

SALIM'S PERSONAL NOTES**SUNDAY FEBRUARY 24, 1991****DAY 39 OF THE GULF WAR : THE GROUND WAR BEGINS**

Today is the 39th Day since the Gulf War began. Since yesterday when the United States ultimatum issued by president Bush on Friday February 22 expired at 1200 noon Eastern Standard Time (Washing-New York Time - correspondent to 1700 hrs GMT and 2000 hrs East African Time) there was an air of an imminence of the Ground War. Judging by the evolution of events in the last 48 hours it was generally expected that this ground assault by the United States and its coalition partners would commence within hours after the expiration of the ultimatum. Put differently, when it became clear that the United States was no longer seriously interested in a diplomatic solution treating the Soviet peace Initiative as at best a side show, it was logical that Washington could not delay much longer the commencement of ground operations. For the longer the delay the greater were the prospects of accelerated pressure for a diplomatic solution.

I stayed late last night and indeed to the very early hours of this morning tuned to the Radio expecting the inevitable to happen at any moment. I went to bed around 0230 hours and by then while the reports indicated that something looked imminent, there was still no ground offensive.

I woke up a bit late around 0730 this morning only to hear the news that the Ground Battle had begun. Indeed the ground offensive involving hundreds of thousands of United States, British, French and other coalition forces was launched at 0400 hours East African Time corresponding to 1700 hours GMT and 2000 hours Eastern Standard Time in the United States. Thus the ground war was launched exactly Eight (8) hours after the expiry of President Bush's ultimatum.

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In a 2½ minutes televised address to the American people President Bush stated that he had directed the Commander of the U.S. and allied forces in the Gulf, General Schwarzkopf to use all the available means including ground forces to evict the Iraqi Army from Kuwait. He said the final phase of the liberation of Kuwait had begun and he has complete confidence in the ability of the allied forces to move swiftly and decisively.

President Bush said that his ultimatum given to the Iraqi leadership on Friday, February 22 to get out of Kuwait by Saturday, February 23 by noon Eastern Standard Time or face the Ground offensive was a last chance (to avoid a ground war). But rather than withdraw their forces, the Iraqi leadership have redoubled their efforts to destroy completely Kuwait and its people.

President Bush who had just returned from his Camp David retreat asked the American people to pray for allied forces and especially for the young American men and women who were risking their lives to defend their country...." He was confident that the final phase for the liberation of Kuwait would be accomplished swiftly and decisively.

Within minutes after President Bush's televised address U.S. Secretary of Defence Dick Cheney held his own press conference at the Pentagon while stating that the ground offensive involved of hundreds of thousands of troops involving also the deployment of naval and air power imposed a news black out on the operations. He said that the flow of information will now flow to a trickle. This, he said was

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done for military security purposes. For any information divulged could be used by the Iraqi military who may now be confused of allied intentions and operations and whose intelligence is clearly deprived of basic information. He therefore announced that the regular military briefing in Washington and Riyadh has been suspended. Secretary Cheney responding to a question as to when did President Bush give the go ahead to the Central Commander, replied that a final position was not resolved until yesterday when the ultimatum had expired. "But for some period of time we had a planning date and a planning hour". And this was the date and the hour. Translation: the US and its allies have already decided to launch the ground offensive today at 0400 hrs Eastern African Time and the ultimatum and everything was fitted to conform with the decision.

Soon after President Bush's announcement there were also following reactions in London, Paris, Riyadh and Cairo.

In London, British Prime Minister John Major announcing that the Ground War has begun and that British troops were an integral part of the operations accused President Saddam Hussein of prevarication and putting conditions before the Land battle began and claimed that at no stage did Iraq agree to implement Security Council Resolutions. He also accused Iraq of committing unimaginable brutalities against Kuwait.

In Paris, a French Government spokesman said that President Francois Mitterand has given authority for French troops to be committed to the Ground War.

In Riyadh, the Commander of the Saudi Arabian Forces and one of the princes of the Saudi Royal Family, Lt. General

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Prince Khalid bin Abdul Aziz exhorted the Saudi fighters to battle saying that President Saddam Hussein did not hear reason.

In Cairo, an Egyptian official said that elements of the 35 000 strong Egyptian contingent in Saudi Arabia were in the front line of the coalition forces. It is interesting to observe the evolution or rather the transformation of Egypt's position in the three weeks or so. Before the meeting of the OAU Ad Hoc Committee on Southern Africa in Harare on February 7, Egypt's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali was quoted in a BBC interview stating that Egypt does not desire the destruction of Iraq or its military machine. Egypt's only objective is the liberation of Kuwait. Furthermore he categorically asserted that Egypt can live with Iraq under President Saddam Hussein. They can work with Saddam Hussein. At the Ad Hoc Committee Session, Harare on February 7, during the discussion on the Gulf War Minister Boutros Ghali who was representing President Saddam Hussein gave Egypt's view on the Gulf War in a similarly restrained manner. Yet significantly, subsequent to President Bush's ultimatum on Friday, February 22, Egyptian officials began to say that they cannot put up (co-exist or work) with President Saddam Hussein. Hence Egypt's goal seems to be at par with that of the United States: One way or another Saddam Hussein must go!

It is also significant that President Bush had given a go ahead to the Ground War to start today in total disregard to the appeal by President Gorbachev for the Allies to delay the offensive for one or two days to give diplomacy a chance.

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Not only did President Gorbachev speak over the phone with President Bush but he also telephoned Prime Minister John Major of Britain. It is also reported that Gorbachev had also telephoned the Japanese Prime Minister.

In his appeals Gorbachev argued that the difference between the Soviet Six Point Peace Plan which the Iraqis have accepted and the U.S. position was insignificant. It was therefore not justifiable to launch the Ground offensive. It should be recalled that last night Soviet Ambassador to the UN said that it is possible and indeed desirable to have an integrated Plan - combining the Soviet and U.S. positions and he indicated that the Security Council could in consultation bridge the gap. But all this was ignored by the United States who, I have commented elsewhere, considered the Soviet Peace Moves as a side show. This " " attitude to President Gorbachev's serious peace moves in many ways demonstrate the devaluation of the Soviet power in the real power equation of the contemporary international system. It also shows that all along the United States really wanted an opportunity to do what it is doing now, the aim being the destruction of the Iraqi military power and the overthrow of President Saddam Hussein. And the Security Council Resolution which authorised the use of all means including force gave president Bush the legitimate cover to proceed with his "hidden" Agenda. Naturally in their messy tactics and defiant postures the Iraqis gave the Bush administration "the God sent opportunity" to accomplish their mission.

I have started writing these notes only seven hours after the Ground War has commenced. Reaction to this development is only slowly coming. As the day proceeds we

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may get more reaction and perhaps we may have views of the battle field though due to news blackout not much is expected for some time and according to a British military spokesman in Riyadh - not at least after 24 hours. There have however been following reactions already :

- In the United States, members of Congress - Democrats and Republican Elite were supportive of the President's decision. This is natural particularly in the early phase of the war and considering the US and allied successes thus far in the air war.

- At the United nations, the Security Council held half an hour closed session and when the news of the commencement of the Ground War became known the Council adjourned as the majority of its members felt there was nothing the Council could do at this stage. Yemen's Ambassador Abdulla Al Asatal who is a member of the Council, called the Ground offensive a tragedy and a sad day for the Security Council. He said that the Council was a first casualty of the Ground War.

India's Permanent Representative to the united nations said that by adjourning (within half an hour) the Security Council is abdicating its responsibilities.

But the British Ambassador said that it was not a sad day for the Security Council. Rather it was a sad day for the people of Iraq.

Meanwhile it has been learnt that American, British, French and Egyptian forces are leading the assault on Kuwait and Iraq. Several fronts have been opened. Intensified air power, naval gunfire, amphibious landing are part of the operations.

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At 1030 hours local time i.e. six and half hours after the Ground offensive began, President Saddam Hussein broadcast a difficult and 'emotional' message to his people and troops exhorting them to resist the allied attacks with all the means at their disposal.

Earlier a Deputy Permanent representative of Iraq to the UN stated that Iraq will fight on. The war will be long and costly. Iraq will not surrender.

COMMENT : Now that the Ground offensive has begun it is pertinent to reflect and ask some pertinent questions. Will the ground war turn out to be "the mother of all battles" as President Saddam Hussein has consistently forecast and promised or will the "liberation of Kuwait" by the U.S. led allies be accomplished "swiftly and decisively" as President Bush declared last night in Washington.

One thing is certain. There is no conceivable way that Iraq can win in this war. 'Victory' for Iraq therefore can only be measured by the degree of resistance and the damage Iraqi forces are also able to inflict on allied casualties. And even conceived in such limited objectives, the odds against Iraq are simply awesome.

A developing third world country with a population of less than 18 million though admittedly with an impressive military power, Iraq is arrayed against the giants both in terms of of power and technology. She has to confront the full power of the United States - the only super power in town, Britain and France and a host of other nations. In the last 38 days of the air war Iraq has endured an unprecedented daunting indeed almost round the clock

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bombardment by the allied forces. More than 100,000 air sorties have been carried by the allies against Iraqi cities and other targets as well as Iraqi positions in occupied Kuwait.

According to allied military spokesmen these raids using the most sophisticated aircraft and equipment including laser precision weapons have resulted in the massive destruction of Iraq's command centres, air defence system, communications systems, supply lines, electricity and water systems, bridges and many other military (and non-military targets).

And as late as yesterday before the Ground offensive began U.S. Defence Spokesmen both in Riyadh and Washington were saying that they have already described a considerable position of the Iraqi armour in Kuwait. If the allied claims are to be taken at their face value 1700 Iraqi tanks (about 40 to 45% of the total) and 1500 Artillery pieces (between 45 to 50% of the total) have been destroyed.

Above all the U.S. led coalition has a total control of the skies. Iraqi air force has not featured at all in air war. A few dozen were either shot down in combat or destroyed on the ground and most of the frontline combat aircraft have 'sought' safe haven in Iran and others are simply not to be found. So in this massive ground war the allied ground forces will have the total support of their airforce coupled with artillery barrage from the navy while Iraqi troops will have no support of their air force.

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It is to all intents and purposes an extremely uneven balance. So on the face of it, the allies should wrap up this operation within weeks. Allied commanders have always stressed that when the Ground war phase came it would be intense, it would be massive, it would be swift and very violent. And the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff has long ago declared that the allied objective and strategy against the Iraqi Army would be : "First we gonna cut it off and then kill it!". All the elements for such an operation in favour of the allies would appear to be there. Yet the question remains, what would be the degree of tenacity and resistance of the Iraqi troops and especially the elite Republican Guard. It is their performance in battle despite formidable odds which will determine whether President Saddam Hussein's promise of "mother of battles" has some substance or simple hot air.

The next few days and weeks will tell.

LUNCHEON IN HONOUR OF FOREIGN MINISTER DIRIA

From 1230 to 1600 hours I hosted a lunch at my residence in honour of Tanzania's Foreign Minister, Ambassador Ahmed Diria Hassan and members of the Tanzania delegation to the 55th Ordinary Session of the OAU Council of Ministers.

Those attending the luncheon in addition to Minister Diria were : (1) Ambassador Sarakikya; (2) Mrs. Martha Sarakikya; (3) Brigadier Hashim Mbita, Executive Secretary, OAU Liberation Committee; (4) Ambassador Mtango, Director, Africa & Middle East and Ambassador designate to Angola; (5) Brigadier Gimonge, Chief of Military Intelligence, TPDF Headquarters, (6) Mr. Kaihular, in charge of affairs of Liberation Movement