

#### IV THE CNN WAR: HOW "CABLE LIVE" CHANGED DIPLOMACY AND PERHAPS WAR ITSELF

In the last few days of the one-month war, a Canadian diplomat was travelling in the Gulf States. Keeping an appointment with a senior minister in the crisis region, the Canadian sat in front of the large desk, while a television set behind the minister's head flickered and muttered with CNN's coverage of the war. The scene switched for breaking news: President Bush had rejected a Soviet peace proposal. Absorbed by this new development, the Canadian lost any ability to follow the comments of the minister, who, with the TV set behind him, was not listening.

Millions of people throughout the world must have been watching television when American aircraft swooped down on Baghdad in the first all-out air attack. It was hardly a great surprise. President Bush had repeatedly threatened it, issuing one ultimatum after another urging Saddam Hussein to start pulling back his troops and tanks. The press had analyzed the likelihood of various dates, readers knew when the moon would be full. In many homes in North America, Europe and the Middle East, TV sets were tuned to CNN -- Cable News Network, based in Atlanta, Georgia and girdling the world with news bureaux dedicated to the art of live coverage. Diplomatic offices all over the world tuned in CNN as long as the incumbent minister or official was at work, which tended to be much of the night as well as all day. No doubt the same was true in the offices and living quarters of presidents and kings, emirs and sheiks, who were also from time to time actors in the unfolding drama, and therefore performers for CNN.

"If we were to take a strong story line, compress it into a formal documentary, pre-empt the news hours, and run it for, say, two hours on any night, chances are quite high that very few people would watch," said Ed Turner, executive vice-president of CNN, responsible for national and international news (and no relation of the owner and presiding genius behind the CNN idea, Ted Turner). "But if you take the same information, the news and opinion, and build it around a live-from-the-scene reporter or anchor, and inject proper but frequent live shots from other aspects of the story, I believe you can not only attract a sizeable audience but also perform some important and effective services for the viewers."