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Chronology

1990

July

- 18** Saddam Hussein openly threatens to use force against Arab oil-exporting nations if they do not curb their excess production.
- 21** The CIA first reported Iraqi troop movement around the Kuwaiti border.
- 24** Saddam Hussein makes a public statement that was broadcast on Jordanian TV warning his fellow Arabs against U.S. domination in the Middle East.
- 25** Ambassador Glaspie meets with Saddam Hussein.

August

- 2** Iraq invades Kuwait. President Bush signs Executive Order #12722 freezing Kuwaiti assets in U.S. banks.
- 3** The UN votes 14-0 to condemn the invasion and demand the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. President Bush meets with NSC in Washington.
- 4** President Bush meets with NSC at Camp David. Schwarzkopf presents Operational Plan 90-1002.
- 5** European Community embargo on oil imports from Iraq and Kuwait.
- 6** King Fahd meets with Richard Cheney, requests U.S. military assistance.
- 7** UN orders trade and financial boycott of Iraq and occupied Kuwait.
- 8** President Bush sends U.S. Air force fighter planes to Saudi Arabia, along with thousands of paratroopers and an armored brigade.
- 9** Saddam Hussein declares annexation of Kuwait.
- 10** U.S. and allies announce naval blockade of Iraq. Bush begins his vacation at Kennebunkport.
- 16** Hussein threatens to use UN coalition hostages as "human shields."
- 17** UN Security Council votes unanimously on Resolution 664 that calls for the immediate release of all foreign nationals being detained. Tens of thousands of American troops land in Saudi Arabia (largest U.S. troop deployment since Vietnam).
- 22** President Bush authorizes call-up of 40,000 reservists.
- 26** The UN Security Council authorizes the use of force to compel compliance with economic sanctions.

September

- 9** President Bush and General Secretary Gorbachev meet in Helsinki for a summit on the crisis.
- 15** President Bush addresses a joint session of Congress.
- 26** UN votes to extend economic blockade to include air traffic.

October

- 3 U.S. Senate approves resolution supporting Bush's actions so far in the Gulf
- 10 CENTCOM's One Corps Concept unveiled at White House.
- 21 Colin Powell flies to Riyadh to discuss offensive plans.
- 25 Congressional leaders reserve right to reconvene Congress in case Bush declares war.
- 30 UN approves resolution warning of further, potentially aggressive means to liberate Kuwait.
- 31 Bush decides to double U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia; decision kept secret until November 8.

November

- 8 State Department announces that Bush administration will send at least 100,000 additional troops to Saudi Arabia (increasing the total to 350,000 by late December).
- 29 UN Security Council authorizes use of "all means necessary" to eject Iraq from Kuwait.

December

- 1 Bush invites Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz of Iraq to Washington.
- 10 Saddam Hussein sets approximately 1,000 hostages free.

1991

January

- 7 Hussein tells his army to be prepared for war: "Mother of all battles."
- 9 James Baker meets Tariq Aziz in Geneva in unsuccessful effort to find a peaceful solution. Bush calls on Congress to adopt a resolution supporting the use of force if Iraq does not withdraw from Kuwait by January 15.
- 13 Congress authorizes use of force by votes in Senate (52-47), and House (250-183).
- 14 UN Secretary meets with Hussein.
- 15 UN deadline for Iraqi withdrawal. Iraqi Parliament votes unanimously to support Hussein in a war against the U.S.
- 17 Allied attack begins with Apache strike at 2:38 A.M.
- 28 Cease-fire takes effect at 8 A.M. Bush announces that "Kuwait is liberated."

June

- 8 Victory parade in Washington, D.C.

Preface

The decision to go to war is one that defines a nation, both to the world and, perhaps more importantly, to itself. There is no more serious business for a national government, no more accurate measure of national leadership.

—Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*, 1991

I first became interested in the Gulf War out of necessity, not choice. As a member of the Naval Reserves in the summer of 1990 I followed the sensational events caused by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. I watched as my Commander-in-Chief responded to the crisis and troubled over his decision to authorize the call-up of 40,000 reservists. For the next six months I was officially on call.

Fortunately, I was never called back to active duty. I sat out the conflict in the security of my civilian lifestyle and, like many of my fellow Americans, pulled up my armchair, put on CNN, and watched as the Bush administration addressed the first major crisis of the post-Cold War era.

This thesis focuses on George Bush and his key advisors during the Gulf crisis, specifically, Bush's National Security Council (NSC). Both the advisory process and the advisors is examined because to separate the two would present only half the story. To focus only on the individual decision makers would, as Alex Hybel suggests, "deny the existence of systemic forces;"¹ while focusing on systemic forces alone implies that structure is more important than the thoughts and actions of individuals. In the imaginary continuum where on the extreme left is history making individuals and on the

extreme right is individuals making history, this thesis is situated slightly to the right. As it turns out, taking this position may be problematic.

As Hybel warns, "Empirical data depicting the beliefs, values, and intentions of decision makers is difficult to access and unreliable."² Undaunted by his words, I have compiled and interpreted just such empirical data. The aforementioned challenge was complicated by the contemporary nature of this historical event. Most of the State Department documents pertinent to my investigation are classified and Bush's memoirs are unpublished.

As a result I have relied heavily on three types of primary sources. First, the oral history of the Gulf crisis compiled by *Frontline* for their program entitled "The Gulf War," which aired in 1996. The making of "The Gulf War" took over a year and a half and incorporated interviews with over one hundred soldiers, airmen, civilian and political leaders.³ The second major source was Bob Woodward's uncontradicted account of the crisis depicted in his book, *The Commanders*, published in 1991. In the course of a year, Woodward interviewed over 400 people and sorted through hundreds of handwritten notes and memos. In Woodward's words, his book "falls between newspaper journalism and history." The third source of primary data came from the memoirs of James Baker, Colin Powell, and Norman Schwarzkopf. To verify their personal recollections, I compared their memoirs with their oral accounts and written documents. A compilation of major speeches, UN resolutions, Executive Orders, and other official documents were obtained from Michael Sifry's *The Gulf War Reader*, and

¹ Alex Roberto Hybel, *Power over Rationality: The Bush Administration and the Gulf Crisis* (New York: SUNY Press, 1993), xiv.

² Hybel, xv.

the National Records and Archives Department's *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*.

As new documents are declassified and released, and other members of the Bush administration publish their memoirs, the central argument of this thesis will either be strengthened or weakened. Because there is always a certain degree of uncertainty surrounding even the most heavily studied historical events, all one may hope for is temporary clarity. This thesis, then, is an attempt to provide this clarity by explaining and assessing the quality of American foreign policy, and policy makers, during the Gulf crisis.

President Bush and his key advisors made critical and momentous decisions that affected hundreds of nations and millions of lives. The decisions and the process, therefore, warrant careful examination.

³ See Bibliography for a list of the specific interviews.

Introduction

What difference does this analysis make for those who think that the U.S. policy was a success and the president made exactly the right decisions? To those who think that the result was successful, it may seem gratuitous to criticize the process that led to the decision. If the point were merely to criticize President Bush, this objection might be valid. But if the point is to learn from this crisis so that future crises with different presidents will be handled effectively, these factors are worth considering.

—James Pfiffner, *The Presidency and War*, 1993

On August 2, 1990, in the dark hours of early morning, 100,000 seasoned Iraqi troops in armored personnel carriers and tanks rolled over the border of Kuwait and began their short journey toward the capital. Within hours the entire nation of Kuwait was at the mercy of the President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein.

That afternoon, in a radio message delivered from Baghdad, Hussein announced that Kuwait had been annexed and that this merger was permanent. He then declared that the former nation of Kuwait would henceforth be known as Iraqi province number nineteen. This invasion came as the democratic nations of the West were celebrating the demise of world Communism. The optimistic mood which accompanied the end of the Cold War was short lived.

In the months following the invasion of Kuwait, President George Bush orchestrated a massive diplomatic coalition of nations. A vast net of economic sanctions covered Iraq. The UN coalition forces attacked the Iraqi Army in mid January 1991, and within 45 days drove them out of Kuwait. Seven months after his invasion, Hussein's

army surrendered, unconditionally, to the victorious allied commander General Norman Schwarzkopf. President Bush's objectives had been met: Kuwait had been liberated and the legitimate government restored. As an added political and strategic bonus, some of Iraq's nuclear and chemical weapons factories had been destroyed, and their war making machine had been reduced by two-thirds. Best of all, Japan, Germany, and the Arab nations contributed \$54 billion, which accounted for almost 90 percent of the overall cost of the campaign.⁴

On the surface, the Persian Gulf War was a military and diplomatic triumph for the United States. In the wake of Operation Desert Storm, President Bush's approval rating peaked around seventy percent giving him a level of popularity with the American people that only President Kennedy, after the Cuban missile crisis, had attained.

Therefore, to question the success of the Gulf war in military terms would be foolish. The U.S. led UN coalition forces made quick work of the fourth largest military in the world. To question the Bush administration's decision-making process in light of this overwhelming military victory, and, taking into consideration the delicate diplomatic situation they faced in the Middle East, might also seem illogical. Nevertheless, as members of a democratic Republic, we have both a right and a responsibility to question government policy at all levels. Sometimes even the most successful war, brilliant in strategy, noble in cause, and absolute in victory, may only represent an unsuccessful peace exposing both a flaw in diplomacy and ultimately a deficiency in leadership.

⁴ Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 493.

Did President Bush's handling of the Persian Gulf crisis represent a failure for U.S. foreign policy, or a success? Focusing on the eight month period leading up to the Gulf War (June 90 to January 91), this thesis will address this question by examining three issues: first, U.S. policy toward Iraq prior to the invasion; second, Bush's advisory process during the crisis; and third, the influence of the "Vietnam syndrome" on the decision-making process of the Bush administration.

Part I

U.S. Middle East Policy

Let me reassure you, as my Ambassador, Senator Dole and others have done, that my Administration continues to desire better relations with Iraq. We will also continue to support our other friends in the region with whom we have had long-standing ties. We see no necessary inconsistency between these two objectives.

—President Bush Message to Saddam Hussein,
28 July 1990

Tension, misunderstanding, and military conflict are problems that have longed plagued the Persian Gulf. As historian Lester Brune appropriately warns “. . . the United States and the world must understand that unlike the destruction of much of Iraq’s military power, these long term problems did not vanish when Iraq accepted the United Nations cease-fire. . . .”⁵ Despite his post invasion media image as a power-hungry madman, Hussein’s risk was both rational and calculated. A brief history of the region, then, is necessary for a more accurate interpretation of Hussein’s decision to invade Kuwait.

Origins of the Conflict

Since World War I, U.S. foreign policy has been dynamic in the Persian Gulf. For the sake of manageability, however, this thesis begins with the presidency of James Carter.

⁵ Lester Brune, *America and the Iraqi Crisis: Origins and Aftermath* (Claremont, Ca.: Regina Books, 1993), 2.

Throughout the 1970s, the U.S. government encouraged American weapons manufacturers to provide the Persian Gulf with military hardware. Iran alone purchased \$8.3 billion worth of arms between 1970 and 1979, while Saudi Arabia purchased \$3.2 billion. Iraq's arms purchases during that same nine year period totaled \$7 billion.⁶ Along with military hardware came U.S. military advisors and support. The balance of power in the Gulf began to shift.

In reaction to the perceived threats to American interests which were represented by both the November 1979 Iranian Shiite hostage crisis and the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, President Carter announced: "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."⁷ This pledge became known as the Carter Doctrine, and it marked a transition to a new era for U.S. policy in the region.

In July 1979, after a bloody but successful coup, Hussein became president of Iraq. His July takeover came only five months after the Shiite fundamentalist Ayahtolla Khomeini seized the reins of leadership in neighboring Iran. Hussein's Baath Party, with its secular doctrine, was immediately in competition with Khomeini's Shiite fanaticism for control and domination of the Persian Gulf region. This competition erupted into war in 1980.

The Iran-Iraq War lasted nine years, from 1980 to 1988. When President Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, his advisors were immediately taxed with the job of

⁶ Joe Stork, "From Rapid Deployment to Massive Deployment," eds. Michael L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf, *The Gulf War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions* (New York: Time Books, 1991), 35.

⁷ Stork, 34.

formulating a stronger policy for the volatile and unpredictable Gulf region. The Reagan administration had the difficult choice of supporting either Hussein's secular, terrorist state or Khomeini's religious, terrorist state. Policy came down to "the enemy of my enemy's, my friend." Khomeini's overthrow of the Shah and the American hostage crisis destroyed Iran's relationship with the U.S. Reagan selected the popular option: Iraq.

Reagan and his administration publicly supported Iraq; but at the same time they sent secret arms shipments to Iran. Although this practice came to an abrupt stop in November 1986 when a Lebanese newspaper disclosed secret U.S. shipments of TOW anti-tank and Hawk anti-aircraft missiles to Iran, the Iran-Contra scandal exposed the double dealing nature of U.S. Middle East policy.⁸ Consequently, America's fragile credibility in the Persian Gulf suffered further damage.

After the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq existed in a state of policy limbo. Bush had recently taken office and was preoccupied with the momentous events unfolding in Eastern Europe, Berlin, and the Soviet Union. Bush inherited from Reagan a tradition of policy ambiguity that characterized U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East. Consequently, Iraq retained its favorable standing in Washington. This relationship was unquestioned until Iraqi tanks rolled over the border of Kuwait and into the capital city. Why did Hussein decide to risk his cozy relationship with the U.S.? A better understanding of Hussein and his motives for invading Kuwait warrant consideration before this question can be addressed.

⁸ Brune, 48.

Dire Straits: Hussein's Claims and Threats

Eight years of bloody warfare against Iran had devastating consequences for Iraq. First, the war solidified Hussein in the role as absolute ruler of his country. The military dictatorship established under an emergency situation remained firmly in place when the fighting ended. Second, Iraq had the fourth largest standing army in the world. Large scale military spending and domestic recruiting had left Hussein with an experienced fighting force ready for action. Third, the war had emptied the state coffers, leaving Iraq with a massive debt. Many nations, including the U.S., Germany, and France, had loaned Iraq billions of dollars during the war for the procurement of food and sophisticated weaponry. Iraq emerged from the war militarily strong but financially in debt. Hussein had solidified his personal power as a result of the war, but the desperate state of the economy threatened continued grass roots political support. In order for Iraq to survive as a nation, and Hussein to survive as its leader, the economic suffering needed to be alleviated.

Iraq's claims against Kuwait represented a significant financial and strategic urgency for Hussein. Kuwait's northern border crossed over a small portion of the gigantic Rumaila oil field. During the Iran-Iraq War, Kuwait took advantage of Hussein's preoccupation and drilled into this field, pumping off billions of dollars worth of crude oil. Hussein demanded compensation for this oil and a border adjustment which would give Iraq the sole rights to this field.

The Iran-Iraq War exposed another problem Iraq hoped to solve through demands upon Kuwait: direct access to the sea. Hussein made a claim for the two islands of Warba and Bubiyan with the intention of building a naval base there. Hussein's last

grievance centered on the war loans he had taken from Kuwait. Although not directly involved in the war, Kuwait had signed a treaty with Iraq to protect its shipping from a hostile Iran. Hussein reasoned that because his nation had carried the economic burden of keeping Khomeini in check and because his people had suffered great losses in human lives, his war debt should be forgiven. In the midst of negotiating these claims, Hussein became frustrated with the diplomatic process and turned to the tactic with which he was most accustomed: military force.

Missed Signals and Policy Ambiguity

In a February 24, 1989 speech in Amman to members of the Arab League, Hussein spoke of an “Imperialist-Zionist plot” to control and divide Arab unity.⁹ This alleged Western/Israeli scheme could only be foiled, he argued, if the Arab nations united behind his leadership. The Arab leaders quickly rejected his bid for power. Hussein’s harsh rhetoric and brutal reputation were seen as a detriment to the peaceful Western relations which the Arab leaders needed for their continued economic prosperity. In this meeting, and in several others in the months that followed, Hussein urged his neighbors to lower oil production as well. He wanted the OPEC nations to limit supply, which would drive up the price of oil, and alleviate some of his economic troubles. Here again, the leaders of the Arab nations were unsympathetic. As Hussein’s desperation grew, he saw the annexation of rich Kuwait as a potential source of relief.

The Bush administration was aware of Hussein’s attempts to unify the Arab nations, but this activity was disregarded as a threat to U.S. interests in the region. Even after Hussein’s February speech, in which he urged the Arab nations to withdraw oil

money from the U.S. and demand the withdrawal of U.S. naval forces in the Gulf, the Bush administration did not take notice or offense. In fact, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie dismissed Hussein's recent tirade against the U.S. as "a simple blowing-off of steam" in response to a recent State Department report that criticized Iraq for alleged human rights violations.¹⁰

Assistant Secretary of State John Kelly contributed to the ambiguity by commenting after a February visit with Hussein that he saw the Iraqi leader as a "force of moderation in the region."¹¹ Kelly and Glaspie are not the only two who missed the anti-West signals coming out of Baghdad. In a public statement, broadcast on Jordanian TV on July 24, Hussein remarked:

The country that will have the greatest influence in the region, through the Arab Gulf and its oil, will maintain its superiority as a superpower without equal to compete with it. This means that if the Gulf people, along with all Arabs, are not careful, the Arab Gulf region will be governed by the wishes of the United States. . . .¹²

This statement went virtually unnoticed at the time. Hussein often used inflammatory language and made idle threats. Earlier that year he had threatened Israel prompting U.S. policy makers to take notice of Hussein's growing discontent.

On April 2, Hussein announced that Iraq had successfully built a powerful new chemical weapon. With the memory of the 1981 Israeli bomber attack on an uncompleted Iraqi nuclear power plant still fresh in his memory, Hussein warned against a repeat performance, declaring, "By God, . . . we will make a fire eat up half of Israel,

⁹ Saddam Hussein, quoted in Theodor Draper, "American Hubris," eds. Michael L Sifry and Christopher Cerf, *The Gulf War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions*, 55.

¹⁰ April Glaspie, quoted in Brune, 50.

¹¹ Don Oberdorfer, "Missed Signals in the Middle East," *Washington Post Magazine*, March 1991, 20.

if it tries to do anything against Iraq.”¹³ This statement, as historian Jean Edward Smith has observed, “set off alarm bells in the State Department.”¹⁴ Spokespersons responded with statements that “This type of behavior would not be tolerated,”¹⁵ calling Hussein’s threats “inflammatory, irresponsible, and outrageous.”¹⁶ These bells, however, were soon muffled by the leaders of the Arab world who came to the defense of Hussein and discouraged the U.S. from responding.

King Hussein of Jordan publicly vowed his support for Iraq by declaring, “We stand by Iraq and will always do so.”¹⁷ Hussein tried to defuse the situation by asking King Fahd of Saudi Arabia to speak to the U.S. on his behalf and assure them that his threat against Israel was idle.¹⁸ With the end of the Cold War distracting U.S. and world attention, and assurances from Hussein, the issue quietly slipped from the public spotlight. Hussein misinterpreted this lack of interest.

Hussein apparently assumed that the U.S. and Israel would remain uninvolved in his affairs. Satellite photos taken the first week after the invasion revealed that Hussein left his western flank unguarded from Israel.¹⁹ Hussein and his military leaders were seasoned veterans. To concentrate the bulk of their defenses along the Saudi border and Gulf coast and to neglect their western flank was a calculated risk made possible by U.S. diplomatic ambiguity prior to the invasion.

¹² Saddam Hussein, Speech printed in *The Economist*, September 1990, 19.

¹³ Hussein, *The Economist*, 20.

¹⁴ Smith, 7.

¹⁵ Margaret Tutwiler, quoted in Gerald Seib, “UN He Seeks Peace in the Gulf,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 1 October 1990.

¹⁶ Margaret Tutwiler, quoted in Gordon Michael, “Cracking the Whip,” *The New York Times*, 3 April 1990.

¹⁷ Youssef M. Ibrahim, “Iraq, in Retaliation, Ousts an American Envoy,” *New York Times*, 10 April 1990, sec. A-5.

¹⁸ Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1991), 199.

Mixed Messages

U.S. policy toward Iraq was uncoordinated and lacked direction. Congress had its own agenda in Iraq which at times ran counter to the president's. Just one week after Senator Robert Dole's June trip to Baghdad with assurances that "he [President Bush] wants better relations, and the U.S. government wants better relations with Iraq,"²⁰ the White House suspended \$500 million in agricultural loan guarantees to Iraq. These mixed signals discouraged Hussein's trust. Ambassador Glaspie was left the task of adjusting theory with practice.

The CIA first reported Iraqi troop movement around the Kuwaiti border on July 21, 1990.²¹ Bush responded quickly. He sent aerial refueling tankers into the area and ordered the U.S. ships in the Gulf to conduct joint operations with the United Arab Emirates. This act was intended to "bolster a friend and lay down a marker for Hussein."²² The State Department made an official statement that "we do not have any defense treaties with Kuwait. . ." but went on to add that, "we also remain strongly committed to supporting the individual and collective self-defense of our friends in the gulf with whom we have deep and long-standing ties."²³ Adding to the ambiguity of the situation, the *Washington Post* quoted a U.S. military official as stating, "We are not going to war, but you are going to see exercises and you are going to see ships."²⁴ In the middle of this inconsistency was April Glaspie. Hussein summoned Glaspie to a meeting on July 25, in order to make his position clear to the U.S. and determine what

¹⁹ Woodward, 239.

²⁰ Woodward, 204.

²¹ Jean Edward Smith, *George Bush's War* (New York: Holt and Co., 1992), 52.

²² Nora Boustany, "U.S. Pursues Diplomatic Solution," *Washington Post*, 25 July 1990, sec A-17.

²³ Boustany, A-17.

the official U.S. policy would be if his dispute with Kuwait worsened into military conflict. This meeting marked a crucial stage in the escalating Gulf crisis. An official U.S. representative in Iraq was face-to-face with Hussein. Glaspie had the opportunity to state clearly and unequivocally the U.S. position should Hussein threaten Kuwait. But Glaspie, acting on instructions, remained noncommittal.²⁵

Ambassador Glaspie: Appeasement or Conciliation

Glaspie told Hussein, "I have direct instructions from President Bush to seek better relations with Iraq." Responding to tales of economic woe Glaspie continued to cajole Hussein:

I think I can understand this. I have lived here for years. I admire your extraordinary efforts to rebuild your country. I know you need funds. We understand that and our opinion is that you should have the opportunity to rebuild your country. But we have no opinion on the Arab to Arab conflict, like your border disagreement with Kuwait.²⁶

This last declaration implied that the U.S. would remain noncommittal. Without U.S. involvement, Hussein could have easily controlled his Arab neighbors. It is immaterial whether Hussein attended the meeting with the intention of invading Kuwait. It is also immaterial whether Hussein had planned, as some now speculate, to invade Kuwait as early as 1988.²⁷ This meeting was significant because Hussein left confident that the U.S. would stay out of an Arab to Arab conflict.

²⁴ Boustany, A-17.

²⁵ George Bush, the text of Bush's cable printed in *Washington Post*, 13 July 1991.

²⁶ April Glaspie, quoted in, Elaine Sciolino "U.S. Gave Iraq Little Reason Not to Mount Kuwait Assault," *The New York Times*, 23 September 1990, sec. A-1.

²⁷ Christopher Hitchens, "Realpolitik in the Gulf: A Game Gone Tilt," Sifry, 109.

Wafic al Samarraï, the former head of the Iraqi Military, commented in 1996 on the likelihood that Hussein was not adequately discouraged from invading Kuwait:

I am not convinced that the USA was the party that gave Saddam the green light to go ahead in his plans but, on the other hand, I am convinced that the USA did not take a decisive and tough line to deter Saddam from doing this invasion. The indications were very clear. They had the ability to deter Saddam. For instance, there was no ultimatum or warning issued in public or in secret that could deter Saddam. The U.S. reaction was very weak, cold. Because, despite the fact that American satellites were monitoring the movements of the Iraqi forces, and it was clear to them that there was massive army build-up, the USA did not issue a warning to Saddam Hussein. This really raised a big question mark.²⁸

The Failure of the Bush administration to send a strong signal to Iraq could not be blamed on a lack of intelligence information. In fact, all the satellite information regarding the size and location of the Iraqi troops along the Kuwait border indicated that an attack was more likely than not. Accordingly, on July 28, CIA director Richard Kerr urged Secretary of State James Baker to issue a stern warning to Hussein. Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz also felt a need to “send a shot across Hussein’s bow.”²⁹ Toward that end he began working on a plan that, if authorized, would move a fleet of Maritime Pre-positioning Ships to Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.³⁰ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Colin Powell, however, disapproved of this plan for the simple reason that Kuwait had not asked for help. Furthermore, for reasons discussed in more detail in part III, Powell was unwilling to

²⁸ Wafis al Samarraï, Interviewed on *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting Service, 1 August 1996, available from <http://www.pbs.org/frontline/gulf/oral/>.

²⁹ Woodward, 214.

³⁰ U.S. News and World Report, *Triumph Without Victory* (New York: Random House, 1992), 47.

commit troops to a potential conflict without a clear political and military objective. The U.S. deliberately chose not to act.

On July 30, Walter Lang, the Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) national intelligence officer for the Middle East, warned General Harry Soyster, the director of the agency, that:

I do not believe he [Hussein] is bluffing . . . I have been looking at the pattern of reinforcements along the Kuwaiti border, there is some artillery and logistics moving; aircraft are moving. There is absolutely no reason for Saddam to do this, it doesn't make any sense if his aim is to intimidate Kuwait. He has created the capability to overrun all of Kuwait and Eastern Saudi Arabia. If he attacks, given his disposition, we will have no warning.³¹

Lang had been interpreting the daily satellite photos taken over the region ever since the morning of July 16, when he first discovered troop movement along the Kuwaiti border. As a retired Army colonel with over twenty years experience in the intelligence community, it was Lang's job to both analyze the physical photographic evidence and to speculate as to its significance. Lang's July 30 warning to his director was based on his theory that Hussein had moved too large a force to the region if his intention was only to intimidate Kuwait. In the conclusion of his official DIA report, Lang asserted that, "Hussein has moved a force disproportionate to the task at hand, if it is to bluff."³² Furthermore, because Kuwait lacked the same intelligence gathering capacity as the U.S., such an intimidating show of force would go undetected by the Kuwaiti government. As Bob Woodward reasons, "Saddam could not have known for certain that the U.S. would share this information. So if 100,000 troops was only a show of

³¹ Walter Lang, quoted in *Triumph Without Victor*, 8.

force, a demonstration, it was being lost on the audience it was designed to influence—Kuwait.”³³

Misread Signals

Lang passed his report on to the proper authorities. Although DIA Director Soyster disagreed with Lang’s conclusions, he found them intriguing enough to pass along the chain of command. The report was hand delivered to both Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and Chairman Colin Powell. Both men reviewed the document but did not act on its assumptions.³⁴

On July 31, *the Washington Post* reported on the Iraqi troop build-up along the Kuwaiti border and mentioned the suspected 100,000 troop strength.³⁵ Hussein no longer needed to guess whether or not the U.S. shared intelligence information with Kuwait. It no longer mattered. The media informed Kuwait that a massive Iraqi force existed on its border. Hussein’s cards were on the table. The U.S. had known his troop strength for weeks, and now so did Kuwait and the rest of the world. The attention of the world media now shifted to Hussein and the Middle East. The U.S. never took the threat of an invasion seriously enough to take the appropriate diplomatic precaution of issuing a stern warning. Consequently, Saddam Hussein had the advantage and was on the offensive instead of George Bush.

Sometime during the morning of August 1, the Iraqi military spread itself out into an offensive posture and advanced within three miles of the Kuwaiti border. When Lang reviewed the August 1 satellite image, he noticed this movement and immediately sent

³² Lang, quoted in Woodward, 217.

³³ Woodward, 217.

³⁴ *Triumph Without Victory*, 9.

another warning to the senior officials in the Pentagon. This time he warned of an imminent attack that he predicted would come within twenty-four hours. Powell had Schwarzkopf, Commander-in-Chief of Central Command (CENTCOM), brief Cheney and all five members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the current situation (CENTCOM was responsible for the Middle East and Southeast Asia).

Schwarzkopf told his colleagues that he doubted Hussein would attack.

Schwarzkopf contended that in order for Hussein's bluff to be taken seriously he had to take up this new more aggressive posture along the border.³⁶ Powell, however, was no longer convinced that Hussein's intention was only to intimidate:

Military men look for three surefire clues that an enemy force is preparing to attack. Is it moving its artillery forward? Is it laying down communications? Is it reinforcing its forces logistically, with fuel and ammunition? By July 31, all three conditions were present in southern Iraq.³⁷

Of course, this is a good example of 20/20 hindsight. Immediately after the August 1 briefing, Powell told Cheney, "This is serious. We can't ignore what's going on. I think the President should get off a tough message to Saddam today . . . try to scare him off." But as Powell later admitted in 1995, "it was too late" (461). Before the administration had a chance to send any such warning to Hussein, his Republican Guard was celebrating its victory in the streets of Kuwait City. Washington officials had misread the signals of conflict that had been emanating from the Middle East all summer.

³⁵ Dan Balz, "Baghdad's Troops Seen Near Border," *Washington Post*, 30 August 1989, sec. A.

³⁶ Colin Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1995), 463.

³⁷ Powell, 461.

Part II

Bush's Advisory Process

New world order—have to be principled and stand up to aggression. Don't make same mistake we did in 30s; or same as in Vietnam—uncertain, tentative, etc.—if we go in we have to have *massive* force.

—Secretary of State James Baker (Briefing Notes),
21 October 1990

We are the only ones who can tell the President what to do. He will look to us. The others can't do it. So what do we do?

—Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney,
2 August 1990

Bush Responds

Shortly after 9 p.m. on August 1, President Bush received notification that Iraqi tanks and armored personnel carriers had crossed the Kuwaiti border at two points and were moving south and east toward Kuwait City. Before midnight he issued a public statement that called for “the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces,” and before dawn of the following day Bush issued and signed two executive orders freezing over \$100 billion worth of Kuwaiti assets to protect them from Hussein.³⁸

On Thursday morning, August 2, President Bush called a brief press conference and declared, “We are not discussing intervention.” On Sunday, August 5, stepping down from a helicopter onto the North lawn of the White House, Bush remarked: “I view very

³⁸ Executive Order #12722, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the National Register, National Records and Archives Department, 1990), v.26, no. 31, 2 August. p. 1152.

seriously our determination to reverse this aggression This will not stand, this will not stand. This aggression against Kuwait."³⁹ This reversal of opinion during the first week of August reveals much about both Bush's advisory process and his personal decision-making style.

The NSC: Take One

The day after he learned of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Bush was scheduled to speak at a conference in Aspen Colorado. Before leaving Washington, however, Bush called an early morning meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) to discuss the possible U.S. responses.

The NSC is comprised of both members and advisors. The members included National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, Vice President Dan Quayle, Secretary of State James Baker, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, and the presiding member, George Bush. The advisors included Director of Central Intelligence William Webster, Chairman JCS General Colin Powell, White House Chief of Staff John Sununu, UN Ambassador Thomas Pickering, and Commander-in-Chief of CENTCOM General Norman Schwarzkopf. They met in the Cabinet room of the White House at 8 a.m. Thursday, August 2.

William Casey opened the meeting with an intelligence briefing that outlined the military details of the Iraqi Invasion. Casey's report revealed that a massive force of approximately 100,000 Iraqi troops had quickly and decisively overrun Kuwait. The NSC notified Bush that the UN Security Council had met the previous night and

³⁹ Ann Devroy, "Bush's Plan: Loosen Grip of Saddam," *The Washington Post*, 6 August 1990, sec. A.

condemned the invasion but had not yet moved to freeze Iraqi and Kuwaiti assets.⁴⁰ At this point Bush took control of the meeting.⁴¹

As a former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Bush understood the importance of quick and decisive UN action. In the televised press conference given prior to the NSC meeting Bush predicted, "I'm sure there will be a lot of frenzied diplomatic activity. I plan to participate in some of that myself."⁴² He was determined to build a diplomatic coalition against Iraq and wanted Baker, Scowcroft, and Pickering to immediately begin working toward that end. Bush understood that any action taken against Iraq, whether military or economic, could only succeed if supported by world opinion. Bush hoped, as will be explored further in section III, that the public relations nightmare of Vietnam not be repeated. Bush, regardless of policy direction, insisted that the U.S. not stand alone.

After diplomatic matters had been addressed, the focus shifted to the economic ramifications of Hussein's invasion. Bush had made part of his fortune as a Texas oil man and, therefore, understood first hand the economic significance of Iraq's actions. With Kuwait, Hussein now controlled 20 percent of the world's oil supply. If he moved on Saudi Arabia, Hussein would add another 25 percent. The U.S. economy in 1990 suffered from a devastating recession and higher oil prices would only exacerbate inflation. Scowcroft invoked the memory of 1987-88, when the world oil supply had been disrupted during the Iran-Iraq war with Iran's attacks on super tankers in the

⁴⁰ Woodward, 225.

⁴¹ Powell, 463.

⁴² George J. Church, "The Tale of Two Bushes," *Time*, 7 January 1991, 20.

Persian Gulf.⁴³ The Reagan administration responded by flagging Kuwaiti tankers. Bush had both the Carter Doctrine and Reagan's precedent to support a claim that vital U.S. interests were threatened. With the diplomatic and economic questions addressed, the President heard his military options.

Powell, along with Cheney, were Bush's primary advisors on military matters. The Middle East, South Asia, and the Horn of Africa fell under the realm of Schwarzkopf's CENTCOM. Based on the satellite photos that had initially exposed Iraqi troop build-up on the Kuwaiti border, Powell had instructed Schwarzkopf to "come up with a two-tiered response" if Hussein invaded. Tier-One would provide the U.S. with "a wide range of retaliatory options if Hussein commits a minor border infraction" while Tier-Two would provide options that would "stop him and protect the region" if Hussein's intentions were "more ambitious."⁴⁴ Schwarzkopf briefed his fellow NSC members.

Schwarzkopf's first tier responses called for a limited air strike of strategic and economic targets such as the Iraqi Army in Kuwait, the Iraqi tankers in the Gulf, or the Iraqi owned pipeline that ran through both Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The army and air force lacked forces in the region and therefore naval carrier groups would initiate the strike. Schwarzkopf's second tier response was far more intricate. It was designed with the defense of the Saudi Arabian Peninsula in mind and called for a massive U.S. commitment of troops: at least 200,000 combined troops from all of the services. This plan required the establishment of massive U.S. bases and the presence of at least two carrier battle groups.⁴⁵

⁴³ Woodward, 227.

⁴⁴ Powell, 460.

⁴⁵ Woodward, 228.

The President was presented with a variety of diplomatic, economic, and strategic options during this NSC meeting. No policy decisions, however, were made. Powell later wrote, "The talk was disjointed and unfocused. As much time was spent discussing the impact of the invasion on the price of oil as how we should respond to Saddam's aggression. . . . the fate of Kuwait was left unresolved."⁴⁶

The Munich Conference and Aspen, Colorado

After the meeting adjourned President Bush then boarded a helicopter on the North lawn of the White House and made his first public statement on the invasion stating, "We are not discussing intervention. I'm not contemplating such action."⁴⁷ It is clear that, after his meeting with the NSC, Bush was noncommittal. The invasion of Kuwait posed no immediate threat to U.S. security. Bush then proceeded with business-as-usual and, keeping to his schedule, flew to Colorado.

The 8 a.m. NSC meeting left Bush and his advisors with more questions than answers. Would the UN act in force to condemn Iraq's act of aggression with massive economic sanctions? Would Saudi Arabia facilitate Schwarzkopf's Tier-Two response by allowing U.S. troops on their soil? Bush was eager to begin "frenzied diplomatic activities" and he utilized the flight time from Washington to Aspen to contact U.S. allies in the Middle East.

President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, and King Hussein of Jordan were meeting in Alexandria to discuss the crisis when Bush called.⁴⁸ King Hussein informed Bush that he had spoken to Hussein about the invasion and had been assured by the Iraqi leader that

⁴⁶ Powell, 462.

⁴⁷ Lisa Beyer, "What Kind of Peace?" *Time Magazine*, 28 January 1991, 39.

⁴⁸ Smith, 64.

"Within a week we'll be gone." The King cautioned Bush that the Iraqi leader "would not respond positively to threats or intimidation" (66). Both Arab leaders warned Bush to allow time for an "Arab solution" to the problem (67). This seemed the most consistent and prudent course for Bush to take. After all, the official U.S. policy expressed by Ambassador Glaspie, in her July 25 meeting with Hussein, clearly indicated where the U.S. stood: "we have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflict like your border disagreement with Kuwait."

The Thatcher Factor

"Margaret, what is your view?" and so indeed I told him that aggressors must be stopped, not only stopped, but they must be thrown out. An aggressor cannot gain from his aggression. He must be thrown out and really, by that time in my mind, I thought we ought to throw him out so decisively that he could never think of doing it again.⁴⁹

—Margaret Thatcher, *Frontline*, 1996

Bush was en route to Colorado to attend an international conference that addressed the new world order following the decline of Communism. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was scheduled to receive the Aspen Institute's Statesman Award and Bush planned to unveil his plan to reduce the U.S. military by twenty-five percent. The crisis in the Persian Gulf lent importance to this otherwise minor conference. Bush and Thatcher went to Colorado to define their nations' roles in the new world order. The crisis in the Gulf brought them global attention and, ironically, presented them with their first test to enforce order in the new post-Cold War era.

⁴⁹ Margaret Thatcher, Interviewed on *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting Service, 1 August 1996, available from <http://www.pbs.org/frontline/gulf/oral/>.

Bush met with Thatcher immediately upon his arrival in Aspen. Shortly after this meeting Bush remarked to the press, "We're not ruling any options in, but we're not ruling any options out."⁵⁰ During their meeting Thatcher had pledged Britain's support and assured Bush that France could be counted on as well, stating, "[French President] Mitterand will give you trouble until the end, but when the ship sails, France will be there."⁵¹ Thatcher's statement that "Hussein must be stopped" left no doubt in Bush's mind as to her position.⁵² If military intervention was required, Bush could count on international support.

In a press conference later that day, Bush added to the growing policy ambiguity, stating that Hussein's actions were "intolerable" and that the invasion was totally "unjustified." He replaced his earlier, more moderate statements with a call for the "international community to act together to ensure that Iraqi forces leave Kuwait immediately."⁵³ Thatcher also took part in this press conference. Her rhetoric was even more emotionally charged than Bush's. Thatcher indicated that the invasion was evidence of "the evil in human nature" and urged the UN members to "stand up and be counted because a vital interest is at stake: an aggressor must never be allowed to get his way."⁵⁴

Bush was away from Washington and somewhat isolated from his vast advisory machine. Furthermore, he uttered most of his statements and declarations in response to questions from the press. This was not official policy. When examined in retrospect, this

⁵⁰ Woodward, 231.

⁵¹ Margaret Thatcher, quoted in Beyer, 41.

⁵² Tom Mathews, "The Road to War," *Newsweek*, 28 January 1991, 58.

⁵³ Smith, 67.

becomes more significant. The U.S. policy that developed over the next three months reflected this mood of outrage that Bush and Thatcher had generated at the Aspen conference. In a twenty-four hour period, without formal consultation with his advisors, Bush committed the U.S., at least in spirit, to the liberation of Kuwait. Bush returned to Washington the following day.

The NSC: Take Two

On Friday, August 3, The NSC again convened in the Cabinet room of the White House. Bush began the meeting with the understatement that, "It sure has been some twenty-four hours."⁵⁴ The UN had voted 14-0 to condemn the invasion and demanded the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev offered Soviet support. Prime Minister Thatcher pledged her full support to any firm stance the U.S. took, and Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar was preparing to invite American military forces into his country. Bush's "diplomatic frenzy" was starting to pay off, and Tier-Two moved from plan to reality.

This Friday meeting proceeded similar to Thursday's. Bush was given a variety of diplomatic, economic, and military considerations. The difference was that U.S. military options were emphasized. CIA director Webster reported:

The Iraqis are within eight tenths of a mile from the Saudi border. If Saddam stays where he is he'll own twenty percent of the world's oil reserves. And a few miles away he can seize another twenty percent. He'll have easy access to the sea from Kuwaiti ports. Jordan and Yemen will probably tilt toward him, and he'll be in a

⁵⁴ George Melloan, "Why so Many Errors in the Mideast?" *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 August 1990, sec. A-13.

⁵⁵ George Bush quoted in Powell, 436.

position to extort the others. We can expect the Arab states to start cutting deals. Iran will be at Iraq's feet. Israel will be threatened."⁵⁶

Scowcroft added "We've got to make a response and accommodating Saddam is not an option." Cheney joined the chorus, warning, "You can't separate Kuwait from Saudi Arabia," only to be followed by Deputy Secretary of State Larry Eagleburger's suggestion that Washington should secure a UN resolution authorizing both sanctions and military force.⁵⁷ All voices seemed to echo the same message: military force was a vital component to any and all policy considerations. Powell came the closest to offering a voice of dissent. He remarked, ". . . it's important to plant the American flag in the Saudi desert as soon as possible," and was concerned that inaction by the U.S. would "embolden Saddam further" (464). He then posed an interesting rhetorical question, ". . . is it worth going to war to liberate Kuwait" (464)? Powell was not playing devil's advocate. As Chairman of the JCS his primary concern was to see that all possible contingencies were explored:

Before we start talking about how many divisions, carriers, and fighter wings we need, I said, we have to ask, to achieve what end? But the question was not answered before the meeting broke up⁵⁸

Only two days into the crisis, Bush's advisors deemed U.S. military intervention inevitable. Worst of all, Bush's advisors seemed unified in their council. Everyone operated and thought in sync. Where were the alternative strategies? Why was there no devil's advocate in the group?

⁵⁶ William Webster quoted in Powell, 463.

⁵⁷ Powell, 464.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 465.

According to Jean Smith, Bush's advisors, had in the past, "demonstrated their dedication to serving the president's interest," and, therefore, were not "prone to provide independent council or unpopular advice."⁵⁹ Bush's advisors were veterans of the Washington political establishment. Scowcroft sat on the Tower Commission that had investigated Reagan's role in the Iran-Contra scandal. Webster had taken over the CIA after the scandal created the need for a change of the guard. Cheney had been the leading House Republican during the period and took part in the investigation as well. Powell served as deputy National Security Advisor under John Poindexter and took over the position when the scandal forced his boss into early retirement. As Republicans, at odds with a Democratic Congress throughout the 80s, they had faced many political battles together and had for the most part survived unscathed. Their unity and loyalty carried them through the tough times of the Reagan era and now once again they stood united behind their boss.

On the morning of August 4, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* headlined their papers with stories that emphasized a potential Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia. Both articles were datelined in Washington. Until this point the media played catch-up. Their stories were a few days behind what was common knowledge among Bush's key advisors yet, here was the first scoop. Or was it? Considering that most of the foreign correspondents in Baghdad and Kuwait City sat trapped in their hotel rooms, it is likely that the White House purposely leaked this news.⁶⁰ Schwarzkopf's operational plan 90-1002 required the complete cooperation of Saudi Arabia. In order for Bush to proceed with the defense of Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia first needed to ask

⁵⁹ Smith, 76.

for help. Saudi King Fahd, however, remained unconvinced that Hussein posed any threat to his Kingdom. If Fahd could be convinced of the threat then Bush and his advisors could implement their plans. Bush and his policy makers waited to be invited into the conflict.

The NSC: Take Three—Camp David

The significance of the Camp David meeting was that we decided or that General Schwarzkopf said the number of troops he needed to be able to confidently defend the Saudi border and, so the President said "You'll have them." So this was the first clear military step in the conflict.

—Brent Scowcroft, *Frontline*, 1996

On Saturday, August 4, President Bush instructed the members of the NSC to meet with him at Camp David. As in previous meetings, CIA director Webster opened with an intelligence briefing. The 100,000 Iraqi troops in Kuwait had taken a defensive position along the Saudi border. In the two days since the invasion the Iraqi regulars who had spearheaded the invasion were being reinforced by the much vaunted troops of the Republican Guard. After Webster's briefing Powell observed that 100,000 troops were excessive for the invasion of Kuwait. He also pointed out that although the Iraqi troops were in a defensive posture along the Saudi border, they could easily reposition themselves for an offensive operation.⁶¹ Schwarzkopf then presented Tier-Two of Operational Plan 90-1002. Powell supported the plan, calling it "do-able." He then added that, "It will achieve the mission of defending or repelling an attack, [however],

⁶⁰ Ibid., 79.

⁶¹ Woodward, 248.

should there be a subsequent decision to move north to Kuwait it [would be] do-able but expensive."⁶²

Schwarzkopf continued, "the Iraqi army is not ten feet tall."⁶³ He gave specifics listing everything from troop strength to the number and type of tanks used by the Iraqis, and estimated that it could take four months to get his entire defense force (Tier-Two) on the sand in Saudi Arabia. He added that it would take an additional two and a half months to put the forces in the area that could sustain an offensive operation.⁶⁴ Schwarzkopf specifically presented both his time tables and troop requirements. He cautioned that in order to obtain a significant advantage in any future offensive maneuver he would need at least a 4 to 1, and if possible a 5 to 1 troop ratio over the Iraqis.⁶⁵ If Hussein now had a force of 100,000 to 150,000 in Kuwait and if Bush wanted an offensive war-fighting option, according to Schwarzkopf's calculations, the U.S. military would need a force of 500,000 to 550,000 in the region within five and a half months. This meeting took place in early August, 1990. By late January, 1991, a force of almost 600,000 allied troops would begin the offensive operation called Desert Storm for the liberation of Kuwait.

The Camp David meeting ended on a sour note. During the discussions, Bush left to take a call from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Mubarak informed Bush that the Saudis were still working on an Arab solution to the conflict and that King Fahd had

⁶² Colin Powell, quoted in Woodward, 248.

⁶³ Norman H. Schwarzkopf, with Peter Petre, *It Doesn't Take A Hero* (New York: Bantam, 1992), 179.

⁶⁴ Schwarzkopf, 179.

⁶⁵ Roger Cohen and Claudio Gatti, *In the Eye of the Storm: The Life of General H. Norman Schwarzkopf* (New York: Farrar, Strous and Giroux, 1991), 219.

rejected Bush's earlier offer of American troops.⁶⁶ When Bush returned to the meeting he put this new dilemma on the table. Scowcroft responded by saying that "Kuwait is not popular among the Arabs," and that Hussein may have "designed" the invasion of Kuwait "to be attractive to the members of the Arab League."⁶⁷ "That's why," Bush responded, "our defense of Saudi Arabia has to be our focus."⁶⁸ The meeting ended with a clear plan for the defense of Saudi Arabia. All that was needed now was proof that Saudi Arabia was threatened and an invitation to come to their aid.

Before his return to Washington, Bush called King Fahd. Fahd still refused to invite U.S. forces into Saudi Arabia. All the same, he wished to be briefed on the current status of the Iraqi military in Kuwait. To that end Bush created a team of top level military and civilian advisors. Here was his chance to persuade Fahd of the need for military assistance. "I want to do this," Bush declared. "I want to send someone personally. It has to be with the understanding that they will not come back with no decisions having been made."⁶⁹ Cheney and Schwarzkopf were on the next plane to Jidda, Saudi Arabia.

"This Will Not Stand!"

While Cheney and Schwarzkopf were in Jidda briefing the Saudis on the latest satellite photos, trying to get invited into the conflict, Bush flew from Camp David to the White House. The President landed on the North Lawn and met a barrage of reporters who pressed him on one point. Was he considering military action? Making a

⁶⁶ Peter Turnley, "The Road to War," *Newsweek*, 28 January 1991, 59.

⁶⁷ Brent Scowcroft, quoted in Woodward, 252.

⁶⁸ George Bush, quoted in Woodward, 253.

⁶⁹ James Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-92* (New York: Putnam, 1995), 297.

fist, pointing his finger and hardening his face, he jabbed at the air stating, "This will not stand, this will not stand. This naked aggression against Kuwait."⁷⁰ Powell witnessed these remarks on CNN. Caught by surprise by the President's remarks, Powell recalls his confusion:

From "We're not discussing intervention" to "This will not stand" marked a giant step. Had the President just committed the U.S. to liberating Kuwait? Did he mean to do it by diplomatic and economic pressure or by force? Had a tail-end option suddenly become the front-end option?

Only twenty-four hours had passed since the NSC meeting at Camp David. The Saudi's were undecided about U.S. military intervention and Bush's key advisors had not been re-consulted, yet Bush issued a strong public decree. Remarking on this peculiar style Powell writes, "The process was pure George Bush. He had listened quietly to his advisors. He had consulted by phone with world leaders. And then, taking his own council, he had come to this momentous decision and revealed it at the first opportunity." On Monday, August 6, Cheney called Washington with the good news: the Saudi royal family had officially "asked" for U.S. help and Bush agreed.⁷¹ Desert Shield was on.

The NSC: Take Four—Kennebunkport

Bush was scheduled to vacation at his home in Kennebunkport, Maine. Unlike Carter, who as a result of the Iranian hostage crisis seemed pinned down in the White House, Bush did not let events appear to alter his schedule. On August 10, he left Washington for a nine day vacation. Despite the media appearance of Bush enjoying his

⁷⁰ Powell, 466.

vacation golfing and sailing, the President worked behind the scenes on his diplomatic agenda. The vacation freed him from a busy White House schedule and allowed him the time to call world leaders and secure their support. The strategy worked.

In the early days of the crisis Bush had secured the support of both President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, and King Hussein of Jordan. A week later a team of U.S. advisors had landed in Saudi Arabia and by August 6, had secured an invitation from King Fahd to help defend the Kingdom. Before he left for Kennebunkport, Bush learned that, as a result of his efforts, the Arab League leaders had met in Cairo and agreed that allied troops should be sent to defend Saudi Arabia. Now Bush needed UN support for military intervention and his vacation allowed him time to secure this goal. In fact, the only time Bush interrupted his vacation was to further his cause.

On August 15, he visited the Pentagon to deliver a speech. Addressing an audience of senior-level Defense Department employees, Bush remarked:

Our jobs, our way of life, our own freedom and the freedom of friendly countries around the world are at stake. No one should doubt our staying power or determination. A half century ago, our nation and the world paid dearly for appeasing an aggressor who should, and could, have been stopped. We are not going to make that same mistake again.⁷²

Bush's implicit comparison of Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler had two results: first, it mustered public support for military intervention, and second, it removed the possibility of a negotiated settlement. The analogy became irrevocable. Any discussion with

⁷¹ Woodward, 316.

⁷² Elaine Sciolino, "Bush Leaves Open Military Options," *The New York Times*, 16 August 1990, sec. A.

Baghdad would be viewed as appeasement. In the process of building public support for his policies, Bush limited his diplomatic options.

Hussein responded to Bush's speech. In an open letter he accused the President of deceiving the American people about the nature of the crisis. In addition Hussein warned Bush that the "thousands of Americans whom you have pushed into this dark tunnel will go home shrouded in sad coffins." As Jean Smith observes:

Saddam and Bush were taking each other's measure. Neither gave any indication of willingness to compromise. Bush spoke the traditional language of Western politics; Saddam responded with the rhetorical overkill of the Middle East. Neither looked closely at what the other was saying. Whatever opportunities there might have been for settlement drifted away.⁷³

Both Hussein and Bush's public statements had been emotionally charged. Their rhetoric heightened the emotions of their people and harnessed public support. In the process, however, Bush and Hussein limited their political options. Only a military solution remained.

Human Shields

On August 18, Hussein miscalculated and worsened his international standing. His National Assembly Speaker Sadi Mahdi announced that UN coalition citizens residing in Kuwait would be detained "until the threat of war against our country ends." The Speaker added that his nation would "play host to the citizens of these aggressive nations," and then implied that they would be used as human shields to protect key military and civil sites.⁷⁴ Once this hostage situation developed, Hussein was on his own.

⁷³ Smith, 133.

⁷⁴ Sadi Mahdi, quoted in "Human Shields," *The New York Times*, 19 August 1990, sec. A-1.

Whatever support or sympathy that may have existed for Iraq after the invasion soon disappeared. Even the traditional UN hold outs, Cuba and Yemen, cast their vote on Resolution 664 that called for the immediate release of all foreign nationals being detained. In a rare showing of solidarity, the Resolution passed unanimously.⁷⁵ As Margaret Thatcher had predicted in Aspen, the French stubbornly resisted Bush's call for universal condemnation. After the "human shield" announcement, however, President Mitterand ordered the French Navy to cooperate with the U.S. Navy in the Gulf. In the words of U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering, Iraq had "crossed the Rubicon by planning to use innocent third-country nationals as human shields around military installations."⁷⁶ The situation in Kuwait had deteriorated. Bush's vacation at Kennebunkport would have to be interrupted after all.

The President returned to Washington on August 20. During the flight Bush told reporters that:

We must not delude ourselves. Iraq's invasion was more than a military attack on tiny Kuwait. It was a ruthless assault on the very essence of international order and civilized ideals. And now . . . Iraq has imposed restrictions on innocent civilians from many countries. This is unacceptable.⁷⁷

The human shield incident heightened the emotional tension surrounding the crisis. On August 25, for the first time in its forty-five year history, the UN Security Council authorized the use of force to compel compliance with economic sanctions. Once again,

⁷⁵ UN Resolution 664, printed in *The New York Times*, 19 August 1990, sec. A.

⁷⁶ Thomas Pickering, quoted in Molly Moore, "U.S. Options for Defending Saudis," *The Washington Post*, 19 August 1990, sec. A-1.

⁷⁷ George Bush, quoted in Steven Mufson, "President Hints at Blocking Iraqi Aggression," *The Washington Post*, 21 August 1990, sec. A.

the Council had voted unanimously.⁷⁸ Bush's international coalition increased in legitimacy and purpose now that a moral imperative existed. Taking full advantage of this heightened international moral outrage, Bush used the press to increase domestic support for his policies. Given Hussein's recent actions, the defense of Saudi Arabia was no longer difficult to justify. Bush could now concentrate on a more aggressive agenda: to liberate Kuwait.

On September 14, Hussein made another significant miscalculation. In violation of diplomatic courtesy, Iraqi troops entered the French embassy and detained the staff for a brief period of time. That same day the embassies of three other Western nations suffered a similar experience. Up until that point France along with several other Western nations had still been on speaking terms with Iraq. After this blatant violation of diplomatic protocol, however, all that changed. Hussein was turning out to be his own worst enemy. Bush's coalition was now firmly united in its opposition to Iraq. With international affairs in order Bush turned his attention to American public opinion.

In mid September, Bush addressed a joint session of Congress. In this televised speech, Bush reiterated his previous commitment to reverse Iraqi aggression. He re-emphasized the need to take action stating, "We will not let this aggression stand." Bush concluded his speech declaring, "Iraq will not be permitted to annex Kuwait. And that's not a threat. It's not a boast. That's just the way it's going to be."⁷⁹ In a press conference that evening reporters asked Bush to comment on the possibility of an offensive operation against Iraq. Bush responded stating, "If we do not continue to

⁷⁸ UN Resolution 655, printed in *The New York Times*, 13 August 1990, sec A.

⁷⁹ George Bush, quoted in Mark Potts, "U.S. Presses Iraq," *The Washington Post*, 12 September 1990, sec. A-1.

demonstrate our determination to stand up to aggression . . . it would be a signal to actual or potential despots around the world."⁸⁰ A week after this address Hussein invited Bush to appear on Iraqi television. In a taped eight minute speech that aired in Baghdad on September 16, Bush again expressed his conviction to resolve the crisis by any means necessary, including force:

No one—not the American people, not this President—wants war. But there are times when a country, when all countries who value principle of sovereignty and independence must stand against aggression. As Americans, we're slow to raise our hand in anger. . . . But when we have exhausted every alternative, when conflict is thrust upon us, there is no nation on earth with greater resolve or stronger steadiness of purpose.⁸¹

The crisis in the Gulf had taken on a new dimension. As Jean Smith observes, "The President's September speech marked a decisive transition in American policy."⁸² It no longer focused on the defense of Saudi Arabia. For the first time the President publicly eluded to offensive military action. Bush continued this rhetoric as he prepared the American people for the next phase of the crisis: the liberation of Kuwait.

On September 28, the exiled Emir of Kuwait met with Bush at the White House. Prior to the meeting, Bush reviewed the latest satellite photos and other intelligence data regarding Kuwait. This data indicated that the Iraqi Army was systematically looting Kuwait. Furthermore, the populace was being terrorized through indiscriminate beatings, rape, starvation, and murder. The satellite intelligence also indicated that Iraq had approximately 430,000 troops in Kuwait and southern Iraq and that these troops

⁸⁰ George Bush, quoted in Potts, sec. A-1.

⁸¹ George Bush, speech printed in *New York Times*, 28 March 1991.

⁸² Smith, 166.

were digging in.⁸³ The threat to Saudi Arabia appeared over. Hussein had put his army into a defensive posture. This good news for Saudi Arabia was terrible news for Kuwait.

Bush and Scowcroft met for an hour with the Emir. After their meeting, Bush took the Emir to meet with the Cabinet and have lunch in the White House residence. According to Woodward's uncontradicted account of that meeting, Bush presented the Emir with satellite photos and other intelligence information.⁸⁴ Every indication was that Hussein had settled in for an extended stay in Kuwait. The defense of Saudi Arabia was no longer the main focus; liberating Kuwait was.

By the end of September, Powell worried that the President had become too impatient with events in the Gulf. On September 24, Powell met with Cheney to voice his concerns:

- Powell: Dick the President's really getting impatient. He keeps asking if we can't get the Iraqis out of Kuwait with air strikes.
- Cheney: Yes, he's concerned that time is running out on him.
- Powell: You know how Norm, the chiefs, and I feel. We shouldn't go on the offensive until we have a force in place that can guarantee victory. And that's going to take time.
- Cheney: So what do you want to do?
- Powell: Our policy now is to hope sanctions will work. I think we owe him a more complete description of how long-term sanctions and strangulation would work. In the mean time, the buildup goes on.
- Cheney: The Presidents available this afternoon. We'll go over and you can lay it all out for him.⁸⁵

During his briefing with the President, Powell outlined what he saw as the "two basic options still available." The first, the offensive option which required the "continued

⁸³ Schwarzkopf, 203.

⁸⁴ Woodward, 298.

⁸⁵ Powell, 479.

preparation of a full-scale air, land, and sea campaign." Powell assured Bush that, "If you decide to go that route in October, we'll be ready to launch sometime in January." In the second option, Powell stressed economic sanctions. Powell reassured Bush that, "Either way no decision will be required for weeks."⁸⁶

Bush responded, "Thanks, Colin. That's useful. That's very interesting. It's good to consider all the angles. But I really don't think we have time for sanctions to work."⁸⁷ The meeting ended—as was standard procedure for Bush's advisory sessions—with no decision reached. In keeping with his *modus operandi*, Bush had listened quietly to his advisors, but decided to take his own council. Bush spent the next few weeks assessing his options.

In the month of October, Powell instructed Schwarzkopf to put together an updated version of Operation Desert Shield that included an offensive maneuver to dislodge the Iraqi Army from Kuwait. On October 11, Schwarzkopf's chief of staff, Marine General Robert B. Johnston outlined the blueprint for what became Desert Storm. Schwarzkopf instructed Johnston to inform the NSC that this plan did not represent the best possible offensive strategy.⁸⁸ Rather, it was the best plan to move from the defense of Saudi to an offensive operation if no increase in troop strength was forthcoming. In other words, Schwarzkopf could not guarantee success without additional personnel and equipment. The NSC severely criticized his offensive plan for its lack of creativity and potential for failure (360). Evidently, an offensive military campaign to force Iraq from Kuwait remained impossible. Bush needed to commit

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 480.

⁸⁷ George Bush quoted in Powell, 480.

⁸⁸ Schwarzkopf, 359.

additional forces to the region if he aimed to physically expel the Iraqi Army from Kuwait.

On November 8, Bush held a press conference and officially shifted U.S. policy in the Gulf. Bush explained the need for military intervention:

I have . . . increased the size of U.S. forces committed to Desert Shield to insure that the coalition has the adequate offensive military options should that be necessary to achieve our common goals. . . . Iraq's brutality, aggression and violations of international law cannot be allowed to succeed.⁸⁹

Following this prepared statement Bush responded to reporters questions:

Q: Mr. President, it sounds like you're going to war. You have moved from a defensive position to an offensive position and you have not said how many more troops you are sending or really why.

Bush: Well, I said why right now, and I hope that it's been very clear to the American people.

Q: Well is there—are there new reasons that have moved this posture?

Bush: No, I'm just continuing to do what is necessary to complete our objectives, to fulfill our objectives that have been clearly stated.

Q: Well are we going to war?

Bush: I'm not—we—I would love to see a peaceful resolution to this question. And that's what I want.⁹⁰

Bush made the decision to increase the number of troops to provide the U.S. military with an offensive option without any formal set of meetings or full consultation with his military advisors. In fact, Powell was in Europe, and Schwarzkopf, Saudi Arabia. Each man learned of Bush's decision via CNN. Powell responded stating, "Goddammit, I'll never travel again. I haven't seen the President on this."⁹¹ Schwarzkopf's response was

⁸⁹ George Bush, "The Need for an Offensive Military Option," speech printed in Sifry, 228.

⁹⁰ Bush, "Offensive Military Options," 228.

⁹¹ Powell, 490.

delayed as he stumbled through numerous phone conversations with enraged Arab leaders. They questioned why they had not been consulted.⁹² How could Schwarzkopf field their questions when he too was surprised by the news?

During the next three months, 300,000 additional troops joined Schwarzkopf in Saudi Arabia and three more carrier battle groups sailed for the Gulf bringing the total to six. While the U.S. military in Saudi Arabia prepared for "the mother of all battles," domestically, the Bush administration prepared the American people for war.

⁹² Schwarzkopf, 370.

Part III

The Vietnam Syndrome

Now there are signs of U.S. weakness everywhere, and cracks are appearing in the system. The policies set in motion during the Vietnam war are now threatening the way of life built since World War II. The military retreat that began with the defeat of the U.S. in a place that held no natural resources or markets now threatens to undermine the nation's ability to protect the vital oil supply and the energy base of the global economy.

—"The Decline of U.S. Power," *Business Week*,
12 March 1979

Vietnam was a war that continues to have an impact on politics. I fear that one of the big losses, in fact, probably the most serious loss of the war, is what I refer to as the Vietnam psychosis. Any time anybody brings up the thought that military forces might be needed, you hear the old hue and cry "another Vietnam, another Vietnam". That can be a real liability to us as we look to the future.

—Ret. General William Westmoreland, 1990

The Legacy of Vietnam

The United States' failure in Vietnam continues to impact American political life and culture. The combined military and foreign policy defeat in Southeast Asia has presented every president since Nixon with the formidable task of combating America's collective anxiety about an activist foreign policy posture. The phenomenon General William Westmoreland described as the Vietnam psychosis has also been described, by Henry Kissinger, as the Vietnam syndrome. Simply stated, the syndrome is the collective articulation of the American public's reluctance to become entangled in Third World

conflicts.⁹³ This collective reluctance to support an interventionist foreign policy has been viewed in two distinct ways: as a wise restraint on an inherently activist American foreign policy agenda, or as an obstacle to Washington's ability to protect vital U.S. interests abroad. Each presidential administration since Nixon has interpreted the consequences of the "syndrome" to fit their specific foreign policy agenda—where the Vietnam syndrome could justify inactivity and vacillation, it was embraced, and where it obstructed interventionism for the sake of protecting vital U.S. interest, it was disdained.

In his inaugural address, Bush commented, "Vietnam cleaves us still." He argued that the time to forget Vietnam had come: "But, friends, that war began in earnest a quarter of a century ago; and surely the statute of limitations has been reached. This is a fact: the final lesson of Vietnam is that no great nation can long afford to be sundered by a memory."⁹⁴ Four years later, however, during his campaign for re-election, Bush asked the American people to condemn Bill Clinton for his affiliation with the anti-war movement. Bush implored the American people to move beyond the divisive memory of the Vietnam War, yet he invoked the memory of Vietnam to cast aspirations on his political rival. In between Bush's inauguration and re-election campaign was the Gulf War, and, as historian Jon Roper astutely observed, "no other event so clearly dramatized the legacy of Vietnam."⁹⁵

⁹³ Michael Klare, *Beyond the Vietnam Syndrome* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Policy Studies, 1981), 1.

⁹⁴ George Bush, quoted in Jon Roper, "Overcoming the Vietnam Syndrome," ed. Jeffrey Walsh, *The Gulf War Did Not Happen* (Cornwall: Hartnolls Limited, 1995), 27.

⁹⁵ Jon Roper, "Overcoming the Vietnam Syndrome," ed. Jeffrey Walsh, *The Gulf War Did Not Happen* (Cornwall: Hartnolls Limited, 1995), 28.

On March 1, 1991, President Bush made a speech in which he claimed that the overwhelming military victory over Iraq had "kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all."⁹⁶ Had it? Was the Gulf War an anomaly and as such did it signal the dawn of a new era in America foreign policy?

The Vietnam syndrome affected the Bush administration's decision-making process before, during, and after the Gulf War. Instead of being the turning point of post-Vietnam foreign policy formulation, the Gulf War represented another episode of Vietnam's legacy. As George Herring explains: "Such was the lingering impact of the Vietnam War that the Persian Gulf conflict appeared at times as much a struggle with its ghosts as with Saddam Hussein's Iraq."⁹⁷

In 1975, Senator Edward Kennedy remarked that "the lesson of Vietnam is that we must throw off the cumbersome mantle of world policeman."⁹⁸ When James Carter became president in 1976, the Vietnam syndrome loomed ominously over his administration and affected his foreign policy. Carter vetoed all Congressional legislation that called for direct military involvement in Third World nations. The Iranian Revolution, the Ethiopian-Somalia conflict, and the Nicaraguan civil war were therefore not met with any large scale U.S. intervention. Even when the lives of U.S. citizens were directly threatened—as was the case in Iran with the hostage crisis of 1979-80—President Carter responded with only a minimal show of force. The failed hostage rescue mission was the final blow to Carter's post-Vietnam foreign policy. Carter had

⁹⁶ George Bush, quoted in Roper, 28.

⁹⁷ George Herring, "America and Vietnam: The Unending War," *Foreign Affairs*, 70, no. 5 (1991): 104-19.

⁹⁸ Edward Kennedy, quoted in Klare, 3.

looked to the Vietnam War as proof that an interventionist foreign policy should be avoided at all costs. His successor, Ronald Reagan, argued just the opposite.

Instead of interpreting Vietnam as the Carter administration had—the fruition of an over-zealous foreign policy agenda—Reagan argued that Vietnam was “a noble cause.” In a campaign that exploited the national sense of frustration created by a long period of economic “stagflation” and perceived foreign policy impotency, Reagan won a landslide victory over Carter.

The Reagan administration targeted the Vietnam syndrome because it had the potential to restrain their activist foreign policy agenda. Reagan’s 1979 election campaign capitalize on the frustration felt at the end of Carter’s presidency. Blaming Carter’s non-interventionist foreign policy for America’s lapse into “an ordinary country” and referring to Vietnam as “a noble cause,” Reagan deliberately put a spin on America’s Vietnam experience. As Jon Roper explains:

The new President [Reagan] rejected the agonizing of his predecessor over the complexities of international relations and America’s place in them. Instead he retreated to the simple formula of Cold War rhetoric. By 1980, therefore, the Vietnam syndrome had been co-opted and had been invested with a new significance. Rather than a self-imposed caution against the pursuit of an expansionist foreign policy, now it was a barrier to business as usual, to empire as a way of life.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Roper, 29.

Historical Revisionism

Each of us behaves in some respects like the paranoiac, substituting a wish-fulfillment for some aspect of the world which is unbearable to him, and carrying this delusion through into reality. When a large number of people make this attempt together and try to obtain assurance of happiness and protection from suffering by a delusional transformation of reality it acquires special significance. Needless to say, no one who shares a delusion recognizes it as such.

—Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontent*¹⁰⁰

In a 1969 speech, Richard Nixon cautioned his fellow citizens that “North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that.”¹⁰¹ Nixon’s warning captured the psychological dimension of the Vietnam syndrome. Instead of seeing America’s growing anxiety over involvement in Vietnam as a natural reaction to an increasingly unpopular war, Reagan, like Nixon, interpreted America’s collective mood of discontent as contributing to failure in Southeast Asia. Whereas fear of this psychological dimension of the Vietnam syndrome had inspired Nixon to pursue the covert tactics that ultimately ended in the Watergate scandal, Reagan, similarly, employed covert operations in his foreign policy which ultimately ended in the “Irangate” debacle. The Vietnam syndrome, despite the effort of revisionism during the Reagan era, was weakened but far from destroyed.

It is said that hindsight is historians’ number one asset as well as their primary liability. America’s defeat in Vietnam began, as Roper points out, “to be rationalized

¹⁰⁰ Sigmund Freud, quoted in Roper, 27.

¹⁰¹ Richard Nixon, quoted in Roper, 27.

and amended through a process of historical revisionism."¹⁰² And who better to lead America through this "delusional transformation of reality" than a former actor?

According to historian Michael Klare, Reagan stated in 1981, that "never again will the U.S. send a fighting force to a country to fight unless it is for a cause that we are prepared to win."¹⁰³ This statement clearly illustrates the changing dynamic that characterized this period of revisionist history. Reagan implied that America's defeat in Vietnam resulted from a lack of political resolve.¹⁰⁴ This interpretation insinuated that successful military missions must be backed by firm political commitments. Reagan summarized his viewpoint in a conversation with co-founder of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, Bob Muller, stating, "Bob, the trouble with Vietnam was that we never let you guys fight the war you could have done, so we denied you the victory all the other veterans enjoyed. It won't happen like that again, Bob. . ."¹⁰⁵

Reagan's political explanation of defeat in Vietnam combined, in the early 1980s, with a host of military analysts' interpretations. These military analysts began to lend credence to General William Westmoreland's decade-long cry that the military had been severely restrained by the politicians in Washington, and therefore unable to secure victory (Westmoreland was Commander of U.S. forces in Southeast Asia from 1964-68 and Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army from 1968 until his retirement in 1972).

Among other things, Westmoreland argued that the U.S. troops never suffered a large scale military defeat. He pointed out that "Unlike the French who fought the

¹⁰² Roper, 27.

¹⁰³ Ronald Reagan, quoted in Klare, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Roper, 27.

¹⁰⁵ Ronald Reagan, quoted in J. Pilger, "New Age Imperialism," *Distant Voices* (London: Vintage Press, 1992), 107.

Vietnamese for a number of years, the American military suffered no loss like the defeat at Dien Bien Phu—a disaster for the French.”¹⁰⁶ Colonel Harry Summers’ book, *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context*, published in 1981, further contributed to the growing fabrication about America’s failure in the Vietnam War. According to Summers, the problem in Vietnam resulted from both detrimental political attitudes and poor military strategy. Taken together these new interpretations, as Roper explains, “invited” the nation to “confront the failure rather than the defeat” in Vietnam.¹⁰⁷ According to this revisionist schema, if America could identify why it failed in Vietnam, then a formula might be developed to prevent a similar future military and political catastrophe.

The Weinberger Doctrine

On November 28, 1984, Secretary of State Caspar Weinberger delivered a speech to the National Press Club in which he laid down six tests for using military force. According to Weinberger’s doctrine the six tests were: 1) “The U.S. should not commit forces to combat overseas unless the particular engagement or occasion is deemed vital to our national interest;” 2) the commitment must be formulated “with the clear intention of winning;” 3) there must be “clearly defined political and military objectives;” 4) the commitment “must be continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary;” 5) it should “have the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress;” and, finally, 6) “it should be a last resort.”¹⁰⁸ The Weinberger doctrine was written with the Vietnam syndrome in mind. In one sweeping, public gesture Reagan’s

¹⁰⁶ William Westmoreland, *Vietnam: Four Americans Perspective*, ed. P.J. Hearden (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1990), 45.

¹⁰⁷ Roper, 27.

Secretary of State summarized the administration's political and military explanation of America's failure in Vietnam; at the same time the American people were presented a formula for success in Reagan's new era of interventionist foreign policy.

When Bush introduced the wishful idea that "the statute of limitations [on America's memory of the Vietnam War] has been reached," he knew that some unfinished business still remained. Serving as Vice President, Bush had seen how the syndrome had continued to frustrate Reagan's foreign policy agenda. When the Weinberger doctrine was followed, for example in the Grenada invasion, or the air strike against Gadaffi in Libya, Reagan's popularity soared; but when the American people were presented with "another Vietnam," such as in the Nicaraguan conflict, or the U.S. Marine Corps' presence in Lebanon, public opinion turned sharply against the president. Bush had learned from Reagan's experiences. The Gulf War appeared to present the Bush administration with an ideal opportunity to overcome the Vietnam syndrome once and for all. As Roper observes:

The Gulf crisis provided the prospects for the completion of the process which aimed to transform defeat in the Vietnam War in the nation's historical memory into at least an honorable failure of well-intentioned policy. If the war against Iraq was a success, the 'Vietnam syndrome' might not only be overcome, it could also be cured.¹⁰⁹

The Gulf Crisis developed into the Gulf War because the military and the government allowed the quixotic memory of Vietnam to cloud its collective judgment. Policy was formulated with the presumed lessons of America's failure in Vietnam in

¹⁰⁸ Caspar Weinberger, quoted in Woodward, 117.

¹⁰⁹ Roper, 35.

mind. In order for Bush and his advisors to successfully pursue an activist foreign policy in the Middle East they had to satisfy the conditions of the Weinberger Doctrine.

Vital Interests

It didn't take a lot of finely honed analysis to see how relevant what happened was to US interests.

—Brent Scowcroft, *Frontline*, 1996

Test #1 of the Weinberger Doctrine states that, "The U.S. should not commit forces to combat overseas unless the particular engagement or occasion is deemed vital to our national interest." In the summer of 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson significantly increased American military involvement in Southeast Asia. Defending this decision he stressed that the three presidents that had proceeded him (Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy) had all found this region of the world vital to U.S interests and therefore worthy of financial and military U.S. commitments. On August 10, 1990, speaking before the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Baker declared that, "Since 1949, every American President has said that the Gulf is a vital U.S. and Western interest."¹¹⁰ The American people in 1965 apparently followed and accepted Johnson's line of reasoning. The American people in 1990, however, looked to their president for a stronger argument for U.S military intervention overseas.

Executive precedent could not sufficiently justify placing American military personnel in harm's way. Baker's declaration may have been sufficient for America's NATO allies, but Bush understood that his fellow citizens, weary of another Vietnam

¹¹⁰ James Baker, quoted in Thomas L. Friedman "Confrontation in the Gulf: U.S. Gulf Policy—Vague 'Vital Interests,'" *New York Times*, 12 August 1990, sec. A1.

and distrustful of the executive after such scandals as Watergate and "Irangate," would demand solid evidence that a clear threat to America's vital interests existed.

Oil is the most important natural resource in the industrial world. As Thomas Friedman insists, "its assured supply at a reasonable price is considered essential for economic growth—not just in the U.S. but also in Western Europe, Japan, and the world at large." It is no wonder then that virtually every news story published during the first week of August alluded to crude oil and its importance to the world economy. Americans needed only to look back to the mid 1970s when the OPEC nations imposed an oil embargo on the U.S. in an attempt to pressure Washington to change its policies toward Israel. This event sparked a period of inflation that, over twenty years later, still exists in certain sectors of the economy.¹¹¹ Bush would have little trouble convincing Americans—who account for only 5 percent of the world population yet consume 25 percent of its natural resources—that their vital interests were at stake.¹¹²

On the morning of August 2, before convening the first meeting with the NSC, Bush held a brief press conference. Bush took this opportunity to review the economic ramifications of the invasion.

Q: What is the likely impact on U.S. oil supplies and prices?

Bush: This is a matter that concerns us . . . Our Secretary of Energy and Secretary of Defense are here, you'll note, and others who understand the situation very well indeed and well be discussing that [in the NSC meeting]. . . . This is a matter of considerable concern, and not just to the United States, I might add.

Q: Are you planning to break relations?

¹¹¹ Klare, 4.

¹¹² Atkinson, 491.

Bush: You've heard me say over and over again, however, that we are dependent for close to 50 percent of our energy requirements on the Middle East. And this is one of the reasons I felt we have to not let our guard down around the world.¹¹³

The President emphasized, right from the start of the crisis, the economic significance of Persian Gulf oil. Bush, however, did not stop there.

According to historian S. Talbott, "When Americans fight, they want to see not just victory but virtue."¹¹⁴ Cheap oil, while a vital national interest, is not enough to sustain public support for a possibly long and costly military presence in the Middle East. Therefore, Bush offered the American people a tangible virtue to sustain them through the upcoming crisis. In the introductory paragraph of an August 8, address, Bush remarked:

In the life of a nation, we're called upon to define who we are and what we believe. Sometimes the choices are not easy. As today's president, I ask for your support in the decision I've made to stand up for what's right and condemn what's wrong all in the cause of peace.

Bush had stated throughout the conflict that the Gulf crisis was a historic test. Historian Marcy Darnovsky confirms this, stating that "Bush had declared repeatedly that his policies were designed to defend and consolidate the new world order." Bush described this new realm as "a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the conduct of nations." Accordingly, America, as the leader of the free world, must play a dominant role and "stand up for what's right, and condemn what's wrong."

¹¹³ George Bush, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the National Register, National Records and Archives Department, 1990), v.26, no. 31, 2 August. p. 1152.

¹¹⁴ S. Talbot, "Post Victory Blues," *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 1 (1992): 69.

In an August speech Bush designated four principles that he said "would guide our [U.S.] policy." The four principles he outlined were:

"First, we seek the immediate, unconditional and complete withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait. . .

"Second, Kuwait's legitimate government must be restored to replace the puppet regime. . .

"Third, I am determined to protect the lives of American citizens abroad."

"Fourth, my administration is committed to the security and stability of the Persian Gulf. . .¹¹⁵

Bush's entire speech that day was spotted with rhetoric designed to expound a threat to America's vital interest and establish that principle was at stake. He warned his fellow citizens that "appeasement does not work," and then, trying to evoke a sense of moral obligation and patriotism he proclaimed, "Standing up for our principles will not come easy. It may take time and possibly cost a great deal, but . . . America has never wavered when her purpose is driven by principle." The NSC meetings held the first week of August persuaded Bush that the defense of Saudi Arabia, if undertaken, would require a large scale military and fiscal commitment. Bush had to psychologically prepare the American people for potential U.S. military intervention in the region.

¹¹⁵ George Bush, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 26, no. 31, (1991): 1171-1206.

The Powell Doctrine: Win!

In the final analysis, the cause of [military] failure [in Vietnam] is easily remedied: to win the next one, send packing the unmanly Washington bureaucrats and politicians who chose the path of gradual escalation; put real men in charge who will go in big, hard and fast.¹¹⁶

—S. Vlastos, *America's "Enemy,"* 1991

Test #2 of the Weinberger Doctrine stated that a military commitment must be formulated “with the clear intention of winning.” If gradual escalation contributed to U.S. failure in Vietnam then Bush would do the exact opposite. There was nothing gradual about transporting 540,000 troops and millions of tons of equipment to Saudi Arabia in a five month period. This was unprecedented in military history with the closest analogy being Eisenhower’s D-Day landing. When asked in a 1996 *Frontline* interview to describe this massive deployment of force, Powell remarked:

I like to use the term decisive force which essentially says “If this is important enough to go to war for, we’re going to do it in a way that there’s no question what the outcome will be and we’re going to do it by putting the force necessary to take the initiative away from your enemy and impose your will upon him. If you’re not serious enough to do that, then you ought to think twice about going to war.”¹¹⁷

This formula, or “doctrine,” was designed to assure victory and both Powell and Schwarzkopf formulated their strategies with the confidence that their commander-in-chief would support them all the way.

¹¹⁶ S. Vlastos, “America’s ‘Enemy’: The Absent Presence in Revisionist Vietnam War History,” ed. J.C. Rowe and R. Berg, *The Vietnam War and American Culture* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1991), 68.

¹¹⁷ Colin Powell, Interviewed on *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting Service, 1 August 1996, available from <http://www.pbs.org/frontline/gulf/oral/>.

In the same *Frontline* interview Baker responded to the question of why President Bush gave the military so much freedom of action by stating:

I think the President was aware of the experience of Vietnam consistently throughout this crisis. He knew that the politicians had dictated the [Vietnam] war, that it was a limited war, the military had never been able to fight the war they thought they needed to fight to win it and he was determined to let the military call the shots. That's exactly what he did and he bent over backwards to give them everything in the world that they might need. General Powell, particularly, believed that if you were going to use force, you've got to use it dramatically and overwhelmingly and substantially and the President provided that kind of a force.¹¹⁸

Powell was one of Bush's key advisors. As a member of what Bob Woodward called "Bush's inner circle,"¹¹⁹ Powell had direct access to the chief executive. Powell's decision-making process was guided by the Vietnam syndrome. As President Bush's chief advisor on military strategy, Powell's advice affected Bush's policy formulation.

Clear Objectives

As a mid-level career officer [in Vietnam], I had been appalled at the docility of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, fighting the war in Vietnam without ever pressing the political leaders to lay out clear objectives for them.

—General Colin Powell, *My American Journey*, 1995

Test #3 of the Weinberger Doctrine states that there must be "clearly defined political and military objectives" before the U.S. commits personnel, money, or equipment to a military engagement. In the first week of the crisis, President Bush asked his national security team to meet with him at Camp David. Satellite intelligence photos

¹¹⁸ James Baker, Interviewed on *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting Service, 1 August 1996, available from <http://www.pbs.org/frontline/gulf/oral/>.

indicated that the Iraqi military had taken up a defensive position within a short distance of the Saudi border (in some places only 10 miles). Schwarzkopf briefed Bush on three options: 1) a deterrent scenario with a minimal show of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia; 2) a defense scenario (basically a reiteration of operational plan 90-1002) that required among other things the mobilization of 200,000 troops; and 3) an offensive scenario to forcefully remove the Iraqi military from Kuwait. Only three days after the invasion, the President and his key advisors were already discussing offensive military options. Furthermore, the Saudi government had not yet asked for help. If, according to the revisionist schema, the lack of a clear military strategy and vacillating political resolve had contributed to America's failure in Vietnam, then success required the opposite approach.

After the August 4, Camp David briefing the military was one step closer to securing its much vaunted "clearly defined military objective." Bush had chosen the defense scenario and had decided to send a briefing team to Saudi Arabia to secure King Fahd's personal invitation for U.S. military assistance.

After the Saudis officially asked for American assistance, Powell began working on a time table of troop build-up to present to the President. Powell was scheduled to brief Bush on the morning of August 16. In preparation for that meeting he gave his staff instructions to put together a chart to graphically depict the troop deployment required for the defense of Saudi Arabia. Powell admitted that, "I wanted to plant a timeline in the President's mind. This chart would let him know when he would have to give us the word to reach certain troop levels." Before his meeting with Bush, Powell had flown

¹¹⁹ Woodward, 179.

down to Tampa to see Schwarzkopf off.¹²⁰ Schwarzkopf, like Powell, wanted clear military objectives. In describing that meeting Powell writes:

Norm had been antsy. 'I need to know where the hell this operation is heading,' he said. I understood his uneasiness. The CINC, the commander in chief who was going to Saudi Arabia to direct troops, ships, and planes, wanted clear-cut instructions. The answers would eventually emerge, but I needed to set the stage for the President to provide them (133).

On August 16, Powell presented his chart to Bush and briefed him on the ongoing troop build-up in Saudi Arabia. The chart represented visually what Schwarzkopf had presented orally during the Camp David meeting, namely the three scenarios: deterrent, defense, and offensive. Powell established the significance of his timetable. He explained that the President needed to make certain key decisions along the way in order for the overall plan to work. Powell told Bush, "Our current mission is to deter and defend Saudi Arabia" (470). He gave the President a date of December 5, as the completion of the defensive scenario. Powell briefing was thorough. He warned that at the current level of deployment it would cost the government \$1 billion a month and might require calling up the reserves. When Powell finished briefing the President on the defensive scenario he introduced the timetable required for an offensive option.

Powell knew that six days earlier the UN Security Council had voted unanimously for an immediate trade embargo against Iraq.¹²¹ Powell explained how economic sanctions against Iraq would affect the timetables. He remarked:

If your goal is only to defend Saudi Arabia and rely on sanctions to pressure Saddam out of Kuwait, then we should cap the troop flow

¹²⁰ Powell, *Journey*, 469.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 470.

probably sometime in October. We've got about two months to assess the impact of sanctions (470).

The President responded to this statement by declaring, "I don't know if sanctions are going to work in an acceptable time frame."¹²² With that, Powell asked Bush for his specific objective. What did Bush want to achieve? How should Powell proceed? These questions worried Powell, prompting him to ask, "If we are going to eject Saddam, is our objective only to free Kuwait or, while we are at it, to destroy his war-making potential at some level?"¹²³ Although Powell received no answer, the President now knew exactly what the military would expect from their commander-in-chief. In the coming days and months of the crisis Bush could not afford to vacillate in policy or gradually increase the U.S. military's commitment. Powell's briefing made that clear. With the military's objective clearly defined, it was now up to Bush and his civilian advisors to clearly define their political objectives.

In a speech announcing the deployment of troops to Saudi Arabia President Bush said:

*I want to be clear about what we are doing and why. America does not seek conflict. . . . The mission of our troops is wholly defensive. They will not initiate hostilities but they will defend themselves, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other friends in the Persian Gulf. [My emphasis]*¹²⁴

Defining their political objectives was the easiest item of the six elements of the Weinberger doctrine to follow because it required that the Bush administration publicly declare its objectives. To avoid a "credibility gap," the administration consistently went

¹²² George Bush, quoted in Powell, 470.

¹²³ Powell, *Journey*, 470.

on record in support of its previously stated objectives. Bush, however, was far from clear in his political objectives, as reporters present apparently understood:

Q: Are we at war?

Bush: We are not at war. We have sent forces to defend Saudi Arabia.

Q: Is this an open ended commitment?

Bush: Nothing is open ended, but I'm not worried about that at all. I'm worried about getting them [U.S. troops] there and doing what I indicated as necessary, the defense of Saudi Arabia. . .

Q: Could you share with us the precise military objective of this mission?
Will the American troops remain there only until Saddam Hussein removes his tanks from the Saudi border?

Bush: I can't answer that because we have to—we have a major objective with those troops, which is the defense of the Soviet Union [sic] so I think it is beyond the defense of Saudi Arabia. So I think it's beyond that—I think it's beyond just a question of tanks along the border. . . .¹²⁵

Bush was clearly shaken by this last question. His response indicated that either he, despite the stated general military objective of defending Saudi Arabia, did not yet have a “precise” military objective; or that he had a “precise” military objective that went beyond the defense of Saudi Arabia but was unwilling at that time to discuss it. Either way, Bush went unchallenged. No follow up question was posed at that press conference. With this out of the way, Bush could concentrate on a more difficult elements of the Weinberger doctrine.

Reassessed and Adjusted

Test #4 of the Weinberger doctrine states that, the commitment “must be continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary. “Desert Shield” was the code name for the defense of Saudi Arabia. “Desert Storm” was the code name for the allied assault on

¹²⁴ George Bush, “In Defense of Saudi Arabia,” 197.

the Iraqi Army occupying Kuwait. When Schwarzkopf's operational plan 90-1002—the blueprint for Desert Shield—was completed and the defense of Saudi Arabia secure, Bush and his advisors “reassessed” their commitment. Desert Shield was “adjusted” and became Desert Storm.

This adjustment took place three months into the crisis when, after an October 30, NSC briefing, Bush approved a plan that required the escalation of U.S. military personnel and equipment in Saudi Arabia. This new phase of the crisis gave the U.S. an offensive military option to force the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. Although offensive options had been considered in early August, this was the first time they were approved. Powell's timetable for the defense of Saudi Arabia had been met. His previous briefing had “set the stage” for Bush to provide the military with the clear objectives they desired. It was decision time for the President. Powell had opened the briefing stating:

Mr. President, we are at a Y in the road. Down one branch we can continue sanctions, which is currently the policy, and we can just be prepared to defend Saudi Arabia. Down the other branch we start to get the necessary political authority to go on the attack.¹²⁶

Powell then briefed his fellow NSC members on an offensive plan he had worked on with Schwarzkopf and the other UN coalition commanders in Saudi Arabia. He described in detail both phases of the offensive: first the air assault and second the ground assault. When he finished the briefing, Powell assured his colleagues that all four of his Joint Chiefs of Staff (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines) supported this offensive—Desert Storm—battle plan. Cheney, voiced his support for the plan, but

¹²⁵ Ibid., 197.

¹²⁶ Powell, *Journey*, 470.

Bush was skeptical: "Now Colin, you and Norm are really sure that air power alone can't do it?"¹²⁷ Powell responded:

Mr. President, I wish to God that I could assure you that air power alone could do it but you can't take that chance. We've got to take the initiative out of the enemy's hands if we're going to go to war. We've got to make sure that there is no ordained conclusion and outcome, that there'll be no guessing as to, you know, we're going to be successful with this plan and this is the plan we recommend.¹²⁸

Unlike previous NSC meetings, which ended without any firm decisions having been made, Bush looked up and said, "Do it."¹²⁹

The Support of the People

The military that ran the Gulf War were the company commanders in the Vietnam War. And they came away from the war with the feeling that the American press had given them a bad shake, had indeed stabbed them in the back. And so they were very distrustful of the media, and would determine that they were not going to allow the press to paint them in dark hues in the Gulf War.

—General Bernard E. Trainor, *The General's War*, 1995

Test #5 of the Weinberger Doctrine stated that, "Any use of U.S. military forces should have the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress." Vietnam, in the long term, divided the American people more than any event since the Civil War. After the 1968 Tet Offensive, public opinion about America's involvement in Vietnam began a devastating nose dive from which it never recovered. Up until that point public opinion for the war in Vietnam was relatively strong and, for

¹²⁷ George Bush, quoted in Powell, *Journey*, 470.

¹²⁸ Powell, *Frontline*, PBS January 1996.

¹²⁹ George Bush, quoted in Powell, *Frontline*, PBS January 1996.

the most part, the media accepted the information coming from the military and the Johnson administration at face value. After Tet that all changed.

Walter Cronkite was one of many in the media who lost faith in the credibility of information coming from the military and the Johnson administration. When the media turned increasingly hostile toward the Johnson administration and the war effort, the American public followed their lead. According to General Westmoreland—who as a consequence of Tet was relieved from command—President Johnson lamented that, “When I lost Cronkite, I lost the American people.”¹³⁰ And when the American people turned on the Vietnam War effort, their representatives in Congress responded. Bush understood that in order to implement his policies he had to maintain the support of the American people and their representatives in Congress. For this to be successful, the Bush administration had to harness and control the power of the media.

In areas where the credibility of the administration was vulnerable, the media was “pooled” together and given limited access to information and, in areas where the media could build public support for Bush’s policies, they were “pooled” together and bombarded with Bush-sponsored propaganda. Powell understood the relationship between the media and success in policy:

Once you’ve got all the forces moving and everything’s being taken care of by the commanders, turn your attention to television because you can win the battle but lose the war if you don’t handle the story right.¹³¹

In the Vietnam War, many in the U.S. military blamed the media for the United States’ defeat. Resolving never to let it happen again, the U.S. Department of Defense

¹³⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson, quoted in Westmoreland, 49.

devised, by the 1970s, a system of prior review and pool coverage. By the time of the Gulf crisis, the Pentagon had the pool system firmly in place. Among other things the pool system required that a military escort accompany every reporter in the field. Unlike Vietnam, the press were prohibited from traveling freely among military personnel. When the media was permitted to interview the troops stationed in Saudi Arabia, the military reviewed any and all footage that film crews shot. Whatever was deemed inappropriate or potentially threatening to the safety of allied personnel was censored out. A European journalist found this situation quite unusual and commented on the media's willingness to acquiesce, stating:

I thought it remarkable to see how the U.S. journalist took part in a show arranged by the military, how they walked around passages at the press center dressed in combat uniforms thinking they were covering the war.¹³²

Strengthening the Pentagon's ground rules in the Persian Gulf were two other factors: the Middle East was historically hostile to the Western press and, the desert terrain limited the possibilities for independent maneuver. Some of the journalists acknowledged the situation for what it was. A reporter from the *Christian Science Monitor* observed that:

The military had direct access to the people—and at the same time was able to undermine the credibility of journalistic interpretations. It was a stunning reversal of roles from Vietnam, where the press called military credibility into question.¹³³

¹³¹ Colin Powell, quoted in Woodward, 155.

¹³² Stig Nohrestedt, quoted in Roper, 35.

¹³³ Mary Mander, "The Coverage of Gulf War," *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 February 1991, 8.

This strategy worked well for the Bush administration. According to public-opinion polls taken throughout the conflict, Bush enjoyed overwhelming support. A Washington Post-ABC News poll indicated that in August only 38 percent of Americans supported an allied invasion of Iraq. By September, 48 percent favored such a move and by January, more than 70 percent of those polled voted in the affirmative.¹³⁴ Bush had the support of the American people.

The Tail Wagging the Dog

To insure policy success, Bush's advisors carefully adhered to most aspect of the Weinberger doctrine. Following this Doctrine U.S. policy assumed a course which was specifically designed to avoid the mistakes made during the Vietnam era. However, this very process accelerated the crisis.

The need for clearly defined military objectives placed unnecessary pressure on president Bush. The need for clearly defined political objectives, while popular domestically, did not foster a good international diplomatic strategy. Furthermore, the support of the people came at the expense of the media. Censorship was a crucial component in persuading Americans that their vital interests were threatened.

Lastly, Bush's key NSC decision makers formulated policy with the clear intention of winning. If, as Bush continually indicated, "winning" required the restoration of stability in the Middle East, then anything short of destroying Hussein's war making potential would seem to fall short of these goals.

¹³⁴ Smith, 162.

Conclusion

It has been a splendid little war; begun with the highest motives, carried on with magnificent intelligence and spirit, favored by Fortune which loves the brave. It is now concluded, I hope, with that fine good nature, which is, after all, the distinguishing trait of the American character.

—John Hay to Theodore Roosevelt, 27 July 1898

On June 8, 1991, Schwarzkopf, his staff, and nine thousand troops representing the nearly six hundred thousand who had participated in the Gulf War marched down Constitution avenue in Washington, D.C.¹³⁵ Over three months had passed since the official end of the Gulf War, and Washington wanted to honor the men and women who had contributed to the victory. Before the parade, President Bush honored those who had died in the war at a ceremony in Arlington National Cemetery:

We celebrate the fact that each person we commemorate today gave up life for principles larger than each of us, principles that at the same time form the muscle and strength of our national heart.¹³⁶

When this ceremony ended, the mourners crossed over the Potomac and joined the estimated 800,000 spectators who had assembled along the streets of Washington. By twelve noon Schwarzkopf and the troops were passing in review before Bush and Powell. At this point in the ceremony salutes were exchanged and Schwarzkopf left the ranks to join his superior officers. Bush, Powell, and Schwarzkopf stood side by side and watched with pride as their victorious troops proceeded along the parade route and

¹³⁵ Atkinson, 492.

¹³⁶ Bush, George, quoted in Atkinson, 491.

finally disappeared past the black wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It certainly had been "a splendid little war." Or so it seemed at the time.

For many Americans at that parade, the Gulf War may have signified the end of the Vietnam syndrome since it represented a glorious victory for the U.S. military and a restored faith in the superiority of American military technology. A war that many feared would go on indefinitely had ended in only forty-three days. Instead of the estimated thousands of U.S. casualties, a much smaller number of American service personnel actually died (143 at war's end). Most of Bush's clearly defined military and political objectives had been met—Kuwait was liberated and the legitimate government restored, American citizens abroad were safe, and Saddam Hussein's hegemony in the Middle East was, at least temporarily, impaired. Bush's post war approval rating was at an all-time high, hovering around 70 percent; his chances for re-election in 1992, assured. Yet, as early as six months after the war Bush's popularity began to wane. The initial wave of optimism and glory that characterized the immediate post-war period had clouded America's collective judgment. The overwhelmingly one-sided military victory may have tempted the nation to assume that success had come as a result of a systematic, well-thought-out decision-making process generated at the highest level of government. It had not.

The question posed in the introduction was whether President Bush's handling of the Persian Gulf crisis represented a failure for U.S. foreign policy or a success. Focusing on the eight month period leading up to the Gulf War, this thesis addressed this question by examining three issues: U.S. policy toward Iraq prior to the invasion; Bush's advisory process during the crisis; and finally, the influence of the "Vietnam

syndrome” on the decision-making process of the Bush administration. These three issues are summarized as follows.

U.S. Policy

U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East prior to the invasion of Kuwait was ambiguous. A legacy of poor policy choices and U.S. intrusion tainted the presidencies of both Carter and Reagan. President Bush inherited this legacy and added to it. His policies in the months leading up to the August 2, invasion increased rather than decreased the likelihood that events would build into crisis. The mixed diplomatic messages going out of Washington to Hussein combined with the misread signals emanating from Baghdad to create an environment of ambiguity that greatly contributed to the escalation of the crisis. In sum the Bush administration failed to send a strong diplomatic warning to deter Hussein’s ambitions.

The Advisory Process

President Bush’s advisory process was flawed. Although his resolve to force Hussein from Kuwait was firm, his decision-making process was marred by the absence of a systematic analysis of alternatives. Bush used his advisors inadequately. Bush conducted policy with a small cadre of subordinates: Cheney, Scowcroft, Powell, and Baker. These NSC members met regularly during the crisis and, according to Powell, the atmosphere was casual, “like boys sitting around shooting the shit before the weekend.”¹³⁷ The informality and intimacy between this key group of decision-makers had two significant effects on policy formulation. First, it facilitated Bush’s personal direction of the crisis, and second, it prevented the President from receiving contrary

¹³⁷ Woodward, 41.

options. As a result, American policy was, at times, at the mercy of presidential prerogative with Bush's advisors toeing the line.

There are at least four tactics that could have been employed to improve the advisory process: first, ensure multiple advocacy; second, initiate a formal policy development process; third, designate a devil's advocate; and fourth, avoid early consensus.¹³⁸

The concept of multiple advocacy was proposed by Alexander George in 1972.¹³⁹ This process involves making sure all opposing perspectives are presented to the president by people with equal staff resources, intelligence, status, and clout. It insures that the president hears the strongest argument for all of his policy options. According to the detailed accounts of Bush's NSC meetings, multiple advocacy was not pursued.

President Eisenhower was famous for initiating a formal policy development process for his NSC. Background and option papers were developed at the subcommittee level by assistant secretaries and their staffs. Similar to multiple advocacy, this system ensured that all alternatives were fully analyzed before final policy decisions were made. According to James Pfiffner, "this system was criticized for overcooking decisions and squeezing out all creativity and boldness."¹⁴⁰ It did, however, ensure that the president's options were adequately researched.

¹³⁸ James P. Pfiffner, "Presidential Policy-Making and the Gulf War," ed. Marcia Lynn Whicker, et.al. *The Presidency and the Persian Gulf War* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 8.

¹³⁹ Alexander George, "The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy," *American Political Science Review* (January/February 1990), 64.

¹⁴⁰ Pfiffner, 8.

Whereas Ike is credited with testing a formal policy development process, Johnson is credited with utilizing a devil's advocate: George Ball. The devil's advocate is expected to attack any plan which becomes too popular within the president's inner group of advisors. This process is designed to ensure that any consensus is skeptically examined. Powell came closest to filling this role within Bush's inner circle.

The fourth tactic, to improve the policy formulation process, was best applied by JFK. During deliberations over the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, Kennedy encouraged his advisors to examine many alternatives. He likewise discouraged early consensus.¹⁴¹ As a result, the initial policy unanimity, which supported an air strike on Russian missile emplacements in Cuba, deteriorated. It was replaced by a more peaceful and effective solution: naval blockade. Furthermore, Kennedy would occasionally leave meetings while they were still in progress. This was supposed to encourage lower level advisors to speak frankly without fear of offending the president.

President Bush employed all four of these tactics albeit to a lesser extent. Nevertheless, the absence of a systematic application of any one of these tactics seriously undermined his foreign policy decision-making process.

The Specter of Vietnam

Following the Weinberger Doctrine U.S. policy assumed a course which was specifically designed to avoid the mistakes made during the Vietnam era. In the process of preventing another Vietnam War, however, Bush and his advisors produced a Gulf War. The momentum created in the process of avoiding the presumed mistakes of Vietnam propelled events forward at an alarming rate. Powell's time tables and need for

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 8.

clearly defined military objectives placed unnecessary pressure on the President. Clearly defined political objectives limited U.S. diplomatic strategy. Bush gained the support of the people; but at what cost to the media's credibility?

The Vietnam syndrome clearly influenced U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf. The memory of the Vietnam War adversely influenced President Bush's policy-making process. In building support for Desert Shield and Desert Storm, Bush propagandized the liberation of Kuwait as a test for American values. He called upon Americans to help him "stand up for what is right and condemn what is wrong." He promised that Desert Storm would not be another Vietnam because the military would not "be asked to fight with both hands tied behind its back." After the war a better understanding of the causes and consequences of the Gulf War emerged.

Bush's judgment and his credibility were called into question when his actions began to diverge from his proclamations. As Thomas Amsted points out, "The glory of Bush's shining moment, the victory over Iraq, faded like a desert mirage. And for that, the President had mostly himself to blame."¹⁴² When Bush claimed that the "Vietnam syndrome had been licked for good," it was only wishful thinking. In fact, Bush formulated post-Gulf War policy with Vietnam in mind.

While Bush was telling the American people that victory in the Gulf War atoned for America's failure in Vietnam, he was also ordering the removal of American troops from the region. A "credibility gap" emerged. Vietnam had been an opened-ended U.S. military commitment and Bush did not want to repeat that in the Gulf. Bush, therefore, ordered a cease fire, as soon as Iraq pulled out of Kuwait. Hussein's retreating army

¹⁴² Thomas Omestad, "Why Bush Lost," *Foreign Policy* 89 (1992-93): 70-81.

was not pursued into the heartland of Iraq. Thus Iraq's army was weakened, but not destroyed. The early cease fire, the lack of support for the Kurdish rebellion, and the fast removal of American troops all had the unmistakable attributes of the Vietnam syndrome. George Bush was not about to lead his nation into another quagmire.

Successful War or Unsuccessful Peace?

On August 8, Bush gave a televised speech in which he designated four principles that he said "would guide our policy." The four principles he outlined were:

"First, we seek the immediate, unconditional and complete withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait. . .

"Second, Kuwait's legitimate government must be restored to replace the puppet regime. . .

"Third, I am determined to protect the lives of American citizens abroad."

"Fourth, my administration is committed to the security and stability of the Persian Gulf. . .¹⁴³

To be sure, Bush delivered on the first three principles: Kuwait was liberated, its government restored, and American hostages were released unharmed. It is the fourth principle, however, that seems to have given Bush the most difficulty. Perhaps, given the volatile nature of the Middle East with its history of instability, committing his administration "to the security and stability of the Persian Gulf" was doomed from the start. Or perhaps, if his administration had been committed to that task in the first place, the Gulf crisis might never have developed. Either way, this promise went unfulfilled.

If the result of a successful foreign policy is peace, then the consequence of failure is war. The Gulf War represented a diplomatic failure for two reasons: the U.S. failed to prevent the invasion and resorted to war against Iraq to liberate Kuwait. Had Bush been

¹⁴³ George Bush, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* v.26, no. 31, 6 August. p. 1171-1206.

able to conduct a policy of deterrence before the invasion, the conflict could have been avoided. Had Bush been able to persuade Hussein that the cost of remaining in Kuwait far outweighed the benefits, war could have been avoided. Neither was accomplished. To be sure, even the most successful war may only represent an unsuccessful peace exposing both a flaw in diplomacy and ultimately a deficiency in leadership.

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