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THE 1991 GULF WAR IN IRAQ – STRATEGIC INADEQUACY

By/par LCdr/capc Marcel Losier

12 April/avril 2004

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ABSTRACT

The United States did not evolve strategically to keep pace with the tremendous transformation after the Vietnam War that earned the American military the title of the world's uncontested superpower. In 1990, the United States was unsuccessful in adapting its strategy dominated by deterrence during the Cold War to the new world order. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait would prove to be the first test of America's strategic inadequacy.

The failure of American strategy in the Middle East during the Persian Gulf War was the result of: (1) failing to address competing regional interests, (2) providing contradictory messages to Iraq prior to the invasion of Kuwait, (3) President Bush's lack of objectivity in dealing with the conflict, (4) the absence of clear and achievable strategic objectives from which to derive subordinate military objectives, and (5) the mishandling of the conflict termination. The overall result was that the United States proved to be strategically deficient during the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

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The United States military underwent a dramatic transformation in the fifteen years leading up to the end of the Cold War on 9 November 1989.¹ In retrospect, by the end of the Vietman War in 1975 the American military was in dreadful shape. Although this devastation was mostly psychological as opposed to equipment capability related, the result was the same. The United States military thus undertook the task of professional transformation, led by General William E. DePuy in the Army, through tremendous changes in doctrine and training.² At the same time, the sustained military spending by the United States significantly increased the capability gap with the remainder of the world. Meanwhile the only peer competitor, the Soviet Union, gradually regressed due to economic pressure and by 1990 the Cold War is over. So the fifteen years after the Vietman War see not only a tremendous rise in American military power but a dramatic decline by the primary adversary, leaving the United States the uncontested military superpower of the world.

¹ Bruce Herschensohn, “Ten Years After the Cold War, Setting the Record Straight,” (The Claremont Institute); available from http://adnetsolfp2.adnetsol.com/ssl_claremont/publications/herschensohn991020.cfm; Internet; accessed 13 March 2004. There is no exact date to the end of the Cold War but the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 is recognized as the end of Soviet communism.

² United States, Combined Arms Research Library, “In Tribute to General William E. DePuy,” Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Command & General Staff College; available from <http://cgsc.leavenworth.army.mil/carl/resources/csi/Depuy/depuy.asp>; Internet; accessed 13 March 2004.

With all this military power in hand and the demise of an obvious adversary, the United States was at a foreign policy crossroad in 1990. Gone were the days of bipolar international politics where major conflicts would ultimately result in strategic deterrence between the two superpowers. The United States was now essentially ‘free’ to act without concern of the Soviet counter force that had for so long been the primary focus. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait would become the first test of the ‘new world order’ to determine if the United States’ strategic ability had matured to the same level as the unparalleled military power achieved at the end of the Cold War.

President Saddam Hussein seized the strategic initiative from the United States in the summer of 1990. Iraq had engaged in a prolonged war with Iran in the 1980s which ended in a stalemate. Left with the fourth largest military force in the world and financially broke from the Iran-Iraq war, President Hussein was not about to wait for something to give. Iraq desperately required money while two of its ‘rich’ neighbours, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, were producing in excess of their Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quotas and consequently bringing down the price of oil. Although acquiring Kuwaiti oil reserves would benefit President Hussein, Iraq held plenty of oil reserves of its own. Therefore, the main draw for the invasion was not acquiring territory but rather the prospect of increasing oil prices.³ President Hussein thus chose to take matters in his own hands by launching military action.

On 2 August 1990, Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait. Given Iraq’s military supremacy over a much smaller adversary, President Hussein’s troops very easily took control of the entire country within days of the invasion. Iraq could have moved on to cross Saudi Arabia’s border as it was similarly undefended but President Hussein chose to establish defensive positions in Kuwait

³ Hamdi A. Hassan, *The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait – Religion, Identity and Otherness in the Analysis of War and Conflict* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 111.

instead. In fact, Iraq essentially remained in a defensive position militarily until coalition forces, led by the United States, compelled a retreat in late February 1991. Although the United States' reliance on oil from Kuwait was minimal, and actually far less than European countries⁴, stable oil prices and supply from neighbouring countries were of significant strategic importance. The United States thus felt obligated to counter the Iraqi aggression.

The American response to the invasion of Kuwait was militarily brilliant. The United States had no troops or adequate basing rights in the local area at the start of the conflict but within days of the invasion, troops arrived in Saudi Arabi to begin the deterrence phase and the United States rapidly built a strong military coalition to repulse Iraq from Kuwait. At the peak of the conflict there were 550,000 allied troops pitted against 600,000 heavily defended Iraqi troops in and around the Kuwaiti Theatre of Operation (KTO).⁵ The United States Defence Intelligence Agency assessed Iraq's military as "formidable".⁶ Iraqi forces were equipped with some of the best Soviet equipment, such as the T-72 tank,⁷ and were veterans of a recent eight-year war with Iran, while the United States had not fought a large-scale war in such an inhospitable desert terrain in decades. In theory, the defender has a five-to-one advantage over the attacker if heavily dug in, as was the case for the Iraqi forces.⁸ Nevertheless, the American led coalition was able to swiftly defeat Iraqi forces in a mere one hundred hour ground campaign 24-27 February 1991.

The United States thus proved its military supremacy during the 1991 Gulf War but did heavily354-0.arg

continuation of policy by other means.”⁹ For the United States, war appeared to be the end of the strategic road in the absence of any other means. There is little evidence to show that American foreign policy produced clear strategic objectives or was able to adroitly use means other than military action during or after the conflict in the Persian Gulf to do anything but build a highly successful military coalition. The bipolar nature of the Cold War seemed to have prevented the United States from evolving strategically to accomplish anything but limited objectives or strive to return the world order to the status quo. The increase in military power achieved by the United States between the Vietnam War and the end of the Cold War was thus not echoed by an equal strategic agility. The United States had become a military superpower without the strategic capability to mandate its use.

In order to question the United States’ strategic ability, it is important to define the term strategy. Strategy is often used to differentiate the high-level use of war from military tactics, but it is much more than that. In the Oxford dictionary, strategy is defined as a “long-term plan or policy.”¹⁰ Craig and Gilbert describe strategy as the modern equivalent of “raison d’etat” or the “rational determination of a nation’s vital interests, the things that are essential to its security, its fundamental purposes in its relations with other nations, and its priorities with respect to goals.”¹¹ A nation’s strategy thus provides the long-term objectives that are achieved through the use of diplomacy, foreign policy and military force.

This paper will demonstrate that the United States lacked coherent strategic objectives during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. This thesis will be proven by focusing on five primary areas: conflicting regional interests, mixed messages given to Iraq by the United States, President

⁹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87.

¹⁰ Della Thomson, *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 902.

George Bush's lack of objectivity, incoherent military objectives and unfocused conflict termination. The point is not to say that the responsibility of being the superpower in a unipolar world is trivial but rather to iterate the fact that the United States did not achieve the same strategic prominence it reached militarily at the end of the Cold War.

The first area of strategic inadequacy on the part of the United States during the 1991 Persian Gulf War rests in pursuing conflicting regional interests. The four long-standing goals of American policy in the Middle East in 1990 were: "(1) assuring adequate supplies of petroleum at reasonable prices; (2) maintaining and enhancing regional security; (3) guaranteeing the survival of Israel; and (4) achieving an Arab-Israeli peace settlement."¹² A fifth goal of containing the USSR was "rendered irrelevant by dynamics internal to the Soviet Union."¹³ The four goals were quite ambitious by themselves given the historical volatility of the Middle East. Trying to execute all four goals at the same time was not only bold, it was virtually impossible given how some goals were diametrically opposed to each other.

Taking a step back in time, the first formal acknowledgement that the Persian Gulf was of vital interest to the United States was under President Jimmy Carter following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.¹⁴ In the State of the Union Address on 23 January 1980, what became known as the 'Carter Doctrine' warned that "an attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of

¹¹ Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, "Reflections on Strategy in the Present and Future," *In Makers of Modern Strategy – from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 869.

¹² Barb E. O'Neill and Ilana Kass, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment," *Comparative Strategy* 11, no. 2 (April-June 1992): 216.

¹³ O'Neill, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment..., 216.

¹⁴ Lawrence E. Grinter, "Avoiding the Burden – The Carter Doctrine in Perspective," (Air & Space Power Chronicles: January-February 1983); available from <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/aureview/1983/jan-feb/grinter.html>; Internet; accessed 13 March 2004.

America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”¹⁵ This assertion was followed by the formation of Central Command (CENTCOM) as a rapid-deployment force in 1983 to counter the possibility of the Red Army seizing Iranian oil fields.¹⁶ In support of the policy to defend vital interests in the Persian Gulf, the United States provided a naval presence at Kuwait’s request in 1987 to protect oil tankers from Iranian aggression.¹⁷ Preserving peace and stability in the Persian Gulf thus evolved as an important foreign policy objective of the United States in the region. This objective amounted to being synonymous with protecting a stable oil supply from forces both external and internal to the Persian Gulf.

Protecting the oil flow from the Persian Gulf was not only a matter of direct military involvement but also entailed maintaining the status quo in the region. The United States supplied weapons to both Iran and Iraq during their eight-year war in the 1980’s without effectively taking sides. By quietly aiding President Hussein, the United States was trying to keep Iran from gaining access to vital oil fields despite knowing full well that the Iraqi President was a ruthless tyrant.¹⁸ Transfer of weapons to Iraq, such as the HAWK anti-aircraft missile, was done through third parties like Egypt, Jordan and Kuwait with White House approval despite a standing congressional arms embargo.¹⁹ The well-publicized Iran/Contra affair under the Reagan Administration to secretly sell weapons to Iran and use the proceeds to support military activities of the Nicaraguan contra rebels indicates how the United States played both sides in the Iran-Iraq war. Ultimately the United States did not appear to want Iran to win the war against

¹⁵ Jimmy Carter Library, “State of the Union Address, January 21, 1980,” available from <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml>; Internet; accessed 13 March 2004.

¹⁶ Peter Petre, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero: The Autobiography of General H. Norman Schwarzkopf*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 285.

¹⁷ Hassan, *The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait* ..., 13.

¹⁸ Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, *Stormin’ Norman: An American Hero* (New York: Zebra Books, 1991), 103.

Iraq for fear of regional instability. Hamdi Hassan notes that the Persian Gulf conflict “emphasized the absence of coherent regional security arrangements and institutional settings that are necessary to solve and reconcile conflicting long-term interests and so contain the autonomous conflict processes which frequently lead to war.”²⁰ Thus, American foreign policy in the Persian Gulf prior to 1990 was focused on oil and dominated by an arms length involvement to maintain the status quo. This involved preventing any one nation from exhorting significant influence over neighbours and deterring any external nation from getting involved as opposed to instigating cohesive security arrangements amongst the concerned parties.

At the same time, American foreign policy in the Middle East inclusive of the Persian Gulf was biased in support of Israel.²¹ Israel was well known for its aggressive behaviour in the name of ‘self-defence’ and despite the occasional verbal condemnation by the United States, Israel managed to escape American persecution for decades. For example, the United States did not intervene when Israel bombed an Iraqi nuclear reactor near Baghdad in 1981 nor did it take any significant steps to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in Israel. Israel was not forced to give back territory after the Six-day War with Syria in 1967 despite United Nations resolutions.²² On one hand, the United States was wary to get directly involved in the Iran-Iraq conflict for fear of allowing one country to exercise regional supremacy in the Middle East. On the other hand, the United States seemed content to allow Israel to continue building up sufficient power to exercise just that. Irrespective of the reasons for the preferential treatment, the United States tolerated Israeli aggressive behavior that would have otherwise been considered unacceptable from other countries.

¹⁹ Murray Waas, “What Washington Gave Saddam for Christmas,” In *The Iraqi War Reader – History, Documents, Opinions*, ed. Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf (New York: Touchstone Book, 2003), 32.

²⁰ Hassan, *The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait...*, 190.

²¹ *Ibid*, 184.

Israel's preferential treatment by the United States formed the basis of conflicting regional interests. Most Arab nations support the creation of a free Palestine in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet most oil-producing Arab nations also depend on the income generated from exporting oil to countries worldwide, including the United States, as much as and perhaps significantly more than the United States depends on its import. For example, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia rely on oil export for as much as 90% of their export revenue.²³ The result was that the United States foreign policy in 1990 was at the same time pro-Israeli and pro-oil. For their part, the majority of the oil-producing Arab nations was pro-Palestinian and thus by default anti-Israeli. To the extreme one could argue that many Arab nations were anti-American except for the matter of economic dependence. The United States understood the importance of resolving the Arab-Israeli problem in 1990 but became so frustrated at the failure to make headway that Secretary of State James Baker stated Israel should give him a call when it was ready for peace.²⁴ Clearly the United States was not exerting the diplomatic influence over Israel to match its military capability.

The conflicting regional interests had a notable bearing on the progress of the Persian Gulf War. At the onset of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the United States was caught off-guard and had no troops on the ground to prevent Iraq from moving past Kuwait and into Saudi Arabia. During subsequent months as the number of allied troops in Saudi Arabia increased, containment was effectively achieved. The United States believed time to be against Iraq with the imposition of sanctions through numerous United Nations Security Council Resolutions. This situation was reversed following the Israeli-Palestinian crisis of October 1990

²² King, *The Gulf War ...*, 27.

²³ Energy Information Administration, "OPEC Revenues: Country Details," January 2004; available from <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/orevcoun.html#Saudi>; Internet; accessed 13 March 2004.

²⁴ O'Neill, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment..., 217.

when concerns over the possible fracture of the coalition resulting from the conflicting interests led the United States to conclude that time was no longer an ally. In his address to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney stated that: "It's far better to deal with [Saddam] now while the [international] coalition [against Iraq] is intact..."²⁵ The United States' failure to address the competing regional interests prior to or even during the Persian Gulf War forced decision makers to abandon long-term sanctions as one of the means to settle Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

The mixed messages given to Iraq by the United States administration is the second general area of American strategic inadequacy. Conflicting indications of support for Iraq were the result of opposing views between

billion was to Kuwait.²⁸ President Hussein was of the opinion that since Iraq had acted against Iran in the interest of all Arab states, the money it owed to Arab ‘brothers’ should be forgiven. The post-war economic crisis in Iraq put enormous political pressure on President Hussein to provide a good living for his people.²⁹ Iraq thus needed tremendous economic relief.

At the same time, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates were overproducing oil, causing an increase in supply on the world market and thus a reduction in oil prices. The United States and other oil importing countries benefited greatly from the reduced oil prices on the world market. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why the United States did not attempt to redress the overproduction by Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. However, the reduced oil prices were having a dramatic impact on Iraq and President Hussein considered this tantamount to an economic war.

The Bush administration understood the severity of the economic crisis in Iraq yet offered no solutions. President Hussein summoned the American ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, to a meeting on 25 July 1990 in order to complain about Kuwait’s overproduction. Ambassador Glaspie told President Hussein that the United States understood Iraq’s need for funds and was of the opinion that he should have the opportunity to rebuild his country. She went on to say that the United States had “no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts”, specifically using the border disagreement with Kuwait as an example.³⁰ Ambassador Glaspie later conceded that President Hussein probably understood this to be “a green light to settle his differences with Kuwait by force.”³¹ The Bush administration offered no solution to help

²⁷ Khadduri, *War in the Gulf, 1990-91 – The Iraqi-Kuwait Conflict and its Implications...*, 97-98.

²⁸ Pyle, *Schwartzkopf: In His Own Words ...*, 70-71.

²⁹ Micah Sifry and Christopher Cerf, *The Iraqi War Reader – History, Documents, Opinions* (New York: Touchstone Book, 2003), 65.

³⁰ Sifry, *The Iraqi War Reader – History, Documents, Opinions...*, 68.

³¹ Roger Hilsman, *George Bush vs. Saddam Hussein – Military Success! Political Failure?* (Novato, CA: Lyford Books, 1992), 43.

President Hussein out of his financial crisis, nor did it provide any alternatives to Iraq's use of force to deal with the Kuwaiti dispute.

To add confusion, branches of the United States government provided Iraq indications that were contradictory to the Bush administration message of appeasement. On 19 July 1990, Secretary of Defense Cheney stated that the United States was committed to defending its allies in the Gulf, especially Kuwait. This statement was consistent with National Security Directive 26 (originally classified SECRET) signed by President Bush on 2 October 1989 stating the United States' commitment to the "individual and collective self-defense of friendly countries" in the Persian Gulf.³² However, Cheney's spokesman later stated that the Secretary of Defense had spoken with 'some degree of freedom'.³³ This insinuated that the United States might not defend Kuwait against Iraqi aggression. On one hand, the message from the Bush administration in the White House was neutral, and arguably supportive, to the prospect of Iraq using force to deal with Kuwait. On the other hand, the Secretary of Defense contradicted the White House only to be corrected by a spokesman. This see-saw display surely proved confusing to President Hussein, who at least kept an open dialogue and consistent message about his country's financial situation and differences with Kuwait up to the final week before the invasion.

There was even a perception in Iraq and other Arab states during the spring and summer of 1990 that the United States was not appeasing Iraq but rather preparing a campaign to destroy it, directly or indirectly through Israel. The perception was shared by Kuwait among others who recommended that the United States opt for "a more conciliatory policy towards Iraq."³⁴ Even the ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, testified before the United States Senate that Iraq believed

³² United States, The White House, "National Security Directive 26 – October 2, 1989," available from <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsd/nsd26.pdf>, Internet; accessed 13 March 2004.

³³ Hassan, *The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait...*, 211 (Note 40).

³⁴ Telhami, "Between Theory and Fact: Explaining American Behavior in the Gulf...", 103.

the United States was trying to overthrow its government.³⁵ The United States was probably not trying to overthrow President Hussein before the invasion of Kuwait but acknowledging that some Middle Eastern countries believed this to be an American objective and subsequently ignoring that perception was clearly unwise. In any case, Iraq understood that the United States could do it harm militarily but in the absence of any other options, the economic crisis forced President Hussein to choose between the prospects of either political humiliation or military defeat.

President Hussein started to plead for a way out of his predicament in early 1990 and his message was persistent in the six months leading up to the invasion of Kuwait. In four major speeches on 28 February, 1 April, 28 May and 17 July 1990, President Hussein “paved the way for the crisis and the war that followed” by emphasizing and intensifying “Arab hostility against Zionism and the United States”.³⁶ For example, in his speech to the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) in Amman, Jordan on 28 February 1990, President Hussein warned “his Arab colleagues of what he feared would be American hegemony following the weakening of the Soviet Union.”³⁷ President Hussein further warned of the prospects of the Arab Gulf region being governed by the United States and “suggested that Arab investments in the United States be moved elsewhere.”³⁸ During his meeting with Ambassador Glaspie on 25 July 1990, President Hussein indicated having knowledge that the United States had papers entitled ‘Who will take over from President Hussein’ and was made aware that Persian Gulf states had been contacted to not provide economic aid to Iraq.³⁹ In the Iraqi version of the meeting, President Hussein

³⁵ Christopher Hitchens, “Realpolitik in the Gulf: A Game Gone Wrong,” In *The Iraqi War Reader – History, Documents, Opinions*, ed. Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf (New York: Touchstone Book, 2003), 47.

³⁶ Hassan, *The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait...*, 160.

³⁷ Telhami, “Between Theory and Fact: Explaining American Behavior in the Gulf...”, 102.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 102.

³⁹ Hassan, *The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait...*, 48.

provided assurances that he would not resort to violence if Kuwait didn't exceed OPEC quotas and forgave Iraq's debt.⁴⁰ President Hussein was extremely skeptical of the United States and quite explicit in expressing himself against conspiracies, whether they were founded or not.

The American response to the Iraqi President during the first part of 1990 was contradictory. In an attempt to reassure Iraq, five United States Senators attended a meeting with President Hussein on 12 April 1990 in Mosul, Iraq. At the time, the United States Congress was considering sanctions against Iraq and Senator Dole suggested to President Hussein that President Bush would likely oppose or veto sanctions against Iraq. Senator Simpson tried to convince President Hussein that his problems were with the American media, not the government. Senator Metzenbaum called President Hussein strong and intelligent, suggesting that if he focused on peace, no leader could compare to him in the Middle East.⁴¹ This is a remarkable statement given that it came from a Jew, Senator Metzenbaum making a point of affirming his religious denomination to President Hussein at the start of the meeting. Given Iraq's differences with Israel, this should have proven to be a strong message of support for Iraq despite the criticism in the United States Congress and the media. Yet nothing was offered to solve the root of the problem, Iraq's economic crisis. Even Ambassador Glaspie termed the United States policy in the Middle East at the time as 'aloof'.⁴² Iraq could hardly be blamed for feeling confused in the midst of such disparity between the message being delivered by the delegation representing President Bush and the United States Congress.

The United States continued to offer conflicting messages to Iraq in the period leading up to the invasion. Hamdi Hassan points out that the "United States had the military capacity to deter Iraq, but the diplomacy of deterrence was inconsistent, incoherent, and unfocused in the

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 48.

⁴¹ Sifry, *The Iraqi War Reader – History, Documents, Opinions...*, 58-60.

critical two weeks preceding the invasion.”⁴³ The United States administration ignored reports of the Iraqi troop buildup from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and even authorized a \$1.2 billion credit for food purchases by Iraq no less than two days before the Kuwaiti invasion.⁴⁴ By continuing to provide financial support despite the obvious troop buildup and failing to provide any comments except ‘no opinion’ on Iraq’s border dispute with Kuwait, the United States made it appear that it supported Iraq’s use of force. For its part, the only way Iraq could have been more explicit would have been to send a letter to the United States after the meeting with Ambassador Glaspie on 25 July 1990 providing the date of the invasion. Unless the United States was in favour of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, a possible but unlikely scenario was that it simply failed to see the signs and grasp the severity of the situation despite numerous indications from Iraq. More probably, the United States understood the situation but was strategically incapable of formulating a means of preventing the invasion. The mixed messages provided to Iraq were likely the result of strategic confusion within the United States government.

President George Bush’s lack of objectivity after the invasion was a dangerous complement to the United States’ conflicting regional interests and mixed messages prior to the conflict. This lack of objectivity was evident in President Bush’s statements directed to President Hussein, his inability to find an alternative to offensive military action and his handling of the conflict termination.

Prior to the conflict, President Bush feared the spread of Islam in the Middle East from Iran and wanted to improve closer business, diplomatic and intelligence ties with Iraq.⁴⁵ During

⁴² Hassan, *The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait...*, 213 (Note 52).

⁴³ *Ibid*, 45.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 44.

⁴⁵ Waas, “What Washington Gave Saddam for Christmas...”, 30.

the meeting held in Iraq on 25 July 1990, Ambassador Glaspie told President Hussein that President Bush had “directed the United States administration to reject the suggestion of implementing trade sanctions.”⁴⁶ President Bush’s attitude towards Iraq and more specifically President Hussein shifted 180° immediately after the 2 August 1990 invasion and never turned back. On the first day following the invasion, President Bush stated: “there was no place in today’s world for this sort of naked aggression.”⁴⁷ This message in itself was not inappropriate but would have served a better purpose had it been delivered prior to the invasion.

Notwithstanding, the objectivity of the messages would go downhill from there.

Numerous statements were directed to President Hussein during the conflict that could not be expected to accomplish anything but aggravate the situation and complicate the post-conflict resolution. Over the course of the months that followed the invasion, President Bush compared President Hussein to Adolf Hitler.⁴⁸ This was accomplished by the not so subtle use of the term ‘blitzkrieg’ for example, as was the case during President Bush’s news conference on 8 August 1990.⁴⁹ In another case, President Bush stated: “We’re dealing with Hitler revisited, a totalitarianism and brutality that is naked and unprecedented in modern times. And it must not stand.”⁵⁰ The way that President Bush pronounced ‘Saddam’ changed the meaning of his name to ‘boy who fixes or cleans shoes’ from ‘leader’ or ‘learned one’, the greatest personal insult in parts of the Arab world.⁵¹ President Bush repeatedly referred to President Hussein by his first name without prefix or suffix instead of the usual diplomatic practice of using a prefix title. The United States may have somehow felt justified in not using the prefix ‘president’ but failing to

⁴⁶ Sifry, *The Iraqi War Reader – History, Documents, Opinions...*, 67.

⁴⁷ King, *The Gulf War...*, 5.

⁴⁸ Stephen R. Graubard, *Mr. Bush’s War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 3–4.

⁴⁹ George Bush Library, “White House Press Conference, August 8, 1990,” available from <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/1990/90080801.html>; Internet; accessed 6 March 2004.

⁵⁰ Lawrence E. Cline, “Defending the End: Decision Making in Terminating the Persian Gulf War,” *Comparative Strategy* 11, no. 2 (April-June 1992): 375.

use at least ‘Mr.’ was diplomatically provocative and unprofessional. A case in point, during the 16 January 1991 address announcing allied military action in the Persian Gulf, President Bush used the name ‘Saddam’ a dozen times by itself.⁵² Granted it was not uncommon in the media to see President Hussein referred to simply as ‘Saddam’, it does not serve as an excuse for doing so at the highest diplomatic levels. William Kincade postulated that the conflict between the two presidents became personal, creating a deadlock that only war could break.⁵³ Kincade goes on to say that President Bush needed to best President Hussein to retrieve his position, placed himself and stayed on a collision course, had a long history of vindictive political action and had the personal goal of humiliating his adversary.⁵⁴ President Bush effectively gave President Hussein two choices: political humiliation or military defeat.⁵⁵ It was even suggested that President Bush thought he could tame President Hussein.⁵⁶ It is understandable how the President of the United States might want to give the appearance of resolve as the leader of the most powerful country in the world but resorting to name calling was more indicative of the intellect of a school yard bully.

The personalization of the conflict by President Bush lacked a complete understanding of President Hussein. In the Arab world, pride is extremely important and a person of stature would attempt to avoid humiliation at all cost. As for the prospects of military defeat, President Hussein would clearly accept this course of action far more easily than political humiliation. President Hussein had already survived the failure of his forces to advance against Iran in the 1980’s and had such little regard for human life that sacrificing troops was really not much of a

⁵¹ Anderson, *Stormin’ Norman: An American Hero...*, 163-164.

⁵² George Bush Library, “White House Press Conference, August 8, 1990,” available from <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/1991/91011602.html>; Internet; accessed 6 March 2004.

⁵³ William H. Kincade, “On the Brink in the Gulf – Part 2: The Route to War,” *Securities Studies* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1993-1994): 298.

⁵⁴ Kincade, “On the Brink in the Gulf – Part 2: The Route to War..., 304-307.

⁵⁵ Bernard Shaw, *War in the Gulf [videorecording]* (Atlanta: CNN Video, 1991).

risk at all. President Bush thus created the conditions for the conflict to aggravate itself as opposed to promoting a strategy to resolve, or at least diffuse, the situation.

On top of the lack of objectivity in statements directed to President Hussein, President Bush also failed to seriously seek alternatives to military action. The United States was in no position to effectively declare war in the days, weeks and even first few months following the invasion due to the lack of troops on the ground in the Persian Gulf area. Nevertheless, President Bush seemed determined to use military force to expel Iraq out of Kuwait and as forces built up he became more and more inclined to do so. In the week following the invasion of Kuwait, the Commander-in-Chief of United States Central Command (CINCENTCOM) and Commander of OPERATION DESERT SHIELD/STORM, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, briefed President Bush that it would take approximately seventeen weeks to effectively establish a sufficient level of troops on the ground to defend Saudi Arabia and eight to twelve months to be in a position to repel Iraq from Kuwait.⁵⁷ From the start of the Iraqi invasion to the end of the conflict, both the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, and General Schwarzkopf advocated against the use of offensive military force in Kuwait. During the 11 October 1990 National Security Council meeting, General Schwarzkopf was even compared to General George McClellan for requesting what some outside the military considered an excessive number of troops and exaggerating the expected casualties to scare President Bush away from a ground attack against Iraqi forces.⁵⁸ The pressure to progress towards a ground attack to resolve the conflict was definitely not emanating from the military.

⁵⁶ Anderson, *Stormin' Norman: An American Hero...*, 103.

⁵⁷ Woodward, *The Commanders...*, 249.

⁵⁸ Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero...*, 361-362. "General McClellan had sat outside Richmond [Virginia] in the Spring of 1862 and refused to attack the army of [General] Robert E. Lee" despite vastly outnumbering his adversary.

Despite advice to the contrary from military advisors, the prospects of transitioning from a role of military deterrence to offensive action originated at the very beginning of the conflict. On the day after the invasion in August 1990, General Powell told General Schwarzkopf: “I think we’d go to war over Saudi Arabia, but I doubt we’d go to war over Kuwait.”⁵⁹ General Powell felt that military intervention would likely depend on how far Iraq went.⁶⁰ This assessment was not without foundation as General Powell held the highest position in the United States military and had served as President Reagan’s National Security Advisor with then Vice-President Bush. General Powell’s inability to anticipate the eventual American response to the conflict, despite extensive experience in the White House, was indicative of the unfounded political determination to escalate the use of military force up to war. President Bush’s statement on 8 August 1990 that the mission was wholly defensive and not to drive Iraq from Kuwait was indicative of the United States’ official position at the onset of the conflict.⁶¹ Yet General Powell was stunned watching CNN on 5 August 1990 when President Bush snapped at reporters on the White House lawn saying that the invasion of Iraq “will not stand”. This had not been discussed at Camp David during the National Security Council meeting the day before and General Powell knew that President Bush had just categorically set a new objective of reversing the invasion, thereby going well beyond simple protection and deterrence of Saudi Arabia.⁶² President Bush appeared to have made his mind within the first week of the invasion to progress to offensive military action.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 297.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 297.

⁶¹ Christopher Cerf and Victor Navasky, “The Experts Speak Out on the Coming Gulf War,” In *The Iraqi War Reader – History, Documents, Opinions*, ed. Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf (New York: Touchstone Book, 2003) 74.

⁶² Woodward, *The Commanders....*, 260.

Over the course of the following months, Iraq was very cautious not to provoke the United States further and adapted a wholly defensive posture yet the prospects of a ground war continued to escalate. As the number of coalition troops on the ground in Saudi Arabia grew and the United States was in a more enviable military position, President Bush increased his propensity to resort to more than simply defending Saudi Arabia. On 2 October 1990, General Powell made it clear to General Schwarzkopf that: "Washington was impatiently awaiting an offensive option from Central Command."⁶³ A few days later, General Powell ordered CENTCOM to brief President Bush and the National Security Council on a notional plan for DESERT STORM.⁶⁴ Major General Bob Johnston, CENTCOM Chief of Staff, conducted the brief on 11 October 1990 in Washington, D.C. highlighting the fact that there was insufficient military capability in the Persian Gulf area to conduct a ground attack without incurring significant casualties. The response to the brief by one presidential advisor was: "My God, he's [General Schwarzkopf] already got all the forces he needs. Why won't he attack?"⁶⁵ General Schwarzkopf received direction to prepare the plans for a ground attack despite the continued military recommendation for containment.⁶⁶ Come 21 October 1990, General Schwarzkopf was asked what he would need to be able to execute a ground attack. His response was a doubling of the forces and by 30 October 1990, President Bush directed the increase in troops.⁶⁷ With the 6 November 1990 elections in the United States behind him, President Bush solidified his intentions to use military force to repulse Iraq.

President Bush's insistence on using military action was not especially objective. The United States had very wide support from the United Nations to continue with sanctions and Iraq

⁶³ Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero...*, 354.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 368.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 359-361.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 361.

did nothing to escalate the situation throughout the conflict. Iraq even released hostages on 6 December 1990 as a show of good faith.⁶⁸ Notwithstanding, President Bush was so adamant about taking offensive military action that he was prepared to do so without the approval of the United Nations or the United States Congress for fear that either one would veto his intentions.⁶⁹ President Bush was thus persistent in his intention to use military force offensively despite a lack of immediate necessity given the availability of alternative means.

Since the military was not prompting the use of force to resolve the conflict, the impetus had to come from elsewhere. However, there is no agreed upon justification for President Bush's determined use of military action. During a lunch on 27 November 1990 with General Powell, Admiral Crowe suggested to his successor as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that: "to be a great president you have to have a war" and "you have to find a war where you are attacked."⁷⁰ As shallow as this might seem, leveraging war for purely political objectives may not be so far fetched. The first eighteen months of President Bush's term in office had been lackluster with substantial economic and social problems, making the Iraqi invasion a welcome distraction.⁷¹ By mid-November 1990, President Bush's public approval rating was at an all time low and he figured that if the United States "could whip the Iraqis in three to four weeks, all these critics would suddenly change their minds."⁷² Stephen Graubard's book entitled 'Mr. Bush's War' draws three interesting conclusions. First, President Bush knew that a voluntary withdrawal from Kuwait by Iraq would mean a political victory but forcing Iraqi troops out would be a political and military victory for the United States. Second, in his eight years as

⁶⁷ Anderson, *Stormin' Norman: An American Hero...*, 114.

⁶⁸ King, *The Gulf War...*, 31.

⁶⁹ Woodward, *The Commanders...*, 284-285 (United Nations) & 357 (Congress). When President Bush was ambassador to the United Nations 1971-72, the Soviet Union had blocked everything the United States tried to pass.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 30 & 39.

⁷¹ Graubard, *Mr. Bush's War...*, ix.

⁷² Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero...*, 378.

Vice-President, he learned how Prime Minister Thatcher had earned a “new stature at home and great repute abroad” by using military force to address the Falkland Islands conflict. Finally, he knew how to do war but “had no idea how to do peace.”⁷³ Whatever the justification for President Bush’s insistence on using military action to solve the Iraqi conflict, none are indicative of supreme strategic thinking.

President Bush’s insistence on the use of military action to solve the conflict also ignored diplomatic opportunities. Many of the European countries had significant economic ties with Iraq, certainly not the least of which in dealing weapons. Europeans were generally supportive of the United Nations Security Council Resolution authorizing the use of force but had every interest in resolving the conflict as peacefully as possible to facilitate the post-conflict situation. At no time did President Bush seriously consider using the European Community as a conduit for a diplomatic solution. Nor did the United States leave any room for diplomacy in dealing with Iraq directly. In describing the United States position during a meeting with Iraq between Foreign Minister Aziz and Secretary of State Baker, President Bush stated: “I’m not in the negotiating mood,” “There will be no give,” and “There can be no face-saving”.⁷⁴ Direct diplomacy with Iraq or indirect diplomacy through European allies was thus not considered as a means to resolve the conflict.

Even more striking was the American refusal to allow a new ally, the Soviet Union, to assist diplomatically. For the first time since the Second World War, the Soviet Union was no longer an adversary. Despite ties to Iraq, the Soviet Union supported the United Nations resolutions against Iraq as a full member of the Security Council. The Soviet Union was the only nation to maintain strong diplomatic ties with Iraq throughout the conflict. This rendered the

⁷³ Graubard, *Mr. Bush’s War...*, x-xi, ix & 158.

⁷⁴ Kincade, “On the Brink in the Gulf – Part 2: The Route to War...”, 301.

Soviet Union ideally suited to bridge the gap between the two factions but President Bush repeatedly refused the Soviet offers to conciliate the conflict. Worst yet, on 19 February 2004 the National Security Council wanted to know if the ground attack could be moved ahead in the face of the latest Soviet pressure on the United States to accept a recently brokered cease-fire proposal with Iraq. Clearly the United States was not interested in diplomacy to resolve the conflict, making a peaceful resolution almost impossible.

The third aspect of President Bush's lack of objectivity pertains to the emotional handling of the conflict termination. Graubard suggested that President Bush calculated in four-year units in reference to the term in office between elections.⁷⁵ As the ground war was getting close to achieving the removal of Iraq from Kuwait, President Bush could claim success and decided to end the war. The initial estimate from CENTCOM indicated that the final phase of OPERATION DESERT STORM, the ground war, would take a few weeks to execute. This would result in effectively destroying Iraqi forces in the Kuwaiti Theatre of Operation. However, the ground war progressed much faster than expected due in part to limited Iraqi resistance. To this point, the Pentagon had very effectively portrayed the military invasion as surgically precise but as President Bush watched televised pictures of Iraqi convoys under attack on the 'Highway of Death', he essentially ordered the war to an abrupt end for fear of losing public support.⁷⁶ Public opinion should not be ignoron the9C52.sbut strategy requires a long-term approach and must look beyond possible short-term setbacks in the pursuit of greater goals and interests. The conflict was thus terminated not on pre-discussed criteriasbut for fear of the emotional backlash in public

Graubard, *Mr. Bush's War ...,*

It is difficult to understand how a veteran military pilot of World War II could on the one hand be so adamant about using military force yet on seeing television pictures bring the conflict to a sudden stop. The United Nations sanctions imposed on Iraq were having an estimated impact of \$1 billion per day.⁷⁷ It is not hard to speculate that the brunt of the impact was felt by the civilian population in Iraq as President Hussein tried to sustain his military forces on an already broken economy. Between 1991 and 1999, estimates indicate that the United Nations sanctions against Iraq were responsible for the death of 4,500 children per month.⁷⁸ The number of deaths was probably even higher during the conflict. Arguably there were no televised pictures of these children dying during the conflict nor was the link necessarily that easy to attribute directly to President Bush's actions. However, one would hope that the deaths of these children would be more significant than enemy soldiers dying in the performance their sworn duty to defend their country.

Assuming that these dying children were faceless to President Bush, the bombing of the Ameriyya civil-defence shelter couldn't be. Two American F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighters each dropped one GBU-27 2,000 pound laser-guided bomb on the shelter in the early morning hours of 13 February 1991.⁷⁹ The United States believed the shelter was being used by senior Iraqi military personnel as a bunker but it was actually being used as a shelter, resulting in the death of an estimated 204 people, mostly women and children.⁸⁰ The level of scrutiny in selecting targets increased after this unfortunate incident, especially in and around Baghdad.⁸¹ But the Ameriyya shelter carnage did not appear to impact President Bush's resolve to order the

⁷⁷ Pyle, *Schwartzkopf: In His Own Words* ..., 155.

⁷⁸ Hassan, *The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait*..., 1.

⁷⁹ United States, Final Report to Congress, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1992), 141.

⁸⁰ Canada, Department of National Defence, C/JC/LAC 306/SE-1 Annex G *Methods and Means of Warfare*, (Toronto: Canadian Forces College, 2003), 4.

execution of the ground campaign less than two weeks later on 24 February 1991, despite televised pictures in this case. President Bush could not have been expecting the ground war to be any less destructive than the strategic air bombing campaign when he ordered it to take place. Fortunately for President Bush, the ground war casualties were almost exclusively Iraqi and perhaps this favourable outcome was more desirable than achieving the planned military objectives, and by default strategic objectives.

It seems quite likely that President Bush's newly found concern for the public's response to the realities of the ground war was more politically than strategically motivated. The war in Iraq certainly had provided a distraction to his mediocre performance in office. Despite failing to capture President Hussein, dead or alive, the United States had overwhelmingly proven its military supremacy. The spirit of United Nations Security Council Resolution 678 of evicting Iraq from Kuwait had been achieved while maintaining the fragile coalition intact. The American public had found a new pride in their military and managed to erase much of the negative feelings left over from the Vietnam War. However, the fact remained that President Hussein was still in power, despite an estimated \$70 billion expense to the coalition.⁸² Furthermore, the original cause of the conflict, Iraq's economic crisis, was no closer to being solved. President Bush had had his war and could claim a military and personal political victory. The point is that casualties are a fact of war but President Bush's selective attention to this reality in watching the ground war progress on television was not strategically objective.

Given President Bush's lack of objectivity, the focus turns to the uncertainty of the military objectives. The basis for this discussion starts with the determination of the centre of

⁸¹ Dennis M. Drew, "The Essence of Aerospace Power: What Leaders Need to Know," *Aerospace Power Journal* XV, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 26.

gravity and covers the targeting of President Hussein, the selection of the precise termination of the conflict, the desired end state and the post-conflict actions.

To appreciate the nature of military action requires an understanding of the centre of gravity concept. Part of the professional military transformation noted earlier that took place between the Vietnam War and the end of the Cold War expanded the concept of the operational level of war. This level of war finds itself between the strategic level responsible for determining whether to fight or not and the tactical level of war whose function it is to fight. The operational level of war thus deals with when and how to fight.⁸³ The operational commander is responsible for approving an operational centre of gravity consistent with the strategic level of war. This centre of gravity is considered the source of the enemy's strength and becomes the focus of the military action.

The United States failed to identify a precise strategic centre of gravity during OPERATION DESERT STORM. The absence of a coherent strategic centre of gravity from Washington made it impossible for the operational level commander to identify a clear subordinate operational centre of gravity. There were three operational centres of gravity identified by the United States: (1) the command, control and leadership of President Hussein's regime; (2) degrading Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capability; and (3) eliminating Iraq's Republican Guard to facilitate the attack and prevent future threats in the region.⁸⁴ By definition there should only be one centre of gravity but ignoring the semantics, a few discrepancies stick out.

⁸² King, *The Gulf War...*, 44.

⁸³ Clayton R. Newell, *The Framework of Operational Warfare* (London: Routledge, 1991), 20.

⁸⁴ United States, Final Report to Congress, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1992), 72.

The first centre of gravity aimed at command, control and leadership of President Hussein's regime was incompatible with pre-conflict objectives of maintaining stability in the region. Targeting the Iraqi military communications infrastructure for example would certainly facilitate the destruction of Iraqi troops during the ground war since it would be equivalent to cutting off the head from the body of the military. Degrading President Hussein's regime would contribute to this objective but would also create a power vacuum in an already volatile area of the world.

It is unclear whether or not the United States intended to destroy President Hussein's regime. Initially, President Bush stated that the United States was not trying to target President Hussein and according to General Schwarzkopf "that was true, to a point." Iraqi bunkers where President Hussein and his senior commanders were likely to be working made the very top of the target list.⁸⁵ President Bush's National Security Advisor, Brent Scowcroft, admitted after the fact that: "We [the United States] don't do assassinations, but yes, we targeted all the places where Saddam might have been."⁸⁶ It is interesting to note how the United States tried to justify the legitimacy of its actions by claiming indirect targeting. The United States thus appeared to want President Hussein killed without making it explicit. President Bush added to the confusion after the cease-fire in two ways. First of all, he signed a 'finding' authorizing the Central Intelligence Agency to create the conditions for the removal of President Hussein.⁸⁷ Then he stated publicly that "We are not targeting Saddam, but I've already said that the Iraqi people should put him aside."⁸⁸ Yet as rebel forces started an uprising and awaited a sign of support, the

⁸⁵ Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero...*, 318-319.

⁸⁶ Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, "We Have Saddam Hussein Still There," In *The Iraqi War Reader – History, Documents, Opinions*, ed. Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf (New York: Touchstone Book, 2003), 93.

⁸⁷ Cockburn, "We Have Saddam Hussein Still There..., 91.

⁸⁸ King, *The Gulf War...*, 43.

United States stayed on the sidelines.⁸⁹ It was probably not inappropriate to try bringing President Hussein to justice by capturing him, but President Bush understood just how challenging that could be from his involvement in the 1989 Panama invasion. The apparent uncertainty over the validity of President Hussein as a target may have only been accidental but was more likely indicative of a failure in clearly defining achievable objectives.

The second centre of gravity, degrading Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capability, had little to do with forcing Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. United Nations Security Council Resolution 678 approved on 29 November 1990 authorized "all means necessary" to enforce prior resolutions if Iraq did not leave Kuwait by 15 January 1991.⁹⁰ Pre-emptive action to protect coalition forces against possible attack from weapons of mass destruction could be justifiable under this resolution. However, it appears that the United States had different reasons for choosing this centre of gravity. When the United States realized that President Hussein would not likely be going across the Saudi Arabian border, strategic objectives shifted to seize what was perceived as an opportunity to eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program.⁹¹ This is difficult to explain given the United States policy of appeasement towards Iraq prior to the conflict and the lack of any prior stated policy objective to achieve such an ambitious and unprecedented task. Although the United Nations condemned Iraq's use of chemical weapons against Iran in the 1980's, the United States stood alone against the United Nations' position.⁹² Furthermore, President Bush not only ignored Iraq's use of chemical weapons on its own population but he approved a doubling of the amount of agricultural credit-guarantees to \$1

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 43.

⁹⁰ United States, Final Report to Congress, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1992), 319.

⁹¹ Kenneth Pollack, "How Saddam Misread the United States," In *The Iraqi War Reader – History, Documents, Opinions*, ed. Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf, (New York: Touchstone Book, 2003) 78.

⁹² Research Unit for Political Economy, *Behind the Invasion of Iraq* (New York: Monthly Review Press: 2003), 31.

billion in his first days in office back in 1988.⁹³ That is not to say that degrading Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capability was not a suitable strategic objective, however, this sudden change was not founded on any existing policy and its appearance seemed little more than an afterthought as opposed to the articulation of a solidly founded strategic objective.

The destruction of the Republican Guard was probably the most appropriate and achievable military objective of the three centres of strategy. The Iraqi Republican Guard was President Hussein's elite force. Aside from being the best paid, trained and equipped, it served the role of enforcer. The troops of the Republican Guard were the most loyal to President Hussein and were used in part to coerce lesser forces to fight by threatening them with death if necessary. The Republican Guard was strategically placed just outside the Kuwaiti border to be less exposed to aggression but more importantly to keep the less capable Iraqi troops in place ahead of it. In the classic meaning of the term, the Republican Guard was the Iraqi centre of gravity as it was for all intent and purpose the source of President Hussein's strength. Without the Republican Guard, it is unlikely the Iraqi forces would have sustained even the slightest military aggression against such an overwhelming coalition force.

President Bush's hasty decision to end the conflict precluded the destruction of the Republican Guard. Although it is true that the larger objective of removing Iraq from Kuwait had been achieved when the decision to end the conflict took place, thus meeting the spirit of United Nations Security Council Resolution 678, President Bush's decision is highly questionable. Among others, the British were upset over the termination of the war before an "appropriate victory".⁹⁴ On the one hand, the United States sought grandiose objectives in destroying Iraq's future capacity to dispense weapons of mass destruction. On the other hand,

⁹³ Waas, "What Washington Gave Saddam for Christmas..., 37.

⁹⁴ Cline, "Defending the End: Decision Making in Terminating the Persian Gulf War..., 371.

after six months of planning and Iraq's source of power finally within hours of destruction, President Bush took his finger off the trigger. President Bush thus ended the conflict before completing the most achievable of the three centres of gravity, the destruction of the Republican Guard.

The selection of the exact time of conflict termination is worthy of discussion. As previously noted, the ground war progressed far more quickly and successfully than expected. Originally predicted to last a couple of weeks, after a mere few days it was obvious that at least one of the military objectives could be achieved within a matter of hours. The allied plan had essentially choked the Republican Guard and coalition forces were having a field day destroying it piece by piece. During a brief on 27 February 1991, General Powell told President Bush that the ground campaign was coming to an end and suggested consideration be given to terminating the war on the next day. President Bush asked, "Why not today?"⁹⁵ As the main military advisors had been against the use of force in the first place, they did not pose serious objections although the Republican Guard had not been completely destroyed. The initial decision by President Bush was to end the war at 9 PM Eastern Standard Time on 27 February 1991. After someone suggested that extending the conflict to midnight would make it an even one hundred hours, the decision was made to delay the cease-fire by three hours. This did not provide Lieutenant General Yeosock, the senior army commander under General Schwarzkopf during OPERATION DESERT STORM, the twenty-four hours estimated to complete the destruction of the Republican Guard.⁹⁶ The chosen conflict termination time thus resulted in a failure to achieve the military objectives.

⁹⁵ Michael Sterner, "Closing the Gate: The Persian Gulf War Revisited," (Current History January 1997): 15.

⁹⁶ Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero...*, 469-470.

It could be argued that extending the ground war by a few more hours would have been insignificant. The reality was that the coalition had succeeded in completely surprising Iraqi forces. The Republican Guard was essentially caught in a bottleneck trying to escape the battle across one bridge on the Euphrates River and a few hours could have finished it off. Stephen Graubard assessed that President Bush “knew neither when to stop the war nor how to conduct it so as to achieve larger and more morally defensible ends.”⁹⁷ This assessment is consistent with the means in which the conflict was concluded. Terminating the conflict 24 hours early precluded the achievement of larger strategic objectives.

Taking advantage of the conflict termination for political reasons is not without some merit but to do so without having achieved the strategic objectives was highly questionable. Looking back at the three stated centres of gravity, President Hussein’s command and control infrastructure was significantly damaged but the regime was not. Damage to Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction capability is difficult to assess given it could only be as accurate as the intelligence information to allow it to be targeted. Last but certainly not least, the Central Intelligence Agency assessed the damage to the Republican Guard at 50%.⁹⁸ This may even be an optimistic estimate by some sources. President Bush could have achieved the destruction of the Republican Guard by extending the war a mere 18 hours. After all, the obliteration of the Iraqi war machine to prevent Iraq from trying again was President Bush’s intention just days before on the eve of the ground campaign 23 February 1991.⁹⁹ The New York Times declared that President Bush had “snatched defeat from the jaws of history.”¹⁰⁰ The failure to achieve at

⁹⁷ Graubard, *Mr. Bush’s War* ..., xiv-xv.

⁹⁸ Sterner, “Closing the Gate: The Persian Gulf War Revisited..., 16.

⁹⁹ Anderson, *Stormin’ Norman: An American Hero*..., 171.

¹⁰⁰ Sterner, “Closing the Gate: The Persian Gulf War Revisited..., 13.

least the third centre of gravity was thus a strategic mistake. That of course presumes that the United States had clear strategic objectives and a known end state in mind.

It is abundantly clear that the United States had not planned how to deal with the end state nearly as effectively as it had planned and executed the ground war. In essence, the point at which the use of war as an instrument of foreign policy culminated was without a path to follow. War was the end of the strategic road. In October 1990, the American ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Chas Freedman, asked General Schwarzkopf if he knew what CENTCOM was trying to accomplish strategically with a ground offensive. His concerns were not appeased when General Schwarzkopf told him that he and his staff were working in the dark and making plans based on assumptions. Ambassador Freedman was uneasy about the prospects of the backlash in the Arab world should war break out with Iraq, saying: “I’m not sure anyone in Washington has given that enough thought.”¹⁰¹ This lack of strategic forethought about the implications of war against Iraq seems to have perpetuated itself throughout the conflict. Cockburn and Cockburn stated that after the cease-fire “neither the military nor the White House had as yet any other plan for dealing with Iraq once the issue of Kuwait had been settled.”¹⁰² The decision makers in Washington were thus unable to formulate coherent strategic objectives to enable the military to derive corresponding military objectives.

The United States had no apparent end state in mind for the military to achieve. Military force is an instrument of foreign policy but it is subordinate to the government it serves in a democracy such as the United States. It is not up to the military leadership to identify the strategic outcome of the war. President Bush felt that the politicians had grossly interfered with

¹⁰¹ Petre, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero....*, 354-355.

¹⁰² Cockburn, “We Have Saddam Hussein Still There....”, 92. “General Steven Arnold, the U.S. Army’s chief of operations officer in Saudi Arabia, actually drew up a secret plan after the cease-fire entitled ‘The Road to Baghdad’” but horrified his commanding officer with it as it suggested the victory was less than complete.

the military's ability to execute its mission during the Vietnam War and he was determined to avoid the same mistake. This was made clear when President Bush stated: "I will not, as Commander-in-Chief, ever put somebody in a military situation that we do not win – ever. And there's not going to be any drawn-out agony [like] Vietnam."¹⁰³ President Bush's hands-off approach had a lot of merit in making the military operation more efficient but it failed in one crucial area. The military was not provided a concrete end-state nor was the United States effectively using other means to achieve strategic objectives. American military power could certainly accomplish the task of destroying Iraqi troops and equipment. It was not so clear how the use of force could unilaterally re-establish Kuwaiti sovereignty and long-term stability in the Middle East. President Bush placed all his proverbial eggs in one basket, the military, and failed to realize the necessity to articulate a clear end state.

Throughout the conflict, General Powell and General Schwarzkopf were both hoping to avoid a ground war and considered that an Iraqi withdrawal without fighting would be a victory.¹⁰⁴ This seemingly unusual reaction from senior military officers was actually well founded. Both generals had served in the Vietnam War and did not take risking the lives of soldiers lightly. That is not to say that either general was unwilling to use force. General Schwarzkopf's briefing of the ground war plan to his commanders on 14 November 1990 included the comments: "We're not gonna say we want to be as nice as we possibly can, and if they draw back across the border that's fine with us. That's bullshit! We are going to destroy the Republican Guard."¹⁰⁵ These words were highly indicative of General Schwarzkopf's direction and actions once ordered to plan for a ground war, despite his internal reservations of

¹⁰³ Thomas R. Dubois, "The Weinburger Doctrine and the Liberation of Kuwait," *Parameters* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1991-1992): 28. Extracted from an article by Eric Schmitt in the New York Times 19 November 1990.

¹⁰⁴ Petre, *It Doesn't Take a Hero....*, 442 & 445.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 380-382.

the appropriateness of ignoring means other than war to settle the conflict. The reluctance on the part of the senior military hierarchy to progress to a ground war was the result of concern over risking lives without a clear end state.

General Powell's views on the use of military force, based on the 'Weinberger Doctrine', were unofficially articulated shortly after the Persian Gulf War. The 'Powell Doctrine' was based on the premise that the lives of American serviceman and servicewomen should "not be squandered for unclear purposes."¹⁰⁶ The doctrine identified five conditions necessary to be met before military force should be used as an instrument of foreign policy. These conditions were that military force should only be used: (1) as a last resort; (2) when the intended target posed a clear risk to national security; (3) overwhelmingly and disproportionately; (4) with strong support from the general public; and (5) with a clear exit strategy.¹⁰⁷ General Powell's argument was that all five conditions needed to be met before military force was used. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq was not a direct threat to American national security but given the strategic importance of oil to the worldwide economy, arguably met the second condition. Clearly overwhelming and disproportionate force was used and the public support was sufficient. The two remaining conditions, the first and the last, explain General Powell's hope that the ground war could be averted. First of all, military force was not being used as a last resort since diplomatic means had not been completely exhausted, especially through the Soviet Union. Most importantly, there was no clear exit strategy since there was no end state from which to derive one.

¹⁰⁶ Doug DuBrin, "Military Strategy: Powell Doctrine – Background, Application and Critical Analysis," PBS NewsHour Extra; available from http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/iraq/powelldoctrine_short.html; Internet; accessed 14 March 2004.

¹⁰⁷ DuBrin, "Military Strategy: Powell Doctrine ...

The last aspect covering the lack of clear military objectives pertains to the post-conflict actions. In this case, the United States fundamentally ignored its regional objective of maintaining peace and enhancing stability. The military coalition started to disband almost immediately after the cease-fire. Some troops remained to offer limited protection and ships enforced sanctions for years to follow but the bulk of the military force left the operating area shortly after the cease-fire. Although the Republican Guard was not completely destroyed during the conflict, it was sufficiently degraded as to create some internal instability in Iraq. There were rebel uprisings in Northern and Southern Iraq yet the United States refrained from getting militarily involved. The United States did intervene eventually to offer humanitarian assistance to the Kurd's in the North but did so extremely reluctantly. Iraq had decreased regional stability with its invasion of Kuwait but the United States' response had not miraculously stabilized the region by virtue of its military action. Iraq's military was significantly degraded and the economic crisis at the origin of the conflict was made worse. Not only were the original catalysts for war still alive, including President Hussein, the region was at greater risk given Iraq's increased vulnerability to aggression from Iran. Regional peace and stability was therefore not achieved after the conflict.

The United States failed to learn from history the importance of military deterrence in the post-conflict resolution. Military deterrence was a significant factor in the highly successful peace achieved with Japan after the Second World War. Long-term peace and stability in the Persian Gulf was unlikely to be achieved without intervention yet the United States refrained from getting involved. Some have argued that without a United Nations mandate, the United States had no legal basis to get involved in Iraq's domestic issues. Not to belittle the United Nations but a superpower such as the United States should have been able to sell a case for

involvement in stabilizing the area, given its economic significance. Others have contested that concerns by some Arab nations of American over-involvement in the Persian Gulf prompted the o

States failed to take advantage of the favourable negotiating position as “[General] Schwarzkopf received no instructions from Washington to use the United States position on the battlefield as leverage to support political objectives in the post war situation.”¹¹⁰ For all the time, effort and cost of the war, the United States did not exploit the cease-fire to its full potential. The White House did request the addition of one stipulation whereby “those Iraqi forces left in the ‘Basra Pocket’ would have to abandon their equipment and walk home.”¹¹¹ But this condition was dropped after CENTCOM staff pointed out that it could not be enforced without continuing the attack.¹¹² The logic of making the use of military force as the only means of resolving the conflict was highly questionable. However, the fact that Washington did not take the lead or at least a far more prominent role in the cease-fire process was irrational.

The failure to engage the cease-fire process was further convoluted by an artificially imposed timeline. President Bush originally ordered the cease-fire negotiations to take place within forty-eight hours of the suspension of hostilities on 27 February 1991.¹¹³ Directing a prompt resolution to the process was not unreasonable but to do so at the detriment of the outcome was unwise. The imposed timeline might have been achievable with the desired terms and conditions already drafted or at least given serious consideration but such was not the case. Perhaps it was President Bush’s failure to appreciate the significance of post-conflict resolutions because of a bias towards exiting as quickly as possible that tarnished his ability to focus this important process. As it turned out, the process moved ahead so quickly that it arguably failed to meet its objectives.

¹¹⁰ Sterner, “Closing the Gate: The Persian Gulf War Revisited..., 17.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 16.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 16.

¹¹³ Petre, *It Doesn’t Take a Hero....*, 473.

For all its ability, the United States military was ill-suited to deal with the cease-fire. General Schwarzkopf performed brilliantly as commander of the coalition but he was not trained to formulate the path for the post-conflict situation and thus the cease-fire conditions that should be sought out. General Swartzkopf was certainly qualified to act as an advisor to the process or even form part of the core team but not act as the lead in uncharted territory. This further amplifies the earlier position that the United States considered war to be the end of the strategic road. Worst yet, Washington failed to take over the lead from the military in dealing with the conflict termination. Conceivably, the fact that the United States had not been involved in large-scale cease-fire negotiations as the victor since the Korean War didn't help. Once again, foreign policy advisors were not up to the task, compared to the military's ability to deliver force, and even seemed unable to ascertain what was their task aside from starting war.

Iraq could have given the United States lessons in negotiating a cease-fire. As General Schwarzkopf frantically planned for a suitable venue to hold the cease-fire negotiations, it is quite apparent that his Iraqi counterparts were fully engaged in what lay ahead of them. General Schwarzkopf obviously had the upper hand in the negotiation process, as is normally the case for the victor, and was not about to make any concessions. He told reporters: "This isn't a negotiation. I'm not about to give them anything."¹¹⁴ In turn, the Iraqi delegation was not in any position to garner any concessions from the United States and the coalition but managed to do so notwithstanding. One of the proposed conditions of the cease-fire imposed restrictions on military flights. The Iraqi delegation asked if the use of armed helicopters could be excluded from this restriction because of the damage done to their transportation system. General Schwarzkopf conceded the request, although he was under no obligation to do so, and later

¹¹⁴ Anderson, *Stormin' Norman: An American Hero...*, 188.

admitted regretting it.¹¹⁵ In the days that followed, Iraq used helicopter gunships to suppress rebel insurgents in Southern Iraq. Although the Iraqi delegation may not have gone into the negotiations with this specific concession in mind, there was no doubt that the United States was outwitted. Incidentally, Iraq's use of helicopters contributed to re-establishing President Hussein's regime and dashed the United States' hope of the regime being overthrown locally. Iraq thus proved more agile in negotiating the cease-fire despite being in an unenviable position.

President Bush placed more emphasis on hope than substance when dealing with the cease-fire. In 1994, President Bush wrote: "I did have a strong feeling that the Iraqi military, having been led to such a crushing defeat by Saddam, would rise up and rid themselves of him."¹¹⁶ This may explain why President Bush expedited the cease-fire process and failed to ensure it contributed to achieving larger strategic objectives. Unfortunately, this approach ignored the military saying that "hope is not a course of action."¹¹⁷ During the first few weeks of March 1991, Iraqi military commanders contemplated abandoning President Hussein's regime and joining the rebels but in Iraq the consequences of choosing the wrong side would be arguably fatal under such a brutal dictatorship. As the balance of power was teetering during this period of instability, President Bush failed to influence the process. The United States did not use the cease-fire to force or at least create the conditions for a regime change because it was hoping that the inherent instability would achieve the desired result.

Failing to create the conditions for a regime change may have been the result of incoherent objectives. Arguably the United States was trying to kill President Hussein, if not at least indirectly given the Central Intelligence 'finding' signed by President Bush. As indicated

¹¹⁵ Sterner, "Closing the Gate: The Persian Gulf War Revisited..., 17.

¹¹⁶ Hassan, *The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait...*, 97.

¹¹⁷ Charles E. Miller, Charles E. "Right Into the Danger Zone – Making History." National Review Online; available from <http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment-miller040203.asp>; Internet; accessed 14 March 2004.

above, President Bush also hoped the military would overthrow the regime. Yet General Powell stated: “we didn’t want to see an Islamic Republic established in the south... nor, frankly, was their [the rebels] success a goal of our policy.”¹¹⁸ This explains why the United States opted not to support the rebel cause in the south. However, it does not explain if and how the United States expected a regime change to materialize itself. General Powell also agreed with Ambassador Freeman’s telegram stating: “It is not our interest to destroy Iraq or weaken it to the point that Iran and/or Syria are not constrained by it.”¹¹⁹ It is not clear whether the United States really wanted a regime change since it did not actively promote one from the cease-fire onwards.

The mishandling of the cease-fire played a significant role in the overall outcome of the conflict. The United States clearly demonstrated its status as the world’s foremost military superpower in planning and executing the defensive and offensive campaigns. Notwithstanding the strategic failure in dealing with the cease-fire, the terms imposed were amongst the most severe in history.¹²⁰ This should prove as little consolation given the overwhelming nature of the military power exerted against Iraq. Notwithstanding, the terms of the cease-fire did very little to re-establish the pre-conflict objective of peace and stability in the region. Former British Prime Minister Thatcher reflected during a PBS interview in January 1996 that she wondered who had won the war given that President Hussein was still in power and President Bush was not.¹²¹ In his 1993 book entitled ‘Hollow Victory’, Jeffery Record says that the Gulf War was a “magnificent military victory barren of any significant diplomatic gains.”¹²² The mishandling of the cease-fire was unfortunately consistent with the way the entire conflict was strategically handled by the United States.

¹¹⁸ Sterner, “Closing the Gate: The Persian Gulf War Revisited..., 19.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 19.

¹²⁰ O’Neill, “The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment..., 230.

¹²¹ Sterner, “Closing the Gate: The Persian Gulf War Revisited..., 13.

Having expanded on the United States' strategic inadequacy relative to its military prowess, it is important to quickly examine the implications of this situation. In their article entitled *How Kuwait Was Won*, Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh argue that: "In the end the United States was successful because the strength of its military offensive eased the pressure on its political defenses."¹²³ It is not difficult to speculate how challenging the situation would have been had Israel gotten involved, coalition casualties been higher, weapons of mass destruction been used or other countries opted to support Iraq, like China for example. The limited objectives sought by the United States would not likely have enabled returning the security situation to the pre-conflict status quo under more stressing scenarios. Clausewitz points out that: "No one starts a war – or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so – without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it."¹²⁴ Seeking peace and stability by doing little more than articulating it vaguely is entirely different from attaining this elusive objective. The United States loosely sought peace and stability in 1990 and had the tools to conduct war and re-establish a relative status quo but remains strategically incapable of making lasting peace. America's ability to formulate and execute strategic objectives is overdue for a radical transformation similar to the one achieved by its military after the Vietnam War.

In summary, the United States did not evolve strategically to keep pace with the tremendous transformation after the Vietnam War that earned the American military the title of

¹²² *Ibid*, 13.

¹²³ Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, "How Kuwait Was Won – Strategy in the Gulf War," *International Security* 16, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 6.

¹²⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*..., 579.

the world's uncontested superpower. The United States demonstrated great patience and resolve in dealing with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Not only did the United States win the Cold War without firing its guns, it achieved long-standing peace with the only other superpower at the time. However, in 1990 the United States was unsuccessful in adapting its strategy dominated by deterrence during the Cold War to the new world order. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait would prove to be the first test of America's strategic inability.

The first failure of American strategy in the Middle East during the Persian Gulf War was caused by not addressing competing regional interests. In 1980, the United States termed the supply of oil from the Persian Gulf as a vital interest. At the same time, American foreign policy showed preferential treatment towards Israel. This placed the United States on a policy collision course between Israel and the oil-producing Arab countries supporting Palestine. The United States recognized the importance of dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict but failed to make any progress before, during or after the invasion of Kuwait. These competing interests forced the United States to abandon a long-term posture in dealing with Iraq and resulted in a premature and perhaps even unnecessary use of war.

The United States administration provided contradictory messages to Iraq prior to the invasion of Kuwait. The United States appeared to understand the severity of the economic crisis in Iraq but did not intervene to redress the burden being aggravated by Kuwait's overproduction of oil. President Hussein was clear about his economic predicament but all the United States could muster in the week preceding the invasion of Kuwait was 'no opinion'. There were also widely conflicting messages between the White House and the remainder of the United States government, most notably Congress. The internal confusion made it difficult to

ascertain whether the United States would interfere if Iraq invaded Kuwait to address its economic crisis.

President Bush lacked objectivity in dealing with the conflict. He was determined to use military force to deal with the conflict despite advice to the contrary from his principal military commanders. In personalizing the conflict by resorting to name calling of his adversary, he placed himself on a collision course that only war could resolve. President Bush largely ignored means other than war to resolve the conflict including repeated attempts by the Soviet Union to act as mediator. Despite the determination to make use of military force, President Bush allowed television coverage of the ground war to impact his decision to end the war hours before it achieved at least the stated objective of destroying Iraq's Republican Guard.

The lack of concise strategic objectives rendered the subordinate military objectives ambiguous. The first of three centres of gravity targeting the command, control and leadership of President Hussein's regime was a prime example. President Hussein was never identified as a direct target although discretely the United States took action to bring it to bear. Similarly, the United States undertook the destruction of the Iraqi Republican Guard as the third centre of gravity to prevent future threat in the region, yet only achieved 50% of this objective when President Bush called an end to the hostilities on 27 February 1991. By these actions, Washington demonstrated that it was never really certain whether it sought the destruction of Iraq's military or wanted to keep it sufficiently intact to remain as a counterforce to Iran. Since Generals Powell and Schwarzkopf were not proponents of the use of force to resolve this conflict, neither posed serious objections to ending the conflict before the three centres of gravity were militarily destroyed.

The mishandling of the conflict termination was consistent with the strategic inability demonstrated by the United States prior to and throughout the conflict. The process was rushed and failed to exploit the tremendous military victory achieved on the battlefield. The United States did not have a vision of how to create the conditions for long-term peace and stability in the region. As a result, there was a lack of diligence placed into executing the cease-fire as anything more than a short-term military instrument. President Bush left the military to execute the war, which certainly contributed to its efficiency, but he failed to ensure its use was founded on clearly articulated and achievable objectives. The overall result was that the United States demonstrated a lack of coherent strategic objectives during the 1991 Persian Gulf War.

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