

*Things are moving at quick pace; in the glory of high technology, in your gruesome face, 24 hour cable news beast, so we .... must .... think .... now, before the End Game. The airwaves are full of a thousand retired generals (who knew we had so many ex-Stars?) the policy wonks are left in their cubicals pondering the shadows against the war's limelight. Essays and commentary on the first week of Gulf War II, the Rematch.*

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## AT WAR

It started off as the “War of Pictures.” Every network had its logo in the corner of the screen blazing EXCLUSIVE as the choppy videophone images were displayed on screen. The studio anchors were drooling at the war graphics! CNN told its reporter with the 7th Cav that it was receiving “historic pictures” as the scene panned toward a nomadic goat herd camp. NBC was so proud it proclaimed that reporter David Bloom was “leading the charge” with the 3rd Infantry Division. Even Ted Koppel had to be out in the field, waiting for a unit commander to arrive for a helicopter inspection of the troops.

The only person sulking on the first nights of the war had to be Dan Rather, as CBS decided to show its NCAA tournament basketball games. When you pay more than a billion dollars for the rights, and having sold premium advertising in a weak ad market, Viacom was not willing to take a bullet in the wallet.

Every reporter bumping along inside a Hummer or a AV



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## GIN & RUMMY

When he says something, you can tell he means it. When Tim Russert speaks a paragraph to set up a question, he snips back at the host. “I didn’t say that. Who said that? That’s incorrect.” He needs, no, he demands accurate information.

He is the raw nerve ending for this latest American conflict. It falls on his shoulders to cut to the chase, torpedo the political nanospeak, and get results.

Donald Rumsfeld finds himself on the last lead horse of his generation’s calvary ride in American history. Gulf War II is the first deadly domino that could trigger the secondary implosions of war in Iran, Turkey, India-Pakistan, and Korea. Spanning the globe used to be a slogan for international sports television, but this is not sport, but the firefighting blazes in a nuclear age.

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is trying to get a career jump like Arthur Kent, the Scud Stud. The advance in technology, and the reversal of the Pentagon position on media access in war coverage, was a boom to the 24/7 cable news outlets. They could have real time battlefield feeds. There were ground rules laid down by the military, but one could tell it was a simple trade-off--- for television producers pictures are gold.

However, after the first hours of self-pleasuring on its new technology, the creep of speculation returned to the newscasts as the gatekeeping journalism function was left abandoned in exchange for being the first to report an item.

CNN breaks in with a Washington Post report that the first bombs hit a palace where Saddam and his sons were staying. Speculation ran rabid on whether Saddam was dead, alive or injured. No confirmation possible, but that did not stop the reports. Then a grim reality hit the graphic scrawls; a helicopter crashed with 16 servicemen reported dead. Then back to Saddam, when Iraqi TV shows a man with glasses reading off a note pad. Speculation is that that is not Saddam, but a body double reading notes to quell rumors of his leader's demise. Other speculation is that was a practice tape of a speech Saddam made before the war. Someone quotes his mistress as saying that's not him; then days later the CIA says it was him. The truth does not

matter in real time television.

At daylight, msnbc's Kerry Sanders is at the border trying to confirm whether the Iraqi's 11th Division was moving south or had surrendered. The other embedded reporters say that they are still on the move, moving past cities and hamlets, in a race to Baghdad. They can see on the horizon helicopters "plowing the fields" and predicting that the enemy will be "awe-struck" by the U.S. force. The embeds are now part cheerleader for the military's efforts.

But there are still those who disagree with the war. Military analysts repeat the case that Saddam is a modern Hitler,

who has terrorized and gassed his own people. But the NBC Chicago affiliate is showing protesters running through traffic on Lake Shore Drive, blocking and gridlocking the city. A protester is screaming at the cameras that his message is "chaos and gridlock." Another states that he as a right "to block traffic." Several hours later, the police corral the remaining protesters and arrest the protesters like skimming leaves from a pool.

At the same time, Fox News anchor is gushing about the new battlefield pictures: "fantastic reporting," "remarkable pictures," "stunning views." But very few credible analysis or historical perspective was broadcast in the first few days of the war. The media took its pictures and reporters bumpy descriptions and made that the lead story hour after hour.



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Lester Holt said “a new way to see war, live.” CNN said the military “appreciates the media” being with the troops. CNN anchor said he did not want to spend the night talking about embedding and journalism, but then did so for the next hour with its embed reporter.

So America’s television screen was carved up like a pizza. Frames of a still picture of the Baghdad skyline, a news scrawl at the bottom flashing headlines on where bomb blasts were heard, a split screen with an anchor and a retired army officer with a bad telestrator. It was an information bombardment of its own.

For all the glory basking on American television, the other CNN, Al Jeereza (in some circles “All That Jeers Television”) was broadcasting the Arab hard-line, with pictures of rubble and downed military craft. As the buzz of the videophone views wore off, the liberal bias in the media came forward with more in-depth glossy coverage of the peace protesters and the graphic footage of police tossing young men and women into prison buses. The protesters could not articulate coherent reasons to be against the war, just recycled 1960s slogans their parents might have used; it really showed the lack of understanding the vocal minority and the press producers have in trying to put context, not spin, on this situation. It did not matter, because the pictures are all that matters in television.

## *Gin & Rummy*

For better or worse, this is not George Bush’s war. It is not Colin Powell’s war. This is Donald Rumsfeld’s war. The Secretary of Defense is clearly in charge in articulating the message and plan of battle. The generals speak like he speaks. The generals think like he thinks. They take media questions, pause, and correct the media send-up statements before answering in their own prepared way.

Powell was the star in Gulf War I. The game plan was to mass such a huge amount of force that the Iraqi Army would retreat quickly. With the political dancing of gathering a coalition that included Arab states, Powell was successful in getting the force necessary to achieve the end game quickly. The politics of that day was different than today. Saddam broke the golden rule and invaded a neighbor. He had to be put back into his place; and that is where the coalition lines ended. Powell recommended that the war stop at the retreating Highway of Death so Americans would not be viewed as savage slaughtering butchers. The mistake was that Saddam would stay in power, and any internal civil war would be stamped out by his terror squads.

Powell’s mission in Gulf War II was to create the same coalition as before, but failed. Even allies could not get over the difference that the campaign was

not to regain invaded land, but to strike at a terrorist in his home. We would learn that many of the dissent countries like France and Russia had substantial economic contracts with Saddam that they wanted to keep or to hide. When the U.S. could not pull a last U.N. Security Council vote, it went ahead with its plans. When NATO refused to honor Turkey’s request if Iraq took military action against it, the U.S. inferred that NATO and the UN were becoming irrelevant. Which is true. The UN is nothing more than a glorified high school debating society run by third world dictators who use the American dues to bash America and democracy. NATO was a defense alliance but now harbors terrorist cells. the only country that the U.S. can trust for its own security is the U.S.

The globalists, pacifists and internationalists are appalled by that conclusion. We must not kill the Iraqi people. We must get a UN mandate before bombing a country to the stone age. The adoption by the Bush team of that appeasement is wrong and dangerous. By avoiding confrontation in Iraqi cities, it gives Saddam’s terror squads perfect cover to fight a long term guerrilla war. The message that should have been sent is that we are coming, and if you don’t like Saddam, get out of our way because at this time we do not know who is our friend or our foe.

At least Rumsfeld is saying after the first giant wave of

bombing that the U.S. would not pause or have any cease fire. Don't allow Saddam's armies to regroup. Do not let the international politicians to get to the front of the line and start harping about inhumanity. War is a dirty business. Things go wrong. People get hurt. People die.

The Iraqi people have been living with Saddam in fear for decades. His armies know the lay of the land, and have infiltrated into every aspect of the societies. Saddam's intelligence bridges are patterned after the KGB, cruel rule is iron rule. Propaganda about the colonial Americans, who are here to seize our oil, plays well in Arabia. The administration should not be lead by the media or critics; the truth is that most Arabs do not like Americans.

In addition, Saddam has had 12 years to prepare for this unfought battle left over from Gulf War I. He learned from the mistakes of Gulf War I. He learned how America is dependent on air bombing to the bloody hand to hand combat that would be needed to up-root him from power. Saddam had 12 years to place his troops, fortify his command and control structure, amass and hide weapons of mass destruction, and sit back for any siege on Baghdad. In sports, it is called home field advantage.

Rumsfeld hinted that he knew these problems going into battle. That is why the timetable was moved up with the bunker buster bombs in hope of killing

Saddam before the first infantry unit left Kuwait. Immediately killing Saddam and his sons would end the war quickly, so the commanders thought. Cut off the head and the body will die.

But one cannot underestimate the evil body. The culture in Iraq is still tribal clans. Saddam had surrounded himself with his cousins, family, and clansman. They are loyal to the bloodline. This is an ancient command structure that goes back to the hordes, Huns and Vikings. When one leader dies, another like minded leader takes his place. The myth of taking out Saddam does not lead to an immediate surrender of his clan from power.

The longer the war drags on, the Iraq plan is to get concessions from America to end it. In Gulf War I, the post-war plan was not thought through. The president merely wanted American POWs returned, and no fly zones established. The Iraqi generals walked away from table with the authority to strike back at the Shiite dissenters in the south, and consolidated their iron grip on the populace. When Saddam failed to disarm, the sanctions, with the exception of oil for food, did more to consolidate Saddam's power. It put him and his sons into the wealth of the black market economy. People were more dependent upon his will for survival. For sanctions to work, it should have been a blockade; and the people would have a reason to coup.

The commanders have to live with those mistakes on the battlefield. The people do not trust the Americans because they are considered an unknown evil empire. With Saddam, they know his evil practices, and have adapted to them. They would rather see the U.S. U.K. effort fail than be abandoned a second time.

Powell has been sent to the bench after he played the political cards at the U.N. He will live on the sidelines since his resume for the Presidential Election of 2008 is complete. Bush has left the war to be fought by his generals and Secretary of Defense. He has inherited another problem from his father's term: a fading economy run up by corporate accounting scandals and corruption. Dick Cheney is MIA. His oil friends are bidding on post-Iraqi government contracts.

So it leaves the hard work to the Pentagon and Rumsfeld to meet all the objectives. Within eight days, the media got bored with the same repetition of bland pictures, and lack of surrenders. They started to complain about the answers the generals were giving at press conferences. They complained the war should have been over by now, that the bombing campaign has turned into shlock and yawn. The gunsights are clearly on Rummy now.

As Fox's Shepard Smith said signing off on his March 29 broadcast, "thanks for having no life and staying up with us all night." The cable news beast still needs to be fed.