

# THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

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### **Presidential Policy-Making and the Gulf War**

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U.S. national security decision-making in the fall of 1990 and the decision to go to war in the Persian Gulf will have far-reaching consequences for the world, and it is important to glean whatever lessons we can from an examination of the policy-making process. This chapter will analyze President Bush's actions in the early fall when he decided that the United States would defend Saudi Arabia and his decision in the late fall to move to the offensive against Iraq. It will then examine the role of Congress in committing the country to war. The chapter will conclude with an evaluation of U.S. policy-making and the likely consequences of alternative courses of action.<sup>1</sup>

#### **THE DECISION TO COMMIT U.S. TROOPS**

On August 2, 1990, Iraqi tanks had sped the 80 miles to Kuwait City to begin the occupation of Kuwait and the deployment of the first 100,000 troops—many more than was needed to conquer a country with a military force of less than 30,000. In his first public statement on the invasion, President Bush said "We're not discussing intervention."<sup>2</sup> Yet later that day in a press conference in Colorado, where he was to get encouragement from Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, he declared "We're not ruling any options in, but we're not ruling any options out."<sup>3</sup>

On August 3 at a White House meeting General Brent Scowcroft, assistant to the president for National Security Affairs, made the argument that the invasion was something that the United States could not

leave unanswered. According to a White House official, "it was Brent's presentation at one of the meetings on August 3, that Friday after the invasion, that made clear what the stakes were, crystallized people's thinking and galvanized support for a very strong response."<sup>4</sup> Though no formal decision was made at the meeting, that afternoon the president assured Saudi Prince Bandar, "I give my word of honor . . . I will see this through with you."<sup>5</sup> Bush then decided to send emissaries to convince King Fahd to invite the United States to send troops to defend Saudi Arabia.

That afternoon at a press conference the president made a public statement: "I view very seriously our determination to reverse out this aggression. . . . This will not stand. This will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait."<sup>6</sup> The implication of this statement was that the United States was committed not only to defend Saudi Arabia but also to liberate Kuwait. There was a large military difference between defending Saudi Arabia and pushing Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. The former involved credible deterrence and the latter a possible military offensive.

The public statement of the president's intention to reverse the occupation of Kuwait was made after hasty meetings in an atmosphere of crisis rather than after a systematic process of consultation with his military advisors. The president had publicly committed the United States to a course of action that it could not easily reconsider. There had been no National Security Council (NSC) meeting to consider the decision or formal debate among presidential advisers. Both General Colin Powell and Secretary of State James Baker had reservations about the speed and lack of deliberation with which the president was committing the United States to military objectives.<sup>7</sup>

The Saudis initially hesitated to accept U.S. military backing for fear that the United States would anger Saddam and then decide not to follow through on its commitment, leaving them at the mercy of Iraq. But President Bush was determined that U.S. troops were necessary to protect Saudi Arabia from invasion. Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney and General Norman Schwarzkopf flew to visit King Fahd and demonstrated with satellite intelligence that Saddam's forces were poised on the Saudi border and fully capable of invading and capturing Saudi oil fields. Such a move would have given Saddam control of 40 percent of the world's oil reserves.

The initial deployment of U.S. forces would amount to more than 200,000 troops over a 17-week period, but the first forces to arrive were vulnerable to an attack by Saddam. U.S. aircraft and troops began to pour into the air base in Riyadh and the port of Dhahran. Fortunately the Saudis and the United States had built the heavy-duty type of infrastructure that could handle the huge amount of traffic of the deployment. Schwarzkopf and his public affairs officers purposely misled the

press so as to make it seem that more troops and military forces were in the country than there actually were in order to deceive Saddam into thinking that an attack would be met by more force than in fact was actually available.<sup>8</sup> Luckily, Saddam did not take advantage of the U.S. relative vulnerability to attack and disrupt the buildup of troops and materiel.

On August 12 President Bush, without checking with Cheney or Powell, gave a speech attacking Saddam personally with harsh rhetoric.<sup>9</sup> The early use of harsh rhetoric and personal attacks closed options to the United States by making it more difficult for Saddam to save face and withdraw without being humiliated, and it gave him a psychological weapon to use in his domestic propaganda war. Thus the president was closing options for a negotiated settlement early in the crisis without full consultation with his military advisers or development of policy options. In addition, the harsh rhetoric may very well have helped Saddam in Iraq, rallying internal support for an Arab leader who seemed to be standing up to the United States.<sup>10</sup>

The early verbal attacks on Saddam contrasted with the approach that President Kennedy took in the early days of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. He purposely refrained from attacking Khrushchev personally so as to leave him the maneuvering room to disengage from Cuba without seeming to capitulate to U.S. demands.

Since the invasion President Bush had been on the phone to world leaders and had brilliantly put together an international coalition against Saddam. On August 25 the United Nations passed Resolution 665, authorizing UN members to enforce the economic embargo on Iraq with a blockade.

On September 5 Bush met with the emir of Kuwait to assure him of U.S. support. During the rest of September the president effectively defined a successful outcome for the United States as not merely the defense of Saudi Arabia, but also the liberation of Kuwait. With the economic blockade cutting off about 95 percent of imports to and exports from Kuwait, General Powell and James Baker felt that the policy of sanctions was about to be abandoned without the full consideration of the possibility that the sanctions would work. The forum in which military policy options would be expected to be fully examined was National Security Council meetings, but the sanctions or "strangulation" option was not given full consideration at NSC meetings.<sup>11</sup>

In late September General Powell went to the White House with Secretary Cheney to meet with the president and General Scowcroft for what was to be the most formal presentation of the sanctions option to the president. Powell told the president that there was a case to be made for the strangulation of Iraq that might protect U.S. interests while avoiding an offensive military action. This could be done with the 230,000

troops that would be in Saudi Arabia by December. He argued that sanctions might take time, but that they would work in the end. When the others in the room did not encourage him he did not press the issue or tell the president that his best judgment was to pursue the sanctions option. When no one at the meeting asked for his overall personal judgment, he told the president that he could live with either containment or the offensive option. Bush's reaction to the "strangulation" option was: "I don't think that there's time politically for that strategy."<sup>12</sup>

## THE DECISION TO GO TO WAR

In early October it became clear to his advisers that the president was losing confidence that his sanctions strategy would force Saddam to leave Kuwait. When he sought a briefing on an offensive option, his military advisers were concerned because the defensive part of the buildup was just under way and would not be completed until December. General Schwarzkopf had estimated in August that it would take eight to twelve months to put in place an offensive capability, and he felt the president might be moving faster than U.S. military capacity to do the job that would be expected of them, particularly since Iraq now had over 400,000 troops in Kuwait.<sup>13</sup>

On October 24 the president told Cheney that he was leaning toward a military buildup that would give the United States the capacity to throw Saddam out of Kuwait. At a congressional briefing later that day, Cheney gave no hint of these plans, but in a news conference the following day he hinted that there might be a big increase in the number of troops in the theater.

The decision to increase the number of troops to give the United States an offensive capability was made by Bush without any formal set of meetings or full consultation with his military advisers. General Powell was in Europe and was surprised by the public announcement. General Schwarzkopf had to brief the inquiring Saudis before he was fully apprised of the decision himself.<sup>14</sup> The decision was finalized before the end of October, but the public announcement was not made until after the elections in early November.

The decision to double U.S. troop strength in the Gulf continued to narrow U.S. options. As long as the United States had 200,000 troops on the Saudi border to deter an attack by Iraq, the troops could be rotated and resupplied for an indefinite period of time to enforce the economic blockade and prevent any attack on Saudi Arabia. But with the number of troops approaching 500,000, the continued supply of the forces became limited to a finite period of time. If Saddam did not pull out of Kuwait, the United States could not withdraw its troops without appearing to agree to Saddam's takeover of Kuwait. The November de-

cision to double U.S. troop strength was a point of no return, absent a capitulation by Saddam.

The president's growing resolve that the United States would have to take the offensive against Iraq became more firm during December. As a last-ditch effort he had made an offer that he would send Baker to Baghdad for one last chance at peace any time between December 15 and January 15. The announcement was made before the implications of the decision were fully examined. When Saddam agreed to the date of January 12, the United States had to back away from the president's statement and argue that this was too close to the date that the United Nations had specified as the deadline for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait. By December 17 the president had virtually made up his mind that he would order an attack on Iraq. He saw the last-minute diplomatic efforts as merely exercises to demonstrate that the United States was willing to consider any genuine change on the part of Saddam.<sup>15</sup>

One of the striking characteristics of the president's approach to decision-making was his dependence on his "war council" of a few close people to advise him on most major decisions. Those closest to Bush during this period were Scowcroft, Cheney, Baker, and Powell. But the circle also included Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Robert Gates, Chief of Staff John Sununu, and Vice-President Dan Quayle.<sup>16</sup> The heavy dependence on a small circle of advisers is not unlike the approach that other presidents have taken during times of war or crisis.<sup>17</sup> John Kennedy had his executive committee during the Cuban missile crisis, and Lyndon Johnson depended on his "Tuesday lunch group" for advice during the Vietnam War.<sup>18</sup>

The problem with depending heavily on a small group is that they are subject to what Irving Janis calls "groupthink," the tendency to artificially limit options because of a (sometimes false) sense of consensus.<sup>19</sup> There are some techniques that can be used to counter the two main dangers of examining only a limited range of options and prematurely arriving at an artificial consensus.

One way is "multiple advocacy," as proposed by Alexander George.<sup>20</sup> This involves assuring that opposing perspectives on issues are fully aired before the president. It is important that the dice are not loaded toward one outcome. This can be done by being sure that both sides of an issue are argued by people of comparable intelligence, status, and clout and who have adequate staff resources. Thus the president will have the benefit of the best argument that can be made for each alternative. In the domestic area the Bush administration had already engaged in this sort of process by holding "scheduled train wrecks" in which proponents of different positions would argue their recommendations before the President.<sup>21</sup> There is no public evidence that President Bush used this type of procedure during the Gulf crisis.

Another way to ensure that all serious alternatives are fully analyzed before final decisions are made is the creation of a formal policy development process. Eisenhower created such a process for his National Security Council. Subcommittees at the assistant secretary level would prepare background and option papers and develop them in a series of iterations until they were honed to the point that they were ready for presidential consideration. This was criticized as "overcooking" decisions and squeezing out all creativity and boldness, but it assured that all presidential decisions were fully staffed out and examined before any final commitment was made.<sup>22</sup>

A third way to ensure full examination of all alternatives was that adopted by John Kennedy during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. He pushed his advisors to examine all possible alternatives and purposefully headed off an early consensus on an air strike to deal with the Russian missile emplacements in Cuba. He also occasionally left the meeting room to ensure that second-tier officials would be frank in their assessments and not hold back from disagreeing with their superiors because of the presence of the president in the room.<sup>23</sup>

Another possible tactic to ensure that the prevailing consensus is fully and skeptically examined is to designate, formally or informally, one member of the inner group to be a "devil's advocate." This person is expected to try to poke holes in any plan that the group tends to favor.<sup>24</sup> This function was filled by George Ball in the Johnson administration with respect to Vietnam.

President Bush seemed to engage in none of these cautionary behaviors during the Persian Gulf crisis. Aside from occasional consultations with outside and governmental Middle East experts, Bush dealt primarily with members of his war council. And even then at crucial decision points he neglected to consult Cheney, Baker, or Powell at different times (for example, the decision to make the liberation of Kuwait U.S. policy, the decision to double U.S. forces, and the decision to offer the Baker trip to Iraq).

President Bush did not set up a multiple advocacy situation in the crucial choice between continuing sanctions and the offensive option. His failure to draw out Powell in the crucial White House meeting and his decision not to ask Baker to present formally the case for diplomatic solutions assured that no credible insiders would make those cases. Certainly the cases were made in public forums, but these could easily be dismissed as coming from those who were critics of the administration or who did not have full knowledge of the facts. This analysis does not imply that Bush never fully considered the options in his own mind or that he did not discuss them with his close advisors or outside experts. The point is he did not assure that in his final decision his advisory apparatus fully and formally considered the most important range of

options available to him. There is also no implication that the advice given him or his final decision would have been different, merely that the cases were not made.

There is no guarantee, of course, that a well-designed policy development process will arrive at the best decision. In most cases the president's advisors will be split in their judgments as to the best course of action, as they were in this case. In the U.S. constitutional system the president has final decision-making authority within the executive branch. All that an effective advisory process can do is make it more likely that the president will have been presented the widest range of options feasible under the circumstances.

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.

## THE ROLE OF CONGRESS

The separation of powers system established in the Constitution divides the most important powers of the federal government, the power of the purse, and the power of the sword between the legislative and executive branches. The power of the sword is divided into the commander-in-chief power, given to the president in Article II; and the power to declare war and raise an army and navy, given to Congress in Article I. The Framers changed the wording from the drafted "make war" to the final version of "declare war" to enable the president to repel sudden attacks. But there was no doubt in their minds that Congress was to play the major role in any decision to commit the country to war.

James Madison, one of the primary authors of the Constitution, argued that the "fundamental doctrine of the Constitution" was

that the power to declare war is *fully and exclusively* vested in the legislature; that the executive has no right, in any case, to decide the question, whether there is or is not cause for declaring war; that the right of convening and informing Congress, whenever such a question seems to call for a decision, is all the right which the Constitution has deemed requisite or proper.<sup>25</sup>

Alexander Hamilton, one of the foremost exponents of a strong executive in the constitutional debate, defined the commander-in-chief power in Federalist Number 69:

It would amount to nothing more than the supreme command and direction of the military and naval forces, as the first general and admiral of the Confederacy; while that of the British king extends to the *declaring* of war and to the *raising* and *regulating* of fleets and armies—all which, by the Constitution under consideration, would appertain to the legislature.<sup>26</sup>

Hamilton defined the war power as "when the nation is at peace, to change that state into a state of war; whether from calculations of policy or from provocations or injuries received: in other words, it belongs to Congress only, to go to war."<sup>27</sup> There can be little doubt that it was the intention of the Framers to give the war power to Congress.

In the aftermath of the war in Vietnam and other executive actions that were perceived to encroach on the congressional role in committing the nation to war, Congress passed, over a presidential veto, the War Powers Resolution of 1973. Presidents have not acknowledged its constitutionality, and when they have complied with its provisions it has been with the stipulation that their actions were consistent with the resolution, not pursuant to it. Congress, for its part, has not been willing to attempt to enforce the resolution on its own.<sup>28</sup> Although it was cited in the resolution authorizing the president to commence war against Iraq, the War Powers Resolution did not play a major role in the debate over the Gulf War. The reason was that what was at issue was not notification of Congress or the 60-day limit, but the authority to go to war.

The president made the initial commitment of the United States to protect Saudi Arabia and the initial deployment of troops to establish that defense without consulting Congress, which was not in session. While it could be argued that some consultation should have taken place, it is generally conceded that the president's actions were defensive in nature and constitutionally permissible. Early statements by members of Congress were supportive of the president's actions as being wise and justified. Each house of Congress passed resolutions supporting the president's actions, though they were not combined into a concurrent or joint resolution. Political support in the country and Congress for the defense of Saudi Arabia and condemnation of Saddam Hussein was nearly universal.

But as the crisis wore on and it became apparent that the administration was exploring the possibility of offensive action to drive the Iraqi army out of Kuwait, reservations were expressed by some members of Congress. When the president announced the doubling of forces on November 8, shortly after the congressional elections, serious concerns were raised in Congress. The president had not consulted with Congress or forewarned its leadership, and this unilateral move on the part of the

president made the use of the forces, barring the capitulation of Saddam Hussein, very likely.

The Democratic leadership of Congress was faced with a dilemma. On the one hand it wanted to support the president's early strategy of containing Saddam and deterring an attack on Saudi Arabia, but on the other hand it did not want to give the president *carte blanche* to pursue an offensive strategy. At the same time, Congress did not want to appear to undermine the president in his confrontation with Saddam. It wanted to present a unified front to show Saddam that the United States would not tolerate his actions, but it was not yet convinced that shedding U.S. blood to throw him out of Kuwait was wise, even if it was justified.

In January, when the president had already decided to pursue the offensive option, he finally decided to ask Congress for a vote of support. Secretary Cheney advised against the request, calculating that if military action was successful Congress would approve of the action and that if it was unsuccessful Congress would condemn the president even if it had approved the action. But if the vote was negative or weak the coalition and the position of U.S. forces would be undermined. It would be a high risk, but there would be little to gain from a victory.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the president decided to seek congressional approval for political support, even though he claimed he did not need constitutional approval: "I don't think I need it."<sup>30</sup>

The political calculus of whether or not to ask Congress for a vote was based on the premise that there was a constitutional choice. That is, the administration felt it could pursue an offensive against Iraq without congressional approval. President Bush felt that the moral and strategic imperative to defeat Saddam was more important than constitutional provisions: "For me it boils down to a very moral case of good versus evil, black versus white. If I have to go, it's not going to matter to me if there isn't one congressman who supports this, or what happens to public opinion. If it's right, it's gotta be done."<sup>31</sup>

While public statements claiming that congressional approval for attacking Iraq was not necessary might have been made merely to convince Saddam of the credibility of U.S. threats, statements to the same effect after the war indicate that the administration really believed that presidents can initiate wars without congressional action. In a speech at Princeton University Bush proclaimed: "Though I felt after studying the question that I had the inherent power to commit our forces to battle after the UN resolution, I solicited congressional support before committing our forces to the Gulf War."<sup>32</sup> Secretary Cheney also claimed after the war: "The president has the authority to undertake this kind of operation without the approval of the Congress."<sup>33</sup> The constitutional justification for this unusual claim of inherent presidential power was not fully argued by the administration.

One of the arguments put forth for the authority of the president to commence the offensive against Iraq without congressional approval was that the United Nations had authorized the use of force against Iraq.<sup>34</sup> But this does not constitute a compelling argument for the right of the president to take the country to war unilaterally, for two reasons. First, the United Nations merely authorized the use of force, it did not order U.S. action. But more importantly, an analysis of the debate over the U.N. Charter in the U.S. Congress clearly shows that the document cannot be read to override the U.S. Constitution with respect to the war power.<sup>35</sup>

All of this discussion may seem a bit academic because of the vote taken in Congress on January 12, 1991, that did authorize the use of force by U.S. troops against Iraq. The fact that it was not a formal declaration of war was not as important as the constitutional principle that the decision to go to war should be shared by Congress and the president. This principle was upheld by congressional vote even though the president had presented Congress with a virtual *fait accompli*.<sup>36</sup> As Speaker of the House Thomas Foley said, the votes in Congress constituted "the moral and constitutional equivalent of a declaration of war."<sup>37</sup>

The argument, however, is not merely academic. Precedents do matter in constitutional law and practice, and if the position of the Bush administration is conceded, it is hard to argue that the constitutional provision for declaring war means anything at all.<sup>38</sup> While U.S. citizens may be willing to trust the exclusive judgment of George Bush in matters of war and peace, the implications of granting that prerogative to all future presidents are disturbing.

#### THE COST-BENEFIT CALCULUS BEFORE JANUARY 17

Any analysis of the relative success or failure of the U.S. war effort must first take into account the initial war aims of the United States and how they developed.<sup>39</sup> President Bush's early statements about the invasion emphasized the dangers of letting international aggression go unchallenged, especially when the invasion was of a state friendly to the United States. But even more important was the potential threat to the world oil supply. After Saddam had invaded Iraq he controlled 20 percent of world oil reserves, and if he had occupied Saudi Arabia, he would have controlled 40 percent. Clearly, the West could not stand by and let such a large portion of the world's oil reserves be controlled by an unpredictable dictator.

As the fall of 1990 progressed, President Bush became increasingly disturbed by the brutality Saddam's forces were using in Kuwait (even though the brutality of his internal policies in the 1980s, while of concern

to the United States, did not change our policies). But Saddam's brutality combined with his military capacity to deploy chemical and biological weapons and his demonstrated willingness to use them along with his threats to use them against Israel gave the United States more reasons to be concerned. Iraq had been attempting to develop a nuclear capacity that was frustrated in 1981 by Israel's air strike on his nuclear facilities and had continued to rebuild his nuclear facilities in the 1980s. Experts disagreed as to the probable time that it would take Saddam to create an effective delivery capability. (In the fall of 1991 it was discovered that his nuclear capacity was developed further than had been earlier suspected.)

Given these aims of the United States, it seemed to some policymakers that the only way to deal effectively with them was to remove Saddam from power. President Bush made a number of public statements about his desire to see Saddam deposed. But the longer the crisis in the fall dragged on, the less likely it seemed to President Bush that the United States could accomplish its aims without a war against Iraq. He thus ordered the doubling of troops in November and the planning for an offensive campaign. While some thought that much could be accomplished by an exclusively air offensive, his military advisers made it clear that they did not think the United States could win militarily without a ground offensive.

Few doubted the ability of U.S. forces to win; the only uncertainty was the time that it would take and the cost in casualties. If the United States was not successful within a few months the fighting could drag on into the hot summer of 1991, complicating supply, maintenance, and morale problems and eroding political support for the war. But even with a U.S. military victory, there was no guarantee that a new balance of power in the region would be favorable to U.S. interests. It was entirely possible that Saddam would be able to provoke Israel into joining the war as he had threatened, and that the international coalition would break apart. Nor was it certain that a war in the Middle East would assure oil availability at reasonable prices.

Thus the position of those who criticized the president's determination to pursue an early offensive strategy and those in Congress who voted in favor of giving sanctions more time was based on their evaluation of the probable trade-offs. Some U.S. objectives had already been achieved by the fall of 1990. Iraq had been deterred from invading Saudi Arabia and the gap in the oil supply had been made up so that oil prices were roughly at the level they were before Iraq's invasion.<sup>40</sup>

The economic blockade of Iraq was working effectively. CIA Director William Webster testified on December 5 that "more than 90 percent of imports and 97 percent of exports have been shut off," that Iraq was being deprived of \$1.5 billion of foreign exchange earnings each month,

and that the choking off of Iraq's financial resources would prove to be Iraq's greatest economic difficulty.<sup>41</sup> But the fact that the embargo was being effectively implemented did not guarantee that Saddam would pull his forces out of Kuwait.

Saddam still occupied Kuwait, and he still maintained an impressive military capacity, including chemical warfare and possible future nuclear capabilities. So the question was one of timing: was forcing Saddam out of Kuwait in a matter of months rather than a year or more worth the probable costs of an early military offensive?

Military advice was by no means unanimous that an offensive option was preferable to a continuation of the economic sanctions strategy of early fall. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) William Crowe and David C. Jones in testimony before Congress did not support an early offensive. Crowe stated:

The issue is not whether an embargo will work, but whether we have the patience to let it take effect... I personally believe [the sanctions] will bring [Saddam Hussein] to his knees ultimately... If, in fact, the sanctions will work in 12 to 18 months, the trade-off of avoiding war with its attendant sacrifices and uncertainties would, in my estimation, be more than worth it.<sup>42</sup>

At a meeting of former secretaries of Defense in the fall there was virtual unanimous support for further pursuit of the sanctions strategy rather than an early offensive; only Donald Rumsfeld supported an air strike to eliminate Saddam's nonconventional capacity.<sup>43</sup> It was also evident that the JCS were not hawks and would have preferred to postpone the offensive option if there were any honorable way for the United States to do so.<sup>44</sup>

But perhaps most striking was the reluctance of the nation's two most important generals to move to the offensive. General Powell's preference for the containment strategy or "strangulation" of Iraq was presented to the president in the Oval Office and rejected. In a number of interviews General Schwarzkopf expressed his opinion about the sanctions strategy. "So why should we say, 'Okay, gave 'em two months, didn't work. Let's go on with it and kill a whole bunch of people?' That's crazy. That's crazy."<sup>45</sup> With respect to troop morale and fighting capacity if faced with a hot summer in the sun waiting for war, he said: "If the alternative to dying is sitting out in the sun for another summer, that's not a bad alternative."<sup>46</sup>

The key element in any calculation of military cost is the number of casualties and troops killed. The administration and the military were extremely careful in the fall of 1990 not to make any public estimates of casualties, but inevitably word leaked out that the military expected there to be significant casualties if an offensive option were pursued, partic-

ularly at the ground offensive stage. One indicator that became public was that 16,000 body bags were ordered from the manufacturer who had to work 24-hour shifts to produce them on schedule. Internally, the medical planning working figures were 20,000 casualties including 7,000 killed in action, and in congressional testimony after the war General Schwarzkopf testified that these were his estimates of probable casualties.<sup>47</sup> Of course, projecting likely casualties is highly uncertain and the bias in planning is to be ready for the worst case. But the point is that the best military judgment was that an offensive campaign would entail significant numbers of U.S. troops killed.<sup>48</sup>

None of this is meant to imply that the professional military was not ready, willing, and able to execute the military policy of the United States or the commander in chief. The point is that President Bush pursued his chosen offensive strategy in spite of the serious reservations of former high military officials and his own top military advisers.

The argument for an early offensive, however, was compelling to President Bush. Even though the blockade was being executed effectively, there was no evidence that it was having any effect on Saddam's outlook or behavior. Neither was there any evidence that he would not be willing to bear the cost of sanctions indefinitely, or at least through the summer months. There was a fear that the international coalition was held together tenuously and that it might easily fall apart if offensive action was not commenced soon. U.S. troop morale was sagging the longer they were forced to wait in the desert. The logistical problems of maintaining a 500,000-troop force in Saudi Arabia made extending the sanctions for another six to twelve months untenable. In addition, Saddam's brutality in the occupation of Kuwait was increasingly evident and the integration of Kuwait as the "nineteenth province" of Iraq was progressing.

Thus the arguments for and against the offensive option and the vote in Congress on January 12 were not about the *principles* of Saddam's behavior or the use of U.S. military forces. Virtually everyone in Congress had condemned the Iraqi invasion and threat to world peace. Most of those in Congress in favor of the economic sanction strategy did not rule out their support for possible future U.S. military action. The question was one of the timing of the offensive.

The vote boiled down to a calculus of probable U.S. casualties weighed against probable outcomes from a war. Those who voted against the president were pessimistic about likely U.S. casualties and were doubtful that a U.S. military victory would accomplish broader U.S. goals for the Middle East. Those who voted for the president were willing to bear the cost of likely casualties and were optimistic that U.S. goals would be substantially achieved by a military victory. They also felt that the likelihood of Saddam's seeing reality and backing down would be en-



hanced by a vote demonstrating that the president had the necessary political support for a military attack in the next few weeks.

### THE CALCULUS AFTER THE WAR

The war in the Gulf proved the old dictum that war is unpredictable: very few military analysts predicted that the military victory would come as easily as it did or at as little cost to the United States. The air phase lasted five weeks and destroyed much of the military and civilian infrastructure of Iraq.<sup>49</sup> The performance of the U.S. military was impressive and widely praised in the states. The logistics mission of transporting huge shipments of military equipment and supplies to support the half million troops in the theater of operations was amazing. The execution of the air and ground combat missions was brilliant, with U.S. forces demonstrating a high degree of professionalism.

But it does not detract from the quality of the military leadership or the professionalism of the troops to admit that the relatively low cost of the victory was due in no small part to luck. Just as the Middle East and the United States were the victims of Saddam's irrationality in his decision to invade Kuwait, so also were we the beneficiaries of his lack of tactical and strategic common sense.

The allies were fortunate in the early days of the invasion that Saddam decided to stop at the Saudi border rather than to plunge ahead and take the oil fields of Saudi Arabia. The United States and the Saudis had little practical ability to stop him at that point. According to General Powell "it would have taken us a lot longer, and it would have been a much more difficult proposition, to have to kick the Iraqi army out of Saudi Arabia as well as Kuwait."<sup>50</sup> Saddam sat back and watched for five months as the U.S. built up its huge battle force of troops, tanks, and planes before the attack.<sup>51</sup>

The United States was fortunate in the early days of the operation that Saddam did not attack its key supply ports. According to General Schwarzkopf the air base at Riyadh and the port at Dhahran were vulnerable targets in the early days of the operation.

All you have to do is stand in Dhahran and look at the huge amounts of equipment we were bringing in there. If they had launched a persistent chemical attack that had denied the port of Dammam to us, obviously this would have been a major setback. Or take Riyadh air base—you know three good fighter planes making a run down there could have taken out huge assets. But once the air campaign started, his air force went away, so I no longer worried about Dhahran and Riyadh.<sup>52</sup>

The rapid U.S. buildup was also made possible by the availability of preexisting, huge military air- and seaports that were designed to handle very heavy equipment and traffic.

Tactically, Saddam immobilized many of his tanks by having them dug into bunkers that in effect turned them into pillboxes and denied him the mobility that is so important in desert warfare. Politically Saddam could have made a number of moves that could have saved him the destruction of much of his military machine. If he had decided to withdraw from Kuwait at any time, even up to the last minute before the air or ground operations, the United States would probably not have attacked militarily, and he could have preserved his military capacity and saved the economic infrastructure of Iraq. Richard Cheney said that the United States would have had to accept an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait without attacking, since the ostensible basis of the coalition was to oust Saddam from Kuwait.<sup>53</sup>

The allies were lucky that Saddam was not able to carry out his threat to attack Israel and bring it into the war. While several SCUD missiles did hit Israel, Saddam's lack of preparation and U.S. suppressing forces were able to counter the SCUD attacks, and Patriot missiles were able to destroy many of those that were launched. An Israeli attack on Saddam would have vastly complicated holding together the Allied coalition, but U.S. diplomacy was able to convince the Israelis to withhold a widely expected counterattack.

Perhaps most important, the Iraqis were not able to fight as well as had been expected by Allied strategists. The toll of the eight-year war with Iran in which casualties amounted to 2.3 percent of the whole Iraqi population outweighed the experience gained in that war.<sup>54</sup> General Schwarzkopf had thought he would need "about five times more force than I ended up getting, and that it would probably take about seven or eight months longer than it actually took to do the job."<sup>55</sup> Even Pat Lang, the DIA analyst who had come closest to predicting the invasion of Kuwait, seriously overestimated the effectiveness of the Iraqi ability to fight; he predicted the necessity of a prolonged ground campaign to oust Saddam from Kuwait.<sup>56</sup>

The point here is not that the United States and the Allies won the war only because they were lucky. U.S. forces were well-trained and executed their mission professionally, and the United States would have prevailed in any case. The point is that the cost of the victory could easily have been much greater if any of the above factors had gone the other way.

The Gulf War was waged in what may have been unique circumstances favorable to the United States. The Soviet Union had just given up its superpower role. It even joined the coalition against its former ally, depriving Iraq of military resupply and intelligence data. The United



States had the best armored force in the world (the VII Corps, stationed in Europe), and it could redeploy that force to the Middle East theater without exposing Western Europe to any likely attack. In addition, the United States had massive advantages over Iraq in superior technology, intelligence, and control of the skies. A Navy report on the Gulf War concluded: "Desert Storm/Shield was not a model for all future operations. . . . We cannot plan on the advantages of a cohesive coalition, outstanding infrastructure or six months of preparation time."<sup>57</sup>

Despite the small toll in U.S. casualties in the war, there were still considerable costs, most of them not borne by the United States. Even though the United States was very careful not to make public estimates of enemy casualties, the best estimates were that Allied forces killed about 100,000 Iraqis during the 44 days of the war, though some estimates were significantly higher.<sup>58</sup> The environmental cost of the war was considerable. Iraq dumped millions of gallons of oil into the Persian Gulf and set fire to Kuwaiti oil wells that fouled the air over much of the region. Smoke from the fires was so heavy that it obscured the sun and forced vehicles to drive with lights on in the daytime. Air pollution from the fires was expected to plague the region for years after the war.

According to the report of a UN mission to Iraq in March 1991, "Iraq has, for some time to come, been relegated to a pre-industrial age, but with all the disabilities of post-industrial dependency on an intensive use of energy and technology."<sup>59</sup>

Would a longer application of the economic sanctions have eliminated the need for all of this destruction? The answer depends on what the goals of U.S. policy were. Early U.S. action did deter Saddam from invading Saudi Arabia. But given the punishment and destruction that Saddam was willing for his country to endure before finally surrendering, it is unlikely that the effective application of economic sanctions would have convinced him to leave Kuwait.

So the U.S. goal of forcing Saddam out of Kuwait would probably not have been achieved within a year or two without the resort to military force. The further U.S. goal of the destruction of Saddam's military capacity as well as his chemical, biological, and incipient nuclear capacity would also have been impossible, and he might have developed them further during the interim. In 1990 and 1991 Saddam demonstrated that he was not the kind of national leader who could be restrained in the use of these capacities.

The benefits of the war for the United States and the Middle East were the destruction of Saddam's ability to project force effectively outside his borders as well as the destruction of much of his nonconventional warfare capacity. Firm U.S. action also demonstrated a willingness to use force that may deter other aggression in the region or the rest of the world. The war, however, did not achieve the U.S. aim of a New

World Order. The states of the Middle East did not seem to be any nearer to agreeing to live together peacefully after the war than they were in the previous two decades (or two millennia, for that matter). The coalition against Iraq's aggression was not able to apply moral suasion or economic sanctions to accomplish what force of arms had been necessary to accomplish in the past.

## CONCLUSION

In retrospect, then, was the cost of the war worth the benefits derived from it to the United States? The cost in U.S. lives was lower than anybody had expected (fewer than 300 deaths), and many of the financial costs were shared by the allies. Saddam's military threat to his neighbors was neutralized, but his ability to oppress the people of Iraq, particularly the Kurds and Shiites, survived the war. The Middle East region was saved from Saddam's aggression, but the same intractable hostilities remained as before the war. No New World Order emerged. For President Bush the war was a huge political success. He took a large military and political risk and stuck to his convictions despite the hesitation of some of his highest military and diplomatic advisers.

Perhaps a better way to frame the question facing the United States in early January 1991 is: would the results of the war have been worth 20,000 U.S. casualties with 7,000 killed in action? Luckily, we will never have to make this decision. But that was the calculus facing the country in January 1991. It was a risk that President Bush was willing to take to achieve what he saw as the moral imperative to punish Saddam's aggression and protect U.S. interests in the Middle East.

Thus in the short run the United States was successful in its military aims, and President Bush deserves credit for his international leadership and firm direction of U.S. military forces during the war. But from a longer term perspective the policies of the United States and other Western nations that allowed Saddam Hussein to develop his military capacity to the point that he was almost able to accomplish his imperial goals cannot be considered successful.

## NOTES

1. For comments on an earlier version of this chapter, the author would like to thank Jim Anderson, Frederick Black, Robert Clark, Louis Fisher, J. W. Harrington, Alana Northrop, Elliot L. Richardson, Larry Stern, and Richard Stillman.

2. Quoted in Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), p. 225. A word must be said about using *The Commanders* as a secondary source for scholarly analyses of U.S. decision-making during the Gulf crisis. Woodward's account depends only on his own credibility and integrity

as a reporter, and thus must be used with some skepticism. On the other hand his account is consistent with other public accounts and has not been publicly disputed by any major figure he quotes, including those who might have a motive to do so. In addition, a high Pentagon official told the author of this chapter that the general opinion in the Pentagon is that the book's main points are essentially sound, though some of the details are inaccurate. For a penetrating review of the book, see Elliot Cohen, "In DOD We Trust," *The New Republic* (17 June 1991), pp. 29-35.

3. Woodward, *The Commanders*, p. 231.
4. Quoted by Andrew Rosenthal, "Scowcroft and Gates: A Team Rivals Baker," *New York Times* (21 February 1991), p. A14.
5. Woodward, *The Commanders*, p. 241.
6. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 260.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 260-262.
8. See Tom Matthews, "The Road to War," *Newsweek* (28 January 1991), p. 62.
9. Woodward, *The Commanders*, p. 282.
10. See Elizabeth Drew, "Letter from Washington," *The New Yorker* (25 January 1991), pp. 82-90.
11. Woodward, *The Commanders*, pp. 299-302.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42. Some commentators have criticized Powell for not pressing his own judgment about the viability of the containment option and standing up to the president, Scowcroft, and Cheney and giving them his best military and political advice. But Powell's attitude was in the classic professional tradition of neutral competence that characterizes the best career public servants. Powell gave the president every opportunity to draw him out about his professional judgment on the wisdom of the two main policy options. But it was clear throughout the meeting that the president was not open to a full hearing of the option. Powell's presenting it despite this would have undermined his credibility with the president and might have branded him as not a team player—the kiss of death in the White House. His actions were appropriate and consistent with civilian policy control of the military.
13. Woodward, *The Commanders*, p. 303.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 311-313.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 345.
16. On the limited number of people that were involved in Gulf War decision-making, see Elizabeth Drew, "Letter from Washington," *The New Yorker* (4 February 1991), p. 84.
17. See Burt Solomon, "Making Foreign Policy In Secret . . . May Be Easy, But It Carries Risks," *National Journal* (12 January 1991), pp. 90-91.
18. See Barbara Kellerman, "How Presidents Take the Nation into War," *New York Times* (20 January 1991), p. E2. During the planning for the war much was made by the Bush administration of the contrast between President Bush giving free rein to the military commanders in the field and Lyndon Johnson's choosing of bombing targets during the Vietnam War. The wisdom of micro-management from headquarters thousands of miles from the theater of battle may be doubtful, but the principle of the right of the commander in chief to make such decisions is clear, and President Bush exercised this right in excluding certain Iraqi symbolic structures from bombing target lists. For an argument that in principle the

president has the right, and sometimes the duty, to make tactical decisions, see James P. Pfiffner, "Can the President Control the Government? Should He?," in James Pfiffner, ed. *The Managerial Presidency* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1991).

19. Irving Janis, *Victims of Groupthink*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).
20. See Alexander George, "The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 66 (September 1972), pp. 751-785.
21. See James P. Pfiffner, "Establishing the Bush Presidency," *Public Administration Review* (January/February 1990), pp. 64-73.
22. For an analysis of Eisenhower's advisory system and decision-making process in the case of Vietnam, especially as contrasted with Lyndon Johnson's approach, see John P. Burke and Fred I. Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam, 1959 and 1965* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989). See also Phillip G. Henderson, *Managing the Presidency* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988); Kevin V. Mulcahy, *American National Security: A Presidential Perspective* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1990); and John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), pp. 69-80.
23. See Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971); Janis, *Groupthink*, p. 142; and Michael R. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).
24. Alexander L. George, "The Devil's Advocate: Uses and Limitations," in U.S. Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy, "Appendices" (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office), June 1975, Vol. 2, pp. 83-85.
25. Gaillard Hunt, ed., "Letters of Helvidius, No. 1, in *The Writings of James Madison*, Vol. 6 (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1900-10), p. 174; quoted by Robert Katzman, "War Powers: Toward a New Accommodation," in Thomas E. Mann, ed., *A Question of Balance* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1990), p. 38.
26. *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Mentor Books), p. 418.
27. Quoted in Michael J. Glennon, "The Gulf War and the Constitution," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, no. 2 (Spring 1991), p. 88.
28. See James P. Pfiffner, "The President and the Postreform Congress," in Roger H. Davidson, ed. *The Postreform Congress* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992). For an analysis of the War Powers Resolution, see Barry M. Blechman, *The Politics of National Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), Chapter 6. See also Katzman, "War Powers: Toward a New Accommodation."
29. Woodward, *The Commanders*, p. 355.
30. Quoted in Glennon, "The Gulf War and the Constitution," p. 84.
31. Quoted by Matthews, "The Road to War," p. 65.
32. "Remarks by the President at Building Dedication of the Social Sciences Complex," Princeton University (10 May 1991), p. 2 of White House press release. The president also stated: "It was argued I can't go to war without the Congress. And I was saying, I have the authority to do this." *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (8 March 1991), p. 284; quoted in Theodore Draper, "The True History of the Gulf War," *New York Review* (30 January 1992), p. 45. President Bush may even have felt that he could initiate war in the face of a

negative congressional vote. In answering a question about whether he could initiate an attack even if Congress had voted against him, he said: "I still feel that I have the constitutional authority, many attorneys having so advised me." Quoted in Anthony Lewis, "Presidential Power," *New York Times* (14 January 1991), p. A17.

33. *U.S. News and World Report* (15 April 1991), p. 31.

34. See Thomas M. Franck, "Declare War? Congress Can't," *The New York Times* (11 December 1990), p. A27.

35. For a detailed analysis of the record, see Chapter 3 by Louis Fisher in this volume.

36. See Chapter 2 by Robert Spitzer in this volume.

37. Statement of Tom Foley at a luncheon for the 75th anniversary of the Brookings Institution, Capital Hilton, Washington, DC (6 May 1991). The author was present.

38. When 56 members of Congress sued the administration and asked the court to forbid the president to go to war without a declaration from Congress, the court refused to decide the case on the basis that only 56 members were asserting the constitutional rights of a body of 535 members. But in *Dellums v. Bush* (752 F. Supp. 1141 [D.D.C. 1990]) the court commented on the merits of the claim in dicta:

If the executive had the sole power to determine that any particular offensive military operation, no matter how vast, does not constitute war-making but only an offensive military attack, the congressional power to declare war will be at the mercy of a semantic decision by the executive. Such an "interpretation" would evade the plain language of the Constitution, and it cannot stand. . . . Here, the forces involved are of such magnitude and significance as to present no serious claim that a war would not ensue if they became engaged in combat, and it is therefore clear that congressional approval is required if Congress desires to become involved.

39. For an analysis of the various justifications for the war with quotes from President Bush, see Larry Berman and Bruce Jentleson, "Bush and the Post-Cold War World: New Challenges for American Leadership," in Colin Campbell and Bert Rockman, eds., *The Bush Presidency: First Appraisals* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1991).

40. Senator Philip Gramm (R-TX) called those who opposed the immediate implementation of the offensive option "appeasement-before-country liberals" (*Parade Magazine*, June 2, 1991). But this is where the analogy with Hitler and appeasement becomes tenuous. The Allies did not put a military force on the border and threaten war if Hitler attacked. Hitler was not faced with an embargo that was 95 percent effective. Regardless of whether these actions would have prevented Hitler from aggression, it is difficult to argue that U.S. actions in the fall of 1990 amounted to "appeasement."

41. "CIA Director William Webster's Statement to the House Armed Services Committee on Sanctions Against Iraq," printed in James Ridgeway, ed., *The March to War* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows Press, 1991), pp. 154-155.

42. Quoted in *Newsweek* (10 December 1990), p. 32.

43. Interview with Elliot L. Richardson, 29 May 1991, Washington, DC. Each of the former secretaries was willing to maintain the threat of force and to use

it eventually as a last resort, except for Donald Rumsfeld, who favored pursuing an air-only campaign to eliminate Saddam's nonconventional capacity. Each of the others would have preferred to give sanctions longer to work. See the transcript of their meeting: "The Fourth Annual Report of the Secretaries of Defense: The Iraqi Crisis," Southern Center for International Studies (30 November 1990).

44. Woodward, *The Commanders*, p. 314.

45. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 313.

46. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 342.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 349; *Washington Post* (13 June 1991), pp. 1, A40.

48. After the war many supporters of the president's strategy made fun of "armchair generals" who predicted heavy U.S. casualties, implying that they were naive in painting a gloomy picture of the likely outcome of battle. They may have been naive, but their naivete was based on the hard-headed calculations of the best military analysis in the Pentagon. What would have been truly naive was to make projections that did not take into account the best military estimates of casualties.

49. Military projections indicated that 150 planes could be lost in the first 30 days of fighting (Woodward, *The Commanders*, p. 340). But the initial attack was able to neutralize Iraq's air defenses, and the United States quickly achieved effective air superiority. When Iraqi planes finally took to the air it was to fly to the haven of former enemy Iran to save the planes from being destroyed.

The effective use of sophisticated and laser-guided bombs destroyed many military targets in populated areas, though with some significant "collateral damage." While the "smart bombs" hit targets with 90 percent accuracy, they amounted to only 7 percent of the total tonnage dropped. Of the 88,500 tons of bombs dropped, 70 percent missed their intended targets (*Washington Post*, 16 March 1991), p. A19.

50. Quoted by Dom Oberdorfer, "Powell Says Iraqi Potential to Take Ports Worried U.S.," *Washington Post* (16 March 1991), p. A19.

51. See the analysis by The Center for Strategic and International Studies, *The Gulf War: Military Lessons Learned* (July 1991).

52. Quoted in *Time* (11 March 1991), p. 27.

53. Speech by Richard Cheney, Georgetown University, 21 March 1991. The author was present.

54. Testimony of CIA Director William Webster before Congress, 5 December 1991, reprinted in Ridgeway, *The March to War*, p. 155.

55. Quoted in *Time* (11 March 1991), p. 27.

56. Woodward, *The Commanders*, pp. 59-60.

57. Molly Moore, "War Exposed Rivalries, Weakness in Military," *Washington Post* (10 June 1991), pp. 1, A17.

58. This estimate was reported to have been made by Schwarzkopf in unofficial briefings to members of Congress. Patrick E. Tyler, "U.S. Officials Believe Iraq Will Take Years to Rebuild," *New York Times* (3 June 1991), pp. A1, A8. For estimates of U.S. casualties, see Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict: An Interim Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: July 1991), p. 27-1.

59. *New York Times* (3 June 1991), pp. A1, A8.