

# Cutting Off the Head of the Snake

## Applying and Assessing Leadership Attack in Military Conflict

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26 April 2013

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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>26 APR 2013</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2013 to 00-00-2013</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Cutting Off the Head of the Snake:Applying and Assessing Leadership Attack in Military Conflict</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>School of Advanced Air and Space Studies,,Air University,,Maxwell Air Force Base,,AL</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT <b>This study examines a compelling phenomenon in modern conflict. Leaders are being attacked and their leadership is being disrupted???at what appears to be an unprecedented rate. Because of this, military decision makers and planners need to know if attacking leadership is an effective strategy. There are numerous and divergent opinions on this subject. This study???s purpose is to answer the research question: when, if ever, is it advisable to attack adversary leadership in times of military conflict? The study differentiates between attacking leadership and the killing or capturing of enemy leaders, commonly called decapitation. Leadership attack is broader than decapitation, as it encompasses additional actions that disrupt the process of leadership within the adversary organization. These include destroying command centers and communication nodes or undermining the adversary leader through psychological attack. The study employs the qualitative research methodology of systematic process analysis to test two competing theories of leadership attack. The primary theory is drawn from the writings of John Warden and J.F.C Fuller, and the competing theory is developed within the study to offer an alternative perspective when considering the historical evidence.</b>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>526</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

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### **About the Author**

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## Abstract

This study examines a compelling phenomenon in modern conflict. Leaders are being attacked—and their leadership is being disrupted—at what appears to be an unprecedented rate. Because of this, military decision makers and planners need to know if attacking leadership is an effective strategy. There are numerous and divergent opinions on this subject. This study's purpose is to answer the research question: when, if ever, is it advisable to attack adversary leadership in times of military conflict? The study differentiates between attacking leadership and the killing or capturing of enemy leaders, commonly called decapitation. Leadership attack is broader than decapitation, as it encompasses additional actions that disrupt the process of leadership within the adversary organization. These include destroying command centers and communication nodes or undermining the adversary leader through psychological attack. The study employs the qualitative research methodology of systematic process analysis to test two competing theories of leadership attack. The primary theory is drawn from the writings of John Warden and J.F.C Fuller, and the competing theory is developed within the study to offer an alternative perspective when considering the historical evidence.

The study draws upon the experience of the United States and its allies in attacking the leadership of Iraq's Saddam Hussein from 1990 to 2003, especially during the Gulf War of 1991 and the Iraq War of 2003. This evidence should support the primary theory, yet the theory has difficulty connecting leadership attack to a favorable war termination. This leads to the study's primary finding—disrupting the enemy's process of leadership can cause organizational paralysis, and even lead to collapse, but this is not always desirable. More specifically, this paralysis is both achievable and desirable at the operational and tactical levels of war, as the military objective at these levels is often to destroy or incapacitate the enemy organization so that it can no longer resist. At the strategic level of war, however, paralysis is difficult to achieve. Even if achieved, it does not lead naturally to a favorable war termination. Major follow-up actions—including the occupation of territory, the defeat of residual military forces, and the reestablishment of essential services to the population—are likely to be required. Wars are often fought for limited objectives at the strategic level; very few wars are fought to avoid extermination or ensure national survival. When the overall aim is limited, persuading the adversary to accept one's demands is likely to be more beneficial in the long term than causing strategic paralysis. The study concludes by proposing an alternative theory of leadership attack that can be used in further research for testing and refinement.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the Air Force for the opportunity to study the profession of arms. The General Stephen R. Lorenz Fellowship represents a rare opportunity in the middle of a military career to read, write, and think. Numerous leaders and educators—including General Lorenz himself—have worked diligently over a period of several years to make the fellowship and the Air University Ph.D. in Military Strategy a reality. Those of us fortunate enough to participate in the program owe these men and women a great debt. Hopefully, our studies will contribute to this important field, and we will be better servants of the United States for having been afforded this opportunity.

I would like to thank my committee: Dr. James Kiras, Dr. Ben Lambeth, and Dr. Mike Kometer. I appreciate their encouragement and expertise in helping me through this challenge. All of them have challenged my assumptions, refined my logic, and improved the product.

My family has offered tremendous support during this time. This includes my mother, with whom I've shared the ups and downs of being a writer. My wonderful children have been supportive and encouraging through the process, as has my wife, who has served as a valued editor for this project and a wonderful partner in life. She has sharpened much of what you read here, and she has patiently endured the entire process from beginning to end. I owe her a major debt of gratitude for her partnership and love.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

*So my recommendation to NATO and the administration is to cut the head of the snake off, go to Tripoli, start bombing Gaddafi's inner circle, their compounds, their military headquarters in Tripoli. The way to get Gaddafi to leave is have his inner circle break and turn on him. And that's going to take a sustained effort through an air campaign. I think the focus should now be to cut the head of the snake off. That's the quickest way to end this.*

U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham

24 April 2011

A compelling phenomenon in military affairs has emerged. Leaders are being attacked—and their leadership is being disrupted—at what appears to be an unprecedented rate. The lethal raid against al Qaeda's Osama bin Laden and the fall of the Libyan government led by Mohmmar Ghadaffi are only two examples of several that have captured the public attention in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Whereas a direct attack against an enemy leader was once avoided due to legal and political concerns, it is becoming increasingly accepted by decision makers, especially in Western countries such as the United States, Britain, and France, that attacking

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<sup>1</sup> In what will become a familiar theme addressed in this study, when discussing the targeting of Libyan President Mohmmar Ghadaffi, NATO's political leaders made a distinction between targeting the individual leader and disrupting the regime's leadership through the attack of command and control facilities. In a joint press conference held by U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and U.K. Secretary of State for Defence Liam Fox, Secretary Gates asserted, "I would say we have considered all along command-and-control centers to be a legitimate target, and we have taken those out elsewhere...we consider them legitimate targets. We are not targeting (Ghadaffi) specifically, but we do consider command-and-control targets legitimate targets wherever we find them." Robert Gates, Press Conference Transcript, 26 April 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4816> (accessed 27 July 2012).



adversary leaders is both morally justified and militarily effective.<sup>2</sup> This has led to several high-profile examples of what this study will call *leadership attack* (a term that will be explained and defined later in this chapter).

There are several high-profile instances of leadership attack in recent conflicts. These include the aerial attack on Colonel Mohmmar Ghaddafi's personal compound in Tripoli in 1986 by the United States in response to allegations of terrorist activities. Another instance was the U.S. invasion of Panama—Operation Just Cause—that culminated in the capture of Manuel Noriega after he fled to temporary refuge in Panama City's Papal Nunciatura.<sup>3</sup> The leadership of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath regime was targeted by a coalition of 28 nations in Operation Desert Storm in 1991. Saddam survived this attack, and he salvaged enough strength to maintain his grip on power, although his leadership was threatened several times in the years that followed. In 1993, key decision makers, including U.S. President William J. Clinton, altered the United Nations' mission in Somalia from providing food and other resources to attempting the capture of General Mohamed Farah

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<sup>2</sup> This has been true in the administration of U.S. President Barak Obama. Regarding the moral justification of leadership attack, President Obama had this to say in response to the death of Mohmmar Ghaddafi, "For four decades, the Qaddafi regime ruled the Libyan people with an iron fist. Basic human rights were denied. Innocent civilians were detained, beaten and killed. And Libya's wealth was squandered. The enormous potential of the Libyan people was held back, and terror was used as a political weapon. ... For the region, today's events prove once more that the rule of an iron fist inevitably comes to an end." President Barak Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Death of Muammar Qaddafi," 20 October 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/10/20/remarks-president-death-muammar-qaddafi> (accessed 29 March 2012). Regarding the efficacy of leadership attack, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta explains the benefits of the leadership attack effort against al-Qaeda: "By virtue of eliminating that leadership, I think it makes it much more difficult for al-Qaida to develop the kinds of plans and operations for conducting large attacks abroad," Lolita C. Baldor, "Panetta: Al-Qaida Deaths Hurt Plans For Attacks," *Associated Press*, 3 October 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, was concerned that Noriega could evade capture for some time, but when asked if the operation could be successful if Noriega remained at large, Powell replied, "The operation is a success already, because we cut off the head of the government, and there is a new government that was elected by the Panamanian people." Nevertheless, Powell was relieved when Noriega was taken into custody. "As soon as the Panamanian people learned that Noriega was in U.S. custody, they started dancing in the streets," Powell writes in his autobiography. "Until then, they had been afraid that he might yet return to power." Colin Powell, with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 425, 430, 433.

Aidid, the leader of a violent faction vying for control of the Somali capital of Mogadishu.<sup>4</sup> U.N. forces were unable to capture Aidid, but an attempt to disrupt a meeting with his top aides ended in a deadly firefight subsequently known as the Battle of Mogadishu. The heavy cost of that battle led the United States to suspend combat operations and eventually pull its forces out of Somalia.<sup>5</sup> Just as dramatic were the tense nights of bombing in Serbia during the 1999 NATO campaign, Operation Allied Force, designed to coerce President Slobodan Milošević to halt the ethnic-cleansing campaign in Kosovo. Saddam Hussein was again targeted in 2003 during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and this time, his regime was deposed and he was captured. Video footage was released that showed sobering images of a once-proud man who appeared gaunt and unkempt due to the relentless pursuit of Coalition forces.<sup>6</sup> Ghadaffi's leadership was attacked again in 2011 by NATO and rebel forces during the Libyan civil war.<sup>7</sup> This time, the longtime leader was killed in a firefight while trying to evade rebel forces in the Libyan desert.

The terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 brought a protracted conflict between the United States along with its Western allies and the al Qaeda network. Interestingly, those attacks were initiated by al Qaeda's own decapitation strike against Ahmad Shah Massoud,

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Howe, Admiral, USN, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: Ambush in Mogadishu*, 1 November 2001, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ambush/> (accessed 29 March 2012)

<sup>5</sup> Robert Oakley, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: Ambush in Mogadishu*, 1 November 2001, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ambush/> (accessed 29 March 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Kuwait Information Minister Mohammed Abulhassan had this to say in reaction to Saddam's capture: "Thank God that he has been captured alive, so he can be tried for the heinous crimes he has committed. Kuwait today feels more relaxed and assured after the departure of this tyrant and after all are certain now that he will never return." "World Reaction in Quotes," *BBC News Online*, 15 December 2003, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3317971.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3317971.stm) (accessed 29 March 2013).

<sup>7</sup> These attacks on Ghadaffi's ability to lead included airstrikes on Ghadaffi's compound as well as attacks on the state television station in Tripoli. David D. Kirkpatrick, "NATO Strikes Qaddafi Compound," *The New York Times*, 25 April 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/26/world/africa/26libya.html> (accessed 4 September 2012).

the strong and charismatic leader of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban's top enemy.<sup>8</sup> Al Qaeda's attacks ushered in a period where the West engaged in reciprocal attacks on the terrorist group's leadership on an unprecedented scale. Visual intelligence obtained by the unblinking eye of overhead drones has been systematically fused with signals and human intelligence to allow the direct targeting of scores of senior and midlevel al Qaeda leaders, culminating in May 2011 with the elimination of bin Laden himself. So many al Qaeda leaders have been killed or captured that some have even suggested that al Qaeda is all but defeated.<sup>9</sup> Of course, there are others who disagree.<sup>10</sup>

This disagreement is not unexpected or unprecedented. The question of leadership attack has provoked controversy on two levels. First, ethicists and legal scholars have debated the morality of targeting individuals in war, especially individuals in leadership positions. This debate is beyond the scope of this study, but Appendix A provides a short

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<sup>8</sup> Masood Khalili, who was present during the attack and severely injured, had this to say about al Qaeda's motivation to kill Masood: "It is proved that Osama [made] the plan to carry out in New York and in Washington. That's number one. Number two, they knew that Afghanistan would be the base to stay for a long time. Number three, that America, whatever happened at the Pentagon, or at the White House or New York, even if a lot of people were not killed, they would strike back. They knew also they would start at the base - Osama and the Arabs were in Afghanistan. Whom should they help? Forces on the ground. Who leads those forces? Commander Masood, kill him." "Masood Assassination Remembered by Man Wounded in Attack," *Voice of America*, 9 September 2002, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-a-2002-09-09-18-Masood-66296067.html> (accessed 29 March 2012).

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta has said, "We're within reach of strategically defeating al-Qaeda. The key is that, having gotten Bin Laden, we've now identified some of the key leadership within al-Qaeda, both in Pakistan as well as in Yemen and other areas. If we can be successful at going after them, I think we can really undermine their ability to do any kind of planning, to be able to conduct any kind of attack." "US 'within reach of strategic defeat of al-Qaeda,'" *BBC News Online*, 9 July 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-14092052> (accessed 29 March 2012)

<sup>10</sup> Leah Farrall writes, "Al Qaeda today is not a traditional hierarchical terrorist organization, with a pyramid-style organizational structure, and it does not exercise full command and control over its branch and franchises. ... Because al Qaeda's second-tier leadership manages most of the group's interaction with its subsidiaries, the removal of either Zawahiri or bin Laden would not overly affect the unity among the organization's core, branch, and franchises, nor would it impede communication among them." Leah Farrall, "How al Qaeda Works: What the Organization's Subsidiaries Say About Its Strength," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2, March/April 2011.

summary of the debate and points to avenues for further exploration. Second, military theorists have long debated the efficacy of attacking enemy leadership, and this study will explore this debate in detail. Some contend that these attacks can be the centerpiece of a successful military strategy. If one is able to attack the enemy leader and/or key subordinate leaders, the resulting chaos and confusion will result in paralysis. This paralysis will prevent the enemy from being able to resist, thereby ensuring victory.<sup>11</sup> Others take a more pessimistic approach, arguing that it could be beneficial to attack the enemy's leaders, but the fog and friction of war coupled with the extraordinary security measures taken by these leaders make it almost impossible to be successful.<sup>12</sup> Another counterargument is that direct attacks on leaders do not work—others will rise to take the original leader's place, and these attacks can incite a popular backlash that can prolong the war.<sup>13</sup> Finally, as information technologies have allowed modern “flat” organizations to emerge, some argue that the very idea of leadership is outdated and, therefore, so is the concept of attacking it. In their estimation, modern organizations are self forming and governing, which makes them

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<sup>11</sup> One proponent of this is J.F.C. Fuller, whose ideas will be discussed in Chapter Three. Fuller compares the enemy organization to a human body, and he states that attacking the enemy leadership is equivalent to a “shot through the head.” J.F.C. Fuller, *On Future Warfare*, (London: Sifton Praed and Co., Ltd., 1928).

<sup>12</sup> Stephen T. Hosmer writes that “Direct attacks on enemy leaders by external powers are rarely successful. ... Such leaders are hard to kill because they devote careful attention to their personal security, and some have survived numerous coup and assassination attempts. They habitually maintain tight security about their planned movements and change locations frequently, conducting state business from a variety of safe houses and other sites and seldom sleeping more than a few nights at the same residence.” Stephen T. Hosmer, *Operations Against Enemy Leaders*, (Santa Monica, California: RAND Inc., 2001), 40-41.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Hosmer describes the effects of the operation to capture General Aideed in Mogadishu: “... instead of weakening Aideed's power base, the raid greatly strengthened it. The attack generated intense bitterness among many Somalis toward U.S. and UN forces.” *Ibid.*, 38.

leaderless and all but immune to leadership attack.<sup>14</sup> Obviously, there is considerable disagreement between those who argue from these perspectives.

In fact, disagreements regarding leadership attack can be understood as a subset of an enduring debate about the nature of war and military strategy. On one side are those who believe that the ultimate strategy is the one that realizes victory with minimal fighting. If one can somehow bypass the enemy (by flying over, going around, penetrating, etc.) and attack the one thing or set of things that matters most—be it the enemy leader, the capital, the industrial base, or the lines of supply—then the enemy’s system will collapse and their will to fight will be broken.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, this victory will occur much faster and at less cost than the alternative. That alternative is winning by overcoming the enemy’s forces on the battlefield, and many believe this is the only way to truly be victorious.<sup>16</sup> To these military thinkers and strategists, there is no shortcut. If one is to defeat the enemy, one must eventually defeat the enemy’s forces, making it either impossible or prohibitively costly to continue resistance. For

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<sup>14</sup> An interesting example of this argument is presented in a book sponsored by U.S. Department of Defense titled *Power to the Edge*. “Command in the Information Age is ultimately not the sole responsibility of any single individual. Does this mean that no one is in charge? This question is at the heart of the matter. The simple truth is that there are in fact many instances where no one is in charge of an enterprise or endeavor today. ... virtually all significant military operations undertaken in the 21st century will require that the function of command be accomplished in a distributed and collaborative fashion.” David S. Alberts and Richard E. Hayes, *Power to the Edge: Command...Control...in the Information Age* (Washington D.C.: DoD Command and Control Research Program, 2003), 203-204.

<sup>15</sup> Unsurprisingly, those who adopt such a position almost always assert that there are technological solutions that allow for this bypassing of the enemy. A familiar example of this are airpower theorists who assert that the primary military value of airpower is the capability it brings to bypass fielded forces and strike the enemy’s “vital centers.” John Warden makes this argument when he writes, “Technology has made possible the nearly simultaneous attack on every strategic- and operational-level vulnerability of the enemy. This parallel process of war, as opposed to the old serial form, makes very real what Clausewitz called the ideal form of war, the striking of blows everywhere at the same time.” John A. Warden III, Colonel, USAF, “The Enemy as a System,” *Airpower Journal*, (Spring 1995), 54.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz writes, “...to overcome the enemy, or disarm him—call it what you will—must always be the aim of warfare.” In this case, Clausewitz is describing his concept of absolute war, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 77.

those who agree with this line of reasoning, the key to victory lies in bringing locally superior numbers, firepower, and technology to bear against these enemy forces, which will eventually ensure that enemy forces are destroyed and degraded in sufficient numbers to persuade the enemy leader to stop. These strategists focus on building the right skills and procuring the best equipment, then using these forces at the decisive place and time to create local superiority and ensure success.<sup>17</sup> These are two very diverse ways of approaching warfare, and many scholarly arguments stem from these diverging perspectives.

The question of leadership attack especially illuminates the debate between proponents of force-on-force battle and those who would avoid it. As one puts aside the practical difficulties in carrying out an attack on an enemy leader, the question becomes stark. If attacking the enemy leader—the one who is perceived to be responsible for the conflict in the first place—will not bring the conflict to a speedier and less-costly end, then what else would? If leadership attack is effective, it validates B.H. Liddell Hart’s concept of the “indirect approach.”<sup>18</sup> Wars can be won, faster and at less cost, by avoiding the direct confrontation with enemy forces and attacking the enemy’s true vital center. If attacking enemy leadership is not effective, however, it would strike a death blow to this idea. Because of the connection between leadership attack and the enduring question of an indirect strategy, assessing the effectiveness of leadership attack offers invaluable insight into the nature of war that will help

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<sup>17</sup> Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini makes this argument when he describes what he calls the Fundamental Principle of War: “On the battlefield, to throw the mass of the forces upon the decisive point, or upon that portion of the hostile line which it is of the first importance to overthrow.” Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War* (London: Greenhill Books, 1996), 70.

<sup>18</sup> Liddell Hart describes the concept in this way, “...throughout the ages, effective results in war have rarely been attained unless the approach has had such indirectness as to ensure the opponent’s unreadiness to meet it. The indirectness has usually been physical, and always psychological. In strategy, the longest way around is often the shortest way home.” B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd Revised Edition (New York: Meridian, 1954) 5.

students explain what has occurred in the past and predict what might occur in the future. That is the purpose of this study.

### **Relevance of This Study**

This study examines the validity of a military theory that advocates attacks on adversary's leadership. This theory is most closely associated with the writings of J.F.C. Fuller and John Warden, and it remains very influential today. The goal is to test this theory against a body of historical evidence to assess its validity and suggest its worth in future contingencies. As there is significant disagreement among competing theories concerning leadership attack, this study will help both scholars and military professionals in explaining how leadership attack works (or does not work) and identifying factors which make adopting a strategy of leadership attack either more or less appropriate. Therefore, it serves as an aid in judging the past as well as anticipating the future. Both functions are needed today, as the adoption of leadership attack strategies appears to be growing.

Indeed, current events make this study eminently relevant. Strategies involving leadership attack are being executed at an unprecedented rate, and they are being employed by all sides. The past decade has seen attacks on recognizable names such as Mullah Omar, Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milošević, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Mohmmar Ghadaffi, and Osama bin Laden, yet one does not have to be a high-profile terrorist or head of government to be targeted. The United States and other Western powers have targeted al Qaeda's leadership at multiple levels for over a decade now, and there are signs that the organization is under extreme pressure as a result. When asked about attacks on al Qaeda leaders, General David Petraeus observed, "That has significantly disrupted their efforts, and it does hold the

prospect of really a strategic defeat—if you will, a strategic dismantling of the al Qaeda network.”<sup>19</sup> Leaders such as Petraeus have also made leadership attack a key component of their campaigns to defeat insurgency groups in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, it seems that both state and non-state actors are increasingly using leadership attack to pursue their interests. In March of 2011, it was remarkable how quickly NATO air operations in Libya shifted to targeting the headquarters and command and control facilities of Libyan leader Colonel Ghadaffi. Ghadaffi’s personal compound was repeatedly targeted by air raids as well as by the revolutionaries themselves.<sup>21</sup> NATO justified these attacks by drawing a direct connection between Ghadaffi’s capability to lead and the killing of innocents in the conflict. As U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates observed, “those centers are the ones that are commanding the forces that are committing some of these...violations of humanitarian rights, such as in Misurata.”<sup>22</sup> Perhaps most interesting was the lack of

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<sup>19</sup> Craig Whitlock, “Panetta: U.S. ‘Within Reach’ of Defeating al Qaeda,” *The Washington Post*, 9 June 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Lower- and mid-level leaders have been routinely targeted in counterinsurgency campaigns in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and many influential leaders and observers believe that leadership attack is an important part of a counterinsurgency campaign, one that creates time and space to establish security and stability for the contested population. U.S. leaders, for example, believe in the effectiveness of leadership attack so much that they have invested a large amount of resources, many of which are in high demand, in the effort to track down and eliminate insurgent leaders. While a popular saying among military officers holds that “you cannot kill or capture your way out of the insurgency,” killing and capturing occupies a great amount of attention and effort in modern counterinsurgency campaigns. U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, advocates attacking insurgent leaders in certain situations, and it identifies key questions that need to be answered by the counterinsurgent, such as “Is the organization hierarchical or nonhierarchical?” and “Do leaders exercise centralized control or do they allow autonomous action and initiative?” It also presents numerous characteristics of insurgent leaders that should be considered, such as their “role in the organization” and their “popularity outside the organization.” U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 15 December 2006, 3-19 to 3-20.

<sup>21</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick writes of one such attack: “The attack on the compound was the third since air raids began in mid-March, but the strike at the television complex was the most significant broadening yet of the NATO air campaign, suggesting that nonmilitary targets would be hit in an effort to break down the instruments of Colonel Qaddafi’s broader control.” David D. Kirkpatrick, “NATO Strikes Qaddafi Compound,” *The New York Times*, 25 April 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/26/world/africa/26libya.html> (accessed 31 March 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Robert Gates, Press Conference Transcript, 26 April 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4816> (accessed 27 July 2012).



significant international criticism for these attacks. One might consider this as evidence that leadership attack is increasingly viewed as an acceptable alternative in conflict.<sup>23</sup>

Despite this evidence that leadership attack is increasingly accepted, military theorists have deep disagreements over its effectiveness. In addition, the historical record on these attacks is mixed. There have been instances when the successful removal of a leader has appeared to severely degrade the targeted organization, but there have also been examples where a similar removal has not accomplished much. Since the amount of time and resources being spent on leadership attack is considerable, military leaders and strategists deserve to have a better idea of what may happen if their efforts are successful. Similarly, military scholars need better tools to explain leadership attack's effectiveness, or lack thereof. The goal of this study is to provide insight to both.

## Research Question

This study attempts to answer the research question:

*When, if ever, is it advisable to attack adversary leadership in times of military conflict?*

This question has been intentionally constructed to elicit an answer in retrospect and in prospect, therefore this answer will be useful to those who wish to explain the past as well as those who want to anticipate the future. Having stated this aspiration up front, it is useful to expand on two aspects of the research question here.

First, this research question—and by extension this study—acknowledges that strategies of leadership attack may be ineffective or counterproductive. The answer may be

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<sup>23</sup> It may well be that the lack of criticism is a result of a general lack of regard for the leaders who have been targeted. For a more detailed discussion of this possibility, see the discussion titled “Is It ‘Sporting’ to Attack Leaders?” in Appendix A.

that it is never advisable to attack enemy leadership. The most likely answer, however, is that the effectiveness of a strategy that attacks adversary leadership depends on the context of the conflict and the type of strategy used. By asking “when is it advisable to attack leadership,” the study is asking if one is able to anticipate the effects of leadership attack. Finding relationships between context, actions, and outcomes is a key aim of this study. This leads to several subordinate questions. First, are there any theories that offer an answer to the research question? Second, how do these theories explain and anticipate the relationship between context, actions, and outcomes? Third, how do these theories hold up when compared with historical evidence? Finally, are there modifications or additional propositions that may be added to refine and develop a theory of leadership attack? These questions are considered throughout this study and answered in the final chapter.

Another key aspect of the research question is that it distinguishes between attacking adversary *leadership* versus adversary *leaders*. This is an important distinction that acknowledges that killing or capturing enemy leaders is only one way to deny the process of leadership to an adversary. Perhaps it is just as effective to cut off the leader from the followers by denying the ability to communicate or by forcing the leader to take such stringent security precautions that his ability to lead is dramatically reduced. This distinction between the organization’s leader and its process of leadership naturally leads to questions about definitions. As with any study, these definitions play a critical role in establishing the framework for the research, and the remainder of this chapter is dedicated to them.

## Definition of Key Terms

### *Leadership*

Scholars have made hundreds of attempts to define the concept of *leadership* in various academic fields, but there is no one recognized definition that enjoys widespread acceptance.

In fact, one of the leading experts on the subject, Dr. Bernard M. Bass, laments this lack of standardization. He observes, “Often, a two-day meeting to discuss leadership has started with a day of argument over the definition.”<sup>24</sup> To illustrate the point, Bass recounts how one leadership scholar found 221 different definitions of leadership in 587 publications.<sup>25</sup>

Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this study to reconcile these differences. Instead, this study needs to identify a definition of leadership that has several important characteristics.

First, the definition needs to be broad enough to encompass the diverse actions and interactions that take place between leaders and followers in combat. A definition that is too narrow may limit the examination in a way that causes it to overlook an important element or interaction. Second, the definition needs to postulate a relation between leader and followers that can be applied to the wartime environment. As Bass states, “the definition of leadership should depend on the purposes to be served,” and that is certainly true in this study.<sup>26</sup>

Leadership in an environment of military conflict is likely to prove quite different than leadership in other settings. While some leadership scholars may want to focus on long-term relationships of trust built up between leader and followers, a definition of leadership that focuses on this aspect to the exclusion of others would not be appropriate for this study, as

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<sup>24</sup> Bernard M. Bass, with Ruth Bass, *The Bass Handbook Of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, 4th ed., (New York: Free Press, 2008), 15.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 25.

leadership in combat may depend on a short-term relationship. For example, a soldier may have to assume a leadership role during an engagement as a result of the established leader's death or injury. Any definition of leadership used in this study, therefore, must prove applicable to an environment of war. Third, it would be beneficial if the definition was both straightforward and widely accepted, at least in relative terms, given the disagreement in the field.

One intriguing candidate for the definition of leadership was developed by 54 scholars from 38 countries at a research conference called Project GLOBE. As these researchers discussed and debated the concept of leadership, a consensus definition emerged that is both broad and straightforward. This group concluded that leadership is "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members."<sup>27</sup> There is much to commend in this definition. It recognizes the importance of the individual leader and describes the leader's functions as influencing, motivating, and enabling. It also establishes the role of followers as those who are responsible for the majority of the work, and it implies that leadership is exercised within an organizational context. All of these elements are beneficial for purposes of this study. The definition, however, has one weakness. It equates leadership with an ability, which characterizes leadership as being somewhat static. This study is more interested in examining leadership that is active and dynamic. Ability does not equate to effectiveness, and possessing the ability to lead is not as important in combat as exercising that ability. For this reason, the Project GLOBE definition falls short of that required for this study. It needs an active component.

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<sup>27</sup> Robert J. House, et. al., "Cultural Influences on Leadership and Organizations: Project GLOBE," *Advances in Global Leadership*, W. H. Mobley, M. J. Gessner, and V. Arnold, eds., (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing, 1999).

Fortunately, a major change is not necessary to remedy the situation; a small, albeit important, improvement is all that is needed. For that improvement, this study looks to another widely referenced definition of leadership advanced by Dr. Peter Guy Northouse in his popular textbook on the subject, *Leadership Theory and Practice*. In the opening chapter, Northouse states that, “leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”<sup>28</sup> Northouse’s elegant definition shares many elements with that of Project GLOBE. It identifies the importance of an individual leader as well as that of the followers. It also describes the significance of a common goal. The key difference between the definitions is, while the Project GLOBE definition equates leadership with ability, Northouse asserts that leadership is a process.

While *ability* may be passive, *process* is active. This is a key point for this study, because the research question asks “when is it advisable to attack adversary leadership?” If leadership is simply an ability, the only way to attack it—at least in the timeframes usually associated with combat—is to attack the individual who possesses this ability and the key capabilities necessary to exercise this ability. This naturally leads to focusing on the leader.<sup>29</sup> This is the

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Guy Northouse. *Leadership Theory and Practice*. 6th ed. (Los Angeles, California: Sage Publications, 2010), 5.

<sup>29</sup> Conceptualizing leadership as an ability is closely related to the trait theory of leadership. Researchers interested in this area focus on the traits that a leader possesses, such as height, intelligence or communication skills. “The trait perspective suggests that certain individuals have special innate or inborn characteristics or qualities that make them leaders,” explains Northouse, “and that it is these qualities that differentiate them from nonleaders.” Northouse argues that focusing on traits leads one to focus on the leader, while focusing on leadership as a process leads one to focus on the interactions between leaders and followers. Northouse, 7-8.

approach taken by many others who examine leadership attack.<sup>30</sup> This approach holds that attacking leadership is simply a matter of killing or capturing the enemy leader.

This study seeks an alternative approach that expands the concept of leadership, and therefore, leadership attack. This approach recognizes Northouse's assertion that leadership is better conceptualized as a process, and as such, it can be both understood and disrupted. In fact, a process can be attacked in numerous ways that do not involve killing or capturing a leader. This could include forcing the leader to stop engaging in the process with the threat of attack, feeding the leader false or misleading information, cutting off communication between leader and follower, or sowing seeds of distrust among followers. By employing a definition that describes leadership as a process, this study can explore multiple avenues of leadership attack that go beyond the killing or capturing of leaders. Therefore, this study will employ a synthesis of the Project GLOBE and Northouse definitions:

*Leadership is the process by which an individual influences, motivates, and enables others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members.*

The heart of this definition is the process of influencing, motivating, and enabling. There is more here than simply giving orders. Of course, orders must be fundamentally sound and useful, otherwise the followers are not enabled to advance the organization. There is, however, much more to leadership than issuing impersonal orders. There is a human dimension to leadership. The inclusion of the words "influence" and "motivation" in the definition recognizes that this human interaction manifests itself as a relationship between

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix B for a discussion of multiple studies that focus on decapitation—the killing or capturing of leaders. These include Lieutenant Commander Victor D. Hyder's "Decapitation Operations: Criteria for Attacking Enemy Leadership" and Benjamin F. Jones and Benjamin A. Olken's "Hit or Miss: The Effect of Assassination on Institutions and War." This appendix also identifies multiple studies that examine the impact of killing or capturing terrorist leaders.

leader and followers. It takes a relationship to influence and motivate a person to do something. The relationship may be based on trust, fear, greed, or some other factor, but this relationship connects the leader and followers and gives the leader the opportunity to influence and motivate the followers to take action that is in the organization's best interests, although it may not be in the individual follower's best interest. Indeed, combat often forces leaders to subordinate their followers' individual interests for the good of the organization. The followers are not ignorant of this. This is why the process of influencing and motivating is so vital to effectiveness in combat, as is the relationship connecting leader and follower that allows this influencing and motivating to take place.

### ***The Process of Leadership - Key Elements***

While it is beyond the scope of this study to derive a comprehensive theory or model of leadership, it is useful to present a straightforward explanation of the leadership process and its key elements in order to understand how an attack might disrupt this process.<sup>31</sup> The leadership process begins with a group of individuals that share some common purpose.<sup>32</sup> This purpose could be as basic as survival for the group, or it could be as specialized as advocating for a political candidate. The individuals may voluntarily identify with the group, or circumstances may force them to join together. Whatever the situation, these individuals recognize their common purpose, and they come together in the form of an *organization* in order to pursue that purpose. Because each member of the organization has some capacity to

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<sup>31</sup> In his article "A Situational Leadership Model for Military Leaders," Colonel Donald E. Waddell III presents the "Air War College Model" of leadership, which includes as key elements the leader, the followers, interaction between the two, the followers role in accomplishing the mission, and the situation. All of these elements are included in this study. Colonel Donald E. Waddell III, USAF, "A Situational Leadership Model for Military Leaders," *Airpower Journal*, Fall 1994, <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj94/fal94/waddell.html> (accessed 5 November 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Northouse explains, "Leadership includes attention to *common goals*. Leaders direct their energies toward individuals who are trying to achieve something together (emphasis in original)." Northouse, 6.

choose how they contribute to the common purpose, all organizations need a form of leadership that influences and motivates the members to contribute effectively.<sup>33</sup> This leadership is essential for the organization to pursue its purpose. In its absence, the members will not be able to act collectively.

This leadership often takes the form of a single individual that is recognized by the members as the *leader*. This recognition may involve a formal title or position, or it may consist of informal influence, or a combination of the two.<sup>34</sup> A small organization will probably designate a single leader—or one will emerge—who exercises responsibility and authority for the entire organization.<sup>35</sup> Alternatively, larger, more complex organizations are likely to adopt a hierarchical structure with higher-level leaders retaining authority for the overall direction of the organization and lower-level leaders exercising responsibility for subgroups that perform specialized functions within the organization.<sup>36</sup> Very large organizations usually employ a chain of leadership—a top leader directs a group of subordinate leaders, who each have subordinate leaders of their own. A large and complex organization, such as a military organization, makes use of multiple layers of leadership that

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<sup>33</sup> Leadership appears to be present in any group of human beings. Accordingly, Bass writes that “leadership is a universal phenomenon in humans...” Bass also asserts, “despite skepticism about the reality and importance of leadership, all social and political movements require leaders to begin them.” Bass, 7, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Northouse uses the distinction assigned leadership vs. emergent leadership to differentiate between leadership that is formalized and that which becomes apparent through the interaction between leader and follower. Northouse, 8-9.

<sup>35</sup> Bass writes about leaders of small groups or teams: “Any or all members can emerge as leaders, depending on how much of the functional roles they enact.” Bass, 756.

<sup>36</sup> One key line of theory for organizational structure is found in Stratified Systems Theory, which postulates a relationship between the levels of a complex organization with the type of work that is accomplished by leaders operating at those levels. Specifically, leaders at higher levels in the organization accomplish work that is increasingly complex, and this increasing complexity is a response to the increasing complexity of their operating environments and the corresponding decreasing influence of precedents, processes, and rules. Elliott Jaques and Gillian Stamp, *Development of Stratified Systems Theory for Possible Implementation in the U.S. Army*, (Alexandria, Virginia: United States Army, Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 1990), A-6, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a226910.pdf> (accessed 12 December 2012).



are specified in its rules, procedures, and doctrine. The different roles of leaders at different levels of an organization is discussed in a following section.

Regardless of the level at which they operate, leaders exercise influence on the members, with the ultimate goal of getting the members to act to accomplish the purposes of the organization. It is these individual members of the organization—the *followers*—who take action in response to this leadership. In a business, they are the ones who make the product or provide the service. In a legal firm, they are the ones who research and try the cases. In a civic organization, they raise money, plan the service projects, and accomplish the work. In a military unit, it is the followers who create the military effects. They execute the tactical missions. They kill and destroy, and sometimes they die.<sup>37</sup>

In an organization, there exists a special relationship between leader and followers that is characterized by *interaction* between them. While much of this interaction can be procedural—i.e. based on rules, doctrine, and/or standard operating procedures—at least some of the interaction between leader and followers is personal.<sup>38</sup> This personal interaction is especially prevalent in smaller organizations or subgroups within organizations. In large organizations, the average follower will probably have very little personal interaction with the overall leader. This may be limited to speeches, written communication, or public appearances. In contrast, the average follower will probably have considerable interaction with their immediate boss.

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<sup>37</sup> The prospect of giving up one's life for the purpose of the organization is an important part of military service that distinguishes it from other professions. On its face, it would seem that each soldier's individual wellbeing and the collective purpose of the military unit are at odds. While the unit may be assigned the collective goal of taking territory or providing security, doing so may require the ultimate sacrifice from the individuals in the unit. This is one reason why military leadership is so critical. Effective military leaders influence their people to fight even when doing so means they might die. As will be discussed later in this study, this also is a vulnerability that can be attacked. When a military leader is not able to influence the followers very well, it may be possible to attack the bonds of trust and convince the followers not to fight.

<sup>38</sup> Bass writes that "there is an emotional connection between the leader and the led." Bass, 22.

This dichotomy is evident in many military units. The soldier will probably have little interaction with the general officer in command, but the platoon or flight leader maintains a near-constant presence.

The desired result of the interaction between leader and followers is that the followers are influenced and motivated to take action. Simply put, they do things in the name of the organization. They process the orders, sweep the floors, plow the fields, assemble the engines, teach the students, and patrol the streets. If the leadership is particularly effective, the followers are motivated to do a good job as they take action. If the organization has access to the necessary resources and its followers are given suitable direction and motivation, the actions of the followers will, in aggregate, further the organization's central purpose—its *mission*. This mission may be well-defined and finite, as is the case with a political campaign or a football team. Some missions may be more indefinite or change over time. A business organization may have the mission of making a profit, for example, but the way in which it pursues this may change in response to changing conditions. When the organization's mission is indefinite or flexible, it is the job of the leader to determine the appropriate direction and articulate this to the followers. When a leader fails to do this, the organization suffers, and it may die.

As the leader tries to set the course for the organization, it is essential that he or she understand the *environment* in which the organization operates. More specifically, the leader

must understand two distinct environments.<sup>39</sup> The first of these is the organization's *external environment*. This environment is the context in which the organization must exist, and the organization's mission is almost always to create some type of effect in this external environment. Often, forces may exist in the external environment that could adversely affect the organization, and the leader must identify these forces and influence the organization to make appropriate adjustments. In addition to the external environment, the leader must be aware of the organization's *internal environment*.<sup>40</sup> This includes the followers' physical conditions and the surroundings in which the followers carry out the organization's mission. Especially important are the resources that are made available to the followers as they work. The organization's internal environment also includes the organization's *culture*—the attitudes, expectations, and beliefs of its members. This culture can grow and change over time, especially as the organization's members interact with each other and with the leader.

An awareness of both the internal and external environment is necessary for effective leadership, so leaders require *methods of sensing* these environments. This may be as easy as

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<sup>39</sup> Bass explains that the top-level leader must be especially aware of these two environments, as "Strategies are a product of the interaction of the individual leader and the organization's internal and external environment." Bernard M. Bass, "Executive and Strategic Leadership," *International Journal of Business*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2007, 34. Stephen J. Zaccaro postulates that knowledge of the internal and external environments is essential for leaders to connect their organization to the external environment—also called "boundary spanning." Zaccaro argues that the external environment for a lower-level leader in a large organization is often within the organization but outside of that leader's subgroup. As a leader moves up in the organization, the external environment is increasingly outside of the organization itself. Stephen J. Zaccaro, *Models and Theories of Executive Leadership: A Conceptual/Empirical Review and Integration* (Alexandria, Virginia: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 1996), 360.

<sup>40</sup> In his book *Command in War*, Martin Van Creveld distinguishes between gathering information on the disposition of one's own forces ("a problem that should not be underestimated" he warns) and gathering information about the enemy, terrain, and weather. For accomplishing the former, he discusses the concept of the "directed telescope." By this, he means the use of people to bypass the bureaucracy by observing key elements of the internal environment directly, then reporting this to the commander. Van Creveld writes, "Ideally, the regular reporting mechanism should tell the commander which questions to ask, and the directed telescope should be able to answer these questions." Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 7, 75.

using one's own eyes and ears, or it may be a complex endeavor that fuses multiple sources into a formal assessment of the environment. For example, a baseball coach watches the field in order to see what the opponent is doing, and he calls to the bullpen to find out which of his pitchers is ready to throw. Alternatively, a military commander may use satellite images, communications intercepts, and spy reports to ascertain the movements and intentions of the enemy, while she relies on formal internal reporting mechanisms augmented by informal visits and anecdotes to understand the disposition of her forces. The followers will often have significant interaction with the external environment, and they will best know their own disposition. Much of the leader's sensing, therefore, can come from communicating with these followers. In any case, the leader must find effective ways to sense the internal and external environments in order to protect and improve the organization's health.

In summary, the process of leadership begins with the individual. Individuals with a common interest unite to form an organization to pursue this interest. This organization requires leadership in order to be effective, and this leadership emerges as a combination of the authority granted to a formal leader and informal influence exercised by others in the organization. As the leader interacts with the followers, the leader provides direction, guidance, and motivation to the followers, who then engage in actions that pursue the organization's mission. To provide effective guidance and direction, the leader must be able to sense the internal and external environments. He or she also has to be able to communicate with the followers. The key elements of this process are shown in the following figure.

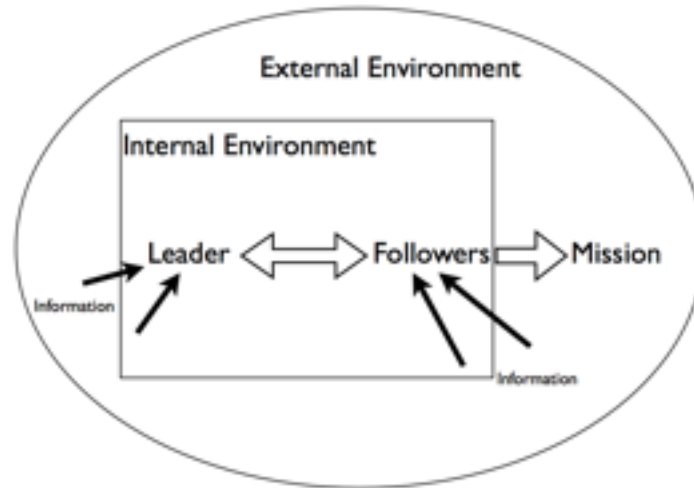


Figure 1: The Leadership Process

### *Leadership and Position*

Typically, leaders who engage in a significant amount of influencing, motivating, and enabling will also hold a title or position that formalizes this relationship with their followers. Some of these formal titles include President, Prime Minister, Commander, and Chief Executive Officer. Sometimes, however, an individual may play a significant leadership role without a formal title. For the purposes of this study, it is the act of leading that is essential to the identity of the leader, not the title. Additionally, the process of leadership is not confined to a single leader at the top of the organization. There may be multiple leaders of significance within an adversary organization, and this will certainly be true of larger organizations. This study recognizes that leaders at different levels provide important leadership throughout the organization, although the specific roles and activities of these leaders may be quite different.

### *Functions of Leadership at Different Levels of the Organization*

For larger organizations, the functions of leadership will differ at different levels of the organization.<sup>41</sup> The functions of the senior leader at the headquarters will be quite different from the function of the front line supervisor at the plant or in the district office. Fortunately, there is a predictable pattern in how these functions change as one moves higher in the organization. First, there is the issue of breadth and depth. The supervisor of a production line or office is expected to have a deep knowledge about the processes, organization, doctrine, and procedures used in the specific area of the organization. It is not expected, however, that this low-level supervisor have detailed knowledge of the other areas within the organization. Leaders at higher levels have a different role. They are supposed to have a significant knowledge about the various areas across the breadth of the organization, but their depth of knowledge about any one area may be quite limited. As individuals progress to leading higher levels of the organization, their knowledge about the organizational specifics becomes increasingly broad and less deep.

Closely related to this observation is the type of interaction that the leader has with the average follower within the organization. At the lower levels, this interaction is quite personal. The lower-level leaders are able to know many, if not all, of their people by name

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<sup>41</sup> Colonel Donald Waddell's paper titled "A Situational Leadership Model for Military Leaders" contains a good discussion of how a leader's role changes as the leader moves up the leadership chain. Many of the concepts presented in this section are derived from this paper. Additionally, Jon L. Pierce and Randall B Dunham's *Managing* puts forth an informative discussion on decision making at different levels of an organization. Jon L. Pierce and Randall B Dunham, *Managing* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown Higher Education, 1990) 476-477. Perhaps the most comprehensive discussion of the roles of leadership at various levels of an organization is contained in Stephen J. Zaccaro's *Models and Theories of Executive Leadership: A Conceptual/Empirical Review and Integration*. In this book, Zaccaro reviews many of the theories of organizational leadership, including Jaques' Stratified Systems Theory, and presents an integrated model of leadership that includes multiple propositions of how leadership varies at different organizational levels. Stephen J. Zaccaro, *Models and Theories of Executive Leadership: A Conceptual/Empirical Review and Integration* (Alexandria, Virginia: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 1996).

and interact with them on an individual basis. It is possible for these leaders to know their follower's families, their hobbies, and their aspirations. Likewise, the followers can get to know their leader on a personal basis. Communication between leader and follower is often face-to-face. While this personal interaction can be detrimental if the resulting relationships are not healthy, the personal interaction can help the leader develop trust and communication with the followers, which can prove to be very positive for the organization. Alternatively, higher-level leaders have so many people under them in the organization that it becomes impossible to interact with them all personally. Their interaction with the average follower becomes more impersonal, and their communication is increasingly accomplished through mid-level leaders, staffs, written statements, policies, speeches, and public appearances.<sup>42</sup>

The content of the communication from leader to follower also differs according to the level of the organization. Leaders at the highest levels of large organizations often communicate at the conceptual level. They discuss broad topics such as a vision for the organization and how the organization will deal with changes in the external environment. The middle- and lower-level leaders take this guidance and add to it with increasing specificity. Their job is to translate the broad communication of the senior leader into specific actions that the followers can accomplish. In other words, the senior leaders of an organization are responsible for communicating "what" the organization is going to do, while the lower-level leaders are responsible for communicating "how" the individual parts of the organization will accomplish its mission. The "what" is often general, and can be communicated with considerable brevity if required. The "how" is often specific, and leaders

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<sup>42</sup> In his "Integrated Model," of leadership within organizations, Stephen J. Zaccarro argues that "all organizational leaders are responsible for operational maintenance and coordination within the organization. At upper levels, operational influence becomes increasingly indirect." Zaccarro, 360.

require a higher volume of communication to ensure that the followers understand the guidance. Both the “what” and the “how” are necessary elements of leadership, yet they are very different in character.

### ***Levels of War and Corresponding Levels of Leadership***

Closely related to this discussion is the relationship to the functions of leadership within a military organization and the three levels of war—strategic, operational, and tactical. The distinction between these levels deserves a brief discussion here. In order to help simplify the complex subject of military conflict, military professionals identify three separate levels of war. Although they have been referred to by various names, U.S. military doctrine defines these levels as the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war.<sup>43</sup> The *strategic level* is the level concerned with identifying national objectives and committing a state’s resources in obtaining these objectives, while the *tactical level* is concerned with individual engagements between forces.<sup>44</sup> The *operational level* connects the strategic and tactical levels by translating overall objectives to tasks that individual units can perform and by orchestrating disparate

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<sup>43</sup> Joint Publication 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, (11 August 2011), I-12. Some sources add the grand strategic level of war to designate the level where a state pursues its interests given all means at its disposal, including instruments of diplomatic, military, informational and economic power.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, I-13 to I-14.



forces to accomplish tasks at the tactical level that contribute to the attainment of strategic objectives.<sup>45</sup>

These levels of war will be useful in this study because they offer an important way to classify how leadership is being attacked or what effects attacks at certain levels may have. Stated another way, it will enable the study to examine an attack on a particular level of the leadership process, and then identify the resulting effects. This is critical, because there may be significant distinctions in leadership attack that can be explained by the differences between the leadership processes at the various levels of war. For example, the strategic level of war corresponds with senior-level leadership as discussed in the previous section. As such, it involves broad guidance and direction toward goals that are often loosely defined. This broad guidance and direction is not typically time sensitive, at least not in terms of seconds and minutes.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, direction from a tactical leader to aim at a particular target or take action to avoid incoming fire could be quite time sensitive.<sup>47</sup> Because the process of

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. To be more precise, the translation function at the operational level is not a one-way process. While operational artists must translate national and theater objectives into tasks that individual units can perform, they must also inform those operating at the strategic level about the capabilities and limitations of tactical forces to accomplish strategic objectives. For an excellent description of the evolution of the concept of operational art and the corresponding operational level of war, see Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan's "Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy." In this monograph, Kelly and Brennan argue that the recent and intense focus on operational art has led to the widening of the gulf between political leaders, who have become little more than "strategic sponsors," and military leaders, who have become preoccupied with campaign design and planning. This often results in an ability to win battles, but this success may not be relevant to the overall result of the conflict. Kelly and Brennan assert that political leaders should be involved in the conduct of war, not just its beginning and end, and that the term *operational art* should be returned to its original intent of connecting various tactical actions to a central idea, usually the strategic aim established by political leaders. This study agrees with Kelly and Brennan that "operational art is, or should be, much more about tactics than strategy." When this study refers to leaders at the operational level of war, it is specifically referring to leaders who are connecting numerous tactical actions in real time. It is not referring to leaders engaging in "campaign design." Such leaders are operating at the strategic level. Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan's "Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy," (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), vii, 39.

<sup>46</sup> There could, of course, be exceptions to this, such as the order to launch a retaliatory nuclear strike.

<sup>47</sup> Examples include the flight leader who shouts to his wingman to "break right" to avoid an incoming missile or the platoon leader who directs his unit to take an alternate route to the objective due to unexpected enemy fire.

leadership is different at the strategic and tactical levels, an effective leadership attack strategy may employ different ways and means to be successful at each level. The study will investigate the possibility that levels of war are significant in leadership attack.

Accordingly, for purposes of this study, *strategic leaders* are responsible for the overall orientation and direction of the state or organization. These include political leaders and in some cases, very senior military leaders. *Operational leaders* are responsible for taking the direction and guidance from senior leaders and translating them into action at the tactical level. They are also responsible for the orchestration of forces in pursuit of the aims articulated at the strategic level. The act of translating and orchestrating is often quite complex and unstructured, which is one reason that military professionals refer to it as *operational art*.<sup>48</sup> Operational leaders include senior military commanders who are directing numerous tactical actions within the theater of operations in real time.<sup>49</sup> *Tactical leaders* are those who direct the operations of units that physically engage in combat.<sup>50</sup> While attacking leaders at the tactical level may be beneficial, this will not be the focus of the study. Instead, the study will focus on the strategic and operational levels, because attacking leaders at these levels may lead to serious and lasting effects that can lead to a quicker victory at lower cost. At least that is what the primary theory of leadership attack proposes, and this study aims to test this argument to the test.

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<sup>48</sup> Joint Publication 3-0, I-13.

<sup>49</sup> See previous note regarding Justin Kelly and Mike Brennan's "Alien: How Operational Art Devoured Strategy." This study differentiates between leaders conducting campaign design, which is largely a strategic function, and those engaged in operational art, where they direct and connect numerous tactical actions.

<sup>50</sup> Despite the requirement that tactical leaders direct units that engage in combat, this does not necessarily mean that they are in physical danger. They may be directing the efforts of remotely piloted vehicles or cyber-attack assets, for example. These leaders are tactical because their leadership influences, motivates, and enables followers to create tactical effects, despite the fact that their physical position is removed from the battlefield.

## *Leadership and Command and Control*

One way of attacking leaders at the strategic and operational levels is to disrupt their command and control, which leads to the question of the relationship between command and control and leadership. While anyone familiar with military operations has an impression about what is meant by the term *command and control*, it is not an easy term to define. In one of the most referenced books on the subject titled *Command in War*, Martin Van Creveld defines command as “a function that has to be exercised, more or less continuously, if the army is to exist and operate.”<sup>51</sup> Pigeau and McCann define command and control as “the establishment of common intent to achieve coordinated action.”<sup>52</sup> John Cushman writes that command and control is “the essential apparatus for using military means effectively.”<sup>53</sup> Others find value in differentiating the functions of command and control. For example, in *Command in Air War*, Michael W. Kometer writes, “Command is perceiving and deciding, whereas control is communicating the decisions, organizing to carry them out, and then monitoring and measuring performance to feed back to command.”<sup>54</sup>

In an attempt to offer more specificity, the U.S. Department of Defense defines command and control as “the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of the mission.

Command and control functions are performed through an arrangement of personnel,

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<sup>51</sup> Van Creveld, 5. Van Creveld chooses to shorten the term command, control, and communication (or “C3”) to “command.” Ibid., 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, “Redefining Command and Control,” *The Human in Command: Exploring the Modern Military Experience*, Carol McCann and Ross Pigeau, eds., (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000), 165.

<sup>53</sup> John H. Cushman, *Command and Control of Theater Forces: Adequacy* (Washington, D.C.: AFCEA International Press, 1985), xi.

<sup>54</sup> Lt Col Michael W. Kometer, *Command in Air War: Centralized Vs. Decentralized Control of Combat Airpower* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2007), 56.

equipment, communications, facilities, and procedures employed by a commander in planning, directing, coordinating, and controlling forces and operations in the accomplishment of the mission.”<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that this definition asserts that the intangible elements of authority and direction are key parts of command and control, but so are tangible elements such as sensors, facilities, equipment, and communication networks.

Accordingly, this study acknowledges command and control has a personal side and a technological side.<sup>56</sup> Command authority is vested in a person and can only be exercised through the influencing of other people. Alternatively, that commander must possess the technical means to exercise that authority. These technical means include specialized facilities, staffs, communications networks, and formal procedures. The Department of Defense refers to the combination of these technical means as “command and control systems.”<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, when military professionals discuss the attack of command and control targets, they are usually referring to attacks on these systems, with the purpose being to disrupt the leadership process in an adversary military unit. In this study, therefore, the term *command and control* will refer to formal military leadership functions, and attacks on command and control systems—the technical means required to exercise command—will be considered attacks on leadership.

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<sup>55</sup> *DoD Dictionary of Military Terms*, [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod\\_dictionary/data/c/3226.html](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/dod_dictionary/data/c/3226.html) (accessed 5 December 2012).

<sup>56</sup> This is a key assertion of Marine Corps Doctrine Pamphlet 6, titled *Command and Control*, which states, “Some forms of command and control are primarily procedural or technical in nature—such as the control of air traffic and airspace, the coordination of supporting arms, or the fire control of a weapons system. Others deal with the overall conduct of military actions, whether on a large or small scale, and involve formulating concepts, deploying forces, allocating resources, supervising, and so on.” Marine Corps Doctrine Pamphlet 6: *Command and Control* (Washington D.C.: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1996), 38.

<sup>57</sup> *DoD Dictionary of Military Terms*.

## *Leadership Attack and Decapitation*

To continue with this discussion, it is critical to define the term *leadership attack*. Existing studies on the use of military force against leadership focus almost exclusively on the killing or capturing of a senior leader—commonly called *decapitation*. They do not examine what happens when an action does not involve killing or capturing but is still designed to disrupt the process of leadership mentioned above. This study will maintain that decapitation is an important subset of leadership attack, but there are other means available to attack the leadership process, and a focus on decapitation is too narrow to judge the overall effectiveness of this category of strategy. By being open to the possibility that other actions can cause significant disruption in the process of leadership, this study attempts to fill a current gap in the field of military strategy. One reason for this gap is the problem of definition.

By defining the concept of leadership attack too narrowly, one may miss important actions and their effects. For example, if leadership attack is limited to physical strikes against enemy leaders, important elements—such as the effects of cutting off communication or undermining the relationship between leader and followers—will be omitted, and the resulting analysis will be too shallow. Alternatively, by defining leadership attack too broadly, one may be tempted to classify almost every military action as leadership attack. For example, the ground invasion of Iraq in 2003 had a military objective of regime change. Certainly, the invasion itself put tremendous pressure on Saddam Hussein and his regime, but classifying a major ground invasion as leadership attack is extremely problematic when considering competing theories of leadership attack. While it is true that most military actions have a relationship, however tenuous, to effects on enemy leadership, an all-encompassing view of leadership attack inevitably leads to a loss of explanatory power. When everything is

classified as leadership attack, the question of effectiveness is equivalent to the question of victory. This leads to the logical fallacy that if one side prevails, its leadership attack efforts must have been effective. To navigate between these two extremes, a balanced approach is needed—one that recognizes that leadership attack includes more than physical strikes on a senior leader but maintains a distinction from other military missions.

This balanced approach can be found by focusing on the effects of military actions on the process of leadership as defined above. Intentional actions that degrade and disrupt the process of leadership—i.e. the process of a leader that influences, motivates, and enables the followers—will be classified as leadership attacks. Certainly, efforts to kill or capture enemy leaders qualify, but so do other types of attacks that have alternative effects. When the effects of such actions degrade the adversary's leadership processes enough to contribute to the attainment of military objectives, then the leadership attack can be considered successful.<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, a leadership attack may begin with actions that degrade the process of leadership by denying leaders the things they require to initiate this process. First, they require a degree of safety. The leader must be reasonably free from the threat of capture or injury, because a leader who is preoccupied with avoiding imminent harm is not going to initiate the leadership process, at least not very well. As explained earlier, the leader also needs accurate information about the situation—including the internal and external environments—and a way to communicate with the followers. While direct attacks on enemy leaders or attacks that cut communications with their followers are physical forms of leadership attack, psychological attacks against both leaders and followers may also prove

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<sup>58</sup> This study avoids the premise that leadership attack actions have to be decisive on their own to be successful. It only proposes that a successful leadership attack is one that contributes to the overall ends desired for the military campaign.

valuable. Efforts that attack the will of a leader to lead or the willingness of the followers to follow must also be categorized as leadership attack because they disrupt the interaction between leader and follower. For example, a message that attempts to dissuade a particular leader (perhaps through a threat to his family or an offer of political asylum) from initiating the process of leadership should be included. In addition, messages that target followers and aim to undermine their relationship with the enemy leader (perhaps through the communication of messages encouraging revolt or promises of money for defection) are important forms of leadership attack.

In the Western context, there is a significant body of literature asserting that an effective leader fosters a healthy relationship with his or her followers.<sup>59</sup> Such a relationship will include bonds of trust and respect. These bonds are especially important when the organization comes under pressure, such as the case of a military unit in combat. For example, when a research group at the Swedish National Defence College studied organizations subjected to severe stress, they found these bonds to be essential in weathering the storm of emotions that inevitably come in war. Their report states, “Mutual trust between leaders and group members is a recurrent theme in the interview responses to questions about what characterizes successful leadership during severe stress.”<sup>60</sup> Given this observation, attempts to undermine the leader with the followers—to sow doubt about the leader’s fitness or the worthiness of their direction—may be an important approach for leadership attack when the leader enjoys a positive relationship with his or her followers.

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<sup>59</sup> Bernard Bass summarizes many of these studies in his monumental work *The Bass Handbook of Leadership*, especially in Chapters 10, 22 and 28.

<sup>60</sup> Gary Larsson et al., “Leadership Under Severe Stress: A Grounded Theory Study,” in *AU-24 Concepts for Air Force Leadership*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, August 2008), 431-437.

There are plenty of examples, however, of leaders who built a relationship with their followers that was fundamentally negative or unemotional. Some practiced rule through fear and intimidation, while others reduced the relationship to one that was purely contractual. This study asserts that though these relationships are not built on trust, they are still relationships through which the process of leadership can be exercised. Armies can still be effective when soldiers fear their leaders more than they do the enemy. Mercenaries can fight well when they are motivated by the prospect of adventure and financial gain, even when they feel no personal connection to the leader or their cause. In each case, the relationship between leader and follower can still be degraded and undermined. A soldier who does not want to fight for a leader may be offered safe passage and asylum. A mercenary follower may be convinced that the leader is unable or unwilling to honor the original agreement. Indeed, such psychological attacks may serve to complement or even replace physical attacks on the adversary's leadership processes.<sup>61</sup>

Accordingly, military strategists have attempted to use both physical and psychological attacks to impair enemy leadership processes, always seeking to weaken the adversary organization and prevent it from achieving its goals. Therefore, this study will adopt a definition of leadership attack that includes both physical and psychological actions:

***Leadership attack includes any intentional actions, physical and psychological, that attempt to disrupt the process of leadership in an adversary organization.***

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<sup>61</sup> In reality, leaders often engender a wide range of relationships with followers in their organization, some negative and others positive. Even leaders such as Adolph Hitler and Saddam Hussein were loved by some followers and hated by others. This means that would-be attackers should understand the audience they are targeting with psychological attacks.



Examples include decapitating an organization by killing its leader, isolating the leader through electronic means, denying critical information to the leader, and discrediting the leader in the eyes of his followers.

### ***Adversary Leadership and Military Conflict***

The research question is limited to attacking *adversary leadership* in times of *military conflict*. A period of military conflict occurs when one or both sides are willing and able to use military force in an overt manner to accomplish their goals. This would include state versus state conflicts as well as conflicts between states and non-state organizations such as terrorist or insurgent groups. For purposes of this study, the focus will be narrowed to include only those leadership attack strategies employed by an established state's military and/or police during an acknowledged conflict. Therefore, it will not address other types of leadership attack that take place during covert operations such as assassinations and coup attempts (see the discussion of assassination that follows). This study's emphasis will be on cases where a state has attacked its adversary's processes of leadership in order to gain a competitive advantage within a military context.

### ***Attack versus Assassination***

One term that surfaces repeatedly when addressing the subject of attacking enemy leadership is *assassination*, and discussions that include this term inevitably turn to the legal and ethical questions that arise when targeting specific individuals with deadly force. These legal and ethical questions are beyond the scope of this study, but because they are so inextricably intertwined with the subject of leadership attack, a discussion is included in Appendix A. This study will make the same distinction between leadership attack and assassination that the organization Human Rights Watch makes in their report, "Off Target:

The Conduct of the War and Civilian Casualties in Iraq.” In this report, the organization writes, “...attacks on enemy leaders who take a direct part in hostilities are not prohibited and are different from assassinations committed outside the context of an armed conflict, which are extrajudicial executions prohibited by international human rights law.”<sup>62</sup>

This study will apply this important distinction in three ways. First, as discussed above, it will confine its examination to actions undertaken in the context of overt military conflict. Second, when considering actions that use lethal force, this force will be applied against a leader who is acting as a combatant—he or she is directly involved in hostilities, either by participating in them or, more likely, by directing them.<sup>63</sup> Third, the study will not examine attack strategies that use treacherous means to gain access to the leader; the attackers will not try to gain the leader’s trust with the intention of betraying that trust later. This does not mean that the attackers are prohibited from using military ruses such as surprise, camouflage, or deception.<sup>64</sup> It does imply that attackers cannot offer promises of safe passage or immunity, then renege on this offer and kill or capture the leader. When taken together,

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<sup>62</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Off Target: The Conduct of the War and Civilian Casualties in Iraq,” 2003, 40, <http://www.hrw.org/> (accessed 19 April 2013).

<sup>63</sup> While considering leadership attack actions where lethal force is applied, this study will also examine actions that fall short of lethal force; these would not normally be included in common definitions of assassination. Additionally, the concept of a “combatant” is one that has been widely debated, especially after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the resulting conflict between the United States and al Qaeda. In response, the Bush administration developed the concept of “unlawful combatant” to describe a member of al Qaeda that participated in combat-like action against the United States. The administration reasoned that, since al Qaeda was not a “High Contracting Party” to the Geneva Conventions, members of al Qaeda should not be granted combatant status under Geneva. Nevertheless, the President decided that when these fighters were captured and detained, they should be treated in accordance with Geneva as an act of policy, not because of their legal status. See President George W. Bush, Memorandum to the Vice President et. al., “Humane Treatment of al Qaeda and Taliban Detainees,” 7 February 2002, [http://www.pegc.us/archive/White\\_House/bush\\_memo\\_20020207\\_ed.pdf](http://www.pegc.us/archive/White_House/bush_memo_20020207_ed.pdf) (accessed 2 April 2012). For purposes of this study, a person who uses force to further an organization’s goals is a combatant, regardless of whether or not that organization is a state or non-state actor. See Appendix A for a more detailed discussion of combatant status.

<sup>64</sup> The concepts of treachery and military ruses are discussed in some detail in Appendix A.

these three limitations ensure that this study considers leadership attack strategies that are consistent with ethical norms on warfare as well as international and U.S. domestic law.<sup>65</sup>

### ***Strategy***

This study will refer repeatedly to “strategies of leadership attack” or “leadership attack strategies,” but there are almost as many definitions of strategy as there are of leadership. How does one make sense of all of these different perspectives? To begin, a distinction needs to be drawn between *strategy* and the *strategic level of war*—i.e. between the noun and the adjective. As explained earlier in this section, the strategic level of war is the level concerned with identifying national objectives and committing a state’s resources in obtaining these objectives. A particular strategy, in contrast, can have repercussions across all the levels of war. For example, the strategy of attacking Saddam Hussein on the first night of Operation Iraqi Freedom concerned strategic thinkers (who worried about how the resulting power vacuum might be filled), operational planners (who were interested in how Saddam’s Republican Guard would act without central direction from the Iraqi dictator), and tactical commanders (who wondered how fiercely the Iraqi soldiers would fight if Saddam were out of the picture). Therefore, it is best to divorce the generic concept of a strategy from any particular level of war.

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<sup>65</sup> This also means that military professionals who wish to use the study’s conclusions to help anticipate the effects of their own leadership attack strategies can be confident that they are not violating the Law of Armed Conflict when they stay within these limitations. The reader should refer to Appendix A for further detail.

Many, if not most, definitions of strategy contain three essential components.<sup>66</sup> First, there is the concept of a desired objective, also called the aim, goal, object, or purpose. These represent the *ends* of strategy. The second component is the concept or set of concepts that are generally developed into a plan of action for achieving the objective. This component of strategy is often described using words such as distribution, employment, application, and connection. These concepts represent the *ways* of strategy. This brings up an important question: what exactly is distributed, employed, applied, or connected? The answer is found in the third component of strategy: the resource base used to obtain the objective, including people, money, equipment, time, etc. These are the *means* of strategy. With these three

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<sup>66</sup> Some of the more well-known definitions of *strategy* include:

“strategy develops an idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives.” Joint Publication 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, xi.

“...the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy.” B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd Revised Edition (New York: Meridian, 1954), 321.

“A plan of action designed in order to achieve some end; a purpose together with a system of measures for its accomplishment.” J.C. Wylie, Rear Admiral, USN, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1967), 14.

“...strategy, in its simplest form, is a plan for attaining continuing advantage.” Everett Carl Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age* (New York: Frank Cass, 2005), 6.

“A mental scheme or design for harmonizing and focusing our efforts as a basis for realizing some aim or purpose in an unfolding and often unforeseen world of many bewildering events and many contending interests.” John R. Boyd, “A Discourse On Winning and Losing,” August 1987.

“Strategy is the art of making war on the map...Strategy decides where to act.” Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996), 69.

“Strategy is the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war. The strategist must therefore define an aim for the entire operational side of the war that will be in accordance with its purpose. In other words, he will draft the plan of the war, and the aim will determine the series of actions intended to achieve it.” Clausewitz, *On War*, 177.

components—ends, ways, and means—one can identify a general, but useful, definition of strategy: a *strategy* uses available *means* in deliberate *ways* to attain specific *ends*.<sup>67</sup>

When an adjective is used to modify a military strategy, it is typically used to identify the ways—the organizing concept or set of concepts—of the strategy. For example, an attrition strategy may refer to a strategy that calls for friendly forces to weaken the enemy force to the point where it can no longer resist effectively. Likewise, an exhaustion strategy may attempt to break the will of the adversary by lengthening the campaign and increasing the cost of victory.<sup>68</sup> This study treats a strategy of leadership attack in the same way. In a *leadership attack strategy*, the organizing concept involves intentional actions designed to disrupt the adversary’s process of leadership.

## A Look Ahead

This study is organized in a straightforward manner. While this first chapter serves as an introduction, Chapter Two explains the research methodology that will be used to attain an answer to the research question. Chapter Three explores the body of strategic thought that addresses the subject of leadership attack. More specifically, the chapter seeks to identify key

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<sup>67</sup> This paragraph is based upon an influential model of strategy taught by the U.S. Army War College’s Arthur F. Lykke, Jr. Lykke asserts that strategy can be best understood with the simple equation: “Strategy = Ends + Ways + Means.” In this model, Lykke suggests that military strategy is like a three-legged stool where the legs consist of Objectives (ends), Concepts (ways), and Resources (means). When these are out of balance, the stool is no longer level, and this departure represents risk. See Arthur F. Lykke, Jr., “Toward an Understanding of Military Strategy,” *U.S. Army War College Guide to Strategy*, Joseph R. Cerami and James F. Holcomb, Jr., eds. (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, 2001), <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army-usawc/strategy/index.htm> (accessed 2 April 2012). David Jablonsky observes that this structure provides comfort for beginning students of strategy, but it is not a substitute for the creative activity required to blend the ends, ways, and means according to the specific context. David Jablonsky, “Why is Strategy Difficult?” *U.S. Army War College Guide to Strategy*, Joseph R. Cerami and James F. Holcomb, Jr., eds. (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, 2001), <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army-usawc/strategy/index.htm> (accessed 10 October 2012).

<sup>68</sup> Both “attrition strategy” and “exhaustion strategy” are English translations of German military historian Hans Delbrück’s concept of *Ermattungs-Strategie*, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

concepts that theorists have applied to leadership attack strategies and trace them back to their theoretical roots. Chapter Four builds on this analysis by identifying a primary theory of leadership attack as well as a competitor. This chapter establishes what each theory proposes about the relationship between context, actions, and outcomes, and it makes predictions about what the study should find if the theory is valid.

The next four chapters present the historical evidence. They are organized around the two major conflicts between the West and Iraq: the Gulf War of 1991 (Operation Desert Storm) and the Iraq War of 2003 (Operation Iraqi Freedom) as well as the period prior to the Gulf War and that between the two wars. This evidence has been chosen for four key reasons. First, multiple strategies of leadership attack were employed against Iraq, and at first look, these strategies met with various degrees of success. Accordingly, there is much detail to consider. Second, this evidence is well-suited for the methodology of systematic process analysis because sufficient and credible evidence exists to trace the evolution of leadership attack. Through interviews, articles, briefs, and memoirs, key decision makers and planners have explained their concepts and expectations about the leadership attack strategies they chose. Along with the evidence on the Coalition side, a significant body of captured Iraqi audio tapes and official documents have been archived and published since the successful 2003 invasion. Along with interviews of surviving Iraqi leaders, these serve to present the other side of the story. Third, the major conflicts with Iraq make a good pairing. While much of the context from the Gulf War carried over into the Iraq War, there were significant differences between 1991 and 2003. Even though the Ba'ath regime of Saddam Hussein was attacked in both wars, the organization was quite different in 2003, as was the Iraqi military. The way that the Coalition approached each war was distinct as well, with regime change

being an unspoken hope in 1991 and a stated goal in 2003. These and other differences help to illuminate key factors and relationships in leadership attack. Fourth, the case of Iraq serves as a best case scenario for the primary theory that argues that attacking the vital center of leadership leads to dysfunction and paralysis. In fact, key components of the Operation Desert Storm plan were originally proposed by one of the most forceful proponents of leadership attack and strategic paralysis. Additionally, Saddam Hussein seems to be an ideal candidate for attack due to his autocratic leadership style and paranoia. In 1991 (Desert Storm), 1998 (Desert Fox), and 2003 (Iraqi Freedom), the Iraqi Army, and much of the Iraqi state, showed signs of strategic paralysis as predicted by the primary theory. Accordingly, the experience in Iraq presents a low threshold for this theory.

While some may argue that choosing an “easy” case is a flawed approach, this study considers it useful for an important reason. If the primary theory cannot prove satisfactory in what appears to be an exercise in which it should excel, it would cast serious doubt about its validity in other, more difficult scenarios. While the study may not be able to prove the primary theory, it may be able to disprove it. Accordingly, conclusions about the primary theory’s validity—as well as that of the alternative theory—are presented in the final chapter. This is also the chapter that identifies propositions that may serve to enrich or improve the theories considered in the study.

In the end, this study will be successful if it serves two functions. First, it should help scholars explain if strategies that attack adversary leadership can work, and if so, when and how they work. A key element of this function is to find a research methodology that proves suitable in answering the research question. Such a methodology can be used for further research. Second, this study should help military strategists propose better strategies. It

should help them appreciate the unique context of the situation in which they find themselves, discern if leadership attack would be an appropriate option, and anticipate the effects that leadership attack may have on the course of the conflict. With these two goals in mind, the study begins by identifying a methodology for answering the question of leadership attack.



## Chapter Two

### Research Methodology

*Small-N comparisons allow scholars to assess more complex causal processes in a much richer set of observations.*

Tulia G. Falleti, University of Pennsylvania  
“Theory-Guided Process-Tracing in Comparative Politics”

This study requires a suitable research methodology in order to arrive at an informed answer to the research question. There are two key considerations in determining the type of methodology that best answers the question. First, the approach can either be qualitative or quantitative. This study adopts a qualitative approach. Second, the study can examine a small number of cases in depth or look at larger number of cases in less detail. This study will examine a few cases in depth. This chapter explains the reasoning behind these choices and identifies the research methodology—known as *systematic process analysis*—that is best suited to apply to this effort.

#### A Qualitative Approach

This study will take a qualitative, versus quantitative, approach. The primary reason is to better explore the nuance that is present in any study of war and strategy. One of the key limitations of a quantitative approach is that nuance tends to get lost in the data and definitions. To illustrate this challenge, one may consider an organization that loses a key leader due to a successful leadership attack. An example of this occurred during World War II in April 1943, when U.S. Army Air Forces shot down the bomber that Japanese Admiral

Isoroku Yamamoto was using as a transport.<sup>1</sup> While the Admiral was killed as a result of the attack, the Japanese Navy continued to fight with tenacity and resolve for over two more years. Nevertheless, many Japanese considered the Admiral's death to be a severe blow to the Japanese morale and outlook.<sup>2</sup> If one was to assign a binary value to signify the success or failure of this leadership attack, it would be difficult to determine a satisfactory answer. One might conclude that the attack was successful simply because it killed a key adversary leader. Alternatively, the attack might be classified as a failure because it did not persuade the Japanese to stop fighting. From yet another perspective, the attack may be considered a success because of the blow it inflicted on the Japanese morale. Because all of these perspectives have some level of validity, this example shows how the artificiality of assigning a numerical value to an attack on adversary leadership would lead to an inevitable loss of depth and appreciation for complexity.

Another key limitation of a quantitative approach involves a troubling problem that arises when the quantitative methods of social science are used to study war. Simply stated, it is very difficult to find a valid control group for comparison. This task is challenging enough when one questions causation and effect in times of war versus peace. A simple example can illustrate this point. Perhaps a study is created to examine the effects of prolonged war on a state's military effectiveness. For comparison purposes, a researcher may be able to find similar states with similar military organizations that have not fought in the specified time period. Unfortunately, this control group is likely to be small, and the researcher would have

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<sup>1</sup> Rear Admiral Edwin T. Layton, Captain Roger Pineau, and John Costello, *"And I Was There:" Pearl Harbor and Midway—Breaking the Secrets* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985), 475-476.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in his book *The End of the Japanese Navy*, Masanori Ito recalled how Yamaoto's demise "shocked and demoralized the entire nation." Masanori Ito with Roger Pineau, *The End of the Imperial Japanese Navy*, Andrew Y. Kuroda and Roger Pineau, trans., (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1956), 92.

to address the effects of alternative variables such as distinctive doctrine, resource bases, and social norms. Comparing states between war and peace is a significant challenge, but this difficulty becomes much more problematic when trying to determine cause and effect within the context of military conflict, which is exactly what this study attempts to do. The goal is to determine the effects of leadership attack strategies. If a quantitative method is employed, the study would first observe the effects of leadership attack in the study group, and then compare them to a control group. The problem is that a scientifically valid control group needs to have all the same characteristics of the studied conflicts with one exception—there would be no attempts to use leadership attack. Given the complexities of war, it is all but impossible to find conflicts that are similar in all aspects but one. While comparison between conflicts is still valid and useful, a qualitative approach is more likely to yield the detailed explanations sought by this study.<sup>3</sup>

### **Small-N Research Design**

This is not to say that qualitative approaches do not have their own limitations. They certainly do, particularly when considering a small number of cases. This study attempts to test theories of leadership attack by using historical cases as evidence and examining this evidence in detail. The main limitation of this approach is the limited number of cases involved. This is often referred to as a *small-n* research design, and the major challenge of this type of research is reaching useful conclusions that have explanatory power beyond the few

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<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, this is an over-simplification. As illustrated in several studies discussed in Appendix B, there are experimental designs that compensate for using techniques such as regression analysis. Given the uniqueness of each conflict, however, such techniques are only partially useful in comparing the effects of a key variable on a conflict. The problem of classification still exists. Even if an experiment identifies a mathematical relationship, studies that employ these methods can have difficulty explaining the cause of this relationship.

cases considered. The consideration of additional cases would provide increased confidence that the study's conclusions are valid. With this in mind, the results should be continually tested against the evidence of further cases as well as the work of other researchers as they contribute to the field.

A gap exists within the body of thought that addresses military strategy and leadership attack, and this study attempts to fill this gap. What is missing is a nuanced approach to the subject—one that explains while avoiding all-or-nothing answers. Because nuance is the goal, a qualitative approach using a small-n research design is a more suitable approach for the study. In his article, “An Emerging Strategy of ‘Direct’ Research,” Henry Mintzberg explains why this is true.<sup>4</sup> “Theory building seems to require rich description, the richness that comes from anecdote,” he writes. “We uncover all kinds of relationships in our ‘hard’ data, but it is only through the use of this ‘soft’ data that we are able to ‘explain’ them, and that explanation is, of course, the purpose of research.”<sup>5</sup> This study asserts that Mintzberg's conclusion regarding the building of theories also applies to the testing of them. Accordingly, the study will consider each case and sift through what Mintzberg refers to as “soft data” in the search for explanations about strategies of leadership attack.

### **Systematic Process Analysis**

Fortunately, there is a respected research method that follows a systematic approach and prescribes an in-depth look at the causal chain of events—much deeper than could be attained in a large-n study. That method is *systematic process analysis* as proposed by Peter A.

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Mintzberg, “An Emerging Strategy of ‘Direct’ Research,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (December 1979), 582-589.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 587.

Hall of Harvard University in his article, "Systematic Process Analysis: When and How to Use It."<sup>6</sup> In this article, Hall explains that small-n studies have inherent advantages over their large-n counterparts. This is especially true for research projects where a causal chain of events can be identified. Because the number of cases is small, each can be examined in depth for the evidence that illuminates this causal chain. "A more intensive examination of the causal chain," writes Hall, "provides a new and different basis for causal inference, one especially well-suited to assessing the complex causal theories now prominent in many of the social sciences."<sup>7</sup> Hall finds that systematic process analysis is particularly appropriate for situations where key participants are crucial to this causal chain, as is the case for leadership attack in the context of military conflict.<sup>8</sup> In fact, he asserts that, due to the precision of the method, "the process analyst can often establish the relative influence various factors had over them (the key participants) with more precision than can be secured by statistical analysis."<sup>9</sup> Just as importantly, Hall argues that systematic process analysis is well-suited for research questions where competing theories exist that ascribe different causal chains to the same outcome. This is because the method "mobilizes multiple observations to reach fine-grained

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<sup>6</sup> Peter A. Hall, "Systematic Process Analysis: When and How To Use It," *European Management Review*, 3, 2006, 24-31, <http://scholar.harvard.edu/hall/publications/systematic-process-analysis-when-and-how-use-it> (accessed 2 April 2012). For more information on this method and others that are similar, see Peter A. Hall, "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research," *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 373-404; and Tulia G. Falleti, "Theory-Guided Process-Tracing in Comparative Politics: Something Old, Something New," *APSA-CP, Newsletter of the Comparative Politics Section of the American Political Science Association* 17, 9-14. For a research method that was originally adopted by this study but was eventually discarded, see Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, "Building Theories from Case Study Research," *The Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 4, October 1989, 532-550.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

assessments about the presence of a specific causal process.”<sup>10</sup> As will be explained in the following chapter, there are multiple perspectives concerning leadership attack, so the potential for comparison between them is a major advantage for this method.

Indeed, the comparison of theories is at the heart of systematic process analysis. The first step in the method is to identify the theory or theories under consideration. More specifically, Hall asserts that the process is better served when two or more theories are identified for examination. Hall contends that, “the ‘facts’ against which a theory is tested are always generated, to some extent, by the theory itself.”<sup>11</sup> When comparing two theories, however, one obtains a “more stringent assessment” of the validity of each.<sup>12</sup> With two theories under consideration, the aim of the study will be to test one theory against the other according to the historical evidence available. “As the familiar adage has it,” writes Hall, “research in social science is most likely to advance when it focuses on a ‘three-cornered fight’ among a theory, a rival theory, and a set of empirical observations.”<sup>13</sup> Hall explains that these theories serve multiple functions. They should identify the key variables that produce the outcome to be explained. They should also propose an account of how these and additional variables interact to produce this outcome. In addition, the theories should include explicit assumptions about the key variables and how they generally operate in the context of the investigation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

After the competing theories are identified and developed, the next step in systematic process analysis is to derive predictions according to each theory. The researcher should be able to make tentative predictions about what will be observed if the primary theory is true and—just as importantly—if it is false.<sup>15</sup> When considering two theories, Hall asserts that a key concern for the researcher is to derive predictions that can be used to differentiate between them—i.e. these predictions should be consistent with the primary theory and inconsistent with its rival.<sup>16</sup> He contends that these predictions should be as “brittle” as possible, meaning that they should be able to be validated (or not) by the available data. The researcher should also be able to show how the predictions of one theory are distinguishable from the other.<sup>17</sup> This step is critical in providing focus for the study as it considers the available evidence.

This evidence is considered in step three, where observations are taken from the cases. These observations should be based on the predictions of step two, with the aim of verifying or disproving them. “It should be apparent that many observations can be drawn from each case,” writes Hall. “The strength of this method rests on the multiplicity of the observations, and hence tests of the theory, that it allows.”<sup>18</sup> The depth at which each case can be treated in this method is what makes it so powerful, according to Hall. Indeed, it can be more powerful in the role of theory testing than large-n studies. Hall explains that, “this method assumes that observations bearing on a theory’s predictions about the *process* whereby an outcome is caused can provide as relevant a test of that theory as predictions about the correspondence between

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

a few key causal variables and the outcomes they are supposed to produce (emphasis in original)."<sup>19</sup> It is in the area of process that this form of research rises above others. Hall asserts that the in-depth observations made in each case should serve to support or refute the proposed processes of the theory:

Therefore, relevant observations include ones about the events that can be expected to occur if a theory is valid, the sequence of those events, the specific actions taken by various types of actors, public and private statements by those actors about why they took those actions, as well as other observations designed to establish whether the causal chain that each theory anticipates is present in the cases. This is not simply a search for "intervening" variables. The point is to see if the multiple actions and statements of the actors at each stage of the causal process are consistent with the image of the world implied by the theory.<sup>20</sup>

In this way, the observations serve to test the explanatory power of the theory, which in Hall's view, is the essential value of a small-n research design.

That value cannot be realized without the last step, which is drawing conclusions from the observations. When these observations are compared with the predictions of each theory, the researcher must judge which theory best matches the evidence. Hall observes that this is where "fine grained judgement" is necessary.<sup>21</sup> This step should not rely on a simple point tally between theories. Instead, Hall asserts that one or two processes will probably be more pertinent to the overall validity of the theory, and the researcher should focus on these processes as he or she makes judgements about the theories and their consistency with the evidence. For Hall, this step depends on the quality of the researcher's work in steps one, two, and three. Indeed, he makes a novel argument that theory development is as important

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



as making observations. Most would agree that worthwhile research involves discerning valid observations using reliable methods and the best sources. Hall argues that it is also crucial that the theory or theories be developed using support based on previous studies as well as logical foundations for the propositions within each theory.<sup>22</sup> Comparison between rival theories in this stage can also aid the researcher's task in reaching judgements about each one.<sup>23</sup>

This study employs the method of systematic process analysis in order to reach conclusions about theories of leadership attack. The primary theory to be considered is most closely associated with the writings of J.F.C. Fuller and John Warden. Although the ideas of these men reflect original thought on the subject of leadership attack, neither of these theorists developed their ideas in a vacuum. Instead, they built upon key concepts proposed by other influential theorists. One can gain great insight into the subject of leadership attack by exploring these concepts and seeking to understand the men who developed them and the historical events that influenced them. This is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Three

### Military Theory: Conceptual Foundations of Leadership Attack

*We may not have to find and destroy thirty thousand tanks if we can destroy the few hundred fuel and ammunition distribution points. We may not have to destroy the few hundred fuel distribution points if we can immobilize an entire society by destroying dozens of electrical generation systems. And we may not need to destroy dozens of electrical generation systems if we can capture or kill the enemy leader.*

Colonel John Warden, U.S. Air Force  
“Centers of Gravity: The Key to Success in War”

As explained in Chapter Two, the first step in systematic process analysis is theory formation. Conceivably, a plausible theory could be formed from a blank slate, employing logic to identify key variables and a causal chain that connects leadership attack to victory. Beginning from scratch, however, would ignore the ideas, concepts, and theories of many others who have put considerable thought into both war and leadership attack. Instead, this study will build on this existing body of thought, and the primary theory it will seek to test is drawn from the ideas of two men: J.F.C. Fuller and John Warden. Neither of these men started with a blank slate either. They built upon concepts and borrowed terms from those who preceded them. This chapter traces many of those key concepts and terms, and in doing so, it provides critical background information that will be useful for the remainder of the study.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Author's Note: Although this chapter discusses a significant portion of the theory that addresses concepts of leadership attack, it is not intended to be a compressive literature review. For those who are interested in a broad summary of articles, papers, and books that discuss leadership attack, especially in a contemporary context, Appendix B presents numerous summaries of works that address the subject.

More specifically, this chapter will explain how Fuller and Warden built upon the foundation of Clausewitz's *center of gravity* concept to buttress their ideas about attacks on leadership. As will be shown, Clausewitz developed the center of gravity concept in the context of war that is relatively unlimited, but not all wars fit this description. In fact, Clausewitz found that war represents a duality—sometimes it is unlimited, or absolute, but most of the time it is limited, and discovery of this has significant implications for how wars are fought. To add to the complexity, war can appear very different at different levels. For example, a war may be limited at the strategic level but at the same time be quite unlimited at the tactical level. Both before and during World War I, many military professionals failed to recognize the duality of war, instead assuming the appropriateness of an annihilation strategy despite relatively limited political aims. This mismatch led to failed military strategies and operational stagnation with horrific social and economic consequences, and out of this experience emerged a shared desire to avoid the futility of attrition warfare. One of the theorists who sought a better strategy was J.F.C Fuller, and he proposed a novel idea for breaking the stalemate at the end of the war. He advocated the attack of the enemy leadership on the front lines—the commanding officers and their headquarters. Attacking the leadership, Fuller argued, would create chaos and confusion that would lead to a form of organizational paralysis and loss of cohesion.

In the years following World War I, other theorists shared Fuller's belief that technology could be used to attack key centers of gravity directly, especially those that advocated for the airplane as a featured weapon. These theorists never proposed the direct attack of leadership, however, but they did develop concepts designed to find and attack vital centers of industry, commerce, and the enemy population. As the end of World War II led to

the Cold War, military strategists needed to find plausible targets for the nuclear weapons under their command, and they proposed “decapitation strikes” on the enemy command structure as part of this equation. Luckily, this strategy was never tested. As the Cold War reached its end, the idea of leadership attack found its most strident supporter in John Warden, an airpower advocate who considered leadership to be the first and best target for the weapons of modern technology. Because leadership was so important to military success and failure—Warden called it the “sine qua non of military operations”—it was considered by some to be the foremost center of gravity.<sup>2</sup> Attacks against this leadership, therefore, could have disproportionate effects, up to the point of inducing the paralysis predicted by Fuller. This study aims to explore the validity of Fuller and Warden’s ideas, and to begin this process, it will explore the most important concept—*center of gravity*—as proposed in one of the most influential works on military strategy in any language, Clausewitz’s *Vom Kriege*, or *On War*.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Center of Gravity—A Short Introduction***

In *Vom Kriege*, Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz introduces the concept of *Schwerpunkt*, commonly translated in English as “center of gravity.”<sup>4</sup> By using this term, Clausewitz appears to be borrowing a concept from the mechanical sciences, specifically the idea that the distributed matter of a solid object can be treated as a single center of mass, and

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<sup>2</sup> John A. Warden, III, *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat* (San Jose, CA: toExcel Press, 2000), 44.

<sup>3</sup> The original version in the German language can be found online. Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, Online Edition, <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/VomKriege1832/TOC.htm> (accessed 19 April 2013). Hereafter designated as Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, Online Edition.

<sup>4</sup> In the three primary English translations of *Vom Kriege* used by this study, Graham, Jolles, and Howard/Paret all translate *Schwerpunkt* as “center of gravity,” although Howard and Paret translates *Schwerpunkte* as “turning points” in the undated note written by Clausewitz and printed at the beginning of the book. Milan Vego argues that “center of gravity” is a mistranslation and that a better translation would be “weight (or focus) of effort.” Milan Vego, “Clausewitz’s Schwerpunkt: Mistranslated from German, Misunderstood in English,” *Military Review*, January-February 2007, 101-109.

forces that act on that object can be represented as acting on that center.<sup>5</sup> In the influential English translation of Clausewitz's work, Michael Howard and Peter Paret translate Clausewitz's terse description of this concept as "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends."<sup>6</sup> Clausewitz's concept of center of gravity has led both military theorists and practitioners to believe that one can identify a focal point for the enemy that, if attacked successfully, can lead to victory. This belief has led to numerous attempts to reduce the complex problem of war into something more simple and understandable. By identifying the enemy's focal point, one can concentrate on developing a method of attacking this point. To this day, this remains the desire of military planners.

It seems logical to apply the center of gravity concept to the enemy's leadership. In a military unit, most members would naturally consider the focal point to be the leader—the commander, the staff, and the headquarters that supports these. For a nation-state, the focal point would seem to be the overall leader—the president, prime minister, etc. Indeed, those who advocate leadership attack invariably do so because they consider leadership to be a center of gravity. Attacking it successfully can, in Fuller's words, "unhinge" the enemy and lead to paralysis and collapse of the enemy organization.<sup>7</sup> Both J.F.C. Fuller and John Warden read Clausewitz extensively, and although both men criticized parts of Clausewitz's work, they borrowed heavily from the Prussian theorist and applied the center of gravity

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<sup>5</sup> It is known that Clausewitz regularly attended lectures given at his *Kriegsschule* by scientists such as Paul Erman, and Peter Paret concludes that "presumably some of the scientific allusions and parallels in *On War* can be traced back to this experience." Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State: The Man, His Theories, and his Times*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 310.

<sup>6</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 595. Hereafter designated as Clausewitz, *On War*, Howard and Paret trans.

<sup>7</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, "Plan 1919," Appendix in *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1936).

concept to their theories of war.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, they also adopted many of Clausewitz's perspectives and assumptions of war, and this has considerable implications for the theory that this study seeks to test. Therefore, it is important to examine Clausewitz's key assumptions about the nature of war.

## War's as a Duality

Specifically, attacks on centers of gravity are most suited for operations where the object is the enemy's complete overthrow. Clausewitz calls this form of war *Absoluter*, literally "the Absolute," but commonly translated as "absolute war."<sup>9</sup> When left to itself, Clausewitz observes that war tends to compel each side to apply the maximum level of violence against the adversary in the effort to disarm him and deny the means to resist.<sup>10</sup> Any theory that adopts leadership attack—or any attacks on centers of gravity—as the means to victory must assume that the nature of war is absolute, at least to a degree. This is because attacks on centers of gravity are intended to have disabling consequences. Stated simply, they are

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<sup>8</sup> For example, in a chapter titled "The Theories of Clausewitz," Fuller critiques Clausewitz's adoption of the dialectic process. He argues, "...in spite of his twenty years' experience of Napoleonic Warfare, Clausewitz had but a vague understanding of it. Nevertheless, because of Napoleon's offensive principle, he foisted on to him his absolute concept, and thereby, not only misled many of his future students, and indirectly was largely responsible for the vast extension of unlimited warfare in the twentieth century." In the very next sentence, however, Fuller praises Clausewitz. "On the other hand," Fuller writes, "his penetrating analysis of the relationship of war and policy has never been excelled..." J.F.C. Fuller, Major General, *The Conduct of War 1789-1861* (London: Methuen & Company, 1961), 60.

John Warden critiques Clausewitz's "battle obsession" throughout his article "Strategy and Airpower." John A. Warden III, Colonel, USAF, "Strategy and Airpower," *Airpower Journal*, (Spring 2011), 64-77.

<sup>9</sup> Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, Online Edition. Howard and Paret translate this term as "Absolute War." Clausewitz, *On War*, Howard & Paret trans., 579.

<sup>10</sup> "...war is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to the application of that force. Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes. ...to overcome the enemy, or disarm him—call it what you will—must always be the aim of warfare." Clausewitz, *On War*, Howard & Paret trans., 77.

intended to leave the enemy no choice in the matter. Therefore, attacks on centers of gravity are only appropriate when one does not want the enemy to exercise a choice.

There is a problem with this assumption. Many wars are not absolute. Instead of being fought for unlimited aims, the object is often much more limited. It may be to regain lost territory, compel the adversary to make a concession, or prevent the enemy from doing something undesirable. Prevailing in such a war does not require the complete overthrow of the enemy. It may simply involve persuading the enemy to make a favorable choice. In these cases, the collapse of the enemy may prove to be quite undesirable, as it creates major challenges for reaching a settlement. In such cases, Clausewitz asserts that wars are moderated by outside forces. This moderated form of war represents the other side of the duality—war’s alter ego—but advocates of leadership attack tend not to do justice to this side of war. Instead, they assume the enemy’s collapse is always useful, as it allows the imposition of one’s will. Since, as B.H. Liddell-Hart observes, the object of war is not destruction of the enemy but “a better state of peace,” advocates of leadership attack must show how disrupting the processes of leadership leads to a desirable end state.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, they must explain how the object of the war affects how it is fought. Clausewitz set a high standard as he accomplished this task. Many who followed would not consider the nature of war so deeply, and their recommendations would suffer as a result.

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<sup>11</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd Revised Edition (New York: Meridian, 1954), 338.

## Both a Duel and a Dialogue

In the first chapter of *Vom Kriege* —the only chapter in the entire book that Clausewitz regarded as finished<sup>12</sup> — Clausewitz begins with an interesting metaphor: “War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale.”<sup>13</sup> Just as the immediate aim of a duel is for one to “overthrow his adversary and thereby make him incapable of any further resistance,” the object of war is to “compel our adversary to do our will.”<sup>14</sup> Clausewitz then expands his definition with what he considers his main idea. “War is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to the application of that force,” he writes, “Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit: a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes.”<sup>15</sup> This thesis must be

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<sup>12</sup> “The first chapter of Book One alone I regard as finished. It will at least serve the whole by indicating the direction I meant to follow everywhere.” “Unfinished Note, Presumably Written in 1830,” Clausewitz, *On War*; Howard & Paret trans., 70. This study accepts the argument presented by Hew Strachan in his book, *Clausewitz’s On War: A Biography*, that Book One, Chapter One and Book Eight represent Clausewitz’s most advanced perspectives on the nature of war, especially war in its Absolute or ideal form. As Strachan explains, there is uncertainty regarding the date of the note that Howard and Paret ascribe to 1830, and this begets uncertainty about the claim that Book One, Chapter One is the most “finished” portion of the work. Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz’s On War: A Biography* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 70-85.

<sup>13</sup> Karl von Clausewitz, *On War*, O.J. Matthijs Jolles, trans., Reprinted in *The Book Of War*, Caleb Howard ed., (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 264. Hereafter designated as Clausewitz, *On War*, Jolles trans.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Howard & Paret trans., 77.



understood as Clausewitz's starting point in a dialectic process.<sup>16</sup> It is a theoretical abstraction that describes war as it would manifest itself were it divorced from the host of outside factors that mitigate it. If this were the case, war would be "a clash of forces freely operating and obedient to no law but their own."<sup>17</sup> Left on its own, war escalates to the maximum level of violence achievable by all sides, with the only goal being the complete destruction of the enemy. "It follows, then, that to overcome the enemy, or disarm him — call it what you will — must always be the aim of warfare."<sup>18</sup> This goal requires the exertion of greater force than one's adversary, up to the maximum level of strength available. "But the enemy will do the same," Clausewitz warns, "competition will then result and, in pure theory, it must again force you both to extremes."<sup>19</sup>

This is war in its ideal form. It is not ideal in the sense that it is perfect or desirable, but it is ideal in that it exists in a theoretical world where there are no external factors that

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<sup>16</sup> Clausewitz's basic approach when focusing on war's nature was to apply a common tool of nineteenth century philosophy, the dialectic. His dialectic reasoning resembles that of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a contemporary of Clausewitz. Hegel's dialectic contains three elements: the Absolute, the Contradiction, and the resolution. The Absolute is the proposition that one holds as true. When this proposition meets with evidence that refutes it, the opposite—or the Contradiction—enters into one's consciousness. The existence of the Contradiction means that what one thought was true is now cast into doubt; it loses its original claim to truth. The Absolute and the Contradiction interact in one's consciousness until one reconciles the two, either by refuting the claims of the Absolute or the Contradiction or by resolving both into a new proposition that now replaces the Absolute because it is more true than the original proposition. Although Hegel did not use the terms, it is common to refer to the Absolute as the *thesis*, the Contradiction as the *antithesis*, and the result of their interaction as the *synthesis*. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Preface and Introduction, reprinted in Albert Hakim, *Historical Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1987), 481-486. In *The Conduct of War 1789-1861*, Fuller ascribes Clausewitz's approach to philosopher Immanuel Kant, and this is not totally incorrect. Kant believed in an ideal, or formal truth as well as a practical truth. Clausewitz seems to agree as he ruminates on the nature of war. Nevertheless, his approach seems to more closely mirror Hegel. "In form and method Clausewitz may have been Kantian," writes Hew Strachan, "but in substance he became progressively more Hegelian." Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz's On War: A Biography* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 90.

<sup>17</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Howard & Paret trans., 78.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. This concept of escalation finds a modern manifestation in Robert Jervis' *spiral model* described in *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 58-113.

modify or moderate it, pulling it away from its true nature. The Absolute is not affected by outside forces such as politics that might limit war's objective, and therefore, its conduct.<sup>20</sup> Either the adversary is destroyed, or he capitulates when it becomes evident that this outcome is inevitable. "If you are to force the enemy, by making war on him, to do your bidding," Clausewitz explains, "you must either make him literally defenseless or at least put him in a position that makes this danger probable."<sup>21</sup> This essentially means that the enemy has no choice in the matter.<sup>22</sup>

"But move from the abstract to the real world," Clausewitz warns, "and the whole things looks quite different."<sup>23</sup> In the dialectic process, Clausewitz must account for historical evidence that clearly demonstrates that outside factors do, in fact, affect how wars are fought. These factors pull it away from the ideal form. Through his historical study, Clausewitz observes that a great number of wars have been fought with limited means in pursuit of limited aims, and this truth stands in opposition to his original thesis. This is why, immediately after he describes the ideal form of war in sections three through five in Chapter One, Clausewitz's sixth section is titled "Modifications in Practice."<sup>24</sup> In this manner, Clausewitz identifies a fundamental truth about warfare. War manifests itself as a duality. When left to itself, it tends to extremes, but outside forces are always pulling back against this

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<sup>20</sup> "If for the moment we consider the pure concept of war," writes Clausewitz, "we should have to say that the political purpose of war had no connection with war itself; for if war is an act of violence meant to force the enemy to do our will its aim would have always and solely to be to overcome the enemy and disarm him." Ibid., 90.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>22</sup> In Book One, Chapter Two, Clausewitz describes the destruction of enemy forces in this way: "The fighting forces must be destroyed: that is, they must be put in such a condition that they can no longer carry on the fight." Ibid., 90.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

natural tendency. The rest of the first chapter—and to a degree the rest of *Vom Kriege*—is an attempt to understand how these forces pull war away from its abstract manifestation as violence without limit.

The primary moderating force is clearly identified by Clausewitz. It is the political object, “the original motive for the war.”<sup>25</sup> Clausewitz asserts that this motive determines the military effort required. The more intense the motive for going to war, he argues, the closer that the war will approach the absolute form, with politics playing a subservient role to military factors in war’s conduct. Alternatively, when the motive for war is less intense, “war will be driven further from its natural course, the political object will be more and more at variance with the aim of ideal war, and the conflict will seem increasingly political in character.”<sup>26</sup> Clausewitz concedes that the political object may be quite unlimited—such as total conquest or extermination. This, in turn, would drive war to the absolute. He observes, however, that this is not often not the case. “In war, many roads lead to success,” writes Clausewitz, “and they do not all involve the opponent’s outright defeat.”<sup>27</sup> The military objectives in war may range from total overthrow of the enemy to simple deterrence, depending on the political goal.<sup>28</sup> Using words that challenge military professionals to the present day, Clausewitz expands on this observation: “war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 87.

Because of this interaction between military considerations and politics, Clausewitz conceptualizes war as a duality. It is absolute, and it is modified. It is, simultaneously, both a duel and a dialogue. Moreover, Clausewitz contends that the primary factor that determines the character of a specific conflict is the political object being sought. If this objective is relatively unlimited, then the conflict itself will approach the absolute. In this case, it is useful to think of war as a duel. One must do everything within one's power to destroy the enemy and make him incapable of resistance. Alternatively, if the war is fought for limited aims, then the character of the conflict will also be limited. Instead of trying to throw every available effort into the destruction of the enemy, one may choose to use just enough force to persuade the enemy to agree to terms, such as a withdrawal from disputed territory or signing of a non-aggression treaty. In such a conflict, it is not necessary—or even desirable—to destroy all the enemy forces or render the enemy incapable of all resistance. One seeks to do just enough to prevail in the competition.

An understanding of Clausewitz's concept of war as a duality is critical to assessing leadership attack. As will be shown later, advocates of leadership attack such as John Warden seem to assume that war's military objective is always to make the enemy incapable of resistance. They want to give the enemy no choice in the matter. Warden tends to see war as a duel, but he wants to ignore the dialogue. This is not altogether incorrect. Clausewitz would agree that this approach is appropriate for some wars. In light of Clausewitz's depth of analysis, however, this approach is incomplete, and it may reveal a significant flaw in any corresponding theory of leadership attack. While leadership attack with the intent of causing the enemy's overthrow and collapse may be appropriate when a war's aim is relatively unlimited, it may be misguided and counterproductive when war moves away from the

absolute. In fact, this study will eventually show that this is the case, but it will also conclude that war appears to be different at different levels, and this has serious consequences for leadership attack at each level.

### **War's Tendency to Grow More Absolute at the Lower Levels**

Whatever the overall nature of the conflict, the perspective of the soldier on the front lines is often very different from that of the political leader in the capital. This is yet another way that war manifests its complexity. Clausewitz spends much of *Vom Kriege* addressing differences between *strategy*, which he calls “the use of engagements for the object of the war,” and *tactics*, which is “the use of armed forces in the engagement.”<sup>30</sup> One of the key observations when one considers war at these various levels is that, as war approaches the tactical level—the level of the individual engagement—it tends to appear increasingly absolute. The larger war can be fought with limited means for limited aims, but the individual engagements that make up the war are often fought to the death. Therefore, war often seems very unlimited from the individual soldier’s perspective, especially as one is placed in a kill-or-be-killed situation.<sup>31</sup> While war may be a dialogue for the political leader, it is most often a duel for the individuals doing the fighting.

This tendency is important for leadership attack, because it opens the possibility that disrupting enemy leadership at one level may be quite beneficial, but doing so at another level

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 128. In modern terms, Clausewitz’s definition of strategy is closer to the definition of “operational art.” See Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, 10 August 2011.

<sup>31</sup> “Engagements mean fighting. The object of fighting is the destruction or defeat of the enemy. ... What do we mean by the defeat of the enemy? Simply the destruction of his forces, whether by death, injury, or any other means—either completely or enough to make him stop fighting. Leaving aside all specific purposes of any particular engagement, the complete or partial destruction of the enemy must be regarded as the sole object of all engagements.” Ibid., 227.

may be ineffective or counterproductive. Exploring this possibility is critical when considering the most important theoretical concept pertaining to leadership attack, that of the *center of gravity*. As will be explained later, John Warden argues that one can identify a center of gravity—or multiple centers—at each level of the enemy’s system or organization. He argues that successful attacks on these centers will have similar effects at each level. As explained above, there is an important counterargument to this, and resolving this tension is a major aim of this study. To proceed, it is critical to present the concept of center of gravity in its original context.

### ***Schwerpunkt* Revisited**

As explained earlier, Clausewitz introduces the concept of *Schwerpunkt* in *Vom Kriege*, and this term is commonly translated in English as “center of gravity.”<sup>32</sup> He uses the term several times in *Vom Kriege*, but the closest he comes to defining the concept is in Book Eight, Chapter Four, subtitled *Niedewerfung des Feindes* or “Overthrow of the Enemy.” In this chapter, Clausewitz attempts to answer the question: “What is this overthrow?”

All that theory can say here is that the main point is to keep the predominant conditions of both parties in view. Out of them a certain center of gravity, a center of power and movement, will form itself, upon which everything depends; and against this center of gravity of the enemy the concentrated blow of all the forces must be directed.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Graham, Jolles, and Howard & Paret all translate *Schwerpunkt* as “center of gravity.”

<sup>33</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Jolles trans., 921.

Later, in Chapter Nine of Book Eight, titled “Plan of War When The Destruction of the Enemy is the Aim,” Clausewitz opens the chapter by weaving the idea of *Schwerpunkt* into his two fundamental principles of war:

The first is to trace the weight of the enemy’s power back to as few centers of gravity as possible, to one if it can be done; again, to confine the attack against these centers of gravity to as few principal undertakings as possible; to one if possible; lastly, to keep all secondary undertakings as subordinate as possible, In a word, the first principle is *to act with as much concentration as possible*.

The second principle is: *to act as swiftly as possible*; therefore to permit no delay or detour without sufficient reason (emphasis in original).<sup>34</sup>

This center of gravity concept has evoked much discussion and debate among military thinkers, and while the controversy is interesting and relevant for military professionals, especially given its preeminence in current military planning models, it is beyond the scope of this study except for two critical points.<sup>35</sup> First, Clausewitz offers this concept in the context of *Niederwerfung des Feindes*—the total overthrow, or annihilation, of the enemy. It is a concept intended to cause the collapse of the enemy.<sup>36</sup> As such, it is inextricably tied to Clausewitz’s concept of absolute war and not necessarily applicable to wars that are significantly moderated by a limited aim. Second, the concept of center of gravity is reductionist in nature. It is a concept for reducing the annihilation problem by postulating a relationship between the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 948.

<sup>35</sup> For example, see Milan Vego, PhD., “Clausewitz’s Schwerpunkt: Mistranslated from German, Misunderstood in English,” *Military Review*, January-February 2007, 101-109; Dr. Joe Strange and Colonel Richard Iron, UK Army, “Understanding Centers of Gravity and Critical Vulnerabilities,” <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/awc-thry.htm#cog> (accessed 27 May 2006); Jan L. Rueschhoff and Johnathan P. Dunne, “Centers of Gravity from the ‘Inside Out,’” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 60, 1st Quarter 2011, 120-125; Dale C. Eikmeier, “Redefining the Center of Gravity,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 59, 4th Quarter 2010, 156-158.

<sup>36</sup> This is the conclusion of Antulio J. Echevarria II in his study *Clausewitz’s Center of Gravity: Changing our Warfighting Doctrine—Again*. “Clausewitz’s CoG,” he writes, “focuses on achieving a specific effect, the collapse of the enemy.” Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Clausewitz’s Center of Gravity: Changing our Warfighting Doctrine—Again* (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, 2002), 12.

concentration of force at a single point or small set of points and the collapse of the enemy's war effort. In this regard, it is primarily a method for *effectiveness* in annihilation. If one does not concentrate force on the center of gravity, the result may be a dispersion of force that results in defeat due to lack of priority. Clausewitz makes this point clear when he discusses war against an alliance. He writes, "I would, therefore, state it as a principle that if you can vanquish all your enemies by defeating one of them, that defeat must be the main objective in the war."<sup>37</sup> The alternative would be to divide one's forces and risk defeat on multiple fronts; it is more *effective* to concentrate one's forces on the one enemy army that matters most. But it is also more *efficient* to defeat one army versus two, even if one is superior to both. Clausewitz does not make a distinction between effectiveness and efficiency, but it appears from the text that he is primarily concerned with effectiveness. Nevertheless, later military theorists who borrowed the center of gravity concept from Clausewitz would recognize its dual promise of effectiveness and efficiency, and this would become a significant theme of leadership attack, especially in the wake of the bankrupt strategies of the Great War.

### **The Doctrine of the Decisive Point Leads to an Indecisive Stalemate**

Perhaps the greatest testimony to the intellectual discipline of Clausewitz is his willingness to consider the full breadth of warfare in light of the successes of Napoleon and his doctrine of the decisive battle. Other theorists took a different view. To them, Napoleon's success arose from the fact that he had employed a superior approach to war. The primary goal of military theory, therefore, was to distill the wisdom of this superior form into principles that could be applied to the battlefield. This was the approach of one of

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<sup>37</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*; Howard & Paret trans., 596-597.



Clausewitz's contemporaries, Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, a Swiss officer who volunteered with the French army and fought under Napoleon's command.<sup>38</sup> As an eyewitness to Napoleon's greatest battles, including Austerlitz and Jena/Auerstedt, Jomini believed he had experienced a revolution in military affairs, and he made it his life's work to explain this development.<sup>39</sup> In keeping with the spirit of the Enlightenment, Jomini adopted a "scientific" approach to war, one which sought to identify the timeless principles that govern its conduct.<sup>40</sup> Jomini accomplished this, or so he thought, in the following passage from his foremost work, *The Art of War*:

#### THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF WAR

It is proposed to show that there is one great principle underlying all the operations of war—a principle which must be followed in all good combinations. It is embraced in the following maxims:

1. To throw by strategic movements the mass of an army, successively, upon the decisive points of a theater of war, and also upon the communications of the enemy as much as possible without compromising one's own.
2. To maneuver to engage fractions of the hostile army with the bulk of one's forces.
3. On the battlefield, to throw the mass of one's forces upon the decisive point, or upon that portion of the hostile line which is of the first importance to overthrow.

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Messenger, "Introduction," Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War* (London: Greenhill Books, 1992), v-vi.

<sup>39</sup> John Shy, "Jomini," *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Peter Paret, ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 143-146. In his article "The Issue of Attrition," J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr. cites Napoleon's victories at Austerlitz and Jena/Auerstadt as the epitome of annihilation war. "The Ulm-Austerlitz campaign and the simultaneous battles at Jena-Auerstadt," writes Bartholomees, "produced exactly the strategic military situation annihilation theory demands of armed force, and produced within days or months the political victory predicted by the theory." J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., "The Issue of Attrition," *Parameters*, Spring 2010, 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 148-149.

4. To so arrange that these masses shall not only be thrown upon the decisive point, but that they shall engage at the proper time and with energy.<sup>41</sup>

For purposes of this study, it is not essential to determine if Jomini's maxims are valid. They certainly seem simplistic when compared to the depth of Clausewitz, but their direction matches some of Napoleon's greatest victories, including Austerlitz. For this study, it is important to remember that Jomini's principles—not Clausewitz's philosophy—became accepted as a distillation of the superior Napoleonic technique. With these conclusions, Jomini established himself as the “authoritative interpreter of Napoleonic warfare” according to historian John Shy.<sup>42</sup> This was not necessarily fortunate for those who listened to Jomini's interpretation. “The most serious criticism of Jomini was not that what he said was wrong,” writes Shy, “but that by omission and exaggeration he had produced a grotesquely simple account of what happened from 1796 to 1815 and thereby a grossly inadequate theory, whose consequences were potentially disastrous.”<sup>43</sup>

This potential for disaster was fully realized in World War I. Subsequent generations of military strategists had studied Napoleon through the work of Jomini, and when the Great War began, Jomini's principles of mass, maneuver, and decisive points were well-known.<sup>44</sup> Instead of helping strategists understand war, the simplicity of these maxims, which was such a large part of their appeal, had masked the broader complexity of war. To Jomini, war was a duel on a larger scale. One simply had to fight well to prevail. To strategists well-versed in Jominian principles, therefore, post-Napoleonic war had a single form. True war consisted of

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<sup>41</sup> Jomini, *Art of War*, 70.

<sup>42</sup> Shy, 180.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

large masses of armies hurling themselves against the enemy's main force with the intent of destroying it, leaving the enemy defenseless and compelled to accept the peace terms as dictated. Anything else was a lesser form that should be avoided. This conception of war, of course, resembles Clausewitz's absolute without the corresponding "modifications in practice." The focus on absolute war as practiced by Napoleon to the exclusion of everything else meant that strategists had little appreciation for war where neither side was able to completely destroy the other. As such, they were unprepared for the stalemate that followed. "The Great War shattered many things," writes Shy, "and none more than military theory. After the horrors and fiascos of trench warfare, the very idea of 'military science' seemed laughable."<sup>45</sup>

Military thinkers reacted to the strategic failures of the Great War in different ways. Some writers such as Hans Delbrück and B.H. Liddell Hart believed that each side needed to adopt more limited political aims, as neither side had sufficient forces to annihilate the other. Hans Delbrück was a prominent German historian who considered it his duty to finish the work that Clausewitz had started.<sup>46</sup> In his copious writings, he provides his own terms to describe war's duality. The first is *Niederwerfungs-Strategie*, which has been consistently translated in English as "strategy of annihilation" but can also mean "strategy of defeat" or

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "Clausewitz died in 1831, before he could carry out this work," writes Delbrück in the closing paragraphs of Volume IV of his *History of the Art of War*. He then concludes, "To fill out the lacuna that he left has been one of the purposes of the present work." Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War: Volume IV, The Dawn of Modern Warfare*, Walter J. Renfro, Jr., trans. (Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 454. For an introduction into the life and work of Delbrück, an invaluable source is the article: Gordon A. Craig, "Delbrück: The Military Historian," *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Peter Paret, ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 341.

“strategy of overthrow.”<sup>47</sup> The second is *Ermattungs-Strategie*, which has traditionally been translated as “strategy of attrition” but can also mean “strategy of erosion,” “strategy of fatigue,” or “strategy of exhaustion.”<sup>48</sup> Delbrück increasingly came to view World War I in terms of *Ermattungs-Strategie*, because neither side could produce a decisive battle over the other.<sup>49</sup> In trying to educate his German audience on the distinction, Delbrück referenced the experiences of Frederick the Great.<sup>50</sup> In keeping with Frederick’s example, Delbrück argued that Germany should have adopted limited political aims to better match their limited ability in the field.<sup>51</sup>

British strategist Basil Henry Liddell Hart served as a soldier in the Allied front lines, and the horrors of trench warfare never left him. His observation and participation in

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<sup>47</sup> Delbrück, *History of the Art of War: Volume IV*, 379. Delbrück insists that he borrowed this term from Clausewitz, but he does not give a reference. A word search of the original *Vom Kriege* shows that the work contains *Niederwerfung* six times, but it is not associated with the word *Strategie*. Instead of being translated as “annihilation,” it is most often translated as “defeat” according to Paret and Howard; and “overthrow” or “destruction” according to Graham and Jolles (reference the titles of Book Eight, Chapters Four and Nine). Generally, the English word “annihilation” is an appropriate translation in the context of Delbrück’s work, because it conveys the proper connotation for a strategy that seeks decisive victory over the opponent, most often through the destruction of the enemy force.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 379. Renfroe translates this as “strategy of attrition,” while Gordon A. Craig translates it as “strategy of exhaustion” in his influential article, “Delbrück: The Military Historian,” *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Peter Paret, ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 341. In contrast to an annihilation strategy, Delbrück argues that the goal of an attrition strategy is to raise the costs for one’s opponent, usually by lengthening the war through a combination of maneuver and battle that avoids the decisive engagement while inflicting damage to the enemy. Eventually, the cost becomes so great that the opponent agrees to a negotiated peace, although this peace usually calls for moderate concessions that are in keeping with the war’s limited character. Delbrück describes the strategy of attrition: “It is also possible that the opposing forces are so equal that from the start only moderate successes can be expected. One may not so much place his hopes on completely defeating the enemy as on wearing him out and exhausting him by blows and destruction of all kinds to the extent that in the end he prefers to accept the conditions of the victor, which in this case must always show a certain moderation. That is the nature of the strategy of attrition, whose great problem is always a question of whether or not a tactical decision, a battle with its dangers and losses, is to be sought, whether or not the prospective gains from a victory outweigh the losses.” Delbrück, *History of the Art of War; Volume IV*, 108-109.

<sup>49</sup> Craig, “Delbrück,” 344-345.

<sup>50</sup> Hans Delbrück, *Krieg und Politik*, 2:164, quoted in Craig, “Delbrück,” 345.

<sup>51</sup> Craig, “Delbrück,” 348-352.

fruitless assaults on defensive fortifications led him to make broad conclusions about the futility of annihilation strategy. This became a major theme in his later writings. For Liddell Hart, adopting an indirect approach is the preferred method to avoid the futility of force-on-force warfare, especially at the lower levels of war. At the strategic level, he advocates a second method, which is to adopt a limited political aim. Liddell Hart asserts that military victory—even a convincing one—does not necessarily result in the ultimate objective, which is “a better state of peace.”<sup>52</sup> He warns, “History shows that gaining military victory is not in itself equivalent to gaining the object of policy.”<sup>53</sup> To avoid winning the battle and losing the political struggle, Liddell Hart argues that “it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire.”<sup>54</sup> Like Delbrück, Liddell Hart concludes that the best way to avoid exhaustion through war is to wage it for limited objectives. “Victory in this sense is only

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<sup>52</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd Revised Ed., (New York: Meridian, 1991), 338.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

possible if a quick result can be gained or if a long effort can be economically proportioned to the national resources," he asserts. "The end must be adjusted to the means."<sup>55</sup>

Even in light of World War I, this realization was rare. Other military thinkers missed this lesson entirely. They viewed the stalemate on the front lines not as a failure of annihilation strategy or a mismatch between political aims and military means. Instead, they considered it a failure of imagination. Particularly in the English language, the word *attrition* was weighed with such negative connotation so that anything associated with it was viewed with disdain.<sup>56</sup> The way to prevent the descent into attrition warfare was not to adjust one's

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 357. Interestingly, Liddell Hart severely criticized Clausewitz, not Jomini, for the failures of strategy in World War I, and his critique is not without merit. The fault, Liddell Hart argues, is in Clausewitz's adoption of the dialectic method, which Liddell Hart attributes to Kantian influence. This method invites disastrous misunderstanding. "Not one reader in a hundred was likely to follow the subtlety of his logic or to preserve a true balance amid such philosophical jugglery," writes Liddell Hart...

But everyone could catch such ringing phrases as:

'We have only one means in war—the battle.'

'The bloody solution of the crisis, the effort for the destruction of the enemy's forces, is the first-born son of war.'

'Only great and general battles can produce great results.'

'Let of not hear of generals who conquer without bloodshed.'

By the reiteration of such phrases Clausewitz blurred the outlines of his philosophy, already indistinct, and made it into a mere marching refrain—a Prussian *Marseillaise* which inflamed the blood and intoxicated the mind."

Liddell Hart presents a stinging conclusion: "The teachings of Clausewitz, taken without understanding, largely influenced both the causation and the character of World War I. Thereby it led on, all too logically, to World War II." Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 339-344.

<sup>56</sup> James D. Kiras observes, "a handful of influential military theorists, writing in the wake of the First World War, ascribed a pejorative value to the term attrition that continues to influence perceptions today. Advocating strategic attrition, or strategies of attrition, has become the intellectual equivalent of inflexibly advocating the slaughter practiced by British general officer 'butchers and bunglers' of the First World War." James D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy: From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2006), 59-60.

J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., opens his article "The Issue of Attrition," with similar sentiments: "Attrition is a dirty word," he writes. "Soldiers and politicians seek quick, decisive victories; the World War I-style slugging match evoked by the term attrition is the last thing a commander or statesman wants to replicate." Bartholomees, "The Issue of Attrition," 5.

political aims, as Delbrück and Liddell Hart had argued. It was, rather, to invent concepts that allowed a return to annihilation warfare and the promise of decisive battle.

This assertion would have tremendous implications for leadership attack. While the proponents of annihilation warfare—including those who proposed leadership attack strategies—tended to dismiss Clausewitz’s conclusions about the duality of war, they wholeheartedly adopted Clausewitz’s concept of the center of gravity and its usefulness in causing the enemy’s overthrow. These proponents made use of two key developments. The first was the incorporation of new technologies such as the tank and airplane in an effort to bypass enemy defenses and fortifications. The second was the introduction of new categories of targets that, when destroyed, would produce decisive effects in a manner similar to the destruction of the opposing army in Napoleonic warfare. The combination of new technologies and new target sets would lead to a powerful idea: disrupting the enemy’s leadership may be the most intelligent—and the most humane—method to achieve decisive victory. This argument would form the core of an innovative proposal by J.F.C. Fuller.

### **J.F.C Fuller and “A Shot Through the Brain”**

John Frederick Charles Fuller gained a considerable reputation for unconventional thinking, beginning prior to World War I and extending long after.<sup>57</sup> As with Liddell Hart, a central theme of Fuller’s work was a hatred for the attrition warfare he had experienced first hand in the Great War and the desire to avoid this horror in the future. In fact, Fuller did not wait until the end of the Great War to begin thinking and writing about new approaches to battle tactics. One of his most important works was written during the war itself. While

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<sup>57</sup> Anthony John Trythall, *‘Boney’ Fuller: The Intellectual General* (London: Cassell & Co., 1977), 23-40, 145-179.

serving in the Tank Corps in 1918, Fuller wrote a memorandum that proposed an innovative plan to break the stalemate on the Western Front.<sup>58</sup> This memorandum would be known as “Plan 1919,” and it contains an original—and controversial—mix of proposals.<sup>59</sup> The thesis of the memorandum is the proposition that using developing technologies to attack the adversary leadership would lead to a breaking of the stalemate by inducing a form of organizational collapse and paralysis of the opposing army. This thesis would be adopted by John Warden in his theory of leadership attack, so it deserves significant exploration here.

In Plan 1919, Fuller argues that two changes are needed. First, the Allies should adopt a new objective for attack. While the objective had traditionally been the destruction of the enemy army, the new objective should be the elements of that army’s command structure.<sup>60</sup> Second, the new technologies of the battlefield, namely the tank (and to a lesser extent, the airplane), should be employed in this attack. These new instruments could break through—or fly over—the front lines and make attacks on German headquarters possible.<sup>61</sup> Once a headquarters was destroyed or disrupted, the army under its command would be thrown into a state of disorganization and chaos, something Fuller would eventually call “strategical

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<sup>58</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, “Plan 1919,” Appendix in *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1936). Fuller composed multiple versions of this memorandum. The first was titled, “The Tactics of the Medium D Tank.” The second was titled, “Strategical Paralysis as the Object of the Attack.” “Plan 1919” was written on 24 May 1918, and this is the version included as an Appendix in *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier*. Trythall, *‘Boney’ Fuller*, 60. The quotes used in this study are from the 24 May 1918 version, hereafter referenced as “Plan 1919.”

<sup>59</sup> Trythall presents an informed discussion of Plan 1919 in *‘Boney’ Fuller*, 60-69.

<sup>60</sup> Fuller, “Plan 1919.”

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*



paralysis.”<sup>62</sup> This would allow the Allies to engage the German army with great advantage, eventually leading to disunity and annihilation of the German units involved.<sup>63</sup>

Fuller argues that this set of cascading effects must begin with an attack on the German command system, not on the front-line units. The bulk of the war had been spent trying to wear down the enemy by attacking soldiers through “brute force.”<sup>64</sup> By 1918, it was increasingly obvious that the costs of this strategy were unacceptable for all sides. In Plan 1919, Fuller reasons that an alternative method may be found in attacking targets that disable the enemy organization. He calls this “unhinging” the enemy.<sup>65</sup> In presenting his key thesis, Fuller relies on the analogy of the human body as representative of a human organization: if the German Headquarters is the brain of the army, why not destroy it first and deal with the paralyzed body—the disorganized ground units—second?<sup>66</sup> It is worth reprinting Fuller’s essential argument in Plan 1919, as these ideas would serve as the foundation for John Warden’s modern theory of leadership attack:

There are two ways of destroying an organisation:

- (i) By wearing it down (dissipating it).
- (ii) By rendering it inoperative (unhinging it).

In war the first comprises the killing, wounding, capturing and disarming of the enemy's soldiers—body warfare. The second, the rendering inoperative of his power of command—brain warfare. Taking a single man as an example: the first method may be compared to a succession of slight wounds which will eventually cause him to bleed to death; the second—a shot through the brain.

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<sup>62</sup> Trythall, “Boney” Fuller, 60.

<sup>63</sup> Fuller, “Plan 1919.”

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

The brains of an army are its Staff—Army, Corps and Divisional Headquarters. Could we suddenly remove these from an extensive sector of the German front, the collapse of the personnel they control would be a mere matter of hours, even if only slight opposition were put up against it. ...

Our present theory, based on our present weapons, weapons of limited range of action, has been one of attaining our strategical object by brute force; that is, the wearing away of the enemy's muscles, bone and blood. ...

As our present theory is to destroy "personnel," so should our new theory be to destroy "command," not after the enemy's personnel has been disorganised, but before it has been attacked, so that it may be found in a state of complete disorganisation when attacked. ...

Compared to fighting men there are but a few Commanders in the field; therefore the means required to destroy these Commanders will be far less than those normally required to destroy the men they control.<sup>67</sup>

In this passage, Fuller presents a straightforward line of logic. Leadership is a vital element for the operation an armed force, much like the brain is vital to the body's function. When deprived of that leadership, the armed force suffers from disorganization and collapse. In Fuller's view, a strategy that attacks the leadership can reintroduce annihilation tactics to the battlefield. To illustrate this assertion, Fuller presents an insightful historical reference immediately following the passage reprinted above:

It is no longer a question of: Had Napoleon possessed a section of machine guns at Waterloo, would he not have won that battle? But: Had he been able to kidnap or kill the Duke of Wellington and his Staff at 9 a.m. on June 18, 1815, would he not have done equally well without firing a shot? Would not the sudden loss of command in the British Army have reduced it to such a state of disorganisation that, when he did advance, he would have been able to walk through it?<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

For Fuller, the answer to these questions is an obvious “yes.”

In 1918, an attack on the enemy brain—in this case, the German Command Headquarters—had been impossible because of the massive challenge of breaking through the front lines. Fuller believed that such an attack was viable, however, given the emerging technologies of the day, especially the tank and airplane.<sup>69</sup> Fuller was more sanguine about the tank than the airplane, as he reasoned that the airplanes would have to land near the targets to attack them.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, Fuller describes how tank columns could penetrate the front lines and create a spearhead that would strike deep behind these lines, all the way to the enemy headquarters and communications networks. This concept would make the attacks on German leadership possible.<sup>71</sup>

Plan 1919 was rendered obsolete by the November Armistice that ended the World War I, but Fuller would recall and expand the concepts of leadership attack in numerous publications released after the war.<sup>72</sup> In one attempt at this expansion, he would again recall the analogy of the human body as an organization. The disorganizing and unhinging effect of destroying the enemy leadership—the shot through the brain—would have the effect of paralyzing the enemy’s organization. Fuller called this effect “strategical paralysis.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Fuller writes: “Before reaching these Headquarters elaborate systems of trenches and wire entanglements, protected by every known type of missile-throwing weapon, have to be crossed. To penetrate or avoid this belt of resistance, which may be compared to a shield protecting the system of command, two types of weapons suggest themselves: (i) The aeroplane. (ii) The tank. The first is able to surmount all obstacles; the second to traverse most.” Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Fuller does not mention the possibility of aerial bombardment. Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. This concept would also become influential in Germany and Russia as these countries developed tank doctrine in the period between World Wars I and II.

<sup>72</sup> For example, in a collection of essays released under the title *On Future Warfare*, Fuller seems to have recycled much of the language of Plan 1919. J.F.C. Fuller, *On Future Warfare*, (London: Sifton Praed and Co., Ltd., 1928).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Additionally, in an influential book titled *The Foundations of the Science of War* published in 1925, Fuller uses language describing the attack of enemy command that is remarkably similar to that reprinted above from Plan 1919.<sup>74</sup> Fuller expands on these ideas, however, by raising the concept of *economy of force* to be the one law that governs all principles of war.<sup>75</sup> He reasons: if war is subject to the law of economy of force, the ultimate expression of this law is the targeting of the commander:

The most vulnerable points are those the capture of which will produce the greatest demoralization, first, in the command, and secondly, in the troops. When controlled by a genius like Napoleon, the decisive point of attack is the genius himself. Remove Napoleon from the command during the 1796 campaign and the probabilities are that the Austrians would have won the war.

Though such a removal is seldom possible, the fact to bear in mind is that all operations of war are directed against the enemy's command—the man behind the hostile battle-front.<sup>76</sup>

In his proposals concerning the attack of enemy leadership, Fuller borrows much from Clausewitz. For Fuller, leadership represents the ultimate center of gravity for the opposing force. Attacking this leadership is effective, in that this strategy offers a path to decisive victory. It is also efficient, in that it offers victory at the least cost to the attacker. The emphasis on both effectiveness and economy is a potent combination, and it represents the core of the strongest argument for leadership attack. It would also become the core of John Warden's theory. The main area where Warden would differ from Fuller, however, is in the choice of the preferred technology for attack. For Fuller, it was the tank. For Warden, it was the airplane. Therefore, while Warden adopted the connection between leadership attack and

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<sup>74</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1925), 291-292.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-207.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 333-334.

strategical paralysis from Fuller, he would also borrow much from the early airpower theorists as they developed ideas to leverage the airplane's unique abilities.

### Airpower and "Vital Centers"

As the airplane quickly developed into a viable weapon with numerous forms, early airpower thinkers—including Giulio Douhet, William "Billy" Mitchell, William Sherman, and the cadre at the Air Corps Tactical School—agreed with Fuller that the technology of the airplane could be used to fly over the formidable defenses of the modern battlefield and strike targets of value to the enemy.<sup>77</sup> With this new capability came important choices, as military commanders had to decide which target sets to strike. The airpower theorists searched for what Billy Mitchell called the "vital centers" of the enemy—those targets that, if destroyed, would have the maximum impact on the adversary.<sup>78</sup>

To these theorists, the airplane was the key element of an economy-of-force doctrine, similar to the role of the tank in Fuller's concepts. The airplane could fly over the traditional battlefield and deliver firepower deep behind enemy lines. To do this, airpower needed what Giulio Douhet called "the command of the air."<sup>79</sup> "I have always maintained," writes Douhet,

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<sup>77</sup> This section is not meant to be a comprehensive review of early airpower theorists. The purpose is to trace concepts of leadership attack through a selection of these theorists. By necessity, it does not mention important theorists such as Hugh Trenchard, John Slessor, and Alexander P. de Seversky. Fortunately, there are numerous sources available that present a more comprehensive view of the early airpower theorists. Among the best are *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory*, Phillip S. Meilinger, ed. (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2001); Colonel Phillip S. Meilinger, *Airmen and Air Theory: A Review of the Sources* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2001); Richard J. Overly, "Strategic Bombardment Before 1939: Doctrine, Planning, and Operations," *Case Studies in Strategic Bombardment*, R. Cargill Hall, ed., (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1998); and David MacIsaac, "Voices from the Central Blue: The Air Power Theorists," *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Peter Paret, ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986).

<sup>78</sup> William Mitchell, *Skyways: A Book on Modern Aeronautics* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1930), 255.

<sup>79</sup> Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, Dino Ferrari, trans., (New York: Coward-McCann, 1942).

“that the essential purpose of an Air Force is to conquer the command of the air by first wiping out the enemy’s air forces.”<sup>80</sup> According to his definition, command of the air “provides whomever possess it with the advantages of protecting all his own land and sea territory from enemy aerial offensives and at the same time of subjecting the enemy’s territory to his own offensives.”<sup>81</sup> With these words, Douhet makes it clear that he is describing a version of annihilation strategy. Just as in Delbrück’s *Niederwerfungs-Strategie* (strategy of annihilation), the first objective is to destroy the enemy armed forces. When an air force annihilates the enemy air force, it leaves the enemy defenseless, because in Douhet’s theory, the only way to defend against enemy air forces is with one’s own air forces.

As Delbrück describes the strategy of annihilation, all that is left after the destruction of the enemy armed forces is “following up on the victory until the loser subjects himself to the will of the victor and accepts his conditions, in the most extreme case even to the point of occupying the entire enemy country.”<sup>82</sup> But in the case of airpower, that last action is unattainable, at least in the traditional sense. Airplanes cannot occupy territory in the same way that soldiers do, i.e. by continually threatening those in close proximity with deadly force in response to noncompliance. In order for airplanes to be effective instruments for following up the annihilation of the enemy armed force, they require the ability to deliver weapons that create effects on the ground that are destructive, coercive, or both. If airplanes are able to do this, then their role in a strategy of annihilation may, in fact, be decisive. “Once an Independent Air Force has conquered the command of the air,” writes Douhet, “it should

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 95-96.

<sup>82</sup> Delbrück, *History of the Art of War, Volume IV*, 421.

keep up violent, uninterrupted action against surface objectives, to the end that it may crush the material and moral resistance of the enemy.”<sup>83</sup>

A major problem arises with this argument. There was no agreement—and there is none today—among airpower theorists on which surface objectives ought to be targeted by airpower. The ability of airplanes to deliver weapons with sufficient accuracy and destructive power was limited during the interwar years. Therefore, airpower theorists faced difficult choices, because they could not propose a theory that required the airplane to strike large numbers of targets. They needed a way of prioritizing targets that was both effective and efficient, and unsurprisingly, they adopted concepts similar to Clausewitz’s center of gravity. The challenge was to identify these centers of gravity and, in Clausewitz’s words, “if possible trace them back to a single one.”<sup>84</sup> There were many ideas for how to do this. In *The Command of the Air*, Douhet argues that the ultimate target is the enemy population. “By bombing the most vital civilian centers it could spread terror through the nation and quickly break down [the enemy’s] material and moral resistance,” he asserts.<sup>85</sup> In Douhet’s opinion, bombing the enemy population with a combination of explosive, incendiary, and poison gas bombs would cause widespread panic.<sup>86</sup> This would inevitably result in the people demanding

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>84</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*; Howard & Paret trans., 619.

<sup>85</sup> Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, 57. Douhet recognizes the moral issues inherent in striking population centers, but he considers this a lesser evil than other options because such wars will be short: “Tragic, too, to think that the decision in this kind of war must depend upon smashing the material and moral resources of a people caught up in a frightful cataclysm which haunts them everywhere without cease until the final collapse of all social organization. Mercifully, the decision will be quick in this kind of war, since the decisive blows will be directed at civilians, that element of the countries at war least able to sustain them. These future wars may yet prove to be more humane than wars in the past in spite of all, because they may in the long run shed less blood.” Ibid., 61.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 20.

that their government end the war.<sup>87</sup> By asserting that air bombardment can induce panic and terror in the enemy population, Douhet completes the logical argument that connects the annihilation of the enemy air forces to victory in the overall war.

Like Douhet, U.S. Army Brigadier General William “Billy” Mitchell asserts that after the air forces have gained command of the air, they will be free to attack surface targets, and these attacks, if directed at the right targets, will have disproportionate effects.<sup>88</sup> Unlike Douhet, Mitchell does not advocate the bombing of the enemy population. Instead, Mitchell reasons that an enemy state’s capacity to wage war was linked to its ability to produce large amounts of munitions, equipment, food, and other supplies, and then get these to the front. Therefore, centers of production and transportation systems would make the most lucrative targets. “Air forces will attack centers of production of all kinds, means of transportation, agricultural areas, ports and shipping; not so much the people themselves,” Mitchell writes. “Today to make war we must have great metal and chemical factories that have to stay in place, take months to build, and, if destroyed, cannot be replaced in the usual length of a modern war.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> “A complete breakdown of the social structure cannot but take place in a country being subjected to this kind of merciless pounding from the air,” writes Douhet. “The time would soon come when, to put an end to the horror and suffering, the people themselves, driven by the instinct of self-preservation, would rise up and demand an end to the war—this before the army and navy had time to mobilize at all!” Ibid., 58.

<sup>88</sup> William Mitchell, *Winged Defense: The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power—Economic and Military* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), 16.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 16-17.



Mitchell's public comments in opposition to official War Department policies regarding aviation led to his court-martial in 1925 and eventual resignation in 1926.<sup>90</sup> While the specifics of his controversial career are beyond the scope of this study, it is noteworthy that, just four days after his resignation from the Army, Mitchell testified before the House Committee on Military Affairs and linked his thoughts on offensive airpower to concepts closely resembling Clausewitz's *Schwerpunkt* and Fuller's strategical paralysis:

There has never been anything that has come which has changed war the way the advent of air power has. The method of prosecuting a war in the old days was always to get at the vital centers of the country in order to paralyze the resistance. This meant the centers of production, the centers of population, the agricultural districts, the animal industry, communications—anything that tended to keep up the war. Now in order to keep the enemy out of that, armies were spread in front of those places and protected them by their flesh and blood. You had mass killings there, sometimes for years before those vital centers were reached. ... Now we can get today to those vital centers by air power.<sup>91</sup>

In this testimony, Mitchell is clearly discussing the use of offensive air power to induce paralysis through the attack of enemy centers of gravity. After his trial, Mitchell would continue to speak out about the importance of air power to the United States, but he had to trust that like-minded individuals—many of whom he had influenced both personally and professionally—would continue this advocacy within the Army bureaucracy.

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<sup>90</sup> In his valuable book, *Airmen and Air Theory*, Phillip S. Meilinger recommends three works for those interested in studying General Mitchell: Alfred F. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell: Crusader for Air Power*, revised ed. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1975); Michael L. Grumelli, "Trial of Faith: The Dissent and Court Martial of Billy Mitchell" (Rutgers University, 1991); and Burke Davis, *The Billy Mitchell Affair* (New York: Random House, 1967). Phillip S. Meilinger, Colonel, USAF. *Airmen and Air Theory: A Review of the Sources* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2001), 9-11.

<sup>91</sup> Haywood S. Hansell, Jr. *The Air Plan That Defeated Hitler* (Atlanta, Georgia: Higgins-MacArthur/Longino & Porter, 1972), 11.

One of these individuals was U.S. Army Major William C. Sherman. Sherman knew Mitchell well, as he had flown with Mitchell during the famous sea trials of 1921, and he was familiar with Mitchell's ideas.<sup>92</sup> In contrast to the strident styles of both Douhet and Mitchell, however, Sherman adopts a much more balanced tone in his book *Air Warfare*, released just one year after Mitchell's *Winged Defense*.<sup>93</sup> This book is a remarkable collection of Major Sherman's notes from his experience as an instructor in the early days of the Air Corps Tactical School.<sup>94</sup> Among the many subjects addressed in *Air Warfare*, Sherman discusses "Bombardment Aviation," where he considers the merits and drawbacks of numerous target sets, including population centers, lines of communications, and fortifications.<sup>95</sup> Sherman observes that air bombardment can be particularly effective against communications over sea lanes, especially against merchant shipping.<sup>96</sup> He concludes, however, that, "The military objective of bombardment aviation, *par excellence*, is the hostile system of supply [emphasis in original]."<sup>97</sup> He finds that the targeting of enemy industrial centers—which he calls "the very

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<sup>92</sup> Wray R. Johnson, Colonel, USMC, "Introduction," William C. Sherman, Major, U.S. Army, *Air Warfare* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1926), reprint edition, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2002). xiv.

<sup>93</sup> William C. Sherman, Major, U.S. Army, *Air Warfare* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1926), reprint edition, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2002). Interestingly, when compared to General Mitchell's speeches and writings, it is difficult to tell if Sherman's ideas built upon Mitchell's or vice versa. Sherman began his teaching at the Air Corps Tactical school in 1921, and his obvious professionalism and systematic study of airpower may have influenced Mitchell as much as Mitchell influenced him. Additionally, there is evidence to believe that a copy of Douhet's *Command of the Air* was available to both men as early as 1922; see Raymond R. Flugel, PhD., "United States Air Power Doctrine: A Study of the Influence of William Mitchell and Giulio Douhet at the Air Corps Tactical School, 1921-35" (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1965).

<sup>94</sup> Johnson, "Introduction," v.

<sup>95</sup> Sherman, *Air Warfare*, 190-208.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

roots of the supply system” —to be a particularly lucrative endeavor.<sup>98</sup> In a discussion of these targets, Sherman strikes a notable balance between effectiveness and efficiency. “Industry consists...of a complex system of interlocking factories, each of which makes only its allotted part of the whole,” writes Sherman. “This is an era of specialization. Accordingly, in the majority of industries, it is necessary to destroy certain elements of the industry only, in order to cripple the whole.”<sup>99</sup> This argument is insightful, as Sherman connects the action of striking a few key industrial targets with the collapse of the enemy supply system.

This argument is strikingly similar to Clausewitz’s concept of *Schwerpunkt*, although Clausewitz, living in a much different time, might not have immediately recognized it as such. In *Vom Kriege*, Clausewitz argues that concentrating mass on a key point can have cascading effects leading to the collapse of the enemy. In taking Mitchell’s ideas about centers of production and developing them further, Sherman applies Clausewitzian concepts to the industrial age, by observing that an industrial system can have centers of gravity. By concentrating mass on the few key points of a system, he argues, one can degrade or even paralyze that system due to the cascading effects caused by the loss of key nodes. This is an extension of annihilation strategy. If it is successful, it renders the enemy incapable of resistance, just as in Clausewitz’s original concept of *Schwerpunkt*. It is an argument that John Warden would adopt later with little modification.

Sherman suffered an untimely death shortly after *Air Warfare* was published, but his successors at the Air Corps Tactical School built upon the concepts he presented in the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 197.

book.<sup>100</sup> As they did this, these instructors built a theory of airpower that was uniquely American.<sup>101</sup> One of these instructors, Haywood Hansell, details much of this development in the opening chapters of his book, *The Air Plan That Defeated Hitler*. Hansell summarizes several key lectures taught to Air Corps Tactical School students, and in these lectures, one can see the development of this American air theory from first principles to key tactics.<sup>102</sup> One such lecture, presented by Donald Wilson, discusses the school's belief that the enemy system of production and supply represents the true vital center:

The aim of the air force may be said to be the disorganization of the enemy's resources for military production, and his means for securing the arrival at the front of men, material, and supplies. It must be remembered that disorganization, with its consequent paralysis, rather than complete destruction, is the ultimate aim of the air force. (The hostile air force must be put out of the way as a means to an end.) Disorganization and paralysis, rather

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<sup>100</sup> For an insightful discussion of Sherman's role in the early days of the Air Corps Tactical School and the school's role in developing U.S. air doctrine, see Peter R. Faber, Lt Col, USAF, "Interwar U.S. Army Aviation and the Air Corps Tactical School: Incubators of American Air Power," *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory*, Phillip S. Meilinger, ed. (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2001), 183-238. Another useful work is Robert T. Finney, *History of the Air Corps Tactical School: 1920-1940* (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1998).

<sup>101</sup> While the Air Corps Tactical School developed theories that were unique, the Air Corps's concepts were closely related to those of the Royal Air Force, which gained its independence in the later days of World War I. Haywood Hansell emphasizes this relationship when he summarizes Don Wilson's teachings on choosing targets for aerial bombardment. Wilson includes a quote from an article written by Wing Commander A.G.R. Garrod's and published in RAF Quarterly:

This implies a knowledge of the channels of supply and distribution of all commodities required for the upkeep of the forces, and the locations of the warehouses where such articles are stored. And when all of the data has been collected, a sound appreciation must be formed regarding the particular sphere of the enemy's national activities whose disorganization will lead to the most profitable results. Here is a whole new field of study for the air strategist, a study which brings him into close association with the international economist, a field that lies quite apart from the normal collection of intelligence regarding the mere strength, disposition, and fighting efficiency of the enemy's armed forces.

Hansell, *The Air Plan That Defeated Hitler*, 46.

<sup>102</sup> Hansell, *The Air Plan That Defeated Hitler*, 30-48.

than complete destruction, is the aim because it is more economical, and is equally effective.<sup>103</sup>

Again, the instructors of the Air Corps Tactical School are plainly using the Clausewitzian concept of center of gravity to describe Mitchell's preferred target set—the vital centers of production. This proposal is meant to enable a strategy of annihilation, as the ultimate goal is to deny the enemy the ability to continue the fight. Instead of doing this through destruction of the enemy force, however, they seek Fuller's strategical paralysis, because it is both effective and efficient.

Interestingly, the airpower theorists of the interwar period did not follow Fuller's lead and connect "brain warfare" to attack of vital centers through the air. While World War II saw sporadic air attacks on leaders—the shootdown of Japan's Admiral Yamamoto was the most successful of these—the primary efforts of bombardment airpower were directed at other target sets deemed vital to the enemy morale or war-making capability. After World War II, airpower technologies continued to improve at a rapid pace, and as they did, airpower theorists continued to advocate the attack of vital centers from the air. It was only a matter of time before someone would make an explicit theoretical connection between leadership attack through airpower in a manner similar to Fuller's "shot through the brain" with the tank, but that would not happen until the appearance of the nuclear weapon. As the Cold War matured, these weapons were developed and fielded in numbers that brought with them an unprecedented capability for destruction. Indeed, some concluded that the consequences of nuclear war had become so terrible that the Clausewitzian concept of absolute war—an

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 46.

abstraction for Clausewitz — had become a new reality.<sup>104</sup> Deterrence, therefore, became the top priority for these new weapons and the organizations that maintained them. A credible deterrent threat required that targets be identified and programmed into these weapons before a nuclear exchange, as there would be no time for this activity once an exchange started. As strategists looked for suitable targets to include in nuclear warfare plans, some reasoned that leadership targets may offer both credibility in deterrence and, perhaps, a center of gravity if events forced the execution of these plans.

### Nuclear Warfare and “Decapitation Strikes”

Nuclear weapons did not change everything. While these weapons brought with them unthinkable destructive power, they did not engender new ways of thinking, at least not right away.<sup>105</sup> More specifically,, Lawrence Freedman argues in *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* that the introduction of nuclear weapons did not lead to a discontinuity in strategic thinking.

Instead, the airpower theorists from the interwar period provided many of the initial concepts used by decision makers regarding nuclear weapons and strategy.<sup>106</sup> At first there seemed to

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<sup>104</sup> For example, Goh Teck Seng describes this perspective in his article “Clausewitz and his Impact on Strategy.” “Nuclear weapons have both invalidated and reaffirmed Clausewitz's thinking,” he writes. “The absolute war that Clausewitz considered an abstraction has become real with nuclear weapons. Consequently, no nuclear war may be fought for any meaningful ends, if war is the continuation of policy by other means.” Goh Teck Seng, “Clausewitz and His Impact on Strategy,” *Pointer: Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces*, Vol. 25 No. 1, Jan - Mar 1999.

<sup>105</sup> Albert Einstein recognized this when he said, “The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything except our way of thinking.” Stuart Chase, “World Without Boundaries,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 1979, 82.

<sup>106</sup> “It might be thought that the introduction of nuclear weapons created a wholly unprecedented situation rendering all previous strategic theories and concepts immediately obsolete. In fact such a demarcation line is hard to establish. The concepts with which nuclear weapons were first understood were derived from a prior era; many of the post-1945 debates were, in essence, continuations of those pre-war days. The main link was provided by the doctrine of strategic bombardment, which assumed that the most effective use of the aircraft was to attack the social and industrial heart of the enemy, so producing internal collapse and obviating the need for a traditional battlefield victory.” Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 3rd ed., (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 3.

be plausible defenses against nuclear weapons—bombers could be shot down, for example. Eventually, however, the combination of technologies such as the independently targetable reentry vehicle, intercontinental ballistic missile, and submarine platforms allowed no credible defenses. From this perspective, one of Douhet’s most controversial predictions about air warfare appeared to have been realized:

Viewed in its true light, aerial warfare admits no defense, only offense. *We must therefore resign ourselves to the offensives the enemy inflicts upon us, while striving to put all our resources to work to inflict even heavier ones upon him.* This is the basic principle which must govern the development of aerial warfare (emphasis in original).<sup>107</sup>

For a time, it seemed like Douhet’s admonition governed the day, and U.S. leaders were content with being able to inflict greater pain and suffering than adversaries could inflict back upon the United States.<sup>108</sup> Nuclear stockpiles, however, soon grew so large that both the Soviet Union and United States could inflict such great destruction on each other that any comparison lost meaning. This situation defined the era of assured destruction, and with it emerged an uneasy but moderately stable stalemate between the superpowers.<sup>109</sup>

Yet for those responsible for establishing a stable deterrence through the stewardship of nuclear weapons, a nagging problem persisted. The weapons needed targets, and the process of developing target sets required something resembling a strategy for winning a nuclear conflict. In their *Foreign Policy* article titled “Victory is Possible,” Colin S. Gray and Keith Payne explain this difficulty.<sup>110</sup> They write, “as long as nuclear threat is a part of the

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<sup>107</sup> Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, 55.

<sup>108</sup> Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 72-85.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 232-242.

<sup>110</sup> Colin S. Gray and Keith Payne, “Victory is Possible,” *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1980, 14-27.

U.S. diplomatic arsenal and provided that threat reflects real operational intentions—it is not a total bluff—U.S. defense planners are obliged to think through the probable course of a nuclear war.”<sup>111</sup> Gray and Payne argue that what is needed is a strategy for connecting the “force applied and the likelihood that political goals will be achieved.”<sup>112</sup> From the U.S. perspective, the *ends* of such a strategy would be fairly straightforward: to survive as a country without having peace terms dictated to it by the Soviet Union. The primary *means* would be similarly well-defined: the tactics would involve the successful delivery of nuclear bombs and missiles. It was the *ways* of strategy that would prove so vexing to planners and theorists when contemplating a nuclear exchange.

There were two basic approaches to this challenge. One could target the fielded forces—the army, rocket forces, navy, military bases, etc.—in the hope of annihilating them. Alternatively, one could target the enemy’s vital centers, if only one knew what these were. Theoretically, one could do both, assuming there were enough weapons available. In reality, given the size of the Soviet forces during the Cold War, there were always more targets than nuclear warheads available.<sup>113</sup> This did not stop the United States from identifying the most lucrative targets in each category in the war plans. In 1970, for example, the Single Integrated Operations Plan, or SIOP, contained four primary target sets.<sup>114</sup> The top priority was titled “Nuclear Threat” and was broken down into “Airfields, Missiles, Defenses, Naval Bases and Storage Sites.”<sup>115</sup> The third priority was “Other Military,” presumably including

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Milton Leitenberg, “Presidential Directive (P.D.) 59: United States Nuclear Weapon Targeting Policy,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1981), 312. Also see the

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.



military facilities and units not targeted under “Nuclear Threat.”<sup>116</sup> The fourth priority was titled “Urban Industrial,” and it included the Soviet population and its warfighting economy.<sup>117</sup>

It was the SIOP’s second priority that is most important to this study. It was titled “Primary Controls,” which most commentators interpreted to be the command and control mechanisms that the Soviet Union would use to launch its nuclear arsenal.<sup>118</sup> Later, this concept would appear in President Jimmy Carter’s Presidential Directive 59, which reads: “Overall targeting planning appropriate to implement a countervailing strategy will result in a capability to choose to put the major weight of the initial response on military and control targets.”<sup>119</sup> In this context, “control targets” referred to Soviet leadership and the capabilities required to control Soviet nuclear forces. Presumably, striking political and military command systems early in the nuclear exchange would degrade the Soviet Union’s capability to fire the remainder of its arsenal, or in the most optimistic scenarios, prevent it altogether. For this reason, this target set represented the ultimate vital center in a nuclear war.

Perhaps the driving force behind this strategy was that some analysts understood how vulnerable the U.S. command and control apparatus was to a so-called “decapitation strike” launched by the Soviet Union. In his 1981 article “Nuclear Decapitation,” John D. Steinbruner sounds a sobering warning to Cold War decision makers.<sup>120</sup> “The United States does not have a strategic command system that could survive deliberate attack of a sort that

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>119</sup> Jimmy Carter, “Presidential Directive/NSC-59,” 25 July 1980. Redacted document is now declassified. <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/pddirectives/pd59.pdf> (accessed 13 April 2013).

<sup>120</sup> John D. Steinbruner, “Nuclear Decapitation,” *Foreign Policy* no. 45 (Winter 1981-1982), 16-28.

the Soviet Union could readily undertake,” he writes.<sup>121</sup> “Fewer than 100 judiciously targeted nuclear weapons could so severely damage U.S. communications facilities and command centers that form the military chain of command that the actions of individual weapons commanders could no longer be controlled or coordinated.”<sup>122</sup> If a relatively small strike could create cascading effects that would cause the U.S. nuclear forces to lose coherency—or even be paralyzed—then it seemed reasonable that the Soviets may be vulnerable to a similar strike, especially given the Soviet reliance on centralized direction from the highest levels.<sup>123</sup> Therefore, it appears that Soviet command and control was targeted in the SIOP at least from 1971, and when Presidential Directive 59 was issued in 1981, it was made explicit that Soviet leaders would be targeted in their command and control bunkers.<sup>124</sup>

At least some thought that this action might be taken with great effect, although not necessarily because they believed that a decapitation strike would paralyze Soviet military forces. Instead, Gray and Payne argued that the Soviet political system itself might be vulnerable to attack:

The most frightening threat to the Soviet Union would be the destruction or serious impairment of its political system. Thus, the United States should be able to destroy key leadership cadres, their means of communication, and some of the instruments of domestic control. The USSR, with its gross overcentralization of authority, epitomized by its vast bureaucracy in Moscow, should be highly vulnerable to such an attack. The Soviet Union might cease to

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 18. In 1977, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote in a memorandum to the President: “The Blue Ribbon Defense Panel of 1970 presented a disturbing evaluation of the survivability of our command and control. The National Command Authority and political succession were among the weaker links. The situation today is not appreciably different.” Zbigniew Brzezinski, Memorandum to the President, “Our Nuclear War Doctrine: Limited Nuclear Options and Regional Nuclear Options,” 31 March 1977. Document is now declassified. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb390/> (accessed 13 April 2013).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>124</sup> Leitenberg, “PD-59,” 315.

function if its security agency, the KGB, were severely crippled. If the Moscow bureaucracy could be eliminated, damaged, or isolated, the USSR might disintegrate into anarchy, hence the extensive civil defense preparations intended to insure the survival of the Soviet leadership. Judicious U.S. targeting and weapon procurement policies might be able to deny the USSR the assurance of political survival.<sup>125</sup>

While this form of attack was distinctly different from that advocated by Douhet—the attack was on the political leaders themselves versus bombing the population directly—the proposed outcome was the same. Both strategies desired to separate the population from the political elites. Freedman comments on this return to previous theories of strategic bombardment: “The debate has thus come full circle, back to the crude political science of early airpower theorists, such as Douhet and Fuller, who believed that strategic bombardment could detach the elite from the masses and thus cause swift social breakdown, and by implication the cessation of military operations.”<sup>126</sup> Fortunately, this theory of nuclear decapitation was never tested before the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

Given this evidence, one can conclude that, at the height of the Cold War, leadership attack was an important part of U.S. nuclear strategy, and presumably part of the Soviet strategy as well. Strategists disagreed, however, on how leadership attack would work. Some thought that attacking leaders and their command, control, and communications systems would cut off these leaders from the military forces that they commanded, and the result would be a loss of coherency—a manifestation of the paralysis postulated by Fuller. This concept depended on the assumption that active leadership was important and necessary in the chaotic first stages of conflict. On the other hand, some saw promise in targeting the

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<sup>125</sup> Gray and Payne, “Victory is Possible,” 21.

<sup>126</sup> Freedman, *Evolution of Nuclear Strategy*, 377.

political elite of the Soviet Union to separate them from the general population. At the heart of this idea was the assumption that the population existed in discord with the elites, and that if given an opportunity, this population would actively oppose these leaders, or at least refuse to follow their direction. The first mechanism was primarily physical in nature, the other primarily psychological, but both were obviously forms of leadership attack, designed to disrupt the process of influence between leaders and followers.

While the prospect of nuclear war between the superpowers faded after the end of the Cold War, these two potential mechanisms of leadership attack remained, as they were recycled into concepts applicable to conventional war. Some proposed physical attack of leaders to cut them off and induce paralysis, while others perceived discord between the population and their leaders—especially those who acted as dictators—and sought to create environments where the population could rise up and oppose them. These concepts played a vital role in shaping the conflicts that defined the post-Cold War era. In this era, no one adopted a more optimistic view of leadership attack than John Warden.

### **John Warden: Strategic Paralysis Through Parallel Attack**

Colonel John A. Warden III served as a fighter pilot in the U.S. Air Force, where he gained combat experience as a forward air controller over Vietnam and Laos.<sup>127</sup> Warden showed an interest in strategy as a young officer, and he nurtured his intellectual curiosities through a regimen of study and writing.<sup>128</sup> He enjoyed proposing new and sometimes radical ideas, but he showed little appreciation for the turmoil that major changes can bring to an

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<sup>127</sup> John Andreas Olsen, *Strategic Airpower in Desert Storm* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 74.

<sup>128</sup> John Andreas Olsen, *John Warden and the Renaissance of American Air Power* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2007), 27-40.

organization.<sup>129</sup> While he was normally polite and well-mannered, he argued his perspective forcefully, something that was not always appreciated by his subordinates or superiors.<sup>130</sup> In many ways, Warden was remarkably similar in personality to J.F.C. Fuller. It may not be surprising, then, that Warden readily acknowledges his intellectual debt to Fuller. Indeed, Warden owes a similar debt to many who came before him. Specifically, Warden connects the Clausewitzian concept of *Schwerpunkt* (center of gravity) and Delbrück's *Niederwerfungs-Strategie* (strategy of annihilation) to Fuller's concept of "brain warfare." He also adopts a theory of systems that has much in common with the targeting philosophy of early airpower theorists such as Mitchell, Sherman, and the Air Corps Tactical School. As he made these connections and added new concepts made possible by emerging technologies, Warden articulated a theory of leadership attack that is more clear and compelling than any in the literature. When commentators discuss modern methods of leadership attack and decapitation, they are invariably talking about Warden's theory. As such, this theory will remain a key subject for the rest of this study. The full theory and the assumptions that underpin it will be articulated in Chapter Four and tested against historical evidence in Chapters Five through Eight. This section will focus on Warden's key concepts of leadership attack and their theoretical relationships to concepts previously discussed.

Warden took full advantage of opportunities for formal education. While a cadet at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Warden was exposed to the writings of J.F.C. Fuller. In an interview conducted after Operation Desert Storm, Warden remembers the influence of

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<sup>129</sup> Warden's biographer, John Andreas Olsen, has done a masterful job in capturing Colonel Warden's penchant for new ideas and lack of appreciation for the difficulty of change in the face of bureaucratic norms. In *John Warden and the Renaissance of Airpower*, Olsen's chapter on Warden's experience as a wing commander is excellent. Ibid., 83-100.

<sup>130</sup> This study will address the reaction of other Air Force officers to Colonel Warden's forceful advocacy during Operation Desert Storm in Chapter Six.

Fuller's book, *The Generalship of Alexander the Great*.<sup>131</sup> "That Alexander book, in my view, is one of the most important works in military history, or really in human history, for that matter," he explains.<sup>132</sup> When pressed for specifics, Warden remembers how Alexander identified a precise center of gravity during his campaign against the Persians, and that center of gravity was the Persian leader, Darius the Third.<sup>133</sup> Fuller's book describes Alexander's actions during the Battle of Arbela, when at a critical juncture in the battle, Alexander led a daring cavalry charge straight at Darius, causing Darius to flee and breaking up the cohesion of the Persian army.<sup>134</sup> From this account, Warden identifies a key lesson. Alexander concentrated his force against the center of gravity, at considerable risk, and that center of gravity was the enemy leader.<sup>135</sup> The result was a convincing victory and the near annihilation of the numerically superior Persian force.<sup>136</sup> This was a lesson that Warden would apply both in his academic studies and practical wartime planning.

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<sup>131</sup> Colonel John A. Warden, III, USAF, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, Air Force Historical Research Agency, K239.0472-114, 22 October 1991, Transcript, 1-2.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Some sources refer to this battle as the "Battle of Gaugamela." J.F.C. Fuller, *The Generalship of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 1960), 163-180.

<sup>135</sup> Warden, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, 2-3.

<sup>136</sup> Fuller, *The Generalship of Alexander the Great*, 173-180. In this book, Fuller asserts that Alexander executed a strategy of annihilation against Darius:

But Alexander's aim was not to bring Darius to terms, it was to appropriate his empire, and, were his conquest to be of profit to him, he not only had to defeat the Persian army but win acceptance in the eyes of the Persian peoples. There was no question of suing for peace, which after his crushing defeat at Issus Darius vainly attempted to do, nor of a negotiated treaty, because Alexander's aim was conquest...

Fuller also lauds Alexander's understanding of concentration of mass at the decisive point, a concept he attributes to Clausewitz. He praises Alexander's ability to distinguish between the destruction of the Persian army, which Fuller asserts was Alexander's military aim, and the winning over of the Persian people, Alexander's political aim. Warden would also make this distinction in his planning for the Gulf War. Ibid., 284-292.

Warden continued his formal studies at Texas Technical University, where he wrote a thesis on grand strategy during World War II. He also attended the National War College, where he wrote a controversial thesis, later published as *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat*.<sup>137</sup> The focus of this book is describing how achieving air superiority contributes to overall victory in modern warfare. Much of it deals with innovative ways to establish air superiority and how to best use this superiority to achieve victory.<sup>138</sup> Embedded in this discussion are central themes of leadership attack. These themes are strongly stated, and they represent Warden's beliefs about leadership and its centrality to military conflict. In the book, Warden borrows the center of gravity concept from Clausewitz and applies it to adversary leadership. This is readily apparent in the passage where Warden introduces his thoughts on *command*:

Command is the sine qua non of military operations. ... Destruction or isolation of any level of command can have a serious—and perhaps fatal—impact on the unit or units subordinate to it. Clearly, command, with its necessarily associated communications and intelligence gathering functions, is an obvious center of gravity, and has been from the earliest times. As the death of the king on the field of battle meant defeat for his forces, so the effective isolation of the command structure in modern war has led to the rapid defeat of dependent forces.<sup>139</sup>

In addition to identifying the importance of leadership to military operations, Warden also expands the focus of leadership attack from killing or capturing a leader to disrupting the enemy's process of leadership. He identifies three elements of the leadership process:

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<sup>137</sup> John A. Warden, III, *The Air Campaign: Planning for Combat* (San Jose, CA: toExcel Press, 2000).

<sup>138</sup> "Central to our thesis is the idea that air superiority is crucial, that a campaign will be lost if the enemy has it, that in many circumstances it alone can win a war, and that its possession is needed before other actions on the ground or in the air can be undertaken." Ibid., 141.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 44.

information gathering, decision making, and communication.<sup>140</sup> “If any one of these can be sufficiently disturbed,” Warden writes, “the effectiveness of operations will begin to decrease dramatically.”<sup>141</sup> Additionally, Warden establishes a relationship between the tempo of warfare and the effectiveness of leadership attack. If the war is characterized by a slow tempo, then disrupting the command element will not have immediately recognizable effects, as “lower echelons of command need little guidance from higher echelons and probably could continue to function for some time without any guidance.”<sup>142</sup> Alternatively, when the tempo increases, “the need for information, decision, and communication goes up exponentially. Now, even a slight disturbance in the command process can be dangerous or even catastrophic.”<sup>143</sup> Warden also discusses efficiency. He argues that identifying the command structure as the center of gravity and attacking it offers the “quickest and cheapest” approach to defeating the enemy.<sup>144</sup>

Warden’s subsequent works would build on the ideas expressed in *The Air Campaign* and describe the strategy of leadership attack in more detail. Indeed, leadership attack would become the centerpiece of his unique theory of war.<sup>145</sup> This focus is most clearly articulated in three articles that encapsulate over 20 years of Warden’s thinking. Before Operation Desert Storm, Warden wrote an unpublished paper entitled “Centers of Gravity: the Key to Success

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>145</sup> John Andreas Olsen, describes Warden’s view of leadership attack: “Targeting the leadership directly during the opening moments of a war, using the principles of mass, concentration, and the offensive, represented the core of Warden’s thinking...” Olsen, *John Warden*, 113.



in War,” and the ideas in this paper guided his work before and during the first Gulf War.<sup>146</sup>

After the war, Warden was assigned to be the Commandant of the U.S. Air Force’s Air Command and Staff College, where he wrote and published the article, “The Enemy as a System” in the Air Force’s professional publication, *The Airpower Journal*.<sup>147</sup> Finally, Warden revisited his theory in another article titled, “Strategy and Airpower,” published in 2011.<sup>148</sup> The remainder of this section will focus on the concepts proposed in these three articles.

Warden is an unapologetic advocate for airpower who believes that it should be used to avoid costly force-on-force ground engagements. He seeks to present a perspective on war and strategy in sharp contrast to that of Clausewitz. Warden especially takes issue with Clausewitz’s focus on the destruction of the enemy force as the primary military aim, which he believes is the dominant view of military professionals.<sup>149</sup> “Land operations have so dominated the study of war that war itself has come to be defined almost exclusively as the clash of armies,” he writes. “The clashes, the battles, became not only the measure of success but also something to be desired.”<sup>150</sup> Warden observes that the clash of military forces in the past was probably inevitable due to the limitations of force size and technology.<sup>151</sup> Modern innovation, however, has changed the dynamics of war, and airpower is at the forefront of this

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<sup>146</sup> John A. Warden III. “Centers of Gravity: The Key to Success in War.” Unpublished paper quoted in John Andreas Olsen, *John Warden and the Renaissance of American Air Power* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2007).

<sup>147</sup> John A. Warden III, Colonel, USAF, “The Enemy as a System,” *Airpower Journal*, (Spring 1995), [http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj95/spr95\\_files/warden.htm](http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj95/spr95_files/warden.htm) (accessed 7 May 2012).

<sup>148</sup> John A. Warden III, Colonel, USAF, “Strategy and Airpower,” *Air and Space Power Journal*, (Spring 2011), 64-77.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

change. For the strategist, airpower opens new alternatives to battle: “Airpower enables us to think about conflict from a future-back, end-game-first perspective as opposed to one based on the battle obsession of Clausewitz and his followers. It also opens up another very exciting possibility: conflict with little or no unplanned destruction or shedding of blood.”<sup>152</sup> With this statement, Warden clearly sides with strategists such as Fuller and Liddell Hart who advocate alternatives that avoid the waste of force-on-force battle. Like Fuller, Warden would build his theory on concepts of leadership attack.

Warden agrees with the early air theorists that airpower offers the strategist a way to strike directly at the adversary’s centers of gravity. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the identification of specific target sets was a major challenge for these early theorists, and one of the most compelling of Warden’s concepts is his unique method of analysis designed to help strategists determine which targets to strike. Warden views the enemy as a system, or more precisely, as a system composed of subsystems.<sup>153</sup> The strategist needs a simplified method to analyze the enemy—that is, to break down the enemy system into its component parts.

Warden asserts that the best place to begin this analysis is with the enemy leadership.<sup>154</sup>

Warden’s model of the enemy system begins with the leadership at the center, surrounded by four concentric rings that contain, in order from inside to out, organic essentials (defined as “some form of input energy and the facilities to convert it to another form”), infrastructure,

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>153</sup> Warden, “Enemy as a System.”

<sup>154</sup> “A good place to start our examination of enemy systems is at the center. By definition, all systems have an organizing center. ... A strategic entity, such as a state, a business organization, or a terrorist organization has elements of both the physical and the biological, but at the center of these whole systems and of every subsystem is a human being who gives direction and meaning. The ones who provide this direction are leaders, either of the whole country or some part of it. They are the ones on which depends the functioning of every subsystem, and they are the ones who decide when they want their strategic entity to adopt or not adopt a different set of objectives. They, the leaders, are at the strategic center, and in strategic warfare must be the figurative, and sometimes the literal, target of our action.” Ibid.

population, and the fighting mechanism.<sup>155</sup> The model's structure clearly illustrates how leadership attack is, literally, at the center of Warden's theory. Every action taken against an adversary system is ultimately directed at the inner ring—the leadership.<sup>156</sup>

For Warden, leadership is both the elusive vital center sought by Mitchell and the ultimate center of gravity as postulated by Clausewitz. All three of Warden's key articles contain passages that advocate leadership attack more clearly than any theorist since Fuller. Each of these passages is worthy of inclusion here. In "Centers of Gravity," Warden asserts that identifying leadership as the center of gravity can lead to an effective and efficient strategy:

The focus of war operations must be against the enemy leadership whether civil or military. To affect the enemy leadership, we must understand what the enemy looks like conceptually. If we accept the idea that the enemy is conceptually a leader in the center surrounded by centers of gravity, we can think more clearly about how to affect the enemy leadership. By thinking in these larger strategic and operational level terms, we simplify our task enormously. We may not have to find and destroy thirty thousand tanks if we can destroy the few hundred fuel and ammunition distribution points. We may not have to destroy the few hundred fuel distribution points if we can immobilize an entire society by destroying dozens of electrical generation systems. And we may not need to destroy dozens of electrical generation systems if we can capture or kill the enemy leader.<sup>157</sup>

In "The Enemy as a System," Warden describes how leadership attack helps one realize the goal of annihilation strategy—either the enemy leader accepts the dictated concessions or he is rendered incapable of leading:

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<sup>155</sup> While these started as concentric rings in the model, they evolved to ellipses and spheres to better illustrate the complexity of a dynamic system. Ibid. In "Strategy and Airpower," Warden uses the word "Processes" as a substitute for "Organic Essentials." Warden, "Strategy and Airpower," 67.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Warden, "Centers of Gravity."

The most critical ring is the command ring because it is the enemy command structure, be it a civilian at the seat of government or a military commander directing a fleet, which is the only element of the enemy that can make concessions, that can make the very complex decisions that are necessary to keep a country on a particular course, or that can direct a country at war. In fact, wars through history have been fought to change (or change the mind of) the command structure—to overthrow the prince literally or figuratively—or, put in other words, to induce the command structure to make concessions or to make it incapable of leading.<sup>158</sup>

In “Strategy and Airpower,” Warden argues that, if one wants to induce the enemy to change policies, often all that is needed is to remove the top leader:

If a strong leader such as Attila, Napoleon, Bismarck, Hitler, or bin Laden is taking an opponent in a particular direction, the removal of that leader (and perhaps his close associates) will normally result either in a reversal of direction or significant deceleration. If we wanted such a change, removal or conversion of a leader (through force, persuasion, or even bribery) would constitute a direct strategic action since change in the center of gravity is directly associated with a strategic objective.<sup>159</sup>

In these three passages, Warden conveys his fundamental beliefs about the “inner ring,” and these beliefs coalesce into the essential components of his theory. Leadership is the central element around which the enemy system is organized, and it is the level where the decision to fight is made. Accordingly, leadership is the primary center of gravity of the enemy system, and in war, leadership should be attacked, directly if possible. Doing so represents the ultimate application of the principle of concentration at the decisive point. If this is not possible, the targeting of other centers of gravity is valid only if it helps to persuade the decision-maker to concede. If the leader chooses to continue to fight, the goal is to make him

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<sup>158</sup> Warden, “Enemy as a System.”

<sup>159</sup> Warden, “Strategy and Airpower,” 68.

or her incapable of continuing their course. It is by changing, removing, or converting a leader that the overall objective—a future that is better than the present—is achieved.

More specifically, leadership attack leads to this overall objective in one of two ways. First, considering the damage sustained in conflict and the prospect of future damage, the leader can make a rational decision to concede to avoid punishment or seek reward. If the leader chooses not make this decision, the enemy system can be paralyzed.<sup>160</sup> Warden adopts the term “strategic paralysis” from Fuller’s “strategical paralysis.” In Plan 1919, Fuller argued that the best way to impose strategical paralysis was with a “shot through the brain.”<sup>161</sup> Warden agrees, but if this is not possible, he advocates inducing paralysis through the parallel attack of multiple points in the enemy system. The strategist, he advises, should identify points of vulnerability and attack them as close to simultaneously as possible.<sup>162</sup> This will shock the enemy system, as it does not have time to adapt or recover to the concurrent loss of multiple key nodes.<sup>163</sup>

Similar to Fuller’s reliance on the nascent technology of the tank for his proposed solution to trench warfare, Warden’s theory rests on technological developments that emerged as he was thinking and writing. He argues the combination of survivable air platforms and

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<sup>160</sup> “When the command element cannot be threatened directly, the task becomes one of supplying sufficient direct pressure so that the command element rationally concludes that concessions are appropriate, realizes that further action is impossible, or is physically deprived of the ability to continue a particular course or to continue combat. The command element will normally reach these conclusions as a result of the degree of damage imposed on the surrounding rings. Absent a rational response by the enemy command element, it is possible to render the enemy impotent—to impose strategic paralysis—by destroying one or more of the outer strategic rings or centers of gravity.” Warden, “Enemy as a System.”

<sup>161</sup> Fuller, “Plan 1919,” *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier*. He also says that this effect will be exacerbated by an additional “shot through the stomach,” the enemy supply system, which may be considered as similar to Warden’s parallel attack of multiple subsystems.

<sup>162</sup> Warden, “Enemy as a System.”

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

precision munitions makes parallel attack possible, whereas in the past, military forces had to attack objectives serially (i.e. in a certain sequence): “Technology has made possible the nearly simultaneous attack on every strategic- and operational-level vulnerability of the enemy. This parallel process of war, as opposed to the old serial form, makes very real what Clausewitz called the ideal form of war, the striking of blows everywhere at the same time.”<sup>164</sup> Warden’s ideal form is a strategy that employs parallel attack against the enemy leadership—directly, if possible, but indirectly on multiple centers of gravity if not—to paralyze the enemy system and renders it incapable of resistance.<sup>165</sup>

### The Influence of Warden’s Ideas

Warden’s provocative ideas have enjoyed wide influence among Western military professionals. After Iraq invaded Kuwait in August of 1990, Warden and his operational planning group at the Pentagon developed an innovative (and optimistic) plan for attacking Saddam Hussein through the air.<sup>166</sup> Although this plan was modified extensively before its execution, General Schwarzkopf and his air commanders enthusiastically adopted Warden’s

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<sup>164</sup> Warden, “Strategy and Airpower,” 74-75, and Warden, “Enemy as a System.” Warden does not give a reference for this passage in *On War*, but there are numerous instances where Clausewitz talks of the maximum exertion of strength in the least amount of time. These comments are made in the context of one who pursues the offensive in absolute war. Of course, given Clausewitz’s dialectic, Warden could have also seen this passage as Clausewitz’s critique of his theory:

How are we to counter the highly sophisticated theory that supposes it possible for a particularly ingenious method of inflicting minor direct damage on the enemy’s forces to lead to major indirect destruction; or that claims to produce, by means of limited but skillfully applied blows, such paralysis of the enemy forces and control of his will-power as to constitute a significant shortcut to victory?

Clausewitz, *On War*, Howard & Paret trans., 228

<sup>165</sup> David A. Deptula, an Air Force officer who worked with Warden and shared many of his ideas, offers a straightforward explanation of parallel attack in: David A. Deptula, *Effects-Based Operations: Change in the Nature of War*, (Arlington, Virginia: Aerospace Education Foundation, 2001).

<sup>166</sup> Diane T. Putney, *Airpower Advantage: Planning the Gulf War Air Campaign 1989-1991* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2004), 31-63.

premise that attacking the Iraqi leadership would contribute to the attainment of their objectives.<sup>167</sup> Due to this enthusiasm and the perceived success of leadership attack in Operation Desert Storm, U.S. military commanders readily adopted leadership-attack strategies in subsequent campaigns, including the Iraq War of 2003.<sup>168</sup> Both the Gulf War and the Iraq War will be examined as historical cases in Chapters Six and Eight of this study, respectively.

Before considering these cases, Chapter Four will begin the formal steps of the research methodology. The critical task for this chapter is to identify the key propositions and predictions for a theory of leadership attack that can be tested against the evidence. This theory will be based on Warden's work—itsself based on the work of so many others. As this chapter has explained, the prevailing theory of leadership attack has been constructed using key concepts proposed by many of the respected theorists of modern warfare, including Clausewitz's center of gravity, Fuller's strategical paralysis, and the early airpower theorists' ideas on strategic bombardment of vital centers. Warden's primary contribution was to combine these ideas along with the concept of parallel attack made possible by the emerging technologies of survivable air platforms, precision weapons, and intelligence gathering

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<sup>167</sup> H. Norman Schwarzkopf, General, USA, with Peter Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 318-320.

<sup>168</sup> General Tommy Franks, the Commander of Coalition Forces during the Iraq War of 2003, remembers briefing senior leaders on the plan to invade Iraq. His description is exemplary of the concept of strategic paralysis:

I briefed the room on targeting, starting as usual with the basics. Using imagery of important regime buildings in central Baghdad—including Baath Party Headquarters and the command center of the *Mukhabarat* Special Security Organization—I explained how destroying these structures would blind and paralyze Saddam's inner leadership circle

"We know where they are," I said, " and we know who works there." Killing regime leaders and destroying their command and control apparatus would be a priority.

General Tommy Franks with Malcolm McConnell, *American Soldier* (New York: ReganBooks, 2004), 392.

through technical means to create a compelling theory of leadership attack. While compelling, this theory is also controversial, as will be explored in the following chapter.



## Chapter Four

### Theories of Leadership Attack and Their Predictions

*Strategic paralysis is virtually impossible to achieve...*

Robert A. Pape  
*Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*

As shown in Chapter Three, the theory of leadership attack originated by J.F.C. Fuller and expanded by John Warden draws upon concepts and ideas proposed by influential men such as Clausewitz and Mitchell. This theory is compelling in its clarity and simplicity. As others have pointed out, it also has major vulnerabilities.<sup>1</sup> The theory of leadership attack and its vulnerabilities will be a major theme for this chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to accomplish the first two steps of the study's methodology: the forming of theory based upon testable hypotheses and the making of predictions. To accomplish this, the underlying assumptions of Warden's theory are considered in detail, and a key critique offered by Robert Pape is used to identify potential vulnerabilities in the theory. The theory is then presented systematically, and then its propositions are used to derive an alternative theory designed to contrast with the primary. Finally, the chapter makes predictions about what the historical evidence in upcoming cases should show if the theories are valid, with a summary table of the two theories and their predictions included at the end of the chapter for reference. By accomplishing these tasks, this chapter provides the critical link between the concepts

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<sup>1</sup> As an example of this, see Lt Col David S. Fadok, "John Boyd and John Warden: Airpower's Quest for Strategic Paralysis," in *The Paths of Heaven: The Evolution of Airpower Theory*, Phillip S. Meilinger, ed. (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2001), 357-398. Fadok argues that Warden's theory focuses exclusively on the leadership to the detriment of a more comprehensive view of the enemy. In addition, Fadok points out that Warden focuses on the physical side of war while ignoring the moral (or, more specifically, assuming it away), and Warden does not consider the action-reaction dynamic of war.

explained in Chapter Three and the historical evidence presented in Chapters Five through Eight.

### **Key Assumptions in the Theory of Leadership Attack**

Chapter Three of this study explains how John Warden borrows key concepts of leadership attack to build his theory of warfare. He incorporates critical assumptions made by the theorists originally associated with these concepts. Some of these assumptions are mentioned explicitly by Warden, while others remain implicit. This study adopts the perspective that, while some of these assumptions may not be intended by Warden as he borrows the concepts, he inherits the assumptions from those who originally proposed them. For this reason, it is important to identify Warden's assumptions—explicit, implicit, and even unintended.

While Warden goes to great lengths to differentiate himself from Clausewitz, he builds his theory on the Clausewitzian concept of *Schwerpunkt*. Clausewitz develops this idea in a specific context where the aim is the overthrow of the enemy in pursuit of relatively unlimited aims. This is made clear in the title of the two chapters in *Vom Kriege* where the concept of *Schwerpunkt* is most fully developed.<sup>2</sup> It is a concept closely related to absolute war, and the concept becomes less applicable as wars are moderated by more limited political goals such as

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<sup>2</sup> These chapters are both in Book Eight. Chapter Four is titled, "Aim of War More Precisely Defined: Overthrow of the Enemy," and Chapter Nine is titled, "Plan of War When the Destruction of the Enemy is the Aim." Karl von Clausewitz, *On War*, O.J. Matthijs Jolles, trans., Reprinted in *The Book Of War*, Caleb Howard ed., (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 920, 948. Hereafter designated as Clausewitz, *On War*, Jolles trans.

the seizing of territory.<sup>3</sup> Clausewitz develops the concept of center of gravity in the context of wars where annihilation of the enemy is desired and sought as an objective. When annihilation is not the objective, however, the center of gravity concept may not be as applicable.

Like others who borrow the concept of center of gravity, Warden uses it according to his own interpretation, and this interpretation is similar to that of both Fuller and Mitchell. Both view attacking the vital centers of the enemy as an effective and efficient way to use emerging technologies to gain the advantage. This represents an important evolution in the concept of *Schwerpunkt*. While Clausewitz proposes the concept as critical to effectiveness in war, he only hints at the possibility that it could lead to efficiency.<sup>4</sup> Fuller's strategic situation, however, was quite different from Clausewitz's. As he considered how to use the new

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<sup>3</sup> One of the strongest passages to support this argument is seen in Book Eight, Chapter Four, where Clausewitz writes these words just after he has described multiple ways in which a center of gravity can manifest itself: "...against these points the blow must be directed. If the enemy hereby loses his balance, no time must be allowed for him to recover it. The blow must be persistently repeated in the same direction, or, in other words, the conqueror must always direct his blows upon the whole, but not against the part of the enemy. It is not by conquering one of the enemy's provinces, with ease and superior numbers, and preferring the more secure possession of the unimportant conquest to great results, but by seeking out constantly the nucleus of hostile power, and staking the whole thing in order to gain the whole, that we can actually strike the enemy to the ground." Ibid., 921.

<sup>4</sup> Clausewitz does seem to acknowledge that the center of gravity concept could lead to efficiency and economy, but he does not develop this thought in *Vom Kriege*. This is best seen in this passage that appears at the beginning of Book Eight, Chapter Nine:

After everything we have so far said on the subject, we can identify two basic principles that underlie all strategic planning and serve to guide all other consideration.

The first principle is that the ultimate substance of the enemy strength must be traced back to the fewest possible sources, and ideally to one alone. The attack on these sources must be compressed into the fewest possible actions—again, ideally, into one. Finally, all minor actions must be subordinated as much as possible. In short the first principle is: act with the utmost concentration.

The second principle is: act with the utmost speed. No halt or detour must be permitted without good cause.

Ibid., 617.

technology of the tank to break the stalemate of World War I, Fuller faced the problem of limited numbers.<sup>5</sup> Any effective strategy would need to use the few tanks that were available in an efficient manner. This was a major reason why Fuller identifies the headquarters of the German ground units as the centers of gravity on the front. “Compared to fighting men there are but a few Commanders in the field,” writes Fuller, “therefore the means required to destroy these Commanders will be far less than those normally required to destroy the men they control.”<sup>6</sup> Fuller argues that striking these leadership targets would have disproportionate effects, as such action would lead to disorganization and paralysis of the armies in the field. Likewise, the problem facing Mitchell, Sherman, and the Air Corps Tactical School was how to use limited numbers of airplanes to attack a vast industrial state like Germany. To solve this problem, they identify centers of gravity that, if struck, will have disproportionate effects by disorganizing or degrading the production and supply systems. By attacking the bottlenecks of the system, air attacks can stop the critical industrial processes that allow the enemy to sustain the war effort.

As he borrows concepts from Fuller and the early airpower theorists, Warden asserts that a relatively small number of weapons targeted at the centers of gravity—and usually

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<sup>5</sup> In Plan 1919, Fuller discusses this tank shortage and the need for a more efficient strategy to use them:

Our present theory, based on our present weapons, weapons of limited range of action, has been one of attaining our strategical object by brute force; that is, the wearing away of the enemy's muscles, bone and blood. To accomplish this rapidly with tanks will demand many thousands of these machines, and there is little likelihood of our obtaining the requisite number by next year; therefore let us search for some other means...

J.F.C. Fuller, “Plan 1919,” Appendix in *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1936). Hereafter designated as Fuller, “Plan 1919.”

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

attacked through the air — can have disproportionate effects that lead to shock and paralysis.<sup>7</sup>

In support of this main idea, he makes three underlying assumptions. The first is that the systems to be attacked are tightly connected or coupled, and their processes involve key nodes that represent single points of failure. An attack on these key nodes — command and control systems or bottlenecks in production, for example — can have disproportionate effects, up to the point of inducing paralysis, because loss of these nodes breaks up the connectedness of the system. Due to the lack of redundancy, the system is unable to adapt to the loss of these key nodes in a compressed timeframe. Early airpower theorists such as Sherman and Mitchell make this an explicit assumption, and so does Warden.<sup>8</sup>

The early airpower theorists also make a second underlying assumption about centers of gravity. In contrast to Clausewitz, who argues that war was characterized by a fog of uncertainty, the airpower theorists assume that they have the intelligence necessary to choose

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<sup>7</sup> Warden writes in “Strategy and Airpower” that: “Notably, even in a large system such as the United States or China, the number of targets associated with strategic centers of gravity is rather small — considerably fewer than 1,000, more than likely.” John A. Warden III, Colonel, USAF, “Strategy and Airpower,” *Airpower Journal*, (Spring 2011), 70.

<sup>8</sup> Sherman writes in *Air Warfare*: “Accordingly, in the majority of industries, it is necessary to destroy certain elements of the industry only, in order to cripple the whole.” William C. Sherman, Major, U.S. Army, *Air Warfare* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1926), reprint edition, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2002), 197. Warden echoes this conclusion: “Every state and every military organization will have a unique set of centers of gravity or vulnerabilities. ...These centers of gravity, which are also rings of vulnerability, are absolutely critical to the functioning of a state.” John A. Warden III, Colonel, USAF, “The Enemy as a System,” *Airpower Journal*, (Spring 1995).

the right centers of gravity to paralyze the targeted system.<sup>9</sup> In this context, the word *intelligence* has a dual meaning. The early airpower theorists believe they can collect the proper *intelligence*, meaning they can gather critical information concerning the enemy systems. They also believe they can put this information in the proper context using their applied knowledge, or *intelligence*, to ascertain which key nodes needed to be attacked. Warden assumes this as well, although he seems to be quite optimistic about the prospects for intelligence in his theory, especially in the second sense. He offers the five rings model as a shorthand method for analyzing the enemy, but his articles tend to gloss over the details of how this model is used to generate targeting data.<sup>10</sup>

The third underlying assumption that Warden makes about centers of gravity is that a means to attack them exists—either directly or indirectly—within a compressed timeline. It does no good to identify centers of gravity for a system if they are invulnerable. Warden

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<sup>9</sup> Sherman writes of these centers of gravity of the industrial system: “These elements will may be called the key plants. These will be carefully determined, usually before the outbreak of war. They will be accurately located at the same time, preferably by air photographs.” Sherman, *Air Warfare*, 197.

Haywood Hansell understood how the challenge of obtaining intelligence could affect the theory of strategic bombardment:

The problem was a vastly complicated one for it supposed knowledge about a nation which that nation naturally tried to hide. Much of the value of the bombing offensive, should there be one, would necessarily rest on intelligence data, and the conclusions the planners gleaned from it. Actually these specific questions were beyond the competence of the school. Strategic air intelligence concerning major world powers would require an organization and a competence of considerable scope and complexity.

Haywood S. Hansell, Jr. *The Air Plan That Defeated Hitler* (Atlanta, Georgia: Higgins-MacArthur/Longino & Porter, 1972), 48.

<sup>10</sup> One example of Warden’s optimism about intelligence occurs in the article titled “The Enemy as a System.” After a general discussion of the five rings at the strategic and operational levels, Warden writes: “The most important requirement of strategic attack is understanding the enemy system.” In the very next sentence, he continues, “The system understood, the next problem becomes one of how to reduce it to the desired level or to paralyze it if required.” The experience of Desert Storm shows that there is a great deal of work that has to take place to connect these two sentences. See Chapter Six. Warden, “Enemy as a System.”

strongly advocates for the use of airpower in this role.<sup>11</sup> For purposes of this study, however, it does not matter the type of force that is used, as long as this force can affect the targeted center of gravity. This may take the form of bombing of a communication node by a stealth aircraft, destroying a command post with artillery fire, capturing a key leader using special forces, blockading a critical port with naval forces, disrupting an electric grid through computer network attack, or denying a satellite signal through use of a ground jamming platform. All of these represent potential ways to attack the adversary's centers of gravity.

Along with these three underlying assumptions about how centers of gravity can be attacked with great effect, the most important assumption made by various theorists, including Warden, is that causing the collapse of key enemy systems and inducing paralysis leads to attainment of the war's objectives. In "Plan 1919," Fuller argues that attacking the leadership of the German army will cause the forces to be so disorganized that they will be easy to annihilate.<sup>12</sup> The enemy forces will then have two choices—they can either recognize their impotence and capitulate, or they can be destroyed. In an annihilation strategy as conceived by Delbrück and adopted by Fuller, paralysis leaves the enemy disorganized, but not totally defenseless. One has to compel the enemy to accept the desired terms for peace through the ability to follow paralysis with military force. Delbrück writes that one must be prepared to apply follow-on force "even to the point of occupying the entire country."<sup>13</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> Warden writes: "Airpower can operate against virtually all of the centers of gravity directly related to strategic objectives, regardless of their location. Because it can bring many under attack in compressed periods of time, it is well suited for parallel operations. Finally, airpower can produce appropriate effects with little destruction and bloodshed, if desired." Warden, "Strategy and Airpower," 75.

<sup>12</sup> Fuller writes in "Plan 1919" that, "Tactical success in war is generally gained by pitting an organised force against a disorganised one." Fuller, "Plan 1919," *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier*.

<sup>13</sup> Hans Delbrück, *History of the Art of War: Volume IV, The Dawn of Modern Warfare*, Walter J. Renfro, Jr., trans. (Lincoln Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 421.

goal of paralysis, therefore, is an intermediate one for Fuller. It is part of the process of annihilating the enemy's armed force, but it does not complete it, and it may not be enough to break the enemy will without extensive follow up.

The airpower theorists were forced to adopt a different approach. Once an air force gains command of the air, it is free to overfly armed forces and strike at the heart of the enemy. It was not necessary, in the view of the early air theorists, to destroy the enemy's ground forces with airplanes.<sup>14</sup> It was also not practical, as these forces were large in number, and they were typically dispersed, camouflaged, or fortified, making them difficult to find and strike from the air. In their writings, early airpower theorists such as Mitchell and Sherman postulate that airpower can paralyze the production and supply systems of the enemy. Because a modern army is so dependent on the outputs of these systems, it will not be capable of resisting an attack without them.<sup>15</sup> These theorists tend to make the logical leap that, once the enemy's capacity to resist is greatly diminished, their will to fight will also evaporate. Although they recognize that paralyzing the enemy production and supply systems may allow friendly ground forces to overcome the enemy more easily, they tend to argue that this will not be necessary once the enemy realizes their predicament.<sup>16</sup>

In this regard, Warden is much closer to the airpower theorists than he is to Fuller. Warden clearly believes that military victory is possible without the destruction of the enemy

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<sup>14</sup> Sherman writes of using bombardment aviation against armies in the field: "It is only rarely that bombardment aviation will be used against objectives lying in the combat zone and within reach of artillery fire. Nor, in the general case, is bombardment aviation suited for the attack of personnel." Sherman, *Air Warfare*, 203.

<sup>15</sup> For an example, see Sherman's arguments in *Air Warfare*, 194-202.

<sup>16</sup> Hansell recalls this key element of the first of the Air Corps Tactical School briefs as presented by Harold George: "It appears that nations are susceptible to defeat by the interruption of this economic web. It is possible that the moral collapse brought about by the break-up of this closely knit web would be sufficient; but connected therewith is the industrial fabric which is absolutely essential for modern war." Hansell, *The Air Plan That Defeated Hitler*, 33.



forces or even the imminent threat of this destruction.<sup>17</sup> His method is to disorganize, shock, and paralyze the enemy system, not destroy its armed forces, but he must show how this leads to a better state of peace. In his key articles, Warden discusses the attainment of strategic objectives at length, but he never explicitly connects paralysis to their realization. Instead there is a general assumption that attacking enemy centers of gravity within a short timeframe (faster than the enemy can adapt) automatically leads to the achievement of one's objectives. It does this in one of two ways, according to Warden. Either the enemy recognizes the futility of resistance and decides to acquiesce or, in Warden's words, "we make it physically impossible for him to oppose us."<sup>18</sup> He writes that the object of war is "to induce the command structure to make concessions or to make it incapable of leading."<sup>19</sup> If this command structure cannot be attacked directly, Warden argues that one must apply enough indirect pressure to induce the desired concessions. According to Warden, this normally happens when there is sufficient damage to the surrounding rings through parallel attack on these centers of gravity.<sup>20</sup> If the enemy fails to acquiesce, then one must make the enemy unable to resist through the inducement of paralysis.<sup>21</sup> Warden acknowledges that, following

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<sup>17</sup> Warden writes: "The essence of war is applying pressure against the enemy's innermost strategic ring, its command structure. Military forces are a means to an end. It is pointless to deal with enemy military forces if they can be bypassed by strategy or technology either in the defense or offense." Warden, "Enemy as a System."

<sup>18</sup> Warden, "Enemy as a System."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Warden explains the best course of action when the enemy leadership is not immediately vulnerable: "When the command element cannot be threatened directly, the task becomes one of applying sufficient indirect pressure so that the command element rationally concludes that concessions are appropriate, realizes that further action is impossible, or is physically deprived of the ability to continue a particular course or to continue combat. The command element will normally reach these conclusions as a result of the degree of damage imposed on the surrounding rings." Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Warden writes, "Absent a rational response by the enemy command element, it is possible to render the enemy impotent to impose strategic paralysis by destroying one or more of the outer strategic rings or centers of gravity." Ibid.

paralysis, change may not be instant, but he assures his reader that it will happen.<sup>22</sup> This is as far as Warden goes in linking action to outcome.

### **Key Propositions of the Primary Theory of Leadership Attack**

Considering these assumptions and the previous discussion of Warden's writings in Chapter Three, Warden's theory of leadership attack can now be specified with sufficient precision. The key propositions of leadership attack in Warden's theory, which will hereafter be known as *the primary theory*, are:

1. **Organizations require central leadership.** All systems require an organizing force that directs the system. It can change direction or make concessions if it decides to do so. This center consists of the individual leader or leaders as well as the capabilities necessary to provide direction to the rest of the system—including information gathering, protective facilities, and communications networks. Every subsystem has a similar organizing force at its center.<sup>23</sup> The other subsystems—identified as processes, infrastructure, population, and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "The most critical ring is the command ring because it is the enemy command structure, be it a civilian at the seat of government or a military commander directing a fleet. The command ring is the only element of the enemy that can make concessions, that can make the very complex decisions that are necessary to keep a country on a particular course, or that can direct a country at war. ... Capturing or killing the state's leader has frequently been decisive. In modern times, however, it has become more difficult but not impossible to capture or kill the command element. At the same time, command communications have become more important than ever, and these are vulnerable to attack." Ibid. In his later article "Strategy and Airpower," Warden placed communications into the second ring, called "processes." This study will leave the communication that is essential to leadership within the first ring.

fielded forces—exist to support the rest of the system. These systems both require and follow the direction set by the central leadership.<sup>24</sup>

2. **Systems are susceptible to attacks on centers of gravity.** Within the enemy system, there exist key centers of gravity for each subsystem that, if attacked successfully, will have detrimental and cascading effects within the subsystem as well as between subsystems.<sup>25</sup>
3. **Intelligence is sufficient, and a means of attack exists.** There is sufficient intelligence information available to identify these centers of gravity, and there exists a means to attack them either directly or indirectly in a compressed timeframe.<sup>26</sup>
4. **Attacks on centers of gravity produce paralysis.** If enough centers of gravity are struck in parallel within a compressed period (faster than the enemy can adapt), the number and magnitude of these cascading effects will cause the collapse of the subsystem and, perhaps, the entire system. This is called *paralysis*, and it renders the enemy incapable of resistance.

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<sup>24</sup> “Having looked at different systems with which we have some familiarity, we recognize a similarity that carries across all of them. The model that unfolds before us and that seems to describe a reasonable number of different systems has four basic components: central leadership or direction, organic essentials, infrastructure, and population. In addition, all organic systems seem to have a fifth component that protects the system from outside attack or general degradation.” Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> “Every state and every military organization will have a unique set of centers of gravity or vulnerabilities. Nevertheless, our five-ring model gives us a good starting point. It tells us what detailed questions to ask, and it suggests a priority for the questions and for operations from the most vital at the middle to the least vital at the outside. These centers of gravity, which are also rings of vulnerability, are absolutely critical to the functioning of a state.” Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> “Airpower can operate against virtually all of the centers of gravity directly related to strategic objectives, regardless of their location. Because it can bring many under attack in compressed periods of time, it is well suited for parallel operations.” Warden, “Strategy and Airpower,” 75.

Destroying elements of the enemy system beyond what is necessary to induce paralysis is both costly and unnecessary.<sup>27</sup>

5. **Paralysis leads to victory.** All offensive actions in war should be undertaken to effect change in the leadership of the enemy system. This can happen in one of two ways: either the leadership can change its direction, or it can be made incapable of continuing its desired course of action. Both eventually lead to the realization of the war's objectives.<sup>28</sup>

### Counterarguments

As with any theory, a breakdown in the primary theory's fundamental assumptions poses significant challenges for its validity. Furthermore, there exist logical arguments against all of these assumptions. For example, if one is fighting for limited objectives or fighting from a position of relative weakness, the systematic attack of the enemy's centers of gravity may not be attainable. One could still implement a strategy of erosion similar to Delbrück's *Ermattungs-Strategie* by inflicting increasing levels of punishment on the other side.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In "The Enemy as a System," Warden writes: "States have a small number of vital targets at the strategic level in the neighborhood of a few hundred with an average of perhaps 10 aimpoints per vital target. These targets tend to be small, very expensive, have few backups, and are hard to repair. If a significant percentage is struck in parallel, the damage becomes insuperable." Later in the article, he adds: "Military forces are a means to an end. It is pointless to deal with enemy military forces if they can be bypassed by strategy or technology either in the defense or offense." Warden, "Enemy as a System."

<sup>28</sup> "At the strategic level, we attain our objectives by causing such changes to one or more parts of the enemy's physical system that the enemy decides to adopt our objectives, or we make it physically impossible for him to oppose us. The latter we call strategic paralysis. ... When the command element cannot be threatened directly, the task becomes one of applying sufficient indirect pressure so that the command element rationally concludes that concessions are appropriate, realizes that further action is impossible, or is physically deprived of the ability to continue a particular course or to continue combat. The command element will normally reach these conclusions as a result of the degree of damage imposed on the surrounding rings. Absent a rational response by the enemy command element, it is possible to render the enemy impotent to impose strategic paralysis by destroying one or more of the outer strategic rings or centers of gravity." Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> For example, the Continental Army adopted this strategy and fought an extended campaign of attrition during the American War for Independence. Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973).

Alternatively, one may be facing enemy systems that are only loosely coupled or highly redundant. In this case, it may be quite impossible to identify key nodes that have systemwide effects.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, gaining the intelligence necessary to apply such a strategy may be difficult, as the level of appreciation required to sufficiently analyze the enemy system may be quite high. The enemy centers of gravity may be well-protected or out of reach.

Finally, it is not a forgone conclusion that an enemy leader will change his or her mind in the face of an attack on their centers of gravity. Even if attack on the enemy system makes it impotent and unable to continue opposition, that in itself does not lead to a better state of peace. Without the act of following up that Delbrück argued was essential to a strategy of annihilation, it may be impossible to compel the enemy to accept the desired terms of peace. Leadership attack may be successful in causing the enemy state to collapse or the enemy leader to be killed, captured, or enter into hiding. If this is the case, however, the enemy armed forces are still largely intact because they have not been targeted, and these soldiers will have no one to tell them to lay down their arms. Additionally, the population may enter a condition of crisis resulting in critical shortages of food, water, and other essential services; rampant lawlessness and instability; or a developing insurgency. If this happens, the strategist is faced with the daunting challenge of transforming widespread chaos into a better state of peace.

Because of these counterarguments and others, Warden's ideas on warfare have invited considerable critique from numerous military professionals and scholars. To help develop an

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<sup>30</sup> An example of such an organization may be a terrorist group that has a decoupled, cellular structure. See Boaz Ganor, *The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle: A Guide for Decision Makers*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005).

alternate theory of leadership attack, this study will consider one of these scholars whose writings highlight key weaknesses in Warden's arguments.

### **Robert Pape and *Bombing to Win***

During his time as Commandant of the Air Force's Air Command and Staff College, Colonel John Warden's concepts and papers received criticism from the faculty at the neighboring School of Advanced Airpower Studies (SAAS).<sup>31</sup> Warden rebutted this criticism with a challenge: if the SAAS professors had better ideas about airpower, they should put them forward. A young professor would answer this challenge, and he would also challenge many of Warden's conclusions.<sup>32</sup> Robert A. Pape comments on Warden's ideas in a series of scholarly articles and a book titled *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*.<sup>33</sup> *Bombing to Win* is much more than a critique of Warden. In this book, Pape proposes a theory of coercion at the strategic level of war that is unique within the field. The book includes a section where he discusses the weaknesses of Warden's theory, which he calls *decapitation*, but it also explains his own theory and examines several case studies. For purposes of this study, the focus will be on Pape's critique of Warden's theory, but a short summary of Pape's theory of coercion is useful to place this critique in context.

When considering Clausewitz, Delbrück, Jomini, Liddell Hart, Fuller, Mitchell, Sherman, the Air Corps Tactical School, and Warden, there is a common weakness in their writings which is troubling to the strategist. In general, they are somewhat vague when

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<sup>31</sup> The school is now known as the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies (SAASS).

<sup>32</sup> John Andreas Olsen, *John Warden and the Renaissance of American Air Power* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2007), 263-264 and note on 326.

<sup>33</sup> Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

connecting military effects on the battlefield (or on industrial production, transportation systems, command and control, etc.) to the breaking of the enemy's will. They all believe that changing the enemy's resolve is essential to a lasting peace, but they find it quite difficult to translate military victory to the psychological side of war, and in many cases, these theorists simply assume that military defeat eventually causes the collapse of the will. In other cases, especially with Warden, the approach is to achieve a military victory that leaves the enemy no choice in the matter. If the enemy understands that he is losing and agrees to make concessions to avoid total defeat, that is a welcome outcome, but it is not required. Eventually, an appropriate strategy will make it physically impossible for the enemy to resist. When this happens, military victory is synonymous with political victory.

This is not Pape's approach. Pape explores *coercion*, which he defines as "efforts to change the behavior of a state by manipulating costs and benefits."<sup>34</sup> He is not interested in proposing a theory of military victory—he seeks to identify the best options for altering the adversary's intentions before military victory is required. In fact, one of his most insightful conclusions is that, if one wishes to coerce the enemy but cannot do so before inflicting military defeat, "then *coercion* has failed, even if the coercer wins the war [emphasis in original]."<sup>35</sup> Pape concedes that the two are related, and it is possible to pursue a strategy to coerce the enemy and a strategy to achieve military victory at the same time. Indeed, he advocates doing this, as his fundamental thesis is that coercion works best when one demonstrates the ability to win on the battlefield.<sup>36</sup> To show this is true in practice, Pape

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>36</sup> Pape writes, "the most effective way to compel concessions without achieving decisive victory is to demonstrate that one actually has the capacity to achieve decisive victory." Ibid., 15.

concentrates on cases where airpower is applied in hopes of coercing the enemy and changing his will. He does this because of airpower's flexibility in pursuing different forms of coercive strategy, making it easier to judge the effects of distinct strategies.<sup>37</sup>

Pape postulates four general categories of strategies that employ airpower to coerce the enemy: punishment, risk, denial, and decapitation.<sup>38</sup> Punishment strategies attempt "to inflict enough pain on enemy civilians to overwhelm their territorial interests in the dispute and to cause either the government to concede or the population to revolt against the government."<sup>39</sup> Pape acknowledges Douhet and British Royal Air Force Chief Hugh Trenchard as exemplars of this strategy, but he also includes the Air Corps Tactical School in this group, asserting that their proposed attacks on production centers were designed to inflict punishment on the population to the point where the population would demand an end to the war. He concludes that punishment strategies do not work, because, "Inflicting enough pain to subdue the resistance of a determined adversary is normally beyond the capacity of conventional forces."<sup>40</sup> The second strategy is one that coerces the enemy through the "manipulation of risk."<sup>41</sup> Pape credits Cold War strategist Thomas Schelling with this theory, which involves inflicting increasing punishment over time to persuade the enemy to make concessions out of a desire to avoid further attacks.<sup>42</sup> Pape argues that such efforts are

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 39-54.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>42</sup> Schelling will be discussed later in this chapter.



doomed to failure, as this strategy is a weaker and diluted form of the punishment strategy.<sup>43</sup> The third category of coercive strategy is called denial, so named because the aim is to deny adversaries the resources and capabilities needed to accomplish their goals.<sup>44</sup> Such strategies involve “smashing enemy forces, weakening them to a point where friendly ground forces can seize disputed territories without suffering unacceptable losses.”<sup>45</sup> In addition to destroying military forces, denial strategies can include interdicting supplies to the battlefield and disrupting the manufacture of armaments.<sup>46</sup> In essence, denial strategies seek to undermine the enemy strategy through military means. For example, if the enemy needs land forces to occupy a piece of territory, the destruction of a large portion of these forces will undermine the enemy strategy and persuade them to forgo territorial claims. Pape’s overall thesis is that denial strategies work best in coercion, as they offer the most compelling reason for enemy decision makers to alter their goals.<sup>47</sup>

The fourth strategy is decapitation, which Pape credits to Warden. This is the strategy where individual leaders and supporting capabilities such as headquarters facilities and communication systems are attacked to induce organizational collapse so that “the whole house of cards comes down.”<sup>48</sup> In describing decapitation, Pape uses terms familiar to readers

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. It is noteworthy that, in one sense, a denial strategy is a form of leadership attack because it seeks to attack the enemy’s strategy by restricting the options available to the commander. This is similar to Sun Tzu’s admonition that, “the highest realization of warfare is to attack the enemy’s plans.” See Sun-Tzu, *Art of War*, ed. and trans. Ralph D. Sawyer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 177. Unlike Sun Tzu, however, Pape believes this attack should be a physical attack against the enemy forces, communication, and supply. In this sense, Pape’s version of denial combines leadership attack with straightforward destruction of enemy forces.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 29-31.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 79.

of J.F.C. Fuller. “According to this strategy,” he writes, “a nation’s leadership is like a body’s brain: destroy it and the body dies; isolate it and the body is paralyzed; confuse it and the body is uncontrollable.”<sup>49</sup> Pape identifies three types of decapitation and argues that each works slightly differently. These three types are leadership decapitation (the targeting of specific leaders), political decapitation (which involves creating an environment where opposition groups can overthrow an unpopular regime), and military decapitation (which seeks to isolate military units in the field by cutting them off from their central leadership).<sup>50</sup> Pape contends that decapitation has become the “cornerstone of air campaigns” because it “offers the possibility of successful coercion with minimal commitment of resources and risk of life...”<sup>51</sup>

Although decapitation offers the promise of effectiveness and efficiency, Pape concludes that this promise remains unfulfilled. He bases this conclusion on four factors. First, Pape argues that removing a specific individual from power is problematic. To begin, it is difficult to find and kill specific leaders.<sup>52</sup> Given the tightening of security measures that often occurs in war, Pape is skeptical that one can gather the intelligence required to predict a leader’s whereabouts in time to send an airplane and conduct an attack.<sup>53</sup> Even if this problem can be overcome, it is unlikely that the troubles that led to war will melt away in the absence of a specific leader.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, it is difficult to predict who will come to power to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 83.

fill the resulting vacuum.<sup>55</sup> The second fallacy of decapitation is that air power is unlikely to be able to create the necessary conditions for a successful change of the enemy regime.<sup>56</sup> Pape argues that, “Air attack is a weak instrument for producing popular rebellions,” because it tends to galvanize populations by focusing a society’s nationalist energy against an attacker.<sup>57</sup> Third, military decapitation is misguided because “strategic paralysis is virtually impossible to achieve...”<sup>58</sup> Pape observes that providing strategic direction does not require a large amount of “high-volume, real-time communication.”<sup>59</sup> It is enough to inform the military leaders of the broad national and military objectives and let them act independently.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, cutting strategic communication for a significant time is unfeasible due to the many forms of communication available to national leaders.<sup>61</sup> Finally, Pape asserts that decapitation can have catastrophic side-effects, including provoking the leader to lash out against innocent people (as with Slobodan Milošević in Kosovo during Operation Allied Force). It can also lead to numerous civilian casualties when attacks take place, as decapitation targets are typically located in urban areas.<sup>62</sup>

Despite all these reasons to avoid decapitation strategies, Pape acknowledges that it may make sense to attack a leader in certain circumstances. “Taking a shot at bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders makes sense,” writes Pape, “but only with solid intelligence about their

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 84

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 84-87.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>62</sup> Robert A. Pape and Merrill A. McPeak, “Hit or Miss,” *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2004), 163

whereabouts and the understanding that decapitation is not a comprehensive solution to the threat of terrorism.”<sup>63</sup> Despite this concession, it is clear that Pape views airpower’s primary role as supporting ground forces in a denial campaign. In an article titled “The True Worth of Airpower,” Pape writes:

The United States has chalked up a tremendous military record in the precision age. In just over a decade, it has won five major wars—in Kuwait and Iraq in 1991, in Bosnia in 1995, in Kosovo in 1999, in Afghanistan in 2001, and in Iraq again in 2003—at the cost of only about 400 combat fatalities overall. Precision air power played an important role in these victories, not by helping decapitate the enemy, but mainly by helping friendly ground power crush enemy ground forces more efficiently.<sup>64</sup>

Warden argues that striking fielded forces with airpower is inefficient. Identifying centers of gravity—especially enemy leaders—and attacking them with speed and precision is the key to effectiveness and efficiency. Pape readily acknowledges that striking fielded forces is inefficient. Denial strategies are costly, but they offer the best chance of succeeding by coercion—i.e. changing the enemy’s mind. For Pape, this is still less expensive than the alternative, which is defeating the enemy through annihilation.

Besides their divergence on the issue of economy, there are several other differences between Pape and Warden that are important to identify. Pape’s interest is coercion, and he goes to great efforts to distinguish between coercion and destruction. For him, victory through annihilation is the lesser form of war, as it represents the failure of a coercion strategy, and annihilation is more costly in time and resources. In contrast, Warden views coercion and destruction as concurrent goals within the same strategy, and he often discusses

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<sup>63</sup> Pape adds, “Striking national leaders may also make sense on occasion, provided heavy air and ground power are deployed to take over the fighting and maximize disruption.” Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Robert A. Pape, “The True Worth of Air Power,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2004).

both at the same time — sometimes in the same sentence. He views coercion as a beneficial side effect that might occur on the way to military victory. If the enemy recognizes the inevitable and agrees to change behavior, that is welcome but unnecessary, since the continuance of good strategy will deny the enemy any choice in the matter. Additionally, Pape is focused on changing behavior at the strategic level of war, as this level is the only one that can make concessions of the magnitude discussed in *Bombing to Win*. Warden, alternatively, argues that his theory can create collapse and paralysis at multiple levels, from strategic to tactical, by using the five-rings model to identify the appropriate centers of gravity at each level. Finally, Pape is optimistic about modern airpower's capability to engage ground forces, but he is quite pessimistic about its ability to gather the intelligence necessary to engage leadership targets. Warden is optimistic about finding and striking centers of gravity within the enemy systems, but he is pessimistic about the additional time and cost for airpower to attrit fielded forces.

Pape's perspective is useful. His discussion of weaknesses in Warden's theory offers important insights into leadership attack. There is, however, a major weakness in Pape's critique. Pape claims that his theory is one of coercion and it is. He also argues that Warden's theory of decapitation is a theory of coercion, but there are significant problems with this assertion. Warden's theory fits better into the category of destruction, not coercion. Admittedly, it can be difficult to differentiate between the two, both within Warden's logic as well as from a more general perspective. To better understand this issue, it is useful to turn to a Cold War strategist who thought deeply about force and how to use it during the standoff between the superpowers.

## Leadership Attack: Is it Coercion or “Brute Force?”

Thomas C. Schelling argues that force can be used in two fundamental ways. In his book *Arms and Influence*, Schelling proposes that force can be used “forcibly.”<sup>65</sup> It can harm the enemy by killing people, demolishing equipment, destroying infrastructure, and damaging production capacity. If one has enough force, one can apply it “without trying to appeal to an enemy’s wishes.”<sup>66</sup> The enemy leader has no choice in the matter, as he must accept the losses inflicted upon him. One wins by pulverizing the opponent until they are incapable of resistance. Schelling calls this form of power *brute force*.<sup>67</sup> It is the form of force that Clausewitz refers to when he writes, “war is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to the application of that force.”<sup>68</sup>

Alternatively, there is another, more subtle, way to apply force. If force can destroy, it can also cause pain. Therein lies an alternative form of power. “The power to hurt is bargaining power,” Schelling writes.<sup>69</sup> Because military force has the power to hurt, it can *coerce*.<sup>70</sup> It can influence a leader to make a choice that he or she may not be inclined to make otherwise. “The power to hurt is bargaining power,” Schelling writes.<sup>71</sup> “To exploit it is

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1966), 1.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>68</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Howard & Paret trans., 77.

<sup>69</sup> Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 2.

<sup>70</sup> “In addition to seizing and holding, disarming and confining, penetrating and obstructing, and all that, military force can be used to hurt. In addition to taking and protecting things of value, it can destroy value. In addition to weakening an enemy, it can cause an enemy plain suffering. ... To inflict suffering gains nothing and saves nothing directly; it can only make people behave to avoid it. The only purpose, unless sport or revenge, must be to influence somebody’s behavior, to coerce his decision or choice.” Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

diplomacy—vicious diplomacy, but diplomacy.”<sup>72</sup> Put another way, force can inflict suffering, and it can raise the specter of increased suffering in the future.<sup>73</sup> If the adversary wants to avoid this possibility, he can choose to agree to the demands put upon him. But the adversary leader still has a choice: to comply or suffer the consequences.

Thus, there are two primary categories of force—brute force and coercion—and applying the appropriate mix is crucial. The key for any strategist lies in understanding how the use of force contributes to the desired outcome. For instance, destroying certain capabilities may be a good choice to limit an adversary’s options in the future. Alternatively, it may not be desirable to destroy certain buildings, equipment, or forces, as they may be needed to realize post-war objectives. Many strategists will try to hedge their bets by combining both the destructive and coercive power of force to achieve their objectives. To some degree, both Pape and Warden do this. Warden writes that if the enemy leader will not be coerced into making concessions, then the enemy can be made incapable of resistance through the application of brute force.<sup>74</sup> Pape argues that the best strategy for coercing an enemy leader is by demonstrating the ability—again through brute force—to deny the enemy leader the capabilities and resources needed to achieve his or her desired aim.<sup>75</sup> In a sense, both Warden

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Using the fear of additional violence to induce concessions is a “risk strategy” according to Pape. Pape credits Schelling with this strategy, and he argues that it does not work in conventional war because it is a diluted form of a punishment strategy. Punishment strategies, in turn, do not work because conventional weapons cannot create enough destruction to convince the enemy to capitulate. Nuclear weapons can do so, and both punishment and risk strategies can be effective in a nuclear context. Pape, *Bombing to Win*, 20-38, 57.

<sup>74</sup> An example of this occurs when Warden writes: “...wars through history have been fought to change [or change the mind of] the command structure to overthrow the prince literally or figuratively or, put in other words, to induce the command structure to make concessions or to make it incapable of leading.” Warden, “Enemy as a System.”

<sup>75</sup> Pape writes: “Denial strategies target the opponent’s military ability to achieve its territorial or other political objectives, thereby compelling concessions in order to avoid futile expenditure of further resources.” Pape, *Bombing to Win*, 19.

and Pape advocate the use of force to destroy things, and they both assert that this can have a coercive effect. The key difference between the two theorists lies in the preferred target sets and the process by which the destruction of these targets leads to a better state of peace. A careful study of their writings can uncover this difference, but for many prospective strategists, the mixing of force for destructive and coercive purposes is quite confusing. Combining brute force and coercion has proven difficult to both conceptualize and explain, yet it is something that every theorist discussed in this study attempts to some degree.

Schelling helps the strategist appreciate how force contributes to a conflict's outcome by dividing these categories of force into subcategories. He separates brute force into *offense* and *defense*. Defense is resistance — i.e. opposing the enemy's advances with force.<sup>76</sup> It is successful when the enemy cannot succeed, even if he tries. Pure defense has a degree of passivity associated with it. One waits until the enemy attacks. Clausewitz refers to this degree of passivity when he writes that defense is the stronger form of warfare, but it has a "negative object" — the thwarting of the offender's advance.<sup>77</sup> Because of this, Clausewitz asserts that the logical extension of the defense is to succeed to the degree that one can then take up the offense. "A sudden and powerful transition to the offensive — the flashing sword of vengeance," he writes, "is the greatest moment for the defense."<sup>78</sup> To Schelling, pure offense is similar to defense. If defense is resisting until the attacker cannot succeed in attacking, offense is advancing until the defender cannot continue resisting.<sup>79</sup> Offense pursues an object, be it a physical object such as a fortification, capital, or other geographic

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<sup>76</sup> Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 2.

<sup>77</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Howard & Paret trans., 358.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>79</sup> Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 79.



location, or a goal such as destruction of an industrial base or disruption of a line of communication. Because both are forms of brute force, defense and offense have one key element in common—they seek to leave the enemy no choice in the matter.

This is not true for coercion. Coercion depends on the enemy having a choice. The goal, of course, is to get the enemy to make the desired choice—the choice that is most congruent with one's interests. When the threat of force is used to induce an enemy *not* to do something, it is *deterrence*. A deterrent threat is a passive threat. The decision to move, and to suffer the hurt, is up to the adversary.<sup>80</sup> The keys to a successful deterrent threat are often summarized as capability, credibility, and communication. First, one must possess the *capability* to hurt the adversary should he attack. This does not mean that one must be militarily superior, just that one can hurt the adversary to the degree required for deterrence. Second, the threat to hurt must be *credible*. A threat loses credibility if it is entirely out of proportion to the action to be deterred. One should not threaten a nuclear response to a low-level provocation; such a threat would not be credible.<sup>81</sup> Finally, the threat must be *communicated* to some degree so that the adversary understands that when an attack is initiated, pain will follow. Depending on the situation, this communication need not be specified in detail. It may be beneficial if there is some ambiguity that keeps the adversary guessing.<sup>82</sup> The adversary must simply know enough to understand that an attack will bring

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>82</sup> In another important Cold War work titled *The Strategy of Conflict*, Schelling discusses a class of threat that is not altogether under the threatener's control. This is called "the threat that leaves something to chance," and it is especially useful in negotiations that use brinkmanship tactics to gain concessions. Thomas S. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1980), 187-203.

an unacceptable response. While there are exceptions, a typical deterrent threat is often of indefinite duration, and it may be in place for quite a long time.<sup>83</sup>

There is another side of coercion, according to Schelling. If deterrence persuades the enemy to choose not to begin an action, *compellence* gets the enemy to choose to stop something that has been started. “The threat that compels rather than deters,” Schelling argues, “often requires that the punishment be administered *until* the other acts, rather than *if* he acts [emphasis in original].”<sup>84</sup> In many ways, compellence is the antithesis of deterrence. If deterrence is passive, waiting for the adversary’s move before responding, compellence is active. One who compels will often take advantage of the power to hurt by initiating force and ending it only if the enemy responds appropriately. To deter, one must possess the capability to harm and the credibility to threaten this harm, but there is always a question in the adversary’s mind about how much it will really hurt. When one applies force to compel, it either hurts or it does not. While communication with the adversary can be somewhat ambiguous when deterring, it needs to be clear when compelling. One must identify the actions the adversary must take to stop the pain. Schelling writes, “when we must start something that then has to be stopped, as in compellent actions, it is both harder and more important to know our aims and to communicate.”<sup>85</sup> Deterrence is often indefinite, but compellence requires a timeline. “There has to be a deadline,” warns Schelling, “otherwise

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<sup>83</sup> Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 72.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

tomorrow never comes.”<sup>86</sup> Therefore, a sense of timing is critical to compellence.<sup>87</sup> Finally, while deterrence concentrates on the initial moves of conflict, compellence has to focus on the end. “Compellence, to be successful, involves an action that must be brought to successful closure,” states Schelling. “The payoff comes at the end, as does disaster if the project fails.”<sup>88</sup>

This discussion is important for leadership attack, because Schelling’s typology of force reveals an essential subtlety in Pape’s argument as well as in Pape’s critique of Warden. Pape points out early in *Bombing to Win* that when he discusses coercion, he is referring to the same concept as Schelling’s compellence.<sup>89</sup> When he discusses punishment, risk, and denial strategies, this makes sense, as these strategies share common characteristics of compellence as identified by Schelling: force is initiated and employed until the adversary changes their actions, there is clear communication on what the adversary must do to stop the force, and there is a timeline that allows the adversary to make concessions before complete destruction is achieved.<sup>90</sup> The major shortcoming of Pape’s critique of Warden’s decapitation strategy, however, is that Pape classifies decapitation as a coercive—i.e. compellent—strategy. This is

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>87</sup> Schelling writes, “Compellence, to be effective, can’t wait forever. Still, it has to wait a little; collision can’t be instantaneous. The compellent threat has to be put into motion to be credible, and then the victim must yield. Too little time, and compliance becomes impossible; too much time, and compliance becomes unnecessary. Thus, compellence involves timing in a way that deterrence typically does not (emphasis in original).” Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>89</sup> Pape, *Bombing to Win*, 4.

<sup>90</sup> It is worth noting that Pape’s description of Schelling’s “manipulation of risk” is difficult to reconcile with Schelling’s original writings. Schelling is clearly talking about creating a strategy where two competitors must share in the risk that the competition turn violent. “If ‘brinksmanship’ means anything, it means *manipulating the shared risk of war*. It means exploiting the danger that somebody may inadvertently go over the brink, dragging the other with him. If two climbers are tied together, and one wants to intimidate the other by seeming about to fall over the edge, there has to be some uncertainty or anticipated irrationality or it won’t work.” Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 99. It is difficult to understand how Pape takes this description and arrives at his description of a risk strategy: “The heart of this strategy is to raise the risk of civilian damage slowly, compelling the opponent to concede to avoid suffering future costs.” Pape, *Bombing to Win*, 66.

not altogether wrong but it is a poor fit. Understanding why will open up an entirely new avenue to explore Warden's theory.

Warden does discuss coercion in his theory, but the way in which he advocates the use of force fits better in Schelling's category of brute force—more specifically, offense—for three reasons. First, Warden emphasizes speed and parallel attack in his theory. The impact that attacks have on the enemy system depend on how quickly the centers of gravity can be affected. The longer this takes, the less chance there is of achieving the aim because the enemy can adapt to the changes. A winning plan is one that is “highly compressed, highly parallel,” and “inside opponent reaction time.”<sup>91</sup> Stated simply, there is no emphasis in Warden's theory on waiting for the enemy decision maker to decide to make concessions. In Warden's ideal plan, the attack would be so fast and devastating that the enemy leader would have no opportunity to sue for peace. Second, Warden's theory is built on the center of gravity concept. As discussed earlier, this is not a concept designed to induce pain but rather collapse due to the cascading effects of striking key nodes in a system. Compellence does not require this, and in fact, it may be hindered by a strategy that causes collapse. This is because of the third reason: Warden seeks paralysis of the enemy system. He explains, “...if we affect enough centers of gravity quickly enough [in parallel], the system will go into a state of paralysis, preventing it from repairing itself, protecting itself against future attacks, or making competent attacks against its opponent's systems.”<sup>92</sup> True paralysis at the strategic level will also prevent the enemy from making concessions. Even if the adversary leader is unharmed, he or she may not be able to receive information about the extent of the collapse.

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<sup>91</sup> Warden, “Strategy and Airpower,” 71-72.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 71.

Furthermore, even if the decision is made to concede, the leader may not be able to communicate this decision to the opponent, the people, the government, or the military. It is difficult to negotiate with a paralyzed entity. In sum, Warden's theory is not intended to influence the enemy leader's choice; it is designed to take that choice away and, therefore, more about brute force than coercion.

Because of this, Pape's critique must be viewed with some degree of skepticism. Pape may be quite right that Warden's theory of decapitation is not suited for coercion, but to be fair, it is not meant to be. It is a theory that seeks to use brute force to induce collapse and paralysis, and that is the standard by which it should be judged. At least it is the intermediate standard, as the final standard should be how this paralysis results in achieving the overall objectives of the war. That is a high standard indeed, and it must inform the consideration of Warden's theory as well as the development of an alternative.

### **Development of an Alternative Theory**

In his article on the subject of systematic process analysis, Peter Hall explains that the method works best when one theory can be tested against an alternative. The primary reason for this recommendation is that each theory tends to generate its own set of facts in a case study. The presence of an alternative theory helps the researcher to approach the case with more objectivity and reach a sound judgment based on comparison between the two.<sup>93</sup> It is easier to answer the question, "Which theory best fits the evidence?" with objectivity versus, "Does this theory fit the evidence?"

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<sup>93</sup> Hall, "Systematic Process Analysis," 27.

This study will employ an alternative theory. Generating such a theory could be as easy as identifying a null hypothesis. In this case, it could be straightforward: *there is no relationship between attacking enemy leadership and the realization of one's objectives in military conflict*. While this represents a definite alternative to the primary theory, it does not serve the study well. Specifically, it does not aid the study in identifying predictions that are, to use Hall's term, "brittle."<sup>94</sup> Hall argues that the alternative theory should stand in contrast to the primary theory, and the two theories should offer explanations that are easily distinguishable. With this in mind, this study will develop an alternative theory by considering the weaknesses in the primary theory along with its underlying assumptions. The alternative theory will consist of a set of propositions that propose distinct processes and generate contrasting predictions.<sup>95</sup> The following discussion leads to these propositions and predictions.

In the primary theory, the first proposition asserts that all systems—and their respective subsystems—require centralized leadership that provides direction and guidance. This is true of systems as diverse as an electrical grid, battalion, or drug cartel, as an electrical grid has a central controller, a battalion has a commander, and a drug cartel has a boss.<sup>96</sup> This central leadership is essential to the direction and health of the system. Without it, the system

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> To aid the reader through the remainder of this discussion, the primary theory will make extensive use of the word "system," while the alternate theory will use "organization." This is done to help the reader keep track of which theory is being discussed. In English, the word "system" has more of an impersonal connotation than "organization," as systems can exist without people, but organizations cannot. While this is somewhat appropriate given the themes of the primary versus alternative theories, the reader should not read too much into this distinction.

<sup>96</sup> See discussion of various systems in Warden, "Enemy as a System." Warden describes the specific example of the operational level commander and the similarities of this commander with the strategic leader.

is unable to display consciousness.<sup>97</sup> It can still function in a technical sense, much like an airplane on autopilot, but it has no ability to adjust, adapt, or evolve.

An alternative perspective to this proposition is that organizations vary in the role of leadership. This variation can manifest itself in two ways. First, while some organizations are relatively dependent on central direction and control, others are relatively independent. If the organization is highly centralized, one would expect to observe certain characteristics, such as subordinates requiring specific direction before taking action and periods of inaction when this direction is not available. One may find standard operating procedures that either delegate or hold back authority within the organization. There may be testimony from the subordinates describing organizational procedures requiring specific approval for their initiatives. Additionally, these subordinates may practice unreasonable deference to their leaders. Decentralized units, in contrast, may emphasize and reward initiative by leaders at lower levels. They may promote leaders who display this initiative and reward creative thinking with recognition or tangible rewards.

Closely related to the degree of centralization is the flow of information throughout the organization. If most information flows through a particular leader or support mechanism (an intelligence fusion cell, for example), this may indicate a high degree of centralization. Determining how information flows through an organization will help identify its degree of centralization, according to Jacob Marschak. He writes, “the workings of an organization might be better understood if, instead of the usual organizational chart, one could have the

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<sup>97</sup> “The brain provides the leadership and direction to the body as a whole and to all its parts. It, and it alone, is absolutely essential in the sense that there can be no substitute for it and without it the body, even though technically alive, is no longer operating at a strategic level.” Warden, “Enemy as a System.”

description—if only very rough—of ‘who does what in response to what information.’”<sup>98</sup>

Understanding information flow, therefore, helps one discover the leader’s role in the organization, which also helps in determining that organization’s susceptibility to attacks on its leadership.

Along with different degrees of centralization, the role of leadership may also vary according to the level at which that organization operates. In other words, the role of a strategic leader may be quite different from the roles of leaders at the operational and tactical levels. As explained in Chapter One, leaders at different levels often have different functions. Strategic leadership is usually characterized by the issuance of broad guidance and direction that is not necessarily time sensitive. Pape observes that, even in governments that are considered to be highly centralized, “national leaders are still mainly concerned with broad decisions regarding fronts to the defended and attacked and not the orchestration of tactical units or their battlefield support to execute those decisions.”<sup>99</sup> Consequently, the disruption of leadership at the strategic level may have significant long-term effects, but little effect in the short term. At lower levels, however, the role of the leader may be markedly different. Leaders at the operational and tactical levels may require constant communication with subordinates and rapid information flow to keep pace with the ebb and flow of battle. Disruption of leadership at these levels may have an immediate impact, but this may be limited in duration, as there will likely be others who can assume the responsibilities of leadership in a short time.

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<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Abdulkader H. Sinno, *Organizations at War: In Afghanistan and Beyond*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008), 83.

<sup>99</sup> Pape, *Bombing to Win*, 84-85.



In the primary theory, proposition two states that all systems and subsystems have centers of gravity. If these centers are attacked, their degradation or destruction will have disproportionate effects across the system. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, the underlying assumptions for this proposition are that the systems have a high degree of connectivity, they contain single points of failure within their key processes, and there are limits to the speed at which the system can adapt to their degradation or absence. These assumptions lead to a situation where the destruction of key nodes has effects that cascade across the system and into other systems.

An alternative to this proposition, therefore, can be derived by questioning these underlying assumptions. Some organizations may only be loosely connected, such as a terrorist group with a cellular structure. Moreover, a key process within the system may be highly redundant, such as a communication network that can reroute traffic around a failed switch. Such organizations may still have centers of gravity, but the overall effect of attack on these centers may be limited because of the ability of a loosely connected or highly redundant system to adapt to their loss. This may be especially true of leadership at the strategic level, as it may give only broad guidance and direction (loosely coupled), and it may have access to multiple capabilities to communicate this broad guidance to the followers (highly redundant). Organizations with these qualities may prove to be highly adaptable in the face of leadership attack.

More specifically, some organizations may take proactive steps to prepare for the possibility of an attack on their leadership. Perhaps the best evidence that an organization is prepared for the loss of its leader is the existence of a clear plan of succession or a named successor. This indicates that an organization has thought through the possibility that a

leader's term is finite. In their book *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, James Collins and Jerry Portas argue that deliberate succession planning is a hallmark of companies that stay strong over long periods of time.<sup>100</sup> A plan of succession may be most beneficial and stabilizing to an organization if the plan is published or otherwise well-known among organization members and institutions. It could also be more effective if it is practiced and exercised.

Additionally, organizations may compliment a plan of succession with a program of leadership development. According to this logic, organizations that spend significant time and resources developing their leaders will be more prepared for the loss of a leader, because other leaders are ready to assume the responsibility. Organizations such as the U.S. armed forces spend sizable resources on the development of future leaders. This is evident in the training and education opportunities afforded to those who show promise as leaders as well as the numerous opportunities to practice leadership at lower levels in the organization before moving up to higher levels. Formal schools, training programs, and leadership courses are key indicators that such a program is in place. Formal and informal mentoring are also important indicators, as are opportunities to practice leadership within subordinate organizations and during exercises. The combination of a clear plan of succession and a leadership development program may prove to inoculate an organization against the loss of its key leadership, as the organization may be able to overcome the initial disruption quickly and move forward.

Another way that organizations may prepare for the loss of their leader—or a disruption in their leadership—is by implementing common doctrine and standard operating

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<sup>100</sup> James C. Collins and Jerry I. Portas, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, (New York: HarperBusiness, 1994), 170-184.

procedures (SOPs). These tools can help ensure continuity and stability in the absence of leadership. James Mooney argues that doctrine is critical for any organization, and he describes doctrine as “the definition of the objective” as well as “the procedures necessary to obtain the objective.”<sup>101</sup> The first definition is similar to the common concept of an organization’s vision and mission statement, or perhaps its statement of purpose or creed, while the second is often referred to as standard operating procedures, regulations, or instructions. A mutual set of core beliefs can help an organization endure the loss of a senior leader, as the organization will not be as dependent upon the senior leader for its direction in the short-term. The existence of well-understood SOPs can help an organization withstand the loss of a junior leader, as the organization can rely upon the SOPs to guide them through the disruption until it can replace the leader with another. The existence of a doctrine of core beliefs in the form of vision, mission statement, creed, SOPs, etc., may be a strong indicator that an organization is prepared for the eventual loss of a leader, no matter how important that leader is to the organization.

The third proposition of the primary theory states that there is sufficient intelligence to identify the centers of gravity for important systems and subsystems, and a means exists to attack these centers of gravity, directly or indirectly, in a compressed timeframe. The word *intelligence* is used here in the twofold manner discussed earlier; one can both gather the pertinent information about the enemy systems and develop the knowledge necessary to identify key centers of gravity based on this information. The ability to strike at these centers of gravity in a compressed timeline is also assumed. Western militaries, particularly that of the United States, have numerous capabilities that can be used to attack multiple enemy

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<sup>101</sup> James D. Mooney, *The Principles of Organization*, Revised ed., (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947), 10-11.

centers of gravity quickly. Developing the intelligence necessary to identify these may be more problematic.

The alternative to this proposition, therefore, depends on how one views intelligence. The primary theory depends on the assumption that the intelligence is sufficient to target systems of gravity. This assumption may not be supported by the evidence of history, especially when one considers that the enemy has a high degree of motivation to guard this information. In considering the experience of past conflicts, many key intelligence breakthroughs seem to be obtained through a fortuitous combination of hard work and luck.

A good example of this combination is illustrated in the intelligence obtained to shoot down the aircraft of Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto in World War II. United States cryptologists went to tremendous lengths to break the Japanese “Purple” code used for top secret messages.<sup>102</sup> In April 1943, these cryptologists intercepted and deciphered a message containing the detailed itinerary of Admiral Yamamoto’s upcoming visit on 18 April to Bougainville in the South Pacific. This intercept was a significant development, because the travel plan would put the Admiral within striking distance from American fighters stationed on Guadalcanal.<sup>103</sup> As luck would have it, information about Admiral Yamamoto’s trip was sent using codes that had not been updated with new keys for many months, and these messages were quickly deciphered.<sup>104</sup> The unusual level of detail contained in these messages made it possible to find and attack Yamamoto’s transport airplane. The result was that the Japanese lost their most capable naval commander. “His death shocked and demoralized the

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<sup>102</sup> For a detailed account of this effort, see Rear Admiral Edwin T. Layton, Captain Roger Pineau, and John Costello, *“And I Was There:” Pearl Harbor and Midway—Breaking the Secrets* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1985).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 474-475.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

entire nation,” wrote Masanori Ito in his book, *The End of the Imperial Japanese Navy*.<sup>105</sup>

Yamamoto’s biographer, Hiroyuki Agawa, describes the sense of angst among the Japanese: “Both for Navy men and the general public, Yamamoto’s death was a source not only of deep grief but of anxiety about the future course of the war.”<sup>106</sup> This action could not have taken place without a combination of hard work and luck. In light of this example, it makes sense to put forward an alternative proposition asserting that the intelligence required to strike leadership is difficult to obtain and may, in the end, be dependent upon chance.

Proposition four of the primary theory states that, when multiple centers of gravity are struck in a compressed period, the effects cascade throughout the system, resulting in collapse and paralysis. This paralysis makes continued opposition impossible. Therefore it is a goal to be sought, and it is both more economical and more effective than destroying large amounts of the enemy system. This is true regarding the attack of fielded forces. Focusing on the destruction of these forces beyond what is necessary to induce paralysis is costly and ineffective.

An alternative to this proposition can be found in two counterarguments. First, paralysis is possible, but not all organizations are vulnerable to attack on centers of gravity, including leadership. If an organization has taken proactive steps to prepare for the loss of leadership, or if it is quite decentralized, the level of destruction required to paralyze it may be very high. The same may be true if the organization is loosely connected and highly redundant. For such organizations, the destruction necessary to induce paralysis may look

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<sup>105</sup> Masanori Ito with Roger Pineau, *The End of the Imperial Japanese Navy*, Andrew Y. Kuroda and Roger Pineau, trans., (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1956), 92.

<sup>106</sup> Hiroyuki Agawa, *The Reluctant Admiral: Yamamoto and the Imperial Navy*, John Bester, trans., (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1979), 388.

similar to Clausewitzian annihilation. Second, paralysis may not always be desirable. More specifically, paralysis may be quite desirable at the operational and tactical levels, especially in units engaged in combat. The paralysis and collapse of an opposition ground unit or air defense system usually leads to success on the battlefield. At the strategic level, however, inducing paralysis may be much more complicated, and it may even be counterproductive. Warden makes it clear that the goal of paralysis is to make the enemy system incapable of resistance. At the strategic level, this may make the enemy leader incapable of leading, even if he or she wants to change direction or concede. If the strategic system is paralyzed, then the enemy leader may not be able to gather information on the true status of the situation. Furthermore, even if the leader makes the decision to capitulate, he or she may not be able to communicate with key subordinates to pass this decision to them. In a situation like this, subordinate organizations, including forces in the field, may continue resisting. In this way, paralysis does not necessarily equal collapse. Even if the central leadership structure is unable to provide guidance and direction, parts of the organization may still be able to act. In a military organization, this means that subordinate units will still be able to fight, perhaps quite effectively. This can make for a very dangerous and volatile situation. In fact, this may make the realization of war objectives more difficult, which leads to the last proposition.

The fifth proposition asserts that paralysis—or the threat of it—leads to eventual victory. When the enemy leader recognizes that continued resistance will soon be impossible or counterproductive, he or she will make the concessions necessary to stop the war. If this does not happen, continued attack on multiple centers of gravity in minimum time will cause paralysis and take away any further choice. The enemy system will be unable to defend itself, and therefore, it cannot win. In this way, Warden employs the logic of annihilation.

Clausewitz and Delbrück held that destroying the enemy's main force meant that the enemy state is defenseless. As a result, it is compelled to accept whatever terms are forced upon it. Warden argues that paralysis is as good as destruction, because the enemy is incapable of resistance in either case.

Paralysis of the enemy system, however, may not automatically result in a better state of peace, and an alternative theory should recognize this. As argued previously, Warden's theory is a theory based on the assumptions of annihilation, but annihilation may not be a good theoretical fit. There have been many wars where at least one side was unable or unwilling to attack the enemy and make them incapable of resistance. Even if one seeks relatively unlimited objectives and annihilation makes logical sense, paralysis at the strategic level may only lead to chaos. Delbrück argued that, when executing a strategy of annihilation, one has to be willing to follow up victory on the battlefield, perhaps by occupying the enemy's territory. Warden does not mention this, but one can argue that he should. A paralyzed enemy is paralyzed but may not necessarily be defeated. Paralysis does not automatically lead to collapse. Significant follow-up actions may be necessary to ensure a desired outcome, even after paralysis.

In contrast, a war may be fought for relatively limited objectives or from a position of weakness, and in this case a strategy of annihilation is not suitable. Instead, it may be more appropriate to implement a strategy that imposes unacceptable costs on the adversary to persuade them to make limited concessions. This is the core of Delbrück's *Ermattungs-Strategie* (strategy of attrition or erosion). It is a strategy of coercion, and it may take the form of compellence through punishment now and the threat of greater punishment to follow. Alternatively, it may take the form of Pape's denial strategy by destroying the capabilities and

resources needed to realize the enemy's strategy. In any case, the enemy leader can be presented with a clear choice to agree to the demands or suffer more painful consequences but inducing strategic paralysis may well hinder this.

It can be argued, however, that at the operational and tactical levels, paralysis is almost always desirable. The reason for this is clear. As one moves from the strategic to the tactical, war tends to become increasingly absolute. Even when war is fought for limited aims with limited means at the strategic level, a tactical engagement will often pit man against man or small unit against small unit, with the loser often suffering injury or death. In this way, war at lower levels often resembles a duel for unlimited stakes no matter what its characteristics at the strategic level. Because war at the operational and tactical levels tends to the absolute, inducing paralysis through leadership attack is usually desirable against tactical and operational units. Indeed, paralysis at these levels may serve to convince the enemy decision maker to accept the terms offered and stop the war.

### **Propositions of the Alternative Theory:**

In light of the this discussion above, it is now possible to construct propositions that offer clear alternatives to those in the primary theory. These propositions are:

1. **The role of leadership varies in organizations.** First, this role varies between organizations. Some organizations have structure and processes—both formal and informal—that make the organization very dependent on central direction, while others can function well with only limited communication and guidance from the central leadership. Second, the role of leadership varies within military organizations. More specifically, leadership varies according to the level of war at which the organization



functions. The strategic leader is likely to provide general guidance, while operational and tactical leaders tend to provide increasingly specific and time-sensitive direction.

**2. Some organizations are susceptible to attacks on centers of gravity, others are not.**

Some organizations are highly connected, while others are composed of components that are relatively independent. Additionally, some organizations may have numerous single points of failure, while others exhibit a high degree of redundancy and are highly adaptive. While all organizations have centers of gravity, their vulnerability to an attack on these centers is directly proportional to their degree of connectedness, redundancy, and adaptivity. A key to adaptivity is how an organization prepares for the loss of its leader. Organizations that have taken proactive steps to prepare for this can adapt to leadership attacks quickly and with minimal disruption to the organization.

**3. Intelligence is incomplete and sometimes inaccurate.** The ability to correctly identify centers of gravity for the enemy organization to the degree required for targeting is uncertain. It is usually a combination of intense effort and luck.

**4. Paralysis is desirable at the operational and tactical levels, but usually not at the strategic level.** Depending on organizational vulnerability, collapse and paralysis are possible. This paralysis is almost always advantageous at the operational and tactical levels, especially against armed forces engaged in battle. It is not always desirable at the strategic level, however, because paralysis at this level may lead to the inability of the leader to change direction or concede. It could also lead to unpredictable and volatile situations that are difficult to control or resolve.

**5. The enemy should be offered an opportunity to concede—strategic paralysis requires major follow up.** If possible, leadership attack should be conducted at the operational and

tactical levels to induce paralysis and enable success on the battlefield. This will often coerce the strategic leader into making concessions. At some point in the conflict, this leader should be presented with an opportunity to concede, especially if the war is fought for a limited aim. If the war's aim is unlimited, paralysis at the strategic level may be desirable, but significant follow-up actions will be required, possibly including defeat of the armed forces and occupation of territory.

### **Predictions of Each Theory**

With both the primary and alternative theories stated, the next step in systematic process analysis is to specify predictions according to each theory. Much of this flows from the discussion in this chapter concerning the primary theory and its alternative perspective. A summary of both theories and their predictions is presented in the following table. Each of these propositions will be tested in the cases that follow, and their predictions will be compared with the historical evidence.

Version 3	Primary Theory	Alternative Theory
Role of Leadership	<p><b>1. Organizations require central leadership.</b>  <i>Predictions:</i> The leadership core is in control of the system and autonomous. This core gathers information, makes decisions, communicates guidance to subordinate components, and holds them accountable. This core is supported by key leadership capabilities such as protective facilities and communications. Key information flows from this leadership core out to the rest of the system. The system may survive without this leadership core, but it will lose the ability to adjust, adapt, or evolve.</p>	<p><b>1. The role of leadership varies within organizations</b>  <i>Predictions:</i> Organizations have varying degrees of centralization. Some are highly connected to the leadership core, and others are more diffuse. The degree of centralization can be seen in how the organization handles the flow of information and the degree of autonomy that it grants to subordinate components. Leaders at different levels serve distinct functions and attacking them produces distinct effects. Strategic leaders provide very broad guidance and direction that is often not time sensitive. Attacking them leads to negligible effects in the short term, but significant effects in the long term. Attacking leaders at the operational and tactical levels will create effects that are quickly recognizable, but they may not last long as units find ways to adapt.</p>
Susceptibility	<p><b>2. Systems are susceptible to attacks on centers of gravity.</b>  <i>Predictions:</i> Systems are connected to the degree that the loss of one part of the system has effects in other parts of the system. Furthermore, systems employ key processes that often contain single points of failure. The loss of several key nodes will have detrimental and cascading effects through the system, and these could spill over into other systems. A system may be able to adapt to the loss of key nodes over time, but not within a short period.</p>	<p><b>2. Some organizations are susceptible to attacks on centers of gravity, others are not.</b>  <i>Predictions:</i> Organizations vary according to connectedness, redundancy, and adaptability. Organizations with a disparate structure as well as high degrees of redundancy and adaptability will be less vulnerable to attack on their centers of gravity.</p>

Version 3	Primary Theory	Alternative Theory
Intelligence	<p><b>3. Intelligence is sufficient, and a means of attack exists.</b>  <i>Predictions:</i> Sufficient intelligence-gathering and analysis capability exists to understand the enemy system. This allows for the identification of key nodes—including the enemy leadership—in sufficient detail to target them.</p>	<p><b>3. Intelligence is incomplete and sometimes inaccurate.</b>  <i>Predictions:</i> Intelligence is incomplete (&amp; sometimes inaccurate). At times, it is impossible to locate, track, and destroy key nodes—including enemy leadership. At other times, intelligence is sufficient. The combination of hard work and luck may produce spectacular results.</p>
Paralysis	<p><b>4. Attacks on centers of gravity produce paralysis.</b>  <i>Predictions:</i> A focused attack on multiple centers of gravity in a compressed time period produces collapse and paralysis of the system. The flow of information within the system stops, as does the issuance of guidance and direction from the leadership core. The result is the inability to adapt or respond to stimuli.</p>	<p><b>4. Paralysis is desirable at the operational and tactical levels, usually not at the strategic level.</b>  <i>Predictions:</i> Some organizations can sustain an attack on centers of gravity and adapt quickly. Organizations that operate at the operational and tactical levels are more vulnerable to attacks on their centers of gravity than those at the strategic level. Paralysis is almost always desirable at the operational and tactical levels, especially against engaged forces.</p>
Better State of Peace	<p><b>5. Paralysis leads to victory.</b>  <i>Predictions:</i> When faced with paralysis, the leadership core will decide to make concessions or the system will be paralyzed (and defenseless). Both lead to a better state of peace.</p>	<p><b>5. The enemy should be offered an opportunity to concede—strategic paralysis requires major follow up.</b>  <i>Predictions:</i> Paralysis at the operational/tactical levels leads to battlefield success and, sometimes, capitulation. After imposing strategic paralysis, major follow up actions are required for a better state of peace.</p>

## Chapter Five

### Iraq and Saddam Hussein (Before the Gulf War of 1991)

*Indeed, he struck me as a much more “serious” character than other Ba’athist leaders; and his engaging smile, when he deployed it, seemed part and parcel of his absorption with the subject in hand and not, as with so many of the others, a matter of superficial affability. I should judge him, young as he is, to be a formidable, single-minded and hard-headed member of the Ba’athist hierarchy, but one with whom, if only one could see more of him, it would be possible to do business.*

H.G. Balfour Paul  
British Ambassador to Baghdad  
Telegraph to London, December 1969

Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in August of 1990 initiated a chain of events that would lead to a 12-year conflict between the regime of Saddam Hussein and a shifting coalition of Western powers led by the United States. During this period, the Western media kept a keen focus on Saddam Hussein’s dictatorial style of leadership and use of brutal measures to maintain power. Western political and military leaders perceived Saddam’s regime to be both highly centralized and illegitimate in the eyes of the Iraqi people. In their view, this made the regime extremely vulnerable to attack. This perspective was shared widely among civilian and military leaders during the military campaigns of Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom. Political leaders demonized Saddam publicly, while military commanders and their planners privately adopted comprehensive strategies of leadership attack against Saddam Hussein, the Ba’ath Party, and the centralized Iraqi military.

There was widespread agreement that these leadership attack strategies would be successful in weakening and eventually disabling the Iraqi regime. This agreement was

founded upon a common understanding of Saddam's leadership that was limited in depth. Western leaders, the press, and the public held a view of Iraq that did not fully appreciate the situation between the people and their leader. They considered Saddam Hussein to be a tyrant who kept his position through tools of terror such as fear, intimidation, humiliation, murder, and torture. This was, in fact, true. According to Western liberal values and norms, such a leader could not be perceived as legitimate. The political traditions of Mesopotamia, however, are quite different. In the lands that comprise modern Iraq, it is difficult to find a time when an effective leader did not use forceful methods—including coercive violence—to ensure his position. Saddam was indeed disliked by a major portion of the people over which he ruled. Like any tyrant from an ethnic minority ruling over a dispossessed majority, his rule was tenuous. Removing him, however, would prove to be very difficult. The prolonged conflict with the Ba'ath that began with the Gulf War of 1991 and ended with the government's collapse in the Iraq War of 2003 would prove that this regime was quite durable as long as Saddam was willing to uphold the long tradition of using coercive violence to suppress internal dissent.

This chapter sets the context for the Gulf War of 1991 by describing the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. It begins with an important assertion. The disparate peoples that inhabit Iraq have a long history of expecting—and in some cases, demanding—strong leadership that does not shy away from violent methods. A simple explanation for Saddam's rise is that he filled this void better than anyone else, and as long as he produced results for Iraq, he would have widespread support despite his brutal tendencies. Shortly after his official rise to power, Saddam would lead Iraq in a war with its much larger neighbor, Iran. A key element of Operation Desert Storm's context is the experience of Iraq's war with

Iran from 1980 to 1988, as this conflict did much to shape the modern Iraqi military. In addition, the political and economic fallout from this war led directly to the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This chapter describes the general nature of Iraq's military, including its leadership structure and culture. For sake of comparison, it also discusses the military culture of the United States and some of the major changes that took place within it at the end of the Cold War. This discussion makes extensive use of interviews with Iraqi insiders, their written accounts, and captured documents made available since the Iraq War of 2003. These valuable sources help fill a persistent gap of knowledge about Iraq, its history, and its people, especially as ordinary Iraqis sought to survive under Saddam's rule.

**“For a long time now, you have been swift to sedition.”**

“Iraqi nationalism understood as a sense of identity with a territorial entity known as Iraq does not exist,” argues Iraqi academic Kanan Makiya in his book *The Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq*.<sup>1</sup> Makiya explains that the “mosaic of communities” within Iraq have never made a collective decision to merge their interests and identities.<sup>2</sup> Instead, there exists a national character that is shared by this collection of communities, villages, families, and tribes. One distinctive of this national character is a common perception about “what it takes to rule in Iraq.”<sup>3</sup> Makiya observes that, “Sunni and Shi'i Iraqi Arabs have always thought of themselves as having to be ruled in a certain way.”<sup>4</sup> For many centuries, the people of Iraq

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<sup>1</sup> Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkley, California: University of California Press, 1998), 120. Originally published in 1989 under the pseudonym Samir al-Khalil.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 120-121.

have proven a difficult challenge for rulers to subdue, and only the most brutal leaders have been able to establish their rule and bring stability and prosperity to the region. Mayika argues that Saddam Hussein is only the most recent example of a long history of leaders who have adopted this approach. As a tool for understanding the phenomenon of Saddam Hussein, Mayika offers an important analogy—that of the rule of al-Hadjadj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi, Governor of Iraq during the Umayyad caliphate (661-750).<sup>5</sup>

Much of what is remembered about al-Hadjadj is positive, as he overcame the effects of the nascent Sunni-Shi'a split and led a period of renewal in Iraq which included important construction projects, economic reforms, religious advances, and agricultural improvements. To establish this rule, however, al-Hadjadj had to establish legitimacy in the eyes of the people, the same people who had already killed several prospective governors sent by the caliph before al-Hadjadj. Upon assuming his post, al-Hadjadj executed several citizens suspected of disloyalty, and he promptly put their heads on display.<sup>6</sup> He then assembled the people and gave a speech that has been preserved and immortalized in Iraqi culture:

By God, O people of Iraq, people of discord and dissembling and evil character! I cannot be squeezed like a fig or scared like a camel with old water skins. ... For a long time now, you have been swift to sedition. By God, I will strip you like bark, I shall truss you like a bundle of twigs, I shall beat you like stray camels. ... By God, what I promise, I fulfill; what I purpose, I accomplish; what I measure, I cut off. ... I swear by God that you will keep strictly to the true path, or I shall punish every man of you in this body.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 121-124.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Lewis, ed., *Islam: From the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople, Volume 1: Politics and War* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 23-24. Quoted in Mayika, 123-124.



Mayika explains that story is so familiar that every school child in Iraq recognizes these words, which represent “a truism on the exercise of political power in Iraq.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Mayika argues, Saddam Hussein epitomizes the themes of the speech by al-Hadjad.<sup>9</sup>

Mayika is not the only observer to make such an argument. In *A History of Iraq*, Charles Tripp asserts that, throughout the history of modern Iraq, there “has been a powerful tendency for politics to be seen mainly as a way of disciplining the population to ensure conformity with the ruler’s visions of social order.”<sup>10</sup> Tripp views Iraq’s modern history as the confluence of three powerful forces. The first is the assumption of patrimonialism, where all power flows from the central ruler. The second is the sharp increase in oil revenues, which has placed tremendous economic power in the hands of the central ruler. Finally, there is the persistent penchant for violence within Iraq. Tripp explains, “The use of violence to suppress dissent, much of which took violent form itself, has been reproduced and elaborated by central governments in Baghdad since the foundation of the state.”<sup>11</sup> In Tripp’s view, strong central authority, economic power in the hands of the government, and the tendency to adopt violence have combined to create a situation where Iraqis are faced with a stark choice: submit to the ruler or flee the country.<sup>12</sup> This situation has existed, more or less, since the formation of the modern Iraqi state, as strong rulers have struggled to control the peoples living within the borders, and the people have struggled to gain normalcy in their lives.

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<sup>8</sup> Mayika, 123.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 281.

## **Iraq's Leadership: A Succession of Strongmen**

The modern state of Iraq was born in 1921 as a British mandate in the aftermath of World War I and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>13</sup> Iraq was then, and is today, a conglomeration of three main ethnic groups—Shi'a (the majority), Sunni, and Kurd.<sup>14</sup> Modern Iraq's existence has been characterized by an uneasy mixing of these three ethnic groups, and peace has been kept only at the hands of a strong leader willing to use force for coercive purposes. The first of these leaders was King Faisal. Faisal dreamed of creating an independent Arab state, and with the help of the British Army and T.E. Lawrence, he led the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Faisal's reign over Iraq began the Hashemite Dynasty, which ruled until 1958.<sup>15</sup> While there were several Hashemite monarchs during this time, the key strongman was Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Said, who assumed office in 1930 and controlled the instruments of Iraqi power until he met a violent end during a military coup in 1958.<sup>16</sup>

More strongmen rose to take al-Said's place, but their tenures ended much more quickly and, for most of them, just as violently. These leaders invariably came from minority Sunni clans, a fact that contributed to considerable enmity between the Sunni and Shi'a as well as disaffection with the Kurds who dominated the northern sections of the country. After a prolonged period of struggle for power, the socialist Ba'ath Party initiated a successful coup

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<sup>13</sup> Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2012), 22-24.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-17.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-78.

<sup>16</sup> A short history of Iraq is presented in an interesting memoir written by Ala Bashir, an educated Iraqi and Saddam's Hussein's physician during the Gulf War. Bashir remembers throwing rocks at al-Said before the military coup. He also remembers that Saddam believed that al-Said "was a great man and his efforts on behalf of our country were exemplary." Ala Bashir, with Lars Sigurd Sunnana, *The Insider: Trapped in Saddam's Brutal Regime* (London: Abacus, 2005), 3-14.

in 1968 and assumed control of Iraq.<sup>17</sup> Ba'ath leader Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr was elevated to the Presidency and Saddam Hussein, a young party activist, was appointed to the office of Vice President. During the 1970s, Saddam Hussein slowly gained power and eventually became the de facto leader of Iraq.<sup>18</sup> In 1979, Hussein formally assumed power from Bakr, and he moved swiftly to consolidate his position.<sup>19</sup> After purging members in what would be remembered as "the Ba'ath party massacre," Saddam assumed the role of the supreme leader in Iraq.<sup>20</sup> He would remain in that position until American tanks rolled into Baghdad in 2003, nearly 24 years later.

In many ways, Saddam Hussein fulfilled Iraqi expectations about the type of leader required to rule over their unique state. Saddam was strong, smart, hard working, and willing to use power to attain his objectives. At the same time, he seemed to be totally committed to strengthening Iraq's military, improving Iraq's economy, reinforcing Iraq's culture and history, and establishing Iraq as the leader of the Arab world. Most Iraqis supported him because they supported these goals. They shared the sentiments of Iraqi author Said K. Aburish, who described the feeling of many Iraqis toward Saddam in this period: "We were enamored with what Saddam was doing. ... Anybody who tells you otherwise didn't know what Saddam was about. He's not telling the truth."<sup>21</sup>

As he consolidated power, Saddam became the legitimate ruler in the eyes of the Iraqi populace. In 1980, he reinforced this legitimacy by establishing the National Assembly.

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<sup>17</sup> Marr, 87-137.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 149-150.

<sup>19</sup> Bashir, 42-49.

<sup>20</sup> Marr, 176-178.

<sup>21</sup> Said K. Aburish, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Survival of Saddam*, 25 January 2000, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saddam/interviews/> (accessed 21 January 2013).

Though this body did not possess real power, its creation was seen as an indication of the progressive nature of Saddam's regime.<sup>22</sup> The Iraqi president's rule was accepted in most communities in Iraq, and he was popular in many. Saddam wanted to be perceived as the successor to the strong and successful rulers of Iraq's past, and he was largely successful in this effort.<sup>23</sup> As Tripp states, "a personality cult of awesome proportions was created around Saddam."<sup>24</sup> Over time, this popularity would eventually give way to dread, but this was a slow process. While the transition from admiration to hate had started by 1990, it was by no means complete. The initial fissures in Saddam's relationship with the military and the people began to surface after he assumed formal office, and this process accelerated during the war with Iran.

## **The War with Iran**

"In examining the causes of a great war," writes J.F.C. Fuller, "it is wise, I think, to go back to the last great war which preceded it..."<sup>25</sup> This advice is relevant to the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the Gulf War of 1991, as the roots of these events can be found in the war between Iran and Iraq that began in 1980 and lasted eight long years. This experience brought about major changes in the structure and culture of Iraq's military, some positive, but

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<sup>22</sup> Tripp, 226.

<sup>23</sup> Tripp explains this effort: "Saddam Hussain sought to impose a political unity on Iraq that found its expression chiefly in his person. Obedience to him was to be the common cause of Iraq's homogenous inhabitants. Under his leadership distinct myths of Iraqi identity were promulgated, stressing not only the usual qualities of martial prowess, spiritual fulfillment and historical rootedness common to all nationalist myth-making, but also emphasizing the succession of absolute rulers who had allegedly presided over the mythical forging of the Iraqi nation. A continuous line of political succession was established between the rulers of the ancient kingdoms of Mesopotamia, the Abbasid caliphs and Saddam Hussain himself. He was the historical necessity towards which this long march of absolute rulers was inexorably heading." Tripp, 225.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1925), 330.

many negative. Most importantly, the war weakened Iraq both economically and socially. Saddam's aura of invincibility was tarnished and his relationship with key constituencies was deteriorating. This left Saddam desperate and dangerous.

The changes within the Iraqi military began prior to the war, shortly after Saddam Hussein assumed power in 1979. Just as he had done with the political structure, Saddam promoted loyal Ba'athist members within the army to secure the party's position within this key Iraqi institution.<sup>26</sup> "The turning point came when Saddam Hussein arrived in total control in mid-1979," recalls General Ra'ad Hamdani, a key leader in the Iraqi army who would eventually rise to command the elite Republican Guard.<sup>27</sup> "He [Saddam] quickly gained the reputation of promoting young leaders who were loyal Ba'athists instead of real professional soldiers."<sup>28</sup> After the Iraq War in 2003, General Hamdani would give several interviews where he provided a rare and valuable insider's account of the Iraqi military under Saddam Hussein, and a recurring theme of these interviews is the schism that existed in the army due to the insertion of political officers within the rank structure. Hamdani describes a dual-track system within the army divided between professionals who belonged to the "reality

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<sup>26</sup> Saddam Hussein's predecessor, President Bakr, also appointed his loyal followers within the military system, but Major General Aladdin Hussein Makki Khamas, a lifetime officer in the Iraqi army and a military scholar, recalled that this practice became much more prevalent and pronounced under Saddam: "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." Kevin M. Woods, Williamson Murray, Elizabeth A. Nathan, Laila Sabara, and Ana M. Venegas, *Saddam's Generals: Perspectives of the Iran-Iraq War* (Alexandria, Virginia: Institute for Defense Analysis, 2010), 116, <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/docuploaded/saddams-generals.pdf> (accessed 25 January 2013).

<sup>27</sup> Kevin M. Woods, Williamson Murray, and Thomas Holaday, "Saddam's War: An Iraqi Military Perspective of the Iran-Iraq War," (Washington D.C.: National Defense University, 2009), 24, <http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/pdf/saddams-war.pdf> (accessed 25 January 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

school” and political officers who were concerned only with appearances.<sup>29</sup> He describes how the initial wave of political promotions “were a major shock for the Iraqi army.”<sup>30</sup> With a conflict looming between Iraq and Iran, the major concern among the army’s professional soldiers was the level of competence that these political officers brought with them. Over time, the Ba’athists would prove much less capable in leading the Iraqi army, and many soldiers would pay for this incompetence with their lives.<sup>31</sup> For Hamdani, Saddam Hussein’s rise marked the beginning of a long process of physical and moral attrition for the Iraqi army.

In September 1980, a little more than a year after taking office, President Hussein ordered a major invasion by the Iraqi army into Iraq, initiating a bloody, brutal war that would last for eight years, with consequences extending much longer.<sup>32</sup> The details concerning the causes and conduct of the Iran-Iraq War are not particularly relevant for this study, so only a short summary will be provided here. What is relevant is how the war changed the relationship between Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi army. The war also dimmed the optimistic view that many in the Iraqi government and general population held toward the president. Both of these developments are discussed below.

There were many factors that contributed to the war between Iraq and Iran, including ongoing territorial disputes, border clashes, attempts by both sides to gain influence through

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>31</sup> As an example, General Hamdani describes the rapid ascension of Ba’athist officer Tala al-Duri: “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.” When the war with Iraq began, al-Duri led the 9th Division, which suffered great losses due to his poor leadership. When President Hussein dismantled the 9th Division, he moved al-Duri to the 12th Division, where the lack of leadership skills was again evident. Woods, *Saddam’s Generals*, 30-31.

<sup>32</sup> Marr, 182.

subversion, and the general distrust and dislike between Ba'ath leadership and the Shi'a leaders of the Iranian revolution, including Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>33</sup> In September 1980, a little more than a year after taking office, President Hussein ordered an invasion by the numerically inferior but technically superior Iraqi army into Iran.<sup>34</sup> At first, the invasion was successful, but Khomeini turned the shock of invasion into a rallying cry for the Iranian people, and Iran was able to mobilize vast numbers of soldiers. Most Iranian soldiers had little training, but their leaders stoked the fire of religious fervor and used this energy to stop the Iraqi invasion with counteroffensives composed of human waves crashing against the Iraqi lines.<sup>35</sup> Although Saddam proposed a cease fire and offered terms to Iran in exchange for the territory occupied by the Iraqi army, the Iranians refused to agree to these terms, and Khomeini launched a major counteroffensive into Iraq.<sup>36</sup> Iranian ground forces were able to threaten key Iraqi territory, including the city of Basra and the Faw peninsula that represented Iraq's only access to the sea. By 1982, neither side was able to sustain an offensive, and the war continued as a defensive struggle characterized by high attrition and little movement of the front lines.<sup>37</sup> In 1987, after successfully capturing Faw, Iran attempted an all-out assault on the Iraqi defenses outside of Basra. This attack proved unsuccessful, and while casualties were high on both sides, the Iranians never recovered from their losses.<sup>38</sup> Following a program of military

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<sup>33</sup> Tripp, 229-234. In an interrogation session held after his capture in 2003, Saddam explained that the primary reason he ordered the invasion was "to have Iran not interfere with our internal affairs." Interview Session Number 3 with Saddam Hussein, 8 February 2004, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 3. Document is now declassified, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB279/index.htm> (accessed 5 June 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Woods et. al., "Saddam's War," 32-33.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>36</sup> Marr, 183.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 184-185.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 186-187.

reform that will be discussed below, the Iraqis army was able to mount and sustain a counteroffensive in 1988 that drove the Iranians out of Iraq's internationally recognized borders.<sup>39</sup> Although Iraq claimed "victory" in 1988, the war had inflicted massive casualties and caused Iraq to incur great debt, with almost no gain of territory or other concessions from Iran to show for the effort. Instead, the country suffered from a weakened economy weighed down with massive war debts, a situation which would lead to the conflict with Kuwait.<sup>40</sup>

As the war with Iran approached, spirits were high in the Iraqi army. As with many wars, men called to fight welcomed the chance to defend their country's interests. To many Iraqis, Iran represented a real threat, and the Iraqi military was optimistic about their chances for success. Major General Aladdin Hussein Makki Khamas, who served as the Chief of Staff of the III Corps during the early part of the war, remembered his willingness to fight:

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.<sup>41</sup>

Saddam seemed to understand how the threat from Iran helped him consolidate support within the military and the population. Saddam also sensed that a confrontation with Iran would help establish Iraq as the leader of the Arab world, a position that many in that world considered abdicated by Egypt after that country had made peace with Israel through the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 188-189.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 190-191.

<sup>41</sup> Woods et. al., *Saddam's Generals*, 118.



Camp David accords. Saddam badly wanted to assume this leadership role, so it is not surprising that he continued toward war with Iran.<sup>42</sup>

Initially, the Iraqi invasion went well, but the offensive momentum was soon halted. According to the professionals within the army, it was the incompetence of the political officers that weakened the army and caused it to stall when challenged by Iranian forces. Specifically, political leaders within the army seemed much more concerned about appearances than with reality.<sup>43</sup> They opposed the professional officers' efforts to make accurate reports about the military situation, saying to one of them, "stop complaining about the reality on the battlefield ... you're ruining the morale of the force!"<sup>44</sup> In fact, political officers had good reason to keep up appearances. Beginning in 1981, in response to failures on the battlefield, Saddam began executing officers as a form of accountability. Several officers were put to death for their failure to stop Iranian counterattacks.<sup>45</sup> This led to an untenable situation for Iraqi military leaders. Either they reported truthfully about their setbacks—making a case to obtain reinforcements but also opening up the possibility of severe punishment—or they lied about losses and subjected their units to ever-increasing vulnerability and isolation.<sup>46</sup> This was one debilitating effect of Saddam's policy of retribution for bad news, and it would continue to worsen throughout his reign.

As the war progressed, it became clear to both Saddam and his officers that Iraq's army needed to adapt to fight more effectively. In 1982, Saddam established the Republican

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<sup>42</sup> Woods et. al., "Saddam's War," 33.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Woods et. al., *Saddam's Generals*, 36.

<sup>46</sup> Woods et. al., "Saddam's War," 37-38.

Guard, which was conceived as a mobile reserve force that could be used to stop the waves of Iranian attacks against the Iraqi lines.<sup>47</sup> These new units were filled with elite, experienced soldiers and officers.<sup>48</sup> While the Republican Guard was somewhat successful during the next four years, especially in developing proficiency in counterattacks, a major effort began in 1986 to reform the elite unit with advanced training and modern equipment.<sup>49</sup> Saddam's son-in-law, Hussein Kamel, was assigned leadership of this effort, and while Kamel was not a professional soldier, he was willing to listen to the advice of the professionals and fight for resources necessary to improve the force.<sup>50</sup> One by one, the Republican Guard units were pulled from the battlefield to receive new equipment and training.

By 1987, the Republican Guard units proved to be an effective and proficient force, and they were responsible for inflicting multitudes of Iranian casualties during the failed offensives on Basra, a weakening from which the Iranians would never recover. In 1988, the Republican Guard mounted direct attacks on Iranian positions, driving the Iranians out of the Faw peninsula and pushing the main Iranian force back to the prewar boundaries of Iran.<sup>51</sup> By July, Iran was forced to accept a cease-fire resolution proposed by the United Nations, and the fighting was essentially over.<sup>52</sup> These final successes of the Republican Guard allowed Saddam Hussein to save face and claim victory.

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<sup>47</sup> Actually, this was a reestablishment of the Republican Guard forces, which had served as the elite protectors of the Iraqi regime during the 1960s. Tripp, 176.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 77-79.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 84-87.

<sup>52</sup> Marr, 189-190.

For this reason, the Republican Guard developed a special relationship with President Saddam Hussein during the war with Iran. Saddam viewed the Republican Guard as a valuable and capable force, one that had salvaged a poor tactical situation and allowed him to declare victory and end the fighting. The soldiers of the Republican Guard units considered themselves to be serving directly under the president, and they were proud of their special status in the regime. "Saddam held a certain position of leadership for the Republican Guard, who felt that they had a different chain of command and that they had open communication and direct contact with Saddam," explains General Hamdani, a veteran of the Republican Guard, "so they saw him as taking care of their interests."<sup>53</sup> The opposite was true for the regular army units that had been decimated over eight years of attrition warfare. Many of these units were tired and suffered from low morale. After the war, the Ba'ath leadership planned to demobilize scores of these units, but when Saddam directed the invasion of Kuwait, many regular units were called back into service.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Iraq entered Kuwait with an army that consisted of loyal, well-trained, and well equipped Republican Guard units coupled with regular army units full of unmotivated conscripts and outfitted with obsolete equipment. The regular army units would prove to be quite vulnerable to psychological attacks designed to separate the men from their leadership. The Republican Guard, however, would prove quite loyal to Saddam and the regime, both during Operation Desert Storm and in the critical months that followed.

Many in the regular army shared the emotional journey of General Makki. At first, the general supported the Iraqi President, and he talked about how he went out of his way to

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

speak to Saddam, whom he considered a great leader. “Everybody thought he was a hero,” remembers General Makki.<sup>55</sup> During the long war with Iran, however, things changed. Makki recalls, “Little by little, as he treated people harshly and began executing them, the truth revealed itself.”<sup>56</sup> Eventually, few in the Iraqi army were willing to give their best efforts for Saddam, as they stopped believing that he was acting in their best interest.

### **Saddam’s Deteriorating Relationship with the Government and People**

General Makki’s journey to disillusion is symbolic of a similar shift by many others in both the government and population. Mr. Said K. Aburish was a business executive who worked for the regime in the 1970s and 1980s, serving as an intermediary for Western companies seeking to do business with an Iraqi government awash in income from oil exports. To Aburish, Saddam Hussein offered Iraq the best chance at modernization and prosperity. “And we took that chance,” Aburish remembers.<sup>57</sup> Over time, however, this optimism turned sour, as Saddam showed increasingly tyrannical tendencies, but there was little corresponding progress for Iraq:

We knew Saddam was tough. But the balance was completely different then. He was also delivering. The Iraqi people were getting a great deal of things that they needed and wanted and he was popular. He eliminated people here and there. With time, as with all dictators, the balance switched. And all we saw of Saddam was elimination and very little benefit to the people.

This transition was underway during the war with Iran and immediately after, but it was not yet complete. On the eve of the conflict with Kuwait, many people still revered Saddam and

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<sup>55</sup> Woods et. al., *Saddam’s Generals*, 149.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Aburish, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

wanted to see him succeed, mainly because they wanted to see Iraq succeed. This included elites within Iraq as well as many in the general population.

### **Saddam Hussein: The Flawed Leader**

Despite the strains of the war with Iran, Saddam Hussein successfully established himself as the unquestioned leader of Iraq during the 1980s. His name was synonymous with the state, both in his mind and in the mind of the people.<sup>58</sup> As one looks back in hindsight, Saddam appears to be the ideal caricature of the evil tyrant. The truth is more complex, however, and it is important to understand this, as it offers insight into how people could still support the regime after experiencing its brutality. Saddam could be relaxed, jovial, generous, flattering, and intelligent. He could even appear to be caring. As seen in the quote that begins this chapter, the British ambassador was impressed with him and considered the rising star in the Ba'ath party someone with whom the British could "do business."<sup>59</sup> He was a man who was capable of sitting by his son-in-law's hospital bedside for hours. He was also a leader who provided for his people by compensating young war widows with a new car and a hefty lump-sum payment.<sup>60</sup> He had a dark side to his personality, however, that began to show itself with increasing regularity. At times, he was abusive of his subordinates, he imposed arbitrary and unconditional punishment, he ignored information that he did not agree with, he did not allow discussion contrary to the way he was already leaning, and he relied exclusively

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<sup>58</sup> Kevin Woods et al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project: A View of Operation Iraqi Freedom From Saddam's Senior Leadership* (Norfolk, Virginia: U.S. Joint Forces Command, 2006), 6.

<sup>59</sup> Ambassador H.G. Balfour Paul, Telegram from British Embassy Baghdad to Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Saddam Hussein," 20 December 1969, Public Record Office, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB107/index.htm> (accessed 10 February 2013).

<sup>60</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 59, 62, 99.

on his own judgement.<sup>61</sup> But this did not occur all the time. Saddam still showed glimmerings of being an effective leader, which is all the people of Iraq wanted given their tumultuous history. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of his character was the fact that he could switch from one side to the other with no notice. General Hamdani, who had the opportunity to observe Saddam Hussein throughout his tenure, concluded that Saddam had a “double personality.”<sup>62</sup> “When I was young and attended meetings,” Hamdani recalled, “my pulse would hit 150 beats per minute, because one did not know what to expect or what would come next.”<sup>63</sup>

Hamdani knew that Hussein’s mood could turn quickly, and nothing vexed him more than lack of loyalty. The central theme of his life was gaining and keeping power in a place where many around him wanted him deposed and dead. The primary reason for his longevity was his readiness to act quickly and ruthlessly at the first sign of disloyalty and disrespect. Even minor slights were not overlooked. For example, he once had a medical student imprisoned for six months for using the wrong term of respect when addressing him.<sup>64</sup> He also ordered the execution of two doctors when he discovered they had joked about one of his policies.<sup>65</sup>

Overt signs of dissent were dealt with summarily. When the Kurds rebelled in northern Iraq in 1988, Saddam sent his cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid to crush the uprising. The man who would later be known as “Chemical Ali” infamously employed Iraq’s chemical

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<sup>61</sup> Bass, *The Baas Handbook*, 440.

<sup>62</sup> Woods et. al., “Saddam’s War,” 42.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Bashir, 71-72.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 66.

weapons against entire villages — men, women, and children — but these casualties represented only a fraction of the overall deaths in the campaign to put down the Kurdish rebellions.<sup>66</sup>

When conducting state business, Saddam often interpreted honest discussion as open dissension, and he reacted accordingly. One particular incident would stifle frank discussion within the Iraqi government for decades. During the setbacks experienced at the beginning war with Iran, Saddam solicited frank feedback from his top ministers. The Minister of Health suggested that Saddam might resign the presidency, and then reassume the office once a peace treaty was signed. Saddam had the minister apprehended and killed immediately, and the next day, Saddam had the minister's body — now chopped in pieces — delivered to the home of his newly widowed wife. According to the head of the Military Industrialization Committee, a relative of the murdered minister, "This powerfully concentrated the attention of the other ministers who were unanimous in their insistence that Saddam remain in power."<sup>67</sup>

Due to these and many other similar incidents, Saddam began to inspire feelings of fear throughout the Iraqi government and within the population. This fear was a key reason that he stayed in power.<sup>68</sup> He skillfully employed purges and secret police to create a culture of fear and manipulation. Loyalty to the Ba'ath party and the party's leader were valued above loyalty to family, religion, and even the state. As an example, in a story recounted in the captured minutes of one Ba'ath party meeting, "one of Saddam's thugs singled out for special praise to Saddam a man who had executed his own brother for blaspheming the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>67</sup> Woods, et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 7.

<sup>68</sup> Unsurprisingly, Saddam adopted Joseph Stalin as a role model. He studied the Russian dictator's methods and lifestyle, and he practiced many of Stalin's techniques for repressing dissension. Simon Sebag Montefiore, "Tyrants on Trial," *The New York Times*, 2 July 2004. Aburish agrees about the influence of Stalin in his interview with *Frontline*.

regime.”<sup>69</sup> Saddam knew that such fear kept people in line, and it kept himself and his party in power.

People especially feared Saddam’s reaction to bad news, as he often punished those who brought it to him. Saddam tended to interpret bad news as weakness, dissension, or disloyalty, and he reacted with ruthlessness. “Not surprisingly,” write the authors of *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, “lying became endemic throughout the Iraqi government and military.”<sup>70</sup> One military adviser simply observed, “Telling the truth was not to your own benefit.”<sup>71</sup> Because of the widespread fear on behalf of Saddam’s subordinates and the culture of misinformation that was created by this fear, the Iraqi leader’s decisions were not based in reality.

Saddam’s leadership style was autocratic. This style can be quite effective, particularly in a crisis. This is especially true when the leader possesses knowledge about what needs to be done and control over the resources to do it.<sup>72</sup> Saddam had unquestioned control, but his knowledge about what to do was highly questionable. This was not because he was unwilling to work hard. Many of the people who served under Saddam describe him as a workaholic, a voracious reader, and a good listener.<sup>73</sup> Saddam seemed hungry for reliable information to make informed decisions, but his major weakness was his lack of capacity for hearing

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<sup>69</sup> Woods, et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 3-4

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Bernard M. Bass, with Ruth Bass, *The Bass Handbook Of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, 4th ed., (New York: Free Press, 2008), 446.

<sup>73</sup> Woods et. al., *Saddam’s Generals*, 60.



information that did not support his bias.<sup>74</sup> As General Hamdani describes, “if he [Saddam] believed something was true, even if he were proved wrong, he believed it to be true.”<sup>75</sup> The result was that Saddam’s decisions often “had little relationship to international realities.”<sup>76</sup>

Saddam preferred loyal subordinates who would bring him information that supported his bias versus competent subordinates who would act according to the real situation.<sup>77</sup> Prior to the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam installed Ali and Hussein Kamel in key leadership posts, and he appointed his half-brother Sabaawi al-Tikriti as the governor of Kuwait, which would become Iraq’s newest province. Generally, these men were incapable of providing competent leadership in these positions. In an example of astounding incompetency, Hussein Kamel dictated to the commander of Republican Guard helicopters that all helicopters were “to fly as low as possible, probably below fifteen meters, but on no account higher.” The commander objected strenuously, arguing that flying that low in a sandy desert was akin to suicide, but he was overruled. Later, this commander lost 58 helicopters during the first hours of the invasion.<sup>78</sup>

While Saddam’s leadership grew increasingly autocratic and arbitrary, this situation was mitigated by the Iraqi culture. As discussed earlier in this chapter, strong—and sometimes cruel—leaders had been the norm in Iraq for generations. Whomever held the top position in Iraq would have been expected to be autocratic. Indeed, one perspective on

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<sup>74</sup> Kevin M. Woods and Mark E. Stout, “Saddam’s Perceptions and Misperceptions: The Case of ‘Desert Storm,’” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 33:1, February 2010, 9-10.

<sup>75</sup> Woods et. al., *Saddam’s Generals*, 60.

<sup>76</sup> Woods, et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 10.

<sup>77</sup> General Hamdani describes this aspect of Saddam’s character: “He believed that the competence level, courage, and loyalty of the people were proportionate to their commitment to the Ba’ath Party.” Woods et. al., *Saddam’s Generals*, 30.

<sup>78</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 102-103.

Saddam's leadership style is that he simply tried to meet these expectations. He felt that he had to institute a highly centralized leadership structure to maintain direct, autocratic control. To accomplish this, he created a "hub and spoke" organization with himself at the center of all spokes. Saddam concentrated power in a small group of loyal Ba'ath Party members that reported directly to him. He would typically give orders directly to the agency heads, and these meetings often occurred face-to-face, where Saddam would be quite intimidating. Other agency heads were not present, and would not know what was said. This helped Saddam create multiple compartments of action, and only he knew the details of all of them.<sup>79</sup>

As a shocking example of how extreme this compartmentalization became, neither the Iraqi Minister of Defense or the Chief of the General Staff knew about the invasion of Kuwait until it was in progress. Saddam had ordered his trusted Republican Guard to begin the invasion, but these two officials controlled only the conventional military, so in Saddam's mind, there was no need for them to know. General Khazraji, ostensibly the top military leader in Iraq, learned about the invasion on the public radio. Saddam's personal physician, who sometimes acted as a confidant for the president, describes how this could happen: "The Republican Guard and the Special Republican Guard existed in a vacuum and neither the Defence Minister nor the Chief of the General Staff were kept up to date with the actions or movements of the elite forces. Any questions on their behalf would be met with suspicion and could be fatal."<sup>80</sup> Compartmentalized leadership was yet another way for Saddam to keep control of the government and discourage rebellion. It also made the entire Iraqi government dependent upon him for leadership in all but the most trivial of matters.

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<sup>79</sup> This leadership style is illustrated repeatedly in meeting transcripts chronicled in *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978-2001*, Kevin M. Woods, David D. Palkki, and Mark E. Stout, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 101.

Despite this tremendous dependence on Saddam's personal leadership within the government and military structure, there were no preparations in Iraq for the potential loss of Saddam. Any such preparation on behalf of his subordinates would have been viewed as a sign of disloyalty and rebellion. To even suggest the thought would have meant prison or worse. The only person in Iraq who could have prepared for Saddam's loss is Saddam himself, and he was unwilling to do so, as the central theme of his leadership was holding on to power. He provided quite a bit of guidance on the defense of Kuwait before hostilities but does not appear to have been willing to issue mission-type orders to be executed in his absence.<sup>81</sup> Saddam did not institute a succession plan in case he was hurt or killed, nor did he groom any leaders to be prepared to take his place.<sup>82</sup>

Saddam's response to any physical threat against him was planning for his security, not his succession. Saddam was a master his own security, as he had been in physical danger for most of his adult life, especially his political life. He was adept at using safe houses, multiple cars, disguises, and communications discipline. Saddam also wanted his subordinate commanders to take similar precautions. Before the outbreak of hostilities with Coalition forces in Kuwait, he admonished his military leaders to have multiple headquarters that were "covered, fortified and kept secret."<sup>83</sup> Saddam directed that his commanders should keep moving between these sites, but they should avoid the use of staff cars, instead using plain

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<sup>81</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Saddam was willing to use mission-type orders at times. For example, see the written order Saddam issued to his military commanders on February 27 concerning the defense of Basra, in which he closes with, "Do not take the details of this as an order..." Reprinted in Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles: Saddam Hussein's Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 236-237.

<sup>82</sup> Many assumed that one of Saddam's sons or sons-in-law would take his place if something happened to Saddam, but there was no one leading candidate from this group, and considerable animosity existed between them. Bashir, *The Insider*, 81-95.

<sup>83</sup> Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 178.

vehicles that did not attract attention. Knowing that the Coalition was able to intercept wireless transmission, Saddam warned his subordinates that they should limit unsecured communications, instead taking advantage of simple countermeasures such as couriers. Saddam even suggested that they not wear uniforms.<sup>84</sup> Kevin Woods, a keen observer of the Iraqi president, comments: “In this area, Saddam was speaking as a true expert.”<sup>85</sup> Saddam was right to worry about the vulnerability of his subordinate military commanders. They would soon become targets, as Western planners considered the highly centralized structure of Iraq’s military to be a major weakness.

### **Trends in Iraq’s Military**

By 1990, Iraqi possessed a formidable military when compared to other forces in the region. Saddam had built a massive army with equipment that was impressive in quantity and some of it—especially that of the Iraqi Air Force and Republican Guard—was high quality. The Iraqis also possessed chemical weapons, and Saddam had shown a willingness to use these weapons both in the war with Iran and against the Kurdish population. Iraqi units were full of experienced fighters who had served in the war with Iran. In sum, the Iraqi military appeared much more capable than most Arab militaries. In the Gulf War of 1991, however, the Iraqis would not be facing a primarily Arab threat. Instead they would have to stand against Western militaries from the United States, the United Kingdom, and others. It is important to understand the fundamental differences in organization and the role of leadership that existed between the Iraq military and those of the West, because U.S. planners

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 178, 184.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 178.

would propose an innovative strategy to attack the leadership and organization of the Iraqi military as part of Operation Desert Storm. They perceived that Saddam Hussein's regime and its military organizations were vulnerable because they manifested many aspects of Arab culture that worked to decrease the overall effectiveness of a large military organization.

With few exceptions, Arab militaries have performed poorly in the modern era. This has led scholars to attempt to identify the structural and cultural reasons why is been the case. One of the most respected works on this subject is Kenneth M. Pollack's *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness 1948-1991*, which explores all the major Arab militaries in search of the answer.<sup>86</sup> Pollack finds that, while many believe that Arab militaries are ineffective due to cowardice, poor unit cohesion, and inadequate logistics, these explanations are not valid. While Arab military units had some problems in these areas, generally Arab units fought bravely, stuck together, and possessed adequate resources to accomplish the given mission.<sup>87</sup> Pollack also examines the possibilities that low morale, poor generalship, and inadequate training contribute to the situation. He finds that these areas are contributing factors in many of the cases, but they cannot be considered major factors, as when they were not present, the Arab militaries still demonstrated poor performance.<sup>88</sup> Instead, Pollack identifies four major influences that were the driving factors behind the ineffectiveness of Arab militaries: "poor tactical leadership, poor information management, poor weapons handling, and poor maintenance."<sup>89</sup> "These complications were present in every single Arab army and air force

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<sup>86</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness 1948-1991* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 573-573.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 573.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

between 1948 and 1991,” writes Pollack.<sup>90</sup> “They were, without question, the principle sources of Arab misfortune in war during this period in history.”<sup>91</sup>

In “Why Arabs Lose Wars,” Colonel Norvell B. De Atkine applies his years of experience as an officer in the U.S. Army assigned training duties with Arab militaries to the question of Arab military effectiveness.<sup>92</sup> His insights serve to expand Pollack’s conclusions. De Atkine focuses on key components of Arab culture and how they may contribute to the ineffectiveness of military units. Like Pollack, De Atkine concludes that the way Arab men handle information is a primary contributor to the problem. “In every society information is a means of making a living or wielding power, but Arabs husband information and hold it especially tightly,” he observes.<sup>93</sup> De Atkine also finds that the lack of an effective noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps means there is little communication and teamwork between the officers and enlisted men. “Most Arab officers treat enlisted soldiers like sub-humans,” writes De Atkine, and he has also noticed that the NCOs are not treated any differently and enlisted soldiers.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, Arab militaries are highly centralized, with almost all key decisions issued from higher headquarters. De Atkine relates that U.S. officers who train Arab militaries have a rule of thumb: “a sergeant first class in the U.S. Army has as much authority as a colonel in an Arab army.”<sup>95</sup> De Atkine concludes that this is why Arab militaries struggle with the maintenance of Western equipment. He explains: “U.S.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Norvell B. De Atkine, “Why Arabs Lose Wars,” *Middle East Quarterly*, December 1999, <http://www.meforum.org/441/why-arabs-lose-wars> (accessed 27 January 2013).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

equipment and its maintenance are predicated on a concept of repair at the lowest level, and therefore require delegation of authority.”<sup>96</sup> Such delegation is unthinkable in the Arab militaries. This is a major impediment to developing effective leaders at the middle levels in an Arab army.

Anyone who shows initiative and decision-making ability is viewed as a threat to their superiors or even the regime itself. Early in their careers, Arab officers learn that they should show a high deference to central authority. The ones that fail to show this deference do so at great risk to themselves, as they are likely to be perceived as a threat to the status quo. De Atkine argues that this tendency is why the Arab militaries have adopted the Soviet model of military organization. Because Soviet military practices were developed to counteract the possibility that the army could rebel against the authoritarian regime, Soviet doctrine, equipment, and standard operating procedures were more suited to the Arab culture. Furthermore, “the Soviets reinforced their clients’ cultural traits far more than, in more recent years, Americans were able to,” writes De Atkine.<sup>97</sup> “Arab political culture is based on a high degree of social stratification, very much like that of the defunct Soviet Union and very much unlike the upwardly mobile, meritocratic, democratic United States.”<sup>98</sup>

Social stratification and deference to authority runs deep in Arab and Iraqi culture, and this is especially true within the military and police chains of command. While most similar organizations around the world incorporate a form of deference to ensure order in times of chaos, the degree of deference displayed in Iraq during this period was considerably higher than in Western cultures at that time. This deference places saving face above the

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

overall good of the unit. In an ironic example that illustrates this point, a Soviet air advisor found this deference to be quite detrimental:

As is known, it is customary in the East to respect elders, not just people who are older but also in a higher rank or status. ... We were taking off in a two-seat trainer to practice some elements of combat training. Ahead of us was the aircraft of the squadron commander, and I was flying with his deputy. "Now," I said to him, "make a turn. We are going to intercept him." The deputy commander, a bright fellow, soon maneuvered his way to his commander's six-o'clock. But I could sense that my "student" was beginning to slacken off. "Go ahead," I said, "attack the target!" And he replied, "I cannot. That is my commander." "What the hell does a commander mean in combat training? Carry out the order!" In the end, the squadron commander was "shot down." But as a result, he would not speak to me for a week, since he had been insulted.<sup>99</sup>

This deference to authority extended across the military, and it was fundamentally sound, to an extent. No one desires a military structure where commanders are not respected.

When saving face becomes more important than unit effectiveness to a commander, however, the result can be disastrous. For Iraqi army units, this was especially true when they faced the prospect of engagement with Western militaries where commanders received harsh critique in realistic training scenarios and subordinates were rewarded for displaying initiative. The Iraqi culture worked against their effectiveness in such a competition, and it opened up the possibility that the entire command structure could be attacked with great effect, beginning with Saddam himself and extending all the way to the tactical commanders in the field.

When Saddam instructed his subordinate commanders to take precautions against attack before the Coalition assault, he was correctly anticipating the Coalition's plans.

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Desert Storm and Its Meaning: The View from Moscow* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 1992), 53.



Leaders at all levels were potential targets of the Coalition's strategy of leadership attack. While the strategic level of government was centralized around Saddam, the operational and tactical levels of Iraqi military organizations also depended on centralized leadership. In part, this conformed to the Iraqi culture of deference to strong authority. Another reason for the emphasis on centralization was that Iraqi forces had received their most valuable military training and equipment from the Soviet Union, and the Soviet style of warfare relied on centralized direction and predictable patterns of behavior to ensure consistent performance in the uncertainty of combat.<sup>100</sup> Like their Soviet counterparts, Iraqi ground forces required detailed information to maneuver, and Iraqi pilots required direction from a ground controller to complete an intercept. Initiative and flexibility were not expected or practiced.<sup>101</sup> The Soviets understood that this doctrine created a vulnerability to leadership attack, but they countered this vulnerability with redundant command systems and multiple, hardened headquarters facilities.<sup>102</sup> Iraq possessed similar infrastructure, but the combination of new Western military technologies, especially stealth and precision weapons, made these facilities vulnerable. The Iraqi reliance on centralized control made military leadership a lucrative target for Coalition forces at the operational and tactical levels.

In order to attack this leadership, the Coalition forces would have to rely on new technologies and tactics. The Coalition's military forces enjoyed great technical superiority

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<sup>100</sup> Lambeth, *Desert Storm and Its Meaning*, 68.

<sup>101</sup> More precisely, Soviet military members were expected to practice autonomy when closing to tactical range. Alternatively, many Iraqi soldiers—especially conscripts—were prone to fleeing the battlefield instead of fighting. Their officers were required to exercise close control in order to get them to fight. General Horner believed that many Iraqi officers threatened their soldiers with deadly force. Horner, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>102</sup> William J. Broad, "War in the Gulf: Baghdad is Heart of Iraq's Complex Military Communications Structure," *The New York Times*, 15 February 1991.

over those of Iraq. This is a significant aspect of the Gulf War's context, as this superiority made it feasible for Coalition forces to bypass Iraqi forces and attack Saddam and the supporting capabilities required for him to exercise leadership. It also allowed Coalition forces to attack other Iraqi leaders, including commanders in the field. This technical superiority coupled with a particular lack of precedent in U.S. military doctrine meant that military planners could consider radical proposals for attacking Iraq, and the proposal that gained the most support was leadership attack of Saddam and his Ba'ath regime, including Iraqi military commanders. Indeed, leadership attack seemed to offer the best way to leverage the U.S. military's unique advantages against Iraq's most blatant vulnerability.

### **The U.S. Military: A Stark Contrast**

In the final stages of the Cold War, Western militaries—especially those in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—made major strides in technology, tactics, training, and organization. Leading the way was the United States. For the U.S. military, the 1980s had brought a major boost in defense spending, and the American forces of the early 1990s were well-equipped and highly trained. In the fall of 1990, the United States was able to deploy unique capabilities such as stealth aircraft, precision weaponry, airborne jamming systems, sophisticated battle tanks, and massive aircraft carriers. Several U.S. allies, including the United Kingdom, also brought modern equipment and unique capabilities to the battlefield. Though formidable in numbers, Iraq's military had no answer for the mismatch of technological quality. Even more concerning for Iraq was the fact that the U.S. and U.K. systems were specifically designed to defeat many of the systems and procedures that Iraq had acquired or adopted from the Soviet Union.

Coalition advantages were not limited to hardware. By 1990, the United States' all-volunteer force had stabilized, and the armed services contained quite a large number of personnel (in contrast, the United States would cut military personnel drastically through the remainder of the 1990s).<sup>103</sup> In addition, the U.S. military had undergone a revolution in training and tactics in the wake of Vietnam, including radical revisions of doctrine and drastic changes in professional military education. In the years following the defeat in Southeast Asia, a committed group of U.S. officers had persevered through the so-called "hollow force" of the 1970s and fought successfully to attain new standards for realistic training. A generation of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines had learned their craft in rigorous training exercises such as Red Flag at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada and the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California.<sup>104</sup> In these exercises, they had faced many of the same systems that Iraqi forces possessed, and they did so in a desert environment very similar to the Middle East. The U.S. military and other members of the Coalition—especially those who had bought arms from and trained with the United States—brought many advantages with them to the conflict with Iraq.

These advantages inspired confidence in U.S. military leaders, but they still faced significant uncertainty. Many of the U.S. technologies and tactics, while thoroughly tested, had never been proven in combat. For example, stealth technology was based on scientific theory, but leaders were still unsure how their aircraft would perform against the dense,

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<sup>103</sup> For U.S. military personnel statistics, see DoD Personnel and Military Casualty Statistics at <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/MMIDHOME.HTM> (accessed 14 February 2012).

<sup>104</sup> For good descriptions of how the U.S. military reinvented itself in the years following Vietnam, see James Kitfield *Prodigal Soldiers: How the Generation of Officers Born of Vietnam Revolutionized the American Style of War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1995); and C.R. Anderegg, *Sierra Hotel: Flying Air Force Fighters in the Decade After Vietnam* (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Project, 2001).

overlapping air defense systems in Iraq.<sup>105</sup> In addition, there was little consensus on how to best employ some of the most advanced technologies to achieve victory. New capabilities require new concepts, and these concepts had not been fully explored. Some weapons had reached unprecedented levels of precision, for example, but there was no consensus on the most appropriate targets for these weapons.

Perhaps the most uncertain area for the U.S. military concerned numerous questions about how forces would be organized and led. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 directed major changes in organization for the U.S. military. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was now the principal military adviser to the President.<sup>106</sup> His Joint Staff became a powerful entity for producing wartime options for the President. The Chairman's power had increased to the degree that some considered his staff a "de facto general staff" that could limit military options at the Chairman's whim and cut out the voice of the Service chiefs.<sup>107</sup> Away from Washington, Goldwater-Nichols had divided the world into five regional Combatant Commands, of which U.S. Central Command was one, each led by a 4-star general officer, also called the Joint Forces Commander. How that commander would direct his forces was a matter of doctrine, but the doctrine that existed at the time tended to cover over major service disagreements over control of forces. The control of air forces, for example, was still very much an open question.<sup>108</sup> The result was that the commander of U.S. Central Command,

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<sup>105</sup> General Buster Glosson, USAF (Ret.), *War With Iraq: Critical Lessons* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Glosson Family Foundation, 2003), 84-87.

<sup>106</sup> Colin Powell, with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 409-412.

<sup>107</sup> Christopher M. Bourne, "Unintended Consequences of the Goldwater-Nichols Act," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Spring 1998.

<sup>108</sup> This question centered on the best way to organize and command air forces, which has been a recurring issue from the earliest days of military airpower. See S. Clinton Hinote, *Centralized Control and Decentralized Execution: A Catchphrase in Crisis* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2007).

General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, would be forced to make difficult decisions about how his forces were organized as he planned the war and built relationships with Coalition leaders, and these decisions would have tremendous implications for the future of the U.S. military. The combination of these uncertainties meant that military entrepreneurs were free to propose new ideas, including concepts that bypassed the Iraqi army in Kuwait and struck directly at Iraqi leadership. To these policy entrepreneurs, attacks on Iraqi leadership were an obvious way to gain an advantage, and perhaps, to achieve decisive effects.

### **Saddam and Iraq: Uniquely Vulnerable to Leadership Attack?**

For purposes of this study, an appreciation for the historical, political, and military context is essential for understanding the strategy of leadership attack adopted by the Coalition of countries led by the United States during Operation Desert Storm. When Iraq invaded Kuwait and the political leaders of the West searched for options to oppose this aggression, military planners examined the Iraqi context and came to a critical conclusion: Iraq appeared very vulnerable to attacks on its leadership. Not only did planners see that Iraq was totally dependent upon President Saddam Hussein for central guidance and direction, but they also observed political and military structures that relied on centralized control and direction to function. In fact, the high degree of centralization that existed throughout all levels in Iraq seemed to make it almost uniquely vulnerable to leadership attack.

This was especially true in light of the primary theory of leadership attack identified in the previous chapter. In planning Operation Desert Storm, the situation seemed to fit many of the theory's propositions. First, Iraq seemed to require centralized leadership at all levels,

and especially at the top. The state appeared to be totally dependent upon Saddam for decisions from large questions of grand strategy down to trivial details of administration. Additionally, the lower levels of government and the military also seemed to be dependent upon centralized leadership. In the Iraqi military, for example, the most mundane decisions were reserved for senior officers. Second, this degree of centralization seemed to make Iraqi systems quite susceptible to attacks on the center of gravity of leadership. Because so many in the Iraqi military and government were conditioned to wait for direction before proceeding, attacks on leadership would create a void of direction within the organization. Third, while Saddam was adept at security measures designed to keep him safe and in power and Iraq had invested heavily in defensive equipment, Western militaries had made great progress in technologies for intelligence gathering as well as for penetrating modern defenses. While Western planners knew that they could not count on locating Saddam Hussein himself for targeting, they could reasonably expect to locate and identify key leadership targets such as communications nodes and command bunkers, and they could also expect that modern weapons could systems could survive the Iraqi defenses and strike these targets in parallel. Fourth, one could reasonably conclude that the Iraqi government and military would be degraded—and perhaps collapse—when multiple leadership targets were struck in parallel. Cutting off Iraqi communication and centralized direction would create a situation where followers would be left waiting for their orders. This would, at a minimum, slow reaction times and leave them vulnerable to the decentralized onslaught of the Western forces.

Finally, there was good reason to believe that a successful attack on Iraq's leadership would bring about a decisive outcome. Once it became apparent that these attacks placed the Iraqi military in a situation where it could expect to face unacceptable losses, President

Saddam Hussein would make a rational decision to withdraw his forces from Kuwait. During the war with Iran, Saddam had displayed the ability to act rationally during conflict and make concessions when the situation called for them.<sup>109</sup> Even if the Iraqi president did not make such concessions, however, attacks on the enemy leadership would render Iraq incapable of continuing the occupation of Kuwait. Either way, it was reasonable for Western leaders and their planners to expect that Iraq's vulnerability to a strategy of leadership attack would make adopting such a strategy a wise choice. Indeed, as they sized up the military situation, it seemed like an ideal situation to apply a leadership attack strategy. Furthermore, for purposes of this study, the Gulf War of 1991 seems to be an ideal case to prove the validity of the primary theory of leadership attack.

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<sup>109</sup> Many considered Saddam Hussein a man who was able to make concessions when the situation dictated. In a detailed psychological profile of the Iraqi leader, psychologist Jerrold M. Post concludes, "should circumstances demonstrate that he has miscalculated, he is capable of reversing his course. In these circumstances, he does not acknowledge that he has erred but rather that he is adapting to a dynamic situation." Jerrold M. Post, MD, ed., *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 340.

## Chapter Six

### The Gulf War of 1991

*For our purposes, it was sufficient to silence Saddam—to destroy his ability to command the forces arrayed against ours. If he'd been killed in the process, I wouldn't have shed any tears.*

General H. Norman Schwarzkopf  
Commander, U.S. Central Command

Perhaps there is no better case for testing a theory of leadership attack than the Gulf War of 1991. It is a fascinating case study of leadership attack that began with Saddam Hussein's fateful decision to invade Iraq's small neighbor in August of 1990. To say that this was an unwelcome event would be a considerable understatement. It was so unwelcome that scores of nations joined in opposition and formed what would become known as the "Coalition." This group had two goals. The military goal was to force the Iraqi army out of Kuwait, while the ultimate political goal was the restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty.

After months of failed diplomacy and a concurrent military buildup, the Coalition initiated Operation Desert Storm in January 1991. Several weeks of bombing preceded a ground invasion into Kuwait, and the two Coalition goals were realized: Iraq's army was routed and Kuwait's freedom restored. Among Coalition members, there was celebration and a sense of accomplishment. Yet the events occurring in the months and years that followed would lead many to question the way the war was fought and how it ended. As events in Iraq grew worse over the next decade, many would come to agree with Thomas E. Ricks that the



Coalition “ended the fighting prematurely and sloppily, without due consideration by the first President Bush and his advisers of what end state they wanted to achieve.”<sup>1</sup>

It is for this reason that Operation Desert Storm is an essential case for the study of leadership attack. A critical portion of the military strategy for Operation Desert Storm was built upon the propositions contained in John Warden’s theory—the theory that this study has adopted as the primary theory for evaluation. Warden’s theory was incorporated into the operational approach as he was involved in the initial stages of the planning. Shortly after Iraq invaded Kuwait, Colonel Warden proposed a plan that focused on attacking the Iraqi regime with the intent of incapacitating it. Policy makers and military leaders agreed widely with Warden on the desirability of attacking the Iraqi regime due to its perceived vulnerability to leadership attack. As a result, the Coalition deliberately targeted Saddam Hussein’s leadership—and that of his subordinate commanders—from the beginning of the planning process through the cease fire.

Behind the adoption of a strategy to attack Iraq’s leadership is an unlikely sequence of events where the ideas of an obscure colonel in the Pentagon influenced the approach ultimately adopted for the war. This influence had limits, however. Not all of Warden’s ideas were adopted, and due to a conflict with a senior commander, he was relegated to the sidelines while others expanded and implemented his original plan. Nevertheless, the experiences of the Gulf War are essential for understanding strategies of leadership attack, especially those connected with Warden’s theory. They offer clear examples of military actions intended to weaken Iraq’s leadership with the ultimate goals of paralysis, collapse, or revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 5.

As explained in the last chapter, paralysis, collapse and revolution seemed like attainable goals for the Coalition, as Iraq appeared to be quite susceptible to leadership attack. Its high degree of centralization and reliance on the direction from a few key regime leaders, all of which owed their position to President Saddam Hussein, meant that the Coalition could expect major effects as it disrupted this leadership at all levels, strategic through tactical. The Coalition leveraged their many advantages to do this, but the results were mixed. At the operational and tactical levels, the Coalition exploited Iraq's susceptibility to leadership attack with great effect. Many military units crumbled as their leadership was disrupted. At the strategic level, however, leadership attack failed to disrupt Saddam's leadership to the degree expected, and it may have been counterproductive. In time, the countries that formed the original Coalition would lament that the peace achieved through Operation Desert Storm contained, in the words of B.H. Liddell Hart, "the germs of another war."<sup>2</sup>

Because of this dichotomy, Desert Storm offers critical evidence for this study. This chapter does not offer a comprehensive narrative of the Gulf War.<sup>3</sup> Instead, it will rely on key sources to extract the evidence relating to leadership attack. A crucial task for this chapter is identifying key decision makers and connecting their critical decisions to actions and

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<sup>2</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd Revised Edition (New York: Meridian, 1954) 353.

<sup>3</sup> Key histories of the Gulf War include Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 1995); Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003); Richard C. Davis, *On Target: Organizing and Executing the Strategic Air Campaign Against Iraq* (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002); John Andreas Olsen, *Strategic Airpower in Desert Storm* (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003); and Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991). The Gulf War Air Power Survey, sponsored by the U.S. Air Force, will be referenced extensively later in this chapter. Other official histories include Robert Scales, Brigadier General, USA, *Certain Victory: The United States Army in the Gulf War* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, 1993) and Edward J. Marolda and Robert J. Schneller Jr., *Shield and Sword: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf War* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2001).

outcomes. The chapter will compare this key evidence to the leadership attack theories under consideration and present preliminary conclusions at the end of the chapter.

## **Iraq Invades Kuwait**

To repay the extensive debts that had accrued during the war with Iran, Saddam needed profits from Iraq's oil exports. This meant that he needed oil prices to remain high, but the world was awash in oil in the late 1980s, and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was unable to sustain the price.<sup>4</sup> One reason for this was the unwillingness of the tiny Gulf state of Kuwait to accept production limitations. Kuwait's overproduction infuriated Saddam, and his government protested vigorously. From Saddam's perspective, the Arab states owed Iraq a debt of gratitude for opposing Iran in its attempt to extend the Persian influence westward. This was especially true of Kuwait, as Iran represented a real threat to Kuwaiti sovereignty. According to Iraq's Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, Saddam personally communicated a clear warning about oil production to Kuwaiti representatives at an Arab summit. "Each dollar less in price means to us one billion in revenues for a year," explained Saddam.<sup>5</sup> "We have fought a very long war, it was a very costly one and in this war we defended your security. If you do not mean waging a war against Iraq, please stop it."<sup>6</sup>

Despite these warnings, Kuwait did not stop overproducing. In the wake of failed diplomacy, President Saddam Hussein was ready to take military action by the summer of

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<sup>4</sup> Tariq Aziz, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Gulf War*, 9 January 1996, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/> (accessed 10 February 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

1990. After massing Iraqi troops on the Kuwaiti border, it appeared that Kuwait finally received the message and was willing to make significant concessions.<sup>7</sup> Saddam, however, did not wait for the outcome of negotiations. Iraq's elite Republican Guard invaded Kuwait early in the morning on 2 August 1990. It took little time for Iraqi forces to consolidate control over the surprised Kuwaitis, while the Kuwaiti Emir and his family narrowly escaped across the border into Saudi Arabia.<sup>8</sup> The world community was shocked at this unexpected aggression, and it was further alarmed by stories of atrocities making their way out of Kuwait.<sup>9</sup> As will be shown later in this chapter, the perception that Saddam Hussein had engaged in unwarranted aggression contributed to the Coalition's adoption of Saddam's leadership as a key target.

To ensure the invasion's success, both Saddam Hussein and Iraq's military leaders applied lessons learned in the war with Iran. Saddam directed that the invasion be conducted by the Republican Guard alone, with no support from the Regular Army. As was explained in the previous chapter, President Hussein did not inform the Iraqi Chief of Staff of his decision to invade Iraq. Saddam always sought to compartmentalize information, and he wanted to ensure surprise. He trusted the Republican Guard more than the Regular Army, as it was the force that saved him in the war with Iran. To ensure a successful invasion, Iraq's elite ground force applied the lessons of its successful breakthrough of Iranian defenses at the end of the

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<sup>7</sup> Ala Bashir, with Lars Sigurd Sunnana, *The Insider: Trapped in Saddam's Brutal Regime* (London: Abacus, 2005), 102.

<sup>8</sup> General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, USA, with Peter Petre, *It Doesn't Take A Hero* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 295-298.

<sup>9</sup> The atrocities committed by Iraqi forces in Kuwait would become a major element of the crisis. A good example of the reporting of such atrocities is found in Judith Miller, "Atrocities by Iraqis in Kuwait: Numbers are Hard to Verify," *The New York Times*, 16 December 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/16/world/standoff-in-the-gulf-atrocities-by-iraqis-in-kuwait-numbers-are-hard-to-verify.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (accessed 16 May 2012).

war with Iran. The key to success in 1988 was thorough planning and rehearsal, and the Republican Guard leaders engaged fully in both endeavors before invading Kuwait. They planned and rehearsed the operation until everyone at all levels of command knew their role.<sup>10</sup> This effort mitigated weakness in leadership at the tactical level. When ordered to initiate the invasion plan, the Republican Guard executed as skillful operation, and the Kuwaitis had little chance. As Kenneth M. Pollack observes, the invasion “was conducted strictly by the book. It was a set-piece operation executed very well, and the only times it showed any signs of stress were when reality diverged from the plan.”<sup>11</sup>

Since the end of the war with Iran, little had changed in the Iraqi military. The entire regime relied upon the central direction of President Saddam Hussein, and all other governmental ministers were both loyal to him and reluctant to act on their own initiative. In the military, the Republican Guard was Iraq’s elite force, but it still relied on standard operating procedures, planning, and rehearsal to overcome shortcomings in its leadership, especially at the tactical levels. The Regular Army was a tired force composed of conscripts. Their soldiers had little reason to act out of loyalty to Saddam, and their leadership situation was worse than the Republican Guard’s. Western military planners would recognize all of these vulnerabilities, and they would propose an overall strategy that included multiple methods of attacking Iraq’s leadership. Before this could happen, however, Western political leaders had to voice their opposition to Saddam’s aggression, reinforcing this rhetoric with the threat of force. As the Republican Guard consolidated its gains in Kuwait and threatened the oil fields in northeastern Saudi Arabia, leaders of the world reacted with harsh language.

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<sup>10</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness 1948-1991* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 236-237.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

Their rhetoric opened the door for attacking Iraq's leadership at all levels, from the lowest company commander to President Hussein himself. In fact, Saddam would be compared to the worst aggressors of the past, making him the personification of evil in Western eyes. This only opened the door wider.

### **Initial Response to Iraqi Aggression**

Not everyone was surprised by Saddam's aggressive move into Kuwait. General Norman Schwarzkopf, the Commander of the United States Central Command, had predicted that Saddam would invade, but he thought that Iraq force would stop after seizing the Kuwaiti oil fields just across the border.<sup>12</sup> In the days before the invasion, officials discussed actions the United States could take to deter the Iraqis, but Saddam moved before the United States could coordinate a response.<sup>13</sup> This put the United States in the unwelcome position of reacting to Saddam's provocation. At first, President Bush was cautious, especially in his public pronouncements, but he increasingly echoed sentiments first voiced by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in a joint press conference on 2 August in Aspen, Colorado. Thatcher's words would form the basis of Western policy toward Iraq over the next five months. "Iraq has violated and taken over the territory of a country which is a full member of the United Nations," proclaimed Thatcher.<sup>14</sup> "That is totally unacceptable and if it were allowed to endure then there would be many other small countries that could never feel

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<sup>12</sup> Colin Powell, with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 461.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 462.

<sup>14</sup> Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Joint Press Conference with President Bush, 2 August 1990, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108170> (accessed 13 February 2012).

safe.”<sup>15</sup> After acknowledging the Security Council’s vote to condemn the invasion and demand Iraq’s withdrawal, Thatcher stated what she thought was the key issue:

The fundamental question is this: whether the nations of the world have the collective will effectively to see that Security Council Resolution is upheld, whether they have the collective will effectively to do anything which the Security Council further agrees to see that Iraq withdraws and that the government of Kuwait is restored to Kuwait.<sup>16</sup>

President Bush seemed to be heavily influenced by Thatcher’s words. When he returned to meet with the National Security Council, the president was resolute. He told his advisers that, “Whatever we do, we’ve got to get the international community behind us.”<sup>17</sup> With that direction, the United States—with the help and encouragement of its closest ally, the United Kingdom—committed itself to building a Coalition of states to oppose Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

This Coalition would begin with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, whose oil fields were now directly threatened by the Republican Guard forces massed on the southern border of Kuwait. As a result of the invasion, Saddam had consolidated 20 percent of the world’s known oil reserves, and all that lay between him and another 20 percent were a few kilometers of Saudi desert.<sup>18</sup> The United States was willing to commit a major force to defend Saudi territory, but it first needed approval from the Saudis. After receiving a delegation led by U.S. Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney and General Schwarzkopf, King Fahd made

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 464.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 463.

the unprecedented decision to invite U.S. forces onto Saudi soil to defend his kingdom.<sup>19</sup> General Schwarzkopf would later remember his surprise at this request: “If someone had snapped a picture at that moment, it would have shown me with my mouth wide open. Fahd had made one of the most courageous decisions I’d ever witnessed.”<sup>20</sup> President Bush immediately ordered U.S. forces to begin deploying to the Middle East.<sup>21</sup>

King Fahd’s courage was an indicator of how seriously he viewed Saddam’s action. It is unlikely that any Saudi ruler would invite Western outsiders to defend their lands unless they considered the threat both serious and immediate. Fahd was not alone in his concern. Iraq’s aggression toward its Arab neighbor troubled the other Arab leaders and united them against Iraq. One by one, the Arab states—including Syria, Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates—stood with the United States, France, and Great Britain in opposition to Iraq. These states would offer their lands, their forces, and their wealth to the Coalition of states committed to reversing Saddam’s provocation. Saddam Hussein had talked about uniting the Arab world, and now he had done so, but not in the way he had hoped.

### **“A New World Order”**

The king’s acceptance of foreign troops on Saudi soil would be only one of many surprising developments following the invasion. Just a few years earlier, one would have expected countries to react to the crisis by lining up according to Cold War factions. That did

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<sup>19</sup> Dick Cheney, with Liz Cheney, *In My Time: A Political and Personal Memoir* (New York: Threshold Books, 2011), 189-191.

<sup>20</sup> Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn’t Take A Hero*, 305.

<sup>21</sup> Cheney, *In My Time*, 191.



not happen. Instead, an international consensus emerged that Saddam's blatant aggression was unacceptable in the immediate wake of the Cold War. Both the Soviet Union and China voted for a Security Council resolution condemning the action, and over time, an unprecedented number of countries joined the Coalition against Iraqi aggression.<sup>22</sup> The end of the Cold War seemed to have opened the door to new possibilities of cooperation between the world's great powers.

To Western officials accustomed to bipolarity between the Soviet Union and the United States, it was both surprising and encouraging to see agreement between these two superpowers creating the conditions for a disparate group of countries to join in opposition to Saddam's aggression. President Bush's National Security Adviser, Brent Scowcroft, later explained the sense of hope that existed about a post-Cold War future of cooperation between nations:

And I said, I think that you know, that this could be the beginning of a new world order that since the founding of the United Nations, the Security Council had always been paralyzed in carrying out its job as foreseen by the founders, because of the veto in the Security Council, and if now the United States and the Soviet Union could cooperate there could be a world order really, that would be able to deal with cases of aggression in a way that it had never been known before. ... instead of every conflict in the world automatically becoming U.S./Soviet conflict, that the two could at least in some cases cooperate to deal with conflicts.<sup>23</sup>

With the typical Cold War restraints removed, nations were free to express their outrage against Saddam's aggression, and the result was unprecedented partnership and cooperation.

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<sup>22</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 660, 2 August 1990. <http://www.un.org/docs/scres/1990/scres90.htm> (accessed 15 February 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Brent Scowcroft, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Gulf War*, 9 January 1996, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/> (accessed 14 February 2012).

To encourage this cooperation, President Bush used the harshest language to describe Saddam. To the Arab world, he observed that Saddam had shown no hesitation in extracting both blood and treasure from his Muslim brothers.<sup>24</sup> To the rest of the world, President Bush compared the Iraqi dictator to Adolph Hitler. “A half a century ago our nation and the world paid dearly for appeasing an aggressor who should and could have been stopped. We're not about to make that same mistake twice,” declared the president.<sup>25</sup>

This approach served President Bush well in a political sense, as it helped him gain support from both the Congress and the American people. It also seemed to play well abroad, as nations enthusiastically joined the Coalition and remained committed to reversing the invasion. Some officials, however, worried that there was a disparity between the stated objective of the U.N. Security Council—to get Iraqi troops out of Kuwait—and the President’s rhetoric concerning Saddam.<sup>26</sup> “Our plan contemplated only ejecting Iraq from Kuwait,” General Colin Powell explains.<sup>27</sup> “It did not include toppling Saddam’s dictatorship. Within these limits, we could not bring George Bush Saddam Hussein’s scalp. And I thought it unwise to elevate public expectations by making the man out to be the devil incarnate and then leaving him in place.”<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the president and others within the Coalition

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<sup>24</sup> George H.W. Bush, *All the Best: My Life in Letters and Other Writings* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1999), 478.

<sup>25</sup> President George H.W. Bush, Remarks to Pentagon Employees, 15 August 1990, [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public\\_papers.php?id=2165&year=1990&month=8](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=2165&year=1990&month=8) (accessed 13 February 2012).

<sup>26</sup> For example, Secretary Dick Cheney was uncomfortable with the President’s words given at the Pentagon on 15 August. Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 282.

<sup>27</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 491.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

continued to paint Saddam with a dark brush in interviews and speeches.<sup>29</sup> This helped to convince the members of the Coalition to stay committed to the overall mission.

One cannot understand the Gulf War of 1991 without understanding the nature of the Coalition that came together to fight Saddam. As explained above, the end of the Cold War opened a new window for cooperation between the great powers, and Saddam's aggression provided a crisis that made it easy for the United States and Soviet Union to cooperate.

"Without the Soviet Union on board, we never would have been able to marshal the international coalition that we were able to build up," recalled U.S. Secretary of State James Baker.<sup>30</sup> Without the strict bipolarity that characterized the Cold War, countries were free to pursue independent foreign policies, and many of them made the deliberate decision to stand with the Coalition against Saddam. The uniqueness of this moment—and the opportunity that it brought—was not lost on leaders such as President Bush and Prime Minister Thatcher. President Bush echoed Scowcroft's talk of a "new world order" where aggression would be opposed by other countries who had the courage and conviction to stand against it.<sup>31</sup> He and others cautiously hoped that this might be an opening to a better world. Of course, this could only happen if states agreed to work together. Cooperation and consensus were prerequisites for this better world.

Importantly, the Coalition's broad consensus and unanimity became an end in itself.

The United States went to great lengths to preserve the Coalition, including taking actions

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<sup>29</sup> President Bush struggled with the conflict between the limited nature of the U.N. mandate and the desire to end Saddam's rule. As the ground war approached, he wrote in his journal: "But the dilemma is, 'What is victory—what is complete victory? Our goal is not the elimination of Saddam Hussein, and yet in many ways it's the only answer in order to get a new start for Iraq in the family of nations.'" George H.W. Bush, *All the Best*, 513.

<sup>30</sup> James Baker, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Gulf War*, 9 January 1996, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/> (accessed 15 February 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Scowcroft, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

that ranged from prohibiting its soldiers from drinking alcohol in Saudi Arabia to persuading Israel not to retaliate when Iraq attacked them with SCUD surface-to-surface missiles.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, when Operation Desert Storm began, a major effort was made to avoid harming Iraqi civilians, either directly through bombing or indirectly by destroying large components of the Iraqi infrastructure. Perhaps most critically, Coalition concerns would eventually drive the overall objective and the strategy used to achieve it. Preserving the Coalition was paramount for U.S. political leaders, even at the expense of the end state.

U.S. military leaders understood that belonging to a broad Coalition would both facilitate and constrain their plans for attacking Iraq. One of the ways that the broad consensus facilitated these plans was in the passing of U.N. Security Council Resolution 678, in which the council authorized “all necessary means” to enforce its previous resolutions calling for the restoration of Kuwait. This resolution also requested member states to support this effort.<sup>33</sup> In essence, the U.N. provided the legal authority for the Coalition to use force.

The key phrase, “all necessary means,” indicated that the Coalition was relatively free to choose its actions as long as there remained broad consensus that these actions would eventually result in the desired military objective—the ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. This allowed significant room for interpretation, and it gave the United States legitimate approval to conduct attacks beyond the immediate vicinity of Kuwait. When coupled with the harsh rhetoric used against Saddam and his regime, it allowed the Coalition to strike at Saddam and his regime’s leaders directly, deep inside of Iraq. This environment allowed a

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<sup>32</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 473-475, 511-512.

<sup>33</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 678, 29 November 1990. <http://www.un.org/docs/scres/1990/scres90.htm> (accessed 15 February 2012).

relatively unknown colonel in the Pentagon to convince the most powerful military leaders in the United States to adopt a plan to do just that.

### **“That’s Exactly What I Want!”**

In the early days of the crisis, most military leaders were preoccupied with reacting to the invasion and figuring out how to quickly deploy military forces halfway around the world to stop Saddam’s army from invading Saudi Arabia. This was true of General Schwarzkopf. As the top U.S. commander for the region, it was his job to develop military options, and just after the invasion, he had relatively few good options to offer. U.S. Central Command had just completed a major wargaming exercise, called Internal Look. The actual invasion of Kuwait, in General Schwarzkopf’s words, “eerily paralleled the imaginary scenario on our game.”<sup>34</sup> There was a problem with the results of the war game, however. The response envisioned was massive. It was designed to stop an Iraqi offensive that was assumed to consist of 300,000 troops, 3200 tanks, and 640 aircraft.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately for the commander, it would take many weeks and months to move a comparable force to Saudi Arabia.<sup>36</sup> In the meantime, Saddam’s forces could do much damage.

General Schwarzkopf needed more immediate options to present to his political leaders, options that relied on considerably smaller numbers of troops and equipment. He was especially concerned that he did not have good options for retaliation if Saddam continued his aggressive actions against its neighbors or the Coalition’s deploying forces. The

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<sup>34</sup> Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn’t Take A Hero*, 291.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Schwarzkopf’s initial estimate to the President on how long it would take to deploy a force large enough to offensively drive the Iraqis from Kuwait was 8-10 months. He later wrote that when he presented this information at a Camp David briefing, “I heard a few people around the table gasp.” Ibid., 301.

only workable option he had in the early days of the crisis were air strikes against a few Iraqi targets. “By the time we’d opted for Desert Shield, we’d completed our planning for symbolic air strikes, but symbolic is all they were,” Schwarzkopf writes. “If the Iraqis started executing U.S. embassy employees, say, and the President wanted to retaliate, Central Command had little to offer short of a nuclear strike on Baghdad.”<sup>37</sup> As the initial air force deployments had gone well, and several squadrons were available, it was natural for the commander to think of airpower options first. What happened next was very unnatural for a field commander with experience in Vietnam. General Schwarzkopf called the Pentagon for help.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act explicitly limited the individual services to a force-provider role, with the responsibility for war planning shared between the Joint Staff and combatant commands such as Central Command. The Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, however, still retained considerable ability to plan operations as they had during the Cold War. In contrast, the combatant commands such as Central Command had not fully developed their planning staffs to meet their responsibilities. When the Central Command staff was unable to give him a retaliatory plan with which he was comfortable, General Schwarzkopf called the Air Force Vice Chief of Staff to request the Air Force’s support in planning—asking for help with developing a “broader strategic air campaign.”<sup>38</sup> Air Force General Michael Loh decided to give the job to Colonel John Warden, who was leading a strategy and planning cell on the Air Staff at the time.<sup>39</sup> This cell, known as “Checkmate,” was a key office for the Air Force in the Cold War era, and it contained some of the brightest

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>38</sup> General John Michael Loh, USAF, *Desert Story Collection*, Air Force Historical Research Agency, K239.0472-96, 26 September 1991, Transcript, 1-7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

staff officers in the service. As he led this group in building a plan to answer this unusual request, Warden was free to insert his propositions about leadership attack. He did so with enthusiasm.

The plan created by Warden's group in the Pentagon was named "Instant Thunder," and it would eventually become the basis for the first phase of Operation Desert Storm.<sup>40</sup> It was a campaign plan—leveraging airpower as the main offensive force against a limited number of carefully selected targets—designed to cripple the Hussein regime, eventually producing collapse and paralysis. After only a few days, the plan was presented to Schwarzkopf as a conceptual briefing, and on the first slide it read:

IRAQ AIR CAMPAIGN  
INSTANT THUNDER

WHAT IT IS: A **FOCUSED, INTENSE** AIR CAMPAIGN DESIGNED TO  
INCAPACITATE IRAQI LEADERSHIP AND DESTROY KEY IRAQI  
MILITARY CAPABILITY, IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME.

AND IT IS  
DESIGNED TO LEAVE BASIC IRAQI INFRASTRUCTURE INTACT.

WHAT IT IS NOT: A GRADUATED, LONG-TERM CAMPAIGN PLAN  
DESIGNED TO PROVIDE ESCALATION OPTIONS OR COUNTER  
IRAQI MOVES.<sup>41</sup>

The briefing went on to present detailed target categories and sets, including Iraqi air defenses, telecommunications, electricity, and chemical weapons facilities. Most importantly, it targeted key leadership facilities used by Saddam and his top subordinates. Despite Schwarzkopf's original request, this plan went well beyond straightforward retaliatory strikes.

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<sup>40</sup> Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take A Hero*, 313.

<sup>41</sup> "Instant Thunder," Air Force Historical Research Agency, CHSH-7/8: K239.0472-8. This slide is reprinted in John Andreas Olsen, *John Warden and the Renaissance of American Airpower* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2007), Appendix 1 "Instant Thunder," 290.

The planners believed that if Instant Thunder was executed, the Coalition could achieve its desired ends for the overall war.<sup>42</sup> Saddam Hussein would either choose to leave Kuwait to avoid further attacks, or his regime would be paralyzed and possibly overthrown. When Warden presented the Instant Thunder brief to General Schwarzkopf, the commander immediately voiced his support for the concepts in the plan. “That’s exactly what I want!” he answered enthusiastically.<sup>43</sup>

In his memoir, Schwarzkopf recalls how Warden’s brief inspired him to think through what would become his four-phase plan for Operation Desert Storm. Instant Thunder would be Phase I, followed by suppression of air defenses in Kuwait, then the attrition of Iraqi army units from the air, and finally a ground invasion.<sup>44</sup> By creating this operational approach and sticking with it over the next several months, Schwarzkopf ensured that leadership attack would be a major part of the overall campaign. Unlike others, Schwarzkopf did not assume that leadership attack would win the war on its own, but he definitely believed that it would play a key role in a successful campaign.

Over the next few weeks, Colonel Warden would present the Instant Thunder brief to key leaders, including Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell at the Pentagon and General Schwarzkopf’s air commander, Lieutenant General Chuck Horner, at the forward headquarters in Riyadh. General Powell thought the brief contained good ideas, but he wanted an increased emphasis on joint planning as well as attacks on fielded forces in

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Davis observes that the plan went far beyond punishment, as “Punishment alone would not alienate the populace from the regime.” Richard C. Davis, *On Target: Organizing and Executing the Strategic Air Campaign Against Iraq* (Washington D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002), 78.

<sup>43</sup> General Robert M. Alexander, USAF, *Desert Story Collection*, Air Force Historical Research Agency, 10 May 1991, Transcript, 16.

<sup>44</sup> Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn’t Take A Hero*, 319-320.



Kuwait.<sup>45</sup> After briefing the most senior military officers in the Pentagon, Warden traveled to Riyadh to brief General Horner. He probably hoped that he would be asked to stay and continue planning at the forward headquarters. Horner, however, disliked Warden's presentation so much that he sent Warden back to the Pentagon immediately.<sup>46</sup> While Horner acknowledged that the plan contained many compelling features, especially in the targeting method, Horner was put off by Warden's responses to his questions, which he considered arrogant.<sup>47</sup> Specifically, when he asked Warden about the Iraqi ground forces in Kuwait, which were largely untouched in the original Instant Thunder plan, Warden dismissed Horner's concerns. In Horner's words, Warden possessed "absolute conviction that the entire package he was presenting was perfect. To question it, much less to doubt it, much less to consider changing it, was for him unthinkable."<sup>48</sup> This led Horner to conclude that Warden was not suited to working with a team and dealing with the inevitable criticism—both internal and external—that would be forthcoming.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 472-473.

<sup>46</sup> There are numerous sources that describe the contentious briefing in Riyadh. A key source is the first hand account given by Lt Col Dave Deptula, *Desert Story Collection*, Air Force Historical Research Agency, K2390472-92. A major portion of Colonel Richard T. Reynolds' book, *Heart of the Storm* describes the meeting. Just as instructive are some of the initial responses to an advanced draft of this work, which are still on file. Richard T. Reynolds, *Heart of the Storm: The Genesis of the Air Campaign Against Iraq* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1995). General Horner offers his perspective on the briefing in the book he coauthored with Tom Clancy titled *Every Man a Tiger*, 259-265.

<sup>47</sup> Air Force leaders varied widely in their reaction to Warden's forceful advocacy as well as his controversial assertions. At times in his career, opposition toward Colonel Warden turned personal, with more senior officers attacking not only his ideas, but also his relatively junior status and performance in past assignments. There are numerous sources that detail these reactions, including Warden's perceived arrogance and stubbornness. The most balanced is John Andreas Olsen's *John Warden and the Renaissance of American Air Power* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2007). Also see Colonel Richard T. Reynolds' *Heart of the Storm: The Genesis of the Air Campaign Against Iraq* and Clancy & Horner's *Every Man a Tiger*.

<sup>48</sup> Horner, *Every Man a Tiger*, 263-264.

<sup>49</sup> Horner recalls, "Sadly, I realized that his brilliance as a thinker would not carry through working with the team in Riyadh. Though I would have liked to use his efforts and his team to build an offensive air campaign, John Warden was too much in love with his own thinking, and too prickly to handle the give-and-take—the communicating—that Riyadh required. I decided he was better off away from the Gulf theater." Ibid., 264-265.

Though Warden failed to convince Horner to include him on the team, this was not the end of Warden's influence or that of his Checkmate division. Horner decided to keep several of the members of Warden's team who had traveled to Riyadh, and these officers kept many of the Instant Thunder ideas alive.<sup>50</sup> They would build an information conduit between Warden's planning cell in the Pentagon and the planning cell in Riyadh. Warden spent the rest of the war gleaning the best information he could find in the Washington D.C. area and pushing it forward to the Riyadh group.<sup>51</sup> The officer who was eventually chosen to lead the planning, General Buster Glosson, would adopt many of Warden's ideas, including concepts of leadership attack, and weave them into the final plan. Indeed, the Coalition would adopt and eventually execute a comprehensive plan of leadership attack, but there was a significant issue to be resolved. Should the Coalition attack Saddam Hussein directly?

### **Targeting Saddam Versus Incapacitating the Regime**

Before continuing, it is useful to discuss the critical question of killing Saddam Hussein, as it surfaced early in the crisis and persisted throughout. Many naturally assumed that targeting the Iraqi leadership meant targeting Saddam Hussein with deadly force. This seemed reasonable in a political sense, as key world leaders demonized Saddam with the most incendiary language. When considering the military situation, it was clear that the Iraqi military depended upon centralized guidance and direction from the president. As a result, it seemed both logical and desirable to remove him. There were, however, at least three reasons

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 265.

<sup>51</sup> Olsen, *John Warden*, 183-219.

why intentionally targeting the Iraqi leader could be deleterious.<sup>52</sup> The first was related to the solidarity of the Coalition. This group was founded upon an agreement to enforce the United Nations' resolutions on Iraq, and although the resolutions—especially Resolution 678—gave wide latitude on the methods that could be used, the Security Council was silent about removing Saddam Hussein or encouraging a change in regime. “The U.N. resolution made clear that the mission was only to free Kuwait,” explains Powell, and the president considered this limited mandate to be intentionally restrictive.<sup>53</sup> Attempting to persuade Coalition members to expand this mandate to include killing Saddam could introduce an issue with the potential to disrupt the cooperation on which the “new world order” depended. In the judgement of both political and military leaders, it was better to avoid this issue by distinguishing between killing Saddam and incapacitating the Iraqi regime.<sup>54</sup> In essence, policy makers modified the target from a person (Saddam) to a capability (the ability to provide military direction and leadership to forces in Kuwait). This distinction would have major implications for how the strategy for leadership attack would be executed. By maintaining Coalition unity, however, it allowed such a strategy to be pursued in the first place.

A second reason for making this distinction was internal to the United States. In the wake of the Nixon presidency, President Ford issued an Executive Order prohibiting U.S. intelligence agencies—or anyone else in the U.S. government—from engaging in assassination. Presidents Carter, Reagan, and Bush had all reaffirmed this decision. Although

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<sup>52</sup> These arguments are presented in Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey: Summary Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 45-46.

<sup>53</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 490.

<sup>54</sup> Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take A Hero*, 318-319.

the language in the order is simple and straightforward, there was significant ambiguity about how this Executive Order applied to Iraq. This was especially true because the order failed to explain what the act of *assassination* entailed.<sup>55</sup> To some, it included any attempt at targeted killing, even if that person was a military leader commanding military forces in combat. Others disagreed, and they argued that Saddam Hussein was clearly a combatant in war and a legal target. After the war, a consensus emerged favoring the later point of view. Before the war, however, Warden and his Instant Thunder planners found that it was, as one planner put it, “politically untenable to run around with a chart that says you’re targeting Hussein.”<sup>56</sup> The main reason for this, according to Warden, was the reaction by many that “you can’t say that because that contravenes the law against assassination and so on and so forth.”<sup>57</sup> Policy makers decided to avoid the controversy by substituting “Hussein Regime” for “Hussein” on the briefing slides. Despite this concession, Warden insisted that the actual targets—the Iraqi command and control facilities—remained the same.<sup>58</sup> Even though no changes were made, the baggage of the term *assassination* led to some convoluted ways of describing US policy. One top aide said, “not to imply that we were trying to assassinate Saddam, but we were trying to kill him.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See Appendix A of this study for a discussion of moral issues surrounding leadership attack, including a detailed discussion of E.O. 12333.

<sup>56</sup> Lieutenant Colonel David Deptula, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, Air Force Historical Research Agency, K239.0422-84, Transcript, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Warden, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, 55.

<sup>58</sup> “We then proceeded to target exactly the same thing that we were going to target anyway,” Warden remembers. “We didn’t change any of the physical targeting; we just changed the label on it.” Warden, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, 55-56.

<sup>59</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Bernard. E. Trainor, Lt Gen, USMC, *The General’s War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 313-314.

Finally, there was the practical issue of targeting Hussein. Planners knew that finding him would be difficult. They had intelligence reports detailing the Iraqi president's obsession with security, and they also recalled the difficulty of finding Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega during Operation Just Cause. Targeting Saddam from the air would require foreknowledge of his whereabouts, something that even his personal assistants did not have.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the Coalition would be fortunate enough to identify a piece of intelligence similar to the one that enabled the success of the Yamamoto mission during World War II, but they could not plan on it, and they did not want to promise a result they could not deliver.

### **The Big Question: How Does Incapacitating the Regime Lead To Victory?**

So while there was agreement among Coalition members and their leaders, both civilian and military, that the Iraqi leadership would be the central target of the Gulf War, there was considerable ambiguity about what this really meant. Specifically, political and military leaders had difficulty explaining how targeting the Iraqi regime would help to realize the main military objective—ejecting Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. There were many distinct conceptions of how this could work in practice. The military commander of Operation Desert Storm, General Schwarzkopf, explains his thoughts on this issue in his memoir, where he also includes a short discussion of Clausewitz and his concept of *center of gravity*:

After the shooting started we repeatedly asserted that the United States was not trying to kill Saddam Hussein—President Bush said so himself—and that was true, to a point. But at the very top of our target list were the bunkers where we knew he and his senior commanders were likely to be working. Because of Iraq's centralized system of command and control, Saddam was what military theorists call an enemy center of gravity—an aspect of the opposing force that, if destroyed, will cause the enemy to lose its will to fight.

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<sup>60</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 122.

(Clausewitz, the great Prussian philosopher of war, defined the concept of a center of gravity in his 1832 book, *Vom Kriege*.) For our purposes, it was sufficient to *silence* Saddam—to destroy his ability to command the forces arrayed against ours. If he'd been killed in the process, I wouldn't have shed any tears. We also targeted communications facilities and television and radio transmitters to keep Saddam from passing orders to his soldiers (emphasis in original).<sup>61</sup>

In Schwarzkopf's mind, leadership attack was connected to victory in two ways. First, it would destroy military facilities that allowed Saddam to command and control his forces in Kuwait and Southern Iraq. It would also destroy the means of communication with these forces—including telephone, television, and radio. Schwarzkopf makes it clear that he was targeting Saddam's leadership in his role as military commander over the forces in Kuwait.<sup>62</sup> Given Iraq's centralized power structure, Schwarzkopf believed Saddam was issuing essential and time-sensitive orders to military commanders in the field. Without these orders, the Iraqi army would be incapable of reacting appropriately to the changing conditions on the battlefield, and its soldiers might lose their will to fight. There is no mention of targeting Saddam's political leadership or of toppling his government. He may have hoped for it, but that was not part of his stated mission.

By characterizing direct attack on Saddam in this way, Schwarzkopf indicated his agreement with his superior, General Colin Powell. Powell was unequivocal about the limits

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<sup>61</sup> Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 318-319.

<sup>62</sup> In an interview after the war, Schwarzkopf echoed many of these sentiments: "...the objective regarding Saddam Hussein was that he was in fact a center of gravity. He was the single most important person in Iraq, and not only that but in Iraq's determination to fight this war. Also when you study the war between Iran and Iraq, often he was the person issuing the orders to the frontline troops. ... That was one of their strategic weaknesses. So therefore what we wanted to do was sever his his ability to... communicate with his frontline forces. And if that meant killing him, then so be it. I mean, you certainly want to go after the center of gravity and therefore we bombed command bunkers and this sort of thing. But the objective was not to kill Saddam Hussein, as much as it was to completely sever his ability to communicate with his forces." General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Gulf War*, 9 January 1996, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/> (accessed 10 February 2012).

of military action in Kuwait. “Our plan contemplated only ejecting Iraq from Kuwait,” Powell would later write. “It did not include toppling Saddam’s dictatorship.”<sup>63</sup> Powell explains, “We hoped that Saddam would not survive the coming fury. But his elimination was not a stated objective. What we hoped for, frankly, in a postwar Gulf region was an Iraq still standing, with Saddam overthrown.”<sup>64</sup> While Powell may have hoped for a change in Iraqi leadership, he made it clear that the Coalition would not make it a military objective, nor would it take military action beyond the U.N. mandate to facilitate or impose a leadership change in Iraq.

The Coalition’s top air commander, General Horner, did not think that killing Saddam would lead to the desired objectives of the war. He viewed the Iraqi regime as a corrupt political system, and killing the top leader would not solve the underlying issues. “Would have killing Saddam Hussein solved the problems in Iraq, I think the answer to that is flat out no,” Horner explains.<sup>65</sup> “You’d have to just pull the entire Ba’ath party out of power, you’d have to get rid of all the Republican Guards, all the secret police, and it’s just not fixable, the society out there has been corrupted, so whether we killed Saddam Hussein or not really to me was not a big issue.”<sup>66</sup> Horner was content to focus on severing Saddam’s communications with his military forces, as he was pessimistic that the Coalition could achieve regime change without tremendous cost, including the fracturing of the Coalition itself.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 491.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 490.

<sup>65</sup> Horner, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite Horner's misgivings, the campaign plan based on Instant Thunder concepts called for destroying leadership targets to weaken the regime to the point of incapacitation and collapse. Even the planners who were most optimistic about this possibility, however, had difficulty explaining exactly how paralysis and collapse would lead to the overall military objective of getting Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. John Warden—who was perhaps the most optimistic of them all—made several assumptions about this connection. Warden later explained these assumptions during a series of interviews conducted to capture the war's lessons. The interview transcript is worth a detailed consideration, as it offers considerable insight into the primary theory of leadership attack and how it was implemented in practice:

*Question:* And you expected in your first iteration a 6-day air campaign. Is that correct?

*Answer:* In the first iteration, we were talking 6 to 9 days.

*Question:* And at the end of 6 to 9 days, what then?

*Answer:* At the end of 6 to 9 days, we assumed that there was a high probability that there would have been a coup of some sort and that Saddam would have been overthrown, but that if he was not overthrown, that he would have been in the process of suing for peace; or that if he was not suing for peace, that Iraq would not have been in position to support a subsequent offensive operation in Kuwait or anyplace else; that it would be an emasculated country that would be in an impossible position for an extended length of time. ...

*Question:* So you are making an assumption that your air campaign would cause an effect on the leadership. Did you feel comfortable with that?

*Answer:* Yes.

*Question:* Why was that? Did you think any leader would have to bow under that pressure, or was there something unique about Saddam Hussein?



*Answer:* No. At a strategic level, there is less difference between one country and another than, say, at a tactical level, and if you succeed in taking away the enemy's strategically important things, you can just plain prevent him from having the ability to do subsequent things, especially offensive things. As a general principle, you are very confident that good strategic attack will just plain impose—we were not using that word then, but we are using it now—strategic paralysis on the enemy. The other part, however, was that from what we knew about Saddam Hussein, which was not as extensive as it later became, he had a reputation for pragmatism. After all, he had just signed a peace treaty with Iran and given up the gains that he had made from the long war with Iran. He had a history of making tactically appropriate retreats when necessary, and it seemed like that under this particular circumstance he would be quite likely to do exactly the same thing because he would recognize that he was in an impossible position; and to save himself, he would agree to terms which we assumed were not going to be overly generous.

*Question:* So in effect, you believed that Instant Thunder, after letting the air campaign accomplish what you said it was going to accomplish, would result in eventually Saddam Hussein suing for peace and withdrawing his troops from Kuwait?

*Answer:* Yes.<sup>68</sup>

In this exchange, Warden identifies—or implies—three separate mechanisms for achieving the primary Coalition objective of forcing Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. First, he proposes that airstrikes could weaken Saddam's position in Iraq, creating the conditions to allow Saddam to be deposed by internal forces aligned against him. Presumably someone would then assume the mantle of leadership in Iraq, and this new leader would make a rational decision to withdraw Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Second, Warden proposes that airstrikes would impose losses on things Saddam valued. These losses would be too painful for him to tolerate, and he would make the decision to withdraw Iraqi forces out of Kuwait to avoid further losses.

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<sup>68</sup> Warden, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, 57-59.

Warden points out that Saddam had made similar decisions in the past, especially in ending the war with Iran. Finally, Warden proposes that airstrikes would damage the strategic components of the Iraqi system. Iraq would suffer from “strategic paralysis” and would no longer be able to support the occupation of Kuwait. Eventually, the Iraqis would withdraw or if they did not—or could not because they were paralyzed—they would offer only token resistance to a ground campaign launched to force them out. These three mechanisms are summarized below:

1. Airstrikes against capabilities used to control population→weakened regime→overthrow of Hussein→new leader withdraws from Kuwait
2. Airstrikes against targets of high value to regime→high cost for Hussein→Hussein decides to withdraw forces from Kuwait to avoid further losses
3. Airstrikes against communication and key production processes→damage to strategic systems→strategic paralysis→Kuwait occupation unsustainable

Warden did not view these as mutually exclusive, and he did not see the need to focus on any one of these mechanisms in isolation. Nor did he see the need to explain exactly how leadership attack would lead to getting Iraqi troops out of Kuwait as he briefed the conceptual plan to decision makers.

As one looks back now, it is relatively obvious to see how critical it was for Coalition leaders to ask: how does leadership attack lead to victory? This is the critical question for this case, especially as this study seeks to evaluate the primary theory. Leadership attack and strategic paralysis are interesting concepts in and of themselves, but to the strategist, there needs to be some connection between action and outcome. Somehow leadership attack had to be connected to the ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. It is important to note that this connection was never specifically made by the original proposer of the plan. The officer that

General Horner picked to lead the air planning effort would attempt to be more specific, but he met with limited success in this endeavor.

### **Buster Glosson Takes Over**

After Warden failed to meet his approval, Horner searched for an officer who could lead the planning cell and direct the transformation of general targeting concepts into practical plans. For this job, Horner chose Brigadier General Buster Glosson, a hard-charging Air Force officer who had a reputation for getting results.<sup>69</sup> Glosson gladly accepted the move, and he jumped into planning immediately.<sup>70</sup> He soon asked one of the officers from Warden's group that was left behind, Lieutenant Colonel David Deptula, to show him the Instant Thunder brief. His immediate reaction was that the brief contained many useful concepts, but it was fundamentally unrealistic.<sup>71</sup> The original Instant Thunder plan called for six to nine days of bombing and only 84 targets, which Glosson thought was wildly optimistic.<sup>72</sup> He remembers, "It was just neophyte thinking. In a word, dumb. This plan, called Instant Thunder, was a good academic effort but I needed a much more diverse option."<sup>73</sup>

Despite this initial reaction, Glosson eventually agreed with many of the assertions about leadership attack in Instant Thunder. As he sized up Iraq, Glosson observed that Iraq

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<sup>69</sup> Clancy and Horner, *Every Man A Tiger*, 266-267.

<sup>70</sup> General Buster Glosson, USAF, *War With Iraq: Critical Lessons* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Glosson Family Foundation, 2003), 8-13.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 16-18.

<sup>72</sup> Glosson's memoir of Operation Desert Storm is full of unvarnished descriptions of his thoughts, and his recorded reaction to the Instant Thunder brief is no exception. When he heard that the plan only called for six to nine days of bombing, he wrote, "they were smoking dope on that one." Ibid., 17.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

had numerous weaknesses. The most glaring was its leadership.<sup>74</sup> Glosson had strong views on the importance of leadership in military conflict. “I fundamentally believed that the leadership of a country was the most important aspect of a country trying to go to war,” he would later write, “...the leader is the single most critical center of gravity for all Third World nations.”<sup>75</sup> While Glosson took a critical view to Warden’s original approach, their fundamental views on leadership attack were quite similar. Moreover, they shared common beliefs about airpower as first espoused by the early airpower theorists such as Mitchell and Sherman.<sup>76</sup> Glosson is quite clear about this in the opening section of his memoir:

I abhor brute force frontal attack and I always have. ... War can be fought without brute force on force. You hit the “vital centers” and you destroy what needs to be destroyed, but you’re smart about it. You conserve force—don’t send everyone rushing in for a big maneuver war when you don’t need to. Don’t bomb every telephone exchange or piece of industry if you don’t need to.<sup>77</sup>

Glosson describes his approach to air warfare as exactly the same as Billy Mitchell’s.<sup>78</sup> He also believed, correctly, that many of Warden’s arguments are found in Mitchell’s writings.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, the two men shared the same intellectual underpinnings, and this common approach helped them work together in shaping the air campaign over Iraq and Kuwait. For

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>76</sup> See Chapter Three of this study for a discussion of both of these airpower theorists.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>79</sup> The influence of Mitchell and the other early airpower theorists on Warden is discussed in detail in Chapters Three and Four. Glosson writes in his memoir: “I could never shake my conviction that he [Warden] ripped off Billy Mitchell, who is not credited in Warden’s book.” Ibid., 17. Glosson is on solid ground when he asserts that many of Warden’s concepts resemble those of Mitchell.

Glosson, that meant adopting some of Warden's initial ideas about leadership attack and developing them into an executable plan.

In the early days of the crisis, General Schwarzkopf badly needed such a plan. Just a few weeks after the Iraqi invasion, Schwarzkopf met with Glosson and conveyed the pressure he was under to provide realistic options. "I need something to give the President if Saddam acts crazy," Schwarzkopf told Glosson.<sup>80</sup> Glosson made it his mission to develop that option for the commander, and he decided to build upon the Instant Thunder concepts. His approach was to construct a stand-alone plan for retaliation, and if this was not needed, the targets identified in this plan could be folded into an overall offensive plan.<sup>81</sup> This was exactly what happened. Leadership attack was at the core of the retaliatory plan as well as what would become Phase I of Operation Desert Storm.

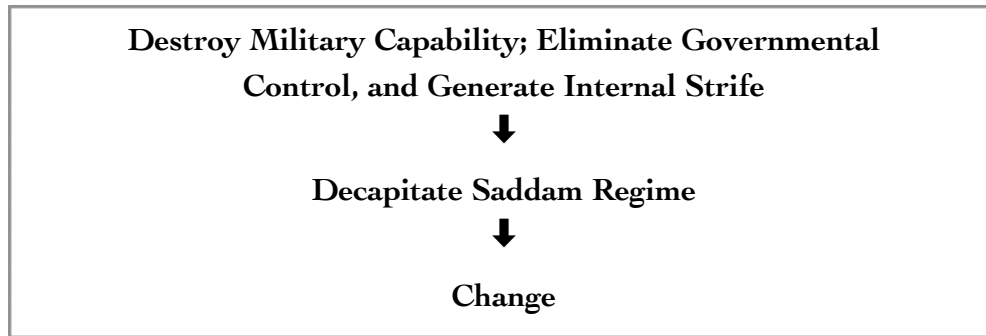
### **Leadership Attack: The Core of the Plan**

As Glosson built and briefed these plans to key senior leaders, the subject of leadership attack surfaced repeatedly. One of these instances occurred when the plans were briefed to the President and the National Security Council. In the brief, Glosson identified "decapitation" of the regime as a major objective and mechanism for change. One of his slides is reproduced here:

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.



When Secretary of State James Baker saw this, he commented that the phrase “Decapitate Saddam Regime” was misleading. Glosson quickly countered: “The intent of the slide is to indicate that he will have difficulty communicating and controlling his military and his people, and his people and his country will be visibly in disarray.”<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, Glosson’s linkage of military force to “internal strife” and regime change was compelling. The desire to weaken the regime’s hold on political power remained an underlying aspiration for planners, if not a stated objective. Along with Warden, they hoped that airstrikes and the resulting effects would weaken the regime and encourage political change in the Iraqi government.

The focus, however, remained on cutting Saddam off from his forces in Kuwait and Southern Iraq, and this would be accomplished through the destruction of command and control facilities as well as communications links and nodes. Because many of these targets were in Baghdad and valuable to Saddam, this alone might persuade the Iraqi president to leave Kuwait. It was more likely, however, that the primary effect would be to disrupt Saddam’s ability to lead the Iraqi forces, which would prove very beneficial if the Coalition attacked these forces in the later stages of the plan. Coalition planners would not stop at simply attacking Saddam’s connectivity with his military and government, however. They

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<sup>82</sup> Glosson, *War With Iraq*, 61.

would also attack command nodes several echelons below Saddam. This would include operations centers for the air defense systems and command posts for the deployed Army leaders in Kuwait and Southern Iraq. Finally, they would attack the will of the Iraqi soldiers to follow their leaders' orders, especially those coming from Saddam, through propaganda messages that emphasized the immorality of Saddam's leadership and the overwhelming military advantages of the Coalition. The cumulative impact would be difficult to quantify, because unlike counting smoldering tanks, the effects would be difficult to observe. Nevertheless, leaders expected it to make a significant contribution to the war's overall aim, as Iraq seemed as vulnerable as ever to leadership attack.

### **Within the Regime**

The atmosphere within the Iraqi regime grew even more toxic in the months leading up to the Gulf War. Shortly after the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam met with his top generals. By then, it was clear that the Coalition of countries lined up against Iraq were willing and able to send their military forces to liberate Kuwait.<sup>83</sup> Despite Iraq's considerable investments in its military forces, they would be outmatched against the superior organizations arrayed against them. It appeared that Saddam had miscalculated. Some concluded that Iraq needed to retreat to preserve its forces and what was left of its prestige. Saddam's Chief of Staff, General Nizar Khazraji, recalls what happened when he made the case to Saddam to withdraw Iraqi forces from Kuwait. General Khazraji argued that the gap in military technology between Coalition and Iraqi forces was insurmountable. "The commander in chief

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<sup>83</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 105.

expressed his anger and ended the meeting before I finished my report,” he recalled.<sup>84</sup>

Khazraji was fired the next morning by Saddam.<sup>85</sup> The other top Iraqi officers understood the message.

## **Operation Desert Storm**

The months following the invasion of Kuwait were tense for all sides. Over twenty-eight other nations joined the Coalition to stand against Saddam and Iraq, and many sent forces to the region.<sup>86</sup> At first, these forces were intended to deter Iraq from moving into Saudi lands, especially the oil fields, but Iraqi forces did not move south. Instead, the Iraqis consolidated their position in Kuwait and constructed large defensive fortifications.

Interestingly, Saddam decided to replace the Republican Guard units that had conducted the successful invasion with units from the Regular Army. While the largely conscripted regulars moved forward, the elite Republican Guard units moved back into southern Iraq and took up key positions along the main lines of communication between Kuwait and al-Basrah.<sup>87</sup> In the event of a Coalition invasion, the Regular Army would attrit Coalition forces to the best of their ability. It was likely that these units would be devastated in the process. The Republican Guard’s position would allow it to operate as a theater reserve, much as it had done in the war with Iran. When the time came, the Guard divisions could smash into engaged Coalition forces and inflict sizable casualties. Also, this position would allow the Republican Guard to race back to Baghdad if the regime were threatened by internal forces.

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<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Woods, et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 13-14.

<sup>85</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 105.

<sup>86</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 475.

<sup>87</sup> Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 125.



In the late months of 1990, the Coalition's focus changed from defending against a possible foray into Saudi Arabia to preparing for an attack. The U.S. military, in partnership with its Coalition allies, developed General Schwarzkopf's four-phase approach into a detailed plan to eject Hussein's forces from Kuwait. The first phase, an expanded version of Instant Thunder, consisted of air strikes directed against the Hussein regime and key military capabilities such as air defenses. These attacks were to be conducted in Iraq proper, with many attacks aimed at the Baghdad area. Phases II and III concentrated air attacks on Iraqi forces in Kuwait and in southern Iraq. Phase IV was a ground attack that would defeat the remaining Iraqi forces in Kuwait.<sup>88</sup> At the end of this phase, there would be no more Iraqi presence in Kuwait. This would set the stage for the ultimate restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty.

After the failure of repeated diplomatic attempts, Coalition leaders concluded that Saddam was not going to order Iraqi forces out of Kuwait.<sup>89</sup> As a result, Phase I of Operation Desert Storm commenced on 17 January 1991. Bombs fell across Iraq, and it quickly became clear that Iraq's air defenses were no match for the Coalition's offensive air forces.<sup>90</sup> Phases II and III were executed concurrently with Phase I, and the bombing continued for 40 days. While Saddam was able to challenge the Coalition's unity with surface-to-surface missiles—also known as SCUDs—Iraq absorbed numerous air strikes, and many key targets were destroyed or disabled. On 24 February, Phase IV kicked off with a major ground assault into

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<sup>88</sup> Diane Putney, *Airpower Advantage: Planning the Gulf War Air Campaign, 1989-1991*, (Washington, D.C.: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2004), 346-354. As explained earlier, this four-phase plan was originally conceived by General Schwarzkopf as he received the Instant Thunder brief from Colonel Warden in August 1990. Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take A Hero*, 317-321.

<sup>89</sup> This was not altogether correct, as Saddam would eventually decide that he wanted to order a retreat. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>90</sup> Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take A Hero*, 416-421.

both Kuwait and Iraq. The Iraqi ground forces proved no better at repulsing the Coalition than their air defenses. The Coalition ground assault quickly turned into a rout, especially in and around Kuwait, where regular Iraqi forces surrendered in unprecedented numbers.<sup>91</sup> By 27 February, Iraqi forces were in full retreat, and news reports described a “highway of death” between Kuwait and Iraq as Coalition forces pounded the retreating Iraqis.<sup>92</sup> Reasoning that the primary objectives of the operation had been accomplished — namely the ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and a severe weakening of the Iraqi military power — President Bush directed a suspension of offensive combat operations at midnight on 27 February.<sup>93</sup> On 3 March, General Schwarzkopf negotiated military terms with the Iraqis, bringing hostilities to an end.<sup>94</sup>

Leadership attack was a major component of the overall military campaign. There were many such attacks, they assumed multiple forms, and they met with varying degrees of success. When the peace that resulted from Operation Desert Storm turned unsatisfying, considerable controversy arose about the contribution of leadership attack to the overall campaign. Some concluded that the leadership attack strategy woven into the overall plan for Operation Desert Storm “failed miserably.”<sup>95</sup> Although Saddam had been thoroughly demonized by President Bush and many others, he was still alive and in power. His Ba’ath party and multi-pronged security apparatus were also largely intact. Moreover, Saddam was

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 451-465.

<sup>92</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 519-520.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 518-524.

<sup>94</sup> Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take A Hero*, 481-491.

<sup>95</sup> This is Tom Clancy's assessment. Clancy and Horner, *Every Man a Tiger*, 374.

still able to communicate with his military forces and direct their efforts throughout the conflict. Considering these facts, leadership attack appears to have been ineffective.

A closer look at the operation, however, yields numerous observations that contradict this conclusion. While Saddam was alive at the end of Operation Desert Storm, he had to remain on the move, which imposed disruptive effects on his leadership processes. The Ba'ath party was forced to vacate damaged buildings, and many workers simply stopped coming to work. The air defense system lost its cohesion and was severely degraded. Although Saddam could still communicate with his military forces, many intermediate commanders lost their ability to direct tactical actions, and the Iraqi military displayed various symptoms of paralysis as Coalition ground forces moved against them. Iraqi soldiers surrendered to Coalition forces in unprecedented numbers, a phenomenon that began before the Coalition ground offensive and continued throughout the remainder of the conflict. After Operation Desert Storm's conclusion, widespread revolts began in the Shiite-dominated southern and Kurdish northern provinces of Iraq, and for a while it appeared that Saddam's downfall was imminent. All of these effects can be traced to actions taken by the Coalition to attack the Iraqi regime. The remainder of this chapter will examine the various forms of leadership attack in Operation Desert Storm and conclude with a summary of the results and observations on how the historical evidence supports the competing theories of leadership attack.

### **Dismantling KARI: The Campaign to Begin the Campaign**

An important—but little known—example of leadership attack is seen in the Coalition's campaign against the Iraqi air defenses.<sup>96</sup> Military leaders and planners agreed

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<sup>96</sup> For an excellent discussion of the Coalition plan to attack air defenses, see Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, Chapter 5, "Kari," 102-122.

that air superiority was a prerequisite for operational success. Therefore, it was vital that the Iraqi air defense network be neutralized, and leadership attack was employed to accomplish this intermediate goal. With few exceptions, the Iraqi air defenses were comprised of numerous aircraft and surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) purchased from the Soviet Union. Soviet aircraft such as the MiG-25 and MiG-29 and SAM systems such as the SA-2, SA-3, SA-6, and SA-8 were quite capable. They had an important weakness, however, one that was exploited by Israel during the infamous raid on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981. As stand-alone systems, these aircraft and SAMs were of limited utility against Western fighter aircraft such as the Israeli F-15s and F-16s used in the raid.<sup>97</sup> Despite facing large numbers of these systems, the Israeli flight never encountered a MiG, and they were not forced to dodge a SAM, according to the flight leader.<sup>98</sup> Iraqi air defense officers were embarrassed and angered, but they learned from the incident. It was not enough to buy the "shooter" systems from the Soviet Union. While these systems were good at tracking and engaging targets, they were poor at detecting these targets—i.e. beginning the chain of events that leads to a successful engagement.<sup>99</sup> These systems needed to be integrated with other capabilities. Specifically, they needed direction to find and engage targets, and Iraq turned to Western arms providers to provide this integration. The solution was a French system called KARI (KARI is "Iraq" spelled backwards in French).<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> A key reason for this is the inherent difficulty of defending a large amount of airspace with a single surface-to-air missile system. Modern fighter aircraft move at altitudes and speeds that typically leave them vulnerable for very short periods of time, and the window to initiate a successful engagement is very small for the ground crew. It is even smaller if the system must perform the initial detection and tracking portions of the engagement as well as the actual intercept.

<sup>98</sup> Matthew Gutman, "Israeli Pilot Recalls Smashing A Rival's Nuclear Ambitions," *USA Today*, 7 March 2006.

<sup>99</sup> This is often called the "kill chain" by professionals who study Integrated Air Defense Systems (IADS).

<sup>100</sup> Glosson, *War With Iraq*, 127.

Interestingly, KARI did not offer additional firepower to the Iraqi air defenses. Instead, its job was to tie the systems together. To do this, it accomplished several tasks: it would take the information generated from long-range Early Warning (EW) radars, forward observation posts, and electronic listening equipment; develop target information; prioritize the response options; direct the shooter systems to engage high-priority targets; and show the shooter systems where to look. Moreover, it would take advantage of the most advanced computer equipment and communications to partially automate these tasks. “That system [KARI] allowed the Iraqis not to think,” observed Brigadier General Larry Henry, the architect of the Coalition Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD) plan.<sup>101</sup> “So sitting back here in these rather removed areas, they could input to the KARI system and the KARI system would initially take over and would allocate for these sets of inbound targets. SAMs would be selected for specified targets to engage, and it would tell them when to shoot what missile at what target.”<sup>102</sup>

As they learned more about this automation, Coalition air experts became quite concerned.<sup>103</sup> KARI gave the Iraqi air defenses a fair shot at downing large numbers of Coalition aircraft. By providing leadership and direction to the numerous air defense systems, KARI made the shooter systems more effective and less vulnerable. They were more effective because they could use KARI’s centralized direction to find, track, and shoot targets in minimum time. They were less vulnerable, in that for every moment that they radiated their fire-control radars to generate their own firing solutions, these systems were in danger of

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<sup>101</sup> Brigadier General Larry Henry, USAF, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, Air Force Historical Research Agency, K239.0472-92, Transcript, 82.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 81.

being struck by Coalition anti-radiation missiles (called HARMs, for High-speed Anti-Radiation Missile). When they received centralized direction from KARI, the SAM battery radars only radiated for short periods of time. Because of the integration provided by KARI, the whole of the Iraqi air defenses was much greater than the sum of the parts. In essence, KARI provided a form of leadership for the Iraqi air defenses by assessing the environment and providing direction to the individual components of the system to accomplish the mission of air defense.

KARI's main computer systems were housed in three tiers of command and control facilities. At the top was the Air Defense Operations Center (ADOC) in Baghdad. This was a relatively remote headquarters that did not get involved in the passing of target data. It was primarily a place where national leaders could watch the air picture over Iraq.<sup>104</sup> Underneath the ADOC in the chain of command were four Sector Operations Centers (SOCs), one each to control the airspace over the four air defense sectors of Iraq: north, west, central, and south. These SOCs were major hubs of activity for KARI, and they were housed in large shelters made up of reinforced concrete protected by layers of sand, gravel, and steel.<sup>105</sup> Coalition planners feared that even a direct hit might not be enough to disable such a structure. Each of these SOCs directed several Intercept Operations Centers (IOCs), 17 in all, whose main purpose was to take detection information from EW radars and forward observation posts and pass this information off to interceptor aircraft, SAMs, and antiaircraft artillery (AAA) stationed in their area of responsibility. These command posts and air defenses were connected by a vast communications system that included land lines,

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<sup>104</sup> In fact, Saddam visited the ADOC on the morning of 17 January—following the first night of bombing—to receive an update brief and provide verbal direction to the air defense forces. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 181.

<sup>105</sup> Glosson, *War With Iraq*, 127-128.

microwave towers, and radios.<sup>106</sup> Together, these command posts and communications nodes constituted the leadership of Iraq's air defense network, and without them, the network would lose cohesion. At least that was what Coalition planners believed.

It was for this reason that Coalition air planners made KARI "the major target" of the war's first night.<sup>107</sup> "If we severed the brain, the KARI system would not be as effective," Henry reasoned.<sup>108</sup> The plan that Glosson and Henry developed to defeat the Iraqi air defenses was comprehensive. "We said that to destroy an integrated air defense system, you must attack it as a whole," explained General Henry.<sup>109</sup> The effort was not limited to attacking the KARI systems and communications nodes. It also included tactical deception using numerous unmanned drones as well as electronic jamming. The Coalition wanted to oversaturate the system and destroy its component parts.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, leadership attack was a critical part of the overall plan. Henry said that dismantling KARI was "the number one thing we want to do: knock out their electricity, put down their AT&T, take out their command bunkers, all of those things that are the brains of the system."<sup>111</sup>

The first shot fired in Operation Desert Storm was aimed at Iraqi air defenses. Early in the morning of 17 January, low-flying helicopters took out key early warning radars.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Henry, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, 81-82.

<sup>107</sup> Glosson, *War With Iraq*, 127.

<sup>108</sup> Henry, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, 82.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>110</sup> Henry explains: "So there are two way to get it [KARI]—we either kill it or we oversaturate it. Or what if we do both? You know, make sure that in the particular areas where we are ingressing that it has lots of targets to deal with, in addition to knocking out key nodes in the system. So the initial plan was, we will go in here using the drones to confuse the system, and we will ambush those guys. ... Now the idea here was, we were going to destroy and jam their military command and control nets." *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>112</sup> Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take A Hero*, 414.

Shortly thereafter, the F-117s unleashed their first bombs of the war against the ADOC as well as all the SOCs and numerous IOCs.<sup>113</sup> They also struck multiple communications nodes that were thought to be used by KARI.<sup>114</sup> These strikes were coordinated with the initial wave of drones, electronic jamming, and HARM attacks. When taken individually, each attack was only somewhat effective. Some of the precision bombs hit their targets but failed to penetrate the dense layers of protective material that covered them.<sup>115</sup> Not all the communications went down, as the Iraqis found alternative ways to communicate.<sup>116</sup> Not all the HARMs hit SAM radars—many travelled harmlessly into the desert.<sup>117</sup> Taken together, however, the campaign against Iraqi air defenses was devastating. Glosson remembers, “the first night more than met all our expectations. It was a success beyond anything imagined by commanders in previous wars.”<sup>118</sup>

Glosson’s enthusiasm may make him prone to hyperbole, but the psychological blow to the Iraqi air defense forces was real, and it had observable effects that lasted for the remainder of the conflict. Without KARI in place, each SAM battery had to turn on their radars for much longer periods of time. This made the battery considerably more vulnerable to Coalition attacks, and the operators understood this heightened risk of attack. Displaying the Iraqi penchant for survival, many SAM battery commanders found a way to save face. When

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<sup>113</sup> SMSgt Harold P. Myers, USAF (Ret.), *Nighthawks Over Iraq: Chronology of the F-117 Stealth Fighter in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm*, Special Study 37 TFW/HO-91-1, 9 January 1992, 6.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Barry D. Watts and Dr. Thomas A Keaney, *Gulf War Air Power Survey—Volume 2: Effects and Effectiveness*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 138-139.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 139-140.

<sup>118</sup> Glosson, *War With Iraq*, 127.



they knew that Coalition aircraft were in the area, they launched missiles but did not guide them with information from the radar. The operators simply left the radar off, letting the missile fly harmlessly through the sky.<sup>119</sup> The unexpected phenomenon of the “ballistic launch” suited air component leaders and operators just fine. These missiles were not a serious threat to Coalition air superiority.

Over the next several weeks, the Coalition would strike and restrike air defense targets to ensure this air superiority. The effort was effective, as Coalition air losses were less than all but the most optimistic projections.<sup>120</sup> The Coalition suffered only eight aircraft damaged or destroyed due to enemy air defenses during the first six days of the campaign, and only five more were damaged or destroyed throughout the remainder of the war.<sup>121</sup> “Given the large numbers of combat sorties flown daily by Coalition air forces, the degree to which Iraq’s strategic SAMs were virtually eliminated as a significant contributor to Coalition attrition does appear to justify fully the conclusion that this portion of the air campaign was highly effective.”<sup>122</sup>

The Coalition’s success in attacking the Iraqi air defense system seems to support the five propositions of the primary theory of leadership attack. First, the air defense system required centralized direction and integration from the KARI system to be effective. Second, the entire system was susceptible to attacks on its key nodes because information flowed through single pathways and fusion centers, and these became single points of failure when

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<sup>119</sup> GWAPS, *Effects and Effectiveness*, 140-141.

<sup>120</sup> For example, the Air Force Chief of Staff, General Tony McPeak, projected that the Coalition would lose about four to five aircraft a day, or about 150 aircraft over 30 days of the air campaign. Woodward, *The Commanders*, 341.

<sup>121</sup> GWAPS, *Effects and Effectiveness*, 141-142.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

struck. Third, the Coalition was able to identify these key nodes through intelligence gathering and then attack them with a combination of surprise, stealth, and precision. Fourth, these attacks produced a form of paralysis throughout the system. While individual batteries could still function, they were not connected to the system that provided them information, and they were much more vulnerable when they tried to operate. Many of these batteries simply fired blindly to save face while not providing an easy target for the Coalition. Finally, this paralysis led to the intermediate objective of air superiority. Leadership attack, therefore, was part of an overall effort to negate the Iraqi air defenses—the campaign to begin the campaign—that was highly effective. The neutralization of this air defense network cleared the way for the Coalition to strike directly at Saddam and his Ba’ath regime.

### **Attacks on Saddam and His Ability to Communicate**

Besides strikes on the Iraqi air defense network, the Coalition attacked numerous leadership targets in the first few days of the war. These included Saddam’s palaces, his presidential bunker, and numerous other command and control bunkers.<sup>123</sup> While some hoped that Saddam might be caught in these initial strikes, that did not happen. The Coalition also struck communications targets such as the main telephone and exchange building in Baghdad as well as the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Culture and Information, the Ba’ath Party headquarters, the intelligence service headquarters, and the

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<sup>123</sup> Meyers, *Nighthawks Over Iraq*, 6-8. When visiting a command building in Kuwait just after the war, Captain Edward P. O’Connell describes what he found: “I carefully eased through a jagged hole in a jammed, metal-plated door. Inside the room I saw rotting food and a personal photo of a senior Iraqi commander with Saddam. Apparently trapped inside the room while under bomb attack, this person frantically axed his way out of a metal door to freedom. I felt this was a dramatic indicator of the effect on personnel inside the building.” Captain Edward P. O’Connell, “A Captain’s Perspective on the Gulf War,” *From the Line in the Sand: Accounts of USAF Company Grade Officers in Support of Desert Shield/Desert Storm*, Michael P. Vriesenga, ed., (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1994), 151.

Iraqi Air Force headquarters.<sup>124</sup> At first, not all of these attacks were successful. F-117 attacks in Baghdad required that pilots identify the target visually before dropping their weapons, and bad weather made this impossible at times.<sup>125</sup> The Coalition continued to attack these targets with aircraft and missiles, however, and many of them were eventually destroyed. Most of the headquarters buildings were struck at night, when they were largely vacant, to keep casualties to a minimum.<sup>126</sup> Attacks near civilian areas were conducted with great care, and civilian neighborhoods were strictly off limits. Saddam recognized this tactic and used it to his advantage.

For Saddam to survive the attacks, he had to take strict safety precautions. Instead of using the military bunkers and command facilities that had been prepared for him, Saddam chose to command the war from private homes in civilian neighborhoods. General Glosson explains how this may have saved the Iraqi dictator's life: "...you can't go into the middle of a city block and decimate an entire city block because you know that Saddam Hussein has his cellular telephone and he's talking to somebody else in the leadership structure from a particular home."<sup>127</sup> When interviewed after the war, Iraq's Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, stated that Saddam did not live underground in bunkers and tunnels during the war. Additionally, Aziz recounted how Saddam held numerous face-to-face meetings in various locations in Baghdad.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., and Glosson, *War with Iraq*, 122-126.

<sup>125</sup> Meyers, *Nighthawks Over Iraq*, 6-8.

<sup>126</sup> The Coalition effort to keep civilian damage in urban areas to a minimum and to pursue precision bombing against selective aimpoints instead of widespread destruction has led some to argue that the bombing was counterproductive to Coalition interests. See William M. Arkin, "Baghdad: The Urban Sanctuary in Desert Storm?" *Airpower Journal*, Spring 1997, 4-21.

<sup>127</sup> Glosson, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>128</sup> Aziz, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

Today, we are aware of these meetings due to the capture of large amounts of documents and audio tapes as well as debriefings of Iraqi senior leaders after the Iraq War of 2003. These sources show that Saddam was firmly in control of his government during Operation Desert Storm. The Coalition's attacks in Baghdad did not force him to stay in one place or forgo meetings with his top commanders. For example, Saddam was personally involved in planning the Iraqi offensive into the Saudi city of al-Khafji, and he traveled over 500 kilometers to al-Basrah to meet face to face with his senior military commanders.<sup>129</sup> The Iraqi III Corps commander, Major General Salah Aboud Mahmaud, recalled the scene as he arrived in an ordinary house in a civilian area of the city. "We passed through a garden attached to the house where we entered a room located at the far end," recalled the general.<sup>130</sup> "Inside the room we found ourselves face to face with Mr. President Saddam Hussein, the commander in chief of the armed forces."<sup>131</sup> Obviously, Saddam took advantage of the Coalition's rules of engagement and used civilian neighborhoods as safe havens from which to conduct state business.

While Saddam was able to survive Operation Desert Storm, it appears likely that the Coalition came tantalizingly close to seriously injuring or killing him. Saddam's personal physician recalls that he was summoned unexpectedly in the middle of the night to care for Saddam, who had been injured in a car crash:

The President was pale and bloody but calm and composed. Apparently his car had collided with another car at a crossroads. The left side of his face was especially affected. He was bleeding profusely from a cut in his forehead and a

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<sup>129</sup> Harmony Document Folder ISGP-2003-00009833. Reprinted in Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 17.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

deep cut under his right eye, right through to the cheekbone. The cut in his chin was even deeper. He had also just about lost the tip of his little finger.<sup>132</sup>

The physician also treated Saddam's son-in-law, Hussein Kamel, and the President's second wife for similar injuries.<sup>133</sup> Although it is possible that this was simply a random car accident, it is also possible that Saddam had survived a Coalition attack as described by General Schwarzkopf after the war:

The closest we came, we had a report that there was a very large convoy moving down a road one night. We then attacked that convoy and it's my understanding that we hit the vehicle in front of his and the vehicle behind his, and killed the bodyguards in it, and didn't touch him. But, one of the interesting things that happened is up until that time, Saddam had been quite visibly up front on television, walking around and being seen in public. And all of a sudden we didn't see him any more. So that in itself accomplished something.<sup>134</sup>

While the relationship between the car accident and this attack remains unclear, what is clear is that the Coalition tried repeatedly to attack Saddam, and the Iraqi President went to great lengths to make himself a difficult target. Furthermore, although he was threatened daily, Saddam Hussein continued to function as the leader of Iraq. He did this by keeping his pattern of life unpredictable. This has led some observers to conclude that the Iraqi president's effectiveness waned as a result of these precautions and the inevitable degradation imposed on the Iraqi president.<sup>135</sup> This may have been the case, but the degree of degradation may not have been as high as originally thought by Coalition war planners. While Saddam

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<sup>132</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 98.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Schwarzkopf, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>135</sup> "Saddam may not have feared continually for his life during the opening days of the war," writes John Anderas Olsen, "but he had to take extraordinary measures to protect himself, and thus his ability to direct the war-effort was hampered." Olsen, *Strategic Air Power in Desert Storm*, 260.

certainly had to overcome friction to fulfill his role as leader, the evidence suggests his capability to lead was still intact throughout the war, as he was able to communicate with his subordinates through face-to-face meetings, couriers, and electronic means.

Despite their best efforts, the Coalition was unable to knock out Saddam's ability to communicate. One important example of Iraqi resiliency involved the SCUD surface-to-surface missiles that Iraq launched into Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. Each of the targets had to be confirmed with Saddam before launch, and this was accomplished using only land lines or liaison officers, because the SCUD Commander prohibited the use of radios by his units throughout Operation Desert Storm.<sup>136</sup> Saddam kept strict control over these missiles. For example, he ordered a two-day break in firing on 2 February, and he also limited the number that could be fired to two per day.<sup>137</sup> Saddam kept control over the Iraqi Air Force as well, and he ordered it to fly Iraq's high-value aircraft to Iran through a written memorandum delivered by courier.<sup>138</sup>

As the Coalition ground invasion gained momentum, Saddam ordered the withdrawal of troops from Kuwait on 25 February. The Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Husayn Rashid Muhhammad, accepted the phone call at his forward headquarters in Southern Iraq. The general remembers, "Mr. President called me in the evening and spoke with me. He told me 'Husayn, I do not want our army to panic. Our soldiers do not like humiliation; they like to uphold their pride. Our goal is now to return our soldiers [to Iraq],

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<sup>136</sup> SH-SHTP-V-001-237, "Saddam and Military Officials Discussing Lessons Learned in the Wake of the 1991 Gulf War" (undated, circa 1993). Transcript printed in *The Saddam Tapes*, 186.

<sup>137</sup> Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 198.

<sup>138</sup> Harmony Document Folder ISGP-2003-00038432. Summarized in Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 192.

but we want them to return with their heads held up high [and] without humiliation.”<sup>139</sup> This account is surprising. After weeks of attacks on Iraq’s communications, Saddam was still able to pick up a phone and talk to his commander, exercising surprisingly strong—and even empathetic—leadership in the face of tremendous pressure. Along with communicating privately with army commanders, Saddam was able to broadcast a public speech on 26 February over Baghdad radio to the Iraqi population, reframing the withdrawal as a victory for Iraq.<sup>140</sup>

Despite their efforts in the first three phases to degrade such methods of communication, Coalition commanders knew that Saddam still possessed the ability to communicate with his forces. One briefing slide presented to the President estimated that only 10 percent of “National Command Telecomms” had been destroyed by 22/23 February, with another 20 percent damaged.<sup>141</sup> While this estimate may have been conservative—air planners disagreed with it—the military objective of cutting Saddam off from his forces in Kuwait and Southern Iraq was not accomplished to the degree envisioned by General Schwarzkopf at the outset of Operation Desert Storm.<sup>142</sup> Unlike the Iraqi air defenses, President Hussein’s communication systems were not susceptible to attacks on key nodes. There were two primary reasons for this. First, the guidance and direction contained in Saddam’s communications was not very

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<sup>139</sup> Harmony Media File ISGP-2003-10151507. Transcript printed in Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 229.

<sup>140</sup> Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 230.

<sup>141</sup> GWAPS, *Effects and Effectiveness*, 289.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

large in terms of volume. General statements and short directives were all that was needed.<sup>143</sup> In addition, there many redundancies and workarounds in the communication systems available to Saddam, and he took advantage of them.<sup>144</sup> At the strategic level, the Iraqi regime led by Saddam Hussein continued to communicate throughout the war — there was no strategic paralysis at these top levels of government, including the military, with one important exception.

Although the Coalition proved unable to cut off communications at Iraq's strategic level, Saddam's preference for stovepiped communication caused much confusion and, at times, paralysis. This has come to light in captured tapes and documents. For example, in a meeting with Saddam after the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, one of the high-ranking Regular Army commanders complained that he did not know the Republican Guard's disposition, and this severely hampered his ability to command his forces. When the commander suggested that the two forces should plan together for a joint defense of the city of Basra, Saddam cut him off with this explanation:

It is not that we don't trust you [the Regular Army], but the commander of the guards has the right to do what he did. ... This will remain the case and is not going to change. This means that I have to know every major matter, and it has to pass through me to the supervisor of the guards.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> This evidence buttresses Robert Pape's claim about strategic leadership and its resiliency: "strategic direction does not demand high-volume real-time communication. ... Even in militaries famous for centralized command styles and major roles for political leaders in operational affairs, national leaders are still mainly concerned with broad decisions regarding fronts to be defended and attacked and not the orchestration of tactical units or their battlefield support to execute those decisions." Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 84-85.

<sup>144</sup> Again, the evidence of Operation Desert Storm seems to support another claim made by Pape: "strategic communications cannot be cut for long. Since national orders can be extremely short messages, many means can be used to send them effectively (land lines, radio transmissions, couriers, and face-to-face meetings)." Ibid., 85.

<sup>145</sup> Harmony Document Folder ISGQ-2003-M0004181, quoted in Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles: Saddam Hussein's Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 233-234.



At least some of the chaos that occurred in the retreat from Kuwait was a result of having multiple military units in the same area, each taking direction directly from Saddam, with little to no idea what the other forces were doing. This would be a difficult challenge in the best of times, but this was far from the best of times for Iraqi commanders. As they directed their forces north, they were forces to traverse populated areas that were also in chaos. The local governments in these cities were largely absent, as many of their buildings had been damaged or destroyed.

### **Attacks on Leadership Facilities**

Besides attacking Saddam's ability to communicate, the Coalition plan also called for attacking governmental facilities, and there is considerable evidence to show that these attacks were quite effective.<sup>146</sup> In many respects, the lower levels of the Iraqi government ceased functioning after the bombing started, and this led to loss of confidence in the government and in Saddam Hussein's leadership. Some Coalition leaders questioned the effectiveness of bombing buildings, especially at night, when most of the people who occupied them were at home.<sup>147</sup> Air planners countered that strikes against these buildings were critical to disrupting the regime.

One of the key air planners, Lt Col David Deptula, addressed this "philosophical disagreement" with an illustration. He asked his fellow planners, what if their air planning office, known as "the Black Hole," had been bombed? "How are we going to work? All of

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<sup>146</sup> In contrast, some observers have argued that the attacks on government buildings were ineffective. William Arkin, for example, writes the following about his visit to Baghdad after the Gulf War: "Baghdad, a sprawling city of more than four million people, was a virtual sanctuary in Desert Storm." William Arkin, "Baghdad Bombing: Plan Spared Saddam from Pain," *The Washington Post Online*, 30 July 1998, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/fogofwar/analysis.htm> (accessed 20 May 2011).

<sup>147</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 513.

our planning documents, all of this stuff that we put together to track what has been hit, all that is gone.”<sup>148</sup> Deptula’s argues that it is difficult for a governmental institution to continue accomplishing its mission without access to its facility. Typically, a facility contains documents and records that are critical to the organization’s day-to-day activities. While the organization can eventually recover, the loss of a facility causes significant turmoil in the short term, and the threat of additional attacks can discourage people from showing up to begin the recovery process.

Although the bombing of government buildings did not disrupt Saddam’s personal leadership significantly—as he chose not to be in them—it crippled his government. The strongest evidence to back this assertion comes from Saddam himself. The president believed that this bombing engendered a loss of confidence in government, which helped encourage the Shiite and Kurdish rebellions after the war. As he discussed the origins of these rebellions with his top commanders, Saddam launched into a revealing tirade:

The entire siege, the air bombardment until the land attack began, they were all methods used to create the appropriate environment for the operation that took place. So, the appropriate environment was created. The psychological aspect was the most important factor prepared, meaning the feeling of defeat that spread to the government offices first, before the defeat happened in fact and became a physical and effective condition, beginning by the change of all the headquarters. ... this spread to the point where the governor would change the location of this ministry, and the security director would change its location, and the police director would change its location, and so on. And maybe their other secondary offices would change their location. What happened was that government was nonexistent. Well, the government offices were nonexistent. In such a way that whoever would say that he was a Sultan, it was possible for him to become a Sultan. So, the traitors showed up in a certain situation supported by elements trained and specifically prepared to play such a role in

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<sup>148</sup> Deptula, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, K 239.0472-82, 74-75.

Iran. And they erupted in Basra and they erupted in other places you know and even in the north.<sup>149</sup>

Saddam's perspective is clear. Although the Coalition bombing did not significantly disrupt his leadership, he credits the bombing of governmental buildings with creating the conditions for rebellion. Specifically, the evacuation of governmental buildings—because they either were bombed or they might be bombed—created an absence of visible governmental presence and control. This is significant, because along with destroying command and control facilities and communications equipment, Coalition air planners desired to send messages with their bombs that encouraged division between the people and the government.<sup>150</sup> To some degree, this appears to have worked.

### **Attack on the al-Firdos Bunker: The Nail in the Coffin of the Strategic Air Campaign**

While the previous section argues that some attacks on leadership and government facilities were effective, one of these attacks ended in tragedy, and the political fallout restrained attacks in Baghdad for the remainder of the war. On the morning of 13 February, a Coalition aircraft struck the al-Firdos bunker in Baghdad. Coalition planners considered the bunker a valid military target. "The target was a communications node being used by Iraqi intelligence concerning Kuwaiti activity," General Glosson reported to General Schwarzkopf. "It was a shelter that had been reinforced and upgraded with communications."<sup>151</sup> Along with the communications upgrades, Coalition intelligence reports

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<sup>149</sup> SH-SHTP-A-000-739, "Saddam and Officials Discussion the State of the Iraqi Army, the 1991 Uprising, and the Withdrawal From Kuwait," 3 April 1991. Transcript printed in *The Saddam Tapes*, 200-201.

<sup>150</sup> Glosson, *War With Iraq*, 129.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

had described numerous visits of “people in limousine-style vehicles” — “not exactly Iraqis off the street,” quipped Glosson.<sup>152</sup> Because of this intelligence, the bunker was added to the strike list, and two F-117s scored direct hits against it. Soon thereafter, it became apparent that the bunker was being used as more than a communications node and military shelter. According to Saddam’s physician, this bunker was originally an air raid shelter designed for Saddam and his staff, but the Iraqis had allowed families inside the shelter during the raids on Baghdad.<sup>153</sup> Many of these families were in the bunker when it was struck, and the result was horrific. Over 400 Iraqis lost their lives in the strike, including many women and children. When Saddam’s physician arrived at the scene, he saw the area “teeming with foreign journalists and TV crews accompanied by their information ministry minders.”<sup>154</sup> Later, he would recall Saddam’s reaction to the incident: “The ministry of information has done a magnificent job. TV pictures of America’s criminal act have been shown all over the world,” observed the Iraqi president.<sup>155</sup>

In this, Saddam was correct, as press reports quickly made their way across the globe, especially to Washington, D.C. The effect was to cause U.S. leaders to question the utility of bombing targets in Baghdad, and by extension, the utility of the leadership attack strategy against strategic-level targets within the Iraqi regime, as the vast majority of these were located in Baghdad. General Powell asked, “Did we still need to pound downtown Baghdad over a month into the war? How many times could you bomb Ba’ath party headquarters, and

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 110-111.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

for what purpose? No one was sitting there waiting for the next Tomahawk to hit.”<sup>156</sup> In response, General Glosson argued that Powell’s assessment was off the mark. He recalls, “the Ba’ath Party headquarters was a critical communications node that was hardened. Our purpose had nothing to do with people.”<sup>157</sup> Nevertheless, Powell began to disapprove target requests in the Baghdad area.<sup>158</sup> Although the air planners continued to nominate key nodes and leadership targets, gaining approval for a few, Baghdad was increasingly off limits. Between the al-Firdos bunker attack and the beginning of the ground invasion, very few targets in Baghdad were approved for attack. Glosson would later call al-Firdos “the nail in the coffin of the strategic campaign.”<sup>159</sup> It cost the Coalition the ability to continue the pressure on the national leadership in Baghdad before the land invasion. It is a good example of how a leadership attack strategy can be dampened due to a political reaction to an incident of war.

### **Air-Ground Controversy**

Not all Coalition commanders were enthusiastic about the strategic air campaign or the leadership attack actions included in it. By the time of the al-Firdos incident, several ground commanders in the Coalition were concerned that the focus on the strategic air campaign and its central premise of attacking the Iraqi regime was pulling the focus away

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<sup>156</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 513. Observations made by Saddam’s physician lend credence to Powell’s view of the war in Baghdad. “...After forty days of persistent efforts it was obvious that the pilots and the men who programmed the missiles had run out of targets. They reset their computers and bombed for a second time buildings, centres of communication, power stations and bridges which had already been shot to smithereens.” Bashir, *The Insider*, 113.

<sup>157</sup> Glosson, *War With Iraq*, 229.

<sup>158</sup> Lieutenant General Buster Glosson, USAF, *Desert Story Collection*, Air Force Historical Research Agency, K239.0472-89, 29 May 1991, 85-87.

<sup>159</sup> Glosson, *War With Iraq*, 228.

from attacks on ground forces in Kuwait and Southern Iraq. Indeed, a few weeks into the air campaign, a significant row erupted over this issue between ground commanders and the officers who directed the air war. Ground commanders argued that the air campaign was too focused on targets in Baghdad and not focused on the forces that they would have to fight.<sup>160</sup> General Walt Boomer, commander of the Marine Expeditionary Task Force assigned to attack Kuwait, desperately wanted to have the Coalition's limited air power focused on the Iraqi troops in their vicinity. In an interview after the war, the general explained, "I'm focused on this piece in front of me, that's where I want every asset focused. If I could have gotten every single Air Force plane ... and focused them on, the enemy in front of me, I would have said great, Chuck [Horner] I love this, bring me more."<sup>161</sup>

When several of the senior ground commanders approached General Calvin Waller, General Schwarzkopf's deputy, about the perceived imbalance, Waller advocated for their cause and persuaded General Schwarzkopf to grant him oversight of the apportionment of targeting resources.<sup>162</sup> General Waller was especially pleased when Air Force pilots developed the tactic of "tank plinking," which involved using their infrared sensors to detect hot tanks in the cool nighttime desert, then attacking these tanks with precision bombs. General Waller recalls his enthusiasm for this new tactic: "I was wondering why didn't we think about this weeks ago, why didn't we think about it when it first happened, why did it take us this long. ... The answer I think is that we were too concerned about the strategic

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<sup>160</sup> Several ground commanders shared similar viewpoints. See Fred Franks, Interview Transcript *Frontline: The Gulf War*, 9 January 1996, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/> (accessed 27 February 2012); "Air Land Battles" in Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, 309-331; and Rick Atkinson, *Cruade*, 338-343.

<sup>161</sup> Walt Boomer, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Gulf War*, 9 January 1996, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/> (accessed 27 February 2012).

<sup>162</sup> Calvin Waller, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Gulf War*, 9 January 1996, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/> (accessed 27 February 2012).

targets, to really concentrate on shaping the battlefield for those ground commanders.”<sup>163</sup>

Unsurprisingly, General Glosson held a different point of view. While ground commanders tended to focus on the real estate that was in front of them, Glosson argued that air planners had a theater-wide perspective and realized the importance of sequencing effects using limited air assets:

We believed, and I still do, that the attacking of targets in Baghdad had as much or more to do with the success or failure of that field army than attacking it directly in the overall scheme of what our coalition was trying to accomplish. ... It's not a matter of not destroying tanks or not destroying armor or not destroying their fire trenches or the fire pipeline connections that they had set up to create this wall of fire when the ground troops went across. It's a matter of doing it at the correct time so that everything is sequenced together.<sup>164</sup>

Glosson understood the overall timeline, and he had planned to concentrate many of the attacks on fielded forces and ground defenses closer to the start of the ground assault so the Iraqi Army would have minimal time to recover. This was, in fact, what happened, and the ground forces faced a weakened enemy when they pushed forward.<sup>165</sup>

In retrospect, it is difficult to argue that the focus on strategic targets, especially leadership targets deep in Iraq, came at the expense of attacks on targets in Kuwait. There are two key reasons for this. First, the best evidence indicates that leadership targets constituted a relatively small percentage of the overall effort. The Gulf War Air Power Survey concludes that, “...a relatively small proportion of the Coalition effort (fewer than

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Buster Glosson, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Gulf War*, 9 January 1996, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/> (accessed 27 February 2012).

<sup>165</sup> Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey: Summary Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), 102-108.

1,000 strikes out of a total of about 42,000) went against this set of targets.”<sup>166</sup> The Survey found that 2 percent of strikes went against the categories of *leadership* (L) and *command, control and communications* (CCC). In contrast, over 56 percent went to attacking surface forces—this constituted over 23,400 strikes.<sup>167</sup> A second reason why leadership attack efforts did not detract from attacks on fielded forces is that the vast majority of L and CCC targets were struck using airplanes that were well suited to conduct these attacks but not adept at striking surface forces. F-117s and Tomahawk cruise missiles were used in the bulk of these strikes, especially in Baghdad.<sup>168</sup> The Tomahawk required precise coordinates to hit its target, and these were not normally available for fielded forces. The F-117’s combination of stealth tactics and precision navigation system made it well-suited for strikes in urban settings. However, the aircraft’s limited communications, maneuverability, and field of view, meant that it was not effective in finding and destroying fielded forces on a contested battlefield.<sup>169</sup> These aircraft did strike some important frontline targets that required very precise attacks, such as the oil valves used to fill the defensive fire trenches, but their use against deep targets did not come at the expense of successful attacks on fielded forces.<sup>170</sup> Because of these two factors, the opportunity cost of leadership attack, as measured in the amount of firepower that could have been put to use against alternative targets, was relatively small.

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<sup>166</sup> GWAPS, *Summary Report*, 239.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>169</sup> Author’s observation as a former F-117 pilot and graduate of the F-117 Division of the USAF Weapons School.

<sup>170</sup> Glosson, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.



## Saddam Ready to Withdraw

As Phases I, II, and III continued, preparations were made for the ground assault that would force Iraqi troops from Kuwait. At the same time, the Soviet Union initiated negotiations with Saddam Hussein to reach a diplomatic solution to the crisis and avert a ground war.<sup>171</sup> By 22 February, Saddam appears to have agreed to a Soviet proposal for withdrawal, as shown in a letter from Saddam to Mikhail Gorbachev.<sup>172</sup> The Iraqi position was that it would take four days to withdraw from Kuwait City, and all forces would leave Kuwait within three weeks.<sup>173</sup> The Bush administration and others in the Coalition viewed this timeframe as excessive, a stalling tactic on behalf of Saddam.<sup>174</sup> As a counterproposal, President Bush issued an ultimatum to Saddam, through Gorbachev, that the Iraqis must initiate the withdrawal by 23 February and complete it within a week.<sup>175</sup> Gorbachev transmitted this request to the Iraqis, and Saddam appears to have acceded to it in a reply letter.<sup>176</sup> By this stage, however, the diplomatic back-and-forth had taken several days, and the chain of events leading to the Coalition ground assault had been initiated. Afterwards,

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<sup>171</sup> Dick Cheney, with Liz Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011), 217-218.

<sup>172</sup> SH-SHTP-A-000-630, "As Coalition Ground Forces Storm into Southern Iraq and Kuwait, Iraqi Leaders Discuss Soviet Diplomacy," 24 February 1991, Transcript printed in *The Saddam Tapes*, 195-200.

<sup>173</sup> SH-SHTP-A-000-633, "Just Before the Ground War Began, Saddam Discussed His Plans to Withdraw Iraqi Forces from Kuwait," 24 February 1991, Transcript printed in *The Saddam Tapes*, 200-201.

<sup>174</sup> In a telephone conversation with President Gorbachev, President Bush said, "It took him only 48 hours to get a hell of a lot of troops in Kuwait and, now I admit that a lot of their transportation is down, but they can do a lot better than a relatively slow withdrawal..." "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation: Telcon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR On February 21, 1991," <http://documents.nytimes.com/transcript-of-conversations-between-president-george-bush-and-mikhail-gorbachev#document/p12/a8> (accessed 21 May 2011).

<sup>175</sup> "Memorandum of Telephone Conversation: Telcon with President Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR On February 22, 1991," <http://documents.nytimes.com/transcript-of-conversations-between-president-george-bush-and-mikhail-gorbachev#document/p12/a8> (accessed 21 May 2011).

<sup>176</sup> SH-SHTP-A-000-630, "Iraqi Leaders Discuss Soviet Diplomacy," Transcript printed in *The Saddam Tapes*, 195-200.

Saddam believed that the whole exercise was a trick to divert his attention.<sup>177</sup> It is important to note, however, that the Iraqi President was willing to withdraw Iraqi forces from Kuwait before the ground war began, although he did not display a great sense of urgency to do so, and he still believed that his army could inflict significant casualties on the invading Coalition forces.<sup>178</sup> The world will never know if Saddam would have followed through on his commitment to Gorbachev, but there is significant evidence to suggest that the Coalition could have accomplished its fundamental objective—the removal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait—with no Phase IV ground invasion. Since leadership attack was such a critical part of the air attacks in Phases I-III, it is logical to conclude that it contributed to this end. More will be said on this possibility at the end of the chapter.

### **Attacks on Military Leaders in the Field**

Despite Saddam's confidence, the Iraqi regular army in Kuwait was in no position to stand up to the Coalition offensive. By the time the ground war started, Coalition airstrikes had pummeled the Iraqi Army and, to a lesser degree, the Republican Guard.<sup>179</sup> This included the repeated attacks on communications lines and command posts.<sup>180</sup> It also included the jamming of tactical radios, and some Iraqis were convinced that the Coalition was passing disinformation on these radios as well.<sup>181</sup> As Coalition troops began the invasion,

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Glosson, *War With Iraq*, 260.

<sup>180</sup> GWAPS, *Effects and Effectiveness*, 223-224. For an interesting account of an attack on a Republican Guard command facility on the first night of the war, see Captain Michael S. O'Grady, "The First Day," *From the Line in the Sand: Accounts of USAF Company Grade Officers in Support of Desert Shield/Desert Storm*, Michael P. Vriesenga, ed., (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 1994), 227-228.

<sup>181</sup> Woods, *Mother of All Battles*, 232.

these attacks had made it almost impossible for the Iraqi land commanders to communicate within the Kuwaiti theater. The operational command in al-Basrah was cut off from the tactical command posts. When couriers were sent forward, they found themselves moving against the flow of traffic and subject to air attacks along the way. Moreover, when they arrived at the tactical headquarters, they had great difficulty locating the commanding officers.<sup>182</sup> It appears that Iraqi army leadership was largely absent during the chaotic withdrawal from Kuwait. One senior officer recalled, “what was bad was the lack of commanders. When there is no commander, how can a withdrawal take place? When there is no company commander or a regimental commander or a brigade commander, then how can you carry out a withdrawal?”<sup>183</sup>

Because of this lack of leadership, what had been planned as an orderly withdrawal from Kuwait turned into chaos and slaughter. The military headquarters in Baghdad, led by Lieutenant General Sultan Hasim, planned a phased withdrawal of the Iraqi army from Kuwait over several days under the cover of the Republican Guard.<sup>184</sup> This order was transmitted down to each corps headquarters (except for the III Corps and the Gulf Operations Command, which could not be contacted).<sup>185</sup> The plan called for each of the Iraqi units to “maintain continuous coordination” with each other, and it specifically warned that

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<sup>182</sup> Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 232. Includes information from Harmony Document Folder ISGP-2003-M0003943.

<sup>183</sup> Harmony Document Folder ISGP-2003-M0004181. Quoted in Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 232.

<sup>184</sup> Harmony Document Folder ISGP-2003-M00046033. Quoted in Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 228-229.

<sup>185</sup> Woods, *Mother of All Battles*, 228.

“communications must be constant between them.”<sup>186</sup> In this, the Iraqi high command was both correct in military doctrine and totally ignorant of the battlefield conditions. As stated above, tactical commanders were not in control of their own organizations, must less in constant coordination with adjacent units. The result was predictable. With few exceptions, the retreat from Kuwait broke down into a panic made all the more acute by the specter of Coalition land forces chasing the Iraqis and incessant pounding from the air. At the tactical level, leadership attack seems to have caused widespread paralysis and loss of cohesion.

### **Psychological Operations and Mass Desertions**

Instead of running or fighting, many Iraqi soldiers made the decision to surrender, doing so in unexpectedly large numbers. This phenomenon began before the land attack started and continued throughout the war.<sup>187</sup> During the first three phases of Operation Desert Storm, the Coalition targeted these front-line troops with leaflets and radio messages as well as bombs. The leaflets and radio messages were meant to deceive the Iraqis as to Coalition intentions, discourage the Iraqi soldiers from fighting, and encourage these soldiers to surrender.<sup>188</sup> The Coalition specifically targeted the will of Iraqi soldiers to fight and die for Saddam.<sup>189</sup> It also subjected them to terrifying bombardment, and the soldiers were largely helpless in the face of Coalition airpower. After the war, General Horner described the plight

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<sup>186</sup> Harmony Document Folder ISGP-2003-M00046033. Quoted in Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 228-229.

<sup>187</sup> Jeffrey B. Jones, Colonel, USA, “Psychological Operations in Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Urban Freedom,” *Special Warfare*, July 1994, 27. Jones commanded the 8th PSYOP Battalion during Operation Desert Storm.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. The main deceptive message was that the Iraqis should expect a major frontal assault by Coalition forces into Kuwait, including an amphibious operation conducted by the U.S. Marine Corps.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

of the soldiers in Iraq's Regular Army: "Probably the most horrible existence anybody had in Desert Shield and Desert Storm had to be the Iraqi soldier in the front lines."<sup>190</sup> In the end, the cumulative effects of deprivation, psychological operations, bombing, and fear of the Coalition ground assault pushed Iraqi soldiers to surrender, and they did so in droves.

Deserters began surrendering well before the ground offensive started, and during the ground assault, the Coalition took so many prisoners that it could not account for them all. Tens of thousands surrendered without a fight.<sup>191</sup> After making his escape from the Iraqi army, one of the deserters relayed this report to the Coalition:

The morale of the 20th Division personnel is not different than the morale of the other divisions located in Kuwait. Everybody is suffering from very low morale. First, personnel do not believe in the cause for which they [were] placed in Kuwaiti lands. Second, the supply lines are cut off from them. The men get only one meal a day which does not exceed rice without meat. The water is scarce, each three men get 1.65 liters for drinking water. ... They are all thinking about surrendering to the Allied forces; however, fear is stopping them. Yet they see their best time to surrender is when the Allied forces start their ground attack. The positions of the 20<sup>th</sup> Division have been exposed to bombardment three times a day. ... Equipment [has] not been replaced and the bodies of dead men remain in their position. The bombardment and not seeing any [Iraqi] resistance destroyed the morale of the men.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> General Horner elaborates: "He [the Iraqi soldier] was sent out there on a mission that was abhorrent to his religion, one Muslim attacking another, he knew that in the eyes of God he was wrong. He worked for a leader who he probably hated personally but feared more and he knew that he was sent out there, he had to know he was a throwaway, he was sent out there to die, to inflict whatever casualties he could on the Americans, but to slow 'em down enough for the Republican Guard to come in and take all the glory, inflict enough casualties that the American people would rise up in arms and demand that our army be brought home, plus he's not going to get food, he's not going to get water, he's going to be kept in the dark communications-wise because we're bombing the hell out of all the lines of communications and re-supply routes." Horner, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>191</sup> Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 435-438, 453-455.

<sup>192</sup> Harmony Document FM8607. Quoted in Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 202-203.

This deserter makes it clear that a combination of negative factors was responsible for the low morale. The first factor mentioned is the lack of belief in the cause for which they were fighting. This observation is interesting, because one of the first responsibilities of the military leader is to help soldiers understand why they are fighting. The Coalition leveraged the deteriorating situation by attacking the soldiers' will to fight for Saddam. This effort included the dropping of numerous leaflets and broadcasting messages over loudspeakers and radio to Iraqi soldiers on the front lines. Some of these messages attacked Iraqi leadership by attempting to "create doubt and fissures in the Iraqi leadership" as well as encouraging "Iraqi discord, alienation, malingering, loss of confidence, resistance, desertion and defection."<sup>193</sup> They specifically targeted the frayed relationship between Saddam and the average Iraqi soldier with messages such as this one printed on numerous leaflets: "Saddam is the cause of the war and its sorrows. He must be stopped. Join with your brothers and demonstrate rejection of Saddam's brutal policies. There will be no peace with Saddam."<sup>194</sup> By all accounts, this effort succeeded in discouraging large portions of the Iraqi ground forces from fighting.<sup>195</sup> Many deserters had leaflets in their possession when they surrendered, despite threats of execution for doing so.<sup>196</sup> This has led to the reasonable conclusion that these forms

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<sup>193</sup> Jones, "Psychological Operations," 23.

<sup>194</sup> 4th Psychological Operations Group (Airborne), *Leaflets of the Persian Gulf War*, 1991, 27. This is an excellent source for leaflets used in Operation Desert Storm.

<sup>195</sup> United States Central Command, *Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm: Executive Summary* [redacted report], 11 July 1991, 12.

<sup>196</sup> Jones, "Psychological Operations," 27.

of leadership attack contributed significantly to the low morale of the Iraqi soldiers on the front and eventually to the mass surrenders.<sup>197</sup>

### **Critical Conclusions: The Gulf War Air Power Survey**

Effects such as the loss of tactical leadership and the surrenders of large portions of Iraq's forces led to the quick conclusion of Operation Desert Storm. After the war was over, military analysts sought to determine the connections between actions, effects, and outcomes. One key effort looked to capture observations about leadership attack. This was the *Gulf War Air Power Survey* group, commissioned by the Secretary of the U.S. Air Force and led by Professor Eliot A. Cohen from the School of Advanced International Studies at the Johns Hopkins University. The *Survey* group was composed of numerous analysts, many with military experience. The group conducted an exhaustive study where they were allowed access to original sources, including Coalition records—both classified and unclassified—as well as interviews with key personnel. In 1994, the group published *The Gulf War Air Power Survey* as eleven studies printed in five volumes. Despite its sponsorship, this study is remarkable for its academic rigor and lack of bias.

The authors do not shy from making observations that can be interpreted as critical of Coalition leaders and their planners. The most important example where the authors offer critical observations occurs as they attempt to determine the effectiveness of striking the

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<sup>197</sup> Despite the success of the tactical portion of the Psychological Operations plan, the use of such operations to encourage rebellion at the strategic level against Saddam never materialized to the same level. As General Horner describes, "We could never get it off the ground because the Saudis wanted to be in control of it, and they were really not interested in trying to persuade people to rebel against their government. I think that is the bottom line. I think they also wanted to downplay the role of the Americans in the PSYOPS campaign." General Charles Horner, USAF, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, Air Force Historical Research Agency, Transcript, 2 December 1991 and 4 March 1992, quoted in Olsen, *John Warden*, 215.

leadership and communication targets. “Unfortunately,” they write in the *Survey*, “there remains some ambiguity as to the specific, concrete aims for which these target categories were attacked by Coalition air forces during Desert Storm.”<sup>198</sup> This overall conclusion frames the *Survey* authors’ key observations of leadership attack.

Their first observation involves a look at the raw numbers. According to the Coalition’s accounting, a total of 260 strikes were conducted against Leadership (L) targets, and another 580 strikes were carried out against Telecommunications/Command, Control, and Communications (CCC) targets.<sup>199</sup> This seems like a considerable number until it is compared with the total amount of strikes, which numbered greater than 42,000.<sup>200</sup> Even if every one of these strikes was an instance of leadership attack, these only represented roughly 2 percent of the overall effort. Even so, this amount of strikes was not trivial, and given the importance of leadership attack in the original plan, one may have reasonably expected that there would be positive results to show for these strikes.

This leads to the authors’ second observation, which is that when judged against the original intent of leadership attack, the results were disappointing. Coalition planners had high hopes for leadership attack. “Yet, at the war’s end,” write the authors, “Saddam Hussein was still alive and his Ba’athist regime still in power.”<sup>201</sup> Moreover, Saddam still possessed the ability to command and control his forces. This was evident by the fact that the Iraqi president still maintained control over the Scud missiles.<sup>202</sup> While the Iraqi communication

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<sup>198</sup> GWAPS, *Effects and Effectiveness*, 274.

<sup>199</sup> GWAPS, *Summary Report*, 70-71.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*



system was obviously degraded by the war's end, Saddam retained enough connectivity to issue strategic-level orders such as the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait.<sup>203</sup> This was less than was promised by Warden and like-minded airmen like Glosson. As the authors observe, "the results of these attacks clearly fell short of fulfilling the ambitious hope, entertained by at least some airmen, that bombing the L and CCC target categories might put enough pressure on the regime to bring about its overthrow and completely sever communications between the leaders in Baghdad and their military forces."<sup>204</sup> When this did not happen, it called the entire effort into question. The authors clearly anticipated that many would conclude that leadership attack simply did not work.

Yet the *Survey* authors offer an important caveat. "In retrospect," they write, "it may be fairer to ask how much disruption and dislocation these attacks imposed on the functioning of the Iraqi government and its telecommunications."<sup>205</sup> They explain, "Common sense would argue that strikes against these two target categories must have imposed *some*, if not *considerable*, disruption and dislocation on the Iraqis involved (emphasis in original)."<sup>206</sup> They then go on to list some of the obvious effects of leadership attack. First, attacks against government buildings forced the relocation of multiple offices. Second, the attacks on communication systems forced the Iraqis to go to their backups, which were not as capable. Third, many governmental leaders had to fear for their lives. Fourth, the Ba'ath regime appeared to lose its control over the population, as seen in the rebellions that occurred immediately after the war. To the authors, these points offer evidence that leadership attack

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

was somewhat effective, yet because of the lack of access to insider accounts, this effectiveness “cannot be quantified, not even roughly.”<sup>207</sup>

Interestingly, the authors lament their lack of access to Iraqi insider accounts. This study has benefited from the emergence of Iraqi accounts that surfaced in the years after the Iraq War of 2003. Many of these have been included in this chapter, and as predicted by the authors of the *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, these accounts offer great insight into the effectiveness of leadership attack. For example, it is now known that Saddam believed that leadership attack efforts weakened his regime. He told his top Ba’ath leaders that the bombing of government buildings created a situation where opposition leaders could influence the Iraqi people. The Iraqi president lamented, “the government offices were nonexistent. In such a way that whoever would say that he was a Sultan, it was possible for him to become a Sultan.”<sup>208</sup> Additionally, insider accounts of Iraqi soldiers make it clear that the psychological attacks on Saddam’s leadership created a deep sense of mistrust among many soldiers on the front lines.<sup>209</sup> Saddam’s ability to communicate with his field commanders and the Scud missile forces remained intact despite the Coalition’s multiple attacks, but the field commanders largely lost their ability to communicate with their subordinate commanders.<sup>210</sup> When Saddam ordered the retreat from Kuwait, these operational commanders received the

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> SH-SHTP-A-000-739, 3 April 1991. Transcript printed in *The Saddam Tapes*, 201. See section titled “Attacks on Leadership Facilities” in this chapter.

<sup>209</sup> Harmony Document FM8607. Quoted in Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 202-203. See section titled “Psychological Operations and Mass Desertions” in this chapter.

<sup>210</sup> Harmony Document Folder ISGP-2003-M0004181. Quoted in Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 232. See section titled “Attacks on Military Leaders in the Field” in this chapter.

order, but were not able to control their forces in the retreat.<sup>211</sup> While quantifying the effects of leadership attack remains impossible, a reasonable conclusion is that the leadership attack strategy did inflict enough disruption to Iraq's leadership to be judged as *considerable*. It could not, however, be classified as decisive.

Given these results, how does one judge the effectiveness of leadership attack in Operation Desert Storm, and how does the evidence support or refute the two theories in consideration? The last few sections of this chapter will offer answers to these pivotal questions.

### **The Most Important—and Unmeasurable—Cost of Leadership Attack**

While there were several benefits of leadership attack as recognized in the *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, it is important to acknowledge that there were costs associated with this strategy. As will be discussed below, leadership attack was relatively cheap in terms of measurable costs, but it was the immeasurable cost that was most significant. This cost was the lack of debate over alternative operational approaches that may have helped realize a better outcome. To gain an understanding of this cost, it is instructive to consider how leadership attack became part of the plan. All key decision makers, including Bush, Cheney, Powell and Schwarzkopf, agreed early in the planning process to key concepts of leadership attack proposed by John Warden in the Instant Thunder plan. The consequence of consensus was that alternatives to this element of the operational approach were never seriously debated. Warden and his group of planners had proposed an approach that centered on incapacitating the Iraqi leadership with a short, intense campaign. This premise was never challenged at

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<sup>211</sup> Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 232. Includes information from Harmony Document Folder ISGP-2003-M0003943.

Schwarzkopf's level or above. In fact, the premise that incapacitation of the Iraqi regime would lead to the war's objective became a key principle for designing the operation. It drove how portions of airpower would be used throughout Operation Desert Storm, and it also engendered the phased approach of using airpower as the supported force for the first three phases of the operation. In contrast, the first course of action proposed by Schwarzkopf's land planners—a frontal assault into Kuwait—was proposed and rejected.<sup>212</sup> The result was an innovative flanking maneuver that caught Iraqi forces off guard. In designing the air offensive, alternative courses of action were not considered. General Horner, the Joint Forces Air Component Commander, initially had misgivings over Warden's key premise of attacking the regime, but he never proposed an alternative proposition for the operational approach.<sup>213</sup> Instead, he enlisted three of Warden's planners to help him build the air campaign. Brigadier General Glosson shared the same perspectives on attacking the Iraqi leadership as Colonel Warden, and he both adopted and expanded the approach of Warden's group.<sup>214</sup> Throughout the months of planning that preceded Operation Desert Storm, military commanders and political leaders agreed about the utility of incapacitating the Iraqi leadership without considering alternatives.

There were alternatives to consider. More specifically, there were alternatives that had a more straightforward connection to the primary military objective as stated by President

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<sup>212</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 484-485, and Cheney, *In My Time*, 199-200.

<sup>213</sup> Lieutenant Colonel David Deptula, USAF, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, Air Force Historical Research Agency, K239.0422-82, Transcript, 30.

<sup>214</sup> Glosson, *War With Iraq*, 11-13.

Bush — the ejection of Iraqi forces from Kuwait.<sup>215</sup> In essence, all the Coalition had to do to realize this end was to persuade Saddam Hussein to withdraw his forces. The whole campaign could have been aimed at coercing Saddam to do this, not on incapacitating his regime.<sup>216</sup> If coercion did not work, then the Coalition could force the Iraqis to leave. As long as the removal of the Iraqi army from Kuwait remained the primary objective, the essence of the military campaign could have been summarized in an entirely different way, as demonstrated in this hypothetical mission statement:

*The Coalition will deploy military forces to the Gulf region to deter further Iraqi aggression into Saudi Arabia. The presence of a superior and united military force will support the diplomatic ultimatum that Iraq must leave Kuwait in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 660. If Iraq does not comply, Coalition forces will employ military force to gain and maintain air superiority within the operating area composed of Kuwait and Southern Iraq, cut off Iraqi logistical supply into this area, and attrit Iraqi forces remaining there. Should Iraq continue to defy UNSCR 660, the Coalition will forcibly eject all Iraqi forces from Kuwait and Southern Iraq to reestablish Kuwaiti sovereignty.*

*WMD Branch Plan: If Iraq employs weapons of mass destruction and/or surface-to-surface missiles, Coalition forces will be prepared to employ massive offensive force against military and economic targets throughout Iraq, including in the capital of Baghdad, to degrade and destroy Iraq's nuclear, biological, chemical, and missile capabilities and prevent Iraq from further threatening its neighbors.*

*The military end state of this operation is the total withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and Southern Iraq with a demilitarized zone established in southern Iraq that will protect Kuwait from future threats of Iraqi aggression. This will create the conditions for the political objective of full restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty.*

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<sup>215</sup> The President actually stated four objectives in *National Security Directive 45*, dated 20 August 1990: 1. “the immediate, complete, and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait;” 2. “the restoration of Kuwait’s legitimate government to replace the puppet regime installed by Iraq;” 3. “a commitment to the security and stability of the Persian Gulf; and” 4. “the protection of the lives of American citizens abroad.” President George H.W. Bush, *National Security Directive 45*, 20 August 1990, 2.

<sup>216</sup> This would have been equivalent to a denial strategy as advocated by Robert A. Pape in *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996).

It is worth noting that nothing in this mission description describes leadership attack. A strategy of leadership attack was not required to realize the primary Coalition objective in this operation. The entire campaign could have been designed without it.

Such a formulation may or may not have been better than the one originally proposed by Warden. There are many potential shortcomings with a strategy based on coercion. For example, Saddam could have chosen to withdraw and faced no penalty. Indeed, had he agreed to the Russian diplomatic initiative earlier, he may have done just that. After such a withdrawal, Saddam could have bided his time, waited for U.S., British and French troops to redeploy, then threatened Kuwait again. Saddam may have been able to save face and remain an unacceptable concern to his neighbors for years to come. Alternatively, an approach based on coercion may have led to a better outcome. In searching for the best targets for persuading Saddam to leave Kuwait, the Coalition may have concluded that targeting the Republican Guard in southern Iraq was the best method. In retrospect, it seems clear that these elite divisions were the center of gravity both during the war and after, as they served the strategic function of keeping Saddam's regime in power. Had the Coalition struck the Republican Guard units early in the war, the result may have been quite different, and Saddam may have lost his hold on power.

The point is that there was more than one way to address the issue—to connect military strategy to political aims—but there was never a serious alternative to leadership attack proposed at the policy-maker level. This represents the true opportunity cost of the strategy. Because everyone accepted the need to attack Saddam's regime, the leadership-attack strategy proposed by Warden was never sharpened through debate. As a result,

Coalition leaders made numerous, unspecified assumptions about how leadership attack would help to realize “a better state of peace.” Many of these assumptions fell short.<sup>217</sup>

### **Additional (Minimal) Costs of Leadership Attack**

While recognizing that this opportunity cost may have contributed to unrealized objectives at the end of the war, it is useful to compare the other potential costs with the benefits. The first potential cost was subjecting Coalition airmen to the risk of flying deep inside Iraq. Adopting a leadership attack strategy called for bombing targets in Baghdad, and this meant exposing pilots to the most formidable of Iraq’s air defenses. Although aircraft like the F-117 were specially designed for this type of mission, it still involved significant risk, and leaders had no way of knowing how the battle would unfold above Baghdad.<sup>218</sup> Fortunately, the Coalition lost relatively few aircraft during the war, and this was especially true in the greater Baghdad area. Surprisingly, no F-117s were lost despite repeatedly flying into the most heavily defended areas of Iraq.<sup>219</sup> In all, the Coalition experienced a loss rate of about 1 loss to hostile action for every 1800 “shooter” sorties flown.<sup>220</sup> While every loss is painful to a commander, it is safe to say that Coalition leaders would have been very pleased to accept this loss rate if given the option before the operation commenced.

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<sup>217</sup> President Bush writes about his assumption that Saddam would not survive the war: “I was convinced, as were all our Arab friends and allies, that Hussein would be overthrown once the war ended. ... We underestimated his brutality and cruelty to his own people and the stranglehold he has on his country. We were disappointed, but I do not regret my decision to end the war when we did. I do not believe in what I call ‘mission creep.’ Our mission, as mandated by the United Nations, was clear: end the aggression. We did that. We liberated Kuwait and destroyed Hussein’s military machine so that he could no longer threaten his neighbors.” George H.W. Bush, *All the Best*, 514.

<sup>218</sup> Clancy and Horner, *Every Man a Tiger*, 337.

<sup>219</sup> GWAPS, *Effects and Effectiveness*, 114. 1 EF-111 electronic jamming aircraft was lost to hostile action.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

The second potential cost was time. The air campaign needed time to work—all the leadership and communication targets could not be destroyed in one night. The leadership attack strategy relied on the cumulative effects of many days and nights of bombing. This meant that tens of thousands of Coalition land forces would have to wait in the desert for these effects to develop. This cost was not too high, however, for two reasons. First, the Coalition wanted to damage Iraq's reconnaissance capabilities so that Iraqi commanders would not see the Coalition repositioning its land forces to the West to prepare for the "left hook" assault. This repositioning would require several days, and this time could be put to use in attacking the regime through the air. Additionally, the plan called for the attrition of Iraqi land forces before the initiation of the Coalition ground assault. Much of this attrition was accomplished by airplanes such as the B-52 and A-10 that were not well-suited for attacking leadership targets, so the attrition goals could be pursued simultaneously. The Iraqi ground forces in Kuwait suffered tremendous losses from Coalition air attacks that occurred concurrently with attacks on the regime in Baghdad. This period also provided the Coalition time to degrade battlefield communication and conduct psychological operations against the Iraqi forces in Kuwait. When Coalition land forces crossed the line into Kuwait and Iraq, their opposition had lost much of their capability and will to fight, and they did not anticipate that the major thrust of the Coalition offensive to run from west to east. Because of the low numbers of Coalition airplanes and airmen lost and the valuable use of time during Phases I-III, the measurable costs of conducting leadership attack in Operation Desert Storm were relatively low.



### **(Substantial, but not Decisive) Benefits of Leadership Attack**

Given the low cost of the leadership attack strategy, the benefits appear substantial in comparison. They were not, however, what Colonel Warden and the most optimistic of air planners had hoped. Coalition planners followed Warden's propositions about the importance of leadership and the efficacy of attacking it as they built a plan that included multiple methods designed to incapacitate the Iraqi regime. As detailed above, this plan included attacks on leadership facilities where Saddam might be found, Ba'ath party and police facilities that were symbols of Saddam's regime, military leadership facilities, and communications on all levels—strategic, operational, and tactical. Coalition leaders also directed psychological operations against the Iraqi soldiers on the front lines that attempted to discourage them from fighting for Saddam, disrupting the process of leadership. While the selective attack of leaders has been employed throughout history, this comprehensive and systematic plan of leadership attack was unique at the time.

Despite widespread agreement that the leadership attack strategy was critical, this strategy was never explicitly connected to the primary objective of the war—the removal of Iraqi soldiers from Kuwait. There was no shared assumption of how leadership attack would work. The best evidence for this is that different leaders had very different expectations for the leadership attack strategy. Some believed that it would weaken the regime to the point where a coup could succeed, causing a change in strategic leadership.<sup>221</sup> Others believed it would coerce Saddam into withdrawing his forces from Kuwait to avoid the pain of further

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<sup>221</sup> For example, Richard Haass, the National Security Council Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs, believed this was likely. "The one fly in the ointment was obviously that Saddam was still in power. It was our view that the likely scenario is that Saddam would be overthrown by his own people, probably from the military, who would have essentially been fed up with the fact that this character had twice marched them off into disaster within a decade. And our view was that whilst we couldn't guarantee it that was the most likely course of action." Richard Haass, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Gulf War*, 9 January 1996, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/> (accessed 10 February 2012).

attacks.<sup>222</sup> Still others thought it would cut Saddam off from his forces in Kuwait, isolating these forces and making them more vulnerable to attack.<sup>223</sup> Some simply thought it would increase the fog and friction that the Iraqis would have to overcome, giving the Coalition a military advantage.<sup>224</sup> The linkage from leadership attack to the war's objective was never formally written down or stated, and this allowed key leaders to develop their own ideas about how they hoped leadership attack would work.

In absence of a stated linkage, leaders hoped that leadership attack would bring dramatic results, but they did not design a specific plan to achieve these hoped-for outcomes. While some, like Colin Powell, hoped for “an Iraq still standing, with Saddam overthrown,” the operation did not include planned actions that would recruit leaders for a rebellion, give arms, intelligence and air cover to rebel forces, or create safe havens for those aligned against Saddam.<sup>225</sup> Attacking government buildings was supposed to send messages to the Iraqi population that Saddam Hussein's regime was weakened and vulnerable, but without a strategic communications campaign to explain this, Iraqis were left to lament the fact that their city was being attacked and their lives disrupted. Some hoped that Saddam would decide to withdraw to avoid further punishment, but there is little evidence of a formal

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<sup>222</sup> For example, John Warden thought that, if Saddam was not overthrown, “that he would be in the process of suing for peace...” Warden, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*.

<sup>223</sup> This was General Schwarzkopf's belief: “For our purposes, it was sufficient to silence Saddam—to destroy his ability to command the forces arrayed against ours.” Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take A Hero*, 319.

<sup>224</sup> When asked by Secretary of State James Baker to explain the phrase, “decapitate Saddam regime” in a brief to President Bush, General Glosston responded, “The intent of that slide is to indicate that he will have difficulty communicating and controlling his military and his people, and his people and his country will be visibly in disarray.” Glosston, *War With Iraq*, 61.

<sup>225</sup> Powell, *My American Journey*, 490. Richard Cheney writes, “We hoped that Saddam's military, in particular, might turn against him after the humiliating defeat we had just delivered them on the battlefield, but this failed to happen.” There is no mention of any communication of support or encouragement with Iraqi military leaders regarding this possibility. Cheney, *In My Time*, 224.

analysis to identify the things that Saddam most valued, and when planners proposed bombing for psychological effect—such as hitting targets in Saddam’s tribal home town of Tikrit—the targets were disapproved. Of course many hoped that Saddam would meet his death during the bombing, but the fact that this objective was never stated discouraged a systematic attack plan, including the formation of an intelligence fusion cell to collate reports, develop indicators, and analyze Saddam’s pattern of life. When the Kurds and Shiites rebelled in the aftermath of the war, the United States decided not to offer support (this will be discussed in the following chapter). In short, Coalition leaders’ hopes were never realized in large part because there was no formal plan to achieve the things for which they hoped.

Attacks at the strategic level did not cause strategic paralysis. Neither Saddam or any other top Iraqi government or military official were killed during Operation Desert Storm, although it appears that there were some near misses. Saddam used his expertise in security to great effect, and despite unrelenting pressure applied by Coalition airpower, he overcame many obstacles designed to cut him off from his government agencies, military forces, and population. The concerns about targeting Saddam expressed by Coalition planners and intelligence specialists prior to the operation were well founded. Saddam stayed on the move, and he used safe houses in the middle of urban centers to seek safe haven and conduct business. He traveled discreetly, and he took advantage of communications methods that put him at minimal risk. In all, his adaptation to the bombing was quite remarkable.

The lower levels of the Iraqi government and military did not prove to be as adaptable as the Iraqi president. There was considerable agreement that attacking military leadership would prove effective, and it did. The original Instant Thunder plan included attacks on

military leadership at the operational and tactical levels.<sup>226</sup> Coalition planners retained this focus as they developed the campaign plan for Operation Desert Storm. For the most part, their efforts proved fruitful. The KARI air defense system lost cohesion after attacks on its leadership and communication nodes. Similarly, the attacks on Iraqi army leadership and communications turned an orderly retreat plan issued by the national command in Baghdad into a chaotic rout. Unit leaders lost the ability to control their men internally, and they had no means of coordinating with other units in their area. The result was a battlefield where one side was virtually leaderless according to Iraqi officers. This gave the Coalition forces an invaluable advantage as they pressed the offensive in the air and on the ground.

Despite the limited success of leadership attack at the strategic level and its considerable success at the operational and tactical levels, leadership attack was not a panacea, and it did not win the war. It did not coerce Saddam into withdrawing his forces, although it probably contributed to his willingness to accept the Soviet proposal for withdrawal on the eve of the ground invasion. Moreover, it did not cause strategic paralysis to the extent envisioned by Warden. Instead of paralysis, the effects of leadership attack in Operation Desert Storm, especially at the strategic level, appear more like an extension of Clausewitzian friction. Clausewitz claimed that the only way to overcome friction on the battlefield is through strong leadership—the “iron will-power” of the commander.<sup>227</sup> But when the commander is denied the opportunity to exert this will, friction can rise to the point of being insurmountable. Clausewitz asserts that friction “brings about effects that cannot be measured,” yet its effects

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<sup>226</sup> This focus stayed intact from the conception of the air campaign through execution. One slide of the Instant Thunder plan proposed “Command and Control” targets to include “Ground Forces—Division and Above” and “Air Force Integrated Air Defense System.” Olsen, *John Warden*, Appendix 2 “CENTCOM Air Campaign Plan,” 297.

<sup>227</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, Howard and Paret trans., 119.

are real and detrimental.<sup>228</sup> The Iraqi Regular Army found this to be true in Operation Desert Storm.

The Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait is the closest that the Iraqi military came to Fuller and Warden's paralysis, and there is considerable evidence that Fuller's original idea of following up a strike on an army's operational and tactical leadership with an armed assault was proved to be valid. While the high command in Baghdad communicated a relatively simple and orderly plan of retreat that called for a phased withdrawal and instructed commanders to coordinate this movement with each other, Iraqi forces could not execute this retreat. These forces largely lost cohesion, and the result was a disaster. The grotesque pictures of the "highway of death" provides remarkable testimony to the effectiveness of leadership attack at the operational and tactical levels.

How much did leadership attack contribute to the overall goal of getting Iraqi forces out of Kuwait? Perhaps the best way to answer that is to consider what would have happened if the leadership attack strategy had not been tried. With leadership in place, the Iraqi air defenses could have successfully engaged more Coalition airplanes. Their Soviet systems were quite capable, especially when employed as an integrated whole. On the ground, the Coalition forces enjoyed a tremendous qualitative advantage over the Iraqis, especially the regular army left behind in Kuwait. With Iraqi leadership in place, however, they could have fought with more resolve and effectiveness, which would have increased Coalition casualties. The outcome would not have been in doubt, but the costs could have been considerably higher for the Coalition. This leads to the conclusion that leadership attack

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 119-120.

was a major contributor—but not the only contributor—to the one-sided military outcomes that defined Operation Desert Storm.

### **Predictions Versus Reality: Comparing the Theories of Leadership Attack**

In many ways, it should be expected that the primary theory fits well with the case of Operation Desert Storm. It was, after all, the main evidence cited by Colonel Warden as he formally composed his theory of leadership attack after the war. Iraq was a highly centralized society that was accustomed to being led by a strongman wielding absolute power. Leaders and elders within the society were treated with excessive deference when compared to Western cultures. Saddam ran his government in compartments, each dependent upon his guidance and direction. He even ran the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Republican Guard in separate compartments. Because of this, the primary theory's first two propositions seem to be largely valid. Iraq could be modeled fairly well using Warden's five rings model, with Saddam Hussein at the center of everything.<sup>229</sup> Saddam had almost unlimited power to lead within Iraq, and the Iraqi system and its subsystems clearly depended on Saddam for guidance and direction. Because of this, Iraq as a whole, and the Iraqi military as a subsystem, seemed quite vulnerable to attack on centers of gravity, especially those associated with the leadership of Saddam Hussein and his key subordinates.

Despite the evidence that supports the first two propositions, the primary theory's last three propositions do not hold up to strict scrutiny. The Coalition did not have sufficient intelligence to attack Hussein directly, nor was it able to analyze the Iraqi telecommunication

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<sup>229</sup> There was one key weakness in the five rings model as applied to Iraq. Warden's model includes the population as the fifth ring, and it appears to be fairly homogeneous. This was not the case in Iraq. There were at least three distinct populations, each with a different and complex relationship with the centralized government headed by President Saddam Hussein.

system with enough clarity to stop the flow of information at Iraq's strategic level.<sup>230</sup> Despite considerable chaos, Saddam remained in control of his country and military at the end of the war. While there were significant portions of the government that were weakened due to Coalition bombing, Saddam still exerted control over the most important institution in Iraq—the Republican Guard. This allowed him to reestablish control over the areas where other parts of the Ba'ath regime were weakened. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that Iraq suffered from strategic paralysis.

It is much easier to make the case that certain segments of Iraq—what Warden would identify as outer rings in his model—did experience paralysis. This was true of the Iraqi air defense system, which lost its leadership in the form of the automated KARI system. As a result, air defenses lost their integration and performed very poorly against Coalition aircraft. The Regular Army also suffered symptoms of paralysis as it retreated from Kuwait in disarray. Army leaders lost control of their forces and had no ability to communicate up the chain or with each other. Finally, lower levels of the Iraqi government were unable to provide a visible presence and continuing services within their communities, and Saddam himself believed that this encouraged the follow-on rebellions that directly threatened his leadership. Paralysis may not have occurred at the strategic level, but Iraqi units and organizations at the lower levels seem to have experienced it to a considerable degree.

The most important prediction of the primary theory is that the threat of imminent paralysis will cause the enemy leader to concede, or the achievement of paralysis will lead to

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<sup>230</sup> General Horner sums up his views on the lack of intelligence: "We sure didn't succeed in our efforts to disrupt Iraqi leadership, not because we were unable to kill the needed targets, but because we were unaware of what targets we needed to destroy." Charles Horner, "Q&A with Lt. Gen. Charles Horner," *The Washington Post Online*, July 1998, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/fogofwar/hornertext.htm> (accessed 22 May 2012).

enemy collapse and allow one to impose concessions as required. For reasons that he never fully divulges in taped meetings, Saddam was willing to pull his troops out of Kuwait before the ground assault began. He did not, however, appear to have a great sense of urgency about the matter, nor did he think that his forces were doomed to failure against the Coalition ground offensive. Coalition leaders believed that Saddam was stalling, and they were unwilling to wait for a negotiated peace. These leaders ordered the ground invasion, and this Coalition offensive quickly gained the upper hand on Regular Army in Kuwait. When Saddam ordered a hasty retreat, the result was a rout. Coalition leaders could have used the operational paralysis experienced by Iraqi forces to follow up and destroy many of them, but that would have required a significant ground campaign much deeper into Iraq, and this may have frayed Coalition unity.<sup>231</sup> Thus, the primary theory falls short. Strategic paralysis was never achieved, so it did not lead to victory. Operational paralysis was achieved, and it could have led to victory and a lasting peace, but only with a major follow-up campaign that may have jeopardized one of the major political objectives of the war—preserving Coalition unity. In this way, Operation Desert Storm brings to light weaknesses in the primary theory, especially in its proposed linkage with the achievement of victory and a lasting peace.

In considering the alternative theory, there are a few key observations that should be made. First, the fact that the primary theory is largely valid for the first two propositions does not invalidate the alternative theory. The alternative theory simply asserts that organizations vary according to structure, the role of leadership, the degree of centralization, and their

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<sup>231</sup> For his part, Schwarzkopf did not believe that he could have kept the Coalition together for a march against Baghdad. "...had we gone on to Baghdad, I don't believe the French would have gone and I'm quite sure that the Arab coalition would not have gone, the coalition would have ruptured and the only people that would have gone would have been the United Kingdom and the United States of America." Schwarzkopf, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.



vulnerability to attacks on key nodes. Iraq happened to be highly centralized and dependent upon a strong leader. Other states and organizations could be different. Much more evidence is needed to assess the alternative theory's view of organizations.

Where the alternative theory seems to hold up is in its last three propositions. The alternative theory states that intelligence is always incomplete, and a bit of luck is needed to accomplish a complex attack on enemy leadership. This proposition proved valid in Operation Desert Storm, as the Coalition seems to have gotten close to killing Saddam from the air, but they never developed predictive intelligence about his whereabouts. In addition, the Coalition did not have sufficient intelligence to cut off Saddam's communication with Iraqi organizations under his command. Moreover, the alternative theory states that paralysis is most likely to be achieved at the operational and tactical levels, and this was certainly the case in Operation Desert Storm. The Coalition was able to disrupt military leadership at these levels to the point where Iraqi units lost their cohesion. As these forces were engaged, it became much easier for Coalition ground forces to defeat them in detail.

Finally, the alternative theory is much more satisfying when considering the linkage between leadership attack and victory. Saddam was ready to concede, but he was not allowed the opportunity, at least not on his chosen timetable. When paralysis at the operational and tactical levels ensued, the Coalition was in a position to impose victory, but political constraints discouraged the follow-up actions required. Even limited follow up—perhaps cutting off the retreat of the Republican Guard and degrading it with artillery and air attacks for a short time—may have tipped the balance against Saddam. It seems unlikely that this limited option would have broken up the Coalition. The point is that the choice was not between a march to Baghdad or stopping at the Kuwaiti border. There were other options,

and had Coalition leaders been expecting that paralysis and collapse would still require significant follow up—as the alternative theory makes clear—they may have been much less willing to rely upon their “hopes” that Saddam would fall after a 100-hour ground war.

As it turns out, such hopes were unfounded. Saddam kept power and continued to defy the will of the United Nations for 12 more years. Eventually, this defiance led to his regime being targeted again during the Iraq War of 2003. In the meantime, Iraq and President Saddam Hussein would be subject to harsh economic and military sanctions, no-fly zones, sporadic attacks, and increasing isolation from the world community. During this time, there were several instances of leadership attack, some of which came close to toppling the Iraqi President and his regime prior to the decisive blow in 2003.

## Chapter Seven

### The Interwar Years: 1991-2001

*The people need strict measures so that they can feel protected by this strictness.*

The peasant girl, Zabibah, to King 'Arab  
From the novel زبيبة والملك (*Zabibah and the King*)  
Authored by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein

Despite the intense focus on leadership attack in Operation Desert Storm, Saddam Hussein maintained his hold on power and remained a problem for the international community.<sup>1</sup> For the next 10 years, world leaders, especially those in the United States and United Kingdom, sought to contain the Iraqi threat through a combination of United Nations Security Council resolutions, economic sanctions, no-fly zones, inspections of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs, periodic airstrikes, and stern rhetoric. To a large degree, this worked. Saddam Hussein did not invade any of Iraq's neighbors or develop a usable WMD capability. World leaders talked of keeping Saddam in a box. Although he was free to rule over his country, the goal was to keep him from hurting anyone outside of Iraq. For the most part, he did not.

It was a different story inside Iraq. Saddam nearly lost control of Iraq during the uprisings that engulfed Iraq after the cease fire agreement ended Operation Desert Storm. He was able, however, to lead forces that remained loyal—mainly Iraq's Republican Guard—to put down this rebellion and reestablish control. He then consolidated his position as Iraq's

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would later write about the challenge of dealing with Iraq: "Of all the headaches inherited by the Clinton administration, Saddam Hussein was the most persistent." Madeleine Albright, *Madame Secretary: A Memoir* (New York: Miramax Books, 2003), 346.

unquestioned ruler through the establishment of multiple security organizations, adherence to the strictest security methods, and the skillful manipulation of fear throughout Iraqi society. Saddam also engaged in a long-term struggle with the arms inspectors sponsored by the United Nations. These inspectors were never allowed complete access, so they could never confirm that Iraq's once-active chemical, biological, nuclear, and missile programs were defunct. In response to Saddam's intransigence, Coalition members kept up the pressure on Iraq through strict economic sanctions and no-fly zones. This stalemate continued through 2001, and the Iraqi people were the ones who suffered the simultaneous rule of a tyrant and lack of resources from the outside world.

This chapter focuses on the period between the Gulf War of 1991 and the terrorist attacks of 2001. During this important time, leadership attack was applied by the remaining members of the Coalition to weaken the Iraqi regime, especially during smaller-scale military operations such as Operations Desert Strike and Desert Fox. Also during this period, Saddam Hussein became increasingly isolated, and Iraq's military atrophied. Paradoxically, Saddam was able to strengthen his grip on power within Iraq. Saddam was primarily concerned about the internal threat within Iraq, and many of his actions during this period were aimed at deterring and defeating this threat. The most pressing external threat to Iraq remained its neighbor, Iran. In the end, however, it would be the remaining members of the anti-Iraq Coalition — not internal conspirators or Iran — that took final aim at Saddam and the Ba'ath regime. Many of the actions that Saddam took to consolidate power worked against him when Iraq was finally invaded. Most importantly for this study, the Iraqi regime of 2001 was more vulnerable than ever to leadership attack. The chapter begins with the rebellions after the Gulf War and continues chronologically to the period just before the 11 September

attacks. In doing so, it provides critical context for the Iraq War of 2003. It also discusses how the events of this period served to change the processes of leadership within Iraq, thus making the country even more susceptible to attacks on its leadership. One can argue that the developments of this period set the stage for the paralysis and collapse of the Iraqi government during the Iraq War of 2003.

### **Surviving the Real Storm: Shiite and Kurdish Rebellions**

As Operation Desert Storm drew to a close, the cords that bound Iraqi society began to fray. Specifically, Saddam's hold on power appeared to be fading. Saddam's physician describes the scene in the capital:

There was chaos in Baghdad too. A power vacuum had developed. Top civil servants abandoned their desks. Members of the Baath Party, who controlled every neighborhood, were suddenly nowhere to be seen. Policemen stayed at home. The regime was on its last legs, so the rumours whispered. Either the generals would intervene and the army take over or we would see American soldiers in Baghdad. The signs of break up were obvious. All over the capital, even in the centre of town, pictures and murals of Saddam were being defaced with black paint.<sup>2</sup>

These effects were not confined to Baghdad. All over Iraq, and especially in the Shiite-dominated south and the Kurdish north, the Ba'ath party's hold on power was severely weakened. This set the stage for the most dire threat to Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath regime since he assumed power in 1979.

At roughly the same time the formal cease fire agreement between Iraq and the Coalition was taking effect, a fateful scene played out in Basra's Sa'ad Square. A disgruntled

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<sup>2</sup> Ala Bashir, with Lars Sigurd Sunnana, *The Insider: Trapped in Saddam's Brutal Regime* (London: Abacus, 2005), 115.

young officer was leading a column of tanks through the city in retreat. When he arrived at the square, he stopped in front of the prominent portrait of Saddam Hussein, stood on top of his tank, and did the unthinkable: he denounced Saddam's leadership. "What has befallen us of defeat, shame, and humiliation, Saddam, is the result of your follies, your miscalculations, and your irresponsible actions."<sup>3</sup> With a few unscripted words, this young officer gave voice to what many in the Regular Army—and many Iraqi citizens—were thinking but did not have the courage to say. The officer then climbed back into the tank and proceeded to destroy the portrait with several blasts. A spontaneous revolt erupted. People began to chant, "Saddam is finished!"<sup>4</sup> The crowd attacked symbols of the Ba'ath Party, including police stations, Ba'ath headquarters, and the governor's palace.<sup>5</sup> The revolt also brought widespread looting and general chaos.<sup>6</sup> The revolt quickly spread throughout Iraq's southern areas, including important cities such as Nasiriyah, Karbala, and Najaf. Within a few weeks, Saddam and his Ba'ath Party had lost control of southern Iraq.<sup>7</sup> The fortunate Ba'athists were able to flee, while the unfortunate died at the hands of the mob.

Before continuing, it is important to acknowledge the nature of the revolt and how it changed over time, as this has implications for leadership attack. Through political rhetoric and actions in the United Nations, Coalition leaders such as President George H.W. Bush and

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<sup>3</sup> Kanan Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising, and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2012), 228.

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Woods describes the scene: "The chaos engendered by Coalition air strikes on government facilities, bridges, and communications infrastructure, combined with the broken pieces of an army in full-scale retreat mixing with a long-simmering insurgency created the perfect storm that soon engulfed the regime." Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles: Saddam Hussein's Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 247.

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had gone to great lengths to discredit Saddam Hussein in the eyes of the world. As part of its leadership attack strategy, the Coalition had also conducted a major psychological campaign to discredit Saddam's leadership in the eyes of his followers, especially those in the Regular Army. In many ways, this campaign appears to have worked exactly as intended. Many in the Regular Army chose not to fight. Those that did not surrender were forced to retreat in shame, and as they did, some soldiers chose to express dissatisfaction with Saddam's leadership. Kanan Makiya believes that this event "marks a watershed in the modern history of Iraq."<sup>8</sup> He explains how Iraqis coined a saying to commemorate the importance of these rebellions: *the barrier of fear was broken*. "The officer who jumped on top of his tank in Sa'ad Square began the business of tearing down that barrier. That officer's initiative signaled the beginning of the future for a country that was in effect brain-dead, living in a time warp of absolutist dictatorship."<sup>9</sup>

While it appears that the psychological campaign to discredit Saddam was effective, it is essential to emphasize a key point. Saddam had already done much to discredit himself. Since he had assumed power, he had asked his people to endure countless hardships of war and deprivation. Average Iraqis had nothing to show for these sacrifices, however, and there was little hope of any benefit to come. This led to a growing discontent within the population. One Iraqi mother recalled her reaction upon watching young men in her neighborhood running to the town square to fight the Ba'athists at the local police station. She lamented, "these boys were sick to the teeth of going from one war to the next. Their souls just exploded

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<sup>8</sup> Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence*, 62.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

from frustration.”<sup>10</sup> The experience of Iraq shows that the goal of separating the leader and followers is achievable, and this is especially true when the leader is a catalyst in the process.

The revolt failed, however, because it evolved away from its roots. While the revolt began as a backlash against Saddam and the Ba’ath party, it quickly changed to reflect the ugly fissures that had existed within Iraqi society long before Saddam. Specifically, the revolt in the south reflected the religious cleavage between the majority Shiite population and the minority Sunnis in that area. While most of the revolt was disorganized and spontaneous, there was a visible and vocal element that was organized around Shia Islam, especially in Najaf and Karbala. Prominent Shiite groups such as the Badr Brigade and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution assumed leadership of the rebellion in these towns. The goal of opposing Saddam—a goal that was shared across Shiite-Sunni lines—was pushed from the fore, and the new goal became the establishment of an Islamic republic. As the rebellion spread to Najaf, crowds chanted, “No East, no West, we want an Islamic republic!”<sup>11</sup> This change of focus doomed the rebellion, as it served to discourage key groups from offering their aid and support. Within Iraq, the Shiite rebellion scared Sunnis who might otherwise have opposed Saddam’s regime, and this fear drove them to support Saddam and the Ba’ath.<sup>12</sup> Many Sunnis fled to the Iraq’s central areas, fearing for their lives. The upper middle-class elites within the capital may have been sympathetic to an anti-Saddam rebellion, but they had no reason to join an effort focused on creating a republic founded upon Shia Islam.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 77-79.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



In the United States, the rebellion's change in tone forced the Bush administration to adopt a cautious approach. President George H.W. Bush and his advisers were concerned about the "long-term balance of power at the head of the Gulf."<sup>14</sup> In their view, a unified Iraq was necessary to counterbalance Iran, which in the words of the influential Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, "remained bitterly hostile toward the United States."<sup>15</sup> When it appeared that Iran might be orchestrating the rebellion, U.S. policy makers ruled out the possibility of providing aid.<sup>16</sup> This included a decision not to shoot down Iraqi attack helicopters that were being used against the Shiites in the south.<sup>17</sup>

Those helicopters flew in support of Iraq's Republican Guard, and it was Saddam's elite forces that ultimately ensured his survival. As explained in the last chapter, Saddam had ordered the divisions of the Republican Guard to withdraw back to Basra before the beginning of Operation Desert Storm. Because these divisions were not in the immediate area of the coming invasion, the Coalition did not attack them to the same degree as the

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<sup>14</sup> George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 489.

<sup>15</sup> Colin Powell, with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 531.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 530-531. Richard Cheney, Secretary of Defense at the time, explains that a major reason that the United States did not help the Shiite rebellion was that State Department personnel viewed the Shiites as natural allies to Iran, and Iran's initial support to the rebellion seemed to support this view. He also explains that the United States was trying to keep its commitments to the Coalition and United Nations. "We'd told our Arab allies, the Saudis in particular, that we'd bring enough forces to liberate Kuwait and that we'd leave when we were done, that we were not interested in becoming an occupying power or leaving our combat forces in the desert for the long term. In addition, neither the United Nations nor the U.S. Congress had signed up for anything beyond the liberation of Kuwait." Dick Cheney, with Liz Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011), 225. The view that Iraqi Shiites were natural allies to Iran is somewhat contradicted in a declassified Central Intelligence Agency report issued in March 1991 titled, "Iraq: Implications of Insurrection and Prospects for Saddam's Survival." In this report, CIA analysts argue, "The Shia community in Iraq is not controlled by Tehran and has indigenous historical traditions and religious institutions older than Iran's. Most Iraqi Shia probably would oppose Iraq becoming a satrapy of Iran, but many do support the political program of the Iraqi clerics in Iran, namely an Iranian-style Islamic republic, democratic elections, and majority rule." The report concludes that Saddam was likely to survive the ongoing Shia and Kurdish rebellions. Directorate of Intelligence, "Iraq: Implications of Insurrection and Prospects for Saddam's Survival," *Central Intelligence Agency*, 91-20010, 16 March 1991. Redacted document is now declassified.

<sup>17</sup> Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), 490.

regular divisions inside Kuwait. While some of these units had engaged Coalition forces and been severely hurt in the process, other Republican Guard units remained largely intact.<sup>18</sup> As detailed in Chapter Five, Republican Guard units enjoyed a much stronger relationship with Saddam Hussein than the Regular Army units. These units were also dominated by Sunni officers who received much of their education in the more sophisticated center of the country. When the rebellions took on a pro-Shia slant, Republican Guard commanders saw no dissonance between their professional duty and their personal loyalty. As their tanks rolled into the city of Najaf, their paint schemes included the phrase “no more Shia after today.”<sup>19</sup> These highly trained soldiers and their modern machinery were too much for the rebellion. The Republican Guard swept through the cities and used brutal methods to bring the population back in line.<sup>20</sup> One by one, the rebellions were crushed. In the end, historian Phebe Marr writes that the uprisings and the crackdowns that followed “took at least twice as many lives as the war itself,” with the civilian population enduring most of the casualties.<sup>21</sup> She concludes: “In the end, the Shia of the south, who had for the most part led a genuine domestic revolt against a repressive regime, were left brutally repressed and politically and intellectually isolated.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Saddam’s brutal crackdown “created undying hatred

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 476.

<sup>19</sup> Makiya, 96.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 96-100.

<sup>21</sup> Marr, 232.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

for the regime within large segments of Iraq's population."<sup>23</sup> This would have major implications for the future.

As the Shiite population rebelled in the south, the Kurdish population also rebelled in the north, but their efforts gained much more tangible results. The Kurds benefitted from better organization and a more unified population base in the northern hill country. Although many groups had struggled within the Kurdish minority for control of the movement, after Operation Desert Storm, the Kurds were more unified than ever, and they quickly gained control of large areas and cities such as Kirkuk. Unlike the widespread chaos that engulfed the south, the Kurds were able to establish a form of administration and governance to replace the Ba'ath.<sup>24</sup> This success was short-lived. When the Republican Guard finished crushing the rebellions in the south, Saddam ordered them to move north and do the same to the Kurds. They did so, and this effort resulted in a flood of Kurdish refugees moving toward the Turkish and Iranian borders. This prompted action in the West, as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France implemented a no-fly zone over northern Iraq and demanded the cessation of military operations within this zone.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the United States sent ground forces into northern Iraq under the name of Operation Provide Comfort and established a secure zone for the refugees.<sup>26</sup> In the short term, this created a safe place for the refugees, and many returned. In the longer term, this created a semi-independent territory within Iraq

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<sup>23</sup> Kevin M. Woods, with Michael R. Pease, Mark E. Stout, Williamson Murray, and James G. Lacey, *The Iraqi Perspectives Project: A View of Operation Iraqi Freedom from Saddam's Senior Leadership* (Norfolk, Virginia: The Joint Center for Operational Analysis, U.S. Joint Forces Command, 2006), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 232-233.

<sup>26</sup> Powell, 531.

where the Kurds could establish sanctuary and self-identity.<sup>27</sup> Saddam never regained complete control of these areas, although he would try.

There is one more important point to make about the uprisings and their effect on the Iraqi president. There is no doubt that Saddam considered these uprisings as the most significant threat to him since he established his rule—even more of a threat than the conflict with Iran or the invasion of Coalition forces. “The traitorous rebellion was more difficult than the phase which had been before it,” Saddam lamented to his senior officers.<sup>28</sup> Saddam seemed to be changed by the rebellions. General Ra’ad Hamdani describes this change:

After the invasion of Kuwait, and Iraq’s defeat, his personality changed, especially after the revolt of the Shia community in 14 provinces. That was a huge shock to him, because he always thought he had the support of the Iraqi people. What he had created, he had then lost not only the respect, but he lost the trust in his own people, and he became contemptuous of them. He also lost trust in his close, high-ranking generals, the ones close to him, and even close members of his family, because he thought that maybe some of them had involved themselves in the revolution after the invasion of Kuwait.<sup>29</sup>

After his capture, Saddam was asked about the uprisings of 1991. In this interrogation, Saddam attributed the uprisings to “outlaws and thieves” who were bolstered by Iran.<sup>30</sup> Iran was seeking control of Iraq, something it could not achieve through the war in the 1980s. In this case of insurrection, Saddam believed that the Geneva Conventions did not apply.<sup>31</sup> He

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<sup>27</sup> Marr, 233-234.

<sup>28</sup> Harmony Document Folder ISGQ-2003-M0003474, quoted in Woods, *The Mother of All Battles*, 249.

<sup>29</sup> Kevin M. Woods, Williamson Murray, and Thomas Holaday, “Saddam’s War: An Iraqi Military Perspective of the Iran-Iraq War,” (Washington D.C.: National Defense University, 2009), 42-43, <http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/pdf/saddams-war.pdf> (accessed 25 January 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Interview Session Number 14 with Saddam Hussein, 13 March 2004, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Document is now declassified, 3, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB279/index.htm> (accessed 5 June 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

argued that if the government had not used strong—even brutal—methods to quell the rebellion, many Iraqis would have acted out of sympathy to the rebels, thinking that one day they would eventually assume power. These rebels needed to be “put in their place ... if not by word, then by weapon.”<sup>32</sup> Eventually, the rebels were put in their place, allowing Saddam and his regime to survive the insurrections. This left an uneasy and largely unresolved situation within Iraq and in the larger Middle East.

### **“The No-Fly Zone War”**

In the days following Operation Desert Storm, the United Nations Security Council passed two critical resolutions. The first was Resolution 687, passed on 3 April 1991, which placed four key demands upon Iraq. First, Iraq was to respect the international boundary with Kuwait. Second, the Council demanded that Iraq destroy all chemical weapons, biological weapons, and missiles under its control. Third, the Council demanded that Iraq cease work on programs to develop WMD, including nuclear weapons. Finally, the Council required Iraq to accept the presence of a “special commission” to verify the destruction of all chemical, biological, and missile capabilities.<sup>33</sup> Two days later, in response to Iraq’s brutal repression of the Kurdish and Shiite populations during the uprisings, the Council passed Resolution 688, which condemned Iraq’s actions and demanded that Iraq stop the violence.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Interview Session Number 15 with Saddam Hussein, 16 March 2004, Federal Bureau of Investigation, document is now declassified, 3, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB279/index.htm> (accessed 7 March 2013).

<sup>33</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 687, 3 April 1991, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/1991.shtml> (accessed 29 May 2012).

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 688, 5 April 1991, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/1991.shtml> (accessed 29 May 2012). Language contained in Resolution 688 was used as justification for the no-fly zones over Iraq. See “No-Fly Zones: The Legal Position,” *BBC News Online*, 19 February 2001, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/1175950.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1175950.stm) (accessed 29 May 2012).

In addition, this resolution seemed to grant authorities to member nations to participate in deterring violence and helping the Iraqi people.

These two resolutions would frame the interaction between Iraq and the outside world for the next 12 years.<sup>35</sup> Resolution 687 demanded that Saddam accept conditions that he considered an illegitimate and unreasonable intrusion on Iraq's sovereignty, and he would never completely comply with its demands. As the Coalition nations convinced themselves that they had to react to Saddam's defiance, Resolution 688 was referenced as the authority for military actions designed to coerce Saddam into complying with 687 or punish him for noncompliance. This led to a series of confrontations between the Coalition states and Saddam Hussein, none of which was decisive. On the contrary, this unresolved standoff proved harmful for all involved. It was certainly harmful for Saddam's leadership, as both his real and perceived authority diminished over this period.

Some have called this "the No-Fly Zone War" after the two no-fly zones that were implemented over Iraq and patrolled under Operations Northern and Southern Watch.<sup>36</sup> In reality, these no-fly zones were only two of many actions—military and otherwise—that were undertaken to punish, coerce, weaken, and undermine Saddam. Such actions also included periodic strikes against key Iraqi targets, show-of-force deployments to Iraq's borders, demands for Iraq to pay war reparations, and a never-ending stream of political rhetoric against Iraq and Saddam. Perhaps most effective, however, were the stiff economic sanctions implemented against Iraq.<sup>37</sup> These sanctions were severe, and they took a tremendous toll on

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<sup>35</sup> Marr, 236.

<sup>36</sup> "The No-Fly Zone War" (U.S./U.K.-Iraq Conflict) 1991-2003, 23 March 2003, [http://www.historyguy.com/no-fly\\_zone\\_war.html](http://www.historyguy.com/no-fly_zone_war.html) (accessed 4 March 2013).

<sup>37</sup> "Containment: The Iraqi No-Fly Zones," *BBC News Online*, 29 December 1998, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/crisis\\_in\\_the\\_gulf/forces\\_and\\_firepower/244364.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/crisis_in_the_gulf/forces_and_firepower/244364.stm) (accessed 29 May 2012).

the Iraqi people and their military.<sup>38</sup> As the world watched the Iraqi people suffer under the harsh conditions, pressure mounted to lift the sanctions, and the Coalition's resolve began to wane.<sup>39</sup> The lifting of sanctions, however, was tied to the verifiable dismantlement of the Iraqi WMD programs, and Hussein steadfastly refused to cooperate with the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM). So the stalemate continued, and Saddam's sovereignty eroded.

While the disarmament efforts seemed to stagnate, the remaining Coalition members ambled from crisis to crisis, resulting in a gradual weakening of the Coalition. In late 1992, Iraqi military aircraft attempted to violate the no-fly zone, and Coalition aircraft shot one Iraqi fighter down. When Saddam ordered surface-to-air missile batteries into the southern no-fly zone, the Coalition responded with several days of air strikes that extended into January of 1993.<sup>40</sup> These attacks were conducted by the United States, United Kingdom, and France, with basing provided by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The strikes, however, were criticized by many Arab partner nations, including Egypt and Turkey. Russia also expressed its disagreement.<sup>41</sup> Later in 1993, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency uncovered an Iraqi plot to assassinate President George H.W. Bush, and President William J. Clinton—who had defeated President Bush in the 1992 elections—ordered a military strike against the Iraqi security organization that allegedly planned the attacks.<sup>42</sup> This unilateral strike was

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<sup>38</sup> Sheraz Sadiq and Sharon Tiller, "The Debate Over U.N. Sanctions," *Frontline World*, November 2002, <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iraq/sanctions.html> (accessed 29 May 2012). Also see the discussion of sanctions by Phebe Marr in *The Modern History of Iraq*, 238-241.

<sup>39</sup> Albright, *Madame Secretary*, 349.

<sup>40</sup> Paul K. White, "Airpower and a Decade of Containment," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Winter 2000-2001, 36.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel L. Byman and Matthew C. Waxman, *Confronting Iraq: U.S. Policy and the Use of Force Since the Gulf War* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2000), 50, 53.

<sup>42</sup> Powell, 584-585, and David Von Drehle and R. Jeffery Smith, "U.S. Strikes Iraq for Plot to Kill Bush," *The Washington Post*, 27 June 1993, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/iraq/timeline/062793.htm> (accessed 8 March 2013).

conducted with cruise missiles by the United States.<sup>43</sup> In 1994, Saddam ordered two divisions of the Republican Guard toward the border of Kuwait to instigate a crisis that would lead to talks and some sort of compromise.<sup>44</sup> The aggressive action by the Iraqis prompted the Coalition to conduct Operation Vigilant Warrior, which involved the rapid deployment of ground, air, and sea assets to the area to deter Saddam from another invasion. The United States, United Kingdom, and France sent forces to the region, and these forces were again hosted by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. This show of force persuaded Saddam to withdraw the Republican Guard forces.<sup>45</sup> In addition, this crisis prompted the Security Council to adopt Resolution 949, which prohibited Iraq from moving military forces into its southern areas, creating what some called a “no-drive zone” in the south.<sup>46</sup> On the surface, it seemed that Saddam had reunited the Coalition by feigning a second invasion of Kuwait. After Saddam ordered the withdrawal, however, some countries complained that the United States had overreacted.<sup>47</sup>

On 31 August 1996, Saddam ordered his troops north to attack the Kurdish enclave of Irbil in northern Iraq (Irbil was located in the northern no-fly zone, and it was one of the protected areas established during Operation Provide Comfort). In response, President Clinton ordered an attack on 3 September named Operation Desert Strike consisting of cruise

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<sup>43</sup> Drehle and Smith.

<sup>44</sup> SH-SHTP-A-001-253, “Saddam Says That He Had Deployed Republican Guard Divisions to the South with the Hope of Creating a Crisis (circa 9-10 October 1994),” transcript reprinted in *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant’s Regime 1978-2001*, Kevin M. Woods, David D. Palkki, and Mark E. Stout, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 264.

<sup>45</sup> W. Eric Herr, “Operation Vigilant Warrior: Conventional Deterrence Theory, Doctrine, and Practice,” Master’s Thesis, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 1996.

<sup>46</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 949, 15 April 1994, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/1991.shtml> (accessed 4 March 2013) and White, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Byman and Waxman, 56.



missile strikes against radars, antiaircraft missiles, and command and control facilities.<sup>48</sup> In addition to the strikes, the United States and United Kingdom expanded the southern no-fly zone almost to the outskirts of Baghdad.<sup>49</sup> The United States provided the majority of combat force and led the actions. Both Saudi Arabia and Turkey refused to allow the attack to originate from bases in their countries, and criticism came from France, Russia, and China.<sup>50</sup> This particular crisis exposed the growing fissures in the Coalition. The “Coalition” was increasingly driven by the United States and United Kingdom, with other states showing signs of “sanctions fatigue.”<sup>51</sup> Saddam was also dealing with an important split, although this one was much more personal.

### **The Betrayal of Hussein Kamel**

By all accounts, Hussein Kamel was one of Saddam’s favorites. He was Saddam’s son-in-law, married to Raghda Hussein, Saddam’s oldest daughter. Saddam had appointed Hussein Kamel to numerous important posts, including leadership of the Republican Guard (see Chapter Five of this study), the Special Security Organization, and the Military Industrialization Commission.<sup>52</sup> Hussein Kamel plays a prominent role in many of the captured audiotapes of Saddam’s meetings, and in these tapes he is one of the only officials

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<sup>48</sup> “U.S. Launches Missile Strikes Into Iraq,” *CNN*, 3 September 1996, <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9609/03/iraq.bombing/index.html> (accessed 14 April 2013).

<sup>49</sup> White, 37.

<sup>50</sup> Byman and Waxman, 60-62.

<sup>51</sup> Albright, 350.

<sup>52</sup> *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978-2001*, Kevin M. Woods, David D. Palkki, and Mark E. Stout, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 296.

who is able to tell Saddam the truth, interrupt him, or disagree with him.<sup>53</sup> General Ra'ad Hamdani had an opportunity to observe both Saddam and Hussein Kamel for a long period, and he observed: "As Hussein Kamel became more important, he gained the freedom to do as he pleased without discipline."<sup>54</sup> Saddam's son Uday was jealous of Hussein Kamel and engaged in a long-standing feud with his brother-in-law.<sup>55</sup> Saddam recognized that Hussein Kamel was ambitious. At one point, he advised the younger man not to show too much ambition.<sup>56</sup> The president, however, never saw fit to remove Hussein Kamel. By 1995, Hussein Kamel had been a trusted member of Saddam's inner circle for many years. According to General Hamdani, "Saddam really loved Hussein Kamel."<sup>57</sup>

The unthinkable happened on 7 August 1995. On that night, Hussein Kamel and his wife Raghad fled to Jordan along with Kamel's younger brother and his wife (also one of Saddam's daughters). It did not take long for Saddam to realize that he had been betrayed. The fallout was immediate and intense. General Hamdani recalls, "This was a major shock to Saddam." The general describes a phone call from the president that day:

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<sup>53</sup> After Operation Desert Storm, Hussein Kamel explained to Saddam why he did not hear about the poor morale of his forces in Kuwait. "Sir, for example, when we were in Kuwait, all the members in the supreme command—which you used to send someone to supervise them—morale reached a level, the lowest level anyone could ever reach," he told Saddam. "However, when we used to come and see you, Sir, we could not reveal it to you or inform you of the truth about our situation, as they say." SH-SHTP-A-000-614, "Saddam and Officials Discussing the Uprising in the South," transcript reprinted in *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978-2001*, Kevin M. Woods, David D. Palkki, and Mark E. Stout, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 203. Also see pages 277 and 327.

<sup>54</sup> Woods, *Saddam's Generals*, 62.

<sup>55</sup> Youssef M. Ibrahim, "The Vendetta that is Jolting the House of Hussein," *The New York Times*, 15 August 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/15/world/the-vendetta-that-is-jolting-the-house-of-hussein.html> (accessed 8 March 2013).

<sup>56</sup> SH-SHTP-A-000-837, "Saddam Tells the Revolutionary Command That He Warned Hussein Kamil About Being Too Politically Ambitious (15 August 1995)," transcript reprinted in *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978-2001*, Kevin M. Woods, David D. Palkki, and Mark E. Stout, eds., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 203.

<sup>57</sup> Woods, *Saddam's Generals*, 63.

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 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.<sup>58</sup>

Hussein Kamel’s defection shook the highest levels of the Iraqi regime. A rumor circulated among the Ba’ath elite that the United States would soon lead an attack on Iraq with the aid of Hussein Kamel’s extensive inside knowledge. Top Iraqi officials tried to ascertain why Hussein Kamel defected, but they could never reach a satisfactory conclusion.<sup>59</sup>

Whatever his motivations, Hussein Kamel’s defection did great damage to Saddam’s leadership. Before Kamel’s betrayal, the effort to ensure that Iraq had dismantled its WMD programs was losing momentum. Saddam’s stratagem of “cheat and retreat” seemed to be working.<sup>60</sup> This changed when Hussein Kamel went to Jordan and agreed to extensive interviews with UNSCOM and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. In these interviews, Hussein Kamel discussed Iraq’s nuclear, biological, chemical, and missile programs in great detail.<sup>61</sup> It quickly became apparent that UNSCOM and the Coalition nations had been unaware of a large amount of Iraqi WMD activity. Hussein Kamel’s revelations led informed observers such as Dr. Richard Haass of the Council on Foreign Relations to conclude that

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>59</sup> *The Saddam Tapes*, 298-300.

<sup>60</sup> Robin Wright, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: Spying on Saddam*, 27 April 1999, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/unscom/experts/defectors.html> (accessed 6 March 2013).

<sup>61</sup> United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), “Interview with Hussein Kamal,” 22 August 1995, <http://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/documents/hk.pdf> (accessed 6 March 2013).

Saddam had been quite successful in hiding key aspects of these forbidden programs. “So when Hussein Kamel came out with his information,” Haass remembered, “it was on a scale that was, quite honestly, larger than people like me thought.”<sup>62</sup> While support for UNSCOM had been fading as some believed it was obsessed with examining “dry holes,” this new information resulted in renewed support for UNSCOM and its mission.<sup>63</sup> “It gave UNSCOM a real lease on life,” recalled Haass.<sup>64</sup> For Saddam, UNSCOM’s intrusive mission was a direct threat to his sovereignty and freedom of action, so Kamel’s actions served to further undercut his leadership of Iraq. Saddam was forced to produce many thousands of pages of documents that he claimed were previously lost. In doing so, Saddam lost face with the international community, and Iraq had to endure several more years of the intrusive inspections.<sup>65</sup>

This embarrassment, however, was not the most important effect of Hussein Kamel’s betrayal. While he was already prone to suspicion of those around him, the actions of Hussein Kamel pushed Saddam into paranoia. This change led General Hamdani to observe, “Saddam had one personality before Hussein Kamel fled, and another completely different one afterwards. ... From that day, Saddam turned into a completely different personality, one

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<sup>62</sup> Dr. Richard Haass, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: Spying on Saddam*, 27 April 1999, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/unscom/experts/defectors.html> (accessed 6 March 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Hussein Kamel and his brother inexplicably decided to return to Iraq in 1996, and Saddam promised not to harm them. Saddam kept his promise, but his brother-in-law, Ali Hassan (a.k.a. ‘Chemical Ali’), led a group of relatives to kill the two sons-in-law for their treachery. Hussein Kamel was thought by many to be Saddam’s favorite son and a strong possibility to be his eventual heir. “I can’t think how he could have left Iraq,” lamented Saddam Hussein on the night Hussein Kamel was killed, “and I certainly don’t understand how he could have thought of returning.” Bashir, *The Insider*, 161-174.

with no trust even in members of his family and tribe.”<sup>66</sup> General Hamdani describes how Saddam seemed to withdraw from public life:

I remember that he would always move from place to place, always in isolated places. It got to a point where he would not trust his people or any Arab leader, including King Hussein of Jordan. In the past, he had been an active person, visiting the troops on the ground, the various ministries, factories, and other government establishments, and different villages throughout Iraq. In this new phase, he stopped such activity and started requiring the ministers to come to him, and even then only a small number of officials. Some of the ministers had no kind of close, direct contact with Saddam Hussein for almost 2 years. And this goes even for the military leaders. Saddam did not visit his generals, even those of the Republican Guard.<sup>67</sup>

Saddam also spent long periods of isolation writing novels and poetry. He continually moved from fortified palace to fortified palace, and he adopted even stricter security measures than he had previously. In essence, the defection of Hussein Kamel pushed Saddam Hussein into a self-imposed solitude that disconnected him from the people he led. This disconnection from his people—and from reality—would contribute directly to the choices that led to the end of his leadership of Iraq, but that would not happen for several more years. Saddam’s reign almost ended much sooner, however, due to yet another crisis over WMD inspections.

### **Operation Desert Fox**

Hussein Kamel’s defection and the subsequent revelations concerning Iraq’s WMD programs served to energize the Special Commission and led to temporary progress. The Iraqis handed over a considerable amount of information in 1995. Over the next few years, however, the character of the inspections became increasingly aggressive and

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<sup>66</sup> Woods, *Saddam’s Generals*, 63, 66.

<sup>67</sup> Woods et. al., “Saddam’s War,” 43.

confrontational.<sup>68</sup> By 1997, Saddam Hussein began to order inspectors out of the country on an individual basis, claiming that these inspectors were spies, and he also stated that his palaces and official residences were off limits to the inspection teams.<sup>69</sup> In October of 1998, Saddam informed all of UNSCOM that its personnel were no longer welcome in Iraq.<sup>70</sup> This forced a crisis in the Clinton administration. In the words of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, “yet another confrontation was at hand.”<sup>71</sup>

In response to Iraq’s ejection of the U.N. inspection team, President Clinton ordered a series of airstrikes against numerous targets inside Iraq, including facilities thought to have been part of the prohibited weapons programs. As President Clinton announced the operation to the nation, he explained that the goal of Operation Desert Fox was “to attack Iraq’s nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs and its military capacity to threaten its neighbors.”<sup>72</sup> Toward the end of his address, however, the president indicated that his overall goal was larger than punishing Saddam:

The hard fact is that as long as Saddam remains in power, he threatens the well-being of his people, the peace of the region, the security of the world. The best way to end that threat once and for all is with a new Iraqi government—a government ready to live in peace with its neighbors, a government that respects the rights of its people. Bringing change in Baghdad will take time

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<sup>68</sup> Scott Ritter, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: Spying on Saddam*, 27 April 1999, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/unscom/interviews/ritter.html> (accessed 6 March 2013).

<sup>69</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, “Chronology of Events: From Desert Storm to Desert Fox,” [http://www.defense.gov/specials/desert\\_fox/timeline.html](http://www.defense.gov/specials/desert_fox/timeline.html) (accessed 6 March 2013).

<sup>70</sup> Albright, *Madame Secretary*, 346-362.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>72</sup> President William Jefferson Clinton, “Transcript: Address to the Nation,” *CNN.com*, 16 December 1998, <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1998/12/16/transcripts/clinton.html> (accessed 5 March 2006).

and effort. We will strengthen our engagement with the full range of Iraqi opposition forces and work with them effectively and prudently.<sup>73</sup>

President Clinton seems to indicate that the strikes might create conditions that would eventually lead to Saddam's internal demise.<sup>74</sup> In Operation Desert Fox, therefore, while responding to Iraq's presumably growing WMD threat, the United States was also attacking Saddam Hussein's leadership.<sup>75</sup>

The target list developed by military planners reveals that the preponderance of facilities struck during the operation were more closely associated with leadership than WMD.<sup>76</sup> Over three days of strikes, U.S. and U.K. forces targeted 11 suspected weapons facilities and 29 airfields and air defense sites. They also struck 18 command and control facilities (including 5 of Saddam's palaces), 19 Special Republican Guard facilities, 9 Republican Guard facilities, and one economic target (a refinery in Basra).<sup>77</sup> The initial

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> U.K. officials also made statements to this effect. In a press conference, British Air Marshall John Day stated: "We have severely disrupted his (Saddam Hussein's) senior level command and control network. These targets are particularly important because Saddam is afraid of a coup by his officers and makes all the decisions himself. He therefore relies on an effective command and control system to pass his instructions to his commanders, and we assess that he will now be finding it far harder to control his military and his internal security forces as a result of the damage which we have inflicted." John Day, Press Conference Transcript, 22 December 1998, <http://www.fco.gov.uk> (accessed 1 June 2006).

<sup>75</sup> Dr. Mark Conversino offers evidence to support this conclusion: "The operation's emphasis on targets that were only tangentially related to Iraq's WMD kept alive in the media throughout the operation and beyond the notion that the 'real' goal of DESERT FOX was the decapitation or fatal weakening of the Iraqi regime. Members of the administration and the military often found themselves fielding questions surrounding the possibility that DESERT FOX was actually aimed at toppling Saddam from power. More often than not, their responses to these questions reinforced the notion that regime change was the intended effect of Operation DESERT FOX." Dr. Mark J. Conversino, "Operation Desert Fox: Effectiveness with Unintended Effects," *Air and Space Power Journal*, 13 July 2005, <http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/cc/conversino.html> (accessed 6 March 2013).

<sup>76</sup> "The heart of the Desert Fox list (49 of the 100 targets) is the Iraqi regime itself: a half-dozen palace strongholds and their supporting cast of secret police, guard and transport organizations." William M. Arkin, "The Difference Was in the Details," *The Washington Post Online*, 17 January 1999, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/iraq/analysis.htm> (accessed 6 March 2006).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

results of the attacks seemed positive to senior decision makers. Secretary of State Albright later wrote, “As we had hoped, the attacks did significant damage to Iraq’s military command infrastructure.”<sup>78</sup>

As time passed and more detailed intelligence became known, U.S. officials had reason to believe that Hussein’s grip on power was weakened significantly by Operation Desert Fox. General Anthony Zinni, the Commander of U.S. Central Command, recalls his surprise at these intelligence reports. “Soon after we turned off Desert Fox,” writes General Zinni, “we started to get really interesting reports from inside Iraq—from diplomatic missions and other people friendly to us—indicating the attack had badly shaken the regime.”<sup>79</sup> In a separate interview, General Zinni described the chaos within Iraq: “After the strike, we heard from countries with diplomatic missions in there [Baghdad] that the regime was paralyzed, and that there was a kind of defiance in the streets.”<sup>80</sup> Apparently, regime leaders did not expect the targeting of the Ba’ath Party and intelligence headquarters.<sup>81</sup> “For a time,” observes Zinni, “they were so dazed and rattled they were virtually headless.”<sup>82</sup> Additionally, there was reason to believe that the regime was vulnerable to a new rebellion. “Some of us even began to wonder about the stability of the regime,” recalls Zinni, “and I began to hear stories [told to my Arab friends by senior officers in the Republican Guard] that there may have been a move

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<sup>78</sup> Albright, *Madame Secretary*, 364.

<sup>79</sup> Tom Clancy with Tony Zinni, General, USMC, *Battle Ready* (New York: GP Putnam’s Sons, 2004), 341. The quote is attributed to Zinni.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, “Four-Star Marine General: Iraq Strategy ‘Screwed-Up,” *The Washington Post*, 23 December 2003.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. The intelligence headquarters was also known to the Iraqis as the “House of Pain” because of the many reports of torture perpetrated there.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



against it if the bombing had lasted a little longer.”<sup>83</sup> The Iraqis seem to have comprehended the implicit message behind the bombing. Saddam’s personal physician remembers, “Rumours were rife in Baghdad that the last air-raids were a signal to Saddam’s generals: initiate a coup d’etat and get rid of him. It was an invitation inciting unrest.”<sup>84</sup>

The strikes reinforced Saddam’s paranoia, and he reacted accordingly. Kenneth Pollack explains, “Saddam panicked during the strikes. Fearing that his control was threatened, he ordered large-scale arrests and executions, which backfired and destabilized his regime for months afterward.”<sup>85</sup> In January, Saddam had several officers executed for their involvement in an alleged conspiracy to overthrow the regime, including former Republican Guard General Kamel Sajid.<sup>86</sup> After Saddam had a prominent Shia cleric gunned down for encouraging active resistance within the population, Shiite riots in Baghdad and elsewhere had to be put down with the Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard.<sup>87</sup> In anticipation of further rebellion, Saddam divided the country into four administrative regions, each run by a loyal Ba’athist representative reporting directly to Saddam. Each of these administrators was given control of military forces within his area of responsibility.<sup>88</sup> This move increased the centralization of authority in Saddam, diluted Iraq’s military commanders, and marginalized the defense bureaucracy.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 207-208.

<sup>85</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2002), 93.

<sup>86</sup> Woods, *Saddam’s Generals*, 51.

<sup>87</sup> Pollack, 93.

<sup>88</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 26.

<sup>89</sup> Interview of Sultan Hashim Ahmed Al-Tai, Minister of Defense, 13 November 2003, in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 27.

Operation Desert Fox had mixed results. Despite indications of his regime's weakening, Saddam survived the attack and remained in power. The intrusive inspections stopped, and UNSCOM inspectors were denied entry into Iraq permanently. Also, for the second time in the decade, Iraq absorbed a major aerial assault by the United States and United Kingdom with no corresponding ground invasion. Saddam undoubtedly believed he could survive more bombing if he was forced to do so, and he continued to defy U.N. demands. This would eventually lead to a consensus within the United States that the Iraqi president had to go.

### **Regime Change: The Official Policy of the United States**

As the Iraq situation was rapidly deteriorating in late 1998, both houses of the United States Congress passed *The Iraq Liberation Act of 1998* by large majorities.<sup>90</sup> This law represented a new direction for U.S. policy, as it explicitly called for an end to Saddam's regime. The core message of the act was stated simply: "It should be the policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein and to promote the emergence of a democratic government to replace that regime."<sup>91</sup> As he signed the bill into law, President Clinton stated, "we look forward to new leadership in Iraq that has the support of the Iraqi people."<sup>92</sup> The president also revealed that, "the United States is providing support to opposition groups from all sectors of the Iraqi community that could lead to a

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<sup>90</sup> HR 4655, *The Iraq Liberation Act of 1998*, 31 October 1998, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d105:H.R.4655>: (accessed 29 May 2012).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> President William Jefferson Clinton, "Statement by the President," 31 October 1998, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=55205#> (accessed 8 March 2013).

popularly supported government.”<sup>93</sup> The passage of The Iraq Liberation Act shows that there existed a strong bipartisan consensus within the United States that was clearly against Saddam Hussein and his Ba’ath regime by the end of the 1990s. The United States, however, could only guarantee regime change within Iraq through a military invasion. Among senior U.S. officials, there was no consensus for this, yet. Meanwhile, Saddam Hussein’s regime grew increasingly dysfunctional.

### **Saddam’s Regime: Descent into Dysfunction**

As noted in the previous chapter, the central themes of Saddam Hussein’s rule were the consolidation of power in the presidency and the repression of internal dissent. His first priority was always ensuring his own survival and hold on power. After Hussein Kamel’s betrayal, Saddam’s constant sense of insecurity led him to construct a system of control that was practically invulnerable to a coup. In this, he largely succeeded. It is remarkable how durable his grip on power was given the large numbers of people within Iraq who had great motivation to depose him. By the turn of the century, the Iraqi dictator’s position was unchallenged. The side effects of Hussein’s consolidation of power, however, were catastrophic for Iraq. Hussein’s centralization of authority meant that only he could make decisions, while his lack of tolerance of bad news ensured that he would not receive the information necessary to make good decisions. Although “Saddam’s word was law,” he was unable to function as an effective leader, and he would not allow anyone else to help cover his shortcomings.<sup>94</sup> Hussein had neither the information nor the disposition necessary to learn or

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 211.

adapt, and he irrevocably cut the bonds of trust and respect that are essential to a healthy relationship between leader and followers. Later, as Coalition planners considered applying strategies of leadership attack to Saddam Hussein's regime one final time, they did not realize that the Iraqi dictator had already done much of their job for them. Saddam had largely disrupted the processes of leadership within Iraq through his own actions.

Saddam's brutal methods have already been documented and discussed in this study. This pall continued to hover over Iraq as the rest of the world welcomed a new millennium. Although Saddam became increasingly isolated and aloof, he remained fully capable of cruelty toward anyone who challenged him. Arbitrary arrests, torture, and execution remained a part of everyday Iraqi life under his leadership.<sup>95</sup> Regime officials and segments of the population would continue to follow out of fear or greed, but they would never act out of respect or affection for the Iraqi president. Saddam had good reason to fear a revolt, and he took every precaution available to ensure that any attempted coup would fail.

As discussed in Chapter Five, a defining characteristic of Saddam Hussein's rule was a strong desire to centralize all power. This effort continued in earnest after Operation Desert Storm. Saddam asserted authority over all meaningful matters. He continued to refuse to allow competent leaders to rise to positions of influence. Instead of promoting promising leaders, he installed relatives and sycophants in positions of power. He also developed a pervasive security apparatus to spy on governmental and military leaders and took steps to divide his military so that they could not unite in a coup attempt. He even used a ring of female informants who would report suspicious "pillow talk" as they made the rounds within Baghdad's elite circles. Finally, Saddam continued the effort to create several armies that

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 235-246.

reported directly to him, bypassing the Iraqi defense bureaucracy. The Republican Guard, Special Republican Guard, Fedayeen Saddam, al-Quds Army, and the four separate intelligence agencies all reported directly to him.<sup>96</sup>

The result was a very high degree of power centralized in one man. Saddam and the state became one—he named himself the Iraqi President, Prime Minister, Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, Commander of the Armed Forces, and General Secretary of the Ba’ath Party.<sup>97</sup> “Saddam was the Regime in a strategic sense,” concludes a 2004 report written U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “and his intent became Iraq’s strategic policy.”<sup>98</sup> His authority over all matters, important as well as trivial, was unquestioned. He made his decisions in isolation, refusing to consult others or listen to advice.<sup>99</sup>

In addition, Saddam did not allow competent leaders to rise to positions of influence. If a promising leader displayed intelligence and initiative, Saddam would often eliminate the official. As one commander in the Republican Guard described, “by his decisions [Saddam] throws out the clever man, or the clever men learn not to involve themselves in any decision making.”<sup>100</sup> Those close to Saddam lived in a constant state of fear.<sup>101</sup> Given this atmosphere, subordinate leaders could not afford to offer innovative solutions to Iraq’s numerous

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<sup>96</sup> *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the Director of Central Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Volume 1, Central Intelligence Agency, 30 September 2004, [https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq\\_wmd\\_2004/index.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/general-reports-1/iraq_wmd_2004/index.html) (accessed 29 May 2012), 1-22.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>99</sup> Woods, et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 12-14.

<sup>100</sup> “Perspectives on OIF from the Former Commander of the Iraqi II Republican Guard Corps,” v3.3, 28 May 2004, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 7.

<sup>101</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 236.

problems. As he strengthened his own position, Saddam robbed the Iraqi people of the benefits of talented leadership throughout the government.

Instead of developing and promoting competent leaders, Saddam chose to install his relatives and cronies in high positions, even when they were totally unqualified. In 2001, he named his son Qusay as the leader of the Republican Guard, and he allowed his other son, Uday, to play a major role in the leadership of the Saddam Fedayeen, Saddam's personal army dedicated to his regime's security.<sup>102</sup> He did this despite his sons' lack of military training or experience and the availability of competent generals such as Ra'ad Hamdani.<sup>103</sup> To fill other positions, noted a senior Iraqi leader, Saddam looked to promote the "uneducated, untalented, and those who posed no threat to his leadership for key roles."<sup>104</sup> A prime example was Major General Barzan Abd al-Ghafur, whom Saddam appointed as the Commander of the Special Republican Guard. Barzan had all the qualities Saddam looked for in a senior leader. As the Iraqi Minister of Defense remembered, "he was Saddam's cousin, but he had two other important qualities which made him the best man for the job. First, he was not intelligent enough to represent a threat to the regime and second, he was not brave enough to participate in anyone else's plots."<sup>105</sup> Such moves strengthened the Iraqi dictator's personal hold on power at the expense of the public good of Iraq.

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<sup>102</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 53-57.

<sup>103</sup> See Lt. Gen. Ra'ad Hamdani, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Invasion of Iraq*, 26 February 2004, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/invasion/interviews/> (accessed 28 May 2012).

<sup>104</sup> Classified Intelligence Report, April 2004, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 56.

<sup>105</sup> Interview of Sultan Hashim Ahmed Al-Tai, Minister of Defense, 13 November 2002, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 58.

## Marginalizing the Military

Just in case subordinate leaders were tempted to show initiative and innovation while away from Saddam's personal supervision, his pervasive security apparatus was always watching them, ready to report any actions that might hint at disloyalty. Woods writes, "military officers executed their duties under the constant, intrusive, and, more often than not, uncoordinated supervision of multiple security services."<sup>106</sup> A senior Republican Guard official described the invasive nature of this supervision:

The main function of the Republican Guard Security Office was to monitor and ensure the loyalty of Republican Guard forces. All phones in Republican Guard offices were monitored and all meetings were recorded. High-ranking officers were subjected to constant technical monitoring and surveillance in and out of their homes. The Republican Guard Office monitored all aspects of senior Republican Guard officer's lives, including their financial affairs and diet. Republican Guard Security office personnel even questioned the guards at senior officers' houses to see what they could learn about the officers' life styles. Republican Guard security officers were generally despised by the regular Republican Guard personnel. The Special Security Office knew how many times I went to the bathroom.<sup>107</sup>

This oppressive level of oversight had significant consequences for Iraqi military effectiveness. "Every senior commander interviewed after hostilities emphasized the psychological costs of constantly looking over their shoulders as a significant constraint on their military effectiveness," write the authors of *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*.<sup>108</sup> This was yet another way that Saddam ensured his personal position at the expense of the people he led.

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<sup>106</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 61.

<sup>107</sup> Classified intelligence Report, June 2004, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 62.

<sup>108</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 61-62.

Yet another measure implemented by Saddam to secure his position was the segmentation of Iraq's defense forces. Saddam forced different military units to report through separate chains of command, and he would not allow military units to coordinate with each other. The Republican Guard commanders, for example, could not plan together with fellow commanders or their counterparts in the Special Republican Guard. The Special Republican Guard commander recalled after the Iraq War of 2003, "we never coordinated with the Republican Guard. ...I had no relation with any other units or fighting forces. No other units were ever allowed near our unit. No visits between officers [of the different military organizations] were ever allowed."<sup>109</sup> Military commanders were even prohibited from interacting with each other socially.<sup>110</sup> These policies, of course, were intended to prevent the Iraqi military from acting with cohesion, something that Saddam greatly feared, as he believed the military was the one organization powerful enough to topple his government. It would prove disastrous, however, when Iraq was challenged with a military organization that emphasized high-tempo operations and utilized decentralized, mission-type orders.

Another measure taken by Saddam Hussein to ensure his grip on power was the formation of several paramilitary organizations that reported directly to him. Along with the Republican Guard and the Special Republican Guard, Saddam created the Al-Quds Army,

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<sup>109</sup> Interview of Barazan Abd Al-Ghufar Sulayman Al Tikriti, Commander, Special Republican Guard, 16 November 2003, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 27-28.

<sup>110</sup> One Republican Guard commander recalled: "The security situation in the last few years reached the point of incredible. We could have no relationships with fellow commanders. This prevented even friendships. Thank God for my books or I would have felt otherwise a man alone in a cave." "Perspectives on OIF from the Former Commander of the Iraqi II Republican Guard Corps," v3.3, 28 May 2004, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 63.



the Saddam Fedayeen, and the Ba'ath militia.<sup>111</sup> The Al-Quds Army was a part-time territorial defense force—a “people’s army”—to be used in times of crisis, and the original call for volunteers focused on confronting Israel.<sup>112</sup> The Iraqi Minister of Defense summarizes his negative feelings toward this organization:

The Quds Force was a headache, they had no equipment for a serious war, and their creation was a bad idea. The Ministry of Defense was required to give them weapons that were taken from the real Army. But the Army had no control over them. Their instructions came only from the President’s office and not from normal military channels.<sup>113</sup>

The Saddam Fedayeen was similar, except that it was a full-time force made up of regime loyalists charged with both internal and external defense.<sup>114</sup> At times, Saddam’s oldest son Uday acted as its leader, and his involvement ensured that the Saddam Fedayeen had priority for resources that could have gone to Regular Army forces and the Republican Guard.<sup>115</sup> It was, according to the authors of *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, “just one more organization sapping the strength and morale of the regular Iraqi army and focusing the security energy at the internal threat.”<sup>116</sup> As these private armies reported directly to Saddam, they were one more way that power and authority was centralized in the Iraqi president. In a crisis, Saddam’s informed judgments and direction would be critical, because in Iraq, no other decision maker mattered.

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<sup>111</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 48.

<sup>112</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 289.

<sup>113</sup> Interview of Sultan Hashim Ahmed Al-Tai, Minister of Defense, 13 November 2003, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 27.

<sup>114</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 51.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

**“When the president was angry, he was deadly.”**

Unfortunately for Iraq, Saddam Hussein was doomed to make poor decisions, because his intolerance for bad news meant that he never received the information necessary to make informed ones. This trend was discussed in Chapter Five of this study. As the years passed and word got around about Saddam’s reaction to negative reports or alternative viewpoints, this problem worsened. Iraq’s government became engulfed in a culture of lies and deceit. The former commander of the Iraqi navy put it this way: “Telling the truth was not to your own benefit.”<sup>117</sup> Officers who contradicted Saddam could expect punishment. Officials who brought up negative reports could expect that Saddam would look to blame someone—maybe them, or perhaps someone else. Saddam’s physician, Dr. Ala Bashir, recalled how he had lied to Saddam about an ongoing medical project. The doctor had told Saddam that all was well, when it clearly was not:

I couldn’t tell the President about the recurring problems. That would have raised the question of whose fault the misery was—bureaucrats, civil servants and ministers. That in turn might lead to their punishment—at best a lengthy prison sentence. When the president was angry he was deadly.<sup>118</sup>

As a result, subordinates constantly lied to the Iraqi president about the status of their organizations, projects, and plans.

In addition, others in Saddam’s inner circle, including Saddam’s son Qusay, were intolerant of contradiction. As the Director General of the Republican Guard Staff

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<sup>117</sup> “Perspectives on OIF from the Former Commander of the Iraqi Navy and Assistant Senior Military Advisor to the Central Euphrates Region,” v2.02, 17 March 2004, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 8.

<sup>118</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 272.

remembered, “any commander who spoke the truth to Qusay would lose his head.”<sup>119</sup> This had a chilling effect on the general morale of the Iraqi military and its preparations for a second Gulf War. “In short, quality information was not available to the only decision-maker who counted,” conclude the authors of *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*.<sup>120</sup> “Instead of accurate reports on the realities around him, Saddam received increasing amounts of flawed assessments and lies that only served to strengthen his preconceptions.”<sup>121</sup> As an engineer in the Iraqi air defense command lamented, “it was all lies, because if you told the truth... you’d be in trouble. ... One lied to the other from the first lieutenant up until it reached Saddam. Even Saddam Hussein was lying to himself.”<sup>122</sup> The institutionalization of dishonesty was a key contributor to the regime’s surprising level of dysfunction in the early 2000s.

As key Western leaders examined Iraq from the outside, few realized just how dysfunctional the regime had become. To these leaders, Iraq still looked like a dangerous foe—one that was capable of building and using the most deadly weapons—and Saddam only reinforced this perception through active deception measures. Iraq appeared to be capable of acting in dangerous and unpredictable ways. To support this view, Iraq was becoming increasingly aggressive to the U.S. and U.K. pilots who flew over its territory.

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<sup>119</sup> Interview of Major General Hamid Isma’aeli Dawish Al R’Baei, Director General of the Republican Guard General Staff, 18 November 2003, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 8.

<sup>120</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 8.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>122</sup> William Branigin, “A Brief, Bitter War for Iraq’s Military Officers: Self-Deception a Factor in Defeat,” *Washington Post*, 27 April 2003.

## **“A low grade war against the United States”**

For much of the 12 years that the no-fly zones were in place, Coalition operations within these zones were quite monotonous. Iraqi pilots stayed away from the forbidden airspace, and U.S., U.K., and French pilots were rarely challenged.<sup>123</sup> As Saddam’s frustration with the U.N. grew, however, so did the attempts to shoot down the patrolling aircraft. This aggression increased rapidly after Operation Desert Fox in 1998 and continued for the next several years, as Iraqi attempts to shoot down Coalition aircraft in no-fly patrols grew in number and scope. President George W. Bush recalls, “by early 2001, Saddam Hussein was waging a low-grade war against the United States. In 1999 and 2000, his forces had fired seven-hundred times at our pilots patrolling the no-fly zones.”<sup>124</sup> The Iraqis began to employ ambush tactics where they would try to lure a patrol into a certain spot by using one of their aircraft as a decoy, then air defense batteries would attempt to shoot the patrol down. When actions such as this happened, the United States and United Kingdom would often respond with an airstrike against a portion of the air defense system or other selected targets.<sup>125</sup> “When they act in an aggressive fashion,” explained Major General David A.

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<sup>123</sup> Personal experience. The author participated both Northern and Southern Watch as an F-16 pilot. For some excellent background article on these operations, see John A. Tirpak, “Legacy of the Air Blockades,” *Air Force Magazine*, February 2003, <http://www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Documents/2003/February%202003/02legacy03.pdf> (accessed 30 May 2012); and John T. Correll, “Northern Watch,” *Air Force Magazine*, February 2000, <http://www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2000/February%202000/0200northern.aspx> (accessed 30 May 2012).

<sup>124</sup> George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Broadway, 2010), 228.

<sup>125</sup> To some, the legal basis for these strikes was ambiguous. The United States maintained that the authority for the no-fly zones came from U.N. Security Council Resolution 688 (as explained earlier in this chapter). “Containment: The Iraqi No-Fly Zones,” *BBC News Online*. The responses to Iraqi attempts to shoot at Coalition airplanes were based on the standing rules of engagement, which allow military forces to act in self defense. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3121.01, *Standing Rules of Engagement / Standing Rules for the Use of Force for U.S. Forces*, 1 October 1994.

Deptula, commander of Operation Northern Watch, “with the intent to kill or harm our people, the response needs to be one which reduces their capacity to do that in the future.”<sup>126</sup>

This philosophy drove an interesting set of responses to the problem. Instead of retaliating immediately against the specific Iraqi air defense asset that fired upon the patrols, the United States and United Kingdom could execute a *response option* that struck a communications node or command and control site that enabled the Iraqi air defense network to find and shoot Coalition aircraft.<sup>127</sup> Therefore, the “low-grade war” presented the United States and the United Kingdom the opportunity to continue to conduct leadership attack against the Iraqi air defenses over a significant period. In fact, this effort would eventually grow into a mini-campaign that would set the stage for a very different Coalition war plan in 2003.

### **The Interwar Period: Implications for Leadership Attack**

The developments of the interwar period had major implications for leadership attack. Simply stated, the reactions of Saddam Hussein and his regime to the pressures of this period weakened the processes of leadership within Iraq. This made the country much more susceptible to concerted attacks on its leadership. When these attacks came during the Iraq War of 2003, the result was paralysis and collapse at all levels of the Iraqi government. Indeed, one can even argue that the primary reason for this paralysis and collapse was the fact that the Iraqi processes of leadership had been so severely crippled during these years.

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<sup>126</sup> Quoted in Tirpak, “Legacy of Air Blockades,” 52.

<sup>127</sup> This represented an expansion of the interpretation of self-defense vis-a-vis the standing rules of engagement.

A general model of the leadership process was presented in Chapter One of this study, and it is remarkable to observe that every element of the Iraqi leadership process eroded during the interwar period. This included Saddam's effectiveness as a leader, as after the betrayal of Hussein Kamel, he isolated himself from reality. He also refused to listen to bad news, which meant that his perceptions of Iraq's internal and external environments were fundamentally flawed. The internal environment continued to deteriorate throughout this period, as the post-Gulf War rebellions and the crackdowns that followed exacerbated the distrust, anxiety, and hatred that existed in large segments of the population. Additionally, international sanctions created widespread shortages for the Iraqi people and denied the equipment that the Iraqi military required to rebuild itself. The external environment worsened as well, especially after Hussein Kamel communicated his revelations about Iraq's WMD program to the outside world. Furthermore, the effectiveness of Saddam's subordinate leaders declined, as Saddam discouraged the development of leadership talent within Iraq because he feared the possibility that a competent leader might challenge his position. Finally, Saddam's interaction with his followers deteriorated further due to the breakdown of trust that resulted from the public rebellions and private betrayals. Iraqis at all levels still acted out of fear, but their willingness to follow their president would only last as long as his ability to impose his will. As soon as Saddam lost the means to do this, his regime would be finished.

In considering how the events of the interwar period relate to the theories of leadership attack, it is useful to begin with the role of leadership within Iraq. During the interwar period, Iraq became even more dependent on Saddam for leadership, as all meaningful power was centralized in him. While Saddam strengthened his hold on power during these years, his ability to provide effective leadership and direction declined (as

described above). Therefore, the primary theory correctly predicts that Iraq was highly centralized, and it also correctly predicts that Iraq was susceptible to attacks on its centers of gravity. This susceptibility was evident in the aftermath of a modest attempt to strike Iraq's vital centers in 1998. Operation Desert Fox was intended to be a punitive strike, not a serious attempt at imposing regime change through leadership attack. As the bombs and missiles struck just a few leadership targets, however, the regime showed definite signs of vulnerability. After the strikes, it appeared to General Zinni that a continuation of these attacks might have brought the entire regime down. Before the strikes, however, no one anticipated this, as the intelligence about the inner workings of the Iraqi government and Ba'ath regime was limited. This gap grew over time as the UNSCOM inspectors were forced out of the country. As a result, the Coalition lost an important source of intelligence, and the resulting gap would contribute to many of the Coalition's missteps in the upcoming Iraq War. Thus, the alternative theory's view of intelligence seems to hold true.

Considering the question of paralysis, both theories propose that paralysis and collapse are possibilities when leadership is attacked, and this certainly seemed to be true in Iraq. As will be seen in the following chapter, many thought that paralysis and collapse were quite likely. Moreover, it appeared that paralysis might happen at all levels, strategic through tactical. At the strategic levels of the regime, Saddam had installed officials based on their loyalty, not their competence. In fact, the lack of competence may have been desirable from Saddam's perspective, as it meant that these officials were unlikely to challenge him. At the operational and tactical levels of Iraq's military, the chain of command was hopelessly compromised by the creation of multiple, independent organizations that reported directly to

Saddam. These separate organizations and commands were not allowed to plan or coordinate with each other in peacetime, so it was highly unlikely that they could be effective in combat.

While paralysis throughout Iraq seemed almost inevitable, its desirability was an open question. The primary theory predicts that paralysis at all levels is desirable, but the alternative theory argues that paralysis at the strategic level may not be desirable, because it might hinder progress to a lasting peace. This would become the main question of the final confrontation between the Coalition and Saddam Hussein. The Coalition could impose paralysis and collapse on Iraq, but then what? How would this lead to the final victory? Coalition planners would wrestle with this dilemma as they planned for a final war with Iraq. They would eventually conclude that the only way they could guarantee the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime would be through an invasion. What they could not predict was the nature of the follow-up actions that would be required once the Iraqi government collapsed. The Coalition would find out that this requirement would be extensive—much more than was anticipated.

In the early days of his administration, however, President George W. Bush was not contemplating the invasion that would come. “For my first eight months in office, my policy focused on tightening the sanctions—or, as Colin Powell put it, keeping Saddam in the box,” recalls President Bush.<sup>128</sup> The president's perspective would soon change.

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<sup>128</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 228.



## Chapter Eight

### The Iraq War of 2003

*I don't know whether he's alive or dead. What I do know is his ability to command and control his forces has been significantly reduced. ...remember from our perspective it's not about him, it's about the regime. So we'll continue to go after the regime.*

Lieutenant General T. Michael Moseley  
Combined Forces Air Component Commander

When the terrorist group al-Qaeda struck the United States on 11 September 2001, some U.S. officials suspected that Iraq might have been involved, and they proposed a response to remove Saddam Hussein.<sup>1</sup> Even though no direct link was found, these leaders grew increasingly concerned that Saddam Hussein would provide chemical or biological weapons to a terrorist organization, and in turn, these weapons could be used to kill Americans at an even higher level than the 9/11 attacks. For years, Saddam created the impression that Iraq still had these weapons or could field them quickly. This effort worked all too well. Despite a dearth of evidence about the existence of Iraqi weapons programs, leaders in the United States and the United Kingdom were convinced that Saddam had retained these capabilities. To these leaders, this represented an unacceptable risk, and President George W. Bush decided that something had to be done about Iraq and Saddam

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<sup>1</sup> Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), 86-87.

Hussein. When the president asked his Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, for military options, Rumsfeld and his key military leaders made a critical assumption. The primary goal of any military action would be regime change. When military operations were complete, Saddam and his Ba'ath regime would no longer be in power.

Unsurprisingly, numerous methods of leadership attack would be included within the overall plans presented to President Bush. When compared to 1991, Iraq seemed even more vulnerable to attacks on its leadership, as its government was even more centralized in 2003 than in 1991. In addition, Western military capabilities had progressed significantly since Operation Desert Storm. Advances in technologies such as precision weapons, reconnaissance, communications, and computers made the military considerably more lethal.<sup>2</sup> By 2003, Western intelligence agencies had studied Iraq closely for over 12 years, and they possessed considerable insights to help identify Iraqi centers of gravity—or so they thought. Finally, with regime change as the primary goal, it was natural to connect attacks on Iraqi leaders and their leadership processes within the context of the overall campaign.

Given these factors, it is surprising that leadership attack did not play as prominent a role in the campaign plan for Operation Iraqi Freedom as it did in Operation Desert Storm. The only way that military planners could guarantee regime change was to deploy ground forces into Iraq and drive them into Baghdad, and the primary concern of the overall plan was on this requirement. Indeed, the major debate during the numerous planning meetings was

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<sup>2</sup> “The Iraqi military was less than half as big as it had been in 1991, and its capabilities were much less lethal—discounting possible use of chemical or biological weapons. The American military, on the other hand, was not only much more lethal than our Desert Storm force in terms of precision-guided weapons, our upgraded C4 (Command-Control-Communications and Computers and Surveillance system) now connected individual aircraft, combat and logistic vehicles, and ground units into nearly seamless digital networks that would have seemed like science-fiction fantasy when our forces had last fought the Iraqi Army in 1991.” General Richard B. Myers, with Malcolm McConnell, *Eyes on the Horizon: Serving on the Front Lines of National Security* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2009), 217.

not over which targets to bomb to cause paralysis or how to pressure Hussein into stepping down. Instead, it was on the size of the ground force necessary to accomplish the invasion. When leadership attack was considered for inclusion into the plan, there was little debate over its role. Instead, there was broad consensus that the leadership attack actions included in the plan would serve specific functions within the overall campaign. Most of these methods stemmed from actions that had proven successful in Operation Desert Storm. Leadership attack had not caused collapse and paralysis at the strategic level in that war, and there was no requirement for it to do so this time. The primary mechanism for regime change would be ground forces entering the Iraqi capital, and leadership attack would support the invasion and enable it to progress quickly.

There was one important exception, however, to this deemphasis on leadership attack. In the Iraq War, the administration of President George W. Bush would not impose upon itself the same political restraints on targeting Saddam directly. If Saddam's whereabouts could be determined, the United States would attack with the intent to kill the Iraqi leader. Given Saddam's authority within Iraq and the lack of anyone close to his stature within the Ba'ath regime, decision makers considered the possibility that killing or injuring him might shorten the conflict or even make it unnecessary. Leaders remembered Saddam's resilience in Operation Desert Storm, and they realized that they would need a high level of intelligence information—especially human intelligence—to target Hussein successfully. They did not need to know where Saddam was at any single moment. Instead, they would need to know where Saddam would be, and this was a much more difficult requirement. Many had mixed feelings about the likelihood of getting such intelligence.

It seemed that these leaders had found what they needed on 19 March 2003, when numerous reports emerged about Saddam's whereabouts. These intelligence reports were enough to persuade President Bush to scrap the invasion timeline and begin Operation Iraqi Freedom by ordering a daring "decapitation strike" against Hussein himself. Although this attack was unsuccessful in killing the Iraqi president, it was clear that the Coalition was willing to attack him personally. In response, Hussein adopted the strictest security measures, and all but disappeared from his governmental duties. While he was able to survive several more attempts by the Coalition to kill him, his process of leadership was disrupted. Within a few weeks, the Iraqi regime showed unmistakable signs of paralysis and collapse. Eventually, most military units dissolved into the population, and the government stopped functioning. While there are many factors that contributed to this result, the attacks on Iraqi leadership do appear to have been consequential.

Operation Iraqi Freedom, therefore, may offer the clearest evidence of the link between leadership attack and paralysis, in keeping with arguments of the primary theory presented in Chapter Four. Indeed, the final weeks of Saddam's regime were the epitome of paralysis. Under the pressure of the Coalition attack, the Ba'ath regime and the Iraqi military displayed numerous signs of dysfunction. In the early stages of the war, guidance and direction from the central leadership had little basis in reality, and eventually this guidance and direction ceased altogether. Information stopped flowing within the system, and eventually the whole of government was unable to respond to stimuli or adapt to changing conditions. "When we arrived in Baghdad, everybody had gone home," recalled General William Scott Wallace, commander of the U.S. Army corps that conducted the main thrust into Baghdad. "The regime officials were gone; the folks that provided security of the

ministry buildings had gone; the folks that operated the water treatment plants and the electricity grid and the water purification plants were gone. There were no bus drivers, no taxi drivers; everybody just went home.”<sup>3</sup>

The collapse of Saddam’s Ba’ath regime did not lead directly to a better state of peace. In contrast, this collapse may have exacerbated the conditions that led to a powerful, complicated insurgency and years of difficult occupation. This chapter explores this possibility as it examines the role of leadership attack within Operation Iraqi Freedom. As in the chapter on the Gulf War of 1991, it does not offer a complete account of the operation.<sup>4</sup> Instead, it seeks to identify how and why leadership attack options were originally included in the campaign plan. In addition, it examines how these options were executed and how these actions affected the outcome. The chapter concludes with a short discussion of how Operation Iraqi Freedom supports or refutes the claims of the two competing theories of leadership attack.

## **Leadership Attack and Regime Change**

Before continuing, two cautionary notes are in order. First, as mentioned in Chapter One, when regime change is the overall campaign objective, it is tempting to interpret almost any action as leadership attack. The logic is seductive. The removal of Hussein and his

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<sup>3</sup> General William Scott Wallace, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Invasion of Iraq*, 26 February 2004, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/invasion/interviews/> (accessed 28 May 2012).

<sup>4</sup> For excellent single-volume summaries of Operation Iraqi Freedom, see: Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons* (Washington, DC: The Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2003); Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006). David Cloud and Greg Jaffe describe the American experience in Iraq through the individual stories of four key officers in *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009).

government was the ultimate goal of the Coalition. Therefore, any action taken by the Coalition had some linkage to disrupting Saddam Hussein's leadership of Iraq, at least over time. The ground invasion of Iraq, for example, was the only way that military leaders could guarantee that Saddam's regime would end. This ground invasion, however, will not be considered a method of leadership attack in this study. This study focuses on actions that are intended to disrupt the process of leadership within an organization. In Operation Iraqi Freedom, this includes attacks on regime leaders, including both Saddam and his military leaders, and their ability to communicate. It also includes attempts by Coalition members to discourage Iraqi soldiers from following their leaders' orders as well as messages designed to discredit the regime in the eyes of Iraqi civilians. It does not include the full range of military actions that were required to launch an invasion of Iraq and eventually occupy the country.

### **Leadership Attack and the Insurgency**

The second cautionary note involves the aftermath of what General Tommy Franks, the Commander of U.S. Central Command, referred to as "major combat operations."<sup>5</sup> When Coalition troops rolled into Baghdad in April of 2003, the regime was finished, but the operation was far from over. Over the next few years, restoring security, government, and essential services in Iraq proved to be a major challenge, and a complex and violent insurgency developed throughout most of the country. Many have made the argument that poor postwar planning, weak interagency cooperation, and low troop levels all contributed to this development. Generally, this study will consider these questions as beyond its scope. Instead, this study will focus on the strategies of leadership attack within the campaign plan

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<sup>5</sup> General Tommy Franks, with Malcolm McConnell, *American Soldier* (New York: ReganBooks, 2004), 523.

that held regime change as its primary goal. At the end of the chapter, however, this study will consider how leadership attack may have imposed an important cost on the Coalition: it may have contributed to some of the postwar conditions—especially the total collapse of the Iraqi government and insufficient troop levels for occupation—that led to nine years of difficult occupation for the Coalition and continuing violence for the Iraqi people.

### **9/11 Forces a Change in Perspective**

The terrorist attacks against the United States on 9/11 forced a change in perspective within the Bush administration. The attacks had shown the world that America was vulnerable. Those who wished to harm American citizens would aspire to match or surpass the al-Qaeda operation. One way that they could surpass this operation would be to use weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and Iraq had them, or at least that is what most leaders thought. Moreover, Saddam seemed to have significant motivation to harm the United States. If he could match chemical or biological weapons with a terrorist group capable of getting them into the United States, it seemed probable that he would do so. No president could ignore this risk.

In the years since they left office, both President Bush and Vice President Richard Cheney described the paradigm change that resulted from the 11 September attacks. Their sentiments are passionate and articulate, and it is worth considering them, as they represent the motivation to initiate Operation Iraqi Freedom and assume all the inherent risks.

President Bush writes:

Before 9/11, Saddam was a problem America might have been able to manage. Through the lens of the post-9/11 world, my view changed. I had just witnessed the damage inflicted by nineteen fanatics armed with box cutters. I

could only imagine the destruction possible if an enemy dictator passed his WMD to terrorists. With threats flowing into the Oval Office daily—many of them about chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons—that seemed like a frighteningly real possibility. The stakes were too high to trust the dictator’s word against the weight of the evidence and the consensus of the world. The lesson of 9/11 was that if we waited for a danger to fully materialize, we would have waited too long. I reached a decision: We would confront the threat from Iraq, one way or another.<sup>6</sup>

Vice President Cheney participated in the decision to end Operation Desert Storm in 1991 as well as the decision to invade Iraq in 2003. He expresses similar sentiments when he writes:

Twelve years later, when we did go all the way to Baghdad, toppled Saddam, and liberated Iraq, the world looked very different. We had suffered a mass casualty attack on the U.S. homeland. We worried that Saddam was a dangerous nexus between terrorists and weapons of mass destruction capability. We had attempted for twelve years, with sixteen U.N. Security Council resolutions and international sanctions, to contain the threat he posed. By 2003 that sanctions regime was crumbling, Saddam had corrupted the U.N.’s oil-for-food program to buy prohibited materials and enrich himself, and he was biding his time planning, as soon as he could, to reconstitute programs that had been halted or slowed in the aftermath of Desert Storm. The calculation about the nature of the direct threat Saddam posed to America and the military action required to defend against that threat was very different in 2003.<sup>7</sup>

While reasonable people can disagree with the logic presented by President Bush and Vice President Cheney, especially considering faulty intelligence estimates that surfaced later, this study accepts these two officials’ statements as the best explanation for events that led to the invasion of 2003. They considered it their responsibility to defend the lives of American citizens, so they decided to confront Hussein with the goal of removing him from power

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<sup>6</sup> George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Broadway, 2010), 229.

<sup>7</sup> Dick Cheney, with Liz Cheney, *In My Time: A Political and Personal Memoir* (New York: Threshold Books, 2011), 225-226.



permanently. To do this, they would need military options, and they began by asking to see the Pentagon's existing plans for Iraq. When they did, they were less than satisfied.

### **“Desert Storm on Steroids”**

When he assumed office, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had ordered a review of all the Department's operational plans. After a conversation with President Bush a short time after 11 September, the Secretary assigned a high priority to revising the plan for invading Iraq.<sup>8</sup> He passed word through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers to General Tommy Franks, Commander of U.S. Central Command, that he wanted to see the latest version of the plan. General Franks considered this plan outdated, as it “was based on Desert Storm-era thinking.”<sup>9</sup> He remembers, “it was troop-heavy, involving a long buildup and a series of air strikes before boots hit the ground.”<sup>10</sup> When he saw that the plan called for nearly a half million troops, Rumsfeld thought the plan was “Desert Storm on Steroids.”<sup>11</sup> Rumsfeld ordered a full rework of the plan, and he decided to play a large role in the effort.

A critical planning assumption was identified early in what would become a highly iterative process. When Franks briefed his initial “Commander's Concept”—which included key assumptions and a broad outline of the plan—he stated to Rumsfeld: “Mr. Secretary, if we initiate military operations in Iraq, I am assuming the principle objective will be to remove the

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 425.

<sup>9</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 329.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 427. Vice President Cheney, who was quite familiar with the Desert Storm plan from his tenure as Secretary of Defense, had the same reaction. Cheney, *In My Time*, 370.

regime of Saddam Hussein.” Rumsfeld answered, “General, that is my assumption too. The President will ultimately make that decision.”<sup>12</sup> For the rest of the planning effort, this assumption would remain intact, and regime change would become the primary objective of any military operation against Iraq.

The adoption of regime change as the primary military objective was a critical development. This objective was relatively unlimited. It would force Saddam Hussein and other Ba’ath party officials to fight for their survival, with no opportunity for negotiation. It also drove lofty requirements for the invading force. The only way that General Franks could guarantee the end of Saddam’s regime would be to send a sizable ground force into Iraq and have this force capture Baghdad.<sup>13</sup> Iraqi ground forces, especially the Republican Guard, would need to be persuaded not to fight, or they would have to be neutralized. Since military planners had to assume the Iraqis would fight, this meant that the invading force needed to be able to attack and destroy a significant portion of the Iraqi ground forces. This situation called for, using Delbrück’s terminology, a strategy of annihilation. The objective—disposal of the regime—was relatively unlimited and the destruction of the enemy was likely to be

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<sup>12</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 330. Several weeks before this, General Franks had received an informal memorandum during a meeting about Iraq with Secretary Rumsfeld. This memorandum, drafted by Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, contained numerous ‘talking points’ about an Iraq campaign derived from brainstorming meetings between Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Feith, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers, and Vice-Chairman General Peter Pace. This memorandum included “regime change” as one of the key discussion items. It also talked about “Decapitation of Government” with the sub-bullets: “Do early” and “Cut off communications too—including television and radio.” “Talking Points for the Rumsfeld-Franks Meeting,” 27 November 2001, Document is now declassified, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB326/index.htm> (accessed 20 June 2012). A description of this document is found in Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 219-220.

<sup>13</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 330-331. In a classified memorandum, policy makers in the U.K. government also arrived at the same conclusion. That document concludes: “In sum, despite the considerable difficulties, the use of overriding force in a ground campaign is the only option that we can be confident will remove Saddam and bring Iraq back into the international community.” Overseas and Defence Secretariat, Cabinet Office, “Iraq: Options Paper,” 8 March 2002, 9, document is now declassified, [http://www.iraqinquirydigest.org/?page\\_id=244](http://www.iraqinquirydigest.org/?page_id=244) (accessed 20 June 2012).

necessary to achieve this objective. Saddam Hussein and his regime leaders could choose to leave power before their overthrow, and that would be a welcome development. If they did not, however, the Coalition could impose its will as needed, because the Coalition would destroy enough of the Iraqi forces so that the regime would lose the ability to oppose the invasion. With regime change as the objective, the nature of the war would be considerably closer to Clausewitz's absolute form than Operation Desert Storm, and because of this, it would look much different.

Typically, such an objective would require large numbers of invading ground forces to increase the chance of success. The original plan, the one that Secretary Rumsfeld called "Desert Storm on Steroids," called for these massive deployments. But that was not what the U.S. political leadership wanted, and neither did General Franks. They were both convinced that the risks inherent in large deployments outweighed the risks of a smaller force, and they began a planning process that was dominated by a negotiation over the number of troops required.

### **Whittling Down the Number**

As the top leaders in the Department of Defense and in U.S. Central Command started the detailed planning for an invasion of Iraq, there was consensus that the objective could be achieved with a relatively small force size.<sup>14</sup> There were many reasons for this. Iraq's military was considerably smaller than during Operation Desert Storm, and years of sanctions had made it more difficult for the Iraqis to sustain their equipment and training

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<sup>14</sup> President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld, General Myers and General Franks all discuss the desirability of using a smaller force in their memoirs: Bush, *Decision Points*, 234; Cheney, *In My Time*, 370; Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 428; Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon*, 217; and Franks, *American Soldier*, 349.

regimen.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. military, on the other hand, was much more capable. In the years since Operation Desert Storm, it had fielded numerous capabilities in the areas of navigation, precision weapons, communications, reconnaissance, logistics, and stealth.<sup>16</sup> With few exceptions, every Iraqi unit was less capable than it was in 1991, while those of the United States and United Kingdom were more capable—in some cases, much more capable.

Besides the disparity in capabilities, there were key advantages to a smaller force size. A large force would mean a long deployment timeline—as long as six months or more—and this would give Saddam plenty of strategic warning. If Saddam concluded that Iraq was going to be invaded, he could order a myriad of actions that would make this invasion much more difficult. This included prepositioning chemical and biological weapons near places where the invasion was expected, or as an extreme measure, he could order a preemptive attack using these weapons.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, he could set fire to Iraq's southern oil wells as he had done in Kuwait in 1991, or he could launch medium-range missiles into Israel.<sup>18</sup> He could also blow up key bridges or destroy dams along the major rivers. This action would cause widespread human suffering and slow the invasion force down considerably.<sup>19</sup> To decrease the chance that Saddam might do these things, U.S. leaders wanted to give him as little warning as possible.

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<sup>15</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 349; George A. Lopez and David Cortright make a strong case that years of sanctions had severely weakened the Iraqi military in their article, "Containing Iraq: Sanctions Worked." George A. Lopez and David Cortright, "Containing Iraq: Sanctions Worked," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon*, 217.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 225-226.

<sup>18</sup> These were two of President Bush's biggest concerns. Bush, *Decision Points*, 325.

<sup>19</sup> Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon*, 226.

There were other reasons why a smaller force was desirable. The larger the force, the more complex the logistical challenges in getting it to Iraq. The ports in Kuwait were not well-suited to offloading large amounts of military equipment, and Kuwait itself did not have a great deal of room to host forces for a lengthy wait.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Saudi Arabia was hesitant to host large numbers of American forces, as was Turkey.<sup>21</sup> The terrain south of Baghdad was not conducive to the movement of large, heavy formations.<sup>22</sup> Deploying large amounts of personnel and equipment would also encourage waste, something Secretary Rumsfeld was keen to avoid.<sup>23</sup> U.S. Central Command had just completed the dismantlement of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, and in that operation, small numbers of forces on the ground were supported by massive amounts of airpower, and the result was impressive. Both Rumsfeld and Franks believed that the critical lessons learned in Afghanistan should inform the planning for Iraq.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the United States was attempting to persuade Saddam Hussein through the concerted use of what the National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, called “coercive diplomacy.”<sup>25</sup> As this persuasion relied on diplomatic messages backed up with a military threat, both the diplomatic and military tracks had to be coordinated closely. Deploying a large force early could hurt the overall effort by getting military activities out in front of diplomatic ones.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Wallace, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*; Franks, *American Soldier*, 344.

<sup>21</sup> Cheney, *In My Time*, 379.

<sup>22</sup> Wallace, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>23</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 428.

<sup>24</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 329.

<sup>25</sup> Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 172.

<sup>26</sup> Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon*, 226.

From the earliest stages in the planning, there was tremendous pressure on General Franks and his planners at U.S. Central Command to pare down the forces required for the invasion plan. Over the next 15 months, Franks would continue to take plans to Secretary Rumsfeld that included fewer and fewer personnel. Rumsfeld kept pushing for leaner options, and the negotiations continued.<sup>27</sup> Eventually, Franks and his team settled on a number that was about a third of that used for Operation Desert Storm.<sup>28</sup> While Franks and Rumsfeld were confident that this force could accomplish the mission, others were uncomfortable with the risks inherent when using a reduced force for invasion.<sup>29</sup>

Over 2400 years ago, the Chinese general known today as Sun-Tzu argued that to wage a successful attack, one needs a superior number of forces.<sup>30</sup> Strategists have been making the same argument ever since. As discussed in Chapter Three, Clausewitz argued that the defense was the stronger form of war. Therefore, to be successful, the offense had to be superior in strength at the point of attack. Generations of military officers had been schooled in the belief that an attacking force must be superior to a defending one, and that has long been thought to mean that the attacking force must be superior in number. Therefore, it was not surprising when some of Franks' subordinate commanders were leery of attacking Iraq with a reduced force. Such a force meant increased risk, something no military commander is fond of assuming.

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<sup>27</sup> There are several informative accounts of this process. See Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 38-54; Ricks, *Fiasco*, 58-111; and Peter J. Boyer, "The New War Machine," *The New Yorker*, 30 June 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Wallace, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Sun-Tzu writes: "In general, the strategy for employing the military is this: If your strength is ten times theirs, surround them; if five, then attack them..." Sun-Tzu, *Art of War*, Ralph D. Sawyer, trans., (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1994), 177.

Instead of combatting Rumsfeld's insistence on a smaller force, Franks and his planners found innovative ways to mitigate the risk. Many of the improved capabilities in reconnaissance would be used extensively to aid the ground commanders in making tactical decisions. The commander of the U.S. 5th Corps, Lieutenant General William Scott Wallace, thought these capabilities "would give us some indication of where the enemy was and, importantly, where he was not."<sup>31</sup> Wallace would serve as the primary operational commander in the actual invasion, and he was also confident that teamwork among the services and between countries would make a big difference. He was especially confident in the teamwork between ground and air forces, and he felt it "could overcome some of our shortcomings on the ground."<sup>32</sup>

For his part, General Franks put a great deal of emphasis on speed. "Speed kills...the enemy," he was fond of saying.<sup>33</sup> A major reason why the general focused on speed was that he believed one of the most dangerous courses of action that Saddam Hussein could choose was to pull back his forces into a defensive ring around and within Baghdad. In this scenario, the final defensive stand would be in Baghdad itself, creating a situation in the city that required house-to-house fighting similar to that which occurred in Stalingrad in World War

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<sup>31</sup> Wallace, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 400.

II.<sup>34</sup> This was a scenario that Coalition leaders feared.<sup>35</sup> If Coalition ground forces could reach the city quickly enough, however, it might shock and dislocate the Iraqi forces, especially if the Iraqis were fixed in place by Coalition airpower.<sup>36</sup> This might prevent the Iraqi ground units from setting up a formidable defense within Baghdad. “A picture was forming in my mind,” Franks would later recall, “Army, Marine Corps, and British armor battalions moving north at maximum speed converging on the Iraqi regime’s centers of gravity...”<sup>37</sup> In this statement, Franks makes it clear that the invasion would be conceptualized around Clausewitz’s center of gravity, which made logical sense considering the situation. One of these centers of gravity would be the regime leadership, including Saddam Hussein. In Operation Iraqi Freedom, the role of leadership attack would be to disrupt the process of leadership within Iraq to enable the invasion and allow a numerically inferior force to quickly get to Baghdad.

## Lines and Slices

In the years since Operation Iraqi Freedom, much has been written about the reduced size of the invading force. The vast majority of discussion has focused on a troubling possibility: while the small footprint may have been sufficient for the combat operations that

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<sup>34</sup> “Nerve Centre Baghdad,” *BBC News Online*, 4 April 2003, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/2865747.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2865747.stm) (accessed 1 June 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Lieutenant General Michael DeLong writes about the problem: “The last thing we wanted was a pitched battle for the Iraqi capital. House-to-house, door-to-door warfare was to be avoided at all costs. Baghdad was a major city, with a population of five million, and if we got mired in urban warfare, it could take months. Worse, we’d be fighting on their ground, where our superiority would be mitigated—we’d be unable to use our major firepower. And the Iraqi civilians could join the fight, which would make the fighting much more messy, and turn Iraqi and world opinion against us.” Lieutenant General Michael DeLong, USA, with Noah Lukeman, *A General Speaks Out: The Truth About the Wars In Afghanistan and Iraq* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Zenith Press, 2007), 87.

<sup>36</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 391.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*



led to the fall of the regime, it was insufficient for the stability operations that followed. With more ground forces, the Coalition may have been able to provide better security for the population in the critical days and weeks after the fall of the regime. In contrast, there has been relatively little written about how the reduced force size enabled the operation to defeat the Iraqi forces and bring down the regime. Nevertheless, the decision to reduce the invading force influenced how the operation was fought. Coalition leaders had to forgo a familiar doctrine of overwhelming force and apply innovative tactics to defeat the regime. One of the key ways they did this was by focusing on Iraqi centers of gravity.

Chapter Three of this study introduced the Clausewitzian concept of center of gravity (*Schwerpunkt*). Clausewitz advanced the concept as a key to military effectiveness, as focusing on the enemy's hub is the best way to achieve victory, especially when the annihilation of the enemy force is an objective. Along with effectiveness, however, the concept also has the characteristic of being efficient. It is much more efficient to focus one's efforts on a few centers of gravity than it is to destroy large numbers of infantry, tanks, airplanes, ships, and satellites. The early airpower theorists recognized this characteristic and sought to exploit it, as their fundamental problem was finding ways to use the limited numbers of airplanes at their disposal to affect conditions on the ground or at sea. To be efficient, these theorists sought to identify the enemy's vital centers and attack them with the intent of causing the enemy's collapse.

In many ways, General Franks and his planners faced a similar problem as they prepared for the invasion of Iraq. They had limited forces at their disposal, and they had to use these forces to cause the collapse of Iraq's Ba'ath regime and the military that protected it. It is no surprise, therefore, that they focused on striking Iraqi centers of gravity as the key

organizing concept in the operation's design. Indeed, in his book *American Soldier*, Franks leads off a critical discussion about his concept for dismantling the Iraqi regime with an explanation that he was seeking to apply pressure to the "foundations of Iraqi power," which he equates with Clausewitzian centers of gravity.<sup>38</sup> He then continues to explain how he thought that the Iraqi regime was supported by a series of columns—elsewhere he calls these "slices"—and he wanted to see which of these columns could be weakened using the instruments of power—he calls these "lines of operation"—available to the Coalition.<sup>39</sup> Franks identified nine columns of power for Iraq: Leadership, Internal Security/Regime Intelligence, Weapons of Mass Destruction Infrastructure/R&D, Republican Guard/Special Republican Guard forces, Selected Regular Army Forces, Territory, Infrastructure, Civilian Population, and Commercial and Diplomatic Leverage. The lines of operation would be: Operational Fires, Special Operations Forces (SOF) Operations, Operational Maneuver, Information Operations, Unconventional Warfare/Support Opposition Groups, Political-Military, and Civil-Military Operations.<sup>40</sup> To conceptualize the plan, Franks put the slices of the Iraqi regime against the lines of operations using a simple matrix. This resulted in 63 intersections, and each of these were considered a possibility for exerting pressure within the overall plan. Franks used these intersections to force his subordinate commanders and planners to work together across traditional—and sometimes parochial—lines.<sup>41</sup> Franks considered this matrix to be the foundation upon which to build the operational plan.<sup>42</sup> He

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<sup>38</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 337.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 337-338.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 340-341.

<sup>42</sup> In an exchange with his top operations officer, Franks called this matrix, "your basic grand strategy." Ibid., 341.

remembers, “I believed we had a template that could produce a decisive victory—should the President decide that the time had come to remove Saddam Hussein and his regime from power.”<sup>43</sup>

As General Franks approached the military problem presented to him by his political superiors—that of causing the collapse of Saddam Hussein’s regime with a reduced force size—he applied his understanding of the Clausewitzian concept of centers of gravity. He believed the best way to cause regime collapse was to focus Coalition efforts on identifying these centers, then putting the maximum pressure on as many of them as possible in a compressed period. He also saw the Iraqi leadership as a target for this pressure. On his handwritten matrix, General Franks listed “Leadership” as the first center of gravity, and he placed a “starburst” on the intersections between Leadership and Operational Fires as well as that with SOF Operations.<sup>44</sup> This meant that leadership targets would be struck with Coalition firepower, and regime leaders would be targeted, including Saddam Hussein and the leaders in his family.<sup>45</sup> It also meant that the Coalition would seek other ways to disrupt Iraqi leadership, including the use of “Information Operations.” One of Franks’ major concerns, however, was that Saddam and his subordinates would take actions to make the invasion very difficult for the Coalition forces. General Franks and his planners sought to prevent this.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>45</sup> Franks writes: “The starbursts at the intersection of Lines and Slices represented points of focus we would use to develop the specifics of a detailed plan. For example, the starburst at the intersection of ‘Operational Fires’ and ‘Leadership’ meant we would attack leadership targets using bombs and missiles.” Ibid. Later in *American Soldier*, Franks writes, “Killing regime leaders and destroying their command and control apparatus would be a priority.” Ibid., 392.

## Achieving Tactical Surprise

As the planning effort continued, one of General Franks' top priorities was achieving tactical surprise. Without some level of surprise, Saddam could make the invasion very difficult through numerous initiatives, including using chemical weapons preemptively, flooding the Euphrates River, setting fire to the southern oil fields, and destroying key bridges. Franks knew that achieving strategic surprise was probably impossible, as the diplomatic effort relied on the open threat of military force if Saddam did not comply with certain demands. In addition, it would be impossible to hide the deployment of personnel and equipment into the region. While achieving strategic surprise was highly unlikely, Franks and his planners thought they could achieve tactical surprise by deviating from the pattern of conflict with which Saddam Hussein had grown accustomed. Specifically, Coalition planners sought to compress the period between the first air attacks and the actual invasion.

As explained in Chapter Six, Operation Desert Storm began with several weeks of aerial bombing before the ground invasion. The Coalition decided to stop this invasion south of Basrah, well short of Baghdad. As explained in Chapter Seven, Iraq had suffered several air and missile attacks since Operation Desert Storm, but none of these was followed up with another invasion. Given this history, Franks and his planners felt that Saddam would not expect an invasion to begin unless there were major airstrikes first. Even if there were an eventual invasion, Saddam would expect it to take a significant amount of time to reach Baghdad, if it made it there at all.<sup>46</sup> To take advantage of this expectation, the plan would have to be flexible enough to accommodate an air-first option, a land-first option, and a

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<sup>46</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 461.

simultaneous option.<sup>47</sup> Even in the air-first option, Coalition air forces would only be given a short time—a few days at most—to strike key air defense, communications, and leadership targets before the ground invasion. Once the invasion began, it would be the main military effort in a race to Baghdad. Franks believed that speed was critical to surprising and disorienting Saddam and his forces. Once begun, the invasion would progress with such speed that Saddam would be unable to react and would, therefore, be overwhelmed.<sup>48</sup> In this way, a small force could move so quickly that it would make up for its lack of mass. Franks believed that “speed would represent a mass all its own.”<sup>49</sup>

Achieving tactical surprise meant that, at most, the Coalition would have a few short days of bombing before the invasion kicked off. This would make establishing air superiority over Iraq much more difficult than it would be if there were weeks of dedicated air attack before the invasion. It would also mean that there would be fewer opportunities to attack the Iraqi leadership before the demands of supporting the ground invasion competed for the attention of Coalition airmen. There was one important factor, however, that made this much more palatable to air commanders. Saddam’s air defenses kept shooting at U.S. and U.K. airplanes in the no fly zones, and as a matter of policy, these air forces attacked Iraqi targets in retaliation. Since General Franks and his commanders could choose which targets to strike in

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<sup>47</sup> During the iterative planning process, one can see Central Command planners striving to produce this flexibility in their planning. They gave different versions of the plan distinct names, such as “Generated Start,” “Running Start,” and “Hybrid.” Several of these planning documents have now been declassified, and they are available in The National Security Archive, “TOP SECRET POLO STEP,” Joyce Battle and Thomas Blanton, eds., 14 February 2007, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB214/index.htm> (accessed 20 June 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 416.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

these retaliatory attacks, they could choose to strike things that would make gaining air superiority much easier when the time came.

### **Operation Southern Focus**

The effort to gain air superiority over Iraq in preparation for an invasion actually began in the summer of 2002. This effort was called Operation Southern Focus, an orchestrated set of aerial attacks designed to weaken Saddam's military power in southern Iraq.<sup>50</sup> The Coalition took advantage of the continuing attacks by Iraqi air defenses on aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones. Instead of retaliating against the antiaircraft artillery and surface-to-air missile batteries that fired upon them, air commanders chose to strike targets that would weaken the overall system of air defenses. This would justify the continuing risk to pilots as they flew inside the zones.<sup>51</sup> By the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Coalition forces had already dropped 606 weapons on 391 targets in southern Iraq, including surface-to-air missile sites, antiaircraft artillery sites, early warning radar sites, and command and control facilities.<sup>52</sup> These strikes would prove to have significant effects when the Coalition began Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Another key target set for these strikes was a new fiber-optic network that was being constructed in Iraq to provide secure communications for military command and control.

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<sup>50</sup> Elaine M. Grossman, "Decision to Hasten Ground Attack Into Iraq Presented New Risks," *Inside the Pentagon*, 18 March 2004; Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Air Raids in '02 Prepared for War in Iraq," *New York Times*, 19 July 2003.

<sup>51</sup> In a press briefing, Secretary Rumsfeld acknowledged the change in tactics, and he explained that these actions "would give us a benefit that would merit the risks that were undertaken." Susan Chapman, "The 'War' Before the War," *Air Force Magazine*, February 2004, 54; Jim Garamone, "Coalition No-Fly Zone Tactics Changed," Armed Forces Press Service, 16 September 2002.

<sup>52</sup> Gordon, "U.S. Air Raids."

General Franks and his deputy, General Michael DeLong, were quite concerned that China was helping Iraq install this network. “China was working with the Iraqis to put in an underground system that would tie all the air defense systems together,” remembers DeLong.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, attacks against this network were a major part of Operation Southern Focus. “The attacks on Iraqi command and control also included precision attacks on the Iraqi fiber-optic cable network,” states an Air Force report, “which the Iraqis used to keep southern Iraq in communication with Baghdad...”<sup>54</sup> While the lines themselves were almost impossible to locate, Coalition airmen focused on striking the cable repeater stations. This called for a high level of precision, as the stations were “about the size of a manhole cover” according to the Coalition’s top air commander, Lieutenant General T. Michael Moseley.<sup>55</sup> The general recalls, “we were breaking them up faster than he [Saddam] could fix them. So then we were able to push it up a little bit and effectively break up the fiber-optic backbone from Baghdad to the south.”<sup>56</sup> Similar to the strikes on KARI during the Gulf War of 1991 that were described in Chapter Six, these strikes broke up the cohesion of the air defense system.

By neutralizing Iraqi air defenses and degrading Iraq’s command and control infrastructure, Operation Southern Focus helped to make an unconventional invasion plan possible. In essence, the tit-for-tat operation substituted for a prolonged air campaign before the actual invasion. Middle East expert and analyst Anthony Cordesman describes the overall effect: “During this time, Iraq not only lost many of its radars and surface-to-air missile fire

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<sup>53</sup> DeLong, *A General Speaks Out*, 67.

<sup>54</sup> Jason L. Haag, “OIF Veterans Discuss Lessons,” *Air Force Public News*, 31 July 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Gordon, “U.S. Air Raids.”

units, but also a significant amount of its command and control system.”<sup>57</sup> After years of sanctions, no-fly zones, sporadic strikes on missile systems, and focused attacks on secure communications, Iraq could offer only token resistance to air operations over its territory. This meant that further attacks on Iraqi leadership could start when the order was given to initiate Operation Iraqi Freedom. Though Operation Southern Focus was the beginning of the end for Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi president believed he had an effective plan to defend his regime and it started with a focus inward.

### **The Iraqi Plan**

As Saddam Hussein prepared for what appeared to be an inevitable attack from the Coalition, his first priority was staying in power by suppressing the internal threat. Saddam believed that the organization best positioned to threaten him was the Republican Guard, and this helps to explain the level of outside supervision he imposed on Republican Guard leaders and the restrictions on coordination between commanders discussed in the previous chapter. It also explains why he installed his son Qusay as the top supervisor of the Republican Guard despite his lack of qualifications.<sup>58</sup> Because of his distrust of the Republican Guard, Saddam was loath to have its units enter Baghdad. Ironically, this focus on internal security prevented Saddam from implementing one of the scenarios most feared by Coalition commanders.

To be more precise, Saddam planned to wait until the very last minute to pull his forces into Baghdad. He unveiled this defense plan through this son, Qusay, in December of

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<sup>57</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons* (Washington, DC: The Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, 2003), 478.

<sup>58</sup> Interview of Sultan Hashim Ahmed Al Hamed Al-Tai, Minister of Defense, 13 November 2003, quoted in Kevin Woods et al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project: A View of Operation Iraqi Freedom From Saddam's Senior Leadership* (Norfolk, Virginia: U.S. Joint Forces Command, 2006), 56.



2002. Qusay and the Chief of Staff of the Republican Guard called a meeting with senior commanders to show them how they would defend Baghdad. The Chief of Staff briefed a plan that was built upon four concentric rings around Baghdad. Iraqi forces would defend each ring against the advancing American forces, but when Saddam gave the order, they would fall back to the next ring. Eventually, Iraqi forces would retreat into the Baghdad area, where they would fight to the death.<sup>59</sup> General Hamdani, the Commander of the II Republican Guard Corps, objected to this plan because it was overly simplistic. He received a disappointing reply:

Qusay said that the plan was already approved by Saddam and “it was you who would now make it work.” I disagreed and told Qusay that a proud Army with an 82-year history cannot fight like this. We were not using our experience. I was told by Qusay that there would be no changes because Saddam had signed the plan already.<sup>60</sup>

Another interesting fact about this meeting is that the Republican Guard commanders—the very men who would be responsible for implementing the plan—were not allowed to have a copy of it. They could only take notes.<sup>61</sup> Nor were they allowed to accomplish the coordination necessary to make the plan work. “In effect,” concludes *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, “serious planning for the defense of Iraq simply ceased in the months before the invasion.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> “Perspectives on OIF from the Former Commander of the Iraqi II Republican Guard Corps,” v3.3, 28 May 2004, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 80-81.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Interview of Salih Ibrahim Hammadi Al- Salamani, Commander, Baghdad Republican Guard Division, 10 November 2003, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 109.

<sup>62</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 109.

The unworkable ring plan for the defense of Baghdad is an apt illustration of the regime's dysfunction. Saddam was the only leader who mattered, military or otherwise, yet he was not a gifted strategist. His intolerance of dissension ensured that he had no appreciation for reality, and as a result, he imposed a defensive plan that was deeply flawed. His preoccupation with his own survival meant that he was unwilling to allow subordinate leaders to take the initiative or coordinate with one another—things that were necessary for his defense plan to work. Finally, his plan denied his forces the ability to enter Baghdad and fight an urban defense, something that his subordinate commanders had already planned in considerable detail.<sup>63</sup>

While Hussein had never been a great strategist, he increasingly became an ineffective military leader. Indeed, a case can be made that Saddam had been quite effective at conducting leadership attack against his own regime. On the eve of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the process of leadership in Iraq was already severely disrupted. "There was little or no fighting spirit evinced by the officers and soldiers of the Republican Guard or the Special Republican Guard who I spoke to," Saddam's physician remembers, "The regime had obviously fallen apart long before the American planes and cruise missiles had left their bases."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> In an article describing Iraqi plans, Robert Collier writes, "General Alaa Abdelkadeer, a Republican Guard commander in Baghdad, said that prewar plans had envisioned a comprehensive urban guerrilla defense, including the mining of streets and bridges. 'There was even a plan to mine the airport, to blow it sky high if the Americans took it,' he said, but none of this was carried out." Robert Collier, "Iraqi Military Plans Were Simplistic, Poorly Coordinated," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 25 May 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Ala Bashir, with Lars Sigurd Sunnana, *The Insider: Trapped in Saddam's Brutal Regime* (London: Abacus, 2005), 296.

## The Role of Leadership Attack in the Final Plan

Despite the dysfunction within Iraq, General Franks and his military planners could not assume away the military capabilities that Iraq still possessed. They thought that Saddam had chemical and biological weapons at his disposal, and he seemed capable of using these weapons if he felt that his hold on power was threatened. On paper at least, Iraq still possessed a formidable army or, more precisely, several different armies. As these armies encountered Coalition ground forces, there was no way to know if they would fight with conviction or dissolve into the population. If these forces made it into Baghdad, they could make taking the city very difficult and costly. As Coalition forces moved at top speed to arrive in Baghdad, they would leave long lines of communication behind them that were exposed to harassing attacks. As responsible officers who had been schooled in a professional planning culture, Coalition leaders needed to account for multiple worst-case scenarios in their planning. Interestingly, one of these scenarios was catastrophic success. “This, in fact, was our biggest fear,” writes Franks’ deputy, General DeLong.<sup>65</sup> These leaders worried about a premature collapse of the regime or its military before Coalition forces could be in place to accept surrenders or secure the urban areas.<sup>66</sup> Despite this possibility, the Coalition would attempt to persuade Iraqi forces not to fight for Saddam and encourage them not to oppose the invasion. This was but one of many forms of leadership attack woven into the plan.

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<sup>65</sup> DeLong, *A General Speaks Out*, 88.

<sup>66</sup> This is the subject of a discussion presented in a Central Command Planning Document titled “Discussion: Possible Contingencies.” This paper discusses contingencies that could happen if Saddam lost power “prematurely,” and one of these contingencies is “Anarchy in Iraq,” and the planners concluded that, “U.S. can’t avoid responsibility for restoring order.” U.S. Central Command, “Discussion: Possible Contingencies,” December 2002, document is now declassified, available in The National Security Archive, “TOP SECRET POLO STEP,” Joyce Battle and Thomas Blanton, eds., 14 February 2007, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB214/index.htm> (accessed 20 June 2012).

In Operations Plan 1003V, the Coalition's final plan to invade Iraq, leadership attack actions fell into three broad categories. First, Coalition forces would physically attack key regime leaders—including Saddam, his sons, and other Ba'ath officials—with the intent of harming or killing them.<sup>67</sup> Failing this, Coalition leaders hoped these attacks would force these regime figures to adopt protective measures that would hinder their ability to lead an effective defense. The constant threat of attack would add to the friction regime leaders faced and when combined with the Coalition's speed of maneuver, this would prevent Iraqi leaders from reacting effectively.<sup>68</sup> Second, Coalition forces would continue the effort begun during Operation Southern Focus by attacking Iraqi communications nodes and command centers, making it more difficult for regime leaders to direct Iraq's defenses or maintain internal order.<sup>69</sup> Third, the Coalition would try to create division between the regime and subordinate leaders, military forces, and the general population. The purpose of these efforts was to encourage these groups to stop supporting Hussein and his regime.<sup>70</sup> DeLong asserts that this aspect of the plan would be "the battle for the psyche of Iraq."<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, when President Bush issued a final ultimatum to Saddam and his sons to leave the country within 48 hours or be expelled, he used several themes of leadership attack as he talked directly to the people of Iraq. "If we must begin a military campaign," the president explained, "it will be directed against the lawless men who rule your country and not against

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<sup>67</sup> General Franks writes, "Killing regime leaders and destroying their command and control apparatus would be a priority." Franks, *American Soldier*, 392.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 396.

<sup>69</sup> Franks wanted to "blind and paralyze Saddam's inner leadership circle" with attacks on command centers and communications nodes. Ibid., 392.

<sup>70</sup> DeLong, *A General Speaks Out*, 86.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

you.”<sup>72</sup> He continued to develop his theme by drawing a sharp distinction between ordinary Iraqis and the Ba’ath regime. “We will tear down the apparatus of terror and we will help you to build a new Iraq that is prosperous and free. The tyrant will soon be gone. The day of your liberation is near,” he promised.<sup>73</sup> He then transitioned to a message designed to create division between the Iraqi military and the regime. President Bush warned the Iraqi military not to fight. “I urge every member of the Iraqi military and intelligence services: If war comes, do not fight for a dying regime that is not worth your own life.”<sup>74</sup> The president’s words made it clear that leadership attack would play a major role in the conflict to come. No one expected, however, that the war would start with a daring strike on Saddam himself. Due to the emergence of an intelligence tip at the last minute, however, that is exactly how the liberation of Iraq would begin.

### **Decapitation Strike at Dora Farm**

After the experience of being unable to find Hussein in Operation Desert Storm, Coalition officials doubted they could attain reliable intelligence on his whereabouts, especially given his obsession with security. As President Bush’s deadline approached, however, it appeared that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had accomplished this improbable feat. On 18 March, an agency source who ran security at Dora Farm—one of Saddam’s residences frequented by his wife and daughters—reported that Saddam was

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<sup>72</sup> President George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation,” 17 March 2003, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030317-7.html> (accessed 5 June 2012).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

there.<sup>75</sup> The CIA passed on this information to the Central Command headquarters in Qatar, where General Franks took immediate interest. Franks directed the Navy to plan an attack on the compound using its cruise missiles, and the F-117 stealth fighter squadron in Qatar was also notified, but it was told to stand down only minutes later.<sup>76</sup> President Bush's ultimatum had not expired, and the president was adamant that no strikes would occur until it was over.<sup>77</sup> Even so, Coalition leaders grew more hopeful that they may be able to gain the intelligence necessary to decapitate the regime.

On 19 March, the report that Saddam was using Dora Farm was corroborated by other sources. The CIA now had two separate informants at the site confirming Hussein's presence, and multiple security vehicles appeared on overhead imagery.<sup>78</sup> Clearly, something unusual was happening at the compound. CIA agents relayed this information to Director George Tenet, who immediately met with Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and the two men hurried to the White House.<sup>79</sup> When they arrived, the president and his top officials discussed the possibility of a strike against Saddam. As this discussion continued, Tenet received another report stating that Saddam had just arrived at the compound.<sup>80</sup> When the president asked about the quality of this intelligence, George Tenet replied, "I can't give you 100 percent assurance, but this is as good as it gets."<sup>81</sup> One by one, all the president's top

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<sup>75</sup> Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 373-374.

<sup>76</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 450-451. After being informed of the target, the author talked directly with the F-117 squadron commander.

<sup>77</sup> DeLong, *A General Speaks Out*, 98.

<sup>78</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 380.

<sup>79</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 459.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.

<sup>81</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 387.

national security advisers recommended a strike on Dora Farm.<sup>82</sup> There was a collective sense that attacking Saddam might shorten the war or avoid it altogether, thus saving lives. President Bush recalls, “I felt a responsibility to seize this opportunity. I turned to the team gathered in the Oval Office and said, ‘Let’s go.’”<sup>83</sup>

There was one problem. The CIA informants said that Saddam would take refuge in an underground bunker.<sup>84</sup> The Navy’s cruise missiles, however, did not have penetrating warheads. The only asset in theater that could survive the Baghdad air defenses and employ penetrating weapons was the F-117.<sup>85</sup> At first, General Franks thought this would be impossible due to the short notice, but he discovered that the F-117 squadron had been preparing on their own — “leaning forward” in military language — and had one jet loaded with the penetrating weapons already.<sup>86</sup> It was possible that they could get another jet loaded and up to Baghdad just before daybreak. General Franks’ air commander, General Moseley, was concerned about the cloud cover forecast in Baghdad that morning. His staff advised him that the clouds would have both positive and negative effects on the mission. On the positive side, the cloud cover would prevent ground observers from seeing the black airplanes as the skies grew brighter just before sunrise. It would be a radar game, and the F-117s excelled in situations like this. On the other hand, the pilots would neither be able to identify the Dora Farm complex visually nor guide their weapons using their onboard lasers. They would have to rely on the accuracy of the coordinates programmed into the bombs — once these bombs

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<sup>82</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 460; Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon*, 238.

<sup>83</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 254.

<sup>84</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 453.

<sup>85</sup> Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon*, 237.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 388.

were released, they would receive position updates from the Global Positioning System and guide themselves to selected target chosen by intelligence specialists. These specialists, however, did not have accurate information on the exact location of the hypothetical bunker where Saddam would be located. There was a field near the main house in the complex, and the experts guessed that this was where the bunker must be located. They spread four aim-points in this field to maximize the chance that the bunker would be struck. These four sets of coordinates were passed to the F-117 squadron and programmed into the state-of-the-art Enhanced GBU-27s.<sup>87</sup>

The plan was straightforward: two F-117s would drop four bombs on the suspected bunker, followed closely by a volley of cruise missiles to destroy all the remaining buildings at the complex except for the main house. This building was not targeted because it was thought to contain Saddam's family members, including multiple women and children. In addition, General Franks approved the addition of several targets, mainly outbuildings housing Saddam's special security forces.<sup>88</sup> At 0312 Baghdad time, General Meyers phoned General Franks to inform him that the president had issued the execute order. At 0338, the F-117s departed from their air base in Qatar on their way to initiate Operation Iraqi Freedom.<sup>89</sup> After one pause for air refueling, the fighters entered Iraq, flying near maximum speed to reach the target before sunrise. As they approached the capital city, the sun began to rise over the horizon, and a low cloud cover blanketed the city. The pilots executed their attacks and turned southward. Although Iraqi air defenses began shooting sporadic anti-aircraft artillery over the skies of Baghdad, it was too late. The stealth characteristics of the F-117 had

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<sup>87</sup> The author was the F-117 liaison officer to General Moseley and participated in these discussions.

<sup>88</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 453.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.



worked, and the pilots returned safely to their base. The question then became: what happened to Saddam?

It soon became clear that Saddam had escaped.<sup>90</sup> Despite initial indications that a high-ranking official had been injured in the attack, the raid on Dora Farm did not kill or seriously injure Saddam Hussein, although the bombs and missiles destroyed much of the compound.<sup>91</sup> Later reports indicated that the central palace—the one not targeted—survived the attack, and it is possible that Saddam may have been in it and survived.<sup>92</sup> Other reports said that he was nowhere near the compound, as he was in the al-Mansour district of Baghdad

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<sup>90</sup> Saddam's interrogator, FBI Agent George Piro, would later reveal that Saddam was at Dora Farm when the bombs fell. "He said it in a kind of a bragging fashion that he was there, but that we missed him. He wasn't bothered by the fact that he was there," said Piro. "Interrogator: Invasion Surprised Saddam," *CBS News*, 24 January 2008, <http://lib.store.yahoo.net/lib/realityzone/UFNSaddamInterrogator.html> (accessed 13 March 2013). However, when Saddam was interrogated directly about his whereabouts on 19 March 2003, he denied being at the compound. "Interview Session Number 4 with Saddam Hussein," 13 February 2004, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 6, document is now declassified, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB279/index.htm> (accessed 5 June 2012).

<sup>91</sup> Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon*, 240.

<sup>92</sup> On 28 May, CBS news reported from the scene, quoting US Army Colonel Tim Madere:

"When we came out here the primary thing they were looking for was an underground facility, or bodies, forensics," says Madere. "And basically what they saw was giant holes created. No underground facilities, no bodies."

Every structure in the compound was destroyed, except one building—the main palace—hidden behind a wall topped by electrified barbed wire. It's a shambles, windows have been blown out, but it is not destroyed.

Madere says a person in the house "could have survived."

... This doesn't solve the mystery of what happened to Saddam, but the clues at Dora Farms leave no doubt he could have survived.

David Martin, "At Saddam's Bombed Palace," *CBS Evening News*, 27 May 2003, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/05/28/eveningnews/main555948.shtml> (accessed 3 June 2012).

that night.<sup>93</sup> President Bush would later write, “the operation was a harbinger of things to com. Our intent was right. The pilots performed bravely. But the intelligence was wrong.”<sup>94</sup>

### A Very Close Call

The Coalition’s intelligence shortcomings continued in the weeks after the strike at Dora Farm, but military commanders kept the pressure on the Iraqi leader as several of his safe houses came under attack.<sup>95</sup> Saddam began to suspect that someone within his inner circle was informing the Coalition of his movements. His suspicion focused on an Iraqi captain close to him, and Saddam devised an experiment to test his loyalty. Saddam asked this officer to prepare a meeting for him and other top officials at a restaurant in the Mansour district. The officer set up the meeting. Saddam arrived and then departed almost immediately.<sup>96</sup> Meanwhile, Coalition forces acted on an intelligence report that Saddam would be at the restaurant. A B-1 bomber was dispatched immediately to attack the target with four 2000-pound weapons. Within minutes of the original tasking, these weapons detonated in the crowded neighborhood, destroying the restaurant and killing several civilians.<sup>97</sup> Saddam narrowly escaped. “Ten minutes after they [Saddam and his entourage] went out the door,” a bodyguard later recalled, “it was bombed.”<sup>98</sup> Saddam had the suspected

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<sup>93</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, “Iraqi Leader, in Frantic Flight, Eluded U.S. Strikes,” *The New York Times*, 16 March 2006, <http://travel.nytimes.com/2006/03/12/international/middleeast/12escape.html> (accessed 5 June 2012).

<sup>94</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 254.

<sup>95</sup> Catherine Philp, “Secrets of Saddam’s Family at War,” *The London Times*, 25 July 2003.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Adam J. Hebert, “The Baghdad Strikes,” *Air Force Magazine*, July 2003, 46-50.

<sup>98</sup> Philp, “Secrets.”

officer executed. By this point, Saddam trusted no one outside of his family. A few days later, according to Uday Hussein's bodyguard, Saddam Hussein and his sons dismissed everyone outside of their family and fled Baghdad.<sup>99</sup>

### **Direct Strikes on Leaders: Beneficial or Not?**

During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Coalition attempted to strike at least 13 other key regime leaders, including figures such as Iraq's number two official, General Izzat Ibrahim, and General Ali Hassan al-Majid, known to many as "Chemical Ali."<sup>100</sup> Despite the impressive capabilities of Coalition airpower, none of these top Iraqi leaders were killed by airstrikes during the operation.<sup>101</sup> In assessing the failure to kill leaders through air strikes, there appears to be a common factor. Iraqi leaders adopted extreme protective measures to evade Coalition attacks. These measures included strict secrecy and continual movement.<sup>102</sup> As a result, the Coalition was unable to attain actionable intelligence on the location of Iraqi leaders. Even if the Coalition could locate the leaders, it could not predict where they would be in the near-term. This made it impossible to attack regime leaders successfully.

While the protective measures adopted by regime leaders and the corresponding lack of predictive intelligence thwarted Coalition efforts, the attacks themselves may have had beneficial effects. Specifically, these attacks may have made it all but impossible for these

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Douglas Jehl and Eric Schmitt, "Errors are Seen in Early Attacks on Iraqi Leaders," *The New York Times*, 13 June 2004.

<sup>101</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 177.

<sup>102</sup> In interrogation sessions conducted after his capture, Saddam described how he did not stay in the same place for more than a day and how he almost never used a telephone, instead relying on couriers. "Casual Conversation with Saddam Hussein," Federal Bureau of Investigation, 11 June 2004, document is now declassified, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB279/index.htm> (accessed 5 June 2012).

leaders to conduct their leadership processes. Saddam Hussein, for example, went into deep hiding. Saddam's physician remembers that no one saw the Iraqi president during the war, including his half-brother.<sup>103</sup> If Saddam wanted to meet with a minister in his government, he would have them blindfolded and driven to meet him at one of the prepared meeting places. In addition, Saddam moved from safe house to safe house every three to six hours in the heavily populated Mansour district of Baghdad. These houses were often located near restricted sites like mosques, hospitals, and embassies.<sup>104</sup> Saddam refused to speak directly to his top military commanders. He also refused to attend a critical meeting with his top Republican Guard officers on 2 April 2003, sending his son Qusay instead.<sup>105</sup> Saddam's fear of attacks drove him to prioritize his own safety over leading the Iraqi defense, and it appears that many of his subordinate leaders followed his example and employed similar protective measures. This led the writers of *The Iraqi Perspectives Project* to conclude: "Combined, these measures generally proved successful against Coalition efforts to eliminate key regime personnel, although they also significantly degraded the regime's ability to maintain a clear awareness of or provide any relevant command and control to the battlefield."<sup>106</sup> Even though protective precautions helped regime leaders survive the attacks, the process of leadership seems to have been severely degraded. Added to this, attacks on command centers and communications infrastructure made it even more difficult for these regime officials to lead.

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<sup>103</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 298.

<sup>104</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 127-128, 148.

<sup>105</sup> "Perspectives on OIF from the Former Commander of the Iraqi II Republican Guard Corps," v3.3, 28 May 2004, in Woods, *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 143-144; Lt. Gen. Ra'ad Hamdani, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: The Invasion of Iraq*, 26 February 2004, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/invasion/interviews/> (accessed 28 May 2012).

<sup>106</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 127.

## Strikes on Command Centers and Communications Infrastructure

A major part of the Coalition's leadership attack strategy was the disruption of Iraqi command centers and the communications infrastructure connecting regime leaders to their military forces. As explained earlier in this chapter, this effort began in the summer of 2002 as Operation Southern Focus, and it was supposed to continue in earnest once Operation Iraqi Freedom started, beginning on the first night of bombing. In the uncertainty after the Dora Farm strike, however, U.S. officials pulled several communications targets off the strike list just before the operation's beginning.<sup>107</sup> About two dozen targets, including communications nodes and leadership sites, were taken off the list because of the high potential for civilian casualties if they were attacked. "There was a hope that there would be a complete and utter collapse of the regime early on," recalls Coalition air strategist Lieutenant Colonel David Hathaway, "In order to let that come to fruition, they initially held back those targets."<sup>108</sup> This helps explain why Secretary Rumsfeld sought to lower expectations about the effects of attacks on Iraqi communications in his 21 March press briefing. The secretary stated, "I think it's a stretch to think it's possible to eliminate their ability to communicate up and down through their command system. Our hope and our prayer is not that we'll get 100 percent of their ability to communicate, but rather that we will be persuasive enough with the people who would have to implement the orders of the senior people in that regime, and persuade

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<sup>107</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 210. The author participated in retargeting activities involving these communications nodes.

<sup>108</sup> Bradley Graham and Vernon Loeb, "An Air War of Might, Coordination and Risks," *The Washington Post*, 27 April 2003.

them that it is clearly not in their interest to obey those types of orders.”<sup>109</sup> This decision explains some of the criticism concerning the initial strikes on Iraqi command and control capability and their unimpressive results.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, General Franks decided not to strike the power grid of Baghdad or in the rural areas. Disrupting the electric power would have affected Iraqi command centers and the supporting communications infrastructure, but it would have caused negative effects for the population as well. General Franks believed the harm to the general population would outweigh the benefits of cutting the power to the military command and control facilities.<sup>111</sup>

Even though officials pulled several targets from the strike list, the Coalition struck numerous command centers and communications targets in the first days of the war. Several of these were in Baghdad. General Franks recalls that, in the first hours of the massive air effort on 21 March, the Coalition struck “precisely selected targets—emergency command posts of Iraqi military intelligence, the luxury villas of senior Baathist leaders, and a checkerboard of communications stations on which the Iraqi air defense system depended to integrate its fires.”<sup>112</sup> The Coalition also targeted the Republican Guard headquarters and communications nodes outside of Baghdad. This exacerbated the Republican Guard

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<sup>109</sup> Donald H. Rumsfeld, Press Briefing, 21 March 2003, [http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/t03212003\\_t0321sd1.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/t03212003_t0321sd1.html) (accessed 21 April 2006).

<sup>110</sup> One such critic is John C. Collins, who writes: “Assumption 3: ‘Shock-and-awe’ assaults against militarily important targets in Baghdad will cripple the Iraqi high command. Reality: Saddam Hussein’s command-and-control apparatus was much more resilient than expected.” In addition, Collins writes, “Redundant command, control, and communications systems dispersed throughout Iraq dramatically reduced results expected from initial shock-and-awe attacks against command, control, and communications centers in Baghdad.” These criticisms can be explained in part by the decision to postpone the high collateral damage targets on the initial strike. John M. Collins, “You Can’t Assume Nothin’,” *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute*, May 2003, 50-51.

<sup>111</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 480.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 482.

commanders' problems in controlling of their forces. Indeed, even before the war began, the threat of attack caused the Republican Guard commanders significant difficulty. The Al-Nida Division commander's plight is described in *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*. In the months before the conflict, the Iraqi commanders had been ordered to move their headquarters to "isolated hide sites."<sup>113</sup> These makeshift headquarters had no computers and only limited telephone and radio communications. The primary way that the commanders kept track of their men was through the manual plotting of forces on maps that hung on the walls. While one of the commanders had a satellite radio, he explained that he was afraid to use it because he did not want to highlight the location of his headquarters.<sup>114</sup> Once the war started, the Republican Guard's communication problems grew worse. "The early air attacks hit only empty headquarters and barracks buildings. It did affect our communications switches which were still based in those buildings," recalled the commander of the Al-Nida Division.<sup>115</sup> This meant that much of the communication had to be conducted face-to-face, which required tremendous time and effort.<sup>116</sup> General Hamdani, Commander of the Republican Guard II Corps, agreed that the initial air strikes were effective against communications facilities.<sup>117</sup>

As Operation Iraqi Freedom continued, the Coalition intensified attacks on communication capabilities. When it became apparent that Iraqis were not going to rise up spontaneously against Saddam, Coalition commanders put many of the initial communications

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<sup>113</sup> Interview of Abd Al-Karim Jasim Nafus Al-Majid, Commander, Al-Nida Armored Division, 21 November 2003, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 129.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>117</sup> "Perspectives on OIF from the Former Commander of the Iraqi II Republican Guard Corps," v3.3, 28 May 2004, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 129.

targets back on the strike list, including telephone exchanges and television broadcast stations.<sup>118</sup> Saddam's physician recalls driving by the local communication center near his hospital. "Fire and smoke rose from the ruins," he writes, "American bombers had scored a bulls-eye just a few minutes earlier."<sup>119</sup> On 31 March 2003, Anthony Shadid of *The Washington Post* reported that the Coalition had effectively disrupted communications in Baghdad. In his article, Shadid observed that "...based on a drive around the city, the most striking change in the landscape was the methodical dispatch of telecommunications facilities. Calls on Baghdad's phones today were answered with the recording: 'All circuits are busy at this time. Please try again later.'"<sup>120</sup> The Coalition also attacked the Iraqi television system because, in the planners' judgment, the regime could use the television to signal Iraqi agents, especially those outside the country, to take adverse action against the Coalition and its members.<sup>121</sup> Coalition commanders wished to limit the damage done to the television broadcast facilities, recognizing that it would be useful to reestablish television communications to aid in stability and reconstruction efforts. Therefore, it took some time to

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<sup>118</sup> Graham, "An Air War of Might, Coordination and Risks."

<sup>119</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 297.

<sup>120</sup> Anthony Shadid, "In Shift, Air War Targets Communications Facilities," *Washington Post*, 1 April 2003, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&contentId=A62768-2003Mar31&notFound=true> (accessed 26 May 2006).

<sup>121</sup> Human Rights Watch telephone interview with senior CENTCOM official #2, in Human Rights Watch, *Off Target: The Conduct of the War and Civilian Casualties in Iraq* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003), 48-49, <http://www.hrw.org/> (accessed 1 June 2006). This decision was criticized by Human Rights Watch: "There is no evidence that Iraqi media was being used to provide direct assistance to the Iraqi armed forces. If the media is used to incite violence, as in Rwanda, or to direct troops, it may become a legitimate target. The media facilities in Iraq, however, did not appear to be making an effective contribution to military action. As a consequence, Human Rights Watch believes that while stopping broadcasts intended to give encouragement to the general population may have served to demoralize the Iraqi population and undermine the government's political support, neither purpose offered the definite military advantage required by law to make media facilities legitimate military targets."



stop TV broadcasts, but this was accomplished on 8 April.<sup>122</sup> By the war's end, communication in Baghdad was nearly impossible.

Military units outside of Baghdad did not fare any better, as the Coalition conducted a sustained campaign against their command centers and communications infrastructure. As General Moseley stated during a press conference on 5 April:

We're still striking leadership targets and command and control targets outside of Baghdad because we want to continue to keep the options of true command and control to a minimum. But I'll tell you, we've been very successful in breaking up the command and control backbone and we'll continue to strike that for as long as we have to keep the forces isolated from the leadership in Baghdad.<sup>123</sup>

The Coalition eventually realized its goal of isolating the forces on the battlefield. By 31 March, military commanders and Ba'ath party leaders in southern Iraq had lost the ability to communicate with Baghdad.<sup>124</sup> As Coalition strikes also disrupted their ability to communicate within their own units, some Republican Guard commanders made courageous attempts to exercise leadership. In one example, the Al-Nida Division "established a relay system to maintain contact between its headquarters and the various units under its

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<sup>122</sup> On 5 April 2003, in response to a question about why it was taking so long to disable the Iraqi TV station, General Moseley answered: "The sensitivity that the CINC and all of us have as component commanders is to absolutely totally minimize the collateral damage and absolutely totally minimize the effect on the civilian population so that as much of this infrastructure can be returned back to the Iraqi people after the liberation so that they can get themselves as fast as possible back to a functioning society. So a lot of these transmitting stations and a lot of these things we've chosen to attempt to work with as minimum damage as we possibly can. You know better than I do about how TVs work and how TV stations work and the many options that we have, both kinetic and non-kinetic, but I'll tell you the trick for us has been to attempt to do this as good as we can while not destroying a lot of the infrastructure. So that's been the balance we've been trying to work." Lieutenant General T. Michael Moseley, Press Briefing, 5 April 2003.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 136. See also Al-Hayat, "Former Iraqi Soldiers Speak Out," *Al-Hayat*, 26 May 2003, which reports: "An officer who was at the defense line near the city of Kut, in Southern Baghdad, said that all the communication means between fighters at the front and top leadership were cut one week before the fall of Baghdad."

command.”<sup>125</sup> This system exacted a toll on the commander, however, as he was forced to spend a great deal of time moving between his units.<sup>126</sup> The same was true of the II Corps Commander, General Hamdani. The general paints a bleak picture of the situation just before Coalition ground forces reached his defensive positions. All of his communication staff was killed by Coalition strikes, and he had no way to issue orders.<sup>127</sup> “I tried to get back to my headquarters to gather troops, because even my mobile phone was out of order, because our communication group was hit, and all of its members were martyred,” recalls Hamdani, “There were no leading figures; everybody was fighting.”<sup>128</sup> By this point, as Anthony Cordesman observes, “there was now no meaningful order of battle for Iraqi land forces.”<sup>129</sup>

In the end, the only way the Iraqis could protect their command centers was to hide them inside schools, hospitals, and mosques, but even this desperate measure could not prevent the collapse of Iraqi command and control.<sup>130</sup> Building on the foundation laid during Operation Southern Focus, Coalition air forces struck 116 command and control targets, including 10 media facilities, between 19 March and 18 April 2003, according to air

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<sup>125</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 129.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> “Perspectives on OIF from the Former Commander of the Iraqi II Republican Guard Corps,” v3.3, 28 May 2004, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 147.

<sup>128</sup> Hamdani, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>129</sup> Cordesman, *The Iraq War*, 109.

<sup>130</sup> Franks, *American Soldier*, 521. Saddam’s physician confirms this tactic in his book, *The Insider*. One night during the war, he looked outside of his window at the hospital and saw numerous pieces of military equipment parked on the hospital grounds. Later that night, he describes a Coalition attack on this equipment. As he looked upon the damage, he recalls: “I could only admire the American precision—it saved my life.” Bashir, *The Insider*, 298-299.

component records.<sup>131</sup> This part of the Coalition campaign appears to have caused major disruptions in Iraqi leadership. There was another Coalition effort that appears to have disrupted the regime significantly, and that was the effort to undermine regime leaders.

### **Undermining the Regime: Targeting Subordinate Leaders**

The Coalition attempted to disrupt the process of leadership within Iraq by undermining the Hussein regime with its subordinate leaders, military forces, and general population. Both before and during the campaign, the Coalition used various methods to drive a wedge of distrust between the regime and these three groups, including the offering of inducements and psychological operations, or PSYOPS. What separated the leadership attack efforts from more traditional PSYOPS actions was the goal behind them. The Coalition wished to break the essential bond between the Iraqi leader and his followers.<sup>132</sup> In essence, the Coalition wanted to encourage individuals in these three groups to do what many of them already wanted to do—stop following Saddam.

The Coalition initiated the effort to undermine Saddam several months before Operation Iraqi Freedom began, and this effort greatly concerned the Iraqi president. “By 2002, Saddam was aware of various American efforts to induce Iraqi generals to cooperate in

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<sup>131</sup> Assessments and Analysis Division, “Operation IRAQI FREEDOM—By the Numbers,” U.S. Air Forces Central, 30 April 2003, 9, [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/uscentaf\\_oif\\_report\\_30apr2003.pdf](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/uscentaf_oif_report_30apr2003.pdf) (accessed 22 September 2011).

<sup>132</sup> As presented here, the Coalition’s leadership attack efforts designed to drive a wedge between the regime and the three groups—subordinate leaders, military forces, and the general population—were actually a subset of traditional PSYOPS. As an example of a more traditional message, the Coalition dropped leaflets that read, “The Medina RGFC has been targeted for destruction. FOR YOUR SAFETY – Abandon your weapons systems. Whether manned or unmanned, these weapons systems will be destroyed.” This is a conventional attempt at propaganda and does not target the bond between the members of the Medina Division and the Hussein regime. This chapter will highlight several propaganda messages that do target this bond, as they can be a potent form of leadership attack. Herbert A. Friedman, “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” *Psywarrior.com*, <http://www.psywarrior.com/OpnIraqiFreedom.html> (accessed 21 April 2006).

the event of a U.S. invasion,” write the authors of *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*.<sup>133</sup> This contributed to Saddam’s paranoia about internal security. As explained throughout this study, he consistently regarded the internal threat as the greatest danger to his regime.<sup>134</sup> General Franks later confirmed that his staff had established contact with several commanders of regular army divisions in southern Iraq.<sup>135</sup> Franks later remarked, “I had letters from Iraqi generals saying ‘I now work for you.’”<sup>136</sup> Franks hoped that some of these units would choose not to oppose Coalition ground forces during the invasion, but as mentioned in the previous chapter, Hussein’s fear of internal uprisings led him to install Ba’athist security teams at each division headquarters. It appears that these security personnel were able to force the soldiers to fight, but some units offered little more than token resistance.<sup>137</sup>

As the war approached, the Coalition increased its propaganda efforts against subordinate leaders in the regime. While these messages were delivered using traditional means such as leaflets and radio broadcasts, the Coalition also used targeted messages aimed at specific personnel.<sup>138</sup> These messages were delivered through various means, including

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<sup>133</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 26.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> John Keegan, *The Iraq War* (New York; Alfred A. Knoff, 2004), 235.

<sup>136</sup> Vago Muradian, “Allied Special Forces Took Western Iraq,” *Defense News*, 19 May 2003, quoted in Peter Dale Scott, “Why Baghdad Fell Without A Fight—Does Saddam’s General Have the Answer?” *Pacific News Service*, 28 May 2003. A spokesman for Central Command, Brigadier General Vincent Brooks, was later quoted, “As we had access to leaders, we spoke with them and said, ‘You need to make a choice here.’ Those that made the choices will have an opportunity to live another day. Those who did not did not survive the operations.” Terry McCarthy, Brian Bennett, Jim Lacey, Simon Robinson, Mark Thompson and Michael Wiesskopf, “What Ever Happened to the Republican Guard?” *Time*, 12 May 2003, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1004798,00.html> (accessed 20 June 2012).

<sup>137</sup> Keegan, *The Iraq War*, 235.

<sup>138</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 95.

direct e-mails, faxes, and phone calls.<sup>139</sup> One Iraqi officer stated that the faxes and e-mails seriously affected those who received them, despite the fact that security officers cut communications lines ten days before the war. “Of course it had an impact,” he explained, “If one commander receives a fax and gives it to his senior, in this simple way the officer knows of the U.S. technical superiority. Imagine him thinking: ‘If the Americans are able to get into the mind of a senior commander this way, how can I protect a whole division?’”<sup>140</sup> In addition to this psychological pressure, rumors were rampant in Baghdad. Some reports asserted that a few of the “human shields” in Baghdad were acting as CIA agents and met with regime leaders to offer inducements.<sup>141</sup> These inducements included cash bribes, safe passage out of the country, and a position in the new Iraqi government. One Arab diplomat said, “Being cautious, those who accepted the deal only agreed to defect once the soldiers were in sight. The signal was to be the taking of the airport in Baghdad.”<sup>142</sup>

It would be wise to treat these reports with a healthy level of skepticism, and it is unlikely that a clear picture of this effort will emerge for some time due to the classification issues inherent in human intelligence activities. The evidence strongly suggests, however, that the Coalition spent considerable time and resources undermining the relationship between Saddam and his subordinate leaders. Indeed, Secretary Rumsfeld confirmed this in a press conference held soon after the operation began. In response to a question about direct talks between the Coalition and senior military leaders in Iraq, the secretary responded, “If you’re

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<sup>139</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 109; Bob Drogin and Greg Miller, “Plan’s Defect: No Defectors,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 28 March 2003; Scott Peterson and Peter Ford, “From Iraqi Officers, Three Tales of Shock and Defeat,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 18 April 2003.

<sup>140</sup> Peterson, “From Iraqi Officers, Three Tales of Shock and Defeat.”

<sup>141</sup> Scott, “Why Baghdad Fell,” and Pepe Escobar, “The Baghdad Deal,” *Asia Times Online*, 25 April 2003, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/ED25Ak04.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/ED25Ak04.html) (accessed 20 June 2012).

<sup>142</sup> “Saddam Betrayed by Republican Guard Chief: Report,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 May 2003.

asking is there contact between Coalition forces and Iraqi forces, the answer is most certainly. There have been over the past period of weeks, and those discussions have intensified.”<sup>143</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that this effort continued after the invasion began. Various reports affirm that several Iraqi officials, including both the commanders of the Special Republican Guard and the Fedayeen Saddam, accepted offers to leave. Some Iraqis believe this explains the quick defeat of the Iraqi army and lack of resistance as Coalition troops entered Baghdad.<sup>144</sup> “I think there was something fishy going on,” said one Iraqi soldier, “some type of contact between the Americans and the Iraqi commanders.”<sup>145</sup>

Whether or not his subordinate commanders actually turned on him, Saddam was convinced that he had been betrayed. In what appears to be his last public appearance on the streets of Baghdad, Saddam met an elderly woman who asked angrily: “What have you done to us?” “What can I do?” the Iraqi president responded with resignation, “I trusted the commanders but they were traitors and they betrayed Iraq.”<sup>146</sup> Hussein’s lament suggests that the effort to target Saddam’s subordinate commanders had succeeded in cutting the bonds between them and the Iraqi president.

### **Undermining the Regime: Targeting the Iraqi Military**

Along with targeting the regime’s subordinate leaders, the Coalition attempted to discourage Iraqi military personnel from fighting. While this is a traditional role for

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<sup>143</sup> Rumsfeld, Press Briefing, 21 March 2003.

<sup>144</sup> Escobar, “The Baghdad Deal;” Scott, “Why Baghdad Fell;” Sydney Morning Herald, “Saddam Betrayed;” and Lee Siu Hin, “Lee Siu Hin Reports, Baghdad,” July 2003.

<sup>145</sup> William Branigin, “A Brief, Bitter War for Iraq’s Military Officers: Self-Deception a Factor in Defeat,” *The Washington Post*, 27 April 2003.

<sup>146</sup> Philp, “Secrets of Saddam’s Family at War.”

PSYOPS, it was also a form of leadership attack because some messages specifically discouraged soldiers from fighting for Saddam and his regime. As with other forms of leadership attack, this effort began months before the war. Coalition aircraft dropped millions of leaflets on Republican Guard and regular army formations. This campaign caused great concern among regime leaders, including Saddam himself. He directed security forces to collect the leaflets once they were dropped, and he threatened to kill or imprison anyone found possessing them.<sup>147</sup> As one Iraqi noted, “The government did not want the people to see the promises the U.S. armed forces were offering the Iraqi soldiers and civilians.”<sup>148</sup> Although the Mukabarat military intelligence agents prevented most Iraqi soldiers from reading the leaflets, the propaganda effort achieved an important psychological effect. This interesting reaction is described in *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*: “In the eyes of the average Iraqi soldier, Iraq’s inability to stop the United States from ‘flying 8,000 miles to drop its trash [pamphlets]’ on them proved the regime’s military impotence. The fact that the Coalition seemed to know exactly where to drop the ‘trash’ made every soldier in the Republican Guard feel as if they were in ‘a sniper’s sight.’”<sup>149</sup>

Once the war began, the Coalition intensified its PSYOPS campaign against military forces. In a press briefing held early in the war, General Meyers explained the role of leaflets and their perceived success. “We have dropped millions of leaflets over Iraq telling the Iraqi people our intentions and asking the Iraqi military to lay down their arms,” stated General Myers, “In fact, some Iraqi soldiers are surrendering and abandoning their positions in the south and also in the north. Clearly, many Iraqi military units are heeding our message that it

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<sup>147</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 95-96.

<sup>148</sup> Classified Intelligence Report, March 2003, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 96.

<sup>149</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 125.

is better to fight for the future of Iraq than to fight for Saddam Hussein.”<sup>150</sup> In Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Coalition dropped over 20 million leaflets containing numerous different messages. In addition, Coalition assets such as EC-130 Commando Solo aircraft broadcast radio messages directly to the Iraqis.<sup>151</sup> Of course, not all of these messages can be categorized as leadership attack, but many contributed to the strategy of driving a psychological wedge between the regime and its military forces. One leaflet read, “As your family struggles to survive—He lives in splendor. Who needs you more? Your family or the regime? Return to your home and family.”<sup>152</sup> The evidence suggests that tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers did exactly that.

Indeed, Iraqi troops deserted their units in droves. General Hamdani, the commander of the Republican Guard II Corps, estimated that only 15 percent of his troops fought against Coalition forces.<sup>153</sup> The Al-Nida Division’s experience was even worse. Its commander explains:

I started the war with 13,000 soldiers. By the time we had orders to pull back to Baghdad, I had less than 2,000; by the time we were in position in Baghdad, I had less than 1,000. Every day the desertions increased. We had no engagements with military American forces.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> General Richard B. Meyers, Press Briefing, 21 March 2003.

<sup>151</sup> Christopher J. Lamb, *Review of Psychological Operations Lessons Learned from Recent Operational Experience* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2005), 48-51.

<sup>152</sup> Herbert A. Friedman, “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” <http://www.psywarrior.com/OpnIraqiFreedom.html> (accessed 6 June 2012). This leaflet—IZD-050—originally appeared in the U.S. Central Command Leaflet Gallery, but that website is no longer functional.

<sup>153</sup> Hamdani, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>154</sup> Interview of Abd Al-Karim Jasim Nafus Al-Majid, Commander, Al-Nida Armored Division, 21 November 2003, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 126.



This revelation is stunning, because prior to the war, the Al-Nida Division was considered one of the top divisions within the Republican Guard.<sup>155</sup> In unit after unit, both Iraqi officers and enlisted men willingly walked away from the battlefield during Iraqi Freedom.<sup>156</sup>

The obvious question is: why did these troops leave? It appears that the immediate motivation for most soldiers was to escape the intense Coalition bombing campaign.<sup>157</sup> Carl Conetta argues that four additional factors contributed to the widespread desertion in his report describing the collapse of the Iraqi military. First, Iraqi soldiers suffered from “severe disenchantment” with their situation, as it had deteriorated since the end of the Gulf War of 1991. Second—and closely related—was the lack of effective leadership at all levels, civilian and military. Third, many of the soldiers understood that the Ba’ath regime was probably not going to survive the conflict. Fourth, the U.S. psychological attacks played upon all of these vulnerabilities.<sup>158</sup> When coupled with devastating air attacks against Iraqi fielded forces, the Coalition PSYOPS campaign exacerbated the strained relationship between Hussein, the Ba’ath party, and the Iraqi military. Once the soldiers saw a chance to leave, they did.

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<sup>155</sup> Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 60.

<sup>156</sup> Carl Conetta, “Catastrophic Interdiction: Air Power and the Collapse of the Iraqi Field Army in the 2003 War,” Commonwealth Institute Project on Defense Alternatives Briefing Memo #30, 26 September 2003, 5, <http://www.comw.org/pda/fulltext/0309bm30.pdf> (accessed 26 May 2006).

<sup>157</sup> The combination of precision airpower and PSYOPS was very effective against the Republican Guard. The Al-Nida Commander observed, “The air attacks were the most effective message. The soldiers who did see the leaflets and then saw the air attacks knew the leaflets were true. They believed the message after that, if they were still alive. Overall they had a terrible effect on us.” The authors of *The Iraqi Perspectives Project* conclude: “In effect, precise airpower and the fear it engendered made an entire division of the Republican Guard combat ineffective.” Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 126.

<sup>158</sup> Conetta, “Catastrophic Interdiction,” 6. An informative article that supports this view is found in *Time*. Terry McCarthy, Brian Bennett, Jim Lacey, Simon Robinson, Mark Thompson and Michael Wiesskopf, “What Ever Happened to the Republican Guard?” *Time*, 12 May 2003, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1004798,00.html> (accessed 20 June 2012).

## Undermining the Regime: Targeting the Iraqi People

The Coalition's PSYOPS campaign was not limited to military personnel—it also targeted the civilian population. PSYOPS units created and delivered numerous messages designed to diminish the people's will to follow and support Saddam. The means of delivery included radio, television, and leaflets. Here is an example of a standard radio message:

People of Iraq. The standard of living for Iraqis has dropped drastically since Saddam came into power. Every night, children go to sleep hungry in Iraq. The sick suffer from ailments that are easily treatable in the rest of the world. Saddam has built palace after palace for himself and has purchased a fleet of luxury cars, all at the expense of the Iraqi people. This money would be much better suited to build libraries and schools...<sup>159</sup>

Numerous leaflet messages repeated this theme. One leaflet contained a cartoon figure of Saddam crushing the state of Iraq. It read, "The Coalition is here to put an end to the oppression caused by Saddam and his regime. The Coalition wishes no harm to the people of Iraq. The Coalition is here to end the oppressive rule of Saddam and his regime."<sup>160</sup> Another leaflet contained this message, "Coalition forces support the people of Iraq in their desire to remove Saddam and his regime. The Coalition wishes no harm to the innocent Iraqi civilians."<sup>161</sup> Yet another read, "The noble people of Iraq are not the target of Coalition Military Operations! The target of Coalition Military Operations is the ruthless regime!"<sup>162</sup>

The Coalition also issued specific messages to encourage Iraqis to disobey regime orders. This included the warning not to destroy oil facilities. One leaflet read, "If the oil industry is destroyed, your livelihood will be RUINED! Help to prevent the sabotage of the

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<sup>159</sup> Friedman, "Operation Iraqi Freedom."

<sup>160</sup> Leaflet IZD-024, Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Leaflet IZD-061, Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Leaflet IZD-060a, Ibid.

oil industry! Your family depends on it!”<sup>163</sup> This message seems to have been both heard and obeyed, as Iraqi oil workers defied the regime’s order to destroy the oil wells. In an April press conference, Major General Victor Renuart, Director of Operations for USCENTCOM, explained how these leaflets contributed to the critical effort to save Iraqi infrastructure. The oil workers had chosen to disobey the regime because they heard and believed the messages being broadcast by the Coalition. “So there’s a case where a message passed by a number of means—leaflets, radio broadcasts, and even some television broadcasts—was getting to the people that could protect the future of the country,” explained Renuart.<sup>164</sup> Persuading the oil workers to protect this infrastructure saved massive amounts of time and money during the reconstruction phase.

In another example of sending messages to the Iraqi population, the Coalition wished to reassure Iraqis through the symbolic bombing of buildings associated with the regime. “We wanted to make it clear to the Iraqi people that we were attacking regime targets,” said Colonel Mace Carpenter, a senior Coalition planner, “We wanted them to see that we were clearly targeting those people who had been repressing them.”<sup>165</sup> This meant that the Coalition bombed key buildings such as presidential palaces, secret police facilities, and the Ba’ath party headquarters, despite the fact that they were largely empty.<sup>166</sup> Saddam’s physician took notice of this effort, and he recalled the bombing of the military intelligence headquarters near his house as well as several prisons associated with the Mukabarat,

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Major General Victor Renuart, U.S. Central Command Daily Briefing Transcript, 10 April 2003.

<sup>165</sup> Graham, “An Air War of Might, Coordination and Risks.”

<sup>166</sup> Shadid, “In Shift, Air War Targets Communications Facilities.”

Saddam's secret intelligence organization.<sup>167</sup> "The purpose of these strikes seemed less to cripple the government," writes Anthony Shadid, "than to signal the impending demise of Hussein's 30-year rule by demolishing institutions that inspired such fear that many Iraqis dared not mention their names."<sup>168</sup> While this action did not provoke a popular uprising against the regime, most Iraqis did not oppose the Coalition's advance into the capital. Instead, the majority of people went to their homes and waited. Saddam's physician described his feelings as he left his post and retreated to his sister's house: "I was finished with Saddam. I owed him nothing...my conscience was clear as I now turned my back upon him."<sup>169</sup>

### Strategic Paralysis

By the first week in April, Saddam Hussein's regime exhibited unmistakable symptoms of strategic paralysis. Unlike in Operation Desert Storm, the core Iraqi leadership stopped responding to stimuli as Saddam Hussein lost the ability to lead. His fear of attack from outside and betrayal from within forced him to forgo any meaningful role in Iraq's defense. The few orders that he issued were not grounded in reality and communicated very late—too late to make a difference.<sup>170</sup> When orders were received, they were often disobeyed. Military leaders looked to escape rather than fight, and thousands of Iraqi soldiers simply left the

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<sup>167</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 298, 301-302.

<sup>168</sup> Shadid, "In Shift, Air War Targets Communications Facilities."

<sup>169</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 300-301.

<sup>170</sup> Anthony Cordesman observes, "The Iraqi decisionmaking cycle fell steadily behind the realities on the ground. By the time the United States entered Baghdad, Iraq had lost force cohesion..." Cordesman, *The Iraq War*, 483.

battlefield at the first opportunity.<sup>171</sup> Most of the Iraqi population went to their homes and waited to see what would happen next. In the end, even Saddam's will was broken. Tariq Aziz observed Saddam at a desperate meeting on 6 April, and he noted that the Iraqi leader was like a man "who had lost his will to resist."<sup>172</sup> This marked the end of Saddam Hussein's leadership and the collapse of his regime. From this point on, he was a fugitive, not a leader.

### **Costs of a Leadership Attack Strategy**

Given this result, the Coalition's adoption of a multifaceted leadership attack strategy within the overall campaign appears to have delivered significant benefits. One cannot attribute all the effects that led to the regime's paralysis to this strategy (a fact which will be discussed later), but leadership attack appears to have made a contribution. While acknowledging the benefits, it is important to ask if there were any costs of the strategy. There were, and these costs manifested themselves in two primary ways. First, when intelligence sources failed to produce accurate information on the whereabouts of the regime's top leaders, Coalition officials made erroneous judgments about the proportionality of strikes on leaders in urban areas. This weakened the moral authority of the United States in the eyes of the world. Second, the leadership attack strategy may have contributed to difficulties in the transition to peace and democracy in Iraq. The following sections discuss these costs and how they affected the overall conduct of the campaign.

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<sup>171</sup> At the 2 April meeting with Qusay, an Iraqi colonel recalled that, "military leaders started secretly whispering together that if someone wanted to keep on fighting, he would have to do it at his own responsibility. He added that all of them decided to go home, declaring that they were ready to fight for the future of their sons and country, but not for Saddam and Qusay." *Al-Hayat*, "Former Iraqi Soldiers Speak Out."

<sup>172</sup> Classified Intelligence Report, May 2003, quoted in Woods et. al., *The Iraqi Perspectives Project*, 149.

## **Lack of Intelligence and Concerns Regarding Proportionality**

Despite numerous aerial attacks during major combat operations, the Coalition failed to kill a single high-ranking regime leader during the race to Baghdad. One reason for this disappointing record may have been the failure of Coalition air forces to attack the leaders promptly. The evidence, however, suggests this was generally not the case. The Dora Farm raid, the attack on the restaurant in Mansour, and numerous other attacks on Iraqi leaders proved the Coalition could conduct accurate weapons delivery on a very short timeline.<sup>173</sup> Coalition forces consistently hit the targets for which they were aiming, and they did so quickly. Unfortunately for them, the intelligence upon which these strikes were based was fundamentally flawed in one of two distinct ways. In some cases, such as at Dora Farm, it was wrong or incomplete. The leader was not where the Coalition thought he was. In other cases, the intelligence was not actionable; while the leader's whereabouts may have been known at a particular time, there was no way to predict where that leader would be in the future. A major reason for this is that regime officials—especially Saddam and his inner circle—adopted effective security measures. Another key reason was the lack of reliable human

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<sup>173</sup> Only in the Mansour attack does it appear that a shorter timeline may have made a difference in the ultimate success of the strike, but it should be remembered that Saddam specifically set up this fake meeting to identify a suspected traitor in his inner circle. While Coalition air forces attacked these targets within timelines that were unprecedented, a key capability has emerged since the war that may make it easier to strike regime leaders from the air. Remotely piloted vehicles have the ability to loiter for much longer periods than manned platforms, and this allows them to gather video intelligence over time. If the platforms also carry weapons, they can be a potent leadership attack tool. These vehicles have been used to great effect against numerous terrorist leaders in Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Yemen. The Coalition had access to early versions of these vehicles during Operation Iraqi Freedom, but air commanders considered their vulnerability to attack to be high, especially over Baghdad, and the tactics were relatively nascent at the time.

intelligence sources within the regime.<sup>174</sup> The combination made it quite unlikely that the Coalition could find the leaders and target them without some luck. Such luck never materialized during the campaign. These failed strikes damaged the credibility of the Coalition, especially that of the United States, as they gave outside observers evidence that decision-makers may have an unbalanced view of proportionality when it came to strikes on Iraqi leaders.

In late 2003, Human Rights Watch published a report titled *Off Target: The Conduct of the War and Civilian Casualties in Iraq*. While this report extends compliments to the Coalition for its efforts to minimize civilian casualties, it singled out the strikes on Iraqi leadership as a cause for concern. In a key passage, the report states:

The aerial strikes on Iraqi leadership constituted one of the most disturbing aspects of the war in Iraq for several reasons. First, many of the civilian casualties from the air war occurred during U.S. attacks on senior Iraqi leadership officials. Second, the intelligence and targeting methodologies used to identify potential leadership targets were inherently flawed and led to preventable civilian deaths. Finally, every single attack on leadership failed. None of the targeted individuals was killed, and in the cases examined by Human Rights Watch, local Iraqis repeatedly stated that they believed the intended targets were not even present at the time of the strike.<sup>175</sup>

Clearly, the Coalition's inability to kill Iraqi leaders raises troubling questions about proportionality. In hindsight, the fact that numerous Iraqi civilians were killed during direct

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<sup>174</sup> General Richard Myers writes, "The shortage of good human intelligence (HUMINT) plagued us not only from the start of the war in Iraq, but also throughout the first several years of the Global War on Terror. That was because we were still trying to rebuild HUMINT capability that had been decimated in the 1990s through shifted priorities following the end of the Cold War and because of the view that our overhead space reconnaissance systems could do the job by themselves. The challenge to get reliable intelligence on Iraq persisted until I retired." Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon*, 240.

<sup>175</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Off Target: The Conduct of the War and Civilian Casualties in Iraq* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003), 22, <http://www.hrw.org/> (accessed 1 June 2006).

attacks, but no top Iraqi leaders, leads some to conclude that Coalition officials misjudged the proportionality of leadership strikes.

Proportionality is a key factor in judging the morality of leadership attack, and it is discussed in detail in Appendix A. The principle is a key element of the Law of Armed Conflict, and it simply holds that the harm that can be reasonably expected to come to innocents due to a military action has to be proportional to the military benefits that are gained. The International Committee of the Red Cross phrases the principle this way in a class intended for military personnel: “When military objectives are attacked, civilians and civilian objects must be spared from incidental or collateral damage to the maximum extent possible. Incidental damage must not be excessive in relation to the direct and concrete military advantage you anticipate from your operations.”<sup>176</sup> This principle is clearly applicable to attacks on enemy leaders. These leaders—especially civilian political leaders—are likely to be surrounded by noncombatants, as they often live and work in urban areas. This was certainly the case in Iraq. In accordance the Law of Armed Conflict, Coalition officials were required to balance the military advantage of attacking key regime leaders with the potential for harm to civilian noncombatants.

The Human Rights Watch report accuses the Coalition of failing to estimate collateral damage adequately during time-sensitive strikes on regime leaders. It states, “While the U.S. military hailed the quick turn-around time between the acquisition of intelligence and the air strikes on leadership targets, it appears the haste contributed to excessive civilian casualties because it prevented adequate collateral damage estimates.”<sup>177</sup> This criticism, however, is not

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<sup>176</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, *The Law of Armed Conflict: Basic Knowledge* (Geneva, Switzerland: 2002), 12.

<sup>177</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Off Target*, 22.



fully supported by the evidence. The Coalition had a system in place for making this judgment that included prediction tools for blast effects and a methodology for estimating the civilian casualties. It also included rules for designating the Coalition official responsible for approving a strike based on estimated casualties—the higher the civilian casualties, the more senior the approving official. At each level, officials had legal advisors present to help them with the proportionality test.<sup>178</sup>

The Coalition's shortcoming was not in estimating collateral damage.<sup>179</sup> As they directed attacks on regime leaders, Coalition officials made a good-faith effort to balance civilian casualties with military advantage. Instead, Coalition officials missed the mark on proportionality because they gave too much credence to intelligence sources. The Coalition's dismal record proves that it was unable to locate regime leaders and predict where they would be. The resulting ratio was no Iraqi leaders killed at a price of scores of civilian casualties. While these strikes had beneficial effects in keeping regime leaders from mounting an effective Iraqi resistance, the Coalition's advantage gained by the strikes versus the unintended consequences appeared to be out of balance. The root cause was giving too much credit to the intelligence and the sources from which it was derived.

This is a troubling development for those who advocate decapitation strikes, because the Coalition enjoyed unprecedented access to Iraq in the months and years leading up to the war. Indeed, U.S. intelligence agencies had fixed their full gaze on Iraq for over twelve years. Since the end of Operation Desert Storm, the United States and the United Kingdom enjoyed access to Iraqi airspace. A generation of intelligence officers had grown up giving and

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<sup>178</sup> The author was present in the Combined Air Operation Center for several of these leadership strikes and observed the process.

<sup>179</sup> Indeed, in the author's experience, the Coalition estimation process tended to overestimate civilian casualties.

receiving intelligence briefings on Iraq. It is highly unlikely that any military power will ever have the time and access to conduct what the military calls “Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace” as occurred prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Yet the Coalition failed to develop actionable intelligence on regime leaders. Due to their belief in the value of leadership attack and its contribution to the overall strategy, Coalition officials were willing to accept the potential for civilian casualties during attacks on Saddam and his inner circle. Unfortunately, these officials failed to recognize the erroneous nature of the intelligence reports they did receive, and they ordered repeated leadership strikes against leaders who were not there. Human Rights Watch rightly criticizes the Coalition for not realizing this shortcoming during the operation: “If attacks are repeatedly unsuccessful and result in significant civilian casualties, the entire target set should be reassessed,” states the report. “Leadership targeting should never have been allowed to reach such a high number of failed strikes that led to significant civilian deaths.”<sup>180</sup> Although the side effect of these attacks—the isolation of top Iraqi leaders—gave the Coalition a military advantage (as discussed in previous sections), it is hard to argue that this indirect effect was proportional to the direct effect of civilian casualties resulting from the strikes.

### **Hindering the Transition to Peace**

Perhaps the most important question when judging the competing theories of leadership attack relates to their final and most important propositions. The strategist need to know: how does attacking leadership help achieve the war’s main objectives? In the case of Operation Iraqi Freedom, it is critical to consider how leadership attack contributed—or

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<sup>180</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Off Target*, 27.

hindered—the realization of the ultimate goal, a stable government and lasting peace in Iraq. While leadership attack contributed to the regime’s quick collapse along with relatively few casualties on all sides, it may have also hindered the establishment of a lasting peace after the major combat operations ended. Leadership attack may have led to problems in three ways. First, as explained above, some of the strikes on regime leaders resulted in civilian casualties, which undoubtedly engendered animosity in some of the Iraqi people. This animosity may have hindered cooperation between Iraqis and Coalition forces. Second, the rhetoric and propaganda used in leadership attack may have raised Iraqis’ expectations to an unrealistic level. When these expectations were not realized quickly after the regime’s collapse, it hurt the Coalition’s credibility with the Iraqi people. Their frustrations may have even led to increased violence. Finally, the Coalition’s leadership attack strategy enabled an overall strategy using a relatively small invasion force. This force was sufficient for the drive to Baghdad, but it proved insufficient for establishing security after the regime’s collapse. The Coalition paid a tremendous price for the failure to establish security in the chaotic months and years that followed. Each of these possibilities is discussed below.

### **Engendering Hatred?**

The first possibility is that leadership attack may have provoked animosity among Iraqis due to the number of civilian deaths caused by strikes on regime leaders. Human Rights Watch investigated four of these attacks in detail and found they resulted in 42 civilians killed and numerous injuries. One of the report’s authors, Marc Garlasco, was a veteran in the Defense Intelligence Agency and served as head of the high-value targeting cell for the Joint Staff before leaving government service. He has stated that the Coalition made

things worse by killing civilians during attacks on regime leaders. In an e-mail message, Garlasco lamented, “We failed to kill the HVTs [high-value targets] and instead killed civilians and engendered hatred and discontent in some of the population.”<sup>181</sup> This was certainly true for Iraqis who lost family and friends in the strikes. After losing several family members, one Iraqi stated angrily, “Ten lives are gone. The house was completely destroyed. You came to save us, to protect us. That’s what you said. It’s now the contrary. Innocent people are killed.”<sup>182</sup> For individual Iraqis, leadership attack extracted a terrible emotional price.

While lust for revenge—a characteristic of Iraq’s tribal culture—was probably the motivation for some attacks against the Coalition, especially among Sunnis, there is no evidence to suggest that anger over casualties resulting from leadership attack was a major contributor to the unrest that followed the regime’s collapse.<sup>183</sup> There are many reasons for the violence that engulfed Iraq in the years following the invasion, including economic hardships, ethnic tensions, and religious extremism. Even if the Coalition had not killed a single civilian during its decapitation attempts, there likely would have been widespread violence in the period after the fall of Baghdad. In addition, the casualties resulting from leadership attack pale in comparison to the atrocities and carnage wrought by Saddam, the military, and security services during the Ba’ath regime’s reign. Nor do they compare to the insurgent and terrorist attacks that followed the invasion. While it matters that civilian casualties occurred at the hands of Coalition forces—often regarded as both omniscient in

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Keith B. Richburg, “In Basra, Growing Resentment, Little Aid; Casualties Stoke Hostility Over British Presence,” *The Washington Post*, 9 April 2003.

<sup>183</sup> Dan Murphy, “At Vortex of Violence—Fallujah,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2 April 2004, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0402/p01s04-woiq.html> (accessed 17 May 2006).

targeting and precise in execution by the Iraqis—the contribution to post-regime difficulties appears to be marginal.

### **Creating False Expectations?**

A second possibility is that the rhetoric of leadership attack as well as the PSYOPS messages raised Iraqi expectations to unrealistic levels. When these expectations were not met in the days following the fall of Baghdad, the Iraqis became disillusioned with the Coalition. The frustration arising from these unmet expectations may have contributed to the violence that emerged after the regime's collapse.

It is certainly true that some Iraqis had very high expectations for life after Saddam. "Surely it should be possible, with the help of other decent, honest and educated Iraqis, to build up a democracy," hoped Fawzi Farman Bashir, an outspoken critic of the regime and a survivor of Saddam's torture chambers.<sup>184</sup> Many other Iraqis expected their prospects to improve with the demise of the former dictator and the rise of democracy. This is evident in their comments after the regime's collapse. The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs conducted multiple focus groups with Iraqis during the summer of 2003. The institute's report observes, "Most participants say that the best thing about the current situation is that Saddam is gone. His removal from power is the best thing that the Coalition forces have accomplished, say many participants."<sup>185</sup> The report concludes, "Out with the old and in with the new, Iraqis are saying. They have high hopes about what the new government

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<sup>184</sup> Bashir, *The Insider*, 302.

<sup>185</sup> Thomas O. Melia and Brian K. Katulis, "Iraqis Discuss Their Country's Future: Post-War Perspectives from the Iraqi Street," National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 28 July 2003, 10.

will provide.”<sup>186</sup> The report also documents the frustration of Iraqis due to the lack of progress in the months after the regime’s fall. Here are some examples of what Iraqis had to say about the aftermath:

Bush and Tony Blair promised they would make an Iraqi government in forty days – and they didn’t. I hope this message will go to them. (Shi’a Man, Sadr City, Baghdad)

The American government – all of the Iraqi citizens are asking why have they delayed organizing an Iraqi government? They want to know. This is why we don’t have security or services. We have heard in Baghdad that three or four people are killed each day. We want to ask the people in charge why are they delaying this? Haven’t they found anyone suitable yet? (Kurdish Man, Sehil El-Hamad)

We think that nothing good is going to come as a result, unless there is an Iraqi government organized. We want a democratic government that can feel our sufferings and know our problems and solve them as soon as possible. (Shi’a Woman, Diwaniya)

There is no place to go, no one responsible – there is no police, no one to take your problems to. (Shi’a Woman, Sadr City, Baghdad)

When the institute conducted additional focus groups in 2005, it found that Iraqi frustrations had only grown. The resulting report stated that the latest conversations “reveal a citizenry craving a say in its future yet fearful and frustrated by the violence and economic dislocation that currently characterize Iraqi life.”<sup>187</sup> One Shiite female stated, “We were happy to have a new government, but in fact we have not got any improvement... therefore elections were only ink on paper.”<sup>188</sup> A Sunni male expressed even greater frustration: “I can say that the recent

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> David M. Dougherty, “Iraqi Voices: Public Attitudes and Political Opportunity in Transition,” National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, June 2005, 7.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 16.

dead regime was better than nowadays.”<sup>189</sup> As these comments demonstrate, Iraqis had high expectations for a new beginning, expectations which were not met in the aftermath of the regime’s collapse.

This disparity led to tremendous frustration, and this frustration may be one reason for the violence that overwhelmed Iraq in the years after Saddam’s fall.<sup>190</sup> The question is, did Coalition rhetoric and PSYOPS messages such as, “Do not give your life for Saddam. ... The Coalition is here to help you and your family,” contribute to the Iraqis’ high expectations?<sup>191</sup> It seems reasonable to conclude that they did, but it is also reasonable to recognize that Iraqi’s expectations for the future would have been high no matter how Saddam’s regime ended. This is especially true for the Kurdish and Shiite populations. For these people, optimism continued through the rough years following the invasion. In 2006, 76 percent of Kurds and 84 percent of Shiites answered that Iraq was headed in the right direction.<sup>192</sup> For comparison, in a poll conducted at the same time in the United States, 64 percent thought the United States was on the wrong track.<sup>193</sup> For the Kurds and Shiites, at least, it does not appear that

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>190</sup> In his book *Why Men Rebel*, Ted Robert Gurr argues that violence is often the result of frustration at the disparity between what people feel they ought to have and what they think they can attain. Gurr calls this discrepancy “Relative Deprivation,” defined as “the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the ‘ought’ and the ‘is’ of collective value satisfaction, and that disposes men to violence.” In his search for the reason people resort to violence, he concludes: “In summary, the primary source of the human capacity for violence appears to be the frustration-aggression mechanism. Frustration does not necessarily lead to violence, and violence for some men is motivated by expectations of gain. The anger induced by frustration, however, is a motivating force that disposes men to aggression, irrespective of its instrumentalities. If frustrations are sufficiently prolonged or sharply felt, aggression is quite likely, if not certain, to occur.” Gurr’s thesis is a plausible explanation for the violent environment that materialized in Iraq. Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 23, 36-37.

<sup>191</sup> Friedman, “Operation Iraqi Freedom.”

<sup>192</sup> Program on International Policy Attitudes, “What the Iraqi Public Wants,” *WorldPublicOpinion.org*, January 2006, [http://worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jan06/Iraq\\_Jan06\\_rpt.pdf](http://worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/jan06/Iraq_Jan06_rpt.pdf) (accessed 7 June 2012), 8.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 8, and Associated Press-Ipsos Public Affairs Poll, 3-5 January 2006.

frustrations arising from unmet expectations fueled the post-invasion violence. If the Coalition messages were the main reason for high expectations before and during the invasion, it seems unlikely that these expectations would remain high through 2006. A better explanation is that their optimism existed in juxtaposition to the horrible experiences of the Saddam era. For them, almost any situation would be better than what they experienced under Saddam.<sup>194</sup> The Sunnis, however, were much more pessimistic about Iraq in the post-invasion years. This is hardly surprising given the amount of power that the Sunnis were forced to give up in the new Iraqi democracy. While Coalition statements and propaganda may have artificially raised Sunni expectations to a slight degree, it seems more likely that their frustrations arose from losing their status as the favored minority and the ethnic tensions that reached a boiling point in the years after the invasion. Considering this evidence, it seems unlikely that Coalition rhetoric and PSYOPS messages contributed significantly to the violence that engulfed Iraq after the fall of the regime.

### **Enabling a Flawed Plan?**

Another possibility is that the Coalition's leadership attack strategy enabled a flawed plan that failed to include sufficient troops for establishing security when the Iraqi government disintegrated. With a relatively small force, the Coalition was able to invade Iraq, drive to Baghdad, and occupy portions of the capital. In the days that followed, however, the Coalition proved unable to establish security in the wake of the regime's collapse. It simply did not have enough soldiers to secure Iraq. As former Secretary of State Colin Powell later

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<sup>194</sup> Shiite and Kurdish opinions stayed optimistic for many years after the invasion. See "Iraqis 'More Upbeat about Future,'" *BBC News Online*, 16 March 2009, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7942974.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7942974.stm) (accessed 7 June 2012).



commented, there were “enough troops for war but not for peace, for establishing order.”<sup>195</sup>

Because the leadership attack strategy helped make the original economy of force possible, it may have contributed to the initial anarchy that arose in the wake of the regime’s collapse.

From the earliest stages of planning, Secretary Rumsfeld and General Franks worked to cut the number of troops in the 1003V plan.<sup>196</sup> The original plan called for approximately 500,000 troops, but General Franks prodded his planners to make do with less, asking questions like, “what could be done with half the force in half the time?”<sup>197</sup> Secretary Rumsfeld encouraged planners to think creatively as well, and he specifically inquired about using leadership attack to set the conditions for victory with a smaller force. At one point in the planning process, he asked: “If dozens of key targets could be destroyed simultaneously, would that put pressure on the regime, cause it to crumble and preclude the need for a long war requiring a large force?”<sup>198</sup> Eventually, Rumsfeld and Franks cut the force levels dramatically. Operation Iraqi Freedom was executed with over 450,000 troops in theater, but only 116,000 in the invasion force.<sup>199</sup>

While this reduced invasion force proved adequate for the march into Baghdad, it was unable to secure the urban areas after the regime collapsed. As Coalition troops rolled into Baghdad, chaos descended on the city, including widespread looting, vandalism, and arson.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> “Colin Powell: ‘I’m Very Sore,’” *Daily Telegraph*, 26 February 2005, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1484462/Colin-Powell-Im-very-sore.html> (accessed 7 June 2012).

<sup>196</sup> Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 425-442; Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon*, 217-224; Franks, *American Soldier*, 328-345.

<sup>197</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 36, 77.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>199</sup> Assessments and Analysis Division, “Operation IRAQI FREEDOM—By the Numbers,” *U.S. Central Command Air Forces*, 30 April 2003, 4, and Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 406.

<sup>200</sup> Major Garret, et. al., “Iraqis, Marines Agree to Joint Baghdad Patrols; Key Saddam Adviser Surrenders,” *Foxnews.com*, 12 April 2003, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,83892,00.html> (accessed 14 May 2006); Bashir, *The Insider*, 300-304.

Later, Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, the civilian administrator for postwar Iraq, lamented about the lack of troops during this critical period. “We paid a big price for not stopping it because it established an atmosphere of lawlessness. We never had enough troops on the ground,” said the ambassador.<sup>201</sup>

With the help of a creative and comprehensive leadership attack strategy, the Coalition accomplished a remarkable feat. It invaded and conquered a country situated halfway around the world while being massively outnumbered on the ground. Indeed, it used the advantages of a small force, including speed and flexibility, coupled with numerous qualitative advantages to disorient and overwhelm the Iraqi regime. Unfortunately, when the collapse of this regime led to chaos, the lack of numbers of ground troops turned into a disadvantage. The result was a lost opportunity to demonstrate how the future would represent real improvement over Saddam.

While it is possible that the Coalition’s lost opportunity resulted from a leadership attack strategy that enabled a small force to be effective during the invasion, the best evidence shows that leadership attack did not drive the lower troop levels in the overall plan. Instead, the driving force was simply the choice made by Coalition leaders—including President Bush, Secretary Rumsfeld, and General Franks—to use fewer troops. There were many reasons that these leaders wanted to cut down on the force size, including the desire to preserve tactical surprise, the belief in unconventional tactics that had proven effective in Afghanistan, the assumption that Iraqi institutions would help to maintain order after the regime’s fall, and the desire to be efficient and avoid waste. Because leadership attack made this smaller level of force work, it may have contributed at the margin to post-invasion violence. However, the

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<sup>201</sup> Robin Wright and Thomas E. Ricks, “Bremer Criticizes Troop Levels,” *The Washington Post*, 5 October 2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A7053-2004Oct4.html> (accessed 14 May 2006).

chaos that engulfed Iraq in the opening days of Coalition rule was not an indictment of leadership attack but rather a consequence of incorrect assumptions made by Coalition leaders about the nature of postwar Iraq.

In retrospect, the comprehensive leadership attack strategy adopted by the Coalition had some drawbacks, including generating ill will resulting from collateral casualties of leadership strikes, raising false expectations, and enabling a flawed plan that relied on a reduced force size. In all of these cases, however, leadership attack was a marginal contributor to these challenges. In each instance where it did contribute, there were more fundamental factors that caused these problems and drove the results. This is not unlike the role of leadership attack in the overall campaign. While it contributed on the fringes of success, it was not an essential element.

### **The Role of Leadership Attack Within the Overall Campaign**

The military objective of Operation Iraqi Freedom was removal of Saddam Hussein's regime. This objective placed the Iraqi president and his inner circle squarely in the crosshairs of Coalition forces and made leadership attack an obvious option. It is ironic, then, that leadership attack was only a small part of a much broader campaign plan. The only way that General Franks could guarantee that the regime would fall was to have military forces invade Iraq and continue to the capital and beyond. From the very earliest stages of planning, officials assumed that a ground invasion would be the primary mechanism of victory. This precluded other options, such as a strategic air campaign like the one that began Operation Desert Storm, or the incitement of revolt within the Iraqi population through subversion or unconventional warfare. Many senior administration officials contributing to the planning for

Operation Iraqi Freedom were also involved in Operation Desert Storm, and they recalled how neither the air campaign nor the revolts had precipitated regime collapse in 1991. These officials were determined to remove Hussein once and for all, and a ground invasion seemed to be necessary to accomplish this.

Therefore the key methods of leadership attack—including the direct attack of regime leaders, attacks on command facilities and communication infrastructure, and the undermining of the regime with the military and the general population—were actions taken to support the overall effort and not an end to themselves. In contrast to Operation Desert Storm, no influential voice within the Coalition argued that attacks on leadership would be decisive. When combined with the other military actions, leadership attack would add pressure on the regime, and officials thought that this could lead collectively to paralysis and collapse. Paralysis, however, would not be sufficient to realize the ultimate objective, as ground forces needed to be in place to ensure the complete removal of the regime and to set the conditions for a transition to a new government.

Indeed, one of the Coalition leaders' biggest fears was "catastrophic success," where the regime would collapse before ground forces were in place. "The question we kept asking ourselves was: What if Iraq fell in thirty minutes?" recalls the USCENTCOM deputy, General DeLong, "This, in fact, was our biggest fear. If the Iraqis surrendered before we had a chance to get our ground forces in, they would have no one to physically surrender to. You can't surrender to a satellite."<sup>202</sup> The military objective was regime change, and the primary mechanism to achieve this was a ground invasion. Ground forces would ultimately defeat the

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<sup>202</sup> DeLong, *A General Speaks Out*, 88.

Iraqi military and depose the regime. They would also provide a stabilizing presence in the regime's absence.

Despite the focus on the ground invasion as the primary mechanism for success, President Bush and others were hopeful, at least at the beginning of the war, that leadership attack could shorten the war or prevent it altogether. This was evident in the discussions leading up to the initial strike at Dora Farm and the decision to pull targets located in downtown Baghdad off the strike list when officials were unsure of the outcome of this attack. Even if this strike had been successful, however, the Coalition would have inserted ground troops. Indeed, it did so before knowing the outcome of the strike, as leaders considered ground troops necessary to protect the oil fields, secure the urban areas, and find the weapons of mass destruction that were believed to exist in Iraq.

In summary, Coalition leaders chose to conduct leadership attack to support the overall campaign plan. Although military forces might find and kill Saddam Hussein, leadership attack was not considered a decisive element of the plan. This was true even though Saddam Hussein's Iraq appeared extremely vulnerable to attacks on its leadership in the months and years leading up to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Instead of causing collapse on their own, however, methods of leadership attack were helpful in pressuring the regime, increasing the friction that regime leaders had to overcome, and encouraging followers to stop their support for Saddam and the Ba'ath Party. In these supporting roles, leadership attack appears to have been quite successful. The direct attacks on key regime leaders kept these leaders on the run. They exhibited paranoia and, as a result, adopted extreme protective measures that hindered their ability to lead. The attacks on Iraqi command centers and communications degraded the ability of Iraqis to communicate to the point that, by early

April, only face-to-face communication was possible. The Coalition's inducements and PSYOPS efforts undermined the regime. Some subordinate leaders turned against Saddam, the Iraqi military suffered mass desertions, and the population passively resisted the regime's orders. In the end, Iraq exhibited a total lack of leadership and numerous signs of strategic paralysis after only a few weeks of combat. A great deal of this success can be attributed to the Coalition's execution of a good plan with superior technology, tactics, and personnel. Additionally, the regime exhibited many signs of dysfunction in the weeks leading up to the invasion, and it appears to have been on the brink of collapse before Operation Iraqi Freedom began. It is impossible to quantify the contribution of these two factors—the Coalition's military excellence versus the preexisting regime dysfunction—to the outcome, but both appear to have contributed significantly. This conclusion must inform the comparison of the theories of leadership attack with the evidence of the 2003 Iraq War.

### **Predictions Versus Reality: Comparing the Theories**

In many ways, the relationship between the Iraq of 1991 and the Iraq of 2003 can be summed up in three words: *only more so*. In 2003, all decision-making authority was centralized in the person of Saddam Hussein, only more so. Subordinates were discouraged from showing initiative, only more so. Saddam distrusted many of his subordinates and kept important information from them, only more so. The Iraqi government was totally unprepared for the loss of Saddam as their leader, only more so. Iraq's military was vulnerable to attacks on its operational leaders, only more so. Many Iraqi soldiers did not want to fight for Saddam, only more so. The Iraqi people hoped for a better life without Saddam, only more so.

Because of this dynamic, the first two propositions of the primary theory—the ones that address the regime’s organization and its vulnerability to attacks on its centers of gravity—hold true for Operation Iraqi Freedom in much the same way that they did for Operation Desert Storm. Warden’s five-rings model was a reasonable representation of Saddam’s regime, with the caveats that Iraq’s population could not be considered homogeneous as it was divided along ethnic lines and Iraq’s military was divided into separate forces that did not cooperate with each other. Saddam’s leadership so dominated the Iraqi government that Saddam was the only leader who mattered at the strategic level. Therefore, the primary theory’s propositions about the role of leadership in the system and its centralization are reasonable interpretations of the situation in Iraq. The theory’s second proposition, that the Iraqi system and its subsystems were vulnerable to attacks on their centers of gravity, certainly appears to be consistent with the collapse of the Iraqi government, its communication system, and its military. As Coalition planners considered how to dismantle the Iraqi regime and remove Saddam Hussein from power, Iraq seemed very vulnerable to leadership attack and collapse. Indeed, some high-ranking officials feared a premature collapse prior to ground forces being ready accept surrenders and provide stability. This proved to be a valid concern, as the Iraqi government and its military collapsed totally under the pressure exerted by the Coalition.

As in Operation Desert Storm, evidence suggests that the third proposition of the primary theory—the one that postulates the sufficiency of available intelligence—proved largely invalid. While the Coalition was able to pressure Saddam and his regime in multiple ways, its ability to generate the appropriate level of intelligence to conduct leadership attack was mixed. On one hand, the attacks on Iraqi communications infrastructure were effective

in disrupting senior leaders' contact with their subordinates. The Coalition appears to have benefitted from months of prewar attacks against fiber-optic networks as part of Operation Southern Focus. Once major combat operations began, the attacks against telecommunications seemed to be quite effective in collapsing that system, and the only reliable way for regime leaders to communicate in the weeks after the invasion was face-to-face. The low point for the Coalition's application of intelligence was in the numerous attacks on regime leaders. None of these leaders were killed or seriously harmed, yet these attacks caused a significant number of civilian casualties. Moreover, these failed attacks damaged the credibility of the Coalition, especially that of the United States. Coalition forces had gone to great lengths to minimize civilian casualties in all forms of attack, yet the attacks on Iraqi leaders seemed to lack the consideration of proportionality that characterized other activities. This can be attributed to intelligence reports that were passed with high confidence, but were later proved to be wrong. As in Operation Desert Storm, Iraqi leaders went to great lengths to ensure their personal safety, and these measures confounded Coalition efforts to track and kill them.

Although no Iraqi senior leaders were killed during the numerous attacks, the Hussein regime suffered strategic paralysis and collapse as postulated in the primary theory's proposition four. As the invasion progressed, the information flow through the Iraqi system became sporadic and ungrounded in reality. It then stopped altogether. The Iraqi government was so overwhelmed that it ceased responding to stimuli. Government workers stayed home, and soldiers walked off the battlefield. In the end, few Iraqis wanted to fight and die for Saddam. The regime's dysfunction created a critical vulnerability. Saddam had led for years through fear and intimidation, not love or respect. The Coalition correctly



identified and exploited this vulnerability through the offering of inducements to Saddam's subordinate leaders and the use of targeted messages to reinforce a psychological wedge of distrust between Hussein and the Iraqi people, including ordinary soldiers and civilians. In short, Saddam's dysfunctional rule created a major vulnerability, and the Coalition made the most of the opportunity to exploit this vulnerability. This effort contributed to the overall collapse of the regime.

This collapse should have led directly to a better state of peace—at least that is what the primary theory's final proposition predicts. Without any resistance by the regime, the Coalition should have been able to impose its demands on what was left of Iraq. This did not happen. Coalition forces were the best in the world at accomplishing the tasks for a successful invasion, yet at the invasion's end they found themselves in the middle of a distrustful and divided population whose cultures and norms were a mystery. In addition, the reduced force levels that were used during the invasion proved to be a liability, as there were not enough troops to impose order, especially in the urban centers. When an insurgency began in these areas, the Coalition could not suppress it, and this insurgency grew to engulf the country in violence and ethnic tension. The collapse of the Iraqi government did not automatically lead to a peaceful Iraq. It was only the beginning of a difficult struggle. It would take years of costly and painful follow-up actions to provide Iraqis with an opportunity for a brighter future.

In considering the predictions and propositions of the alternative theory, many of the conclusions presented at the end of the chapter on Operation Desert Storm can apply to Operation Iraqi Freedom as well. Iraq's power was so centered in one man that the regime was utterly dependent on his leadership for its direction. The Iraqi regime, therefore, was

invariably centralized. In contrast, the first two propositions of the alternate theory postulate the variability of organizations. For example, proposition one of the alternative theory holds that some organizations are dependent upon central leadership, and others are not. While Iraq's organizations were all dependent on central leadership, that does not invalidate the proposition that others might not be structured this way. Similar arguments hold for propositions two of the alternative theory. Other organizations may exhibit characteristics that are quite different from those of the Hussein regime. More data, and more cases, are needed to judge the alternative theory.

As in Operation Desert Storm, the alternative theory's view of intelligence seems to be supported by this case. Intelligence in Operation Iraqi Freedom was both incomplete and inaccurate. As seen in the attacks on Saddam Hussein, the Coalition needed some luck to find and kill the Iraqi president and other key regime leaders, but that luck never developed. The result was a dismal record of direct attacks on Iraqi leaders which resulted in civilian deaths and injuries that hurt the Coalition's credibility.

The alternative theory holds that paralysis and collapse is easier to accomplish at the tactical and operational levels versus the strategic level, and it is more desirable as well. In the Iraq War, the Iraqi regime collapsed at all levels. The Coalition's invading forces benefitted from the collapse of the Iraqi military at the operational and tactical levels. This allowed the invasion to continue at an unprecedented rate, and it prevented the dreaded "Fortress Baghdad" scenario where the Coalition would be forced to fight house-to-house and neighborhood-to-neighborhood in the capital city. The collapse at Iraq's strategic level does not appear to have been as beneficial. When senior leaders melted into the population, they left behind a vacuum of power and great confusion within the Iraqi population. No one was

available to negotiate a surrender or sign a peace treaty. With Saddam, his sons, and other senior leaders still at large, many Iraqis were hesitant to help with reconstruction due to fear that Saddam would return and retaliate. The Coalition assumed that Iraqi police would be available to help maintain order after the fall of Baghdad. That assumption proved false, as the police simply failed to show for work, and the same was true for most other governmental organizations. Collapse at Iraq's strategic level led to great confusion and chaos in the aftermath of the invasion.

This leads to the alternative theory's final proposition, which states that the enemy should be given an opportunity to concede, as strategic paralysis requires major follow up to ensure victory and a lasting peace. Saddam and his sons were given one last chance to leave the country by President Bush, but there was no formal offer of surrender or negotiation of terms. It is reasonable to conclude that Saddam would not have been willing to negotiate or sign a surrender, unless it was very late in the conflict and he saw the error of the optimistic reports he had been receiving. Iraq's strategic paralysis and collapse brought chaos and confusion as well as disorder that could not be stopped with the forces available. It was relatively easy for an insurgency to develop in this environment, and opposing that insurgency took many more years of costly effort.

Chapter Two of this study introduced the methodology of systematic process analysis. A key tenet of this methodology is that competing theories can produce important insight into a relatively small number of cases. As Peter Hall writes, "research in social science is most likely to advance when it focuses on a 'three-cornered fight' among a theory, a rival theory,

and a set of empirical observations.”<sup>203</sup> The purpose of this study’s last chapter is to derive conclusions about how its competing theories have fared in this fight, and offer some final thoughts for those contemplating strategies of leadership attack.

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<sup>203</sup> Peter A. Hall, “Systematic Process Analysis: When and How To Use It,” *European Management Review*, 3, 2006, 27, <http://scholar.harvard.edu/hall/publications/systematic-process-analysis-when-and-how-use-it> (accessed 2 April 2012).

## Chapter Nine

### Summary and Findings

*For any war effort—offensive or defensive—that is supposed to serve long-term national objectives, the most essential question is how the enemy might be forced to surrender, or failing that, what sort of bargain might be struck with him to terminate the war. This question combines both the military and the political realms, in the sense that not only the military contest but also domestic and foreign policy developments will determine the outcome. As we have seen, this aspect tends to receive short shrift in war plans. Sometimes it is ignored entirely.*

Fred Charles Iklé  
*Every War Must End*

Chapter One opened with the assertion that attacks on adversary leadership were becoming increasingly common in military conflict. It has proven difficult, however, to judge the overall effectiveness of these attacks. Opinions vary widely, but there has been little in the way of scholarship to address this issue in an objective and systematic way. Therefore, the purpose of this study has been to answer the research question:

***When, if ever, is it advisable to attack adversary leadership in times of military conflict?***

With this question came several caveats. Perhaps the most important is that this study distinguishes between attacking adversary *leadership*—defined as the process of influencing, motivating, and enabling others to contribute to an organization—versus attacking the leaders themselves. This distinction is critical, as it aims to broaden the study's focus beyond simple *decapitation*, or the killing or capturing of enemy leaders. Instead, the study seeks to determine the effectiveness of a military strategy that disrupts the process of leadership within an organization. Killing or capturing leaders certainly fits in this category, but so do other

military actions, including cutting off communications between the leader and followers as well as undermining the leader through the delivery of divisive messages to followers. At the core of this strategy is the basic belief that leadership is, to some degree, universal, and it is essential for an organization's health. If one wants to gain a competitive advantage over an adversary organization, disrupting its process of leadership can serve to weaken the adversary, perhaps up to the point of paralyzing the organization and causing its collapse.

This paralysis and collapse—if it occurs at all—may have different effects at different levels of leadership, and this study seeks to determine if this is true by differentiating between attacking leadership at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. It is possible that the function of leadership is different at these different levels, and therefore, attacking leaders at the various levels causes different effects. Additionally, this study limits itself to consideration of instances of leadership attack occurring in times of conflict where a state actor uses military force in an acknowledged way. This helps the study differentiate between leadership attack and *assassination*. This study does not attempt to examine assassination, and it limits its consideration to non-treacherous, overt uses of force against enemy leaders acting as combatants. These are important distinctions, because there are many moral and legal considerations that arise when considering leadership attack. This study's purpose is to address military and political effectiveness, however, not legal and moral considerations. The instances of leadership attack addressed in this study stay within widely accepted norms for the conduct of war. Because legal and moral considerations often arise when examining attacks on enemy leaders, however, a background discussion is included in Appendix A.

This study employs a methodology that is primarily qualitative, as it seeks deeper explanations than a quantitative study would be able to provide. This study attempts to go

beyond determining if leadership attack is or is not effective. Instead, it seeks to understand how leadership attack works and explain why it is or is not effective. This type of answer would be difficult to obtain in a quantitative study. Quantitative methodologies are insufficient when used to assess military conflict for at least two reasons. First, most quantitative studies test a hypothesis by examining a variable or set of variables. These typically rely on a control group for comparison. It is all but impossible, however, to develop a scientifically valid control group when examining military conflict. Such a group would have to be sufficient in size for valid comparison with the test group, and it would have to share all (or most) of the aspects of the examined group except the variable in question. Unfortunately, the complexity and uniqueness inherent in every military conflict makes identifying a valid control group virtually impossible.

A second difficulty for quantitative studies of military conflicts is that these studies almost always assign a numerical value to an action—in this case an attack on enemy leadership—that oversimplifies an element of strategy that is both complex and multilayered. At some point in a quantitative study, the researcher must make a judgement about what effectiveness looks like and then assign it a value. In contrast, this study uses the complexity and richness contained in the cases to look more deeply at the many forms of effectiveness and ineffectiveness that appear in the narrative. Because of this complexity, this study attempts to avoid the all-or-nothing answers that are prevalent in the extant literature and discussed in Chapters Three and Four (as well as the summaries of numerous quantitative studies presented in Appendix B). Instead of taking a broad look at numerous cases and assigning numerical values to the effectiveness of leadership attack, this study looks closely at a small

number of cases and seeks to understand how leadership attack was employed within each and identify the effects achieved.

Systematic process analysis is a methodology that is well-suited to providing an appropriate answer to the research question, and it is the chosen methodology for this study. As explained in Chapter Two, systematic process analysis is a powerful approach to “small-n” studies because it allows the researcher to delve into the complexity of the narrative and test the explanatory power of theory in light of historical evidence. This study follows the four steps of systematic process analysis as detailed by Peter A. Hall of Harvard University.<sup>1</sup> The first step is theory formation, and this step is initiated in Chapter Three by identifying the key concepts that were borrowed and synthesized by John Warden into the most recognizable theory of leadership attack. Chapter Four formally presents this theory in five propositions, and an alternative theory is also developed to provide a counterweight to the primary theory. The next step is the derivation of predictions, and predictions for both the primary and alternative theories are presented in the last section of Chapter Four. These theories and predictions are applied in the third step, which involves making observations from the historical evidence. This study examines the decision making, planning, execution, and outcomes of leadership attacks conducted against Saddam Hussein between 1990 and 2003. The main cases were Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom, discussed in Chapters Six and Eight respectively. While preliminary conclusions were presented at the end of each of these historical studies, the primary findings are presented in this chapter, completing the fourth and final step of this methodology. This chapter will compare

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<sup>1</sup> Peter A. Hall, “Systemic Process Analysis: When and How To Use It,” *European Management Review*, 3, 2006, 24-31, <http://scholar.harvard.edu/hall/publications/systematic-process-analysis-when-and-how-use-it> (accessed 2 April 2012)



propositions of the primary and alternative theories and determine how the evidence of the historical cases supports or refutes each.

### **What This Study Can (and Cannot) Do**

Before moving to these conclusions, however, it is important to address the aspect of this study's methodology that is likely to invite the most critique. Simply stated, the study limits its examination to different conflicts with the same adversary—Iraq and Saddam Hussein—and one could argue that it is unlikely to provide any useful conclusions about the broad effectiveness of leadership attack. Indeed, many observations made by this study seem to point to the conclusion that Iraq was the exception, not the rule.

Because of the increasingly dysfunctional nature of Saddam's regime over time, and its increasing degree of centralization, Iraq seemed uniquely vulnerable to attacks on its leadership. At the strategic level, Saddam was the only decision maker who mattered. Iraq had done nothing to prepare for the loss of his leadership, as any steps to do so would have been interpreted as treasonous. The regime was loathed by large segments of the Iraqi population. In addition, the Iraqi military had been trained in the Soviet style of warfare which relied on centralized control of forces, and Iraq's military culture demanded a high degree of deference to senior leaders, regardless of their competence. In both wars, the Coalition's military forces were vastly superior in technology, training, and morale. The Coalition enjoyed a degree of air superiority in both conflicts that allowed for the direct attack of the Iraqi capital using long-range, precision weaponry. Given these factors, it seems unlikely that a study that confines itself to these two cases can prove a theory of leadership attack that is applicable to a wider spectrum of conflict.

This, of course, is a valid criticism. The best answer is that this study, as constructed, cannot prove a broad theory of leadership attack. It may, however, be able to disprove one. In fact, this may be its primary value. Taken together, the case pair of Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom represent the best-case scenario for the primary theory of leadership attack. Therefore, if the primary theory falls short in explaining outcomes in these two cases, it would be a clear and powerful repudiation. As explained above, the Iraqi government and its military were centralized to such a degree that some expected them to suffer paralysis and collapse if their leadership was disrupted. This was certainly true of John Warden, who, due to an unlikely chain of events that occurred after Saddam decided to invade Kuwait in 1990, was allowed to propose an operational approach that relied on a comprehensive strategy of leadership attack. This approach involved direct attacks and messaging to weaken Saddam's government and military, eventually forcing the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. Warden's proposals on leadership attack were accepted by senior U.S. decision makers with little debate, and they became a major portion of the plan for Operation Desert Storm. Multiple methods of leadership attack were conducted against Saddam and his regime for several weeks before the Coalition eventually resorted to a ground invasion to eject Iraqi forces out of Kuwait, setting the conditions for the reestablishment of Kuwaiti sovereignty.

Twelve years later, the objective became regime change. Again, a Coalition of nations set out to attack Saddam and his leadership, with a key difference being that the Coalition did not hesitate to conduct direct attacks intended to kill Saddam and other senior Ba'ath leaders. These direct attacks began from the earliest stages of the conflict and continued throughout. The Coalition also used other methods of leadership attack, including attacks on the

communications infrastructure and the use of PSYOPS to persuade Iraqi soldiers not to fight for Saddam. Taken together, these attacks on Iraqi leadership—especially in Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom—contain the most prominent and all-encompassing forms of leadership attack that can be found in modern military conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the consideration of the period of conflict with Iraq should be a welcome opportunity for the primary theory of leadership attack—the one most closely associated with John Warden himself—to prove its validity. Put another way, if the primary theory does not prove itself in these cases, it is hard to imagine that the theory is broadly applicable to military conflict. It would be a severe blow to the theory, and such knowledge would be quite valuable for the prospective strategist who is faced with the question of incorporating leadership attack into a campaign plan.

As will be discussed below, several propositions of the primary theory hold up well when compared with the evidence, but others do not. Therefore, the main value of this study lies in four accomplishments. First, it formally presents the most prominent theory of leadership attack. Second, it proves that this theory is flawed, even when tested in the most favorable of circumstances. Third, it proposes a promising alternative theory that can be tested and refined using additional case studies. Finally, it demonstrates a powerful research methodology that can be used to build, test, and refine military theory.

## **Findings and Conclusions: Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom**

Preliminary conclusions for each major conflict were presented at the end of Chapters Six and Eight. These were limited to discussions of how each theory stood up to the evidence

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<sup>2</sup> With the possible exception of the ongoing leadership attack efforts by the United States against the terrorist group al-Qaeda.

within each individual operation. This section builds on those preliminary conclusions to compare the theories across the entire case of Iraq, and the study's findings follow directly from this comparison. In both theories, the first two propositions largely address the organizational structure of the adversary that is to be attacked and the role of leadership within these organizations. For the primary theory, these propositions hold up well in the context of Iraq from 1990 to 2003. This is not surprising, as the experience of contributing to the campaign plan of Operation Desert Storm was a major influence in John Warden's later writings. In many ways, his theory was shaped by the 1991 war with Iraq, and by 2003, Iraq's regime was even more centralized and dysfunctional. The fact that the primary theory's assumptions about organizational structure and the role of leadership hold true for Iraq does not necessarily negate the first two propositions of the alternative theory, however. The alternative theory argues that organizations vary, the role of leadership varies within them, and they have varying degrees of connectedness, redundancy, and adaptability. As has been discussed previously, Iraq seemed to be uniquely vulnerable to leadership attack because of its centralization, its dependence upon a single leader, and a general lack of redundancy and adaptability. Other countries and organizations might be quite different, and their individual makeup may prevent them from being as vulnerable. Indeed, this is a likely conclusion, but more evidence is needed.

Much more can be said about the final three propositions of both the primary and alternative theories. The case of Iraq highlights major differences between these theories. One of these differences is seen in the approach each theory takes toward intelligence. Conducting successful leadership attack requires accurate and detailed intelligence, yet in both wars, despite having access to the world's best reconnaissance technology and technical

expertise, the Coalition's ability to gain and apply intelligence was mixed. This contradicts the primary theory's assertion that the intelligence is available and can be applied to conduct successful attacks. The primary theory seems quite optimistic about the ability to gain and use intelligence, and this optimism appears to be unfounded in the case studies.

The last two propositions of each theory also present a stark contrast when considering Iraq. These propositions are the ones that predict the ability of leadership attack to cause paralysis and how this condition leads to war termination. Although Iraq suffered from varying degrees of paralysis—and even collapse—in both wars, the primary theory's connection of this paralysis to the realization of the war's objectives proves to be flawed.<sup>3</sup> In short, there needs to be much more consideration of how inducing paralysis can lead to a favorable ending of the war. The alternative theory provides greater detail in this area by postulating a difference between the desirability of paralysis at different levels of war, and by warning of the significant follow-up actions required to turn paralysis into a lasting victory. What follows below is a more detailed discussion of the differences between the two theories given the historical evidence of Iraq.

### ***Proposition One***

The first propositions of both theories deal with the degree of centralization in various organizations. The primary theory holds that all organizations are fundamentally centralized, because strong leadership is an essential part of their healthy function. This leadership performs several key functions within the organizational system. It gathers pertinent

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<sup>3</sup> As explained in Chapter Four, paralysis does not necessarily equal collapse. It is possible that an organization may be paralyzed, but still maintain the ability to act on its external environment. Indeed, this may be a likely outcome if military actions have focused on degrading the leadership process while leaving fielded forces relatively intact.

information, analyzes this information, makes decisions about the organization, and communicates these decisions as direction and guidance to the rest of the system. In essence, centralized leadership allows the organization to adjust, adapt, and evolve. Therefore, the loss of leadership degrades the organization's ability to do all of these things. The alternative theory argues that, while some organizations exhibit this degree of centralization, others do not. The power to make decisions and adjust to emerging stimuli is diffused throughout some organizations, as leaders at higher levels in the organization encourage those at lower levels to act with increased autonomy. Furthermore, in some organizations, initiative at lower levels is encouraged and rewarded. There may be significant differences in how leadership manifests itself at different levels of the organization, especially in a military context. More specifically, the type of direction and guidance provided at the lower levels of military organizations—typically described as the operational and tactical levels—is much more time-sensitive, and therefore attacks on these leaders can achieve effects that are quickly recognizable. Because there are many other leaders at these levels who can fill the void, the effects of leadership attack are relatively short lived, as leaders are replaced or communication is reestablished. Attacks on leaders at the strategic level, in contrast, will lead to effects that take much longer to manifest themselves but can be observed for much longer periods than attacks at lower levels.

For the period examined in this study, Iraq's government and military forces were centralized. Saddam was responsible for orientation and direction throughout Iraq. Key decision-making power was vested in Saddam Hussein, and power within the governmental and military subsystems was also centralized in their respective leaders, all of whom reported directly to Saddam. The Iraqi president was involved in the creation of military plans, such as

the invasion of the Saudi town of Khafji during Operation Desert Storm and the ringed defense plan for Baghdad announced before the invasion of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Saddam rarely issued time-sensitive commands, and when he did, he displayed a penchant for issuing the commands late — too late for them to be executed as he wished. This was true when he directed the retreat of the regular army out of Kuwait during the Gulf War as well as his direction to pull the Republican Guard into Baghdad in the later stages of the Iraq War. Both orders lacked a fundamental appreciation for the situation on the ground, and this lack of appreciation was exacerbated by the Coalition's leadership attacks. While it is difficult to argue that this proposition would hold for a wider range of potential adversaries, the experience of Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom backs up the primary theory's claims about centralization. Many believed that this high degree of centralization made Iraq vulnerable to leadership attack, and this was a major reason why military leaders proposed so many attacks on Saddam's leadership and that of his subordinates.

Despite the dominant role of Saddam's leadership within Iraq, the alternative theory correctly predicts the effects of disrupting leadership at the lower levels, especially in the military. As the regular army was ordered to leave Kuwait in 1991, the central headquarters issued the command that neighboring units needed to closely coordinate to prevent confusion and fratricide. Although the communication between the national leadership and the operational leaders in the field had not been cut, the field commander's communications were devastated to the point that many units lost connection with their leaders as they were under attack from the ground and air. The result was total chaos during the retreat from Kuwait. Similar chaos ensued in Operation Iraqi Freedom, as military commanders in the Republican Guard lost their ability to communicate, and these units lost cohesion as well. Thus,

leadership attack at the tactical and operational levels had timely and demonstrable effects that helped the Coalition create and sustain two military routs. So while the primary theory proved mostly valid in these two cases, the alternative theory's view that attacks at different levels can create distinct effects appears to provide an additional layer of explanation.

### ***Proposition Two***

Each theory's second proposition makes assertions about the vulnerability of an organization to attacks on its centers of gravity, especially those associated with its leadership. The primary theory holds that attacks on centers of gravity will have multiple, cascading effects because organizations are connected, and their processes often have single points of failure. The alternative theory, in contrast, asserts that some organizations are connected, but others are not, nor do they have significant single points of failure. Instead, some organizations are highly redundant and adaptable, and therefore, not as vulnerable to attacks on their centers of gravity. A key point of the alternative theory is that organizations can make themselves less vulnerable to attacks on their centers of gravity by increasing their redundancy and minimizing single points of failure. Closely related to this, organizations can prepare for attacks on their leadership by implementing a clear line of succession and by preparing subordinate leaders to assume more responsible positions through education and practical experience. Additionally, the establishment of recognized doctrine and standardized operating procedures allows an organization to mitigate the effects of an attack on its leadership by providing continuity in direction and guidance. Organizations that do these things significantly reduce their vulnerability to leadership attack.



Some parts of Iraq were highly vulnerable to attacks on their centers of gravity, while others were not. At the strategic level, Iraq and its Ba'ath regime were most vulnerable to an attack on Saddam himself, but the security measures adopted by the Iraqi president helped to prevent the regime's decapitation. The Iraqi communications infrastructure was quite redundant and adaptable during Operation Desert Storm. In 2002 and 2003, it took months of deliberate attacks during Operation Southern Focus as well as numerous precision strikes in Baghdad to knock out telecommunications, while the television broadcasting station proved quite resilient to attack. Operational subsystems in Iraq were highly connected, such as the KARI air defense system during Operation Desert Storm. The effectiveness of KARI depended almost entirely on its connectivity between various elements of the air defense systems, and when this connectivity was broken, the air defenses showed little ability to challenge the Coalition's air offensive.

In both Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom, a key operational center of gravity was the morale and fighting spirit of the Iraqi military. In 1991, and again in 2003, PSYOPS messages from the Coalition helped to persuade soldiers to stop fighting for Saddam, and this led to widespread disillusionment and many defections. These soldiers lacked confidence and belief in Saddam, and they were quite vulnerable to the Coalition's messaging. The Iraqi military lacked the ability to adapt to the situation because of the absence of trust between its leader and the average follower.

On the whole, Iraq was vulnerable to attacks on centers of gravity, although this vulnerability varied according to the level of the particular organization or unit attacked. Thus, the primary theory is valid, but the alternative theory seems to offer more depth in

explanation. Where attacks on Iraqi centers of gravity failed, a major contributor to this failure was the lack of appropriate intelligence.

### ***Proposition Three***

In their versions of proposition three, the theories adopt markedly different views of intelligence. The primary theory is optimistic. It asserts that the intelligence necessary to attack an adversary's centers of gravity is normally available, at least to an advanced military force such as that of the United States. This includes raw information about the enemy system and its leadership as well as the knowledge required to take this information, put it into context, and identify key nodes for attack. The alternative theory is not as optimistic. It argues that such intelligence is not always available. Even if it is available, this intelligence is invariably incomplete and often inaccurate. Sometimes the available intelligence is sufficient to identify, locate, and target key nodes, including enemy leadership. Other times it is not. Chance is a key part of the equation. Sometimes luck is necessary to gain the intelligence necessary for leadership attack.

The evidence of Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom clearly favor the alternative theory's perspective on intelligence. Despite access to the best intelligence products available, the air planners in Operation Desert Storm never obtained the intelligence necessary to carry out leadership attacks to the degree they desired. First, they could never find Saddam or any of the other senior Ba'ath officials. Second, their targeting of Iraqi communications systems was never sufficient to stop Saddam from communicating to the population or his military forces in southern Iraq and Kuwait, even though this was a key military objective. Third, the Coalition was unable to identify the key pressure points that

would coerce Saddam into agreeing to U.N. demands and withdrawing the army from Kuwait (at least in compliance with President Bush's timeline). In contrast, there were several successes in Operation Desert Storm keyed by accurate intelligence, including the dismantling of Iraq's air defenses, the attacks on field commanders in the Kuwait theater, and the PSYOPS messages aimed at Iraqi soldiers on the front lines.

As in 1991, the Coalition's record of gaining and applying intelligence in Operation Iraqi Freedom was mixed. Again, Saddam and his senior leaders were able to elude numerous direct attacks despite the Coalition's intense effort to find, track, and target them. These attacks resulted in significant civilian casualties, but no enemy leaders were killed. The Coalition's attacks on the Iraqi telecommunications were eventually successful, but this effort benefitted from months of attacks before the invasion during Operation Southern Focus. Attacks against military headquarters were moderately successful. Although many of these headquarters had been vacated before being attacked, the loss of these headquarters added to the considerable friction facing these commanders. Eventually, the only reliable way for these military commanders to communicate was face-to-face, an impracticable situation given the speed of the Coalition's maneuver forces.

The mixed record for intelligence raises an important point. If ever there would be a time when an attacker had the necessary access to a country to develop good intelligence, it should have been in Iraq, especially for Operation Iraqi Freedom. This is especially true for intelligence gathered through technical means. The United States and United Kingdom had been patrolling the no-fly zones for almost twelve years. During this time, they had enjoyed daily access to Iraqi airspace to collect intelligence information. Their analysts had enjoyed an unprecedented opportunity to focus their collection, examine the results, and develop a deep

knowledge of the country and its complexities. Despite this advantage, intelligence information during Operation Iraqi Freedom was both incomplete and inaccurate, with the human side of intelligence being especially subject to question. This is strong evidence that the primary theory's optimistic perspective on intelligence is unwarranted and should be rejected. Any theory that advocates the use of leadership attack should recognize that this type of attack requires a high level of intelligence to be successful, that this intelligence is difficult to obtain, and that acquiring this level of intelligence is subject to chance.

#### *Propositions Four and Five*

The most important propositions for both theories are propositions four and five, which address the results of leadership attack and how these results translate into a successful war termination. Proposition four of the primary theory predicts that paralysis and collapse occurs when multiple centers of gravity, especially those associated with leadership, are struck in a compressed timeframe. This timeframe should be short—short enough that the enemy is unable to adapt to the loss of leadership before being subjected to follow-on attacks. When this happens, the flow of information through the system slows down or stops altogether. The leadership core issues guidance and direction that is late and not relevant to the current situation. Eventually, this direction and guidance ceases, and the system stops responding to stimuli. Parts of the system may continue functioning, but they will only be able to follow their established course, and they lose the ability to adjust and adapt. Paralysis and collapse is the result, no matter if the attack is at the strategic, operational, or tactical levels.

The alternative theory agrees that paralysis due to leadership attack is possible at all levels, but it does not necessarily agree that this is a good thing. Specifically, the alternative

theory argues that paralysis and collapse is almost always desirable at the operational and tactical levels, as these are the levels where units require detailed, time-sensitive direction from their leader in order to be effective. Collapse of the enemy at these levels usually leads to tactical victory, and this is usually a beneficial step toward an eventual termination on favorable terms. At the strategic level, however, paralysis may not be so desirable. It is quite difficult to achieve, and it may even hinder the eventual cessation of hostilities under favorable terms. This is because in the chaos and confusion that accompanies strategic paralysis and collapse, it is impossible to establish or continue a dialogue with the enemy. This critical observation leads to the distinct contentions of each theory about how paralysis leads to victory.

The primary theory does not consider dialogue to be all that important. In its fifth proposition, it holds that paralysis is the key to war termination. If the adversary leadership agrees to appropriate concessions when convinced that paralysis and collapse is inevitable, that is welcome but unnecessary. This is because paralysis leads to victory and a better state of peace according to the primary theory. When the enemy suffers paralysis and becomes incapable of organized resistance, this makes it possible to impose one's will on the enemy and force a favorable war termination. Indeed, one should be able to dictate the terms of the peace.

The alternative theory disagrees with this perspective. It asserts that strategic paralysis is both difficult to achieve and difficult to translate into a lasting peace. War is different at the strategic level. At this level, Clausewitz describes how war is indistinct from policy—in fact, it is a “continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*; ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87.

The alternative theory agrees with Clausewitz that a critical component of war at the strategic level is the dialogue between combatants. The imposition of strategic paralysis stops this dialogue. This alternative perspective argues that it is important for the enemy to be given a chance to concede, because there is value to continuing (and possibly concluding) the dialogue versus cutting it off. Leadership attack at the operational and tactical levels can cause significant paralysis of military units, and this may be enough to persuade the enemy leader to make concessions. If the enemy does not yield, even in the face of inevitable defeat, then continued attack may cause the entire strategic system to be paralyzed and suffer collapse. Generally, this should not be welcomed, as a major point of the alternative theory is that paralysis requires extensive follow-up actions to establish a better state of peace. Unless one is willing to paralyze an adversary and then walk away—seldom the case in an increasingly interconnected world—follow-up actions will be required to reestablish order out of chaos and confusion. These may include the defeat of residual military forces, the occupation of territory, the establishment of security, and the restoration of essential services. These follow-up actions may be very costly and time-consuming, and they may fail, creating the conditions for future conflict.

The evidence of Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom clearly favors the alternative theory. Operational and tactical paralysis of the Iraqi military was largely achieved in both wars, and this was desirable in both cases. This operational and tactical paralysis enabled successful Coalition invasions by numerically inferior forces with casualty rates that were unprecedented. Paralysis at the strategic level, however, was a different story. In Operation Desert Storm, Iraq never suffered from strategic paralysis. Saddam Hussein retained control of his forces and communicated with his operational commanders regularly.

During the first three phases of the campaign, Saddam was able to monitor the situation in Kuwait and the status of his forces, although he had to overcome the friction caused by Coalition air attacks. The pressure of these airstrikes eventually took their toll. By the eve of the ground invasion, Saddam was ready to order a retreat from Kuwait brokered by the Soviet Union. While Saddam's sense of urgency was lacking, there was still a dialogue taking place, and this dialogue could have led to realization of the war's objectives—at least the ones articulated by the U.N. Security Council—while minimizing the threat to Coalition ground forces and civilians in Kuwait. Instead of offering Saddam an opportunity to concede at this late stage, President George W. Bush decided to launch the ground invasion of Kuwait, which was very successful in a tactical sense. At the strategic level, however, Operation Desert Storm ended with an uneasy truce that would lead to years of conflict and, eventually, another war.

This war occurred in 2003, after twelve years of actions designed to weaken Iraq's regime through sanctions and sporadic strikes. Perhaps what is more important from the Coalition's perspective, Saddam Hussein had twelve more years to lead Iraq deeper into dysfunction. When the Coalition unleashed a much improved military operating at lightning speed and able to exert pressure on Iraq across multiple fronts, the result was paralysis and collapse at all levels in Iraq. Once the invasion began, the Coalition had no intention of giving Saddam a chance to concede. There would be no opportunity for dialogue. The objective was regime change, and decision makers thought that paralysis would lead to this change. It did, but that paralysis was only the beginning of the Coalition's attempt to translate a military invasion into a lasting peace. The leaders of the Coalition—the United States and United Kingdom—were unwilling to leave Iraq in chaos, and thus began the journey of establishing

governance in Iraq. Years later, after incalculable cost in lives lost and disrupted as well as billions of dollars spent with questionable value returned, it was undeniable that the paralysis and collapse of Iraq's Ba'ath regime did not naturally lead to a better state of peace.

Therefore, the experience of Iraq refutes the primary theory's perspective on the relationship between paralysis and war termination. As explained earlier in this chapter, these two cases should offer the primary theory an easy test. The foremost proponent of the primary theory, Colonel John Warden, was able to persuade decision makers to include leadership attack as a fundamental element in Operation Desert Storm's campaign plan. When the campaign's first phase was initiated, leadership attack actions were executed to a degree that surpassed many of Warden's proposals. Twelve years later, quite a few of these forms of leadership attack were resurrected and included in the campaign plan for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Additionally, the politics of that war were so slanted against Saddam that the Coalition was able to conduct leadership attacks broadly and repeatedly, even including multiple attacks on Hussein in the middle of dense civilian areas.<sup>5</sup> The Iraq of 2003 was ripe for paralysis and collapse, and when the Coalition exerted pressure on the regime, it crumbled. This should have led to a decisive victory for the Coalition.

This decisive victory did not happen, and therein lies the fundamental finding of this study. Simply stated, leadership attack can lead to strategic paralysis, but this does not equal victory without major follow-up actions such as occupation of territory or defeat of residual forces. The primary theory is quite vague on how paralysis translates to victory. According to the theory, it just does, and that is the problem. The experience of Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom show that strategic paralysis is difficult to achieve through

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<sup>5</sup> In contrast, consider NATO's experience in Serbia and the reluctance to attack Slobodan Milošević. This will be discussed later in this chapter.



leadership attack, although it is possible. Even when it is achieved, however, it tends to require multiple intervening actions between the inducement of paralysis and the realization of the overall objectives of the war. Although it is not always possible, it appears to be better to keep the dialogue between combatants open, realizing that the cost of cleaning up after paralysis and collapse may be much higher than expected. As Fred Charles Iklé states in the epigraph that begins this chapter, war plans often have great difficulty relating military actions to war termination.<sup>6</sup> A valid theory of leadership attack must take this into account and help strategists understand how leadership attack can lead to a better state of peace. This is the strength of the alternative theory and the main reason why it eclipses the primary theory in this study.

### **Merits of the Alternative Theory**

The five propositions of the alternative theory present a more plausible perspective on leadership attack and how it works. This conclusion has been derived using case evidence that should favor the primary theory. The alternative theory presents a nuanced view of leadership attack—one that lies between the view of John Warden that leadership attack is often decisive and that of Robert Pape, who argues just as confidently against what he calls a “decapitation strategy.”<sup>7</sup> The alternative theory recognizes that both have a point, and both overstate their case.

It is important to restate that this theory has not been proven by this study. That will require much more comparison of this theory with additional evidence. A major

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<sup>6</sup> Fred Charles Iklé, *Every War Must End* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> In “The Enemy as a System,” Warden writes that, “Capturing or killing the state’s leader has frequently been decisive.” Pape counters in “The True Worth of Airpower” that, “decapitation strategies have never been effective, and the advent of precision air weaponry has not made them any more so.”

accomplishment of this study, however, is that it has identified a theory that is worthy of continued testing and refinement as well as a methodology that is suitable for the task.

### **Contribution to the Field**

This study contributes to the field of military strategy in four ways. First, it formalizes the theory of leadership attack most closely associated with J.F.C. Fuller and John Warden into a series of propositions that are verifiable when compared with historical evidence. Second, it presents strong evidence that this theory is flawed, especially in the area of connecting leadership attack to war termination and a better state of peace. Third, it presents a clear alternative theory that can also be verified through further case studies. Finally, this study contributes to the field by identifying and demonstrating a research methodology that is well-suited for both theory building and theory testing, as both are critical to the field of military strategy. As explained in Chapter Two, systematic process analysis is a methodology that is designed to squeeze the most value out of “small-n” studies. This is especially valuable for studies of military strategy, because in a sense, each military conflict is to some degree unique. Therefore, establishing a valid control group for a “large-n” quantitative study is problematic at best. Systemic process analysis provides a method whereby a theory or theories can be identified, developed, tested and refined through case study. The method takes advantage of the complexity found in each case, as it traces the process of interest through the case or cases to be studied. Key parts of this process are identified and examined, including decision making, execution, and outcomes. The result is a deeper appreciation of the causal chain of events, which is critical for testing and refining theory. Systematic process analysis is able to give the researcher a better chance to discover both what happened and

why it happened. For this reason, it is quite valuable to research projects in the field of military strategy, especially as one considers additional cases.

### **A Brief Illustration: Operation Allied Force**

To better illustrate this contribution to the field, it is worthwhile to present a brief examination of another important case study in leadership attack. This section addresses the case of Operation Allied Force in 1999, which was conducted to stop violence against ethnic Albanians by military forces and paramilitary units in the Kosovo region of Serbia. This operation was conducted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) against Serbia, which was under the leadership of President Slobodan Milošević. Although Milošević was not targeted directly, multiple processes of leadership within Serbia were attacked with the intention of disrupting them. As will be discussed below, the overall goal was simple—to get Milošević to withdraw forces from Kosovo and accept a NATO peacekeeping force there—and this goal was eventually achieved. Unlike in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Milošević was offered numerous opportunities to accept a compromise solution, and his regime was never under direct threat.<sup>8</sup> In the end, NATO increased the military, economic, and diplomatic pressure on Serbia and Milošević while keeping the dialogue open, and Milošević eventually returned to negotiations and accepted the terms proposed by NATO.

A brief consideration of Operation Allied Force serves several functions. First, it addresses a case of leadership attack that occurred at relatively the same time as the two major cases previously addressed in this study, as Operation Allied Force was conducted between

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<sup>8</sup> U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright explains, “We thought about declaring Milošević’s removal from power as an explicit war aim, but rejected that because we had no short-term way to bring it about.” Madeleine Albright with Bill Woodward, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir* (New York: Hyperion, 2003), 523.

Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Indeed, many of the planners for Operation Allied Force were influenced by the experience of leadership attack in Operation Desert Storm. The operation was conducted in a much different context, however, and that context placed significant limitations on leadership attack as applied by NATO. Even so, Operation Allied Force is put forth by some as an example of how attacking an enemy leader has led to a better state of peace. It is useful to see if this conclusion is supported by the evidence. Finally, this discussion illustrates how the framework used in this study can be applied to other cases of leadership attack and demonstrates how further research can refine the findings presented in this study.

What follows is a short examination of this operation using the methodology of systemic process analysis and the alternative theory of leadership attack developed within this study. To illustrate how this theory can help the researcher determine the effectiveness of leadership attack, the five propositions of the theory have been rephrased into five questions for the researcher to address. Each question helps illuminate the role and effectiveness of leadership attack within the overall conflict. The result is a better understanding of how leadership attack was part of a campaign that successfully coerced Slobodan Milošević to stop the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo.

### *1. What was the role of leadership within Serbia?*

It is important to establish the role of leadership within the Serbian power structure. As explained previously, organizations vary in the role of leadership, with some being highly centralized and others more decentralized. At the strategic level, Serbian President Slobodan Milošević appeared to be in complete command of the Serbian government. The top NATO

commander, General Wesley Clark, asserted that Milošević “has full control, or has had nearly full control of the legal system, the police structure, the information, and the media, and so he has many different power plays that he can use.”<sup>9</sup> On the Serbian side, the commander of the Third Army—the Serbian ground forces assigned to Kosovo—confirmed that Milošević was in charge. “He is the top command,” asserts General Nobosja Pavkovic, “and as such, he knows the political and the military climate very well.”<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the best evidence that Milošević provided centralized leadership to Serbia is the fact that when he agreed to the final cease fire and its associated terms, Serbian forces obeyed his orders and exited Kosovo.

In addition, the subordinate organizations within Serbia appeared to be centralized as well, with some variation. After the conflict, Serbian soldiers recalled following the orders of their superiors, even when they disagreed with the overall direction. They also discussed fairly detailed restrictions from their leaders concerning what they were allowed to do.<sup>11</sup> Serbian air defenses also relied on centralized control and communications. Alternatively, while the political and economic power in Serbia was controlled by a small group of power brokers loyal to Milošević (a fact that is discussed further below), there was significant power that was distributed among the general population. President Milošević had stirred up the sentiments of nationalism within the population by exploiting the Kosovo issue, and he had used those sentiments to gain and maintain power.<sup>12</sup> Unlike in Iraq, where the Ba’ath Party

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<sup>9</sup> Wesley Clark, General, USA, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: War in Europe*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/interviews/> (accessed 31 March 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Nobosja Pavkovic, General, Serbian Army, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: War in Europe*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/interviews/> (accessed 31 March 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Three Serb Soldiers, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: War in Europe*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/interviews/> (accessed 31 March 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Ivo H. Daadler and Michael E. O’Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO’s War to Save Kosovo* (Washington D.C.: Brookings, 2000), 10.

had established a high degree of control among the population, Serbian citizens maintained some ability to voice their opinion and speak out, and this meant that Milošević had to consider how his actions would affect his popular support and therefore, his legitimacy and continued mandate to hold power. This placed an important check on his authority.

## ***2. How susceptible was Serbia to attacks on its centers of gravity?***

This is probably the most difficult question of Operation Allied Force to answer, even in retrospect. To begin, NATO's military commanders had deep disagreements with each other over the premise of this question. Given that the ultimate goal of Operation Allied Force involved coercing President Milošević, there was no consensus that the concept of center of gravity even applied to Serbia. Indeed, the overall NATO commander, General Wesley Clark, did not think that Serbia had a military center of gravity in the Clausewitzian sense. General Clark viewed the military action as an extension of diplomacy, with the application of military force being a means to apply pressure to persuade President Milošević to do what he would otherwise not want to do. "Now, one couldn't know exactly what the threshold was where Milošević would give up," General Clark explained after the conflict. "In fact, there was never a single target, or single set of targets, that were guaranteed to produce the surrender. There wasn't, in that sense, a military center of gravity strategically—not one that we could get at."<sup>13</sup> From General Clark's perspective, NATO needed to apply a strategy that would increase the pain on Milošević and those around him to persuade him to withdraw forces from Kosovo and allow a peacekeeping force to enter.

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<sup>13</sup> Clark, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

NATO's air commander, Lieutenant General Michael Short, held a different view. Along with his air planners, General Short thought that Serbia was vulnerable to attacks on centers of gravity, and furthermore, that his air component was capable of identifying and successfully disrupting these vital centers. Unlike in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the objective in Operation Allied Force was not regime change. Imposing a degree of paralysis, however, could help achieve the desired objectives in four possible ways. First, if President Milošević's control of his military forces—especially those in Kosovo—was degraded, then ethnic cleansing operations might be hampered or stopped altogether. Second, if Milošević lost the ability to control the population and inflame their passions, then the violence occurring in Kosovo would be less likely to continue. Third, imposing a degree of paralysis through the attack of vital centers might convince President Milošević that negotiations were a better option than continued attacks on the Albanians in Kosovo. President Milošević did not want to lose control within Serbia, and when he recognized that a loss of control was eminent, he would return to negotiations. Finally, attacks on key economic and infrastructure targets would hurt both the general population and elites in Serbia, and this would discourage them from following Milošević. As the Serbian president sensed that he was losing the support of those who kept him in power, he would be much more likely to agree to concessions.

For these reasons, General Short and his air planners believed that Serbia was vulnerable to attacks on its centers of gravity. Therefore, he proposed that NATO begin the air attacks on Serbia by striking these targets in parallel. "We recommended that we go after what we believed to be the strategic target set in Belgrade," explains General Short, "the power grid, lines of communication, as they effected Belgrade, the river bridges, the traffic patterns into and out of Belgrade, . . . and at least six to eight military command centers in

Belgrade.”<sup>14</sup> From General Short’s perspective, rapid and parallel attack of these targets would have shocked the Serbs.<sup>15</sup> This course of action would offer the best potential to employ air power within the overall effort to persuade Milošević to back down.

There was a major problem, however, for both General Clark and General Short. Due to its unique command structure, NATO member nations had to agree on target sets before they could be attacked. While General Clark and General Short agreed on many of the targets, including the Serbian power grid and television stations, they had to get approval from NATO, and this proved to be exceptionally difficult.<sup>16</sup> Every target had to be vetted through the member nations, with each of the 19 members having what amounted to veto power over each target.<sup>17</sup> In this environment, obtaining approval for targets in the Belgrade area—with their high potential for collateral damage—was exceptionally difficult. These were precisely the targets, however, that would qualify as centers of gravity from a leadership perspective. The result was predictable for any organization that operates by consensus. NATO was very slow in approving targets, and the overall effort seemed to stagnate as a result.<sup>18</sup>

These political constraints meant that the “classic air campaign”—one that identifies and strikes multiple vital centers in a short timeframe—was unachievable. The NATO target approval process could not keep up. Moreover, for NATO’s political leaders, maintaining

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Short, Lieutenant General, USAF, Interview Transcript, *Frontline: War in Europe*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/interviews/> (accessed 31 March 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Clark and Short, Interview Transcripts, *Frontline*.

<sup>17</sup> Short, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of the NATO targeting process and its effects on the overall campaign, see Benjamin S. Lambeth, *NATO’s Air War For Kosovo: A Strategic and Operational Assessment* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 2001), 184-189.



unity was more important than executing a viable air campaign. “Our plan was to escalate as rapidly as possible, to do as much as we could,” remembers General Clark. “But we also recognized that no single target, no set of targets, and no bombing series was more important than maintaining the consensus of NATO.”<sup>19</sup> Even in retrospect, therefore, it is impossible to determine if Serbia was truly susceptible to attacks on its centers of gravity. Simply stated, the type of attacks proposed by General Short (and John Warden, William Sherman, and Billy Mitchell before him) were never attempted. Additionally, Benjamin Lambeth makes an important observation about the plan for air targeting. He argues that NATO would have been better served if the military commanders would have moved beyond their preconceived notions based on their services’ parochial doctrine. “They might more effectively have approached Milošević instead as a unique rather than generic opponent, conducted a serious analysis of his distinctive vulnerabilities, and then tailored a campaign plan aimed at attacking those vulnerabilities directly, irrespective of canonical air or land warfare solutions for all seasons.”<sup>20</sup> Because this never happened, the question of Serbia’s susceptibility to attacks on its centers of gravity remains an open one.

### *3. Was the available intelligence sufficient to identify key nodes that, if attacked, would disrupt the process of leadership?*

The intelligence that NATO used to identify targets during Operation Allied Force was incomplete, and at times, incorrect. The fundamental problem that NATO commanders faced as they attempted to stop the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo through air attack was to

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<sup>19</sup> Clark, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>20</sup> Lambeth, *NATO’s Air War*, 240.

identify targets that would the most pressure on President Milošević. NATO's ability to identify such targets was, at best, mixed. To illustrate this, one can point to widespread and spectacular targeting failures during the conflict, including the inability to find and attack fielded forces in Kosovo as well as the mistaken attack on the Chinese embassy.

Target identification was a major problem throughout the campaign, and this was true for leadership attack. Since direct attack on Milošević was ruled out, successful leadership attack efforts required identifying other categories of targets. One such category involved targets that could cut off Serbian leadership from the forces doing the killing in Kosovo. This would include disrupting communications and disabling command and control facilities at the various levels of leadership to induce friction and paralysis. This was not accomplished to the level necessary to disrupt the processes of leadership within Serbia. Although NATO attacked presidential facilities, command and control facilities, organizational headquarters, and communications relays, there is no indication that Milošević ever lost control of Serbian forces. After the war, the commander of the Serbian Third Army in Kosovo, General Pavkovic, recalled meeting with President Milošević and receiving orders from him throughout the war.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the best evidence that Serbian never experienced strategic paralysis is that, when President Milošević ordered Serbian forces to withdraw from Kosovo, they did so quickly, even while under the fog and friction of continuing conflict.

While there was no paralysis at the strategic level in Serbia, it may have been possible for impose paralysis at the operational and tactical levels, but this does not appear to have happened either. General Pavkovic claimed that NATO never struck any of his ground force command centers, and he says that he remained in "constant contact" with his military

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<sup>21</sup> Pavkovic, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

planners.<sup>22</sup> Similar shortcomings were seen in the effort to degrade Serbian air defenses. In Operation Desert Storm, the Coalition had enjoyed success in attacking leadership within the Iraqi air defense system. In Operation Allied Force, degrading the centralized control of Serbian air defenses proved to be much more difficult and frustrating. NATO was never able to find and attack the key nodes that would break the air defenses apart. Benjamin Lambeth writes, “the Yugoslav IADS’s extensive network of underground command sites, buried landlines, and mobile communications centers hampered the allied effort to attack that system’s internetted communications links. This internetting used fused radar input, which allowed the acquisition and tracking of NATO aircraft from the north, and subsequently fed the resulting surveillance data to air defense radars in the south.”<sup>23</sup> As in Operation Desert Storm, the Serbian air defense commanders prioritized survival above attack, and this limited their effectiveness. Their ability to maintain cohesion through central command and control, however, allowed them to remain a viable threat to NATO operations throughout the conflict. In doing so, they forced NATO aircraft to operate in ways that reduced the overall effectiveness of air operations.<sup>24</sup>

While President Milošević remained firmly in control of Serbian governmental and military forces, NATO attempted to degrade his ability to influence the Serbian population through mass media. In NATO’s view, Milošević deliberately used television and radio to inflame the passions of Serbian nationalism, which created an environment that encouraged

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<sup>22</sup> “They never hit one command center nor any of the units.” Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Benjamin S. Lambeth, “Kosovo and the Continuing SEAD Challenge,” *Aerospace Power Journal*, Summer 2002, <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj02/sum02/lambeth.html> (accessed 6 April 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, it was useful to degrade his ability to communicate through disrupting the television and radio stations. In this, NATO was only partially successful. NATO successfully targeted Serbian television and radio stations, including Radio Television Serbia (RTS), the top media outlet in Serbia and the preferred voice of Milošević.<sup>26</sup> After the attack on the RTS building, the station was back up and broadcasting within hours from an alternate outlet.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, attacks on radio and television stations placed NATO on the defensive against watchdog groups like Amnesty International, who considered these attacks to be illegal.<sup>28</sup> As in the case of Iraq, strategic communication through mass media proved very difficult to disrupt. Throughout the conflict, Milošević retained the ability to communicate directly to the people of Serbia.<sup>29</sup>

While NATO had almost no success in cutting off communication and inducing paralysis upon the Serbian processes of leadership, its efforts to divide Milošević from his followers appear to have been more fruitful. Many within NATO considered Serbian power to be centralized in Milošević. He was the dictator within Serbia and the root cause of

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<sup>25</sup> General Clark asserts, "We knew that Milošević used TV as an instrument of command and control. He used it to control the population, to inflame the passions of ethnic cleansing, and so forth." Clark, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*. There is considerable evidence to suggest that this was true. The Director of RTS later said, "The things that happened at state TV, warmongering, things we can admit to now: false information, biased reporting. That went directly from Milošević to the head of TV" *Wide Angle: Milošević and the Media*, "Part 3: Dictatorship on the Airwaves," PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/episodes/media-by-milosevic/video-full-episode/852/> (accessed 6 April 2013).

<sup>26</sup> "NATO Defends TV Bombing," *BBC News Online*, 23 April 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/326653.stm> (accessed 6 April 2013).

<sup>27</sup> "NATO strike on Serbian TV prompts hard questions," *CNN*, 23 April 1999, [http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9904/23/kosovo.02/index.html?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9904/23/kosovo.02/index.html?_s=PM:WORLD) (accessed 6 April 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Robert Fisk, "Amnesty International: NATO Deliberately Attacked Civilians In Serbia," *The Independent*, 7 June 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen T. Hosmer, *The Conflict Over Kosovo: Why Milošević Decided to Settle When He Did* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Project Air Force, 2001), 72-73.

problems in Kosovo.<sup>30</sup> When they looked deeper, however, they found that Milošević was supported by several key power brokers. In a symbiotic relationship, Milošević would grant resources, authorities, and favors to these elites, and, in return, they would support him and his policies. NATO strategists reasoned that if these elites could be discouraged from following Milošević, this would weaken the Serbian president and make him much more likely to concede to NATO's demands. This would be a potent form of leadership attack, as it would drive a wedge between the leader and key followers and therefore, disrupt the process of leadership.<sup>31</sup> The effort, however, would rely on intelligence to identify the key followers and apply pressure to them in a way that would turn them against Milošević and his policies in Kosovo.<sup>32</sup> NATO conducted "crony attack" by sending key messages to Serbian elites. Some of these messages were delivered as PSYOPS messages directly to the elites themselves, including through phone calls, e-mails, and fax messages.<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, some messages were delivered through the bombing of facilities that were under the control of these elites, including industrial facilities and television stations owned by Milošević supporters.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, other forms of pressure were placed on these elites, including the threat to freeze assets held outside of Serbia as well as prohibition to enter or conduct business in countries of

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<sup>30</sup> Albright, 484.

<sup>31</sup> Julian H. Tolbert, Major, USAF, "Crony Attack: Strategic Attack's Silver Bullet," (Master's Thesis, School of Advanced Air And Space Power Studies, November 2006). 27-30.

<sup>32</sup> In the months after Operation Allied Force, Washington Post reporter William M. Arkin described this effort. He reported that the overall strategy had been conducted under the title "Operation Matrix," and that the CIA had a major role in this effort. He also reported about nature of messages sent to the cronies, including messages warning of attacks before their occurrence as well as messages delivered afterwards that stated that more attacks were on their way. William M. Arkin, "Ask Not for Whom the Phone Rings," *The Washington Post*, 11 October 1999, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/dotmil/arkin101199.htm> (accessed 6 April 2013).

<sup>33</sup> William Arkin and Robert Windrem, "The Other Kosovo War," MSNBC, 29 August 2001.

<sup>34</sup> Tolbert, 31-35.

the European Union.<sup>35</sup> As Operation Allied Force continued, support for Milošević and his policies in Kosovo waned, and this created an atmosphere where concessions to NATO were acceptable—and perhaps even desired—among the Serbian elites.<sup>36</sup> In retrospect, there appears to have been sufficient intelligence to identify these elites and some of their personal pressure points. The combined effects of direct targeting with PSYOPS messages, destruction of assets and critical infrastructure, diplomatic rhetoric, legal actions, travel restrictions, and economic sanctions seems to have been sufficient to encourage concessions among this important group.

The intelligence used in these efforts was far from perfect, however. In one of the lowest points of the war from NATO's perspective, a target intended to bring pressure on these elites was mistakenly identified. This began a tragic chain of events that ended with the destruction of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. This target was originally identified by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency as the Federal Directorate for Supply and Procurement (FDSP), which coordinated all import and export activity with Serbia. This organization was a source of hard currency for Milošević and his cronies, and this currency was an important source of their power.<sup>37</sup> The attack on the FDSP, therefore, was an attempt at leadership attack, and the intelligence mistake had major implications for leadership attack in the weeks

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<sup>35</sup> In a speech after the war, National Security Adviser Samuel Berger stated, "And we employed other means — enforcing tough economic sanctions; tightening travel restrictions; freezing financial holdings; making it difficult for Serbia's privileged class to go abroad, move money around, or plan their exits. In one case, a Milošević crony, with family in tow and suitcases bulging, found himself denied entry to a nearby country. Such developments raised the level of anxiety and discontent within Belgrade's power circles." Samuel L. Berger, "Winning the Peace in Kosovo," (address, Remarks to the Council of Foreign Relations, Washington, D.C., 26 July 1999).

<sup>36</sup> "In short, coercion through negative manipulation of private goods of the ruling coalition worked to change policy without having to cause a regime change." Tolbert, 37.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Lessons and Non-Lessons of the Air and Missile Campaign in Kosovo* (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2003), 96, <http://csis.org/publication/lessons-and-non-lessons-air-and-missile-campaign-kosovo> (accessed 6 April 2003).

that followed. As General Short recalls, “What happened after the embassy was hit? We had a circle drawn around downtown Belgrade, within which we couldn't hit anymore. ... It took the Rock and Roll Bridge off the table, and many of the headquarters off the table. It essentially cleared the sanctuary.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the mistaken attack on the Chinese embassy had many of the same ramifications for leadership attack as the destruction of the al-Firdos bunker in Operation Desert Storm. It discouraged further attacks in the enemy capital, which degraded the overall leadership attack effort.

*4. If processes of leadership were attacked, did the attacks disrupt these processes? Did this lead to paralysis?*

In the days before Milošević conceded to NATO's terms and agreed to withdraw forces from Kosovo, the strain of the conflict could be seen in numerous ways. These included effects from the economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and the continued bombing of infrastructure. The Serbian people were subject to a lack of electricity and fuel, major difficulties in agriculture and transportation, high unemployment, and a lack of funds to pay government workers.<sup>39</sup> There was, however, little evidence to suggest that Serbia was paralyzed at any level. Milošević maintained the ability to communicate with his elites, the Serbian population, and the armed forces. In addition, he seemed to maintain the support of many within Serbia. General Pavkovic remembered, “I was present as a member of top brass on many occasions, and I can tell you that there was a feeling of unity in the headquarters and amongst the people.”<sup>40</sup> While this assertion might be dismissed as the whitewashed memory

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<sup>38</sup> Short, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

<sup>39</sup> Hosmer, 69-73.

<sup>40</sup> Pavkovic, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

of a true believer, it appears that Serbia did not suffer from paralysis as described by Warden or Fuller. Instead, the conflict resembled a contest of wills as described by Clausewitz. U.S. Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, later wrote, “As the stalemate continued, I felt we were in a race in which both runners were tiring; the question was whose legs would buckle first.”<sup>41</sup>

While it was fatigue, not paralysis, that manifested itself in the last days of Operation Allied Force, this does not prove that paralysis could not have occurred. As explained above, there were many things that NATO could have done to impose paralysis. It chose not to do these things because such actions were untenable given the political context and the structure of NATO itself. These alternatives may have included different target sets, such as direct attacks on Milošević and his top commanders, as well as different methods of attack, including the parallel attack on multiple targets within hours and days versus weeks. These were proposed but never attempted. Therefore, it is impossible to say what effects they may have generated, all the way up to imposing paralysis.

Importantly, John Warden suggests that as a leader recognizes that he is losing control due to the attacks of the enemy, this realization would sometimes be enough to persuade the leader to sue for peace.<sup>42</sup> This is one way of interpreting the events of Operation Allied Force. NATO’s military attacks, when coupled with increasing economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure, served to erode Milošević’s power. While many considered him a dictator, Milošević did not enjoy absolute power in the same sense as Saddam Hussein. Milošević was an elected

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<sup>41</sup> Albright, 533.

<sup>42</sup> “When the command element cannot be threatened directly, the task becomes one of applying sufficient indirect pressure so that the command element rationally concludes that concessions are appropriate, realizes that further action is impossible, or is physically deprived of the ability to continue a particular course or to continue combat. The command element will normally reach these conclusions as a result of the degree of damage imposed on the surrounding rings.” John A. Warden III, Colonel, USAF, “The Enemy as a System,” *Airpower Journal*, Spring 1995.



official. While he ruthlessly employed all means at his disposal to maintain power, he controlled the population through skillful manipulation, not through fear.<sup>43</sup> In the end, Milošević understood that if he lost the support of the people, he might lose everything. Milošević's popular support waned significantly as the bombing expanded to include dual-use targets such as bridges, refineries, and the electric power grid.<sup>44</sup> His processes of leadership weakened accordingly. As President Milošević looked for a way to stop this erosion, he found NATO willing to resume dialogue. This represents the fundamental difference between leadership attack against Milošević's regime in Operation Allied Force versus the attack of Saddam Hussein in Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom. Milošević was offered a chance to negotiate during the course of military operations.

*5. How did leadership attack lead to the cessation of hostilities? Did it encourage dialogue or serve to stifle it?*

Throughout Operation Allied Force, NATO never cut off the dialogue with Milošević. Instead, NATO used military attack along with other forms of power to coerce Milošević to return to negotiations. "This was a case where there was an agreement made to try to get a political solution, and as part of that agreement, there was an incentive card thrown on the table called an air campaign," explains General Clark. "It wasn't a war—there was no intent to destroy Serbia, and there was no intent to take Milošević out of power."<sup>45</sup> When combined with economic and diplomatic pressure, military means—including leadership attack—were intended to convince Milošević to come back to the negotiating table. Inasmuch as it

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<sup>43</sup> Tolbert, 29-31.

<sup>44</sup> Hosmer, 53.

<sup>45</sup> Clark, Interview Transcript, *Frontline*.

supported the overall effort to get Milošević to agree to stop the violence, withdraw his forces from Kosovo, and allow NATO peacekeeping troops into the area, leadership attack in Operation Allied Force was successful.

This leads to a final question: how did leadership attack lead to a lasting peace? Because President Milošević was allowed an opportunity to compromise, people on all sides of the conflict enjoyed an opportunity to move on, although few have taken full advantage of this opportunity. After the war, most Serbs returned to their normal lives. They also exerted their will on the political process. President Milošević's support among the general population continued to erode, and he was forced to resign after a disputed election in 2000.<sup>46</sup> In 2001, Milošević was handed over to the War Crimes Tribunal at the Hague, where he subsequently died in prison during his trial.<sup>47</sup> Zoran Djindjic, the Serbian prime minister who was responsible for handing over Milošević, was assassinated by pro-Milošević conspirators in 2003.<sup>48</sup> Since then, Serbia has experienced a slow and sometimes tumultuous road to democracy, capitalism, and inclusion in the broader European community. Serbs remain divided over the issue of Kosovo to this day.

After Operation Allied Force, NATO inserted a sizable peacekeeping force, titled Kosovo Force (KFOR), into the small territory, and this served to mitigate the violence there. For the most part, KFOR has kept security in Kosovo, although there have been sporadic

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<sup>46</sup> Steven Erlanger, "Showdown in Yugoslavia; The Overview: Milošević Concedes His Defeat; Yugoslavs Celebrate New Era," *The New York Times*, 7 October 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/07/world/showdown-yugoslavia-overview-milosevic-concedes-his-defeat-yugoslavs-celebrate.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm> (accessed 6 April 2013).

<sup>47</sup> "Milošević Found Dead in his Cell," *BBC News Online*, 11 March 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4796470.stm> (accessed 6 April 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Peter S. Green, "Serbian Police Charge 45 in Slaying of Premier," *The New York Times*, 30 April 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/30/world/serbian-police-charge-45-in-slaying-of-premier.html?ref=zorandjindjic> (accessed 6 April 2013).

clashes between ethnic Albanians and Serbs, especially in the volatile northern areas of Kosovo. Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008, a move that has not been recognized by Serbia. Negotiations over Kosovo's fate remain ongoing, and KFOR maintains a force of approximately 5000 soldiers — roughly 10 percent of the original force inserted in 1999 — to maintain security.<sup>49</sup>

For many, Operation Allied Force was messy and frustrating, and the resultant political process has been difficult as well. During the conflict, political constraints within NATO and incomplete intelligence prevented the employment of pristine military concepts involving the application of overwhelming force in parallel attack on centers of gravity. The operation languished at times, and the political pressure tore at the fabric of NATO. After Milošević capitulated, NATO devoted considerable time, money, and personnel to maintain a presence in Kosovo to preserve the promise of peace, a promise that remains elusive. Given this, it is natural to ask: did NATO do the right thing by allowing Milošević an opportunity to concede?

The answer to this question is an unreserved “yes.” The alternatives for NATO included doing nothing, which would have allowed Serbian forces to succeed in cleansing Kosovo of the Albanians. This was an alternative that was unacceptable to the United States and its European partners. Another alternative was to impose paralysis and collapse on Serbia using all means necessary, up to and including invasion. NATO could have imposed its will on Serbia, but the follow up actions required to rebuild both Serbia and Kosovo would have been enormous. In the end, the NATO nations decided that their interests in Kosovo, though important, could not justify the expense of imposing regime change in Serbia. Unlike

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<sup>49</sup> “NATO's Role in Kosovo,” *Kosovo Force (KFOR)*, <http://www.aco.nato.int/kfor/about-us/natos-role-in-kosovo.aspx> (accessed 6 April 2013).

Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milošević was given both an opportunity to concede and time to do so. As this time passed, the losses from the bombings, the discontent of the power elite, and the unrest in the population all grew more troublesome to the Serbian president, and he eventually decided to acquiesce. The result was a negotiated agreement that ended the war led to progress in the years since. It has almost certainly resulted in a better state of peace than would have an invasion—and subsequent rebuilding—of Serbia.

***Summary: Operation Allied Force***

Given this analysis, the evidence of Operation Allied Force fits more closely with the alternative theory of leadership attack. Regarding proposition one, Serbia was centralized around President Milošević. The organizations under him were centralized as well, but there were variations in the level of centralization. Perhaps most importantly, there turned out to be a significant amount of power diffused throughout a group of elites as well as the general population. When sentiment in both groups began to turn, Milošević became willing to negotiate. As for proposition two, it is difficult to determine how susceptible Serbia was to parallel attack on multiple centers of gravity, as this was never attempted at the strategic level. At the tactical level, however, Serbian ground forces and air defenses proved to be quite resistant and resilient to attacks on their networks. Proposition three was confirmed in Operation Allied Force, as the intelligence used to conduct leadership attack was incomplete and, at times, inaccurate. There were also significant successes, including the identification of key Milošević cronies who could pressure their leader into making concessions. In considering proposition four, Serbia never suffered paralysis and collapse, but the processes of leadership within Serbia were degraded. This degradation placed additional pressure on

Milošević and added to his reasons for returning to negotiations. Finally, regarding proposition five, Milošević was offered an opportunity to concede before the imposition of paralysis and collapse on Serbia—probably achieved through the mechanism of a ground invasion. This led to a political process that allowed the people of Kosovo and Serbia an opportunity to move on without the high cost to NATO of invasion and nation building. While this process has been messy and frustrating, it is difficult to conceive of an alternative that would have been much more suitable in the long run.

### **Value to Military Strategists**

As illustrated in this discussion of Operation Allied Force, the study provides a method of analysis that helps the military strategist find the pertinent evidence in historical cases and derive conclusions about the effectiveness of leadership attack. Besides this contribution, this study also helps the military strategist by explaining and connecting the concepts originally borrowed to create theories of leadership attack. It connects leadership attack to the Clausewitzian concept of center of gravity, and it explains how it was developed in the context of wars that are fought with the objective of annihilating the enemy. This leads to the conclusion that an attack on adversary centers of gravity—including the process of leadership—is most appropriate when the objective is the enemy's overthrow or annihilation. When the objective is more limited, attacking the process of leadership may not achieve the desired effect, and it may even be counterproductive.

More specifically, for the strategist, it is important to understand how leadership attack works at the different levels of war. Because war takes different forms at the different levels, leadership attack may be more desirable at one level than another. For example, no matter

what the war's overall objectives—be they limited or unlimited—war often approaches the unlimited form at the tactical level. In fact, war is quite unlimited for individuals and small units engaging in close-quarters combat, as it tends to resemble a duel to the death. Because of this dynamic, leadership attack is almost always a good strategy at the tactical level. One should always try to eliminate the tactical leader—the flight leader, the platoon sergeant, the company commander, or the ship captain—if one wants an advantage in a tactical engagement. At the strategic level, in contrast, war is rarely fought for unlimited aims. Instead of a duel, war at the strategic level often resembles a dialogue between combatants. For this reason, leadership attack is often undesirable at the strategic level, because strategic paralysis cuts off this dialogue, and the alternative is to resign oneself to the major follow-up actions required to translate paralysis into a favorable war termination.

Above all, this study provides the military strategist with strong evidence that paralysis and collapse are difficult to achieve at the strategic level of war, and even if achieved, this will not automatically lead to victory. Both Fuller and Warden argued that an attack on enemy centers of gravity—including leadership—leads to paralysis and collapse, and this allows one to impose one's will on the adversary, as there is no organization left to resist.<sup>50</sup> At the strategic level, this logic fails to acknowledge three important points. First, when a state suffers complete collapse, there cannot be concession. There is no one available to sign a peace treaty or surrender document. One does not want to overstate the significance of this omission, but there is probably psychological value to having the sense of closure that comes with a formal termination. Second, the assertion that paralysis leads to peace fails to acknowledge that a form of resistance could rise out of the population as an insurgent or

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<sup>50</sup> In writings such as "Plan 1919," Fuller limited this conclusion to the operational and tactical levels. Warden, however, extended it to the strategic level.

terrorist threat. This was certainly the case in Iraq after 2003. Finally, even if no insurgency develops, collapse at the strategic level forces the occupying power to take on the responsibility of providing essential services. This is especially true in urban areas, and these services include policing, fire protection, electricity, sewage, trash collection, and water. This is a daunting task well beyond the capability of most military forces, especially ground invasion forces that specialize in combining maneuver and fires at a rapid pace. While imposing “operational paralysis” or “tactical paralysis” can be very favorable in military conflict, imposing “strategic paralysis” carries great risk and should be avoided by offering the adversary a way out.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Although this study does make progress in the field of military strategy, it does not definitively answer the research question or prove the preferred (alternative) theory. More testing of this theory—similar to the consideration given to Serbia and Milošević in this chapter—is necessary to raise its status past anything more than “promising.” Researchers have an opportunity to test this theory against other cases that are very different from Operations Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom. This will undoubtedly lead to new insights and further refinements in the theory postulated at the end of this study (or the development of another that replaces it). More specifically, researchers could pursue important avenues such as:

- Cases involving organizations that have structures and leadership processes that are different from the rigidly hierarchical structure this study encountered in Iraq.

Organizations with decentralized structures and distributed leadership should be much more

difficult to disrupt through leadership attack. When compared to U.S. or other Western militaries, some organizations may have divergent methods of command and control.

Specifically, their ideas about *control* may be fundamentally different, and it seems logical that this would have significant implications for leadership attack.

- Cases involving organizations that have inoculated themselves against leadership attack by implementing a plan of succession coupled with a leadership development program, or organizations that have well-established doctrine and standard operating procedures. A good example of this would be the aerial attack on the commander of the Japanese Imperial Fleet, Admiral Yamamoto, during World War II. The Japanese replaced Yamamoto with another senior admiral who had extensive command and combat experience, Admiral Koga Mineichi. In addition, the Japanese Navy had established doctrine and standard operating procedures that should have mitigated the loss of Yamamoto, especially in the short term. It would be interesting to examine the Japanese Navy's effectiveness before and after this action to see if this daring form of leadership attack was effective.
- Cases involving non-state actors. This study examined leadership attack in the context of state actors. Researchers could realize significant value in examining non-state actors such as terrorist and insurgent groups, especially al-Qaeda. Since 2001, many of these groups have been subjected to extensive leadership attack efforts, including the investment of considerable time and resources as well as the development of new tactics and techniques. These advancements include the use of intelligence fusion cells and remotely piloted air vehicles that can monitor a target for lengthy periods of time, then strike the target without being detected. This combination seems very potent in the context of leadership attack, and it deserves further study.



## Final Thoughts

There are numerous reasons why leadership attack is becoming more commonplace in military conflict. Some of these reasons have little to do with effectiveness, and as such, they have only been mentioned briefly in this study. As was seen in the months before Operation Desert Storm, President George H.W. Bush found it useful to condemn Iraqi President Saddam Hussein repeatedly and harshly, as this helped him gain support in domestic politics as well as from foreign leaders. Other political leaders have used similar rhetoric to condemn—and even demonize—leaders such as Manuel Noriega, Mohamed Farah Aidid, Slobodan Milošević, Osama bin Laden, Mullah Omar, Mohmmar Ghadaffi, and Bashar al-Assad. Given the pervasive and emotional rhetoric that often precedes a conflict, it is not surprising that strategists have offered military options for striking directly at these leaders as well as disrupting their processes of leadership within their spheres of influence.

Indeed, one could argue that leadership attack has a compelling moral component. To many, it seems more fitting to attack the leader who made the choices that led to conflict instead of the soldier who probably had little choice in the matter. Decision makers believed this in both the Gulf War of 1991 and the Iraq War of 2003. This perspective influenced many of their decisions, including the decision in Operation Desert Storm to undermine Saddam's influence with Iraqi conscripts positioned as fodder in Kuwait. It was more humane to use leadership attack to induce these soldiers to surrender than it was to kill them in large numbers as they presented easy targets for the Coalition. Moral considerations also influenced the decision to begin Operation Iraqi Freedom with a decapitation strike on Saddam Hussein. President George W. Bush believed that this strike might end the war

before it began, preventing unnecessary bloodshed. These are but two illustrations of how the logic of leadership attack can present a compelling moral case for action.

Along with this moral argument, the logic of leadership attack has a compelling practical application, and this has been the main focus of this study. A major reason why leadership attack has become more commonplace is that it works, to an extent. As this study has shown, adversary leadership is not a panacea target, but leadership attack can be quite effective if conducted with an appreciation for its limitations. Leadership is essential for the healthy function of an organization. Therefore, the process of leadership is a center of gravity, and disrupting it weakens the organization. It can even paralyze it. This is especially true in a military context, where leadership can make the difference between survival and destruction. Therefore, attacking military leaders, especially at the operational and tactical levels of war, makes eminent sense and is almost always desirable.

Leadership attack at the strategic level, however, is a different story. Attacking leadership at this level is hard to do. It requires a level of intelligence that is often unavailable due to chance and uncertainty, as strategic leaders are often well protected and difficult to locate. Strategic leaders usually have access to various and redundant communication systems, and the type of guidance and direction that they provide may not be detailed or particularly time sensitive. This combination makes it very difficult to cut off their communication. In addition, many strategic leaders do not have the time or ability to get involved with the details of the organizations that they lead, so they have delegated a significant amount of their authority to lower levels. Many strategic organizations have clear lines of succession and established procedures for elevating a successor if something happens

to the leader. All of these factors make an attack on strategic leadership less likely to produce paralysis and collapse.

Even if paralysis is possible at the strategic level, it is probably not desirable. Indeed, the major limitation of leadership attack—as determined by this study—is that it is difficult to connect a successful attack on strategic leadership with a better state of peace. The disruption of the adversary's strategic leadership can lead to chaos. This may appear to be a good strategy, as the confusion and chaos make it nearly impossible for one's enemy to resist effectively. While this is true, it also means that the enemy cannot make the choice to concede. In essence, a successful leadership attack can deny the enemy any choice in the matter. This is a normal and natural desire when a state goes to war. Why give the enemy a choice and engage in messy negotiations when one can impose a solution by taking away the enemy's ability to resist?

The experience in Iraq shows that imposing one's will is not as straightforward as it may seem. There is often a long journey between collapse of the enemy and a victory that is worth the fight. The rebuilding of a state such as Iraq is a daunting task. The cost can be steep in terms of lives disrupted as well as treasure spent. Unless the war is for a truly unlimited aim or national survival is at stake, it is difficult to justify this cost. It is preferable to keep the dialogue open between combatants to reach a solution that allows both victor and vanquished to move forward. This can be a messy and frustrating process, and it will undoubtedly take longer than many expect or want, yet this dialogue offers the best chance for an outcome that is worth the effort. When leadership attack encourages this dialogue, it can be very effective. When it cuts this dialogue off, it should be shunned.

## Appendix A

### Legal and Moral Considerations Regarding Leadership Attack

*Philosophers have long argued that there are times when murdering a murderer is not only necessary but noble. "Grecian nations give the honors of the gods to those men who have slain tyrants," wrote Cicero. Targeting Saddam also seems in accord with the "just war" principles first developed by Augustine and Aquinas. We've exhausted other efforts to stop him, and killing him certainly seems more proportionate to his crimes and discriminate in its effect than massive bombing raids that will inevitably kill innocent civilians. ... It's one of the extremely rare circumstances where killing can be a humanitarian act that saves far more lives than it risks....*

George Stephanopoulos  
*Newsweek*, 1 December 1997

*The intent of this appendix is to introduce key legal and moral considerations to those who are interested in strategies that attack leaders, especially through lethal means. It is not intended to provide an authoritative answer to the question, "is it legal and/or ethical to kill enemy leaders?" One who is interested in answering that question, however, may find several valuable leads in these pages.*

In a democracy founded upon the rule of law, effectiveness is not the only criteria on which a military strategy is judged. Along with seeking effectiveness, planners and decision-makers must also consider the morality and legality of a proposed course of action. While all strategies are subject to legal and moral concerns, leadership attack strategies are subject to specific limitations, especially when an individual is targeted with lethal force. Some planners, unfamiliar with these limitations, believe them to be more stringent than they are. This can lead to unnecessary friction during the planning process. An example of this occurred prior to Operation Desert Storm. As the Checkmate planners developed the Instant Thunder plan,

Colonel James Blackburn, the head of the Targets Directorate for the Air Force Intelligence Agency, raised an interesting objection:

Blackburn had concerns with two target sets under the strategic leadership category: Saddam Hussein, and military and civilian C2 systems. He thought that Saddam *per se* should not be identified as the primary target because he believed that Presidential Executive Order 12333 prohibited the targeting of an individual. Sometime later, he obtained a legal opinion that Saddam could be attacked during wartime in his capacity as a military leader who commanded military forces and directed their operations. Others, however, constantly raised the same issue. Warden yielded and changed the wording on the target from *Hussein* to *Hussein regime*.<sup>1</sup>

In this case, a misunderstanding about the moral and legal framework of leadership attack forced a change to a target's description. Although no actual targets changed in the Operation Desert Storm example, the uncertainty regarding the legal limits of leadership attack could have led to changes that would have diluted the intended strategy.<sup>2</sup>

This appendix addresses moral and legal questions frequently raised concerning leadership attack. It begins with a description of the moral and legal framework that is extant. This framework constrains military action generally, and it places specific limitations on leadership attack. It includes the prohibition on assassinations mandated in U.S. Executive Order 12333, the directive mentioned in the account above. A discussion of the definition and application of the term *assassination* follows, with an emphasis on the difference between

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<sup>1</sup> Diane T. Putney, *Airpower Advantage: Planning the Gulf War Air Campaign 1989-1991* (Washington, DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2004), 49-50. Both Colonel John Warden and Lieutenant Colonel David Deptula confirm this in their *Desert Story* interviews. Colonel John A. Warden, III, USAF, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, Air Force Historical Research Agency, K239.0472-114, 22 October 1991, Transcript, 55, and Lieutenant Colonel David Deptula, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, Air Force Historical Research Agency, K239.0422-84, Transcript, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Warden says that while he agreed to change the name of the target set, none of the targets actually changed. "We then proceeded to target exactly the same thing that we were going to target anyway," Warden remembers. "We didn't change any of the physical targeting; we just changed the label on it." Warden, Oral Interview, *Desert Story Collection*, 55.

wartime and peacetime definitions. The appendix continues with a description of how a leader's status as a combatant or noncombatant can be determined. Next is a discussion of the concept of proportionality and its application to leadership attack, and the chapter closes by presenting contemporary conclusions regarding leadership attack that have developed in response to the experience of conflict with both state and non-state actors in recent decades.

### **The Moral and Legal Framework**

Today's moral and legal framework for questions of war, especially in the West, is rooted in the Just War tradition of moral thought. Although the application of moral reasoning to war was evident in ancient China, Egypt, and Babylon, Saint Augustine initiated the Just War tradition in the fourth century A.D.<sup>3</sup> During Augustine's lifetime, the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as its official religion.<sup>4</sup> Augustine attempted to reconcile Judeo-Christian teachings such as the commandment not to commit murder and Jesus' teachings on neighborly relations with the political reality of a dangerous world that seemed to require the use of force to maintain order.<sup>5</sup> As time passed, Augustine's theory was refined by Christian moralists such as Saint Thomas Aquinas and adopted by legal theorists as a basis for international law.<sup>6</sup> Many Just War concepts are codified in the Hague and Geneva

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Christopher, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction to Legal and Moral Issues*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1999), 8-9, 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>5</sup> Telford Taylor, "Just and Unjust Wars," in *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, Malham M. Wakin, ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986), 226-227.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher, *Ethics of War and Peace*, 47-60.

Conventions, and today's U.S. armed forces are subject to the Law of Armed Conflict, a set of rules based upon the Just War tradition.<sup>7</sup>

The basic premise of the Just War tradition is that several criteria that must be satisfied if a war is to be morally acceptable, and these criteria are divided into two broad categories. The first set of criteria addresses a state's decision to engage in war. This set is known as *jus ad bellum* (justice of war) criteria.<sup>8</sup> Alex Moseley summarizes these criteria: "The principles of the justice of war are commonly held to be: having just cause, being a last resort, being declared by a proper authority, possessing right intention, having a reasonable chance of success, and the end being proportional to the means used."<sup>9</sup> As these criteria address the decision to go to war, they primarily apply to the leaders who make such decisions. In the United States, the principle of civilian control of the military ensures that it is the political leaders who are subject to these criteria. It is important, however, that military officers know and understand these principles, because they often possess information useful to civilian leaders as they weigh these decisions.

While uniformed officers in the United States are not primarily responsible for the decision to go to war, they are held accountable for the conduct within it. The second category of Just War thinking, termed *jus in bello* (justice in war) contains two broad principles for these officers to honor.<sup>10</sup> The first principle of *jus in bello* is *discrimination*—the

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<sup>7</sup> For example, both the Hague and Geneva Conventions—and by extension the Law of Armed Conflict—expand on the Just War principle of *discrimination*. "The Law of Armed Conflict," *The Military Commander and the Law* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air Force Judge Advocate General School, 2004), 547-549.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Catholic Bishops, "The Just War and Non-Violence Positions," in *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, Malham M. Wakin, ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986), 245.

<sup>9</sup> Alex Moseley, "Just War Theory," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2001, <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/j/justwar.htm> (accessed 31 January 2012).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Catholic Bishops, "The Just War and Non-Violence Positions," 248-250.

requirement to distinguish, or discriminate, between civilian and military people/objects.<sup>11</sup>

This principle is also known as *noncombatant immunity*, and it requires military members to aim lethal force only at *combatants* such as enemy soldiers and sailors while avoiding *noncombatants* such as children and relief workers. This simple principle can grow quite complex in practice, especially in cases where enemy fighters choose not to wear uniforms or when civilians contribute directly to the military effort.<sup>12</sup> In war, there are tremendous pressures to widen the scope of conflict to include those who sit on the periphery of combat, especially in reprisal for an atrocity committed against one's own side. Nevertheless, the principle of discrimination holds that combatants are responsible for ensuring that their weapons do not harm the innocent.<sup>13</sup> In addition, they are prohibited from using weapons that kill indiscriminately.<sup>14</sup> As an example, poisoning the enemy's water supply may achieve substantial military effects, it would also harm innocents and violate this principle.<sup>15</sup>

The second principle of *jus in bello* is *proportionality*—the requirement for the military ends to be proportional to the means used to attain them.<sup>16</sup> This concept is distinct from the

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<sup>11</sup> Air Force Judge Advocate General School, "The Law of Armed Conflict," 549.

<sup>12</sup> The concept of a "combatant" is one that has been widely debated, especially after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the resulting conflict between the United States and al Qaeda. In response, the Bush administration developed the concept of "unlawful combatant" to describe a member of al Qaeda that participated in combat-like action against the United States. The administration reasoned that, since al Qaeda was not a "High Contracting Party" to the Geneva Conventions, members of al Qaeda should not be granted combatant status under Geneva. Nevertheless, the President decided that when these fighters were captured and detained, they should be treated in accordance with Geneva as an act of policy, not because of their legal status. See President George W. Bush, Memorandum to the Vice President et. al., "Humane Treatment of al Qaeda and Taliban Detainees," 7 February 2002, [http://www.pegc.us/archive/White\\_House/bush\\_memo\\_20020207\\_ed.pdf](http://www.pegc.us/archive/White_House/bush_memo_20020207_ed.pdf) (accessed 2 April 2012). A discussion of combatant status is presented later in this Appendix.

<sup>13</sup> Air Force Judge Advocate General School, "The Law of Armed Conflict," 549.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 551.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 549



proportionality criteria in *jus ad bellum*, which can be described as proportionality of ends. In the context of *jus in bello*, the proportionality principle is more specifically described as *proportionality of means*. It forces leaders to balance the undesirable aspects of war, including the threat to civilians, with the military advantage sought.<sup>17</sup> Moseley illustrates this principle with a historical example: “At the battle of Omduran in the Sudan, six machine gunners killed thousands of dervishes—the gunners may have been right to defend themselves, but the principle of proportionality demands that a battle ends before it becomes a massacre.”<sup>18</sup> The principle of proportionality asserts that grossly destructive means must not be used to attain limited ends.

In his landmark work, *On the Laws of War and Peace*, Hugo Grotius—commonly regarded as the father of international law—extolls the principles of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. Grotius asserts that these principles are not exclusively Christian—they are universal, as they are based on the unchanging laws of nature.<sup>19</sup> Grotius espouses a core belief, prevalent in his time, that monarchs had a sovereign right to make war.<sup>20</sup> He also believes that monarchs are subject to the laws of nature when they exercise this right. In adopting the *jus ad bellum* criteria, Grotius attempts to use the concept of international law to make wars rare. Additionally, by adopting *jus in bello* requirements, he attempts to make war less destructive.

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<sup>17</sup> Moseley, “Just War Theory.”

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Interestingly, the current interpretation of the Law of Armed Conflict holds that this situation would not violate the principle of proportionality, assuming the dervishes were classified as combatants. “The concept does not apply to military facilities and forces, which are legitimate targets anywhere and anytime.” Air Force Judge Advocate General School, “The Law of Armed Conflict,” 549.

<sup>19</sup> Hugo Grotius, *On the Laws of War and Peace*, Book I, Chapter 1, trans. A.C. Campbell (London, 1814), <http://www.constitution.org/gro/djbp.htm> (accessed 31 January 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Grotius writes, “But as a whole state is by war involved in danger, it is an established law in almost all nations that no war can be made but by the authority of the sovereign in each state.” Grotius, *On the Laws of War and Peace*, Book I, Chapter 1.

In doing so, Grotius laid a firm foundation for later attempts to transform natural law into a more concrete, codified version.

By the nineteenth century, Grotius' vision was beginning to be realized, as the ideas expressed in *On the Laws of War and Peace* were being adopted into binding law.<sup>21</sup> One example of this trend was the adoption of General Order 100 in 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln. This directive governed the conduct of Union troops during the U.S. Civil War, as it mandated the protection of innocents and specified rules for the treatment of prisoners. Known as Lieber's Code (after its author), this was "the first instance since Ancient Rome of a nation adopting a formal code of law to regulate its army's conduct toward enemy soldiers."<sup>22</sup> During the same period, Henry Dunant, along with a group of Genevese citizens, established the International Committee of the Red Cross.<sup>23</sup> In 1864, an international conference in Geneva, Switzerland adopted the "Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded Armies in the Field."<sup>24</sup> This movement continued in 1868 in St. Petersburg, Russia with a declaration by representatives of several nations against the use of exploding bullets. This declaration remains important because it articulated the idea that international law should seek to prohibit "unnecessary suffering" — suffering inflicted for no military advantage.<sup>25</sup> Both of these international agreements were included in the peace conferences held at the Hague, Netherlands in 1899 and 1907.<sup>26</sup> In describing the importance of the

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher, *The Ethics of War and Peace*, 104.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 105.

products of these two conferences, Christopher comments, “These agreements, to which almost every nation of the civilized world is a signatory, comprise much—but not all—of what is considered international law for the conduct of warfare.”<sup>27</sup> The international community adopted additional conventions in Geneva in 1929 and 1949. These agreements articulate requirements for the treatment of prisoners as well as the sick and wounded. They also address the protection of civilians and the status of medical personnel and facilities.<sup>28</sup> Today, the Geneva Conventions incorporate many of the Grotius’ original principles into an international legal framework that attempts to govern the conduct of war.

The international community differs with Grotius on one key point, however. As was stated earlier, Grotius writes in *On the Laws of War and Peace* that monarchs possess the sovereign right to pursue the public good using any and every means, including war. In 1945, the international community joined to form the United Nations, and in doing so, they repudiated force as an acceptable means to achieve the public good. Chapter I of the U.N. Charter contains the following principles:

All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered.

All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.<sup>29</sup>

Taken together, the U.N. Charter, the Geneva and Hague Conventions, and modern international agreements such as the Conventional Weapons Convention of 1980 and the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>29</sup> The United Nations, *The Charter of the United Nations*, 24 October 1945, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/index.shtml> (accessed 31 January 2012).

Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993 make up the Law of Armed Conflict that binds U.S. forces in the conduct of war.<sup>30</sup> U.S. military personnel are briefed on these limitations and held accountable for observing them through the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

### **The Question of Assassination**

When considering the morality and legality of a strategy, both civilian and military leaders must honor the general limitations articulated in the Law of Armed Conflict. When considering strategies of leadership attack, however, there is another consideration. Besides the components of international law described above, strategists must consider the complex question of assassination. International norms regarding assassination have evolved over the years, and the U.S. policy on assassination is even more complex. In 1976, U.S. President Gerald R. Ford issued an executive order which prohibited U.S. intelligence personnel from engaging in assassination. President James E. Carter extended this prohibition, and so did President Ronald W. Reagan when he issued Executive Order 12333, which remains in effect (the order was amended by President George W. Bush in 2008, but the prohibition on assassination remained unchanged).<sup>31</sup> In addition, U.S. Department of Defense Directive 5240.1 extended the prohibition to all Department personnel.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, neither of these directives provided a definition for the term *assassination*. In absence of a specific definition, a

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<sup>30</sup> Air Force Judge Advocate General School, "The Law of Armed Conflict," 547-551.

<sup>31</sup> The original order signed by President Ford was Executive Order 11905. President Carter extended the prohibition in Executive Order 12036. The wording of the assassination clause did not change significantly in any of these orders, including in Executive Order 12333 as amended by President George W. Bush. See Elizabeth B. Bazan, "Assassination Ban and E.O. 12333: A Brief Summary," *The Congressional Research Service*, 4 January 2002, 1-2, <http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RS21037.pdf> (accessed 31 January 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Department of Defense Directive 5240.1, *DoD Intelligence Activities*, 27 August 2007, 3. <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/524001p.pdf> (accessed 31 January 2012).

consensus has arisen regarding the morality and legality of targeting specific leaders, and this consensus is built upon four considerations. First, one must not use “treacherous” means to target the leader. Second, there is a major distinction between targeting enemy leaders in peacetime versus wartime. Third, it is important to determine the leader’s status as a combatant. Finally, the leader’s perceived legitimacy is an important factor to consider when employing a strategy of leadership attack. This section describes some of the legal thought regarding assassination and discusses the four considerations.

Early in the development of international law, legal commentators had much to say on the subject of assassination. Scholars such as Hugo Grotius, Alberico Gentile, Emer de Mattel and C. van Byrneshoek all wrote on the subject.<sup>33</sup> In her influential article on the history and theory behind assassination titled “Assassination and the Law of Armed Conflict,” Patricia Zengel summarizes early legal thought on the relationship between assassination and treachery:

The consensus of these early commentators was that an attack directed at an enemy, including an enemy leader, with the intent of killing him or her was generally permissible, but not if the attack was a treacherous one. Treachery was defined as betrayal by one owing obligation of good faith to the intended victim. Grotius and Mattel also objected to making use of another’s treachery. Byrneshoek, however, did not. He considered that the only obligation of good faith owed to an enemy to be that of abiding any agreements that had been made with him or her. Gentile dissented, in effect declaring any secret attack to be treacherous, and limiting permissible attacks upon enemy leaders to those on, or in close proximity to, the battlefield.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Patricia Zengel, Lt Commander, USN, “Assassination and the Law of Armed Conflict,” *Military Law Review*, Volume 134, Fall 1991, 126-130.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

The issue of treachery was an important one to these men, and it would remain so as international law evolved. Zengel continues by explaining why legal theorists considered it beneficial to protect monarchs and generals from treacherous attack:

The reasons given for restricting the manner in which an enemy might be attacked personally generally involved perceptions of what constituted honorable warfare, together with a desire to protect kings and generals—who were reasonably expected to be the most frequently selected targets—from unpredictable assaults against which they would find it difficult to defend themselves. Implicit in the latter was the premise that making war was a proper activity of sovereigns for which they ought not be required to sacrifice their personal safety.<sup>35</sup>

The prohibition on treachery, therefore, was tied to the concept of the sovereign right of kings to make war.

As moral codes and international law evolved, the prohibition against treachery proved durable. For example, the Lieber Code of 1863 prohibited assassination by treachery, stating “Civilized nations look with horror upon offers or rewards for the assassination of enemies as relapses into barbarism.”<sup>36</sup> This theme was consistently incorporated into the international agreements that followed. The Hague Convention of 1907 forbids soldiers “to kill or wound treacherously individuals belonging to the hostile nation or army.”<sup>37</sup> Treacherous activity in this context has been described as “the assumption of a false character, whereby the person assuming it deceives his enemy and so is able to commit a hostile act, which he could not have

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Francis Lieber, “The Lieber Code of 1863: General Orders No. 100,” 24 April 1863, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/law/liebercode.htm> (accessed 31 January 2012).

<sup>37</sup> “Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land,” *The Hague*, 18 October 1907, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/law/hague-iv-1907.txt> (accessed 31 January 2012).

done had he avoided the false pretenses.”<sup>38</sup> The prohibition against treachery has been understood by some to mean that a soldier must be in uniform to avoid being accused of treacherous conduct.<sup>39</sup> Zengel observes that assassination, ironically, “was the only form of hostile activity, the legality of which seemed to depend on the clothing not worn by the perpetrator.”<sup>40</sup>

In the wake of World War II, the Geneva Convention of 1949 attempted to define treacherous attacks more precisely by introducing the concept of perfidy. Article 37 of Additional Protocol I—which several nations, including the United States, failed to ratify— forbids attacks through perfidy, defined as “Acts inviting the confidence of an adversary to lead him to believe that he is entitled to, or is obliged to accord, protection under the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, with intent to betray that confidence.”<sup>41</sup> In addition, it presents the example of pretending to be a noncombatant as an example of perfidy.<sup>42</sup> Although this prohibition did not specifically include assassination, it has been interpreted as an extension of the prohibition on attacks on enemy leaders by treachery.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, international law is widely interpreted as prohibiting assassination using treacherous means, where treachery is defined as using false pretenses to gain access to the person to be assassinated.

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<sup>38</sup> A. Keith, *Wheaton's International Law* (7th ed., 1944), 207, quoted in Patricia Zengel, Lt Commander, USN, “Assassination and the Law of Armed Conflict,” *Military Law Review*, Volume 134, Fall 1991, 132.

<sup>39</sup> Zengel, “Assassination and the Law of Armed Conflict,” 132-136.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>41</sup> “Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I),” <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/full/470?opendocument> (accessed 31 January 2012).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Zengel, “Assassination and the Law of Armed Conflict,” 140.

In the United States, President Ford altered the domestic legal framework regarding assassination with the signing of the aforementioned executive order in 1976. In the aftermath of the Watergate scandal and the consequent resignation of President Richard M. Nixon, the U.S. Congress investigated assassination attempts made by the United States in the period since 1960. In a published report, Congress found that the U.S. Government was involved in five assassination attempts during that time.<sup>44</sup> This finding was disturbing to many, and the Select Committee responsible for the investigation, commonly known as the Church Committee, forcefully rejected assassination:

We condemn the use of assassination as a tool of foreign policy. Aside from pragmatic arguments against the use of assassination supplied to the Committee by witnesses with extensive experience in covert operations, we find that assassination violates moral precepts fundamental to our way of life.<sup>45</sup>

Besides rejecting assassination on moral grounds, the committee also cited testimony concerning the unpredictable effects of killing a foreign leader as well as the possibility that assassination attempts would invite reciprocity from other governments against the United States.<sup>46</sup> Zengel describes the recommendations of the Church Committee: “Based on its findings, the Committee recommended legislation that would have made it a criminal offense for anyone subject to the jurisdiction of the United States to assassinate, attempt to assassinate, or conspire to assassinate a leader of a foreign country with which the United

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<sup>44</sup> United States Senate, Select Committee To Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, Interim Report, 20 November 1976, 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-282.



States was not at war.”<sup>47</sup> Despite the recommendations of the Committee, Congress failed to pass legislation prohibiting assassination.<sup>48</sup>

President Ford, however, took action. In late 1976, he issued Executive Order 11905, which contained a prohibition on assassination. This prohibition was extended by President Carter as Executive Order 12036 and by President Reagan as Executive Order 12333.<sup>49</sup> This order was further amended by President George W. Bush, but the prohibition on assassination remained unchanged, and it remains in effect today. Here is what the language in the order says regarding assassination:

*Prohibition on Assassination.* No person employed by or acting on behalf of the United States Government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, assassination.<sup>50</sup>

The order includes no further elaboration on what constitutes assassination. Along with the Executive Order, the U.S. Department of Defense issued DoD Directive 5240.1, which reads:

Under no circumstances shall any DoD Component or DoD employee engage in, or conspire to engage in, assassination.<sup>51</sup>

Like Executive Order 12333, this directive fails to provide a definition of assassination. It seems reasonable to conclude that this silence is a deliberate attempt to preserve flexibility in policy and keep potential enemies unsure of U.S. intentions. The absence of specific

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<sup>47</sup> Zengel, “Assassination and the Law of Armed Conflict,” 144.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Bazan, “Assassination Ban and E.O. 12333,” 1-2.

<sup>50</sup> Executive Order 12333—*United States Intelligence Activities*, 4 December 1981, <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/12333.html> (accessed 31 January 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Department of Defense Directive 5240.1, 3.

definition, however, has consequences. As Zengel writes, the failure to define the term has led to some unnecessarily strict interpretations:

Whether the uncertainty regarding the intended meaning of the word “assassination” was inadvertent or deliberate, its effect on domestic political discussion has been to invite interpretations significantly more restrictive than the legislation originally proposed in the Senate Select Committee’s Interim Report, and certainly more restrictive than required by international law. Disregarding any distinction between peacetime and times of conflict, those who argue for the broadest interpretation evidently believe that the executive order prevents the United States Government from directing, facilitating, encouraging, or even incidentally causing the killing of any specified individual, whatever the circumstances.<sup>52</sup>

To understand the true legal nature of the prohibition on assassination, it is necessary to examine two key areas. The first is the difference between engaging in assassination—or “targeted killing”—during wartime versus peacetime. The second is the classification the targeted individual as a combatant or noncombatant.

Assassination in peacetime is different from wartime. As Tyler Harder writes, “The modern approach tends to define it (assassination) from one of two perspectives: a wartime perspective, or a general peacetime perspective.”<sup>53</sup> In wartime, international law—and by extension the Law of Armed Conflict—does not prohibit the targeting of an individual, be it a night sentry or a top military commander, provided this is not accomplished through treacherous means.<sup>54</sup> This conclusion is supported by Human Rights Watch, which states in a key report on the Iraq War: “Attacks on enemy leaders who take a direct part in hostilities are not prohibited and are different from assassinations committed outside the context of an

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<sup>52</sup> Zengel, “Assassination and the Law of Armed Conflict,” 145-146.

<sup>53</sup> Tyler J. Harder, Major, USAF, “Time to Repeal the Assassination Ban of Executive Order 12333: A Small Step in Clarifying Current Law,” *Military Law Review*, Volume 172, June 2002, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Air Force Judge Advocate General School, “The Law of Armed Conflict,” 549-552.

armed conflict, which are extrajudicial executions prohibited by international human rights law.”<sup>55</sup> This distinction is critical to understanding how the extant legal framework views questions of assassination.

International-law expert Michael Schmitt adds to this understanding in an article titled “State Sponsored Assassination in International and Domestic Law.” In this article, Schmitt identifies two components—the targeting of an individual and the use of treachery—as critical to the concept of wartime assassination.<sup>56</sup> Since leadership attack relies on the targeting of specific individuals, it is essential to understand the concept of treachery when considering strategies of leadership attack. In modern times, treachery has been defined both narrowly and broadly. The narrow definition is straightforward; if a member of the armed forces is wearing a uniform when attempting to kill an individual in wartime, it is not a treacherous attack and, therefore, not assassination.<sup>57</sup> The presence of the uniform is an inoculation against charges of treachery. Schmitt, however, advocates a broader definition of treachery. “The essence of treachery is a breach of confidence,” he writes. “For instance, an attack on an individual who justifiably believes he has nothing to fear from the assailant is treachery.”<sup>58</sup> In understanding treachery, it is important to realize that both the narrow and broad approaches attempt to guarantee that all people, including leaders, have the inherent right of self-defense. International law holds that people deserve a minimum amount of information about an enemy’s intentions in order to make decisions regarding their wellbeing. This does not

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<sup>55</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Off Target: The Conduct of the War and Civilian Casualties in Iraq,” Human Rights Watch, 2003, 40, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/12/11/target> (accessed 31 January 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Michael N. Schmitt, “State Sponsored Assassination in International Law,” *Yale Journal of International Law* 17 (1992), quoted in Tyler J. Harder, Major, USAF, “Time to Repeal the Assassination Ban of Executive Order 12333: Small Step in Clarifying Current Law,” *Military Law Review*, Volume 172, June 2002, 4.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

preclude the use of surprise, deception, or camouflage, however. Both of these are considered acceptable military “ruses” in wartime.<sup>59</sup>

Alternatively, legal approaches to assassination are different in times of peace. International law prohibits the use of force against specific individuals in peacetime; this prohibition is clearly outlined in the sections of the United Nations Charter quoted earlier in this chapter. Legal scholars such as Harding generally approach assassination in the following way—the intentional killing of any individual in peacetime is murder, and when a specific individual is targeted for political purposes, it is assassination.<sup>60</sup> For the U.S. armed forces, assassination in peacetime is prohibited on three levels: by the Law of Armed Conflict, by Executive Order 12333, and by DoD Directive 5240.1.

A second fundamental question of assassination within leadership attack is the classification of the targeted individual as a combatant or noncombatant. In peacetime, of course, there are no combatants. In wartime, the *jus in bello* principle of discrimination applies. During hostilities, accordingly, the targeted leader must be a combatant for a direct attack on that leader to be legal. Three categories can be used to classify an enemy leader:

1. The leader is either a military member, or
2. The leader is a civilian but is engaged in military actions, or
3. The leader is a civilian and is not engaged in military actions.

The first category is the easiest case. During hostilities, when a targeted leader is a uniformed member of the enemy’s armed forces, that leader is a combatant. An example would be Japanese Admiral Yamamoto in World War II. Another example would be a uniformed dictator such as Saddam Hussein who is both the head of the government and of the

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<sup>59</sup> Air Force Judge Advocate General School, “The Law of Armed Conflict,” 552.

<sup>60</sup> Harder, “Time to Repeal the Assassination Ban,” 5.

government's armed forces. The third category is also straightforward. A civilian leader not involved in military operations is a noncombatant and is immune from lawful attack. A civilian acting as a foreign minister or Secretary of Labor is not a legitimate target, even in wartime. The second category presents a grey area, and determining if a leader belongs in this category can be difficult. W. Hayes Parks explains this challenge in his 1989 legal memorandum concerning the legality of assassination:

While there is general agreement among the law-of-war experts that civilians who participate in hostilities may be regarded as combatants, there is no agreement as to the degree of participation necessary to make an individual civilian a combatant. Historically, however, the decision as to the level at which civilians may be regarded as combatants or 'quasi-combatants' and thereby subject to attack generally has been a policy rather than a legal matter.<sup>61</sup>

If classifying a leader as a combatant or noncombatant is a policy matter, it is important to consider what factors will influence policy makers as they craft their policies.

The most straightforward answer is that policy makers are likely to base their decisions on both pragmatic and ethical grounds. A key consideration is the expected public reaction to killing an enemy leader, and this will undoubtedly depend upon the targeted leader's perceived legitimacy. In explaining this phenomenon, Michael Walzter writes, "For we judge the assassin by his victim, and when the victim is Hitler-like in character, we are likely to praise the assassin's work..."<sup>62</sup> If a leader is perceived as illegitimate due to unpopular or abhorrent actions, a direct attack on that leader is likely to be judged as good policy. In fact, a political leader can make a strong moral argument for leadership attack in

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<sup>61</sup> W. Hays Parks, "Memorandum of Law: Executive Order 12333 and Assassination," 2 November 1989, [http://www.hks.harvard.edu/cchrp/Use%20of%20Force/October%202002/Parks\\_final.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/cchrp/Use%20of%20Force/October%202002/Parks_final.pdf) (accessed 2 February 2012).

<sup>62</sup> Michael Waltzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*, 3rd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 199.

this case. The conscript in the trench, who was not a volunteer and had no say about the origins of the war, should not be subject to attack while the leader, who is the one responsible for the situation, enjoys protected status. In contrast, as enemy leaders rise in their perceived legitimacy through free elections, popular support, beneficial policies, etc., directly attacking them is unlikely to be perceived as the right policy.

Those who propose leadership attack through lethal means should be prepared to explain why their plans are not equivalent to assassination. To comply with international law and domestic directives, a direct attack on a leader must occur during wartime, use non-treacherous means, and target a leader who is acting as a combatant. Policy makers will also be concerned about how these attacks will be perceived by various audiences. To be good policy, leadership-attack strategies should be aimed against leaders who are perceived as illegitimate both with their own people and by outsiders. Leadership attack strategies that comply with international law and meet the perception test are likely to be attractive. Even when these criteria are met, however, there is one additional consideration for such strategies —the *ius in bello* principle of proportionality, also known as proportionality of means.

### **Proportionality of Means and Double Effect**

A major challenge when targeting enemy leaders is that they are frequently surrounded by people, and at least some of these people are noncombatants. This is especially true of governmental leaders, who often live and work in urban areas. When this is the case, a strategy of leadership attack must pass the test of proportionality of means. Simply stated, decision makers must balance the benefit of killing the enemy leader against the possibility of

killing innocents nearby.<sup>63</sup> When the harm to noncombatants grows to overshadow the military advantage of killing the leader, the attack must be halted. Even when the act is judged to be proportional, leaders must take steps to mitigate the risk to noncombatants.<sup>64</sup> Such is the requirement of proportionality.

Though this requirement is straightforward in theory, it is problematic in reality. It is one thing to consider that harm may come to noncombatants if something unexpected happens such as a weapons failure, pilot error, lack of intelligence, etc. It is quite another to conclude that, even if the attack is executed as planned, innocents will be harmed. Such a situation is certainly plausible when planning a physical attack on an enemy leader in an urban environment. A leader's command center may be located under a house, or in the middle of a heavily populated area, for example. It may be impossible to attack this facility without causing harm to innocents. Indeed, an unscrupulous leader might locate the command center there intentionally, understanding that the presence of innocents may help shield the center from attacks. Does the knowledge that innocents are likely to be harmed even if things go right (as opposed to the concern that they might be harmed if something goes wrong) mean that the command center is off limits?

The answer is, not necessarily. The principle of *double effect* is a component of Just War theory that addresses situations such as that described above. The principle states that, even if one knows that innocents will be harmed, the attack can still be carried out if three conditions are met.<sup>65</sup> First, the action (in this case, the attack) is directed at a legitimate target. Second, the harmful effect (the killing of innocents that are sure to be nearby) is not

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<sup>63</sup> Air Force Judge Advocate General School, "The Law of Armed Conflict," 549.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> J.C. Ford, "The Morality of Obliteration Bombing," *Theological Studies* 5 (1944), 295.

an intended consequence of the action. Third, the balance between the military gain and the harm to noncombatants is proportionate (i.e. the proportionality of means criteria still applies). If the decision maker is convinced that the three criteria are satisfied, the attack on the command center is morally acceptable even if one is reasonably sure that harm will come to noncombatants. The principle of double effect draws a sharp distinction between knowing that something harmful will happen and intending it to happen — this distinction helped give the principle its name. Thomas Nagel elaborates:

...there is a morally relevant distinction between bringing about the death of an innocent person deliberately, either as an end in itself or as a means, and bringing it about as a side effect of something else one does deliberately. In the latter case, even if the outcome is foreseen, it is not murder, and does not fall under the absolute prohibition (on killing innocents), though of course it may still be wrong for other reasons. ... In application to war or revolution, the law of double effect permits a certain amount of civilian carnage as a side effect of bombing munitions plants or attacking enemy soldiers.<sup>66</sup>

As one may suspect, leaders have abused this principle in practice.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, it offers decision makers some guidance to help them decide the proper course of action when they foresee harm to innocents, as is often the case with physical attacks on enemy leaders.

### **Consensus in an Era of Conflict**

The years following the Cold War have ushered in an era of persistent conflict for the United States and many of her allies. In these conflicts, the targeting of individual leaders has often been an issue. As a result, a growing body of literature has appeared concerning the ban

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre," *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, ed. Malham M. Wakin (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986), 303.

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Anscombe, "War and Murder," *War, Morality, and the Military Profession*, ed. Malham M. Wakin (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986), 293.



on assassination and the moral and legal considerations when targeting leaders, be they foreign heads of state or terrorist masterminds. Along with this, the international community has seen a developing consensus about the legality—and the morality—of targeting leaders.

In Operation Desert Storm, Coalition forces attacked Saddam Hussein's ability to lead repeatedly, although the Iraqi leader received only minor physical injuries.<sup>68</sup> In the aftermath of Operation Desert Storm, there was widespread agreement that Hussein was a legitimate military target who could be singled out and physically attacked despite Executive Order 12333 and DoD Directive 5240.1. For example, Patricia Zengel's article, which was published just after the end of Operation Desert Storm, contains this clear conclusion:

Under international law as it pertains to armed conflict, an overt attack against the person of Saddam Hussein, carried out by uniformed members of the opposing armed forces, would have been entirely permissible. ... There is no doubt that a state of war existed between the United States and its allies, and Iraq. There being no dispute concerning the legality of using force, there likewise can be no dispute that Saddam Hussein, as commander of the Iraqi armed forces, was as legitimate a target as was Admiral Yamamoto—that is, both were enemy combatants.<sup>69</sup>

Along with the prevalent legal opinion about targeting Saddam, others held that there was a strong moral argument for targeting him due to his perceived illegitimacy. Professor Robert F. Turner of the Center for National Security Law summarizes this view:

In an October 7, 1990 Op-Ed article I wrote for The Washington Post entitled "Killing Saddam: Would It Be a Crime?" I took the view that it would not be illegal to intentionally target him. A number of very respected military lawyers have also taken that view that in his case, because he was a uniformed member of the Military High Command, he was a lawful target under the laws of armed conflict anyway, which is certainly true. But I go a step further and say that if he is the head policy maker in deciding to launch an aggressive war, then he's

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<sup>68</sup> See Chapter Five of this study for a detailed discussion of these attacks..

<sup>69</sup> Zengel, "Assassination and the Law of Armed Conflict," 148.

committing an international crime; it's outrageous to say he should receive the kind of protection we give hospital workers or Red Cross workers or the like. If we want to deter aggression, then we have to extract a cost from those who make the decisions. ... There's another fundamental principle of morality that we see reflected in all reasonable legal systems—it's better to punish the guilty than the innocent. While the general historical rule has been it's open season on uniformed soldiers, I would argue that most uniformed soldiers in this setting are less guilty than the politicians that make the decision to launch the aggressive war.<sup>70</sup>

In this passage, Turner proposes two consequential conclusions. The first is that targeting leaders in military conflict is not assassination as prohibited by international law and executive order, and decision makers should not confuse the two. As discussed above, many others have reached a similar conclusion.<sup>71</sup> In contrast, Turner's second conclusion both controversial and powerful. He argues that leaders who employ policies of violence and aggression against the weak and helpless bear a special burden of guilt—one that makes them legitimate targets according to universal norms and values. Despite the Western legal tradition that upheld the sovereign right of kings to go to war, a growing number of scholars and experts have tended to agree with Turner on both points.

No man did more to build this consensus than the leader of al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden. While terrorism experts considered him dangerous prior to 11 September 2001, the attacks on that day thrust him into the world's consciousness. For many in the West, bin Laden became the number one enemy. Accordingly, the subject of killing bin Laden has been

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<sup>70</sup> Robert F. Turner, Interview Transcript, *Fairness.Com*, 2 October 1991, <http://www.fairness.com/interviews/turner011012> (accessed 29 March 2006).

<sup>71</sup> For articles that arrive at similar conclusions, please see Catherine Lorionte, "When to Target Leaders," *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2003, 73-86; Major Matthew J. Machon, USA, "Targeted Killing as an Element of U.S. Foreign Policy in the War on Terror," (monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 25 May 2006); Matthew S. Pape, "Can We Put Leaders of the 'Axis of Evil' in the Crosshairs?" *Parameters*, Autumn 2002, 62-71; and John D. Bellinger, III, "Bin Laden Killing: The Legal Basis?" Council on Foreign Relations, 2 May 2011, <http://www.cfr.org/terrorism/bin-laden-killing-legal-basis/p24866> (accessed 1 February 2012).

addressed in numerous writings. A good example is Howard A. Watchel's article in the *Duke Law Journal* titled, "Targeting Osama bin Laden: Examining the Legality of Assassination as a Tool of U.S. Foreign Policy."<sup>72</sup> In this article, Watchel uses bin Laden, whom he calls the "the worst offender in the modern era," to make his point about the acceptability of using force against an individual.<sup>73</sup>

It would be legally acceptable for the U.S. to target the leaders of the terrorist group that attacked its people. Osama bin Laden is a de facto combatant and is therefore an appropriate target for the U.S. military, as long as he is not killed treacherously. If the U.S. justifies killing Osama bin Laden on the ground that it has a right to use force against a recurring threat, then his death is legally permissible and will not be considered a reprisal. Nevertheless, the act cannot be done treacherously or in a manner that otherwise violates the rules of warfare.<sup>74</sup>

The effort to stop bin Laden's al Qaeda network and its affiliates has led to a strategy where al Qaeda leaders—commonly called high-value individuals, or HVIs, in military circles—are targeted to weaken the network. This, too, has been examined, including in Peter M. Cullen's "The Role of Targeted Killing in the Campaign Against Terror."<sup>75</sup> In this article, Cullen reaches a conclusion similar to Watchel's concerning this policy:

A review of the U.S. policy of targeted killing confirms that it has a valid basis under international and domestic law. The United States is legally justified in taking military action against AQAM (al Qaeda and associated movements) as a matter of self-defense. AQAM are an organized force and their operatives are combatants in a noninternational armed conflict who can be targeted at will,

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<sup>72</sup> Howard A. Watchel, "Targeting Osama bin Laden: Examining the Legality of Assassination as a Tool of U.S. Foreign Policy," *Duke Law Journal* Vol 55:677, 2005.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 680.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 706-707.

<sup>75</sup> Peter M. Cullen, "The Role of Targeted Killing in the Campaign Against Terror," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 48, 1st Quarter 2008

provided such action is proportionate, does not involve perfidy or treachery, and respects the sovereignty of other nations.<sup>76</sup>

In the years following the 11 September attacks, many individual leaders have been targeted successfully, the most infamous of which were Saddam Hussein (captured and later executed in Iraq), Mohmmar Ghadaffi (captured and killed in Libya) and bin Laden himself (killed in a raid in Pakistan). The world did not weep for these men.<sup>77</sup> Instead, there was a general sense that their demises were just.<sup>78</sup> Jim Lacey articulates what many others were thinking on the day after the bin Laden raid was announced:

As someone who lost friends on 9/11 (my office was then on the 82nd floor of Tower Two), knowing that the man responsible for the brutal murder of nearly 3,000 Americans is dead is deeply satisfying. It is even more gratifying knowing his death came as a result of American military action. In the long term, I believe there is tremendous value in announcing to all those planning to do us harm that we will never stop coming after them.<sup>79</sup>

In his reaction to the news about bin Laden, Ilya Somin recalled a passage he had written several years earlier—one that summed up his perspective on the issue:

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> In the aftermath of the bin Laden raid, Jeffrey Toobin wrote: “No one today is shedding any tears about bin Laden’s death. ... Bin Laden didn’t get a trial and didn’t deserve one.” Jeffrey Toobin, “Killing Osama: Was It Legal?” *The New Yorker*, 2 May 2011, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/05/killing-osama-was-it-legal.html#ixzz1rBLHx1LP> (accessed 5 April 2012).

<sup>78</sup> There are exceptions to this majority perspective. Geoffrey Robertson, for example, argues that justice was not done in the raid on bin Laden. Instead, Robertson argues, every effort should have been made to capture bin Laden alive so he could face trial. “This would have been the best way of de-mystifying this man,” he writes, “debunking his cause and de-brainwashing his followers. In the dock he would have been reduced in stature – never more remembered as the tall, soulful figure on the mountain, but as a hateful and hate-filled old man, screaming from the dock or lying from the witness box.” Geoffrey Robertson, QC, “Why It’s Absurd to Claim That Justice Has Been Done,” *The Independent*, 3 May 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/geoffrey-robertson-why-its-absurd-to-claim-that-justice-has-been-done-2278041.html> (accessed 5 April 2012).

<sup>79</sup> Jim Lacey, “Killing bin Laden,” *National Review Online*, 2 May 2011, <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/266153/killing-bin-laden-jim-lacey> (accessed 1 February 2012).

In my view, targeting terrorist leaders is not only defensible, but actually more ethical than going after rank and file terrorists or trying to combat terrorism through purely defensive security measures. The rank and file have far less culpability for terrorist attacks than do their leaders, and killing them is less likely to impair terrorist operations. Purely defensive measures, meanwhile, often impose substantial costs on innocent people and may imperil civil liberties. Despite the possibility of collateral damage inflicted on civilians whom the terrorist leaders use as human shields, targeted assassination of terrorist leaders is less likely to harm innocents than most other strategies for combatting terror and more likely to disrupt future terrorist operations.<sup>80</sup>

In this era of persistent conflict, Somin reflects a growing consensus on two points. First, it is lawful to kill leaders in overt military conflict as long as one does not use treacherous means; this is fundamentally different from assassination. Second, the killing of individual leaders can, in fact, be more moral than alternatives that target the rank and file, because it is the leaders who are responsible for their organization's pursuit of immoral policies. Given this consensus, the current trend regarding strategies that target individual leaders is likely to continue.

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<sup>80</sup> Ilya Somin, "The Death of bin Laden and the Morality of Targeted Killings," *The Volokh Conspiracy*, 2 May 2011, <http://volokh.com/2011/05/02/the-death-of-bin-laden-and-the-morality-of-targeted-killings/> (accessed 1 February 2012).

## An Aside

### Is It 'Sporting' to Attack Leaders?

*Leaders of armies have better things to do than fire at each other.*

Field Marshall Arthur Wellesley, First Duke of Wellington  
Quoted in the 1970 movie *Waterloo*

Despite the dramatic quality of this quote from the movie *Waterloo*, there is no evidence that the Duke of Wellington failed to fire on Napoleon in the opening moments of the battle because he had better things to do. This apocryphal quote, however, has much to commend it. It captures the essence of a recurring theme relating to leadership attack: *it is just not sporting*. To state this theme in more concrete terms, leadership attack may violate an unwritten warrior code that calls on a soldier to respect the adversary and the adversary's leader. If this is so, even for a small portion of conflicts, it may have a profound effect on the findings of this study.

Warrior codes are not a new development. In her book *The Code of the Warrior: Exploring Warrior Values Past and Present*, Shannon E. French observes that such codes have existed across numerous cultures for millennia.<sup>81</sup> "Warrior cultures throughout history and from diverse regions around the globe," she writes, "have constructed codes of behavior based on their own image of the ideal warrior."<sup>82</sup> While these codes have not necessarily been written or codified, they definitely exist, and they are passed down from older to younger

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<sup>81</sup> Shannon E. French, *The Code of the Warrior: Exploring Warrior Values Past and Present* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

generations with great care. “The code is not imposed from the outside,” writes French. “The warriors themselves police strict adherence to these standards...”<sup>83</sup>

French argues that these codes are not necessary for effectiveness. Warriors can win without the existence of a code. Instead, her main argument is that these codes exist to protect the warriors from the inhumanity of combat and its harmful effects on their psyche:

It is not enough to ask, Can our warriors still get the job done if they do not have a code? We must also consider the related question, What will getting the job done do to our warriors if they do not have a code? Accepting certain constraints as a moral duty, even when it is inconvenient or inefficient to do so, allows warriors to hold on to their humanity while experiencing the horror of war—and, when the war is over, to return home and reintegrate into the society they so ably defended. Fighters who cannot say, “This far and no farther,” who have no lines they will not cross and no atrocities from which they will shrink, may be effective. They may complete their missions, but they will do so at the loss of their humanity.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, the warrior code serves the warriors themselves by helping to protect their humanity.

As French so eloquently put it, by adopting such codes, “warriors can create a lifeline that will allow them to pull themselves into their society, should they survive to see peace restored.”<sup>85</sup>

French asserts that a common ingredient of various warrior codes is a healthy respect for the enemy. This respect is essential in transforming military conflict from organized murder to an honorable endeavor. French points to a key section in Jonathan Shay’s book *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*.<sup>86</sup> Shay, a psychiatrist who has treated numerous Vietnam veterans, makes a critical observation about honor and respect:

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner, 1994).

Restoring honor to the enemy is an essential step in recovery from combat PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). While other things are obviously needed as well, the veteran's self-respect never fully recovers so long as he is unable to see the enemy as worthy. In the words of one of our patients, a war against subhuman vermin "has no honor." This is true even in victory; in defeat, the dishonoring absence of human *themis* linking enemy to enemy makes life unendurable. ... Our patients tell us that turning the enemy into vermin exacted a terrible price from them *after* the fight was over (emphasis in original).<sup>87</sup>

Both French and Shay argue that it is essential for warriors to show "respect for the inherent worth and dignity of their opponents."<sup>88</sup> Doing so guards their own wellbeing by imbuing a sense of honor into a profession that can otherwise quickly degrade into unbridled brutality.

It is logical that, if the warrior code calls for respecting one's adversary, then the adversary leader may be worthy of a special degree of respect. This may be especially true if the adversary leader conducts himself or herself according to the warrior code and holds those under their command accountable to this high standard. Even though one may fight with great energy against such a leader, there will be residual respect that endures after the fighting stops. An example from American military history illustrates this point. General Robert E. Lee and the men under his command earned the respect of the Northern troops who fought so fiercely and ably against them. General Ulysses S. Grant recalls his feelings when he sat down with Lee to settle the terms of the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia:

...but my own feelings, which had been quite jubilant on the receipt of his letter [proposing negotiations], were sad and depressed. I felt like anything rather than rejoicing at the downfall of a foe who had fought so long and valiantly, and had suffered so much for a cause, though that cause was, I believe, one of the worst for which a people ever fought, and one for which there was the least

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 115-116.

<sup>88</sup> French, *The Code of the Warrior*, 11.



excuse. I do not question, however, the sincerity of the great mass of those who were opposed to us.<sup>89</sup>

Grant's respect carried over to his subordinates. At the surrender ceremony that ended the war, General Joshua L. Chamberlain describes how he ordered his men to salute the defeated force and, more importantly, he explains why he did this:

The momentous meaning of this occasion impressed me deeply. I resolved to mark it by some token of recognition, which could be no other than a salute of arms. Well aware of the responsibility assumed, and of the criticisms that would follow, as the sequel proved, nothing of that kind could move me in the least. The act could be defended, if needful, by the suggestion that such a salute was not to the cause for which the flag of the Confederacy stood, but to its going down before the flag of the Union. My main reason, however, was one for which I sought no authority nor asked forgiveness. Before us in proud humiliation stood the embodiment of manhood: men whom neither toils and sufferings, nor the fact of death, nor disaster, nor hopelessness could bend from their resolve; standing before us now, thin, worn, and famished, but erect, and with eyes looking level into ours, waking memories that bound us together as no other bond;—was not such manhood to be welcomed back into a Union so tested and assured?<sup>90</sup>

Interestingly, General Lee and his officers were allowed to keep their swords and sidearms, and with them a modicum of honor in defeat.<sup>91</sup>

If adversary leaders have been treated with deference and respect in the past according to an unwritten warrior code, it is possible that this may also happen in the future. Despite the trend of killing and capturing leaders identified at the outset of this study, such respect may one day restrict the methods and means of targeting adversary leaders. It seems logical

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<sup>89</sup> General Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: 1885), <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/grant-memoirs/> (accessed 9 May 2012).

<sup>90</sup> General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *The Passing of the Armies: The Last Campaign of the Armies* (Pennsylvania: Stan Clark Military Books, 1994), 260-261.

<sup>91</sup> General Joshua L. Chamberlain, "Lenient Terms of General Grant," quoted in "The Last Salute of the Army of Northern Virginia," *Boston Journal*, May 1901.

that the probability of this would depend heavily on the level of respect afforded to the enemy leader, and this, in turn, would depend on that leader's adherence to the warrior code.

Saddam Hussein, Mohmmar Ghadaffi, and Osama bin Laden were not respected by many because they violated the code of honor by using force in a subversive and indiscriminate manner. While they may have adhered to warrior codes that existed within their respective subcultures, these codes were very different from the ones adopted by their Western adversaries. This disparity made it easy to demonize these leaders and, eventually, target them. It is altogether possible, however, that an adversary leader could earn the respect of their opponents, and this could make it emotionally difficult to target that leader with deadly force. In such a case, the warriors involved may choose to adopt an unwritten restriction against targeting the respected leader. This may be especially true when using remote means such as long-distance weapons or unmanned platforms. This appendix has shown that such an action may be legally and ethically permissible. It may not, however, be sporting.

## Appendix B

### Leadership Attack: Literature Review

*In addition to the theorists and theories discussed in Chapter Two of this study, there are numerous academic books, articles, and papers that have relevance to this research project. This appendix examines several of these studies and presents a summary of their findings. While no literature review can claim to be complete, those interested in exploring the subject of leadership attack can find many valuable leads in this appendix.*

#### Key Academic Studies on Leadership Attack

One of the most thorough studies of leadership attack is RAND researcher Stephen Hosmer's *Operations Against Enemy Leaders*, a book-length report published in 2001 that examines U.S. attacks on enemy leaders and their effectiveness.<sup>1</sup> In this book, Hosmer identifies three methods that the United States has used to attack senior enemy decision makers. The first method is direct attack of the leader. The second is the fomenting and support of coups and rebellions against the enemy leader. The third method is a "takedown operation" where the United States sends invasion forces to overthrow a leader and his or her government. Hosmer examines numerous cases in each of these categories, and he concludes that only takedown operations have had consistently successful results.<sup>2</sup>

Direct attacks are problematic, primarily because they are so difficult to accomplish. Hosmer states that he could only find one successful direct attack on a senior enemy leader by

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen T. Hosmer, *Operations Against Enemy Leaders*, (Santa Monica, California: RAND Inc., 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., xi.

the United States—the aerial shoot down of Japanese Admiral Yamamoto in World War II.<sup>3</sup>

Writing in 2001, Hosmer claims that the previous attacks on Fidel Castro, Muammar al-Qaddafi, Saddam Hussein, Mohamed Farah Adieed, Osama bin Laden and Slobodan Milošević all failed to neutralize these leaders. These men took many strict security precautions that made it difficult to target them directly.<sup>4</sup> In addition to this practical difficulty, there are other concerns. Direct attacks have carried with them legal questions as well as a moral and political stigma that have precluded policy makers from adopting this method openly.<sup>5</sup> When direct attacks have occurred, they have often failed to produce the desired policy outcomes. The death or capture of a leader does not automatically mean that the organization or movement will wither away. In fact, sometimes the results can be counterproductive. The loss of the leader may serve to bring the remaining participants together in solidarity, and the result may be a redoubling of efforts due to “fueling of the fire.”<sup>6</sup> Also, a new leader or consensus could emerge that is worse than the original one. Hosmer concludes that, when it comes to attacking leaders directly, “as with the physician, the decisionmaker’s first concern should be to avoid doing harm.”<sup>7</sup>

While direct attacks on leaders have been problematic, Hosmer argues that the United States’ record of fomenting successful coups and rebellions has been equally poor. “With a few notable exceptions,” Hosmer writes, “such U.S. attempts to remove undesirable leaders

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 24-27.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 46.

by coup or rebellion have failed.”<sup>8</sup> He continues, “These include the U.S. attempts to overthrow Enver Hoxa in Albania, Fidel Castro in Cuba, Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya, Manuel Noriega in Panama, and Saddam Hussein in Iraq.”<sup>9</sup> When coups or rebellions have been successful, the country in question had a leader whose policies were harmful to U.S. interests while significant elements of the country’s power base, usually the military, were concerned about these policies and retained close ties to the United States.<sup>10</sup> Hosmer observes that in the post-Cold War era, many opposing countries are likely to be less vulnerable to coups or rebellions. This is due to the fact that their leaders will use their authoritarian powers to firmly establish their security and suppress their rivals.<sup>11</sup>

For Hosmer, the only consistently successful method for attacking these authoritarian leaders is the “takedown operation.” Operations in Grenada, Panama, and Haiti were successful when a U.S. invasion force ousted the regime. “In each instance,” Hosmer observes, “the United States disestablished the military and security services that had maintained the previous regimes in power and promoted elections to select new governing bodies and national leadership.”<sup>12</sup> Such operations have two major advantages. They generally produce more permanent results than other methods, and a credible threat of invasion can have a more significant impact on enemy leaders than other threats.<sup>13</sup> Hosmer notes that these operations may carry significant costs in terms of blood, treasure and time,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 117-124.

and these may serve to discourage U.S. policy makers from using takedown operations in the future.<sup>14</sup> Even though this is the case, Hosmer argues that policy makers should not rule out this option in their public announcements, and they may choose to pursue a hybrid option that weakens a regime with stand-off munitions and airstrikes in an effort to make it more vulnerable to a rebellion or coup.<sup>15</sup>

Hosmer concludes the study with general observations about the likelihood of leadership attack by the United States in the future. He surmises that attacks on an enemy leader will be most likely when there are important U.S. interests involved, and the enemy leader is perceived to be the source of threat to those interests. Additionally, U.S. action is most likely when the proposed activity does not violate the prohibition on assassination specified in Executive Order 12333, and the operation's benefits are perceived to be higher than the foreseeable costs.<sup>16</sup> Hosmer ends the study with a cautionary tone, warning that "particular attention must be paid to ensuring that the potential downside consequences of the operation are adequately explored with knowledgeable area experts."<sup>17</sup>

Another set of experts have weighed in on the topic of attacking enemy leadership. Several active-duty officers in the U.S. military have composed papers on the subject while attending Professional Military Education (PME), and some of these have added significantly to the field. Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of these papers has been that almost all of the authors are compelled to address the moral and legal ramifications of attacking leaders directly, and all of these conclude that this strategy can be both a moral and legal

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 125-128.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

option for strategists and policy makers. Some of the papers stop there, while others continue with a discussion of the costs and benefits of this strategy.

The most compelling papers have come from the Army's School for Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) and the Air Force's School of Advanced Air and Space Studies (SAASS). One of the most insightful of these is Major Timothy F. Lindemann's "Decapitation: Contemporary Air Power Countercontrol Strategies."<sup>18</sup> In this SAASS thesis, Lindemann makes the connection between nuclear countercontrol strategies—strategies that attempt to incapacitate the enemy's political or military control systems—with Warden's five-ring model and advocacy of leadership attack.<sup>19</sup> Lindemann identifies three forms of countercontrol strategies proposed by U.S. nuclear strategists:

counterleadership — incapacitation through the elimination or threatened elimination of the level political-military leadership;  
counterstate — incapacitation through the overthrow or threatened overthrow of the existing government and/or social-political order; and  
countercommand — incapacitation of the military command structure through the dislocation of military C3.<sup>20</sup>

Lindemann contends that Warden's theory contains elements of all three of these forms.<sup>21</sup>

Warden's theory diverges from nuclear countercontrol theory, according to Lindemann, in three ways. First, while nuclear strategists assumed that countercontrol was possible in the context of a U.S.-Soviet conflict due to the centralized nature of the Soviet political-military system, Warden concluded that attacking leadership was applicable in all

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<sup>18</sup> Major Timothy F. Lindemann, USAF, "Decapitation: Contemporary Air Power Countercontrol Strategies," (Master's thesis, School of Advanced Air Studies, June 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 2-3 and 32.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 32.

scenarios. Second, while the United States was committed to using nuclear weapons only in the event that war became inevitable, Warden did not make timing of attack an issue, except that he seemed to advocate it immediately and repeatedly if necessary. Finally, nuclear strategists always believed that it was important to target fielded forces at the same time as the leadership, while Warden rejected these attacks as inefficient.<sup>22</sup>

While Warden strongly advocated for an air campaign against a small set of leadership targets in the prelude to Operation Desert Storm, the actual campaign included numerous attacks against fielded forces. Relying on the Gulf War Air Power Survey, Lindemann recounts Operation Desert Storm and the debate over the efficacy of leadership attack. Lindemann contrasts Warden's views of the war with Pape's.<sup>23</sup> Lindemann concludes that strategists should keep three considerations in mind when proposing contemporary countercontrol strategies. First, they should remember that the results of leadership attacks are difficult to quantify, and even if successful, the fielded forces remain at threat. Second, leaders can make themselves to be hard targets through the use of security measures. Third, countercontrol strategy is not applicable to just any situation. The strategist should carefully consider the specific characteristics of the enemy to determine if a countercontrol strategy will be effective.<sup>24</sup>

In his SAMS thesis titled "Decapitation Operations: Criteria for Targeting Enemy Leadership," Lieutenant Commander Victor D. Hyder considers the research question, "when

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 32-34.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 36-52.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 60.



are decapitation operations beneficial to achieving the desired end state?"<sup>25</sup> To answer this, he builds upon Pape's concepts of decapitation operations and considers five cases where the United States has tried to attack leaders: Philippine General Emilio Aguinaldo, Mexican General Francisco "Pancho" Villa, Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Panamanian leader Manuel A. Noriega, and Pablo Escobar, leader of the Cali drug cartel in Columbia. Before considering these cases, he defines key terms, including the concept of a "strategic individual," which he defines as:

A single person widely identified on the world stage as the nucleus of the system or environment he or she influences and is subsequently given significant diplomatic, informational, military and/or economic value relative to vital national interests and the desired end state of that system or environment.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, Hyder states that this definition is based upon the concept of the "super-empowered individual" in Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. Hyder states that the "angry version" of this individual represents the most likely target for decapitation operation in the near future.<sup>27</sup> Before tackling the five cases, Hyder makes another important observation:

The attractiveness of decapitation operations stems from the potential profits versus the costs. Precision targeting with air power or surgical special operations units offer a potential for high returns with minimal commitment and risk. Continuation of decapitation operations becomes a gamble when multiple failed attempts swell the commitment of resources, time involved, and risk to life into a cost equal to or greater than the realistic potential of success.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lieutenant Commander Victor D. Hyder, USN, "Decapitation Operations: Criteria for Attacking Enemy Leadership," (monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 26 May 2004).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 17.

With this, Hyder makes the connection between “multiple failed attempts” and a situation where the costs could quickly grow to outweigh the benefits.

One of the most impressive aspects of Hyder’s study is that he includes a cost estimate for each of the cases he considers. With these costs in mind, Hyder considers each of the cases a qualified success except for Admiral Yamamoto (which he classifies as “disputed”) and Pablo Escobar (which he classifies as “not beneficial”).<sup>29</sup> Hyder then ties together the historical evidence with theory and military planning norms and presents four factors that a strategist should consider when weighing options for decapitation: *Criticality* of the strategic individual, *Legitimacy* of the attack option according to Just War principles and the Law of Armed Conflict, *Cost Effectiveness* of the operation given the resources needed to prosecute the attack, and *Proportionality* of these costs with respect to the potential benefits.<sup>30</sup> This aspect of Hyder’s work is admirable because he attempts to give the strategist a list of specific considerations for use when deciding on a leadership-attack strategy in prospect.

Hyder ends with two conclusions, the first of which puts decapitation operations in context. He writes, “Decapitation, most often, shapes the effectiveness of a larger, grand strategy that incorporates all elements of national power.” The second conclusion reminds the strategist that the cost of such operations should remain in the forefront of one’s mind. “...one should always investigate the potential strategic values of targeting enemy leadership when participating in a campaign,” he argues. “More often than not, the pressure applied will

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 51-55.

provide some level of benefit. Commanders, however, must continuously reassess the expected value derived from decapitation and weigh that value against its costs.”<sup>31</sup>

Another advanced-study student, Major S. Clinton Hinote, reaches similar conclusions in his SAASS thesis titled, “More than Bombing Saddam: Leadership Attack in Operation Iraqi Freedom.”<sup>32</sup> Hinote makes the case that leadership attack can be much broader than the simple killing or capturing of an enemy leader—what most people refer to as *decapitation*. It also includes efforts taken to isolate the leader from his or her followers as well as psychological efforts that discourage the followers from following a particular leader.<sup>33</sup> “A comprehensive strategy of leadership attack would attempt to impair the enemy leadership in multiple ways,” Hinote argues, and he contends that this is exactly what happened in Operation Iraqi Freedom.<sup>34</sup>

Before examining the leadership-attack efforts in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Hinote examines the context of leadership-attack strategies, including the historical record, the theory, and the moral and legal issues of attacking the enemy leadership. He points out that forms of leadership attack have been observed since classical times, and he shows how such strategies were well-suited to the political and practical realities of the United States.<sup>35</sup> This is especially evident in the language that its political leaders have used to gain popular support during times of conflict, and Hinote quotes four presidents using the language of leadership attack in seven different conflicts, and then he details how the United States carried out

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>32</sup> Major S. Clinton Hinote, USAF, “More than Bombing Saddam: Leadership Attack in Operation Iraqi Freedom,” (Master’s thesis, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, June 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 4-8.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 15-23.

attacks in several operations, including in Libya, Panama, Iraq and Serbia.<sup>36</sup> He then discusses the various views of several theorists who comment on strategies of leadership attack before devoting a chapter to the ethical and legal issues of leadership attack and assassination. Hinote shows how many of the questions regarding the legality and morality of attacking Saddam Hussein were asked and answered during Operation Desert Storm and its aftermath. When it was time for Operation Iraqi Freedom, strategists and policy makers were confident that they could include a comprehensive strategy of leadership attack to delegitimize, isolate, and perhaps, even kill the Iraqi dictator.<sup>37</sup>

From the opening moments of the war, the Coalition tried many tactics against the Hussein regime. Hinote shows how the Ba'ath government in Iraq was uniquely vulnerable to attacks on its leader due to Hussein's role as the unquestioned dictator and the rampant mistrust that existed at all levels of the organization. Hinote details Coalition efforts to attack Iraqi leadership at many levels, and he draws upon post-war interviews of Iraqi officers and government officials to show how the attacks affected the Iraqi government and military. He concludes that even though the Coalition failed to kill a single senior-level leader prior to the fall of Baghdad, the Iraqi regime did suffer paralysis, and this was partially induced by Coalition efforts—including leadership-attack actions—and partially due to the regime's dysfunction that existed prior to the conflict.<sup>38</sup>

According to Hinote, the experience of leadership attack in Operation Iraqi Freedom offers valuable insight into the theories of men like Boyd and Fuller. Hinote argues that the “strong form” of leadership attack theory—that it brings about strategic paralysis that

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 23-61.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 92-108.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 132-175.

automatically leads to decisive victory—was not supported in this operation. He proposes that a more modest theory of leadership attack. This theory recognizes that leadership attack is best viewed as a component of a plan that applies pressure across the depth and breadth of the battlespace, then looks for cracks and fissures to exploit. For Hinote, the fundamental lesson learned about leadership attack in Operation Iraqi Freedom is, “It is more important to apply force on a broad front and to be able to exploit emerging vulnerabilities than it is to focus narrowly on panacea targets identified through imperfect intelligence.”<sup>39</sup>

In addition to these three PME papers, one Naval War College paper deserves mention. In “Targeting Enemy Leaders: Panacea or Pandora’s Box,” Marine Corps Colonel Edward M. McCue III concludes that this strategy is neither a panacea or a Pandora’s Box.<sup>40</sup> Instead, it is a course of action that is difficult to pursue but has great potential. A military lawyer, McCue concludes that “The law of armed conflict is ironically the least difficult dimension of targeting an enemy leader.” The practical considerations are the ones that are the most difficult to achieve.<sup>41</sup> McCue advocates some fundamental “rules of engagement” for military strategists when considering a leadership-attack strategy. “Foremost is the understanding that targeting a specific enemy leader is not a stand-alone course of action,” he warns. Perhaps the most interesting portion of the paper, however, is the distinction McCue makes between targeting an enemy commander and targeting his or her ability to command:

The appropriate target of command and control warfare is the act of commanding (the ability of operational leaders to orchestrate their forces), not the commander. This is an important distinction because destroying the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 176-186.

<sup>40</sup> Colonel Edward M. McCue III, USMC, “Targeting Enemy Leaders: Panacea or Pandora’s Box?” (Naval War College, 18 May 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

commander does not destroy the capability (of someone else) to command. ... it is the ability to command and control forces in the field that can do harm, not the individual commander. Therefore the true center of gravity is not the commander himself but the ability to command and control forces.<sup>42</sup>

By making this distinction, McCue offers an approach that focuses on the function of leadership in an organization, not the particular leaders themselves. Interestingly, this is an approach that is not shared by others who study the issues inherent in assassination.

Instead, some researchers focus on the political changes brought about by the demise of a national leader. One example of a such a study is that of Benjamin F. Jones and Benjamin A. Olken titled, "Hit or Miss: The Effect of Assassination on Institutions and War."<sup>43</sup> In this study, Jones and Olken examine 296 assassination attempts on national-level leaders occurring since 1875. Of these, 59 were successful.<sup>44</sup> Jones and Olken conclude that, when assassination attempts are successful, they result in significant change, but the type of leader matters. Specifically, they find that when autocrats are assassinated, there is an increase in the instances of transition to democracy, and this increase is a statistically significant 13 percent. The same results do not occur when democrats are assassinated, leading Jones and Olsen to conclude that, "Democratic institutions thus appear robust to the assassination of leaders, while autocratic regimes are not."<sup>45</sup> They also found that assassinations of leaders in wartime have an effect on the war itself. When engaged in an intense war (one with greater than 1000 battlefield deaths), the assassination of a leader tends

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin F. Jones and Benjamin A. Olken, "Hit or Miss: The Effect of Assassination on Institutions and War," *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics* 1, no. 2, (July 2009), 55-87.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 14.

to lower the probability of continued intense conflict by 25 percent. The authors, however, acknowledge that the evidence here is weak due to low sample size, especially post-World War II. For moderate-level conflicts, the story is different. Such conflicts are 33 percent more likely to intensify after the assassination of a leader.<sup>46</sup> These findings add quantitative evidence to support many of the qualitative arguments made by theorists in the area of leadership attack.

This type of quantitative approach is not limited to the field of political assassination. Several researchers have studied the question of how to weaken terrorist organizations, and they have employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the effectiveness (of lack thereof) of targeting specific terrorist leaders.

### **Studies of Leadership Attack in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency Operations**

As might be expected, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have spawned a decade of research and writing on how to weaken and destroy terrorist and insurgent networks. Since the official U.S. National Strategies for Counterterrorism have included leadership attack as a major feature, an important subset of this literature deals with the effectiveness of leadership attack in insurgent and terrorist contexts.<sup>47</sup> Like much of the literature dealing with general forms of leadership attack, the literature addressing the targeted killings of terrorist and insurgent leaders have

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>47</sup> As just one of many examples of this focus, the President states in his introduction to the National Strategy for Counterterrorism, "In the past two and a half years, we have eliminated more key al-Qa'ida leaders in rapid succession than at any time since 11 September 2001, including Usama bin Laden, the only leader that al-Qa'ida had ever known. As a result, we now have the opportunity to seize a turning point in our effort to disrupt, dismantle, and ultimately defeat al-Qa'ida." President Barrack H. Obama, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, June 2011.

focused on two questions. First, is it moral, ethical, and legal to kill individual leaders — normally with no trial or similar legal mechanism? Second, how effective is this form of leadership attack in weakening terrorist and insurgent groups and preventing future terrorist attacks?

Brian Michael Jenkins deals with both of these questions in his 1987 article, “Should Our Arsenal Against Terrorism Include Assassination?”<sup>48</sup> After considering five arguments for and ten arguments against assassination in the context of preventing further terrorist attacks, Jenkins answers his research question with a resounding, “No!” Jenkins identifies many of the arguments that later commentators would use to justify leadership attack in terrorism, including the arguments that assassination of terrorist leaders may weaken the terrorist organizations and preclude further attacks on innocents.<sup>49</sup> In his arguments against assassination, Jenkins focuses on the moral and ethical issues surrounding assassination, but he also finds arguments against the effectiveness of this strategy. He states up front that he believes assassination is wrong and that it will not work.<sup>50</sup> Unlike many commentators that would come after him, Jenkins makes no attempt to distinguish clandestine assassination as defined in Executive Order 12333 from targeting terrorists who are openly engaged in hostile conflict with a state or society. In fact, he equates the actions, stating that “in combatting terrorism, we ought not to employ actions that are indistinguishable from those of the terrorists themselves.” Jenkins also argues that attacking terrorist leaders may be ineffective

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<sup>48</sup> Brian Michael Jenkins, “Should Our Arsenal Against Terrorism Include Assassination?” (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corp., 1987).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-5.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



because its effects are temporary, the successor may be worse, and it is very difficult to accomplish.<sup>51</sup>

Jenkins article is interesting because of where it occurs in history. Written after the air attack on Libya but before the U.S. experience with Saddam Hussein and the terrorist attacks of 11 September, Jenkins' views may have represented many others regarding combatting terrorism through attacking terrorist leaders, and his method of providing arguments both for and against this tactic was appropriate to the time. In the following years, the people of Israel would engage in this debate, as the tactic of targeted killings became a central feature of their efforts to protect themselves from Palestinian terrorism.

There is a robust set of literature that deals with the problem of terrorism in the context of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Some of this literature assesses the issues surrounding leadership attack. One influential article is Steven R. David's "Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of Targeted Killing."<sup>52</sup> In this article, David differentiates between "targeted killing" and assassination, arguing that the former is not necessarily "treacherous," and the term assassination usually refers to the killing of political leaders, not terrorists.<sup>53</sup> David proceeds to detail the benefits and costs of Israel's policy. Among the benefits, David states that "targeted killings have impeded the effectiveness of Palestinian terrorist organizations where leadership, planning, and tactical skills are confined to a few key individuals."<sup>54</sup> Additionally, targeted killing acts as a deterrent, it keeps terrorists on the run, and it helps

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 5-12.

<sup>52</sup> Steven R. David, "Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of Targeted Killing," (Ramat Gan, Israel: The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, September 2002).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 6.

satisfy a need for retribution and revenge for a “population under siege.”<sup>55</sup> On the downside, David asserts that, “No compelling evidence exists that targeted killing has reduced the terrorist threat against Israel.”<sup>56</sup> The decentralized nature of the terror groups makes targeted killing less effective, and this tactic can provoke retaliatory attacks by the terrorists themselves.<sup>57</sup> Given all the evidence, David concludes that the policy of targeted killings is the “least bad option” available to Israel, and it is a moral option because it focuses on the perpetrators of terrorist acts (in stark contrast to the terrorists, who intentionally target innocents). Finally, David leaves open the possibility that, in the long run, the policy may undermine the Palestinian terrorist organizations.<sup>58</sup>

Daniel Byman also examines the question of Israel and targeted killing in his 2006 article, “Do Targeted Killings Work?”<sup>59</sup> Like David, Byman concludes that the policy is a mixed bag. He observes that killing leaders can create the memory of martyrs that help the terrorists’ cause, and “the policy is less effective against decentralized groups” such as Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.<sup>60</sup> Similar to David, Byman recognizes that the policy satisfies an important public need for a strong response to terrorism.<sup>61</sup> Byman also concludes that the policy can be effective. He argues:

Contrary to popular myth, the number of skilled terrorists is quite limited. Bomb makers, terrorism trainers, forgers, recruiters, and terrorist leaders are

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 2, 5-7.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 8-12.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 16-21.

<sup>59</sup> Daniel Byman, “Do Targeted Killings Work?” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2006), 95-111.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 99-101.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 102.

scarce; they need many months, if not years, to gain enough expertise to be effective. When these individuals are arrested or killed, their organizations are disrupted. The groups may still be able to attract recruits, but lacking expertise, these new recruits will not pose the same kind of threat.<sup>62</sup>

Byman asserts that, “To achieve such an effect on a terrorist group requires a rapid pace of attacks against it.” When this happens, the terrorists must spend more and more time protecting themselves. This hurts their communication and, ultimately, their effectiveness.<sup>63</sup> Finally, Bynum argues that perhaps the most reliable gauge of the effectiveness of targeted killings is the fact the Palestinians have been so vocal about their demands for Israel to stop, and they have even proposed a unilateral “period of calm” due to the leadership losses they suffered.<sup>64</sup> Even so, Byman contends that the policy of targeted killings is not a silver bullet. He warns, “any killings must be embedded in a broader counterterrorism program with better defenses and improved intelligence.”<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps no work is as thorough in discussing the issues of a “broader counterterrorism program” as *The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle: A Guide for Decision Makers* by Boaz Ganor.<sup>66</sup> In this book, Ganor considers many of the dilemmas facing policy makers as they confront the threat of terrorism, and he addresses offensive actions, including attacks on terrorist leaders. Ganor readily accepts that offensive action in general, and action against terrorist leaders in particular, can have the important benefit of raising the public morale in the face of a terrorist

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 103-104.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>66</sup> Boaz Ganor, *The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle: A Guide for Decision Makers*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005).

threat.<sup>67</sup> While he does not think that the morale effect alone justifies offensive action, it is important and should be taken into account as decision makers weigh costs and benefits.<sup>68</sup>

Ganor accepts that targeted killing can be moral and legal using logic similar to David and Byman:

There is almost no question that physical damage to terrorists before they embark on an attack is legitimate and constitutes an act of self-defense aimed at saving lives. In similar fashion, any operational activity aimed at activist involved in the chain of command, or planning and carrying out attacks, must also be considered a legitimate action in the context of the war against terrorism.<sup>69</sup>

Ganor observes that targeting terrorist leaders can have a multi-faceted effect. It can kick off a power struggle within the organization, it can leave a void of charisma or specific expertise, and it can create a high level of fear in leaders who are targeted.<sup>70</sup> Ganor concludes that such an attack “is likely to have ongoing consequences, rather than merely a short term effect.”<sup>71</sup>

Ganor includes an enlightening discussion of “the Boomerang Effect,” where attacks on terrorist leaders can incite the group to take revenge and perpetrate even more heinous terrorist actions. Ganor distinguishes between groups whose motivation to conduct terrorist attacks is higher than their current capability versus those whose capability is higher than their motivation. The Boomerang Effect can be expected when one attacks a group whose capabilities exceed their current motivation, as the attacks are likely to increase their

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 128-129. Ganor also lists multiple quotes in note 183 by terrorist leaders that present their perspectives on being hunted.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 128.

motivation in the short term. Thus, when one is planning an attack against a group whose current capabilities exceed their motivation, and the planned attack will not seriously hinder the group's capabilities, there is a high chance of the Boomerang Effect, and the attack plans should be reviewed.<sup>72</sup>

Audrey Kurth Cronin is another author who has taken a comprehensive approach in studying terrorist organizations, and she has also written on the subject of attacking terrorist leaders. In her article "How Al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," Cronin identifies seven critical elements that can contribute to a terrorist group's downfall.<sup>73</sup> The first element is the capturing or killing of the leader, and she begins her discussion with this assertion: "The effects of capturing or killing a terrorist leader have varied greatly depending on variables such as the structure of the organization, whether the leader created a cult of personality, and the presence of a viable successor."<sup>74</sup> Cronin discusses several cases where terrorist groups have declined after the removal of their leader, concluding that "organizations that have been crippled by the killing of their leader have been hierarchically structured, reflecting to some degree a cult of personality, and have lacked a viable successor."<sup>75</sup> She goes on to argue that "the killing of a terrorist leader may backfire by creating increased publicity for the group's cause and perhaps making the leader a martyr who will attract new members to the organization." She also states that "There is some reason

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 129-135.

<sup>73</sup> Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," *International Security* 31, no. 1, (Summer 2006), 7-48.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

to believe that arresting a leader is more effective in damaging a group than is killing or assassinating him,” although she does not offer specific evidence to support this claim.<sup>76</sup>

U.S. Army Major Paul W. Staeheli examines the possibility that arrest is preferable to targeted killing in “Collapsing Terrorist Organizations Through Leadership Decapitation: A Comparison of Targeted Killing and Targeted Incarceration in Insurgent Organizations.”<sup>77</sup> Through a qualitative analysis of four case studies, Staeheli finds that both targeted killing and targeted incarceration can be effective strategies in weakening terrorist organizations. He also argues that the key variable determining the effectiveness of a leadership-attack strategy is whether or not the organization has a named successor. If it does, and that leader has the legitimacy to lead, the organization is likely to survive an attack on its leader.<sup>78</sup> Staeheli’s qualitative analysis begs for a quantitative companion that analyzes the effects of killing versus capturing a terrorist leader, and fortunately this analysis is provided in other studies (and addressed later in this appendix).

In 2009, Thomas Byron Hunter published another qualitative analysis about terrorism and targeted killings. In “Targeted Killing: Self-Defense, Preemption and the War on Terrorism,” Hunter arrives at similar conclusions to authors like David, Byman and Cronin.<sup>79</sup> He distinguishes assassination from targeted killings and concludes that targeted killings are legal and moral given the state’s inherit right to self defense.<sup>80</sup> Hunter examines how Israel,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>77</sup> Major Paul W. Staeheli, U.S. Army, “Collapsing Terrorist Organizations Through Leadership Decapitation: A Comparison of Targeted Killing and Targeted Incarceration in Insurgent Organizations,” (Master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, March 2010).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Byron Hunter, “Targeted Killing: Self-Defense, Preemption, and the War on Terrorism,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 2, no. 2, (2009), 1-52.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 5.

the United States, and Great Britain have approached the issue of targeted killing and briefly looks at some individual cases.<sup>81</sup> Much like previous authors, he discusses the mixed results and potential political downside to leadership attack in terrorist groups.

Hunter appears to make an original contribution in one area. He argues that targeted killing have have effects at the three levels of war —strategic, operational, and tactical—and he identifies several possible effects at each level. At the strategic level, Hunter contends that the killing of a group leader does not lead to the group’s end or even a severe degradation of its capabilities. This is especially true of older and larger groups. Targeted killing can, however, be effective if it serves to remove a leader with “mythic” qualities or is used against “splinter” groups that are small and have not had time to establish themselves.<sup>82</sup> At the operational level, killing members with critical skills can have a detrimental effect in the short-to medium-term, but larger, more established groups are more likely to be able to work around this friction than smaller, less-established ones.<sup>83</sup> At the tactical level, targeted killing can prevent an imminent attack and should be conducted whenever a state has knowledge of a clear and present danger to its citizens.<sup>84</sup>

While authors such as David, Byman, Ganor, Cronin and Hunter have focused on terrorist groups, others have reached similar conclusions when examining insurgencies. One of these authors is Paul Staniland. In his article, “Defeating Transnational Insurgencies: The Best Offense is a Good Fence,” Staniland discusses the possibility of attacking insurgent leaders through airpower, and he concludes that, “Killing key leaders can trigger disarray and

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 16-22.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 24-26.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 26-28.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 29.

even disintegration within insurgencies or at least disrupt their operations and organization.”<sup>85</sup>

There are two problems with this tactic, however, according to Staniland. The first is that finding and killing insurgent leaders is difficult to do. The second is that many insurgent organizations are networked and decentralized, which decreases the effectiveness of removing the leader.<sup>86</sup> Staniland’s assertions about insurgent groups, therefore, are similar to many of those already discussed regarding terrorist groups.

Graham H. Turbiville, Jr. also reaches some familiar conclusions when he examines cases of leadership attack within both terrorist and insurgent groups. In his book *Hunting Leadership Targets in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Operations*, Turbiville pursues fresh lessons and perspectives by focusing on several cases not involving the United States.<sup>87</sup> After examining these cases, he makes three observations. First, he highlights the role of special operations and interdisciplinary expertise: “The ability to conduct discrete special operations as needed—or in some cases the development of ways to integrate overall military, law enforcement, and other security forces in support of targeting actions—has often been fundamental to immediate success.”<sup>88</sup> Second, he makes the point that states have often “sought to exploit the capture or elimination of guerrilla and terrorist leaders via various types of post-operation publicity.” This includes videos and photos—items that have become familiar to those who follow the news. “Aside from touting the presumed accomplishment,” Turbiville argues, “governments are well aware that cynical populations need as much

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<sup>85</sup> Paul Staniland, “Defeating Transnational Insurgencies: The Best Offense is a Good Fence,” *The Washington Quarterly*, (Winter 2005-2006), 21-40.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>87</sup> Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., *Hunting Leadership Targets in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Operations*, JSOU Report 07-6 (Hurlburt Field, Florida: Joint Special Operations University, June 2007).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.



definitive proof as possible to accept that a famous/notorious guerrilla has really been neutralized.”<sup>89</sup> Finally, Turbiville concludes that attacks on terrorist leaders have not been translated into more permanent success unless they are integrated into larger counterinsurgency or counterterrorism campaigns.<sup>90</sup> Thus, he joins the consensus that leadership attack is not an all-encompassing solution to terrorism and insurgency.

### **Quantitative Studies in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency**

While many agree that leadership attack is not the silver bullet in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, there is wide disagreement on its relative contribution to the overall effort. While the authors discussed above made various qualitative arguments on this contribution, another group of researchers has taken a quantitative approach. Their findings make for a fascinating body of evidence for those interested in leadership attack. As these researchers make key decisions that structure their studies—choosing the research questions, determining a research design, figuring out which cases to include and which to throw out, etc—the outside observer is treated to nuanced insights about the subject of leadership attack.

Lisa Langdon, Alexander J. Sarapu, and Matthew Wells began this quantitative trend with their 2004 study, “Targeting the Leadership of Terrorist and Insurgent Movements: Historical Lessons for Contemporary Policymakers.”<sup>91</sup> In this study, the researchers focus on political, social and religious movements, and they specifically examine how a leader’s death, arrest, or disappearance affects these groups. To do this, Langdon, Sarapu, and Wells studied

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>91</sup> Lisa Langdon, Alexander J. Sarapu, and Matthew Wells, “Targeting the Leadership of Terrorist and Insurgent Movements: Historical Lessons for Contemporary Policymakers,” *Journal of Public and International Affairs* 15, (Spring 2004), 59-78.

19 different groups—including diverse “movements” such as the Irish Republican Army and the Mormon Church—across 35 different crisis events.<sup>92</sup> They present their analysis in a simple table where cases are binned in their respective categories and totaled at the end.<sup>93</sup> They reach several findings, including the main one. “After a crisis in leadership, twenty-three of the thirty-one groups we examined remained together, while only eight disbanded,” they write. “This suggests that the loss of a leader may not necessarily cause the group to disband.”<sup>94</sup> They also found that “the assassination of a leader is more likely to cause a group to fail or disband than is the arrest of the leader.”<sup>95</sup> In addition, they found evidence to suggest that organizational structure may help counteract the effects of a leadership attack. Specifically, organizations with clear plans of successions and hierarchical command structures may be better suited to deal with leadership crises.<sup>96</sup>

Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki study a much larger number of terrorist groups in their 2008 report, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering Al-Qa’ida*.<sup>97</sup> Jones and Libicki claim to analyze 648 terrorist groups existing from 1968 to 2006. They find that most terrorist groups (43 percent) end by making a transition to the political process.<sup>98</sup> The second most common way that terrorist groups end (40 percent) occurs when local police and

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>97</sup> Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering Al-Qa’ida*, (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corp., 2008).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., xiii.

intelligence agencies arrest key members of the group.<sup>99</sup> Military force leads to a group's demise only 7 percent of the time.<sup>100</sup> For Jones and Libicki, this is the key finding—military force is unsuited to combatting terrorism:

Police and intelligence services have better training and information to penetrate and disrupt terrorist organizations than do such institutions as the military. They are the primary arm of the government focused on internal security matters. Local police and intelligence agencies usually have a permanent presence in cities, towns, and villages; a better understanding of the threat environment in these areas; and better human intelligence.<sup>101</sup>

When terrorist groups become involved in insurgencies, however, military force is often necessary to counter them. Jones and Libicki also find that religious groups have more staying power than other types of terrorist groups, although no religious groups have fully realized their objectives. Size also matters regarding terrorist groups. In addition, they find that larger groups last longer and are more likely to be victorious than smaller groups.<sup>102</sup>

Interestingly, Jones and Libicki do not develop independent codes for the arrest or killing of a terrorist leader. Instead they subsume these events into the categories for military force (if the leader was captured or killed by military forces) or law enforcement (if the state police apprehended the leader).<sup>103</sup> They clearly believe that the killing or capturing of terrorist leaders weakens the organization, and they point this out in several of their case

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., xiv-xv.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 10.

study discussions.<sup>104</sup> They view the killing or capturing of key leaders as a part of an overall strategy for weakening a terrorist group, not as a shortcut to collapse.

While many academic studies have agreed with this last point—that killing or capturing leaders can be an effective part of an overall counterterrorism strategy but not a panacea—some have argued that the action is ineffective and may be counterproductive. This is true of the next two researchers presented in this review. Jenna Jordan makes the negative case in her study, “When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation.”<sup>105</sup> In the introduction to this study, Jordan argues that a major reason for the discrepancies between those who have written about decapitation and the conclusions they have reached is the “weakness of the empirical evidence:”

Existing work tends to be anecdotal, is based on studies of assassination of state leaders, or focuses on single cases. These studies are based primarily upon a small sample, do not look at statistical patterns, and overlook differences between different types of organizations. However, optimism toward decapitation continues to dominate current counterterrorism policies.<sup>106</sup>

She attempts to fill this gap with her study of 298 cases of leadership decapitation from 1945 to 2004. Jordan builds this database using her own research, and she includes actions against the top leader of the terrorist group or any member of the “upper echelon” of leadership.<sup>107</sup> She uses a logit model to test variables against the incident of group collapse, which she defines as two years of inactivity (which she admits is a very high standard).<sup>108</sup> These results

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<sup>104</sup> For example, see pages 61-62, 115, and 130, but also see alternative argument on 120 regarding capturing of Al-Qaida leaders.

<sup>105</sup> Jenna Jordan, “When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation,” *Security Studies*, 18, (2009), 719-755.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 726.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 733. Interestingly, Jordan does not publish her database.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 732.

are compared with a control group. The main variables she tests are a group's age, size, and type.

Jordan finds that decapitation was successful in 17 percent of the 298 cases,<sup>5</sup> but she argues that terrorist groups are likely to disband anyway.<sup>109</sup> Of her control group of 169 terrorist groups, 70 percent of them eventually collapsed, but of the 298 terrorist groups that experienced decapitation, only 53 percent collapsed. Therefore, Jordan argues, decapitation can be counterproductive.<sup>110</sup> She also finds that older and larger groups are more resistant to decapitation, as are groups based on religion. Ideological groups, on the other hand, are more likely to fall apart after decapitation.<sup>111</sup> Due to these findings, Jordan concludes that "this study shows that we need to rethink current counterterrorism policies. Decapitation is not ineffective merely against religious, old, or large groups," she writes, "it is actually counterproductive for many of the terrorist groups currently being targeted."<sup>112</sup> She describes counterterrorism strategies based on decapitation as "misguided."<sup>113</sup>

Aaron Mannes reaches similar conclusions in "Testing the Snake Head Strategy: Does Killing or Capturing its Leaders Reduce a Terrorist Group's Activity?"<sup>114</sup> He uses 81 observations, including 20 control observations and 61 instances where a terrorist group had lost its leader.<sup>115</sup> Mannes attempts to build a least-squares regression model using his

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 745.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 745-746.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 755.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 754.

<sup>114</sup> Aaron Mannes, "Testing the Snake Head Strategy: Does Killing or Capturing its Leaders Reduce a Terrorist Group's Activity?" *The Journal of International Policy Solutions* 9, Spring 2008.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 42.

observations to test for correlation between decapitation and various outcomes, including number of incidents following an attack and number of fatalities following an attack. In his analysis, Mannes states that most of his findings are statistically insignificant due to the small sample sizes involved.<sup>116</sup> He does present some significant findings, however. Mannes contends that incidents of terrorist attacks decreased after decapitation, but these attacks become more deadly. Specifically, in the cases involving religiously-motivated groups, the killing of their leader provoked deadlier attacks than when their leader was captured.<sup>117</sup> “Based on this data, decapitation strikes are not a silver bullet against terrorist organizations,” Mannes concludes. “In the case of religious groups, they may be counter-productive.”<sup>118</sup> Ultimately, he concludes that more data is needed to better isolate the effects of decapitation.

Bryan C. Price attempts to provide this additional data in his study “Removing the Devil You Know: Unraveling the Puzzle Behind Decapitation Effectiveness and Terrorist Group Duration.”<sup>119</sup> In doing so, he reaches conclusions that are very different than Jordan and Mannes. Price uses a sophisticated quantitative approach and then tests his conclusions using a case study of Hamas. Drawing upon elements of leadership and organizational theory, Price argues that the effects of leadership attack will be different on different organizations, and this is because the role of the leader varies. Simply put, some organizations rely on their leader more than others, and this makes them vulnerable to leadership attack. This is especially true in terrorist groups because of three organizational characteristics: their

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>119</sup> Bryan C. Price, “Removing the Devil You Know: Unraveling the Puzzle Behind Decapitation Effectiveness and Terrorist Group Duration,” (Phd. diss., Stanford University, September 2009).

core purpose is violence; they must operate in a clandestine manner; and they are values-based, not profit-based.<sup>120</sup>

Price identifies 207 terrorist groups from 65 countries active from 1970 to 2008.<sup>121</sup> In this set, there are 204 instances of terrorist leaders being killed or captured and many more where leaders turned over for other reasons (due to natural death, for example).<sup>122</sup> Unlike Jordan, Price omits the “upper echelon” leaders from this study, focusing only on the top leader or co-leader of a group.<sup>123</sup> Price is careful to explain how his research design is different than others—including how it accounts for “right-censored data,” i.e. groups that have experienced a decapitation event but the effect has not manifested itself due to the short time that has passed.<sup>124</sup> Price builds several models to test the effect of independent variables on the main dependent variable—the duration of the group’s existence.

Price clearly finds that decapitation weakens terrorist groups:

Regardless of how the decapitation effect was conceptualized, groups that experienced a decapitation event were much more at risk than groups that did not. In other words, depending on how one chooses to model the effect of decapitation, groups are 3.6-6.7 times more likely to end than groups that are not decapitated.<sup>125</sup>

In addition, Price finds that religious groups are more likely to die after the loss of their leader, that the effects of a decapitation event are most salient in the year after the event, and older

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 49-108.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 191.

terrorist groups are more likely to survive a decapitation event than younger ones.<sup>126</sup> He also finds that groups are three times more likely to end when they face a second decapitation event.<sup>127</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Price finds that the size of the terrorist group does not seem to matter—smaller groups behave no differently than larger ones after decapitation.<sup>128</sup> While Price attempts to compare the hazard rates on groups that have suffered the killing of their leader versus capture, he is not able to reach any statistically significant conclusions.<sup>129</sup> Finally, Price concludes that when the leader of a terrorist group is removed for any reason—decapitation, hostile turnover, natural causes—the groups hazard rate increases significantly.<sup>130</sup> This reinforces Price’s thesis that terrorist groups rely on leadership to stay alive and effective, and they are weakened when this leadership is removed.<sup>131</sup>

Patrick B. Johnston reaches similar conclusions to Price’s. While Price focuses on terrorist groups, however, Johnston addresses the decapitation of insurgent groups in his article, “Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation in Counterinsurgency Campaigns.”<sup>132</sup> In this article, Johnston builds a database using a sample size of 118 decapitation attempts, 46 of which were successful.<sup>133</sup> He uses the unsuccessful attempts to

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 191-197, 205. Price finds that the marginal utility of decapitation decreases over a group’s life span, and in the 14th or 15th year of a terrorist group’s existence, the effect of decapitation flattens out. After about 20 years, there appears to be no effect from decapitation.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>132</sup> Patrick B. Johnston, “Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation in Counterinsurgency Campaigns,” (Paper presented at 11th Annual Triangle Institute for Security Studies New Faces Conference. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: 24 September 2010).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 6.



build his control group. He explains that this is proper because whether or not a decapitation attempt is successful is arguably “exogenous,” i.e. it is determined by external factors that often lead to “bad luck” and “near misses.”<sup>134</sup> Johnston also limits his focus to top leaders in an insurgent organization.<sup>135</sup> Johnston employs probit regressions to build models that attempt to predict the likelihood of war termination after a decapitation event as well as levels of violence following such an event.

Johnston derives several conclusions from his analysis:

...leadership decapitation in counterinsurgency is on average a cause, not an consequence, of military effectiveness. This suggests that insurgent leaders are critically important in determining the fates of their organizations. Although failed decapitation strikes are not without costs, failed attempts appear to have few negative consequences in terms of the outcomes that are most important to policymakers--reducing insurgent violence and achieving quick, favorable campaign resolutions. ...Whether because of their mobilization capacity, charisma, or operational skills and expertise, leaders matter.<sup>136</sup>

Johnston is careful to point out that, while his study suggests decapitation is effective in counterinsurgency, it does not attempt to judge its effectiveness against other alternatives, including securing the population and nation-building actions. He does, however, contend that the evidence found in his study supports assertions that leadership attack can be a stand-alone counterinsurgency option for policy makers, especially in situations where ground forces are stretched to the breaking point.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 4-6.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

The most recent quantitative study to be published is “Organizational Structure and the Effects of Targeting Terrorist Leadership” by Dane Rowlands and Joshua Kilberg.<sup>138</sup> In this study, Rowlands and Kilberg attempt to determine if a terrorist group’s vulnerability to decapitation is linked to its organizational structure.<sup>139</sup> They identify four major types of terrorist organizations: market, all-channel, hub and spoke, and bureaucracy. A market structure is highly decentralized and cellular, while an all-channel structure is highly networked and flattened. Hub-and-spoke organizations have the leader at the center, and bureaucratic organizations are hierarchical with well-defined chains-of-command.<sup>140</sup> Rowlands and Kilberg’s sample size contains 249 groups, and the period of study extends from 1970 to 2007.<sup>141</sup> They use probit and logit regression to build models that compare outcomes to organizational types. Rowlands and Kilberg find that the results are highly variable for the different organizational structures, but they attempt to make some general conclusions.<sup>142</sup> For market groups—the most decentralized structure of the four—a leader’s death has an extreme effect in the two years following the event, but the sample size for this is very small. For all-channel groups, the killing of a senior leader actually leads to an increase in attack frequency, suggesting that leaders in these decentralized groups are not required for conducting effective operations, but attacks against their leadership do provoke reprisals. For hub-and-spoke organizations, the loss of a leader for any reason leads to a decline in attack frequency over the next two years, and some of these declines are dramatic. For

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<sup>138</sup> Dane Rowlands and Joshua Kilberg, “Organizational Structure and the Effects of Targeting Terrorist Leadership,” (Ottawa, Ontario: Centre for Security and Defence Studies, April 2011).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 19.

Rowlands and Kilberg, hub-and-spoke organizations offer the most promising opportunity for decision makers to employ a decapitation strategy. In a bureaucratic organization, they find that the capture, exile, or killing of a senior leader has no significant effect on attack frequency. Because these organizations are complex by definition, Rowland and Kilberg assert that there are probably complex reasons behind this finding, and they propose this as an area ripe for more research.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

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