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Interview Session Number: 2
Interview Conducted by: SSA George L. Piro
SSA [redacted]
Arabic/English Translation: [redacted]

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~~(S)~~ Saddam Hussein (High Value Detainee #1) was interviewed on February 8, 2004 at a military detention facility at Baghdad International Airport (BIAP), Baghdad, Iraq. Hussein provided the following information:

~~(S)~~ Hussein stated the farm where he was captured in December, 2003 was the same location he stayed in 1959 after fleeing Baghdad upon participating in a failed assassination attempt on then Iraqi President Qassem.

~~(S)~~ Hussein was asked whether the decision to go to war against Iran in September, 1980 was based on threats from Iran or whether the war was a means of reclaiming Arab/Iraqi territory, specifically the Shatt-al-Arab Waterway. Hussein stated, "We consider the war as having started on September 4, not September 22, as the Iranians state." Hussein then provided an example of a farmer who is your neighbor next door. Hussein prefers to use farming/rural examples as they have special meaning to him. One day, the neighbor's son beats up your son. The next day, the neighbor's son bothers your cows. Subsequently, the neighbor's son damages your farmland by disturbing the irrigation system. If all these things have occurred, eventually, after enough incidents, you approach your neighbor, tell him each transgression by event and ask him to stop. Usually, a warning or approach to the neighbor is enough to stop this behavior. With Iran, however, this approach by Iraq did not work. Iran, in Hussein's opinion, was in violation of the 1975 "Algiers Agreement" concerning the waterway. Furthermore, Iran was also deemed to have interfered in Iraqi politics, also a violation of the treaty. In Hussein's opinion, this left Iraq no choice but

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to fight. Thereafter, Iraq fought the war and sacrificed so that interference by Iran in Iraq would end.

~~(S)~~ Hussein provided some thoughts about the mindset of the Iranian leadership, specifically Ayatollah Khomeini, and the Iranian decision to fight the war. When Khomeini came to power in 1979, he had two things which "interfered" with his mind. One, he was a religious fanatic who thought all leaders were like the Shah of Iran, a person easily toppled. Khomeini thought since he removed the Shah so easily he could do the same elsewhere including Iraq. Second, Khomeini had a "complex" about leaving/being kicked out of Iraq previously in the late 1970s. Khomeini, exiled from Iran, had been a "guest" of Iraq who was "given shelter" in Najaf. While there, he began speaking out against the Shah and the Iranian government. Khomeini, in Hussein's opinion, was not respecting the written agreement (Algiers Agreement) between Iraq and Iran and was interfering in internal Iranian affairs. The Iraqi government informed Khomeini of their position. They also told him "you are our guest, no one can ask you to leave or for you to be handed over." The Shah had, in fact, tried to get Hussein to turn over Khomeini to Iran. In Arab culture, one can not "give up" a guest.

~~(S)~~ Khomeini refused to cease his activities against the Shah and the Iranian government. Khomeini stated that if his practices were against Iraqi policy, he would leave. Thereafter, he attempted to depart to Kuwait but was refused entry. Iraq allowed him to return for three or four days and complied with his request for assistance in traveling to another country. Khomeini then traveled to Paris, France.

~~(S)~~ Hussein stated he does not regret Iraq's treatment of Khomeini. When asked whether Khomeini ignored the gratitude of Iraq upon return from Kuwait, a step which could have resulted in Iraq's refusal to admit him and subsequent transfer to Iran, Hussein stated, "No. It would not have changed the situation. The people did not want the Shah." Khomeini became a symbol for the people of Iran after departing Iraq because of his age and because he had been "kicked out" of Iran. Hussein only stated "maybe" when questioned whether Ayatollah Sayyid Mohammad Sadr, a prominent Shia cleric executed in Iraq in 1980, may have been such a symbol. Hussein added he himself was a symbol as one could find pictures of Hussein inside houses and elsewhere in Iraq.

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~~(S)~~ Khomeini believed the Shia population in southern Iraq would follow him, especially during the war with Iraq. But, according to Hussein, "They did not welcome him." In fact, the Shia remained loyal to Iraq and fought the Iranians.

~~(S)~~ Hussein acknowledged that the Iranian military in 1980 was weak and "lacked leadership" as most of the high-ranking officers had been removed upon change of the Iranian leadership from the Shah to Khomeini. This, however, did not impact on the decision to engage in war with Iran at that moment. Hussein stated, "If the Shah's army still existed, we would have defeated them in the first month." Under Khomeini, despite lacking leadership, the Iranian military, including the army and the Revolutionary Guard, "advanced in thousands" against Iraqi forces. The Iraqi army fought bravely, especially at the borders.

~~(S)~~ Hussein was asked whether assassination attempts against Iraqi government officials prior to the conflict, allegedly at the hands of Iranian-backed groups, including Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz and Minister of Culture and Information Latif Nayyif Jasim, affected the decision to go to war with Iran. Hussein stated there were "540 assaults" on Iraq by Iran before the war. 249 of these "assaults" included air incursions or raids. Iraq presented this information to the United Nations. Iran blocked the Shatt-al-Arab Waterway and sank Iraqi and foreign ships. Before September 29, 1980, Iran bombed Iraqi oil refineries in Basra and other cities in southern Iraq. The assassination attempts against Aziz and Jasim, and others, were among the many incidents leading up to war with Iran.

~~(S)~~ When asked the objective of the war, Hussein replied, "Ask Iran. They began the war. I have explained all the reasons for the war before." Upon repeating the question, Hussein stated the objective was "to have Iran not interfere in our internal affairs." Hussein repeated some information previously provided including the fact that he believed Iran violated the treaty of 1975 (Algiers Agreement). Iran occupied the entire Shatt-al-Arab Waterway, while the agreement stated their right to only half. Iran did not respond to diplomatic communications regarding these facts.

~~(S)~~ Hussein stated Iraqi forces initially succeeded and occupied cities and territory in southern Iran just across the

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border including areas in and near Muhamra, Ahwaz, and Dosful. Iraqi forces did not push further into Iran because the immediate objective was to stop artillery attacks from Iran which emanated from areas near the border.

~~(S)~~ After approximately two years, Iraqi forces were pushed back and the war became defensive for Hussein's military. When questioned why the war became defensive for Iraq, Hussein stated that "one can not plan for the Iraqi army the same as for the American army." From a military viewpoint, plans are made according to capability. The military agrees that when supply routes are lengthened, problems arise. Hussein stated, "The soldier of today is not the same as the soldier of 100 years ago." They are part of a "universal group" hearing and seeing things on the television and radio. The soldier is "part of the world" and is "affected" by this. If ordered to counterattack, the "winning" soldier will push to the objective and beyond. Hussein agreed that the later Iraqi offensive stage of the war in 1986-87 saw many successes, including the capture of three-fourths of Iranian tanks and half of the artillery and armored personnel carriers.

~~(S)~~ Hussein discussed further the reasoning behind not advancing further into Iran. He repeated that Iraq had recovered enough territory, removing the threat of Iranian artillery, in the early years of the war. Hussein said, "If we went deep inside Iran, they would think we wanted something else." He added, "We did not face a regular army, which is easier to plan against." Hussein further stated that for many Iraqi soldiers, this was their first combat experience. Many were "pumped up" especially with the early successes into Iranian territory. Within a few days, however, many soldiers thought "Why am I here?" As confirmed to Hussein by the Iraqi military leaders, many soldiers preferred to defend the borders and remain in Iraq. Withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Iranian territory should have occurred before this change in mentality took place. Some military commanders wanted to remain, others wanted to withdraw. After two years of war, some Iraqi military leaders felt Iran had "learned its lesson" and recommended withdrawal. Hussein respected information from the military commanders and ordered withdrawal of Iraqi forces.

~~(S)~~ Hussein stated, normally, defensive operations are not "good from a tactical standpoint" nor are they good for the

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soldiers' morale. Hussein said, "If a soldier does not see logic, he will not perform as well or be obedient. If he accepts the task at hand as logical, he will be obedient. A soldier must be convinced, otherwise discipline is a problem." Hussein commented about the present mental state of American soldiers in Iraq. He said, "If you asked the American soldier, who came to Iraq to find weapons of mass destruction, but none could be found, and who came to remove the leaders of the Hussein dictatorship, who are all in jail now, but are replaced with other dictators, whether he wanted to stay or go, he would say go."

~~(S)~~ When asked whether the use of chemical weapons by Iraq against Iran during the defensive period of the war occurred only through necessity, i.e., Iraq would have lost the war without such use, Hussein responded, "I do not have an answer for that. I am not going to answer." When asked whether he thought Iraq was going to lose the war with Iran, particularly after 1982 and during the 1984-86 time frame, Hussein responded, "No. Not for a second. I said this on television. I said this in five letters I sent to Iran." In the letters, Hussein outlined the strengths of the Iraqi military. Hussein stated some Iraqi commanders did not like the fact that this type of information was included in letters to Iran. Iranian leaders thought Hussein was lying, while Iraqis believed him. Returning to Iraqi chemical weapons use, Hussein stated, "I will not be cornered or caught on some technicality. It will not do you any good. The United States has paid dearly for its mistakes here in Iraq and throughout the world and will continue to pay for its mistakes all over the world."

~~(S)~~ Hussein stated Iran did not "get the message" after 1982 when Iraq pulled back to its borders. He stated, "If you do not break their heads, they will not understand."

~~(S)~~ Hussein stated Iraq "did not owe much money" after the war with Iran. Iraq had received aid from Arab countries, which Hussein believed to be aid and not loans. After the war, however, these countries "changed their minds" and demanded repayment. Some countries viewed Iraq as a military threat. Iran was not viewed as a military threat, as its forces were devastated by the war. Hussein laughed at this point.

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~~(S)~~ Hussein stated Iraq agreed to a United Nations resolution on September 28, 1980 calling for a cessation of hostilities with Iran. Iran, however, did not agree to this resolution. Hussein added that Iraq also agreed to UN Resolution 598 in 1987 calling for an end to the war. Iran, again, did not agree to this resolution. Iraq, in fact, attempted numerous times throughout the war to engage Iran in discussion in order to stop the fighting. Hussein stated "we did this when we did not have to" for the good of the people and for humanity. Iran only accepted terms of a cease fire in 1988 "after they lost the war."

~~(S)~~ Regarding UN findings about Iraq's use of chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq War, Hussein stated, "History is written and will not change. No one can stop history from being written." Hussein pointed out that Iran used chemical weapons first, at Muhamra (which is Khoramshahar in Iran), in September/October, 1981. When asked whether Iraq had to use chemical weapons for defensive reasons, Hussein responded, "I am not going to answer, no matter how you put the question."

~~(S)~~ Hussein stated, "I will discuss everything unless it hurts my people, my friends, or the army." Hussein gave details of an incident in 1964 involving Ahmad Hasan Al-Bakr, General Secretary of the Ba'ath Party. Bakr and Hussein, who was chief of the military branch of the Ba'ath at that time, were arrested for plotting a coup against then Iraqi President Aref. Hussein stated he admitted full responsibility for the plot and could not have provided information against anyone else.

~~(S)~~ Hussein stated, "It is not fair for someone in charge to blame others. If someone says Saddam told me to do it, that is not a problem for me and does not hurt me."

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