

“Meeting between Saddam Hussein and His Military Commanders after the First Gulf War”



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UM1: [*The conversation was already in progress*] ... of the training year. We are going to finish it, and we are going to put it in control of the location that the 502nd Brigade will vacate. This brigade finished [*training*] at the regimental level this year but did not start at the brigade level and it is not included [*on the list*] now to start at the brigade level because of a priority issue. However, we are going to let this released brigade spend time with all brigades, because every brigade always has a total training period of forty-five days starting with the squad [*training*] until it finishes the brigade training in terms of advancement and attack. We chose the toughest situation the brigade will encounter for its training purposes, where the infantry attacks a semi-mountainous area, crosses a mine field, maintains contact with the location [*base*], and attacks the enemy, as we have... if there is no mine field, which is what the infantry always wishes for, but if there is supposedly a mine field, they will be trained for it in this case, and it will not be hard for them regarding planning or execution.

In addition, Sir, we felt that [*after*] these 45-day exercises, which consist of repeated exercises at the squad, platoon, and company [*levels*], not to mention many exercises at the regimental [*level*], the ranks' physical fitness has become very good. The proof of this is that the Minister of Defense left the platform, I mean, and sat in front of the assault line. When the infantry starts the assault at the end at the same line—I mean, let's say about one, two, or three meters—it is nothing because the assault was excellent as there was no one [*lagging*] behind or in front during the opening and advancement; they all advanced at once. This is regarding the infantry training, Sir. As for the training of armored brigades, we have the 8th Mechanized Infantry Brigade this year that was given an exercise or two by the War Academy. They are exercises at the level of regiment and brigade. I mean, we considered those practical exercises as fully performed exercises. We also have the Ibn al-Walid Armored Brigade that started an exercise at the brigade level. As for our planning for this year, we now have a request for training at the division level for the entire 3rd Armored Division. I mean, we have to wait until the 59th Division... the command of the 59th Division to be formed... once a commander is appointed for that division since the division did not have a commander for the last five months and I cannot get the commander of the 3rd Division out of the position if there is no [*alternate*] commander. If a commander is appointed to the 59th [*Division*] and the 59th takes control of the location, the 3rd Division will be entirely released. That's when we will be ready for the training at the division level.

At present, Sir, as far as our location and training, we are very much comfortable because it is going according to plan and even more—I mean, more than the ambitious planning that we received from the training department or the Chief of Staff of the Army, especially the exercises at the brigade level. However, the only problem we have, Sir, is an incomplete number. I mean, we are short on individuals, infantry.... Let's say we want to bring the number of the main corps of armor to 60% [*capacity*]. I mean, the tank battalion that has about 30-35 tanks.... When it is duty time, I mean, it will not leave with more than 22-23 tanks. We have to leave the rest in their bases because we have no [*inaudible*]. The armor is going to work exactly with 60% and the infantry with 55% [*capacity*]. The total size of the infantry is about one corps, of course. I mean, once we step down to the regimental level, company and platoon [*levels*], etcetera, the percentage starts decreasing because, as you know, the headquarters always takes a percentage until a decrease [*in manpower*] starts. At this point, the platoon personnel becomes 36 soldiers; the optimal platoon has between 10-12 soldiers. The same thing applies to the company level. I

mean, this is the current combat capability available at the [*present*] location, except for the commando companies that we have, as they are the reserve for the Corps' commanders; so it [*the division*] is somewhat complete and strong, because, as you know, Sir, the reserve must be a little bit stronger so that when we push it [*into battle*], they will achieve results, and our efforts will not go to waste. As for the mechanized infantry, its activity is somewhat better than the [*regular*] infantry. I mean, it has a percentage [*of strength*], but it is also, Sir, suffering from [*manpower*] shortages.

Sir, we also have a 25% shortage in officers at the level of platoon commander and company commander. I believe that the statistics I showed to the Minister of Defense when he visited our location reflect our personnel status. Sir, I believe that this percentage shortage will be permanent, of course, for one reason, Sir, and that is because, when compared to the size of the Army, the percentage of [*officers*] people who join the Army is hardly half of that. I mean, it [*enlistment*] hardly covers half of that. For example, Sir, if the army needs 200,000 soldiers a year, 100,000 people will join. Therefore, the distribution will be 50%, in general, I mean, 50% to repair the shortage. Since it -- [*Interrupted*]

[*Time Stamp: 00:05:46*]

Saddam: The only improvement that occurs is in the number of volunteers.

UM1: The volunteers, and as you know, Sir, volunteers require special examination [*consideration*], and we can hardly handle them [*logistically*]. I mean, we need now at least 100,000 volunteers in order to say that we can transfer the accumulated experience from one generation to another without being worried of losing it. As far as the remaining corps, Sir, they have an uncertain completion percentage. Some corps are generally good and the soldiers stay in them, while other corps are not [*good*]. For instance, the supply and transportation [*corps*] work at a 29% [*efficiency*] based on my study of them today. It is not affecting us because the number of cars that we currently have is low. But I need to try and complete the other types of corps, even at the expense of the infantry. The artillery, for example: maybe two days ago I was talking with the 34th Division commander and I said, "If you get soldiers from the infantry this time, try to send those who finished the 6th grade and can read and write to the artillery." If we complete our support battalions, they will help us with fire support more than the number of rifles, which is one or two and can't do anything. But when you assign two [*soldiers*] for the artillery unit, the results will be different than the rifle [*infantry units*]. We are going to try our best to concentrate our momentum on the main corps, which is the armor, the infantry, the artillery, and engineering. As for the remaining training plans, Sir, we can say that, thank God, we are pleased with them, and they are going normally.

UM1: Pardon me, Sir, if you allow me [*Saddam was about to speak*].

Saddam: Go ahead, comrade.

UM1: I remembered... pardon me, Sir. Honestly, I wrote down some notes, but I was not sure I would get the chance to mention them to you. Your Excellency has ordered in one of your instructions to open the headquarters organized [*for*] the corps, divisions, and brigades. A

committee from the General Command came for inspection, and I told the Chief of Staff of the Army about the problems we encountered with the 2nd Corps. This headquarters must be open before arriving to the corps. I mean, if you are heading from Baghdad to the corps, before you arrive at the corps, it [*the headquarters*] has to be to the right side, because when the [*inaudible*] walks at night or during the day, he must see the camp to the right side of the road in order to enter it or to see his troops.

From Ba'qouba, Sir, to the corps headquarters in Diyala, is entirely an agricultural area. I mean people grow barley, wheat, garden and so forth. I mean, I went there by myself and I took an agriculture specialist, and we hardly found a government related corner in the residential area. I also wrote to the [*Ministry of*] Housing... to the Chief of Staff of the Army to refer the matter to the [*Ministry of*] Housing. I told them, Sir, that this requires an appropriation period and a lot of paper work. I mean, if I want now to choose a good and appropriate area, we have to buy land from one of the farmers; whereas, according to the instructions I received, I have to open this headquarters within seven days. To be honest with you, Sir, and to carry out the order, there was an area that I had to appropriate, which is about three kilometers away from the corps headquarters, where I had to set up the headquarters just to comply with the order. But when a committee from the General Command came to me, I explained to them and said, "Let me tell you, we could not find a [*plot of*] land between the corps towards Ba'qouba. In order to do this and carry out the order, I would have to bring my own shovels, cut the plants, and tell the farmers to leave and complain or go wherever they wanted to." But in order to carry out the order, I kept it about two kilometers away from the corps. I mean it was an open uncultivated area... a desert that originally belonged to the Army. It was a railroad area but became a camp for a military academy, and so I opened the headquarters there. If someone wants to come to the headquarters at night and cannot find it, he will arrive there but then the guide will turn around and go for two or three kilometers to bring him to the headquarters. But the committee will not accept this, of course, because this is originally one of the important terms that I did not comply with, as [*the headquarters*] is behind and not in front of the corps. Frankly, Sir, the official letters that I received now ask me one thing, "Please inform us of the status and progress of [*carrying out*] [*the operation*] and what you have done." This committee is sent by the General Command once every 15 days or once a month to check and see the place, and that's because the order came from Your Excellency.

Saddam: Rent a place temporarily.... Rent!

[*Time Stamp: 00:10:40*]

UM1: Sir, they all planted [*the fields*]... Sir, if you give the farmers one million dinars now -- [*Interrupted*].

Saddam: Once the season is over, if the situation remains the same, we will not consider your headquarters to fall within the correct tactical standards. Technically, we will consider it better than to maintain a previously known position. Even the enemy needs a preconception and coordinates that will exactly define for him the location of the corps [*headquarters*] or the division [*headquarters*] so that he can come and strike it. I mean three kilometers [*away*] will also give you a better position if it is used at that moment only.

UM1: Sir, I... if it is the headquarters for the movement's duty, I will not leave it. I mean, [after] any warning that we receive, the headquarters will be evacuated immediately and no one will stay in it. We will move forward, I mean, from this headquarters that I established. In terms of actual [military] movements, I am not staying here. Truly, I will be leaving to where Darawishkeh is and even farther [than that]. Therefore, the [location of the] headquarters would be very suitable even if there were actual operations. Once there is a warning I will leave this corps headquarters immediately. Why would I stay there?

Saddam: Anyways, for your situation...

UM1: Yes, Sir.

Saddam: We accept this alternative, but try to rent land for six months once the winter season is over.

UM1: By God, Sir, I sent for someone -- [Interrupted].

Saddam: I mean as an alternative headquarters or for one year as something temporary.

UM1: I sent for one of the sheikhs in the area and told him. So, immediately when he... when I described the area to him he said, "This house belongs to such and such, and that house belongs to such and such." He said, "By God, I will stop by their houses and see if they would sell you about 20 dunam [a piece of land, measuring 1000m²]." I replied, "I wish!"

Saddam: Yeah, see!

UM1: I said, "I wish they would sell, yeah."

Saddam: Renting or selling, I mean, it does not matter!

UM1: God willing, Sir. Thank you, Sir.

Saddam: Hazem.

Hazem: Yes, Sir.

Saddam: Tell us about your missiles.... They did their duty, but this transaction was the best! Even though sometimes, including the person speaking, we unfortunately consider striking Israel as a trivial issue now; I mean we don't talk about it, but about America, and the thirty countries [of the Coalition], etcetera... all Arabs started bragging, etcetera,... but they never struck Israel, not even a slap on the face [Saddam uses the term "Rashidi" here, which means "a light slap"] and made it [Israel] cry from 1948 until today, and even in the 1967 and 1973 war[s]. But when we struck, Israel got a good slap [Saddam uses the term "Mahmoudi" here, which means "a bigger slap" than the "Rashidi"] and it [Israel] is still crying because of it. So, they [the missiles] played their role there.

Hazem: Yes, Sir, President Leader, may God protect you. Blessed Ramadan, God willing, and we are really honored tonight, which is the night of the 29th of blessed Ramadan and we are honored to meet with you. Your Excellency has asked about the missiles. Did you mean the current ones or their story in the glorious Um al-Ma'arik [*The Mother of All Battles (the Gulf War)*]?

Saddam: No, I am asking about your current situation.

Hazem: The current situation -- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam: As far as training.

Hazem: Yes, Sir.

Saddam: And preparation.

Hazem: Sir, the missiles that were not included in the 1991 unjust resolution of the Security Council no. 687 are different systems than the al-Hussein [*missiles*], whose range does not exceed 150 kilometers. They consist of three types: the Luna missile system, which, in one of the meetings with Your Excellency, you asked why we did not give it an Arabic name, while we did submit suggestions in this regard stating that we wanted to give it an Arabic name. The range of this one [*missile*] is 67 kilometers on flat land, but it exceeds this range in mountainous areas. We have two brigades for this one, six battalions plus one secondary unit at the combat training unit of the missile school that could be considered as a combat unit as well. We also modified the al-Milad [*missiles*] a little bit regarding the battle system, so that when you participate in group strikes at the corps level, you will need to use missiles of limited stock ... not as much usage as what happened in the glorious Qadisiyah of Saddam or even at [*the*] Kuwaiti sector during the glorious Um al-Ma'arik. Therefore, we formed the battalion of two batteries and not three so that the firing nozzles will not be misused and exceed the range [*of the missiles*], and also because of their [*lack of*] numbers. The second system -- [*Interrupted*]

[*Time Stamp: 00:15:53*]

Saddam: The enemy was very surprised at not hitting even one launching base of our mobile missiles, the al-Hussein missiles, throughout Um al-Ma'arik.

Hazem: Yes.

Saddam: I mean the first phase of the war, and it is a fact that it [*the United States*] did not hit even one base. So, explain to the commanders why the enemy failed to hit any of the launching bases up to the last minute until the war stopped.

Hazem: Sir -- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam: [Explain] how we deployed them [the missiles] in the Western area [of Iraq], how we withdrew them when it was almost time to do so, how we dispersed them and how they were later on launched to strike Israel, and hit -- [Interrupted]

Hazem: Sir, as a matter of fact, as far as the missiles -- [Interrupted]

Saddam: So that they will have an idea -- [Interrupted]

Hazem: Yes.

Saddam: And benefit from it in the future.

Hazem: When we got ready for the al-Hussein missiles, they were not used after the honorable performance day [Hazem refers to "al-Nidaa' day" that means the calling day], but it was a personal motive since the end of, I mean, since the day of liberation from Iran, the day we won at the beginning of Ramadan in 1988. Therefore, we were interested in preparing the western area, the theater of the western operations that primarily targeted Israel. And because the area was wide open with no cover, we thought of many ways of how to carry out the duty with the fewest possible losses and exposure. My talk about the unseen [enemy] may not sound logical, but I believe in it. I mean, believing in the unseen is Truth [religious fact] and it is mentioned at the beginning of Surat al-Baqara [the longest Sura in the Quran]. The important thing in the camouflage operation is the prayers of Your Excellency for us; God responded to your prayers. You used to always pray to God to protect us without the practical guidance, without the clear combat instructions. You used to pray to God to grant us success and blind the sight of the enemy. I had this faith and so did my group, all of them. I used to spread it and talk about it because God responds to the prayers of the just leader.

The other point is the physical [tangible] measures we took. Immediately after al-Nidaa' day, Your Excellency ordered us—I mean, that was a big step in the war history—to empty the warehouses and not to keep missiles in shelters. That operation was important and forced us to take advantage of natural cover. The war has proved that, as far as missiles and maybe other sectors, taking advantage of natural cover is better than any practical means because it is—I mean in terms of buildings, shelters, or underground shelters—we take advantage of the folds of the ground, trees, and small tricks with simple measures. This would be better since we are not going to rely on the establishment of buildings that we are going to use, which is the only one we have. We are going to have many alternatives to natural cover. On July 31, which was one day or two before al-Nidaa' Day, the missile troops moved to the western area, moved to the western area and were ready to fire on Israel. We reduced the firing time to four hours from the time we received the order. The operation of liquid fuel missiles takes a long time; 24 hours would hardly be enough for us to carry out [the order to launch]. However, we took certain measures so that we could respond within four hours because Israel was threatening to strike us [Iraq] at any time and we had to be ready to respond to it [any attack] immediately. So, the immediate response requires reducing the time of the battle procedures as much as possible. We did not stay at the same place for more than two or three nights. Basically, we were supposed to change our location every night, but that was impossible, since all areas were going to be used [for operations]. The Chief of Staff of the Army then, General Hussein Rashid, and the operations

assistant Lieutenant General Sultan, he [*they*] used to emphasize the instructions of Your Excellency in every meeting... emphasize again on the fact not to stay [*in the same location*] even when he was at the advanced command site in Basra. Your Excellency used to ask about this point in every meeting also. I mean it became a continuous implementation or education for all groups and all officers.

[*Time Stamp: 00:20:53*]

Saddam: Stay about two days in the place to get some rest before the combat starts.

Hazem: Yes. And then -- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam: I mean -- [*Interrupted*]

Hazem: And then in a period that followed, Your Excellency ordered us to withdraw them [*the missiles and launchers*] towards Baghdad—all the equipment. Therefore, I inquired because it was going to take longer, I mean, it was going to put some constraints on the battle procedures while moving. So, I said the instant response is not the [*most*] important thing, but to take revenge by getting adequately prepared, I mean, is better. This way we wouldn't destroy [*any of*] our launchers; therefore, we withdrew them into places near Baghdad to make sure they were in a safer place and not empty—I mean, the areas were inhabited [*were not empty*] -- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam: I wanted them [*U.S. and Coalition forces*] to watch us at the time of withdrawing.

Hazem: Yes.

Saddam: They would get the news and they would hit their traditional places.

Hazem: Yes.

Saddam: And that is what really happened.

Hazem: The place where they were.

Saddam: At the expected edge of [*their*] firing [*range*], at the edge of the attack, we withdrew them, so for sure they stayed during that period about...

Hazem: Almost four months.

Saddam: Four months. By that time they got the news. Once they heard that they were withdrawn to Baghdad, what location would they expect [*to go*]? Towards their camps, and that's why al-Taji camp was hit very badly.

Hazem: Yes.

Saddam: [*Continues*] by their firing. However, we spread them in known places -- [*Interrupted*]

Hazem: Sir, also -- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam: Known.

Hazem: The simple plans with our capabilities -- [*Interrupted*]

Saddam: Besides, Baghdad has an air defense [*system*] that is better and more important than our entire air defense wherever the missiles are [*positioned*].

Hazem: Sir, simple means... we were hoping for camouflaged launchers. We were not fully convinced that they would serve the correct purpose, because the great deception or extensive camouflage requires great capabilities while our army was not entirely dedicated to this since the Kuwaiti sector as well as other sectors were important. Therefore, we built a brigade, a camouflaged missile brigade that is very similar to the Russian launchers, which are the old R-17 system and not al-Nidaa', and we set them up in places as if they were really in a camouflaged position. They were also hidden in a way that gives the sense of credibility to the enemy.

Saddam: They gave the sense of credibility so that they can see...

Hazem: I was not satisfied with this. I wanted to think, I mean, to increase our equipment. So, we have the ones you talked about, the Luna launchers, Arab and Luna's carriers that carry missiles only and don't [*possess*] launch [*capabilities*]. We have a lot of stock at the warehouse. So, we also prepared them and got them out for duty in more than two brigades. They got mixed up and we created a group that we called the "First Special Camouflage Group," but we did not call it... I mean, we omitted the word "camouflage" and we called it the "First Special Duty Group." We used it in the western area and another one very similar to it in the Kuwaiti sector, also. In spite of the Luna launchers, there was another brigade that moves amid the units there and changes its location. It is possible some of them were real and could launch. This took place at the western area. I would like to describe the situation in relation to the enemy's capabilities. Talking about the capabilities of the enemy, if we were interested in al-Hussein and other Russian launchers, I mean al-Hussein system, too, he [*the enemy*] did not see them because we were concerned about hiding and moving quickly and not entering the [*launching*] locations until the last minute. So, why did they [*the United States and Coalition forces*] not see the First Special Camouflage Group who had over 26 carriers and launchers? And they were also using tactics similar to the other missiles' tactics, but they did not launch. They used natural cover. We prohibited the use of radio [*wireless*]. We prohibited the use of radio by any means. We were using only the land lines or liaison officers. What emerged in Um al-Ma'arik and even in the glorious battle of Qadisiyya Saddam was because there were no liaison officers or good liaison panel. But we formed a large group to help us exchange communications between the western and southern area of the country. [*Time Stamp: 00:25:16*]

As far as the electronic devices that may help the enemy detect us, I prohibited their use. This happened with God's guidance because we were supposed to comply with the instructions that we received. But understanding the principles of war and the presence of Your Excellency, when we have the honor to meet with you or when you call or send one of the escort comrades or give

direct instructions related to our corps or support us from the Presidential Council or the secretary with a clear guidance to us or mobilizing the resources of the country, such as the Ministry of Oil with regard to the choice of targets or the Military Intelligence or the Air Forces or others, I mean, this is a great motive for us. So, at the last minute and before heading to the battle on the 15th, when the warning was given to Iraq, I prohibited the opening of the weather conditions' radar stations, because in the launching operations, we have to launch at a very high altitude into the air so that we can compensate for the difference in air conditions. So, I prohibited their use and some commanders said, "Had they any flexibility, we would have moved the stations but we would not have used them." I replied, "Don't move them so that you do not use them." This is also one of the war's secrets that the inspection teams don't know. They still don't know that we have used meteorological conditions [*radar*]. We gave them the launching rates that we documented while experimenting with the Military Industrialization Commission in previous years. We used to count them and additionally, launching used to take place in the western area, not towards Jordan or Israel, but rather towards Hafr al-Batin—in the al-Batin Valley. Therefore, when the [*statistics of*] weather conditions of several months of the year were available, we got statistics on them and used them, and realized that using them or not will not make a big difference in the accuracy [*of the missiles*]. The only difference is no more than 100 or 200 meters, while the missile's accuracy is better than that. Therefore, we used to shoot at the rate of... first of all, we had to use all equipment the first night. The first night we had to use all available equipment; therefore, we used—we had 14 launchers—I mean, 9 launchers—of the original corps, one reserve launcher that was for the training school, which we were able to prepare, making it a total of 10 launchers. We built four—I mean six Iraqi al-Nidaa' launchers, four of which were fully equipped and we used them all on Israel the first night. However, there were some failures and the missiles were not perfect. Failures appeared at the last minute, I mean, the failures occurred at the time of launching. Therefore, the maximum amount that was launched during the war was 10 missiles, 8 missiles the first night --
[*Interrupted*]

Saddam: In one second.

Hazem: Yes, in one second or at the same time. Therefore, when it was time to analyze [*the Gulf War*], and based on what we sensed from the [*UN*] inspection teams, they used to believe that we had at least two brigades in the Western area and two brigades in the Southern area, and that is why they were looking for them, looking for a larger number than 20 to 100 launchers. They said, "It is impossible for you to engage in a war with missiles that you launch on Israel and the dens of treason,"—they meant the Gulf and so forth, the colonial bases—"with 14 launchers. Of course, we have to count how many were active, how many [*were*] in reserve, and how many [*were*] undergoing maintenance." They also did not believe that we were on the move day and night. We moved day and night even on the express ways, but in small groups; we did not use a whole column like a parade or a unit presenting itself in a show, but we took the combat component only and sent it to the location. We managed without the command location... we managed without the administrative vehicle. We finished the survey a long time ago, the survey of the Western and Southern area. The information was in pocket [*in hand*] and an officer was watching them, as we were very concerned about protection against land infiltration. [*Time Stamp: 00:29:34*]

So, thank God, we did not face difficulties in this regard. Thank God who granted us success.

Saddam: You had a company from the Special Guard.

Hazem: We had a company from the Special Guard and we also had a Commando Brigade from the 4th Corps. We transferred all technical components that we were able to spare to protective components—to protective components. So, they hit the missile shelters and they hit locations which were not occupied, but they did not hit an occupied location during the war or close to it or a land communications joint [*hub*] that we were close to. They could not discover a location on their own during the inspections they performed because of the Security Council resolution that is enforced to this day. They could not find any location where we hid our equipment, because it is all natural cover and they enter [*the location*] near it [*the camouflaged equipment*]; they enter at about 100 or 200 meters, except for the locations we told them about. We were present according to the plan since we cannot say anything that will contradict what we have told them before. But they did not go on their own to a location where we hid [*things*] before or after the war, at all. This is regarding the al-Hussein missiles.

Our troops were confident. In the memoirs of de Pierre that were distributed to us and in the memoirs we wrote during the years of war, he claims that we were scared and our shooting became inaccurate and without guidance. Running the missile's technical operations requires more than one person. I mean, an engineer, technician or a military officer cannot operate the missile alone; it requires teamwork, and the nice thing about it is that no one can master his work completely, even if he kept working for many years on the same launcher, because the driver can operate, and so does the engine technician and electrician—I mean many teams. Therefore, they cannot spread the news to aim and fire randomly. This is not a gun or a rifle that one person or two are going to use. Maybe they were scared and that's why the shooting became inaccurate in the last stages, but, I mean, if we look at the facts, many targets were accurately hit in the end, I mean, at the end of the battle [*war*], shortly before the cease-fire. I was proud to say that they were so confident to the point where my son, who was in the 4th grade of elementary school at that time—I used to get him involved with the troops. My son Mohammed, who was in the 4th grade, launched two missiles himself. I mean, he pressed [*the button*] himself and launched the missile. If our people were confused as far as aircraft, I would have feared for my son, although all soldiers, officers and brothers are our sons, but he launched [*the missile*] on his own the same way he did when he was in the 1st grade of elementary school during or before the liberation battles. We used to plan and arrange for something and then rely on God, feeling confident and wishing that all launchers and missiles were sacrificed for the sake of the country. In this case, we would have used a higher rate of shooting had we, as military people [*recording ends abruptly*]...

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