Unprepared for Peace in the Persian Gulf

Failure at Safwan

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Dedicated to my Mother and Father, without whose unflagging support I would never have completed this project.

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Introduction

Looking back on the Persian Gulf War, the central question is this: what did the United States accomplish? Few wars have gone so well and yielded so little. The United States seemed to have achieved much, but so much more slipped through her fingers. In the years since, Iraq remained a constant irritation to the United States with Saddam Hussein in power. The situation has only worsened with Saddam Hussein gone. As frustrations mounted in the interwar years, both citizens and policymakers increasingly sought somewhere to place blame—and the favorite scapegoat has been the ceasefire talks at Safwan, Iraq. Immediately the US invasion in 2003, people began to forget about those talks because there were seemingly bigger fish to fry. Indeed, America's disinterest in reexamining those talks made sense: they presented no easy answers, and compared to the events of the present day, their repercussions appeared trivial. For the politicians, usually so good at sniffing out error and assigning blame, Safwan refused to yield simple scapegoats. For the historian, the events at Safwan first appeared to be an inconclusive end to a largely irrelevant war. Unfortunately however, the lessons of those talks were far from irrelevant. Though tricky to unravel and bitter to swallow, the lessons of the ceasefire are about the limitations of US power abroad and the institutional weakness of the United States government. The results of Safwan were as the prophesies of Cassandra: prescient warnings ever ignored.

Safwan, properly examined, speaks to all the issues of the emerging post Cold War era. It revealed America's faulty notion of her own power abroad and the utility of military force. It presented the world a first glimpse of the cultural tensions within Iraq, and of the cultural clash between the Western world and the Muslim world. Most importantly, Safwan revealed the limitations of our own government, both human and institutional.

The War

The proximate cause of the Safwan talks was the Persian Gulf War. On August 2nd, 1990, the Iraqi Army invaded Kuwait, its small southern neighbor. Within several days the Iraqis had secured the country and had troops stationed on the Saudi border. In the course of the attacks, Iraqi soldiers looted Kuwait, carried out numerous atrocities including rape, torture, and mutilation on the Kuwaiti population, and killed a half-brother of the emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Fahd.[1] The pretext for the invasion was Kuwait's refusal to forgive Iraq's sizable debts accrued during the Iraq-Iran War when both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia bankrolled the Iraqi military as well as claims that Kuwait was stealing oil from Iraq's Rumaila oil fields.

Despite early signs of an attack, the invasion caught the US, Kuwaitis, and Saudis off guard.[2] The Iraqi troops performed well against meager resistance and were massing very quickly along the Saudi border. Having failed to act earlier, the US now rushed Marines, a carrier group, and a fighter group to Saudi Arabia to deter any further aggression by Saddam Hussein. A US diplomatic effort spearheaded by Secretary of State James Baker began to mobilize diplomatic support against Saddam while US military planners rushed more US troops to the Gulf region. In the United Nations, the United States first secured Resolution 660 condemning the Iraqi presence in Kuwait. Multiple resolutions followed, placing sanctions on Iraq, and finally Resolution 678 passed on November 29 authorizing the use of force to expel Iraqi forces should they still be in Kuwait on January 15th. An international coalition of thirty-four nations ultimately contributed money, troops, or hardware to the effort. More than five hundred thousand

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[1] Baker, James A III, with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.
[2] Gordon, Michael R., and Bernard E. Trainor, *The General's War*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995.

US military personnel participated in the war. The United Kingdom contributed around forty-five thousand troops. Though Saudi Arabia and Egypt also made sizable contributions, insubordination and the inferior quality of Saudi and Egyptian troops meant that militarily the war was largely an American and British effort.

Despite several last ditch efforts by the Soviets to find a negotiated solution that would save their former client state, Iraq, the Iraqis refused to back down, and on January 16th, the air war commenced. Missions ranged from "tank plinking" in the desert to bunker-busting in Baghdad. The air war lasted forty days and reduced the strength of many Iraqi divisions by 50 percent according to Air Force estimates.[3] One last ultimatum was issued on February 22nd, and on February 24th, the coalition ground offensive began. United States Marines smashed through the Iraqi center and drove straight for Kuwait City while the US Army and British forces made a long looping left hook around Iraqi frontlines. Throughout the theater Iraqi resistance amounted to almost nothing, and they began to retreat to Iraq through Basra almost immediately. By February 26, Marines reached Kuwait City which was officially liberated by Egyptians the following day. At 8 AM on February 28th, Coalition forces halted all offensive actions. Ceasefire talks occurred in Safwan on March 3rd. At that point, Iraq had suffered approximately 20,000 casualties,[4] and another 60,000 had been captured by Coalition forces.[5]

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[3] The CIA gave somewhat different estimates, significantly more conservative, probably to protect themselves should Iraqi forces prove to be in better shape than was believed by CENTCOM. The CIA estimates were largely incorrect, and for whatever reason, the Iraqis were not prepared to offer reasonable resistance anyways. Atkinson, Rick, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War*. New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993, p. 265-6.
[4] Estimates vary. This is the air force estimate. Ibid, p. 477.
[5] Gordon, p. 444.

The Ceasefire Talks and Afterwards

On March 3rd, 1990, Norman Schwarzkopf arrived at Safwan airfield to conduct ceasefire talks. With him was Prince Khalid, representing the Joint Arab Forces. The Iraqis, LTG Sala Abud Mahmud, commander of III Corps, and LTG Hashim Ahmad, Chief of the Staff of the Defense Ministry, arrived in Humvees shortly after eleven o'clock.[6] Inside a tent at 11:34 AM Baghdad time, the talks began. Schwarzkopf began by laying out the purpose of the meeting, which was to formalize the ceasefire and to ensure that the Iraqis complied with the resolutions of the Security Counsel. The first order of business was to agree to a prisoner exchange. The Iraqis were extremely cooperative, offering to begin releasing Coalition prisoners to the Red Cross "at once."[7] On the subject of Kuwaiti POWs, the Iraqis were evasive. They promised to disclose the full number of POWs taken as of August 8th, but this number did not include resistance fighters captured between the 8th and the liberation of Iraq. Furthermore, the Iraqis argued that many Kuwaitis had chosen to move to Iraq of their own free will.[8] Schwarzkopf also became concerned that the Red Cross might move too slowly, and so he suggested an immediate "symbolic exchange"[9] of a handful of prisoners.

The discussion then moved to the subject of returning the dead from each side—not a contentious issue. Then they discussed clearing minefields and whether or not any chemical or biological munitions were in Kuwait. The Iraqis were cooperative in turning over maps showing minefields, and

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[6] Atkinson, p. 5.
[7] Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illness, "Cease-Fire Talks with Iraqis at Safwan Airfield, Iraq," http://www.gulflink.osd.mil/declassimages/centcom/19960424/DOC_80_CEASE_FIRE_DISCUSSI ONS_WITH_IRAQIS_AT_SAFWAN_AIRFIELD_013.html (accessed April 7, 2008), p. 2.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid, p. 4.

they denied the presence of any hidden biological or chemical weapons in Kuwait except for some artillery shells.

When the conversation turned to the location of the neutral line dividing the belligerents, the Iraqis extracted a promise from Schwarzkopf that the line, which in places fell within Iraq, would in no way be permanent and that furthermore Coalition forces would withdraw as quickly as possible.[10] Schwarzkopf also suggested that a protocol be worked out to identify non-military ships and aircraft coming in and out of Iraq.

At this point in the conversation and at several other points, LTG Ahmad, who did most of the talking for the Iraqis, pointed out that Coalition forces had continued its attack after the Iraqis had announced that they were withdrawing. Iraqi forces entered a general retreat on the evening of the second day of the ground offensive.[11] Ahmad also inquired why Coalition aircraft continued to fly over Baghdad. Later he brought up an engagement between a retreating Iraqi column and the 24th Mechanized Division after the ceasefire. Apparently, his purpose was to state these Iraqi grievances for the sake of "history."[12]

Khalid then demanded that no Iraqis ever violate the Saudi Border, to which the Iraqis replied that they would see that no Iraqis crossed into Saudi Arabia and that no Saudis crossed into Iraq.

Then the Iraqis asked Schwarzkopf if it might be possible for them to fly helicopters internally because of the degree of damage to their bridges and roads. Schwarzkopf magnanimously agreed, doing the Iraqis one better by allowing not just civilian but also military helicopters free reign over the whole of Iraq.[13] This decision became one of the most controversial issues of the ceasefire.

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[10] Ibid, p. 9.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid, p. 11.

The discussion then moved back to a more detailed discussion of how many POWs each side had. Then, though, the Iraqis reiterated that they were displeased with the Coalition presence within Iraqi borders. Schwarzkopf responded that there would not be "one single Coalition force member in…Iraq, as soon as… [the Coalition could] get them out."[14] The remainder of the meeting dealt with coordinating the prisoner exchanges and maintaining open communications between the Iraqis and the Coalition.

For the next few weeks, Iraqi attack helicopters could be seen over much of northern and southern Iraq. In the aftermath of the war, both the Kurds and Shiites rose up in abortive attempts to throw off the Baathist yoke. Initially, the insurrections appeared promising, and retreating Iraqi soldiers joined the insurrection. Unfortunately, brutality begets brutality, and after years of military oppression and abuse, the Shiites killed surrendering Iraqi soldiers rather than embrace them. The defections soon stopped, and the military threw its hat in with the old regime. And so Saddam survived.

After about a month, as a result of an outcry of public opinion and prodding by British Prime Minister John Major,[15] the United States and the United Kingdom launched Operation Provide Comfort. Together they set up no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq and provided humanitarian assistance to the Kurds in the north. Saddam resisted disarmament to the best of his ability, and continued to provoke the US, most notably in a failed attempt to assassination George Bush. America remained involved in the region, mainly enforcing sanctions and curbing Saddam's repeated attempts to antagonize his own people and his neighbors, until 2003, when the United

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[14] Ibid, p. 13.
[15] Frontline, "The Gulf War, Oral Histories: James Baker," PBS. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/ gulf/oral/baker/1.html (accessed April 12, 2008), p. 4.

States and several other nations invaded Iraq. Thus, US involvement in and around Iraq has been roughly continuous since the Gulf War.[16]

There were several key criteria in the ceasefire, but the overarching concern was how to tie off the war efficiently and to maximize gains from the war. Though viewed as a purely military proceeding by the State Department,[17] the ceasefire would be the only negotiated event at the close of hostilities, so whatever it theoretically should have been, in actuality the talks had to shoulder all of the US's prewar goals. The US was not looking for a long term involvement in Iraq. The ceasefire had do get the military out quickly. On the other side, the ceasefire had to ensure that Coalition goals, specifically those of the Security Counsel resolutions, were met, and that Iraq would no longer be a regional threat. There were other goals, less apparent, which were primarily personal and institutional, including, for Baker, that he have the opportunity to seek a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict,[18] and for the military that they come out of the war with as sterling a reputation as possible. Though the decision by Schwarzkopf to allow helicopters to fly was the only part of the ceasefire which drew instant criticism, as events progressed, more of its flaws would become apparent. One way or another, very few of the war aims were met.

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[16] Hahn, Peter L., *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945*. Canada: Potomac Books, Inc, 2005, p. 105-115, 120-130.

[17] According to the Franks, the perception of meeting was that it was just "a battlefield meeting of the commanders…, to agree on the separation of forces." Clancy, Tom, with Fred Franks, Jr., and Tony Koltz, *Into the Storm*. New York: Penguin Group, 2007, p. 496.

[18] Baker, p. 412-418.

Shades of Vietnam:

The US Military's Preconceptions and Objectives

While the nation often seems to forget the past, the military does not, nor can it afford to. Each of the four services as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff has some version of a Center for Lessons Learned. These centers' main occupation is to review past military engagements, analyze them, and to draw from them lessons for the future. Beyond the bureaucratic analysis process, the top US commanders also retain their own personal impressions and notions from prior conflicts in which they have participated—George Bush flew with the Navy in World War II, Colin Powell served in Vietnam, Scowcroft served in the Air Force for twenty-nine years, James Baker was a Marine stateside during the Korean War, Norman Schwarzkopf and almost every corps, divisional, and brigade commander served in Vietnam. Thus, each generation of the American military establishment is unique based on the experiences which it brings to the table; its goals are uniquely informed, and the style in which war is prosecuted and concluded bear its signature. Understanding the particular identity of the American war-fighting machine of 1990-1991 is essential in understanding the institutional and personal goals during the ceasefire and for afterwards.

The Gulf War's particular generation of military leadership, Powell, Schwarzkopf, Franks, and others, was the direct product of Vietnam. Of those who had served, many had sustained injuries, and all had lost comrades. Fred Franks' story was paradigmatic. During an engagement in Cambodia, a North Vietnamese grenade severely injured Franks' left leg and foot. His life was saved by a piece of body armor. Over the course of the next six months, Franks struggled to decide whether or not to have the leg amputated. The leg was removed in January 1971. While recovering, he went into a shoe store on crutches, where a woman approached him and

asked him how he had sustained the injury. He told her, and she responded: "What a waste….You and all those boys did all that for nothing."[19] Franks equated this story to a sense that America had lost faith in its soldiers and no longer valued their sacrifices. He vowed that the next time "it would be different."[20]

Military leaders looked for scapegoats, primarily politicians like Lyndon Johnson and Robert McNamara. To some degree, the military felt a sense of alienation from its civilian overseers and the public,[21] and the officers involved in rebuilding the military vowed to maintain tighter control over not just operations but also over decisions about when and how to go to war. What authority the officer corps had, it wished to maintain.[22] Many of the officers of Powell's generation "vowed that when [their] turn came to call the shots, [they] would not quietly acquiesce"[23] to civilian control that they disagreed with.[24]

The military lost both its morale and cohesion during the war. Discipline was lax and drug use high. When Nixon created the All Volunteer Force and ended the draft in 1973 and began to shed its size from around 1.5 million men to 750 thousand, the quality of the average soldier dropped, as only the few who had no better prospects volunteered.[25] In 1980, 57 percent of soldiers were 'Category Four,' which meant they had IQs of 60 to 80.[26] Painfully, the army began to rebuild itself. The experience of men like Schwarzkopf, who served in a recruiting office at the end of the war, drove

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[19] Clancy, p. 81.
[20] Ibid, p. 83
[21] Powell, Colin, with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1996, 152.
[22] Bacevich, Andrew, *The New American Militarism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 52.
[23] Powell, p. 144.
[24] Bacevich, p. 47.
[25] Bacevich, Andrew, "lecture born again April 11th
[26] Bacevich, Andrew, *The New American Militarism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 109.

home both the impression that the public was disenchanted and that the military could never allow itself to end up in such a sorry situation again.[27] As the military slowly rebuild itself, rising officers vowed to regain the public's respect and to never again place the armed forces in a situation where it could suffer so much damage. Quick, clean, limited operations became the only type to which the military would acquiesce.[28]

Nevertheless, the military made very little progress through 1980. The failure of Operation Eagle Claw during the Carter Administration reinforced the perception that the military was a broken institution. Operation Eagle Claw was an ambitious, poorly conceived operation to rescue the American hostages held by Iran in 1980. The mission was aborted before contact was made with the hostages, and due to technical failures and poor training, eight US servicemen were killed when a helicopter and a C-130 collided. The instance served as a wakeup call to the public, and the exploitation of military weakness by Ronald Reagan as a campaign issue breathed new life into the effort to rebuild.[29]

Throughout the 80s, the scars of the Vietnam War became enshrined in pop culture, reflecting the nation's unresolved and conflicting impressions of the war. Films like *The Karate Kid* (1984) epitomize disillusionment with the military. After being attacked by several Cobra Kai karate students, the hero Daniel LaRusso and Mr. Miyagi go to the Cobra Kai Dojo to confront its sensei, John Kreese, a Vietnam veteran. On the wall of the Dojo is a picture of Kreese in Vietnam proudly brandishing an M-16. Kreese's motto is "strike hard, strike fast, no mercy." Later, at the karate tournament at the end of the movie, Kreese orders students of his dojo to perform "sweep the leg" to cripple LaRusso before the final fight—a move both illegal and

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[27] Schwarzkopf, H. Norman, with Peter Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993, p. 263.
[28] Bacevich, p. 43.
[29] Powell, p. 242-3.

unethical. From the sidelines one Cobra Kai student can be heard shouting "put him in a body bag!" in another reference to the horrors of Vietnam and suggestive of the body count method of fighting instituted in the Army during the war.[30] Kreese, the unethical, brutal, cold, merciless Vietnam veteran dramatically contrasts with Mr. Miyagi, the honorable, wise World War Two veteran, and the audience cannot help but feel disgust for Kreese.

Rambo: First Blood (1982) captures the other side of the story, and mirrors the struggle of many veterans. John Rambo returns to society only to find it hostile and unsympathetic to his struggle. The sheriff, representative of civilian authority, abuses Rambo, forcing Rambo to flee and fight. At one point, Rambo is hunted by unsympathetic, incompetent National Guardsmen. The National Guard was never called up in Vietnam and thus never experienced the horrors of the war, explaining its lack of sympathy for Rambo. Later, as part of military reforms, the Joint Chiefs of Staff changed force configurations, making fighting war without the National Guard largely impossible, as a way to bring the war home to America and ensure that war was fought only in instances where the public was committed enough to feel the burden. At the end of the final climactic shootout, Col. Trautman (Richard Crenna), Rambo's old superior, returns and persuades Rambo to give himself up.[31] Regardless of the inaccuracies and over-the-top nature of the film, *First Blood* became enshrined in pop culture and reinforces certain themes common to the military after the war: estrangement over its alienation with the public and with civilian institutions and the trauma of a poorly conceived morally ambiguous conflict. Finally, Rambo's decision to return to Fort Bragg with Col. Trautman is emblematic of the decision of many of those who chose to stay with the military to help rebuild it. Schwarzkopf decided to remain because he was "good at being a soldier and what [he]

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[30] *The Karate Kid*, directed by John G. Avildsen, Columbia Pictures, 1984.
[31] *Rambo: First Blood*, directed by Ted Kotcheff, Orion Pictures Corporation, 1982.

wanted was to see the Army—and the attitude of the public—change."[32] Franks, after losing his leg, went through a similar time trying to determine whether or not to remain with the Army, ultimately realizing that the Army was where he belonged.[33]

Eight years later, in 1981, Reagan entered office. Military spending went through the roof under Cap Weinberger. The Pentagon would come up with a projected budget, and Weinberger would reject it. It was "not enough."[34] Due to the huge influx of money, a budget so large that the Pentagon sometimes did not know how to spend it, the "hollow army" Reagan planned to fix rebuilt itself.[35] By 1986, only four percent of soldiers were Category Four.[36] Reagan also made a peace offering of sorts to the Armed Services by giving Master Sgt. Roy Benavidez a long deserved Medal of Honor for his heroic actions during the Vietnam War. [37, 38] Reagan began to reestablish the relationship between the military and its civilian leaders, by both funding them and giving them respect publicly. Regan's description of soldiers as "idealists"[39] and his much repeated effusive praise established a trend—civilians tended to exert less control over the military on the principle that soldiers were one hundred percent virtuous heroes, and furthermore, by rebuilding the institution, Reagan returned much clout to the officer corps. Furthermore, Reagan's successor, George Bush, would faithfully follow the philosophy espoused by Reagan of hands-off civilian control.[40] As a byproduct of the Reagan military renaissance, ground commanders during

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[32] Schwarzkopf, p. 209.
[33] Clancy, p. 83.
[34] Powell, p. 249.
[35] Powell, p. 250.
[36] Bacevich, p. 109.
[37] Bacevich, p. 107.
[38] Powell, p. 242.
[39] Reagan, Ronald, "Remarks at a Memorial Service in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for the Members of the 101st Airborne Division Who Died in the Airplane Crash in Gander, Newfoundland," December 16, 1985.
[40] Gordon, p. 16.

the Persian Gulf War would find themselves with an unprecedented amount of control.

Overriding all other considerations, then, was the military's quest to regain its lost status and honor. Thus, there was a tendency to avoid all unnecessary casualties on both sides, which contributed to the decision to end the Gulf War before the Iraqi army was completely destroyed.[41] The increased clout of and insecurities within the armed forces helped determine both who would make the decisions at the end of the war and also what decisions were made.

Objectives

The United States had four objectives according to President Bush. First, Iraq must immediately withdraw unconditionally from Kuwait. Second, the legitimate Kuwaiti government must be restored. Third, the stability and security of the Gulf must be maintained. Finally, American safety abroad must be protected.[42] At least, these were the publicly announced objectives. Privately, the State Department and the White House emphasized the objectives differently, as did the military. In making the case for war to the public, the President and Secretary Baker found it imperative to emphasize the proximate cause—the Iraqi invasion—to maintain public support. The need to create consensus at home, a task that was in some ways more difficult than the task of raising support abroad, necessitated couching purely strategic and political goals in a media-friendly veneer of morality. While Bush and Baker were no doubt moved by the suffering and

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[41] Atkinson, p. 469.

[42] George Bush, "Why We Are in the Gulf," *Newsweek,* 26 November 1990, 29, as quoted in Gerrard, Mark, "War Termination in the Persian Gulf: Problems and Prospects," Aerospace Power Journal 15, no.3 [Fall 2001], http://www.airpower.maxwell .af.mil/airchronicles/apj /apj01/fal01/garrard.html (accessed April 7, 2008).

humiliation endured by the occupied Kuwaitis,[43] wars have rarely been waged for purely humanitarian reasons, and the Gulf War was no exception.

1989 was a historic year. The Berlin Wall fell. Germany reunified the following year. The great struggle of the past forty years, America's Cold War standoff with the Soviet Union, was ending. The waning of the Soviets impacted international politics in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and to a lesser extent, the rest of Asia, South America, the Middle East, and Africa. Bush's single largest foreign policy responsibility during his term was to manage the USSR's disintegration to benefit the US. American objectives at Safwan have to be viewed through this lens.

Accordingly, the second and third goals deserve the most focus. While protecting Americans abroad certainly always remains of paramount importance to a President, few Americans were directly threatened, and when Saddam released all foreign hostages shortly before the air war began, the direct threat to American civilians abroad ceased to exist. The second goal, reinstalling the legitimate Kuwaiti government, constituted the short term objective of the Bush administration. The third goal, achieving stability and security in the Middle East, was the guiding principle of the second goal.

America did not go into Kuwait because of any particular moral legitimacy that the Kuwaiti government possessed. Kuwait was far from democratic, and both the White House and the State Department knew it.[44] Kuwait had been ruled since the state's inception by autocratic emirs who governed with little regard for Western liberal ideals. While the nation has a de facto Parliament, the prime minister is appointed by the emir, and the prime minister appoints the cabinet. Jim Baker himself acknowledged that the American people could not be expected to support a war to maintain a monarchy.[45] Instead, the principle that provided the supposed moral

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[43] Baker, p. 322
[44] Bush, p. 358.
[45] Baker, p. 332.

justification for war was a Wilsonian notion of international sovereignty and the belief that whatever the Kuwaiti monarchy did to its people, what Saddam was doing to the Kuwaitis was much worse.

The United Nations charter provided the United States with the initial legal justification for its involvement. Article 51 of the UN charter states that nothing within it shall "impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a member…until the Security Counsel has taken measures to maintain international peace and security."[46] Ostensibly, US interests in the Gulf were vital, and, as such, any threat to the flow of oil was a direct threat to the United States, triggering Article 51. Through this somewhat liberal interpretation of self-defense, the US justified first placing military assets in Saudi Arabia. In fact, some key players, most notably Margaret Thatcher, felt that instead of risking further action through the UN, the US should simply avoid convening the Security Counsel at all, relying exclusively on Article 51 as legal justification.[47] The United States, however, placed great store in achieving international legitimacy, both to maintain its image and to get contributions from other nations to help offset the cost of the war. Thus, since the United States worked through the United Nations, the goals of the UN resolutions were also US goals. These included the disarmament of Iraq and that Iraq obey international law.

Finally, a long war is an unpopular war, so the Bush administration, along with the military, sought to keep the war as short as possible. All in all, Bush wanted a contained, decisive, quick war that would maintain or enhance US prestige in the Middle East while reducing Iraqi power.

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[46] United Nations Charter, Chapter. 8, Art. 51.
[47] Baker, p. 278.

Arab Support and the Question: To Baghdad?

To what extent did the US wish to reduce Iraqi power—or, in short, should Saddam stay or should he go? While Saddam's government had carried out extreme acts of cruelty on both the people of Iraq and the Kuwaitis,[48] the US found that the Arab states would not support altering the domestic situation of Iraq. Before Iraq invaded, the Saudis and other Arab nations preferred to handle Saddam's grievances internally.[49] After Kuwait fell, Arab nations more readily accepted US military aid, but even then only nations that were directly threatened by Saddam, such as Saudi Arabia, or nations with close Western ties, like Egypt, really had any pro-US stance. Jordan and a host of smaller nations including Yemen and Bahrain refused to cooperate. Bahrain and Yemen, which do not border Iraq, probably felt that Saudi Arabia posed more of a threat to them than Iraq. Even typically pro-Western Jordan remained stubbornly neutral.[50] The members of the royal family even attended Sandhurst Military Academy in England. The overwhelming consideration for all three nations was public opinion. Saddam had offered strong words of support to the Palestinians and had condemned the Israelis. Launching scud missiles at Israeli targets only bolstered pro-Saddam sentiments with Arab peoples.[51]

Arab leaders in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other states were key US allies. If the US wanted to overthrow Saddam, it needed the backing of those states. Those Arab governments walked a fine line between supporting their international interests and maintaining domestic control. The Egyptian

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[48] "Iraq Used Gas Against Kurds, Senate Staff Report Charges," New York Times, September 22, 1988. http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940DEFDC1E3BF931A1575AC0A96E948260 (Accessed April 12, 2008).
[49] Gordon, p. 5.
[50] Baker, p. 278, 280, 306.
[51] In fact, Palestinian refugees for a while named their children Saddam and Scud in honor of the attacks.
Atkinson, p. 133.

military government held on to power by cracking down on radical Islamic groups, representing ideals of Arab nationalism, and by refraining from provocative acts which would push moderates into the radical camp. The Saudi monarchy survived through repression and by backing Islamic groups, funding Islamic charities, and building mosques.[52] In these countries and across the region, secular and quasi-secular governments clung to power by their fingertips. Any show of force by the US in an Arab country without overwhelming justification would upset the delicate balance which the pro-US Arab governments ruled, either forcing them to withdraw support from the US or potentially setting them at odds with their citizens and throwing their countries into chaos. If an American intervention in Iraq angered the Saudi people, the Saudi government would have no option but to break the Saudi-US alliance, which would be nearly as disastrous to US policy as if Iraq had actually invaded Saudi Arabia in the first place.

Furthermore, Arab nations had no interest in the US running things in what they regarded as their sphere of control. Regardless of motive, all of the nations in the Middle East desired increased power and influence. US presence curtailed their ability to exercise influence on their neighbors.[53]

Another consideration was the potential danger of a destabilized Iraq. First and foremost, Iraqi power countered Iranian power. The US initially supplied[54] both Iraq and Iran during the Iran-Iraq War because US officials did not wish to see either side gain decisive influence over the region. Taking down the Baathist regime would remove the check on Iran. US officials believed that Iraqi, Saudi, and Iranian Shiites would plot together while the Kurds launched attacks into Turkey, plunging the region

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[52] …and extremist groups. During the eighties, the Saudi government was able to vent the pent up radicalism of some of its citizens in Afghanistan. When the Soviet Union pulled out in 1989, extremists began to look for new targets. Coll, Steve, *Ghost Wars*, New York: Penguin Books, 2005, p. 261, 398.
[53] Ibid, p. 297.
[54] Funding for Iran ended when the Iran-Contra Scandal occurred. Hahn, p. 83.

into war.[55] Iraq could have become the next Lebanon. The chaos could also destabilize the regimes in the surrounding countries. These assessments, however, ignored ethnic and cultural differences and were unfounded.[56]

Even if the US was willing to shoulder the responsibility of regime change by herself, she would be confronted with a nearly impossible task. She would have to police a population of twenty-seven million in a region nearly one and two thirds again as big as Texas.[57] The expense of rebuilding destroyed infrastructure would be astronomical. Also, the only type of government that the US could install that the US electorate would support would be a democratic one subscribing to liberal Western traditions. These traditions could not be fostered overnight. Grafting one nation's cultural and political system on another takes at least a generation. Children have to grow up being taught those traditions before any leaders of the new political culture are prepared to take control. The US would be condemned to multiple years of thankless occupation before the nation stabilized sufficiently. Even then, religious and ethnic ties might still trump the new national identity.

The security of the Middle East was the ultimate objective of invading. To push on to Baghdad, alienating Arab allies and costing the US thousands of dollars and lives was not in US interests. To this end, in the ceasefire talks, the State Department and White House were content to let Schwarzkopf come up with lenient terms for the Iraqis. Both the politicians and the brass frowned upon any action that might have continued the

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[55] 1. U.S. Congress. Senate. 1991, *Civil War in Iraq: a Staff Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate*. 102nd Cong., 1st sess. S. Prt. 102-27. Washington, U.S. G.P.O., 1991. Microfilm, CIS 91 S382-9, p. 15.

[56] Ibid, p. 14-16.

[57] Central Intelligence Agency, "Iraq," *The World Factbook*. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html (accessed April 7, 2008).

conflict.[58] Since going to Baghdad had been ruled out as a possibility by everyone except Paul Wolfowitz and several other low to midlevel State Department officials,[59] no one thought to encourage Schwarzkopf to modify his terms accordingly. No one wished to sacrifice positive Arab opinion for the dubious goal of removing Saddam.

Lesser alternatives included supporting an low-level Afghanistan-like insurgency in southern Iraq. Though the Saudis actually supported this idea,[60] this plan proved unattractive because of the instability that would have resulted in the region. Largely because of the State Department's policy of "no contact"[61] with Kurdish and Shiite leaders, created three year earlier to appease Turkey and Iraq, the northern and southern uprisings caught the US by surprise. Not willing to spend the time or the energy in crafting a new government from a diverse group of religious and ethnic leaders, US leaders refused to aid the insurrections since the US policy was to "get rid of Saddam Hussein, not his regime," [62] thus alleviating any need for continued US involvement in the region.

The 'Deciders': Who They Were and Why They Mattered

Within the government of the United States there are three major groups responsible for dealing with foreign crisis: the President, his advisors, and his staff; the State Department; and the Department of Defense, including the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs (CJC), and the theater Commander in Chief (CINC). These three sections made

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[58] Powell, p. 505.
[59] Gordon, p. 448.
[60] U.S. Congress, 16.
[61] Ibid, p. VII.
[62] Ibid, p. 28.

decisions regarding the conduct, the objectives, and the cessation of the war. Understanding the important members of each group and the way in which they interacted explains what happened at Safwan and how.

The White House: In the White House one figure dominated: President Bush. No other figure approached him in influence or power. National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, the other major figure within the White House, did not take a leading role, and most of the time simply supported the President.[63]

Though President Bush had once joked that he was not very good at the "vision thing," George Bush undoubtedly fell for the easy, and false, idealism of the era. In his term, President Bush witnessed the disintegration of the Soviet Union. After forty years of Cold War, it would be easy to believe, as George Bush did, that American values, liberty and democracy, were finally triumphing.[64] Furthermore, it was easy for the President to imagine the world headed by the United States, the unipolar world leader. Unfortunately, Bush enchanted by his false visions, failed to perceive emerging threats such as global terrorism, and was utterly unable to understand that dictators could survive in the new world order.[65] He was a man of vision, but his vision was overly optimistic, simplistic, and uncritical.

Often President Bush preferred to look to the past, matching current events to past events, looking for metaphors to guide himself through the present. World War II, which shaped much of his notion of war, was Bush's preferred object of comparison. Bush compared Saddam to Adolph Hitler frequently.[66] While in principle the two men were similar—Hitler and Saddam both used violence on their own countrymen, they each persecuted

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[63] As near as can be told from the Bush-Scowcroft memoirs. Bush, 487.
[64] Ibid, pg. 564.
[65] Atkinson, p. 55.
[66] Ibid, p. 320, 328, 340, 366, 375, 388, 399.

specific ethnic groups, and they both used military force to conquer their neighbors—the scenarios, however, were dramatically different. The Wehrmacht of 1939 was one of the best military forces the world had ever seen. In comparison, the Iraqi army, though large, was third rate in every way and demoralized to boot. Hitler systematically slaughtered over six million people while Saddam's abuses, though heinous, never approached the same level of organization or evil efficiency. During World War II, none of the allies sought anything other than total victory. Meanwhile, after handicapping the Iraqi military, the Arab nations were content to allow Saddam to continue on in their midst. Finally and most importantly, Iraq was a culturally diverse nation whose citizens did not possess a sense of national identity. At no point was Iraq ever truly unified, whereas Nazi Germany unerringly was. The discrepancy between the metaphors illustrated Bush's inability to understand Iraq and what the regime represented.

On the day of the ceasefire, President Bush expressed deep misgivings about the way the war was concluded. He worried about the lack of a "battleship Missouri surrender" and believed that was what was "missing to make [the Gulf War] akin to WW II, to separate Kuwait from Korea and Vietnam." Essentially he was concerned that Saddam would retain power and claim to have triumphed. Bush assuaged his fears with the thought that "when the troops straggle home with no armor, beaten up…50,000 and maybe more dead, the people of Iraq [would] know" that they had been beaten,[67] but somehow the words rang hollowly. Militarily, there was, in fact, something amiss. While three quarters of Iraqi armor had been destroyed, one half of the superior T-72 tanks used by the Republican Guard escaped. One of the three Republican Guard divisions, the Hammurabi, escaped roughly seventy percent intact.[68] That President Bush did not act upon his misgivings constitutes a major failure in leadership. As president,

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[67] Bush, p. 487.
[68] Gordon, p. 429.

George Bush had more authority than anyone else to oversee events and to ensure that the outcome served US and Coalition interests.

Unclear as to the goals or the accomplishments of the conflict, President Bush was unable to exploit what gains were made or to remedy potential errors. His rhetoric contradicted his aims. On February 14th, Bush encouraged "the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands."[69] Bush's war aims, however, did not include the overthrow of Saddam in a popular uprising. On the ground, Bush's grand statements about freedom fell short in practice, and thousands of Kurds and Shiites paid the price.

Furthermore, Bush failed in the basic responsibility of a leader; to organize and steer his subordinates towards a common goal.[70] Bush showed little awareness that either Baker or the top folks at the Pentagon were pursuing personal and institutional agendas with such ardor. Reigning in the State Department and Department of Defense might have led to a far more satisfactory conclusion for both the president and the nation than Safwan ever provided. As Commander in Chief, President Bush bears most of the responsibility for the events and aftermath of the Gulf War, and his failure to keep his senior people on the same page working toward similar goals probably constitutes one of the most damaging mistakes of the Gulf War.

The State Department: Secretary of State James Baker was one of the strongest figures within the administration and successfully pursued his own agenda.[71] As the head of the State Department, he had several missions.

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[69] George Bush as quoted by Maurine Dowd, "War in the Gulf: The President; Bush, Scorning Offer, Suggests Iraqis Topple Hussein," New York Times, February 16, 1991, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpa ge.html?res=9D0CEFDB1538F935A25751C0A967958260 (accessed on April 14, 2008).
[70] Baker, p. 330-334.
[71] Ibid, p. 412-414.

First, like other Secretaries of State from the previous forty years, Baker was responsible for successfully managing US-Soviet diplomacy, which at this point meant containing the Soviets and managing the dissolution of the USSR. Second, he was responsible for ensuring that the US could line up foreign support for its international policies. Finally, Baker's personal goal was to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict and to shape a newly stable Middle East with the US as a major strategic partner. Each of his missions played into State Department and US policy during the Gulf War.[72]

Ironically, Baker's biggest task—managing US-Soviet relations and crafting a new world order as the USSR collapsed—had the smallest impact upon his decisions regarding the war and ceasefire. In general, Baker believed that the USSR's dismemberment was continuing in accordance with US wishes. Baker's strategy consisted of maintaining pressure on the Soviet Union, allowing them no latitude either to repress demonstrations in satellite states or to attempt to mediate international disputes. He specifically fought to keep Soviet peace plans off the table before the ground war began.[73] The Soviets, at the behest of 'Arabist'[74] politicians who wanted to expand Soviet influence in the Middle East, made several attempts at brokering a peaceful Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. Baker blocked them at every turn. By and large though, the US was pleased with the opportunity the Gulf War presented because it broke the diplomatic logjam between the US and the Soviets in the UN and thus brought the Soviets into line behind America.[75] Thus, Baker's interest in the ceasefire was ensuring that the United Nation's resolutions, which represented new international cooperation and an acknowledgement of US leadership, be observed.

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[72] Author's opinion.
[73] Ibid, p. 281, 396.
[74] A factions of politicians within the USSR who wanted to expand Soviet involvement in the region. Ibid, p. 285.
[75] Bush, p. 493.

Baker also forged the coalition, bringing members into the coalition, managing their contributions, and holding them to their commitments. The US called in many favors abroad to gain support for and to pay for the war. Baker made multiple trips to meet with the Kuwaitis, the Saudis, the Germans, and the Japanese who supplied the coalition with most of its money. He also extracted favorable loans from the Saudis for the Turks to gain Turkish support. He called off Egypt's debts. He offered presidential meetings to the Chinese if they would vote in favor of the Security Counsel resolution authorizing force[76]. The amount of time and effort Baker put into pulling together the international coalition begs the question: what could the war achieve that merited such effort? Part of the answer lies in the building of the coalition itself. The coalition was supposed to be the harbinger of a new united world community.[77] By bringing thirty-four nations together, the United States could claim that the world had entered a new phase of international cooperation and respect. This attitude fostered globalism which US policy makers regarded as the keystone of the American economy.[78] Therefore, Baker wished to ensure a clean war and stable world economy to demonstrate the efficacy of US leadership.

It was the potential dividend of Arab goodwill that the US could accrue what most excited Baker. Even before the military actions had drawn to a close, Baker felt that an opportunity unparalleled in recent history

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[76] The Chinese did not accept Baker's offer. After the Chinese government suppressed the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, the Bush administration had to balance trade interests with the Chinese against moral outrage domestically over China's actions. The Chinese wanted either Bush or Baker to visit China to prove that relations between the two nations were warming. Baker countered, offering the Chinese an audience with the President at the White House if they voted for the resolutions or no meeting if they abstained or voted no. In the end, an abstention mattered enough to the US that Baker caved, and the Chinese foreign minister Qian Qichen was granted a short meeting with the President on December 1st 1990. The Chinese abstained. Ibid, p. 326.

[77] Bush, p. 440.

[78] Bacevich, Andrew, *American Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 32-54.

existed to mediate the Arab-Israeli question. The tendency to regard the events in Iraq as "an earthquake" [79] whose window of opportunity would close as quickly as dust settled lent a sense of urgency to Baker's gambit. Therefore, the State Department chose to leave the terms of the ceasefire in the hands of the military.[80] Baker, focused man that he was, was already looking for ways to convert Arab gratitude into political capital, and so he did not pay much attention to the ceasefire. Besides, he assumed that a more formal peace treaty document could be drawn up later, after Saddam disarmed and sanctions were lifted. Baker envisioned a Middle East redrawn, with a stable Iraq, Arab-Israeli peace, and the US at the center of a new collective Arab defense force.[81]

Unfortunately though for Baker, Saddam did not give up his arms willingly. For years, weapons inspectors played a game of cat-and-mouse with the Iraqis, often arriving at facilities only to see Iraqis trucks smuggling all the weapons out the opposite entrance. Additionally, as Saddam began to brutally suppress the Kurdish and Shiite rebellions in the north and the south, the US found itself involved in combat missions to protect the dissident Iraqis. Peace would be a long time coming, and Baker never regained the opportunity he gave up at Safwan to have a bigger role in crafting the peace.

Baker's attempt to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict also collapsed. After an intense round of negotiations simply to bring the Arabs to the table, Baker finally organized the Madrid Conference which met in October 1991. Though the Conference did yield some progress, including wider recognition of Israel and a reaffirmation of UN Resolutions 242 and 338, the talks

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[79] Baker, p. 412.

[80] Frontline. "The Gulf War, Oral Histories: Brent Scowcroft," PBS. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/front line/gulf/oral/scowcroft/4.html (accessed April 12, 2008), p. 4.

[81] Baker, p. 413.

ultimately led nowhere.[82] Whatever momentum Baker thought he had dissipated.

Instead, when the dust had settled, Baker's gambit was a total failure. While he had reduced Soviet influence in the region and successfully built a coalition, the rewards were meager. The Soviet Union was already withdrawing support from satellite states in Eastern Europe. In that context, and owing to recent scars of Afghanistan, increased Soviet involvement would have been unlikely, and anyway, there was little Gorbachev could do. The coalition that Baker built cost the US a tremendous amount of political capital, and yielded very little. And by failing to tie off the war, the continued US presence in the region very quickly began to generate fierce resentment among radical Muslims. Finally, Baker's gambit, his decision to focus on both the Arab-Israeli conflict and his vision for the Middle East, achieved nothing and his lack of involvement at Safwan had enormous repercussions for years to come. He failed to convert global goodwill into a lasting peace agreement between the Arabs and the Israelis[83] and sacrificed a serious examination of the diplomatic possibilities at Safwan in the process. Although the ceasefire talks were the purview of the military, Baker should have realized that these talks might have become the basis for US-Iraqi relations for years to come—certainly at least until Iraq fully disarmed. At the very least, as the Secretary of State, Baker should have had a stronger influence in what in the end were the only negotiations of the war.

The Military: Richard Cheney, Secretary of Defense during the war, was an exceptionally able and elusive man. Known for his secretive nature and his brilliant analytical skills, Cheney won the respect and admiration, if not

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[82] Hahn, p. 92.
[83] Baker, p. 541.

the trust, of his subordinates with his attention to detail and willingness to listen.

Though Cheney made his opinions heard, if he disagreed with the recommendations of the military, Cheney did not intrude upon the ceasefire process. The only reason why Cheney would have refrained from interfering would be if he already felt comfortable with the planned course of the talks. Also Cheney believed that Saddam would be toppled[84], that it was only a matter of time.[85] Viewed in that light, Cheney must have thought that the ceasefire talks were moot. His curious inaction on the matter illustrated just how low a priority he placed on the ceasefire talks.

H. Norman Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell wielded enormous influence during the Persian Gulf War. The Goldwater-Nichols Military Reorganization Act in 1986 dramatically increased the power of both the regional Commander in Chief (CINC) and of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs (CJC). Originally the JCS functioned by voting on specific issues, but the Goldwater-Nichols Act concentrated power unilaterally in the hands of the CJC. The Goldwater-Nichols Act also enhanced the power of each of the regional CINCs. The US Military divided the globe into different geographic areas and designated one commanding officer to each region. As a result of the act, the CINC, rather than the service chiefs, had direct control over the assets of each of the four services that were within his or her region. The CINC answered only to the CJC and the Secretary of Defense and the President. During the Gulf War, this relatively new doctrine gave both Powell and Schwarzkopf unprecedented leverage and flexibility over the conduct war and over the ceasefire.

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[84] Frontline. "The Gulf War, Oral Histories: Richard Cheney," PBS. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/front line/gulf/oral/cheney/2.html (accessed April 12, 2008), p. 2.

[85] Hayes, Stephen F, *Cheney: The Untold Story of America's Most Powerful and Controversial Vice President.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007, p. 249.

Colin Powell was probably one of the most politically adroit men ever to hold the position of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. He was tremendously persuasive,[86] and as CJC, he was the link between Schwarzkopf and the civilian decision makers. Though he was not directly involved in the talks at Safwan, Powell's military beliefs dominated all military decisions during the war.

The Powell Doctrine for making war, very similar to the Weinberger Doctrine,[87] impacted the war and the ceasefire in two very clear ways: First, overwhelming force should be used whenever possible. Second, war should only be fought for clear, limited political objectives, and once those objectives had been accomplished, the military should get out as soon as possible.[88] Powell's conclusions drawn from his experience in the Vietnam War also figured in. As the Gulf War closed, Powell pushed to end the conflict sooner rather than later. His concern on February 27, as Iraqi resistance melted away, was that the public would perceive continued military operations as unjustified slaughter.[89] The administration shared his fears. The administration was concerned about sullying the reputation of the war and by extension its reputation, and Powell's concern was to preserve the military's image. Moral considerations did not enter into the debate. On the ground, the commanders felt that they needed another day or more to complete the encirclement of the Republican Guard and Iraqi army, but the

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[86] A rather telling example of Powell's powers of persuasion actually occurred after the war. Schwarzkopf had called to discuss future career plans. Both men knew that because of his popularity after the war, Schwarzkopf could be a nominee for the Army Chief of Staff, or even for CJC itself. Powell managed to convince Schwarzkopf that no position was big enough for him, so Schwarzkopf should retire, which Schwarzkopf did. Though Powell's true motives were unclear, he likely at least in part convinced Schwarzkopf to retire to protect his post as CJC. Powell, p. 515-516.

[87] Bacevich, Andrew, *The New American Militarism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 48-49.

[88] Powell, Colin, with Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1996, p. 420-421.

[89] Gordon, p. 404.

commanders changed the objectives, deciding not to complete the destruction of Iraq's warfighting capability. Powell's concern was to protect the military and to maintain its image, not to achieve victory at all costs. His priorities reflected institutional, rather than national, priorities.

By avoiding the total destruction of the Iraqi Army, Powell preserved the reputation of the United States's military. After the war he said that "America [had] once again fallen in love with its Armed Forces."[90] His preoccupation with the military's image prompted him to allow Schwarzkopf to be "too hasty and too dignified"[91] in handling the ceasefire. While he achieved his institutional goals, Powell, for lack of stronger civilian control, paid little attention to the long term needs of national policy.

Schwarzkopf operated under many of the same preconceptions as Powell. He too wanted a war of limited scope and an honorable engagement that would gloss the military's tarnished image. The State Department and White House gave Schwarzkopf total control in drafting the terms of reference for the ceasefire.[92] All that Washington demanded of Schwarzkopf was that he send the terms of reference to Washington for approval. Schwarzkopf's concerns were of the military first and last. Either he did not conceive of geopolitical responsibilities beyond the actual conduct of the war, or he did not believe they fell within his purview. As a soldier, he should not have been making foreign policy. Schwarzkopf's job was to win the war, and once that was done, his job was to end the engagement and get troops home. Unfortunately, those who had that responsibility, in the White House and State Department, did not fulfill their roles.

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[90] Powell, p. 488-489.
[91] Paul Wolfowitz as quoted in Gordon, p. 448.
[92] Schwarzkopf, H. Norman, with Peter Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993, p. 531.

Foreign Involvement

The sad irony is that in two major instances, foreign players perceived the best interests of the US when US statesmen could not. The first was Margret Thatcher. Perhaps the only person to 'get it right,' Thatcher, the British Prime Minister through 1990, kept President Bush from going "wobbly."[93] A resolute woman, Thatcher was also very shrewd. She perceived that a middle path existed, one that neither radicals like Wolfowitz nor conservatives like Powell acknowledged. Rather than either a rapid withdrawal or a thrust straight to Baghdad, Thatcher advocated sitting on the Rumaila oil fields[94] to ensure that Saddam fulfilled his UN obligations. She and others recognized that sanctions did not work. Regrettably, Thatcher resigned in late November, and her influence went with her.[95] The continued troop presence could have been relatively small, certainly as small the number of troops that almost immediately became involved in Operation Provide Comfort.

The second instance of 'getting it right' occurred when Saudi Prince Khalid demanded that Iraq send more senior delegates to the ceasefire talks.[96] The greater the rank of the Iraqi representatives, the more difficult it would be for the Iraqis to claim victory. US generals, eager to be done with the conflict, hampered Khalid's efforts. Thus, while the Iraqis agreed to send more senior commanders, the CINC did not have the patience to wait for the

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[93] Frontline, "The Gulf War, Oral Histories: Margaret Thatcher," PBS. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/fro ntline/gulf/oral/thatcher/2.html (accessed April 12, 2008) p. 2.
[94] Gordon, p. 447.
[95] Thatcher, Margaret, *The Downing Street Years*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1993, p. 828.
[96] Gordon, p. 448.

true prize, a visit from Saddam.[97] In the end, Saddam was able to maintain the façade of victory at home to the chagrin of American officials.

Aftermath and Criticism

Few people, if any, criticized the events at Safwan during the following months. Though politicians such as Bush and Baker harbored private reservations about the manner in which the war was closed, especially after making the decision to protect the Kurds and the Shiites, few openly protested. Most soldiers became swept up in the parades and celebrations given to the returning troops, something that had been lacking in 1974.[98] Within the administration, a small core of hardliners, chief among them Paul Wolfowitz,[99] felt that the coalition should have gone to Baghdad. Criticism also arose once it became apparent that the United States was responsible for allowing Iraqis to use their helicopters to suppress the insurrections. Operation Provide Comfort, however, had remedied the situation by establishing no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq. Other events, most notably the continued collapse of the Soviet Empire and the August 1991 coup attempt in Moscow distracted attention. During the 1992 presidential campaign, Al Gore briefly returned to the issue to castigate the Bush administration for allowing Saddam to remain in power.[100] The majority of complaints, ultimately, however, either consisted of empty

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[97] Frontline. "The Gulf War, Oral Histories: Brent Scowcroft," PBS. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/front line/gulf/oral/scowcroft/4.html (accessed April 12, 2008), p. 4.
[98] Frontline, "The Gulf War, Oral Histories: Colin Powell," PBS. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/ gulf/oral/powell/5.html (accessed April 12, 2008), p. 5.
[99] Paul Wolfowitz, interview by Margaret Warner, News Hour, PBS, transcript (originally aired September 14, 2001), http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/terrorism/julydec 01/wolfowitz-9-14.html (accessed April 7, 2008).
[100] Hayes, p. 252.

words, as in the case of Al Gore, or were voiced by people with little real power, such as Wolfowitz.

The unresolved issues slipped to the back-burner during the 1990s. Because the US failed to resolve the situation, US troops remained in the Middle East, giving rise to the conception of America as the 'Great Satan' within radical Muslim groups. In the years following the war, America embarked upon a mission of direct Middle East involvement—i.e. 'boots on the ground'. This involvement occurred because the Safwan ceasefire talks had not provided the US a defined exit strategy. A hallmark of the 1990s, this policy of military involvement in the Gulf has only increased with the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Conclusion

If the Gulf War demonstrated any one thing, it was that there are no simple solutions in wars. This conflict, a seemingly clear-cut operation—the removal of the Iraqis from Kuwait—in fact actually brought with it numerous complex and often competing issues. The Safwan ceasefire talks highlighted competing institutional and personal interests within the US government, and the Bush administration's failure of leadership allowed military and civilian officials to pursue their personal agendas to the exclusion of US national interests.

Baker was preoccupied with the search for an Arab-Israeli peace settlement and his postwar vision for the Middle East, which died stillborn in Congress. In the process he failed in his duties to fully prepare for peace and to think seriously about the ceasefire. Institutionally, the military was the big winner. The armed services regained the honor and prestige they had lost a generation before. In the process, the military rushed the ceasefire talks to get out quickly, sacrificing any chance at a more meaningful end to the conflict. In a cruel twist of fate, the military's success actually worked

against it. Politicians began to use the military with increasing irresponsibility, placing greater stress on America's armed forces, until the military slipped into the situation in which it finds itself today, with "too much war for too few warriors."[101]

Finally, the ultimate responsibility and failure must rest with the president. George H. W. Bush failed in the key test of the office—he failed to lead effectively. As President, his mission was to promote the best interests of the country above all else. Haunted by the feeling that something was wrong, Bush nevertheless could not see events clearly enough to keep his subordinates in check. The end result was a weak ceasefire that left the US with very few cards to play in the postwar game.

The two key lessons of the Safwan ceasefire talks are that the presidency must lead the executive branch and that America's leader must examine every option from multiple perspectives before acting. As the powers of the institutions which comprise the executive branch expand, specifically in terms of the military, their interests often compete with the interests of the nation as a whole. The president must acknowledge the difference between institutional and national needs and be willing to promote the interests of America ahead of those institutions. Furthermore, he or she must ensure that serious analysis of both shore and long term national goals occurs.

Peter Galbraith wrote in his report, "Civil War in Iraq," to the Senate that "unless the world community is prepared to consign the Iraqi people to a fate which many have fought to avoid, the United States and its coalition partners are stuck in the Iraqi quagmire."[102] He wrote these words in May of 1991, two months after Safwan. Seventeen years later, we are still stuck in

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[101] Bacevich, Andrew, "An Army at Risk," New York Times, April 8, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008 /04/08/opinion/08bacevich.html (accessed on April 11, 2008).
[102] U.S. Congress, p. VII.

an Iraqi quagmire with no end in sight. The thread between Safwan and the present is strong, and we must be careful lest we weave another like it.

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