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Saddam Hussein and His Advisers Discussing Iraq's Decision to Go to War with Iran

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Summary:

Transcript of a meeting between Saddam Hussein, the National Command and the
Revolutionary Command Council discussing the military situation during the Iran-Iraq
War, mainly regarding the disputed territory along the Shatt Al-'Arab river.

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Arabic

Contents:

Translation - English

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Key: UM = Unidentified Male Speaker**Translator comments, clarifications, and additions are italicized in brackets**

Saddam Hussein: God's blessings. Good evening. [*Pause, people entering the meeting and greeting Saddam*] Welcome. How was your trip? [*Pause*] God's blessings and welcome. [*Inaudible, Saddam whispering with Tariq Aziz*]. Are there any other comrades not here yet? [*Inaudible, talking in background*]

Saddam Hussein: Taha is traveling?

UM: Yes, Sir.

Saddam Hussein: Today? I thought he was leaving tomorrow. Everyone is traveling! If it weren't for Comrade Izzat we would be in chaos! [*Joking*] So we are not waiting for any other comrades? My comrades, in previous meetings we reviewed developments affecting the military situation and the decision to retake our lands from Iran. We explained to you the military situation regarding retaking the areas of Zayn al-Qus and Sayf Sa'ad. [*Time Stamp: 00:05:00*] We had a number of border posts left but we are still sticking with the position that we decided to take; taking one piece out of the Iranians at a time so they do not go further than what we want, dragging both of us into a situation that neither we nor they possibly want so they will know that the whole situation is strictly within the framework of returning the lands taken by them. We had a number of posts. I think six or five, Comrade Adnan?

Adnan Khairallah: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: I think six. Six posts that we postponed until now. Today the comrades retook them. There is one post left and they have a night operation planned for it. Nothing else is left?

Adnan Khairallah: Yes, Sir. Nothing is left.

Saddam Hussein: They were all returned. So tonight - today we can say all of our land extorted by Iran is back under our sovereignty according to the international borders that are agreed upon through historical agreements.

UM: What's the total area?

Saddam Hussein: The total area for Sayf Sa'ad and Zayn al-Qus is known but I do not know about the posts area. Maybe the comrades [*others*] have an idea about it. Zayn al-Qus is about 12 to 14, correct Comrade Adnan?

Adnan Khairallah: Sir, the depth of Zayn al-Qus is from 5 to 6 and the length is 10 to 12 kilometers. The total area [*of Zayn al-Qus*] is 50 to 60 square kilometers. The total area is about 200-220 [*kilometers*].

Saddam Hussein: Alright, Sayf Sa'ad is about 120. Anyways, the two areas combined is about 200 kilometer for both places. When we add the other posts... Huh?

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Adnan Khairallah: [*Inaudible*] about two to two and a half kilometers depth on the border.
[*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: So the area we got back is perhaps about 250 kilometers. That's our international borderlines. We still have the other subject which is the Shatt al-Arab. Through the previous meeting with the National Command - Comrade Izzat did not attend because he was traveling- we understood that the public wants everything returned and wants to reaffirm our sovereignty over everything that was taken whether it was taken during our time or in prior decades. In accordance with the Algiers Agreement [*The Algiers Accord of 1975*] that was published today, right Comrade Tariq? It was published today?

Tariq Aziz: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: The basis for the agreement was: Iraq shall recognize the Thalweg line as the borderline between the two countries in the Shatt al-Arab; Iran, practically speaking, should kill its horse [*Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the head of the Iraqi Kurds' insurgency in northern Iraq*] by closing the borders and stopping the military support to the saboteurs whom they were directly supporting; The two countries shall give up all lands that were taken in violation of the Constantinople Protocol which was held between them in 1913 and against the committees for drawing the borders between Turkey and Persia; Any violation of the above three clauses is considered an end to the Agreement. I am not looking for a legal reason. What is important now is that we can gain back our land and we must get it back. That's it. All other legal reasons are to be said to international public opinion so that we have a legal reason as a weapon in our hands when facing the international and Arab publics. In fact, the Iranians themselves gave us this weapon. [*Time Stamp: 00:10:30*]

Before they came [*to power in the 1979 revolution*], they declared the 1975 agreement a colonial agreement. After they came - they were quiet for some time - then they again announced that they do not approve of the 1975 agreement and [*they*] most recently [*rejected it*] in an announcement from an important official. The Mullah and his sons were the heads of the insurgency [*Mullah Mustafa Barzani and his son Massoud*]. The Mullah and his sons were called upon to come live in Iran before the Mullah died. His sons came back from America and became protected by Iran which then started to help and support them and so forth. This took place in an early stage before we contacted the Iranian opposition. It all still exists and is documented. The date when they entered Iran is documented and the date when the Mullah died and when they contacted him to welcome his arrival is documented. We will put out all the legal reasons. There is an agreement between us - a balanced agreement. The extorted Iraqi lands at the borders are to come back peacefully [*to Iraq*] and the Iranian/American horse, Mullah Mustafa Barazani, will die. This is what Iran offered Iraq while Iraq offered Iran the Thalweg line in the Shatt al-Arab.

We gave Iran all this time and the new regime has been there for a year and a half. That's enough. A year and a half and they didn't return the lands controlled and occupied by them according to the Agreement. This necessitates that we regain it with blood and weapons. The Agreement is dead now. The agreement has ended, legally and nationally. And legally and

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realistically they [*the Iranians*] are responsible for ending it. Do we wish for that? Yes, we wish for it. When we have the ability to return what is rightfully ours we will do it. No patriotic person would let go of what is rightfully his. Now, we have the Shatt al-Arab. It was given up for two clauses and Iran did not fulfill both clauses. The National Command decision was that the next step should be announcing these facts, considering the Algiers Agreement as something of the past, and retaking control of the Shatt al-Arab. Not just legally reasserting control of the Shatt al-'Arab but retaking control of the Shatt al-Arab the way it was before the Algiers Agreement in 1975.

The National Command may remember all these facts but the Pan-Arab Command may not have discussed all the details in 1975. However, there are some facts that we must remind our comrades about. In 1975, we used almost all of the ammunition we had for the artillery [*during the First Iraqi Kurdish War*]. Our situation was such that we only had three heavy bombs for the Air Force. We sent the Chief of Staff to the Soviet Union where he signed a deal but he was told that they only have 1200 artillery rounds [*Saddam bangs his hand on the table*]. 1200 artillery rounds means only half a day of fighting for that war.

[Time Stamp: 00:15:16]

UM: For one [*artillery*] battery, sir.

Saddam Hussein: Yes, for one battery only. These are the military facts. As for the political facts, you all know that we initially told the Shah of Iran that he could get what he got in the Shatt al-Arab through the announcement made by the conference of the National Command and the Revolutionary Council on October 7, just one day after the war [*third Arab-Israeli War of 1973*]. We announced that we are ready to peacefully resolve the issues between us and Iran. This decision came out while we were working on providing suitable combat capabilities against the enemy in the Syrian lands to defend Damascus, reaffirming our Pan-Arab role.

Izzat al-Duri: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: We did not wait for an answer from the Shah. But rather we announced our decision on the radio and we pulled our military from the frontlines, leaving the frontlines completely vacant while the Shah's military was mobilized to confront our military. It became clear since then that the Shah would use this as a reason against us because we previously announced this. It was also clear to you all that I was asking for the Thalweg line in the Shatt al-Arab, so how else can we be flexible?! Anyway, if we had ammunition then we wouldn't have showed him any flexibility nor would we have given him the Thalweg line in the Shatt al-Arab. If our political and military situation had allowed us to take a different position, we wouldn't have been pushed into something we do not want. The situation at that time was considered critical by many Iraqis, more than the Command members themselves, including me, because we are not used to dealing with our sovereignty flexibly under any condition.

So, mentally I knew that signing the Algiers Pact was a victory because it was protecting large areas of the homeland from being extorted in a humiliating way and preserving the revolution with its leader the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party ideologically, not existentially. Ideologically,

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because we believe that without the Party, Iraq wouldn't be united and strong like this [*Saddam banging on the table*] and we would not have put an important beacon of hope in the Arab region. Yet despite all of this, I was still in pain and I came back in pain, but it was only the people who eased my pain. We have to mention this with historical appreciation to the honorable position that the Iraqi people took during these situations. The Iraqi men and women came out of their homes for me, all yelling in happiness and they said that what was announced while I was in Algiers was a victory. This eased our pain and we were happy when we got to the Republican Palace. They made their own decision without guidance from the Party. Everyone came of their own free will and thus the Iraqi military also considered it a victory, even though it cost them many precious and irreplaceable sacrifices. There were about 16 to 17 thousand [military] casualties in this battle that lasted 12 months. The civilian casualties were over 40,000 for both sides. That was the situation at the time. [*Time Stamp: 00:20:35*]

Maybe someone will ask us or ask you why you kept quiet during the Shah's rule and now you're not? We signed the Pact during the Shah's regime not in another time. This is not the first time in history this sort of thing has happened. A man dies without taking revenge but he asks his son to take revenge. This is a fact. Sometimes a man cannot build a big palace as his heritage so he asks those after him to continue building it. Many of our ancestors lost a military battle but then they gathered themselves together again and returned to win other battles. Our greatest guide, Muhammad Ibn Abdullah, peace and prayers be upon him, dealt with life this way. We did not have everything available for us at the time to fight for a hundred years and we did not do it. We did not lack willpower, awareness, or the national identity to fight but we lacked the materials, the imported materials, not those that are made locally inside Iraq. We should not be ashamed to say that even if the Iranian regime did not do all this and we had the capability to take everything back, we would take it back.

Also, when it comes to sovereignty, there is no difference between one ruler and the other or one entity and another. Our land is precious. Anyone who takes our land, be it the Shah of Iran or Khomeini, we would do the same thing against them. Be it Iran or the Soviet Union or China or America or France, we would have the same position. Politically, Khomeini will not give back the land which was extorted by the Shah or the lands which the Shah exploited to gain advantage according to the Algiers Pact. This makes him just like that Shah regarding our sovereignty. Maybe he is different than the Shah regarding his fellow countrymen. This is something personal. China is a socialist country and they love their countrymen. They are nationalists, faithful, hardworking, and clear but if they take a piece of Arab land and we have the power to get that land back by weapons, then we should do so. It does not make any difference if the regime in China is socialist or capitalist, autocratic or hierarchical. The decision of the-- Comrade S'adoun Ghaidan is not here?

UM: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: Yes. Therefore, the decision of the National [*Party*] Command was to announce these facts to the public and to go ahead and do as we please with the Shatt al-Arab with the full sovereignty that we had before the Algiers Pact in 1975 after retaking our land on the borderline. [*Time Stamp: 00:25:13*]

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In life and while engaging in leadership, there should be no possibilities. The leading role is needed sometimes, not because in life there are many possibilities and the leader and the leadership is asked to choose one of many possibilities but because sometimes he [*the leader*] might choose one possibility amongst hundreds of other possibilities and build on it, the basis for advancing forward. Thus, a whole era can be credited to one leader while another era is named with a setback for another leader. These are facts. Some may say, do you guarantee that the Soviet Union will continue to supply you with ammunitions or else you would go through the same condition that you went through in 1975? The answer is that there is no one who can guarantee this. Can you deny that Iran will possibly confront you with force and that they will escalate their action out of their borders into a full scale war? There is no one that will give us such a statement. The calculations that we conducted through the Arab world, internationally, in Iraq, and in Iran, all tell us that this kind of statement is correct and that it is possible through leadership to mobilize the people and the enthusiasm of the army. The enthusiasm of the people is available. The Arab nation's understanding is based on several factors but we should not forget that the regimes affect the Arab people in one way or another. Otherwise, if we leave the Arab people to make their own decision by telling them that we have an extorted land, do not ask us how it was extorted but it was extorted, and we have the ability to get it back... So, should we get it back or not? All the Arab people will tell you to get it back. These are facts and the citizens will not disagree on this. However, if we tell them who started this, that the Shah is one thing and Khomeini is another thing, and why did we give it up at the time of the Shah, and why do we want to take it at the time of Khomeini and so on... then surely you would find that the Arab public opinion has some parties that do not understand the correct historical path regarding what we have to do and regarding what position we should take. In any case, the Arab public and popular opinion is not bad at this stage. In other words, they understand and they are able to understand. However, those who have a preset opinion of our Party will have difficulty with this.

Comrades, you must not forget one fact. Retaking our land will be an embarrassment for all those who have an extorted land and are not retaking it. This is a fact. Another fact is that getting your land back will scare them because it takes you to another level of capabilities and has a psychological effect on the Arab people and international public opinion. So, it is normal that the regimes which have a preset opinion regarding your regime and your party will not be relaxed about this action that you're all taking. [*Time Stamp: 00:30:16*]

The decision that was made by the National [*Party*] Command is what we are now discussing, about all of these issues in this joint meeting. It was decided that we give a speech at the National Council [*Iraq's Parliament*] calling on the Party cadre and the national cadre to explain these facts to them and we are to announce our position during this meeting. The chain of events that we have planned is: a joint meeting now; then a meeting for the advanced cadre tomorrow at about 11:00 am; and then the National Council meeting at 5:00 pm. I was authorized to set up these meetings in light of the military facts and the military situation, and the meeting with the National [*Party*] Command took place before Comrade `Izzat traveled. When was that?

Izzat al-Duri: Late Thursday night.

Saddam Hussein: Late Thursday night. Additionally, we completed all calculations for how to deal with any Iranian reaction. Though, so far, their reaction is only on the [*battle*] field.

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However, this kind of situation cannot be calculated only according to what we see. We have to account for the worst [*case*] scenario. We would have to prepare ourselves to face the worst case scenario. At the same time we did not want to have a long time period between retaking our land and mobilizing our military across their border. Our military has been pouring towards their borders for the past ten days or maybe even more like 15 days. In the beginning it was limited mobilization, but now we have whole divisions mobilizing on the border. They are probably thinking it's all just a couple of border posts and small pieces of land so why are all these armed forces coming here? They might fall into delusion and lead themselves and us to a situation that neither of us wants. So for us to be clearly understood, we are to let them know all our steps. We said that we are using-- Comrade Ali and Comrade Qasim were absent. We said that we're using a method never used before in wars or revolutions.

UM: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: What?

UM: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: We will tell them that we are coming. We'll tell them that the next time it is going to be militarily. It is clear in the memorandum that we will be responding militarily at this place and that place to follow up if they don't avoid military action. They know that we are coming for the border posts, then, after our forces get the land back, we will tell them again. We will say that our forces on this date and at this time retook this land from you so now give us back the remainder of the land or we will take it too by force. Militarily speaking, this will surely cost us more. In Sayf Sa'ad and the other border posts, it was possible to cause them even more losses and we could have had fewer losses. But we preferred the other choice to let them completely understand us and understand why we acted this way, why all of this mobilization, and why we chose to act this way.

Therefore, we are required to reinforce these mobilizations because these masses are pouring onto their borders. They would have to understand that this is to return the Shatt al-'Arab. So if they do not act as we hope, we will strike them just like we struck them in Zayn al-Qus and Sayf Sa'ad and in the border posts. We have to prepare ourselves for actual implementation of the law. The law says that since Iran is no longer honoring the Algiers Pact, it is null and the land is to return to Iraqi sovereignty as it was previously. Not just that, but we have the right to do as we please with it, meaning navigation [*in the Shatt al-Arab*] will be under the sovereignty and the control of Iraq.

The Iranian ships that pass through are to be guided by an Iraqi navigator within our national borders and the navigator is to take it to its destination and they [*the ships*] must raise the Iraqi flag. If they do not raise the Iraqi flag, then the navigator will punch the captain and this means we will have a fight in the middle of the Shatt al-Arab. Foreign ships that pass through from the Iranian ports have to raise the Iraqi flag as well and the passage revenues shall be for Iraq. This is, in short, the meaning of controlling the Shatt al-'Arab and how we practice our sovereignty. Thus, the situation necessitates such a reaction, and this is what we need to discuss in our meeting, comrades. [*Time Stamp: 00:36:51*] Comrade Izzat.

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Izzat al-Duri: Mr. President, this is a big, historical opportunity for Iraq to retake the Shatt al-Arab and the lands that we got back from Iran. Many Iraqis, especially those who are concerned with the laws of borders, know that for tens of years Iran has been doing as they please with this land, outside of Iraqi sovereignty, some of it since 40 years ago- since the first drawing of the borders according to the Muhamarah Agreement.

Saddam Hussein: Some of it before the 1958 Revolution and some of it after.

UM: Since 1936.

Izzat al-Duri: Mr. President, I know about it. I was working with the people who put together the Agreement. Some of it was in the year 1918 or 1919. After the Muhamarah Agreement was signed, some of the lands were vacated but they [Iran] never handed it over. Iraq did not get the lands. There were other parts that were extorted in-- *[Interrupted]*

Saddam Hussein: 1964.

Izzat al-Duri: In 1964, yes.

Saddam Hussein: The most recent overtaking was in 1964. Zayn al-Qus was taken in 1964.

Izzat al-Duri: Yes, the latest overtaking was in 1964. This is our chance. This is a historical chance. It not only means we're getting back the Shatt al-Arab and the lands along our border but it means something greater, it means that Iraq has moved from one stage to another. This, in my opinion, will have an unmatched positive Arab and international effect, especially in the Arab world and for the Arab people, and even for the Arab regimes that we are living with. If this action is to be done successfully until the end, it will put Iraq in a prominent and significantly effective position. Through this, in the future, Iraq can take big strides in accomplishing its goals nationally and in the Pan-Arab region. Additionally, it has the benefit of building a revolutionary and ideological military, which is being built on the principle of being the armed forces of the Arab people. This action will elevate it psychologically, spiritually, militarily, and technically to an elite level, a high level. We will save a lot of time in attaining such a high level and this is what had happened in the past ten or 15 days. Then, it also has effects on the people and our internal, national situation. The procedures for the legal justification and the international acceptance, or rather for the international circumstances and the Arab circumstances, are the best procedures that can be done at this time. At any other time, even if we are more capable, it will be harder for us to retake this part of our country and especially the Shatt al-Arab. *[Time Stamp: 00:41:15]*

So I see that this is the best opportunity for us to retake the parts of the Shatt al-Arab under Iranian control. All that is needed is to account for the possibilities that Your Excellency mentioned, to account for the worst case scenario, which is Iran escalating by their reaction, and making it a complex and vast reaction, or the Soviet Union pressuring us using ammunition. So, we should look for other sources to import ammunition from around the world. Let us rely on God and start according to the specified timeframe. My personal belief is that Iran will react with

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a vast response. If they react with a vast response, they must be out of their minds because they will lose.

Saddam Hussein: Would they sanely attack Mandali [*an Iraqi city on the Iran-Iraq border*] while they are in this miserable military situation?

Izzat al-Duri: Mr. President-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: They're striking us and we are striking back on military targets yet again they strike Mandali. They think it's a forgotten city.

Izzat al-Duri: If they come to the Shatt al-Arab area, they will be destroyed. It is not like the other areas that are-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: Yes, any assault on the Shatt al-Arab will not be-- [*Interrupted*]

Izzat al-Duri: I mean, let the comrades understand that-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: We will not be flexible with it.

Izzat al-Duri: The area that we retook from the Iranians is along the line. The border is in the middle, between mountains and plains. This is the situation. The situation is like this, we were on the plain while they were in the hard mountainous land. Their positions are either harsh or mountainous all the way to the Amarah area. This is how you would see the border; whereas in the Shatt al-Arab that land is all flat if they want to fight us. So, they would lose a lot if they try to confront us in the Shatt al-Arab.

Saddam Hussein: Comrade Abu Bashar [*Shibli al-Aisamy, senior member of the Ba'ath Party*].

Shibli al-Aisamy: [*Speaks without an Iraqi accent*] Indeed, retaking the land is a wonderful and great step. The decision to retake the Shatt al-Arab is also something that makes us happy and great. It is something relieving to have self-confidence regarding the military, the people, and the leadership. However, I have some questions which I am sure you have accounted for in your planning. There is no doubt that the international circumstances, currently, are in our favor to get the land back and to conduct these operations. But in the future, perhaps, the international circumstances will not stay the same if things take a long time. So are there any measures taken to settle these matters so it does not take a long time? Because taking a long time means getting into a process of draining our resources. [*Time Stamp: 00:45:00*]

It came to my attention today, for example, that the Soviets have a transit agreement with Iran. The Iranians would allow Soviet goods to pass through their land, and in return the Soviets will allow Iranian goods to pass through their land. Also, if we look again at the hostages' case [*referring to the American Hostage Crisis in Iran*], we can see that if they [*the Iranians*] are put under pressure they may back off some conditions to agree on a compromise. Some circumstances may change, and it may become in the interest of both America and the Soviets to drain us and Iran at the same time, especially since we cannot rely on the Arab rulers, the people

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you just mentioned-- *[Interrupted]*

Saddam Hussein: We have accounted for everyone in our planning. Anyone who we did not consider a friend, we accounted for as an enemy. *[Inaudible]*

Shibli al-Aisamy: Sir, *[inaudible]* we can retake the three islands; *[but]* they won't accept it. Thus-- *[Interrupted]* *[The speaker is likely talking about retaking the three islands disputed between Iran and the UAE]*

Saddam Hussein: I've said it many times and it's documented in a written letter to Sheikh Zayed. We told him that we have the military capability to retake all three islands but there are some technical and subjective facts regarding sovereignty and that he would have to cooperate with us. At least, he would *[have to]* assist us and support us internationally and say he authorizes his brothers to retake it for him.

Shibli al-Aisamy: Another thing is the articles in Mujahid and al-Sha'ab Algerian newspapers.

Saddam Hussein: Bad.

Shibli al-Aisamy: They're bad--

[Recording is blank from 46:45 to 47:16]

Shibli al-Aisamy: What I mean is that presenting our reasons to the international public is beneficial because if the international public is convinced that we are retaking what is rightfully ours, just like what happened recently when we retook our territories along the border, especially by you and high-level officials, then our attack will not be seen as an *[act of]* aggression. Thus, international and Arab opinion is very beneficial, especially when we focus on explaining that we're retaking what is rightfully ours, that there is no aggression, and that this is not because we're a powerful nation or because Iran has a weak military. No. It is all about our rights that were extorted. It is about our land and sovereignty that have to be addressed. Also, people will stick to good results. When the results are positive and when the Iranians cannot drain our resources or retake what we took, then all the people will be happy and cheering. So do not be afraid of the results and God willing they will be positive. If the Shatt al-Arab closes down just because of a sinking ship in it, then they will close the Shatt al-Arab completely-- *[Interrupted]*

Saddam Hussein: The main point that Comrade Shibli made is correct. The leadership must not accept draining resources. I mean, we should not accept doing all these actions while Iran keeps quiet without an answer. We have to stick Iran's head in the mud and force them to say yes so we can get done quickly with this matter. If they continue without an answer while they keep bombarding us with artillery and our army is mobilized on the Iranian border, then this situation is unacceptable. The right situation is that we have to put them in a political and military position so they will say yes or they will have to pull back their military and assume that the issue is over so we can retake the land militarily. We cannot stay on the border forever. This is exactly what we have on our minds. *[Time Stamp: 00:50:09]*

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Also, what you said about the international circumstances being in our favor is correct. However, who is going to give us a guarantee that the international circumstances will continue the same way forever? This is another correct question. We truly expect situations to change in Iran. Therefore it is important and essential to resolve the matter legally.

Shibli al-Aisamy: It is also important to accept mediations too because-- *[Interrupted]*

Saddam Hussein: Hundreds of meditations. We just accepted one, Abu Bashir. I told the comrades in a meeting, anyone who comes to you asking to mediate our answer should be you're more than welcome to do so and we actually want you to mediate.

If there's any Arab ruler who's honest and competent, we would even accept mediation from an Arab representative with Israel. We would first ask Israel to give back the occupied lands of 1967 and then let's sit and discuss Israel's situation in the region. If Arabs authorize Saddam Hussein to sit and negotiate with Began *[the Israeli Prime Minister at the time]*, I would tell him this: announce publicly that you would give back all the occupied lands of 1967 then we'll talk, and when he comes back after the announcement I'll tell him your country is not legal and you must get out of our lands!

So we're never afraid of something like that. We're relaxed and whoever wants to mediate, we immediately say yes. The Palestinian Resistance visited us, represented by our brother Yasser Arafat. He said we're Arabs and the conflict between you and Iran is an Arab conflict. We said that's a good thing to say. We're not asking for more, this is enough for us. We think this talk is enough for the Arabs in this era. He asked us if we want to assign him more to do and we said just advise them *[the Iranians]* not to remain arrogant. These are facts. They can't say they won't give back the lands. If they don't give it back, we'll take it by force. These are the facts in today's Iraq. If the *[Algiers]* Pact is colonial, then let's end it and give us back everything you took according to it. Why are they sticking to it if it's a colonial pact?

UM: *[Inaudible]*

Saddam Hussein: Yes. So we asked them *[the Palestinians]* to wake up the Iranians and to send our regards to Banisadr *[Iranian President in 1980]* and to tell him that whenever he wants to support their new state, we're ready to do it except for this issue which we will never give up on. If he wants both of us to sit at one table and discuss it, then we're also ready.

Shibli al-Aisamy: *[Inaudible]*

Saddam Hussein: Everyone who cursed at us for signing the Algiers Pact in 1975 will now curse us for this action as well. We know all of this, Comrade Ali.

Ali Abu Hassan: Surely, retaking our extorted land and having full sovereignty over it is not an issue that is discussed based on who is a supporter and who is not. It is a situation that is basically connected to conditional and circumstantial objectives. So, if the comrades have good anticipations, they know better in this kind of situation, and all the conditions are set, then it is a good decision for sure. What is painful to see is the Arab regimes' response regarding this issue

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because they're mostly negative. They are either standing as spectators, rejoicing the misfortune, or they are traitors and conspirators. I do not expect, as Mr. President mentioned, that a lot of Arab regimes will support us. [*Time Stamp: 00:55:57*]

As for the Arab people, it is surely a different position, but the Arab regimes still exert a negative influence on them. The Arab people will burst this bubble if the results are great and successful. Then the Arab regimes will no longer have influence. So it all goes back to the final results.

I am also certain that you do not think of the Shatt al-'Arab like you think of Zayn al-Qus or Sayf Sa'ad because it is way more complicated and may lead to a full scale war. This is my opinion. This is particularly [*true*] because the Iranians may, as far as I know, have a better naval fleet than the Iraqi fleet. They also have remarkable modern military bases that are spread over the coast which is about 860 kilometers [*534.38 miles*]. These bases can have an impact on the international navigation for oil in the Strait of Hormuz. All of these issues are supposed to be well accounted for in planning.

There is one issue left that may not have been understood by many of our comrades, which is that the Iraqi borders end before Muhamarah by about 5 or 7 kilometers. Right after this, the Iranian borders start directly along the coast. In other words, there is no Iraqi land on the other side from which Iraq could move to control the Shatt on both coasts, ensuring safe international navigation. We have to account for this situation and be very careful. The Iraqi border after Basra is about 32 kilometers from which Iraq has control on both coasts. After that, Iraq has only the western beach under control and the other coast belongs to Arabistan [*Arabic name for the Persian region of Khuzestan*] which has been under Persian sovereignty since 1954. So Iraqi soldiers cannot cross to the other beach-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: We don't need to, Abu Hassan.

Ali Abu Hassan: Yes, but I am going to talk about the oil issue-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: When they attack our navigators, then we move Iraqi soldiers to that part.

Ali Abu Hassan: Here, the oil situation is involved. Matters will widen to include oil. I just would like to clarify this issue because when the time comes-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: Correct, Abu Hassan. The vision we have is that tomorrow we will explain the legal situation. Then, we will go back and see how we used to enforce our sovereignty in the Shatt al-Arab and we'll start reinforcing it again, including what we just explained. Say we have an Italian cargo ship going to Iran, the Iraqi navigator will take it from its entry point in the Shatt until he gets it to the Iranian port while it's raising the Iraqi flag. Then he will take the entry fee from the Iranians.

Ali Abu Hassan: Then they will also be searched by an Iraqi.

Saddam Hussein: Yes, we will do all the procedures. If an Italian ship comes to the Shatt and it is approached by an Iranian and an Iraqi, and say the Iraqi punched the Iranian, then the Iraqi

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brings a military patrol and a fight begins. If they just fight within the same area, that's fine. However, if they go further, then we will force their heads into the mud to enforce our political will on them [*Saddam striking the table with his hand*] which can only happen militarily.

[Time Stamp: 1:00:35]

Ali Abu Hassan: This means oil facilities will be involved too.

Saddam Hussein: It may happen. This may lead to burning oil facilities by us or by them. This is war, Abu Hassan. You cannot say during a war that I guarantee our oil establishments will not burn. No. However, when our facilities are burned, theirs will be on fire too. An action will be met by another action. This is known all over the world, not just by us or them. This matter is not controlled by only one entity. If it were up to us, then we would not want a full scale war, we do not want the destruction of oil, and we do not want to strike cities. We want to bombard military targets, twisting their arm until they accept the legal facts. What is stopping us from taking Qasr-e-Shirin militarily at any time? Comrade Minister of Defense, what is stopping us from taking Qasr-e-Shirin?

Adnan Khairallah: Nothing.

Saddam Hussein: What is to stop us from going on all axes to surround their armies and imprison all of them or to do as we please with some areas inside the Iranian border? No one is saying there is no resistance. No one is saying that there are no losses or martyrs, but militarily speaking our estimate is that we are able to reach the heartland of Iran. Though, when we got to our international borders, we stopped and that's it. They might harass us every now and then; their warplanes will go over there and we will bring them down. This stage now is different than the stage before it. We will give them some space to strike here and there! However, once a warplane attacks Baghdad, then that's it. Things will be different. So if they accept what we want, with some pressure, to preserve their dignity, then there is no problem, but if they try to bombard oil facilities or similar things then the matters will escalate instantly without [*our*] even thinking or discussing it. We will retaliate immediately. It is just a single phone call for our decision to reach them just like lightening on their heads.

We expect such things. We can't say we don't. That's the way it is and that's what we say all the time, what are we saving our souls for? This is an individual right to ask yourself all the time. We are building a military for whom, for what, and where? We're building a party, a nation, for what? We're doing calculations for such possibilities, including what you are saying, so that we can retake our lands with some losses. We have to accept the negative possibilities. Historically, what else can we say? As officials responsible for this nation and its sovereignty, what can we say to history in such a situation when we can retake our land but we do not do anything about it? We cannot accept this, historically and patriotically.

Ali Abu Hassan: If you would please, the other thing is regarding the Soviet Union. I am sure that you are following the situation more than I do and you know the Soviet intentions with regard to us. In my personal opinion, the Soviets are more lenient towards us than before.

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Saddam Hussein: Yes, correct.*[Time Stamp: 1:05:00]***Ali Abu Hassan:** However, I do not think that they will provide strong support for Iraq.**Saddam Hussein:** So far, no. They have not done anything.

Ali Abu Hassan: Yes, why? Because this issue is not related only to Soviet considerations, I mean it is not just considerations about Soviet relations with both Iran and Iraq. There are other considerations that pertain to Syria and other groups that do not currently want Iraq to take such a position or such a role. Therefore, in my opinion, the Soviet Union will be tight regarding the supply of ammunition if the situation escalates. If it is a few days war, then we do not need them. However, the Soviet Union will not supply us for a long time. Please account for this in the decision because this is very significant. The other thing, which also in my opinion should be accounted for, is that there is currently no authority in Iran to make a decision except for Khomeini. There is no one else. He is a stubborn man, who claims he is coming to liberate Iraq, so how can he tolerate that the land which he has is snatched away from him? He has to be arrogant about it. This is how I see him thinking. He has to be arrogant. This will make... unless God you know makes him die like we heard [*via a rumor*] and then it [*the rumor*] turned out to be false, or his health situation [*deteriorates*]*-- [Interrupted]*

Saddam Hussein: Is there a rumor that he died?**Ali Abu Hassan:** Yes, we heard a rumor of this sort.

Saddam Hussein: This is like the rumors that the Syrians put out about Saddam Hussein [*Laughs*]. Did you spread this rumor?

Ali Abu Hassan: No, Sir. So in my opinion this situation will stay up in the air. I mean it will not be determined quickly. Why? Because, who is making decisions in Iran? We do not have full control [*over the situation*] so I just want this to be clearly understood because full control is impossible. I mean, the hostages' situation, everyone agrees, is now stupid. He is convinced that this is the way he should deal with America. However, for Iraq he can't be flexible. He can be flexible with America, but we can't compare his position towards Iraq with his position towards America. When he first came to power, the first thing he said [*he would do*] is to allegedly liberate Iraq, and now we [*have*] moved from [*Khomeini*] liberating Iraq to Iraq taking land from him. It is a very difficult situation for which he would die before he compromises on it. I might be wrong, but this is my judgment.

Saddam Hussein: This is correct. Khomeini cannot, whether it is him or anyone else, Iran's situation is more dangerous than before. Khomeini used to be the man in charge. Now, I think that even if Khomeini says something, it is not carried out and to prove it: there is more than one case in which he says something and no one obeys. He has even got to the point where he won't say something because he knows no one listens. Even Banisadr is not obeyed, nor is Rafsanjani or whatever his name is, some other "Sanjani" or their Shura council [*Parliament*]. No one is

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talking to them and they won't all agree on something so of course making peace will be impossible. In other words, the Iranian mentality is closer to agreeing on war than to unite in favor of peace. But even in case of war, because they all became officials, they will need something to unite them. What will this something be? We are to try hard not to create an opportunity for them to unite. After all, they have to act like humans and consider their circumstances to formulate a response. *[Time Stamp: 1:10:00]*

They actually had a response, which is trying to fight back, but it looks like they did not get the message. We are indeed proud, although these are not major battles in which a whole military fights another military, all types of branches are involved, except for the Navy, including the Air Force, the armored, the artillery, the infantry, and the Special Forces. All different branches against all types of branches, yet the Iraqi military is Ba'athist while the Iranian military was non-Khomeini. They're not following the narrative that he *[Khomeini]* always provides, that it is the 'twenty million military' and that he is going to march to Baghdad and no one is going to stop him. The results-- *[Interrupted]*

Ali Abu Hassan: Cowards.

Saddam Hussein: No, not this way. They tried to resist, some of them. But in all of the positions, they left behind ammunition and weapons and supplies still in boxes. This is to include fully operational tanks. Why is that? The frontline is not that deep, you know not like 200 kilometers long and 50 kilometers wide for them to leave operational tanks. The frontline is very small. They could just push the tank to somewhere, but they are afraid of even doing that, they can get it done in five minutes.

Ali Abu Hassan: It is also important to clarify what happened after the revolution, you know the willingness to mess up Iraq's stability and the determination to do so. They want to instill fear in the Zionists and the Americans *[against Iraq]* and how it is going to affect our efforts regarding the other issue of the nuclear power in Iraq. Iraq does not own a bomb yet and they *[the U.S. and Zionists]* are already afraid, so what if Iraq actually owned a bomb *[Laughing]*.

Saddam Hussein: The Zionists knows us very well and they know the Ba'ath party very well. Do you see how they are insisting? It's been two years and the escalation is still ongoing. But everyone else will know us better and better.

Ali Abu Hassan: In other words, everyone will be afraid. *[Laughing]* The Arabs, the Zionists, and the Americans are going to work hard against us because they are afraid, which is a problem.

Saddam Hussein: There's no other way. You cannot express your beliefs without colliding with 8 others. This is part of our principles. What you said is correct, the Kuwaitis are already afraid. The Kuwaiti Ambassador visited me and said that we're with you and so forth, but tell us how far will you go? So of course they *[the Kuwaitis]* will say "let's see how long these people *[Iraqis]* will go in this fight because, after all, one day they will be impatient with us *[Kuwaitis]* and may punch us too!"

Ali Abu Hassan: I do not see it militarily- I am not a military expert- I do not think militarily we

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are able to defend Umm Qasr, especially during this war, without artillery in Boubyan [*a Kuwaiti Island off the coast of Iraq*]. I do not see it. I mean Umm Qasr is like the Shatt al-'Arab. If a small ship sinks, then the rest of the fleet will be stuck in Umm Qasr, which will be closed. I do not know the details because military people will understand this better than me, but this is also an important issue.

Saddam Hussein: It is out of our borders.

Ali Abu Hassan: Yes, this how it is supposed to be. There should be some temporary arrangements for Boubyan. I do not know if there is an agreement with the Kuwaitis.

Saddam Hussein: Does it benefit us militarily in any way?

Adnan Khairallah: No, Sir. It is out of our border, Boubyan [*Inaudible*]

Ali Abu Hassan: It is out of the Iraqi border, looking over the sea.

Saddam Hussein: If it were up to me, I would not ask for help from anyone. We ask God that we do not need to escalate this matter to a full scale war. However, if it becomes a full scale war, then we will land wherever we need to. I mean, we will either land with an agreement with our brothers or we will just land.

[*Time Stamp: 1:15:30*]

Ali Abu Hassan: [*In*] the worst case scenario, someone has to predict and read between the lines even though it is difficult to read-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: But our Arab brothers should not, at this time when we're fighting with a foreigner, do anything to upset the Arab situation. Everything has a time. We have to be more patient since our situation is better.

Saddam Hussein: [*Whispering with someone*]

Izzat al-Duri: If you excuse me [*Leaving*].

Saddam Hussein: Yes, brother. Do as you like.

Saddam Hussein: Tomorrow, at 11, there is a meeting with the Advanced Cadre and then at 5 pm at the National Council.

We wanted to inform the Arab rulers in the east about the next steps in the Shatt al-Arab. All the Arabs were informed by calling-in all the Ambassadors before the official public announcement about Zayn al-Qus. We also had a special arrangement for the Soviets because of the agreement [*Saddam may be referencing the mutual defense agreement with the Soviets*]. So we called him [*perhaps referring to the Soviet Ambassador*] alone and informed him about our steps. They [*the Soviets*] so far have been committed, in accordance with the agreement, to exporting weapons

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and ammunitions [*to Iraq*].

Saddam Hussein: You made us sandwiches? Good job! Thank you but I don't eat that.

UM: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: Where will you put it for them?

UM: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: Bring it here so we'll talk and they can eat.

UM: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: We need representatives to go to the north and to Saudi [*Arabia*] and Jordan and all of the Gulf countries, including Oman. Oman is now part of the new arrangements because they are on top of the Strait of Hormuz so we have to inform them so they do not complain that we did not inform them or anyone involved.

UM1: Sir, I would like to comment on this last thing you said. I had a meeting with the ambassadors of the involved countries and we informed them that our representatives will travel tomorrow. They asked several questions and we answered them based on the general guidelines. I informed them about the occupation of the five border posts half an hour before the Iranian Charge d'Affaires arrived. Based on your instructions, when the Iranian Charge d'Affaires came we informed him. I told him that I am talking with you frankly like we are used to and with the same manner of the memorandum that we provided to you regarding occupying Zayn al-Qus,

[*Time Stamp: 1:20:32*]

Saddam Hussein: [*Inaudible*]

UM1: And we would also like to inform you that our glorious military, today, occupied five posts: al-Rashidah, al-Tawuws, etc... I named all of them [*in the memorandum*], four in al-Maysan sector and 'Injirah in Diyala sector. We will also continue-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: Change 'Injirah.

UM1: 'Injirah is also in Kirkuk.

Saddam Hussein: Is it a Kurdish or Persian name? Or is it Turkish?

UM1: Kurdish, Sir.

UM2: 'Injirah, Sir, means wolf.

UM1: In Kurdish, Sir.

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UM3: Sir, it's right on, if you may remember the road to Sayf Sa'ad--

Saddam Hussein: To the right of Sayf Sa'ad.

UM3: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: [*Inaudible*]

UM1: So we informed all of them that this is probably the first time in the history of any two nations that a country is telling the other we're coming to liberate this area or that area. Be sure that we are not letting go of one inch of our land and we will accept nothing but retaking our lands and rights. Sir, he [*the Iranian Charge d'Affaires*] was in such a miserable situation that even I felt bad for him. I mean, he did not look like he was representing a nation, [*he looked*] like he was a prisoner of war, and he did not even say anything. He tried to speak a couple of words in Arabic, saying that we're all Muslims, and I asked him, "what Islam"?! He pointed out one point where we submitted a memorandum and [*said*] that we did not give them a chance for them to prove their good intentions. Two hours later I submitted-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: Is it something new so that we [*need to*] give them a chance for good intentions?

UM1: I said it is not only two hours! I told him that our negotiations and your tricks continued for years with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in this case you don't need-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: We gave them three days for Sayf Sa'ad.

UM1: Ok, when we took Zayn al-Qus, why did you not give up the rest of the territories? We gave you a chance, when we occupied Zayn al-Qus, why have you not showed any good intentions? You should've said that we are ready and let's have a discussion. All that you did is [*send*] a memorandum, which in the diplomatic community was nothing but insults.

Saddam Hussein: Distribute it to the comrades so they can enjoy it! [*Saddam's tone indicates humor*] I read it briefly and laughed about it.

UM1: It is all insults and [*states*] that there are 140 Egyptian soldiers that were killed and that this is not the Iraqi military.

Saddam Hussein: Did they say 140?

UM1: Yes, 140 soldiers and that this large number of dead soldiers made the Government of Egypt protest against Iraq. What are these discrepancies? They were killed because they were fighting from the Egyptian military, and then the Egyptian government protests against Iraq because they were killed. It is just stupid nonsense.

UM: [*Inaudible*]

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Saddam Hussein: In any case, we are not angry about it. If our Egyptian brothers are here and they want to participate with us, we would be happy, but their brothers [*Iraqis*] here are sufficient.

UM1: Sir, regarding the Arab ambassadors, the only one who expressed positive feelings was the Ambassador of Jordan. He said we are-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: King Hussein called me yesterday but, according to what we were just saying, I was afraid that maybe he does not want to say "I encouraged Iraq in a phone call." So I did not want to embarrass him and I did not say to the media that there was a phone call. The people leaked it to the media. He said in this phone call that we are here and we are with you and whatever you want from us, we are ready for it.

[*Time Stamp: 1:25:02*]

Saddam Hussein: What?

UM5: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: Yes, but this man last night was the king of a country and he said we are ready for whatever forces you need and whatever you need we are ready for it. The Algerians were also nice, they were good.

UM: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: What?

UM: What about their press?

Saddam Hussein: Regarding the press. This man called Abd-al-Khaliq, him and Salah Hyawi.

UM: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: We discussed a number of issues. He wanted to tell us about their internal affairs. He asked, "does Iraq need anything from us? Any help?" I explained the situation to him without assigning him anything. As you know, what Algerians say is political not... [*The implied meaning might be that the Algerians are unable to provide real support due to their own difficult political situation*]. He expressed good feelings towards Iraq and so forth. [*Pause*] It is hot in here!?! [*Pause*]

UM6: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: Do you have any other comments? So tomorrow... There's someone who wants to speak.

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UM4: [*Speaks without an Iraqi accent*] What happened is, of course, terrific, it is glorious. One cannot help but be happy about it and everything will happen successfully, God willing. As you said, Mr. President, we have to account for everything and we must cover all possibilities. So, regarding Turkey and the current coup [*1980 Turkish coup d'état*], it is very clear that they are against the Iranians or rather the Iranians are against them. However-- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam Hussein: It's like there's no sane person over there [*in Iran*]! There was a coup, so just stay silent! Do you really have to take a position and get involved in the situation? May God damn them and their policies!

UM4: [*Laughs*] the speech was towards the [*Turkish*] Islamic movements, and they [*the Iranians*] have relations with them.

Saddam Hussein: So what! We have better relations than they do with, umm...

UM4: Yes.

Saddam Hussein: You mean with Erbakan [*Turkish politician and former Prime Minister*]? We have better relations than they do [*with Erbakan*].

UM4: Yes, Erbakan. It is clear that the coup d'état is aimed at him more than anyone else.

Saddam Hussein: He is our friend and the coup d'état is most probably against him.

UM4: It is against him more than anyone else. The number of the parliamentary representatives who were arrested and the number of-- [*Interrupted*]

Tariq Aziz: [*Inaudible*]

UM4: In the protest march.

Tariq Aziz: [*Inaudible*]

Saddam Hussein: Yes, when they marched, protesting.

Tariq Aziz: [*Inaudible*] such actions are against the whole nation.

Saddam Hussein: What did he do?

Tariq Aziz: He arranged a marching protest which was to support Palestine and, of course, for political advertisement too. However, their actions, such as not standing for the national anthem, are against Atatürkism [*Kemalism*]. Why would they do that?!

[*Time Stamp: 1:30:10*]

Saddam Hussein: Trying to provoke them.

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Tariq Aziz: [*Inaudible*]**Saddam Hussein:** May God damn them with the Persians altogether. America here is checking things out. What you said is that in the medium range one has to account for his moves. It is not expected that within three to four months [*inaudible*] he still has time.**UM4:** Yes, he can still settle down, correct. Also, I cannot hear the Iranian media. I only hear some translation. I do not know if this is a translation or is it truly aimed at Arabic listeners. So we can do the same in our Persian media. We can communicate with the soldiers in a different way, different than how we communicate with them on television.**Saddam Hussein:** Yes, we ordered them to do it.**UM4:** Because now the things that are said about the Persian army-- [*Interrupted*]**Saddam Hussein:** We ordered the media to tell them that you [*they*] are being forcibly pushed to this fight and that Khomeini forced you [*them*] into the border under fire so he can make his Revolutionary Guards do as they please with power. And that he is using you to strengthen their positions in the political fight and they are presenting you as a fuel for a fire that you have nothing to do with. We are not against Iran. Tomorrow, also, my speech will tell them all of this. Pass me the emergency action draft. This is a good note that you mentioned. We already ordered that there should be a separation between what is being said in the Iraqi public and what are we going to broadcast.

Comrade Tariq, this has been on my mind for more than two months, I wanted to tell you that the Persian racial infighting should be removed from our Persian radio. We also have Persian friends here-- [*Interrupted*]

Tariq Aziz: [*Inaudible*]**Saddam Hussein:** A racial regime which is backward, suspicious, and hateful, etc.**Tariq Aziz:** Childish.**Saddam Hussein:** No, not childish. [*Saddam laughs*]**Tariq Aziz:** In Arabic and Persian.**Saddam Hussein:** In Persian, for sure. We have been avoiding it.[*Time Stamp: 1:33:30*]**END OF RECORDING**