HOW COGNITIVE DISSONANCE LED TO
STRATEGIC SURPRISE IN THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

KURTIS D. LOHIDE, MAJ, USAF
B.A., Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, 1979

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
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This study maintains strategic surprise occurred in two instances during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. First Saddam's invasion of Kuwait took the United States, and most of the world, by surprise. Next, the U.S. led coalition attacks strategically surprised Saddam and his forces. By claiming that strategic surprise took place during the Gulf War, this study contradicts Clausewitz and modern U.S. military doctrine. These sources both state strategic surprise rarely occurs because of the large size of armies. Yet, dispite the large forces in the Gulf War, strategic surprise did occur. As this study shows, strategic surprise occurred in the Gulf crisis due to cognitive dissonance. This condition causes an individual's mind to become out of tune with reality. During the Gulf War, cognitive dissonance tended to cause decision makers on both sides of the conflict to discount warning signs which indicated their respective plans were not working. By discounting these warning signs, Gulf War leaders failed to reassess their plans and make required adjustments. This failure created an environment in which strategic surprised occurred.

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the large forces involved in the Gulf War, strategic
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As this study shows, strategic surprise occurred in the Gulf
crisis due to cognitive dissonance. This condition causes
an individual's mind to become out of tune with reality.
During the Gulf War, cognitive dissonance tended to make
decision makers on both sides of the conflict discount
warning signs which indicated their respective strategic
plans were not working. By discounting these warning signs,
Gulf War leaders failed to reassess their plans and make
required adjustments. This failure created an environment
in which strategic surprise occurred.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> In the course of this process [carrying out a
> plan], it is necessary to examine anew whether the
> plan worked out in the preceding process corresponds
> with reality. If it does not correspond with
> reality, or if it does not fully do so, then in the
> light of our new knowledge, it becomes necessary to
> form new judgments, make new decisions and change
> the original plan so as to meet the new situation.
> The plan is partially changed in almost every
> operation, and sometimes it is even changed
> completely. A rash man who does not understand the
> need for such alterations or is unwilling to make
> them, but who acts blindly, will inevitably run his
> head against a brick wall.[1]

> Mao Tse-Tung

If a person were to predict at what level of
warfare surprise might occur in modern times, the tactical
level would probably be the popular choice. Strategic
surprise, on the other hand, would most likely receive
little consideration. To support this general belief, one
could site doctrinal manuals of the United States military.
U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5, Operations,[2] and U.S. Air
Force Manual 1-1, Basic Aerospace Doctrine,[3] both claim
modern surveillance and intelligence assets, combined with
the large size of today's armies, make strategic surprise
nearly impossible to achieve. This study takes exception
with these claims by demonstrating strategic surprise

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occurred on both sides of the Persian Gulf War.
Specifically, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait came as a
strategic surprise to the United States. Then, Saddam
became strategically surprised by the coalition's attack on
his country. In both cases, these surprise attacks
occurred despite ample warnings that should have prevented
them from happening. As this study will explain, strategic
surprise can occur, despite obvious warning signs, due to a
condition called cognitive dissonance.

The Case Against Strategic Surprise

The arguments against strategic military surprise
certainly do not represent any radical new thinking.
Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz expressed
his doubts about strategic surprise over two hundred years
ago. He wrote, "basically surprise is a tactical device,
simply because in tactics time and space are limited in
scale."[4] Clausewitz reasoned armies had grown so large that
troop concentrations and their accompanying logistical
areas were too large to be effectively hidden. He
concluded his thoughts on the subject saying, "it is very
rare therefore that one state surprises another, either by
an attack or by preparations for war."[5]

It is easy to understand why this position still
prevails today. When Clausewitz voiced his thoughts in the
nineteenth century, he relied mainly on his studies of the

campaigns of Frederick the Great and his experiences with Napoleon. Their battles involved increasingly larger forces which eventually numbered into the tens of thousands. To Clausewitz, it seemed virtually impossible for a commander to mask the movements of this many soldiers and the large amounts of equipment and supplies necessary to sustain them. Due to these developments, he maintained that strategic surprise, for the most part, no longer was possible.

Following Clausewitz's argument, it seems logical to think strategic surprise would be even more difficult to achieve today. Compared to the numbers of troops moving about Europe when Clausewitz formulated his theories, the order of battle of modern armies involves staggering quantities of men and equipment. In the Persian Gulf War, the United States fielded an army of 532,000 troops and 2,000 tanks. U.S. naval forces consisted of eight aircraft carriers, two battleships and a large assortment of destroyers, frigates, submarines, and aircraft. Finally America's air armada contained 1,376 war planes. Opposing the U.S. forces, Iraq assembled an army of over one million men, 4,300 tanks, and more than 750 combat aircraft. While these numbers represent gigantic sizes, they still do not consider the remaining coalition forces. Among the larger

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contributors were the Saudis with 95,000 troops, the United Kingdom with 35,000 soldiers, and the Egyptians with 40,000 combatants.[6] As the Gulf conflict developed and these forces arrayed themselves into battle positions, they left tremendous signatures. Therefore it would be logical to assume each side had a reasonably accurate estimate concerning the disposition of its antagonists.

Advances in reconnaissance methods enhanced the ability of the Persian Gulf commanders to keep abreast of their enemy's movements. While Napoleon relied primarily upon the keen eyes and swift horses of his cavalry scouts for information, commanders in Southwest Asia (SWA) had a much wider array of sophisticated equipment at their disposal. Desert Storm brought with it the first widespread use of space based satellites. Orbiting far above the atmosphere, spy satellites like the KH-11, Lacrosse, and Magnum, used their electronic sensors to hear and see the battlefield in exacting detail. According to the director of American Scientists Space Policy Project, Saddam Hussein would have had a hard time making a move without detection in such an environment. The Lacrosse radar imaging satellite could tell the difference between an Iraqi tank and an Iraqi truck. An advanced KH-11 electro-optical satellite could tell the exact type of tank

and whether a truck was carrying troops or ammunition.[7]
Beside these assets which could see enemy movements, oi er
systems eavesdropped on communications and radar emis..ions.

Although lacking satellites, the Iraqis could also
obtain strategic information. Throughout Desert Shield
their Soviet made MIG-25 Foxbat aircraft made near daily
flights along the Saudi border. Using on board
reconnaissance pods, these flights looked deep into
coalition territory where allied ground forces were
located. The U.S. Air Force also made use of
reconnaissance aircraft. Although the high-flying SR-71
aircraft had retired just before the beginning of the
United States deployment, TR-1 and RF-4C aircraft provided
photographic evidence of Iraq's movements.

Another factor making strategic surprise difficult
to obtain was the mass media's involvement. Vietnam became
the first television war, and the Gulf War extended that
trend to continuous live coverage. Cable television,
newspapers, and magazines covered every angle of the
conflict. As the crisis progressed, the various mediums
sometimes reported sensitive information in an attempt to
capture the viewing public from their competitors. Such
was the case of a New York Times report that described in
detail the "Hail Mary" maneuver just six days before the
launching of the ground war.

The military sometimes unwittingly contributed to the effectiveness of the media. The most publicized case revolved around then Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force, General Michael Dugan. Early in Desert Shield, Dugan listed the strategic targets in Iraq and Kuwait under consideration for coalition bombing raids. In essence, he divulged the plans for Instant Thunder, the initial U.S. air campaign to retaliate against the Iraqis in case they invaded Saudi Arabia. The media provided world wide distribution of this type of information, and Baghdad surely took notice of such intelligence. It was even reported that Saddam often watched the Atlanta based Cable News Network (CNN) to update himself on the coalition's maneuvers. Likewise, on the morning after the coalition air campaign began, U. S. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney said CNN was his best source of information on what was happening in Baghdad. With these descriptive reports readily available to all sides involved in war, the argument against achieving strategic surprise would appear strengthened.

These examples from the Persian Gulf conflict would seem to support Clausewitz's arguments against the possibility of strategic surprise. But events proved otherwise. First, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait surprised most of the world. Next, the extent and severity

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of the air campaign, and the following ground assault, allowed the U.S. led coalition to repeatedly score surprise, on the strategic level, against Iraq.

Surprise Defined

To substantiate the previous assertions, it is necessary to first define what constitutes surprise. In his book Surprise Attack, Richard K. Betts says, "strategic surprise occurs to the degree that the victim does not appreciate whether, when, where, or how the adversary will strike."[8] Betts further qualifies surprise by saying it is significant not in its occurrence, but in its success.

> Surprise in itself is unimportant. Indeed anything unexpected is a surprise, but few novelties threaten to turn the world upside down. What is important is the impact of surprise that invalidates premises of defense planning, preventing effective application of the victim's capabilities and plans.[9]

To illustrate his point, Betts cites the disastrous 1980 American attempt to rescue U.S. hostages from the Iranian embassy in Tehran. In this case, the American special forces surprised the Iranians by penetrating Iran's borders; however, the mission ended without a successful rescue, thus negating the impact of surprise.[10]

This study uses Bett's definition to support the claim that surprise occurred on both sides of the conflict in the Persian Gulf crisis. First, it looks at the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and maintains this constituted strategic surprise by invalidating the defensive planning the United

States had taken to protect its national interest in the region. Next, it examines the U.S. led response to the invasion and how Saddam Hussein's defensive plans became invalid. However, the overall object is not to just cite examples of strategic surprise, but to understand how surprise happened despite ample warnings that telegraphed its impending occurrence.

Developing Cognitive Dissonance

To explain how strategic surprise occurred, despite the myriad of warnings available to prevent it, this study suggests that at times during the war decision makers on both sides of the conflict committed the errors of a student navigator. To arrive at his objectives, the inexperienced navigator collected his maps, analyzed the terrain, and plotted a seemingly logical course. However, once under way, he discovered the actual landscape did not match that shown on his maps. As a result, he encountered conflicting waypoints and uncharted obstacles. At this point, the situation called for the student to perform a navigational fix to verify his course. However, due to the human tendency to resist change, the navigator pushed on, convincing himself he remained on course despite obvious landmarks suggesting otherwise. Eventually, the reality of his surroundings contrasted so radically with his preplanned course his mind could no longer dismiss the

inconsistencies. Unfortunately, by this time the young navigator was so far off course he had no hope of reaching his objective.

The essence of the above analogy is that the navigator plotted out his course using maps which presented a static, one-dimensional view of the world. Once on his journey, the student encountered obstacles not shown on his charts. At this point, the human tendency to resist change prevented him from correcting his position to make it consistent with the real world. Instead, he used his mind's eye to mold the terrain to fit his perception of reality. In doing so, the navigator developed a faulty mindset which allowed him to rationalize or dismiss the obvious landmarks which should have signaled him he was drifting off course. While he might have made small course corrections based on the unexpected obstacles, this was not enough. He needed a complete reassessment of his position.

Retired British Major General Julian Thompson saw England commit these kinds of errors during the 1982 Falklands War. He summed up this human tendency for one's mind to become out of tune with reality in two words He called it, "cognitive dissonance."[11] Social psychologists since the mid-1960s have extensively studied cognitive consistency, or the tendency for a person's beliefs and actions to be logically consistent with one another. When

cognitive dissonance, or the lack of such consistency, arises, a person tends unconsciously to change his beliefs or perceptions to restore consistency.[12] However, problems arise when a person's motivation to restore cognitive consistency becomes so strong that the individual discounts reality.

Conclusion

The following study shows how cognitive dissonance allowed strategic surprise to take place during the Persian Gulf crisis. First, it examines how U.S. decision makers be amc blinded by a Cold War dominated view toward the Middle east. Eventually this Soviet phobia prevented U.S. officials from changing their SWA defense plans in light of changing regional circumstances. As a result, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait surprised Washington by invalidating the last minute actions U.S. planners had taken to protect the nation's vital interests in the Persian Gulf. Next, the study turns to Saddam Hussein and the gamble he made in attacking Kuwait. The Iraqi leader developed his plan to absorb Kuwait based on faulty assumptions. Once this plan began to founder, Saddam's faulty world view prevented him from making much needed changes to his course of action. Therefore, the coalition attack caught him by surprise. As one will see, in both cases cognitive dissonance created an environment that permitted strategic surprise.

CHAPTER II

SURPRISE IN WASHINGTON

The high level of US preparedness clearly
contributed to the tremendous success in Operations
Desert Shield and Desert Storm. This preparedness
was a product of years of involvement and forward
presence in the region. . . . Planning for crises
in the region began long before Iraq's invasion of
Kuwait. These plans were based on Secretary of
Defense and CJCS guidance and detailed analyses of
the Region.[1]

> Conduct of the Persian Gulf War

The impetus of existing plans is always stronger
than the impulse to change.[2]

> Barbara Tuchman, The Guns Of August

Introduction

In the afterglow of the U.S. military victory in the

Persian Gulf War, it is tempting to claim America's

preparedness eliminated any possibility of strategic

surprise against the United States. Those supporting this

position would point out the government's accurate analysis

of the dynamics of the region resulted in an excellent plan

to protect America's vital interest in the Middle East. Due

to this foresight, when Saddam invaded, defense planners

simply activated the existing plan and pushed the Iraqis

back behind their own borders. In fact, this was not so.

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Actually, the Iraqi invasion invalidated the U.S. strategic
plan to defend the nation's vital interests in the Gulf.
Thus, Saddam's invasion came as a strategic surprise to the
United States. This happened because cognitive dissonance
caused U.S. planners to remain preoccupied with a perceived
Soviet menace long after regional threats began to
constitute a greater danger to U.S. Mideast interests.

Despite this fixation on the Soviet Union, the
lopsidedness of the U.S. victory against Iraq tempts one to
herald the effectiveness of America's strategic plans and
preparations to protect its interest in Southwest Asia.
However, this view contains mistakes that occur when the
winner of a conflict then writes that conflict's history.
Instead of looking back from the present, perhaps a more
realistic appraisal comes from going to the early days of
August 1990 and looking forward. Using this reference, one
discovers Iraq's invasion of Kuwait created an unexpected
crisis for the United States. On 2 August 1990, the same
day the Iraqis invaded, in a meeting of top U.S. officials,
Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady pointed out to President
Bush that by taking over Kuwait, Iraq had doubled its oil
reserves to 20 percent of the total world reserves.[3] In
this same meeting, the president expressed fears saying that
with so much oil at his disposal, Saddam could manipulate

world prices and hold the United States and its allies at his mercy. Higher oil prices would fuel inflation, thus worsening the already bleak condition of the U.S. economy.[4]

At this point in the crisis, U.S. military forces could do nothing to stop Saddam's forces from consolidating their positions in Kuwait. Lieutenant General Thomas W. Kelly, Director of Operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the time stated "There's nothing we can do. . . . With no heavy ground forces--tank divisions--in the area, there [is] no effective way to meet Saddam's thrust."[5] Additionally, the U.S. military could not insert the forces earmarked to protect the nation's vital interests in the Mideast. The U.S. forces had no place to deploy. The Kuwaitis wanted help but it was obviously too late to put forces in that country. Saudi Arabia was the planned deployment site, but Saudi Monarch, Fahd ibn Abdul Aziz, had stated that he did not want U.S. ground forces in his country. Apparently calling in foreign forces seemed an over reaction to the Saudi government which saw no evidence that Saddam was planning to attack the Kingdom.[6] In a telephone conversation with President Bush on 4 August 1990, King Fahd informed the president that Saudi Arabia did not require ground troops to defend itself. The King had only requested somehelp with airpower and equipment.[7]

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At this juncture, the Bush administration found itself in a difficult situation. The president felt leaving Kuwait in Iraq's possession was unacceptable. He agreed with a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report arguing Saddam's grab of Kuwait posed a threat to the current world order and the long-range impact on the world economy could be potentially devastating.[8] However, he had few options to pressure Iraq to withdraw other than employing economic sanctions. And, as U.S. Budget Director Richard G. Darman had informed the president, economic embargoes historically did not work.[9]

Viewed from the perspective of early 2 August 1990, one sees Saddam's invasion invalidated U.S. defensive measures to protect the country's vital interests in the region. Clearly, the Bush administration had not antici pated Saddam's aggression and was surprised when Iraqi forces launched their attack. To appreciate why this happened, it is useful to recall the analogy of the student navigator.

The navigator experienced problems because obstacles appeared in the real world which were not depicted on his map. However, rather than replot his course in light of this conflicting information, he chose instead to convince himself he was still tracking correctly. Similarly, the United States strategic plan to defend its vital interests in the Middle East, encountered obstacles because of a U.S.

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Cold War orientation. Also, like the student navigator, U.S. strategic planners developed a mindset which allowed them to dismiss the inconsistencies of their plans and convince themselves they were still on course. As this study will show, this Cold War mentality prevented successive U.S. administrations from seeing the requirement for a major change in the direction of America's Persian Gulf defense planning.

America's Soviet Fixation

Events leading to the American government's faulty perception of reality in the Middle East can be traced back to two major events in 1979. First, in November, Iranian students staged a sit-in at the American embassy in Tehran that ended in violence and the taking of approximately one hundred U.S. hostages. The new Iranian leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini condoned the measure as a way to pressure the United States into extraditing the deposed Iranian Shah Reza Mohammed Pahlevi, who had fled the country in January of 1979.[10] Second in December, a pro-Soviet communist faction in Afghanistan staged a successful coup. To assist the new regime in consolidating its power, the Soviet Union initially committed 30,000 troops, a number that grew to over 80,000 in the following months.[11] These two events produced a reaction among "a whole phalanx of

conservatives and neo-conservatives groups attempting since the mid-1970s to reinstate Cold War axioms in U.S. foreign policy . . . ."[12] Because of these groups' efforts, domestic perceptions of the international position of the United States returned to a Cold War mindset that prevented an objective evaluation of regional events.[13] Simply put, the U.S. alarm over the Soviet presence in Afghanistan overshadowed the regional significance of the Ayatollah's Islamic Revolution in Iran. This overemphasis on the Cold War threat started a pattern of cognitive dissonance that culminated in America's lack of readiness to counter the threat posed by Iraq.

In all fairness, the Soviet army's move into Afghanistan was an alarming development from a United States viewpoint. For years, the worst case scenario faced by U.S. defense planners involved an invasion of Iran by Soviet forces crossing the common border between the two countries. After the initial crossing, the Soviet columns would drive across the Zagros Mountains in Western Iran eventually ending on the shores of the Persian Gulf. Occupying this position, they could dominate the Straits of Hormuz and choke off the supply of oil through this bottleneck. Additionally, they would be in a favorable position to launch an effort to capture the massive oil reserves of

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Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. With the U.S. and its allies heavy dependence on this Mideast oil, such an attack would be economically incapacitating.

The Soviet move into Afghanistan proved disturbing to the U.S. for several reasons, but one seemed to stand out. It signaled Moscow's willingness to use military strength to expand its sphere of influence. For years Soviet military expenditures outstripped those of the United States. Now it seemed the Russians felt confident enough in this imbalance to flex their muscle in a region where U.S. influence appeared to be declining. Before the Islamic Revolution, the U.S. was in a favorable position to ward off any Soviet incursion into Iran. But with the Shah gone and the anti-American Islamic fundamentalists in power, the U.S. had lost its strongest ally in the region. Defense analysts in Washington postulated that Moscow intended to capitalize on the American misfortunes.

Faced with these developments, it is understandable that Cold War fears began to heighten in the United States. However, what both the public and the administration largely misunderstood was that the failure of American policy in Iran represented more than just losing a buffer against Soviet expansion.

> The fall of the Shah was the biggest single setback for the United States in Southwest Asia. It removed the very pivot of America's Gulf policy. The crisis also exposed U.S. inability to understand both profound social changes and the virulent anti-U.S. revolutionary upsurge that economic development could

trigger in a Third World. With all its military
might, the United States had no measures, diplomatic
or political to cope with the crisis.[14]

With their tunnel vision zeroed in on the Soviet
troops in Afghanistan, United States policy makers failed to
grasp the full implications of the Iranian fundamentalist
revolution. Khomeini and his followers had revolutionized
the Shi'a sect of Islam by placing Iranian society under the
rule of Islamic law. This transformation included all state
institutions and the armed forces.[15] Additionally,
Khomeini's followers had the dream of returning the Middle
East to an Islamic empire based on the rigorous guidelines
of their fundamentalist doctrine.

Because of the resurgence of Cold War fears in
America, the U.S. down played the growing Iranian compulsion
to spread the Islamic alternative throughout the region.
The administration in Washington focused instead on the
impact the loss of Iran would have on the country's ability
to stem Soviet expansionism. This concentration on the USSR
represented a one-dimensional appraisal of the situation.
The Soviet threat certainly existed, but just as the Russian
occupation of Afghanistan posed a threat to U.S. interests,
so too did Khomein's desire of inspiring a fundamentalist
movement in the region. If the Islamic revolution in Iran
generated a domino effect that ousted moderate governments
throughout the Middle East, the results would be disastrous
for the United States.

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On 20 November 1979, an assault on the Grand Mosque in Saudi Arabia proved the seriousness the Iranian threat posed to Washington. Just 16 days after the storming of the American embassy in Tehran, more than 700 Shiite fundamentalists attacked and occupied the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The Saudis eventually overwhelmed the radicals, but this attack upon the holiest of Islamic shrines shook the apparently stable Saudi regime to its core.[16]

Besides frightening the Saudi monarchy, the attack put the U.S. government in an economic bind due to America's increasing dependence on Saudi oil. American President Jimmy Carter had drastically increased imports of Saudi oil in 1979. This increase became necessary to offset the loss of Iranian oil imports that President Carter had embargoed in response to deteriorating relations between the two countries. As a result, the U.S. depended on the Saudi imports for 17 percent of its oil supply.[17] This oil lifeline could be cut if Saudi Arabia's Shiite minority, inspired by Tehran's fundamentalist zeal, continued attacks on King Fahd's government. It was unlikely the Saudi dynasty would suffer the fate of the Shah, but a Shiite uprising might become substantial enough to force the King to take a less pro-Western stance to placate the rebellious factions in his country.

Perhaps at this point, the United States, submerged in its ocean of Cold War apprehensions, should have come to periscope depth and checked the accuracy of its position. Though the Soviet threat obviously could not be dismissed, between the Soviets and the Persian Gulf stood the hostile Iranian forces. Fearing outside attacks against the Revolution, the Ayatollah had mobilized his nation. To augment the regular forces of about 200,000 troops left over from the Shah's days in power, Khomeini established the Revolutionary Guards, or *Pasdaran*, which grew to 250,000 soldiers. As a subset of the Guards, the Ayatollah formed a volunteer militia known as the Basij. This body constituted another 100,000 troops.[18]

While the USSR represented a substantial, but still indirect threat, the regional menace manifested by the Grand Mosque attack seemed much closer to the U.S. economic vital interests. Still, emerging U.S. policy focused clearly on the Soviets. In 1980, President Carter established the foundation for the nation's response to the Soviet's Afghanistan incursion during his January State of the Union address. Specifically, he stated:

> Any 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 USA and will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.[19]

The wording of what became known as the Carter
Doctrine is revealing in its reference to use force against
an "outside threat" to the country's vital interest. This
seemed a simplistic approach considering the seriousness of
the attacks on the Grand Mosque coupled with Iran's vehement
anti-American stance. However, neglecting to address
regional problems was characteristic of Washington's
tendency to view the Middle East as primarily an arena where
the two superpowers vied for dominance. Although realizing
this clash did not occur in a vacuum, the U.S. still seemed
to feel the countries in the region would either placidly
observe or become polarized and support either the East or
the West. Failure to acknowledge the Gulf States as
independent regional actors resulted from an emerging case
of cognitive dissonance among U.S. decisions makers.

Shortly after the Carter Doctrine initiated a
revised, more militarily orientated direction for American
strategic policy in the Middle East, newly elected American
President Ronald Reagan replaced President Carter.
President Reagan quickly expanded the initiatives started at
the end of the Carter term. The major overarching theme of
the Reagan administration was the growing Soviet threat and
declining U.S. strength. Its main preoccupation was to
recast U.S. strategy and strengthen the military to meet
this threat.[20] Keeping with this agenda, Reagan immediately
began to put some muscle behind the Carter Doctrine as a way

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to counter the Soviet influence in the Gulf. This entailed bulking up the defense budget and greatly expanding the concept of the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), an offshoot of the Carter Doctrine.

In March of 1980, Reagan expanded inter-service participation in the RDF and renamed it the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF). The broad mission of the RDJTF tasked the U.S. military to protect U.S. national interest in Southwest Asia. Facets of this mission included ensuring a steady supply of oil along with promoting stable and secure regimes in the region. Although various contingency plans of the RDJTF addressed possible regional flare-ups throughout SWA, the Reagan administration's world view caused the bulk of the task force's efforts to be directed against the Soviets.[21]

As the commander of the U.S. Army's 24th mechanized division, part of the RDJTF at Ft. Stewart, Georgia, then Major General Norman Schwarzkopf described the main mission of the force.

> To ensure that we had the military wherewithal to protect the United States' interest in the Persian Gulf, Washington had expanded the Rapid Deployment Force, effective January 1, 1983, into a full-fledged four-star command. . . . The Army's role in Central Command's war plan was to prevent the Soviet Army from swooping down out of the Caucasus and seizing the oil fields in Iran. Should such an invasion seem imminent, our two sister divisions, the 82 Airborne and the 101st Air Assault, would rush to the Middle East aboard giant Air Force C-5A and C-141 transport planes.[22]

General Schwarzkopf's statements illustrate the Reagan Administration's commitment to strengthening the nation's strategic posture in the Middle East. Establishing a separate U.S. warfighting command dedicated solely to the Gulf region offers clear testament to this fact. However, the general's description also suggests that from 1980 until at least 1983, U.S. strategy planners still had not conducted a reality check to verify the correctness of their Mideast policy. This detail emphasizes the U.S. administration's flawed perceptions concerning the realities of the region. This flawed mindset, brought on by a Soviet fixation, prevented Pentagon planners from including regional developments into the RDJTF plan.

A major flaw in the plan was its concept of operating out of Iran. Perhaps the U.S. defense establishment envisioned the Iranians welcoming American forces into the country if Russian divisions began crossing the border. But the xenophobic nature of the Iranian fundamentalist state tended to discredit this scenario. The Iranian's hard-line hatred of "Godless foreigners" would most likely spur them to take on both superpowers at once. If this happened, the RDJTF divisions would have to execute a forced entry into the country.

However, storming into Iran without an invitation could end in a bloodbath for the Americans. The U.S. Defense Department's plan called for the first units to take

up defensive positions in the Zagros Mountain chain. The transportation system over this formidable terrain was exceedingly limited and dotted with chokepoints.[23] The Pentagon assumed the small, but well-equipped RDJTF, backed by U.S. air strikes, could theoretically hold off the invading Russians until reinforcements arrived.

This scenario probably looked good as a contingency plan while on a shelf at CENTCOM headquarters, but as stated earlier, the plan had problems. For instance, if the Iranians opposed the American presence, as in all likelihood they would, Khomeini's troops would already be occupying the highly defensible Zagros Mountains when the RDJTF began piling off their cargo planes. It seems reasonable to assume Khomeini's forces, fighting on their own territory, could hold off the Americans just as the Americans had planned to arrest a Russian advance. The whole idea of a forced entry was a major departure from earlier policy that had carefully avoided repeating the mistakes of Vietnam where U.S. military actions had often alienated the civilian population.[24]

By minimizing the threat posed by Iranian nationals to a RDJTF deployment into Iran, the United States appeared to be forming its strategy using unrealistic assumptions. That is, countering the Soviet threat became not just the main mission, but also the only mission. This idea behind U.S. planning prevailed although the overthrow of the Shah

had demonstrated the ability of the Islamic fundamentalist movement to threaten U.S. interests. It appeared U.S. planners needed to significantly shift their assessment of the region to encompass all threats to the America's vital interest, not just those posed by the Soviet Union. However, like the student navigator discussed earlier, American strategic planners stuck to their original course despite indicators that signaled they were getting off track.

One might argue this interpretation of U.S. strategy by citing certain U.S. activities in SWA that did not seem to center on countering a Soviet threat. For instance, there was Operation Bright Star. Conducted in fiscal years 83, 85, 87, and 90, Bright Star was a large scale deployment of U.S. forces to Egypt. Designed to test the capabilities of the RDJTF, major participants in the exercises included the U.S. Army and Air Force components of Central Command. Additionally, the exercise included a U.S. Marine Expeditionary Force and various ships of the American Navy.[25]

Besides this exercise with Egypt, the United States for years had lent assistance to Saudi Arabia. Starting as early as 1951, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) undertook construction projects in the Saudi Kingdom.[26] By the mid 1980s, the COE had designed and built a network of

military facilities throughout Saudi Arabia that included port facilities, airfields, and military cantonment areas at Khamis Mushayat, Tabuk, and King Kahlid Military City.[27] This help in building a nationwide military infrastructure in Saudi Arabia came in addition to an American Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) established in the country in the early 1950s.

Taking these efforts into consideration, one must credit the U.S. with doing more in the region than just establishing a plan for the RDJTF to operate out of Iran. Still, the U.S. focus remained firmly on the Soviets and excluded any considerations of threats posed by regional entities. A closer look at the reasons for Bright Star and the U.S. involvement in Saudia Arabia supports this conclusion.

In 1981, United States planners ran an exercise called Gallant Knight. Its purpose was to see how Iran could be defended against a Soviet invasion. The exercise revealed the U.S. could need upwards of 325,000 military personnel to counter a worst-case Russian advance. These numbers exceed the capabilities of the RDJTF as it was then conceived. During President Reagan's first term in office he took substantial steps to alleviate the defects highlighted during the Gallant Knight exercise. Part of the answer consisted of securing staging facilities in the

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Middle East where the RDJTF could organize and replenish before continuing on their way to fight the Soviets. Bright Star was an outgrowth of these initiatives.[28]

A similar emphasis could be found behind many U.S. actions in Saudi Arabia. Since U.S. contingency plans in the 1980s envisioned a conflict between the two superpowers, the American forces needed bases from which to counter a Soviet offensive or to launch offensive strikes against the Soviet Union. It was in this context which the COE built the massive infrastructure in Saudi.[29]

Viewed from the preceding perspective, one sees how both Bright Star and U.S. assistance to Saudi Arabia resulted from the America's desire to counter the perceived Soviet threat to the region. As such, these actions did not establish any great change in U.S. strategy. Because U.S. policy makers remained preoccupied with the anti-Soviet approach to Middle East strategy, they tended to minimize other regional threats to U.S. vital interest. Such was the case when on 22 September 1980, Saddam ordered five of his army divisions to attack across the border into neighboring Iran. This signaled the start of the bloody eight-year war between the two countries. Much of the fighting which took place during the course of the war centered around Basra, the major regional city which marks the Southern border between the two combatant states. That put the fighting only a hundred or so miles from the oil fields of the

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Arabian peninsula which were newly declared U.S. vital interests. Despite this proximity, the fighting did not attract much interest or attention among U.S. officials.

Perhaps the U.S. maintained this low-keyed reaction because the war did not involve an outside threat to the Gulf oil supplies. An external threat, after all, was the kind of danger that the Carter Doctrine vowed to resist. Since the Russians remained uninvolved in the Iran-Iraq conflict, the U.S. did the same. As the hostilities progressed, both the United States and the Soviet Union maintained this hands off policy. The neutral position developed mostly because neither superpower had starkly opposed interest in this war between the two countries.[30] In fact, as long as the war remained a localized affair, both superpowers saw advantages to letting the two sides slug it out. A continuing stalemate kept both Iran and Iraq out of any power equation in the Persian Gulf.[31]

In Washington, the developing stalemate between Iran and Iraq fit comfortably into the administration's Cold War view of the region. As long as Russia did not get involved in the Iran and Iraq war, the U.S. would also stay neutral. This permitted U.S. strategic planners to maintain their focus on countering an Afghan-based Soviet invasion. They apparently saw no need to worry about the regional

consequences of the Iran-Iraq conflict since the two states were busily expending their energies on each other in a series of non-decisive engagements.

Through the mid-1980s, the United States' general policy of neutrality worked well. At times, both the United States and Russia provided limited aid to Iraq when Saddam's forces suffered military defeats. Also there was the Irangate affair which sent covert U.S. aid to Iran. But these were isolated incidents, and overall both superpowers avoided making any firm commitment to either side.

Then in the summer of 1987, during what became known as the Tanker War, the United States Navy took direct military action against the Iranians. This came about because as the Iran-Iraq War continued over the years, the two sides began attacking each other's oil tankers as a means of inflicting economic damage. Iran became quite good at these attacks and expanded them to include Saudi and Kuwaiti tankers. This constituted a retaliatory measure against these countries because they were supplying Saddam's government with money to continue the war. Eventually, the United States elected to intervene militarily after a request from the Kuwaiti government. Under the code name Earnest Will, the U.S. reflagged Kuwaiti tankers under American registration. This act afforded the U.S. Navy a

lawful means to provide the tankers with armed escorts. As the Iranian Navy challenged the reflagged tankers, they were systematically blown out of the water by American warships.

This shift to military involvement seemed to invalidate all the reasons the U.S. had for staying neutral in the Iran-Iraq war. By intervening, Washington ran the risk of giving Iraq the advantage and upsetting the balance of power in the region. But upsetting regional balances wa_ not the United States' primary concern. American motivations for entering the Iran-Iraq war came from a fear of the Soviets gaining the upper hand in the region. In December of 1986, the Kuwait Oil Tanker Company contacted the U.S. Coast Guard and asked about the possibility of reflagging its ships. At the same time, the Kuwaitis worked out arrangements with the Soviet Union to charter three Soviet tankers with an additional agreement that tw could be leased on short notice.[32]

> These provisions were worked out to enable
> to increase its Soviet-protected tankers if the
> United States did not come across. When the Uni
> States did not quickly grab the bait, Kuwait's ci,
> minister, Ali al-Khalifa al-Athbi al-Sabah, formall,
> requested that the United States agree to the
> "reflagging" of some Kuwaiti ships on January 13,
> 1987. Still no American reply was forthcoming until
> a report was received in Washington on March 2 that a
> deal had been struck between Kuwait and the Soviet
> Union for the protection of Kuwaiti tankers. Five
> days later, the United States decided to outbid the
> Soviets by offering to put the U.S. flag on eleven
> Kuwaiti tankers.[33]

In its rush to preempt Soviet advances in Kuwait, the U.S. tipped the scales in the Iran-Iraq war in favor of Baghdad. The U.S. attacks against the Iranian Navy, while not a crippling blow to Khomeini's military power, did send a clear message of U.S resolve an increased Iran's sense of isolation. To Tehran, it seemed that Iraq now had both superpowers in its camp. While the Soviet Union did not intervene militarily, its policy of neutrality did not inhibit the Russians from supplying Baghdad with weapons in the later years of the conflict. Although Russian assistance to Iraq had waned after Saddam's initial invasion of Iran, the rift had mended over the years and by 1987, Iraqi defense efforts were largely supported by the Soviet Union.[34] These Soviet arms equipped a vastly improved Iraqi army which had grown to over one million men. The combination of superpower involvement and Iraq military strength eventually took its toll on the Iranians.

After the Iranians suffered reverses in its 1987 Karbala 5 campaign against Basra, it became apparent the eight-year war had finally exhausted Kohmeini's forces. Externally, the Iranians faced increasing isolation from the world community and an inability to secure any new military hardware to replace that lost on the battlefield. Internally, economic depravations resulting from the long war and recent Iraqi bombing campaigns greatly diminished the fundamentalist zeal that had fueled the nation in the

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early war years. Accordingly, "on 18 July, [1988] after a year of evasion and hesitation, Iran accepted [United Nations] Security Council Resolution 598 on a cease-fire in the Gulf War."[35]

The New Threat

The cease-fire resulted in a new regional alignment in Southwest Asia with Iraq as the dominant military power. Between 1986 and 1988 for instance, Iraq had added 150,000 men to its armed forces and could field a force of 39 infantry divisions.[36] "Territorially, at the time of the 1988 cease-fire, Iraq possessed about twice the land it had claimed from Iran in 1980. Militarily, Baghdad sounded as bullish at the end as it did at the start of the war."[37]

Only two years after the cease-fire, the United States would be taken by surprise when the enlarged Iraqi military invaded Kuwait. This move would surprise the U.S. because of America's focus on a Soviet threat in the Gulf. That is not to imply that U.S. strategists should have possessed a clairvoyance which permitted them to predict Saddam's invasion. However, the Iranian revolution in 1979 should have prompted U.S. planners to consider the threat from regional forces when formulating strategy to defend the country's vital interests in the region.

Instead, the centerpiece of America's SWA strategy still called for the RDJTF to deploy into Iran and stop a Soviet invasion from taking control of the Strait of Hormuz. This same plan remained on the books from 1980 until 1989. Of course it was periodically reviewed, but apparently never in the context of how the Iranian's would react to an American force suddenly appearing on their soil. This seems an unpardonable oversight in light of Ayatollah Khomeini's hard line stance against the "great Satan," as he called America. Unfortunately, dismissing regional forces seemed to be a trademark of U.S. strategic defense planning for the area.

The U.S. made a similar mistake when Operation Earnest Will sent ships to protect Kuwaiti oil tankers in 1987. Earnest Will constituted a knee-jerk reaction to the Soviet assistance to the Kuwaiti government. As result of the U.S. decision, the American navy effectively blew Iran's small coastal navy out of the water. This destruction of Iran's navy, represented another in a series of events which forced Tehran to finally succumb to Baghdad's army the following year.

Because the U.S. concentrated only on the Soviets, Washington never anticipated Iran's defeat as a side effect of Earnest Will. Now, Saddam Hussein arose as the premier military power broker in the Mideast. His attack against Kuwait in 1990 would require the U.S. to essentially

"reinvent the wheel" regarding its strategic planing to defend America's Persian Gulf interests. The final portion of this chapter deals with Washington's inability to correct the mistakes of a decade in only two years.

In summary, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 set off an explosion of Cold War fears among U.S. defense planners. Over the next decade, Washington's preoccupation with the Russian military threat caused successive administrations to misread disturbing Mideast developments such as the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. The U.S. made these mistakes because of cognitive dissonance. As the country's mindset became increasingly out of tune with reality, strategic planners never stopped to reassess their plans and consider new contingencies to counter growing regional threats. As a result, Iraq's emergence as a major threat caught U.S. planners by surprise and forced them to attempt a rapid overhaul of U.S. strategic plans designed to defend America's Persian Gulf interests. This effort came too late and therefore proved ineffective in deterring a resurgent Iraqi threat to the region.

CENTCOM's Makeshift Plan

In the fall of 1989, the United States began correcting some inconsistencies in its strategic view of Southwest Asia. A new assessment made by the U.S. Central

Command staff, led Washington to conclude Iraq, and not the
Soviet Union, now represented the primary threat to U.S.
vital interests in the region. Together with this
appraisal, U.S. planners constructed a strategic plan to
deal with a possible Iraqi attack on the oil fields of
Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Since the Iraqi victory had caught
U.S. planners largely by surprise, they now scrambled to
develop a plan to counter Saddam's massive military.

In the time available, they could only address one
option: a takeover of both the Kuwaiti and Saudi oil
fields. Other options, such as an Iraqi invasion of just
Kuwait, would easily invalidate strategic assumptions of the
U.S. plan. Because they had no time to plan for these other
contingencies, the U.S. planners elected to mold Saddam's
possible military options to fit within the context of the
U.S. plan. This approach proved easier than admitting no
U.S. contingency plan existed to deal with Iraq's actions
against Kuwait. But, in minimizing Iraq's threat against
Kuwait, the U.S. rejected multiple warnings signs suggesting
Saddam meant to attack. Once again, cognitive dissonance
affected U.S. thinking. Due to Washington's flawed mindset,
Saddam's 2 August 1990 invasion of Kuwait strategically
surprised the U.S. administration.

Two events in 1989 led to America's being surprised by Saddam's aggression. First, as previously discussed, there was Iraq's victory over Iran. The other event was the lessening of Soviet communism and the declining tensions between the U.S. and Russia.

> While during the 1980s DCD had focused principally on developing the power projection capabilities to counter a Soviet invasion into Iran, the USD(P) and the Command-in-Chief, Central Command (CINCCENT) now judged that-while still a concern worth planning against-it no longer was the most likely or worrisome challenge in the region, given the increasing turmoil and political changes in the Soviet Union and the fact that it was perceived as unlikely that Iran would ask for US assistance in a timely manner to counter such an invasion . . . . The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) directed CINCCENT to develop war plans consistent with this shift in emphasis.[38]

As a result of the chairman's guidance, CINCCENT determined Iraq now represented the greatest threat to U.S. vital interest in the region. However, because successive Washington administrations had remained fixed for so long on a "RDJTF versus the Soviets" scenario, the country now had no viable plan to deter an Iraqi move against the oil fields in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. To remedy this situation, U.S. military planners began work on a new option for the defense of the Arabian Peninsula.

The result was CENTCOM OPLAN 1002-90 which recognized Iraq as the dominate threat to the region's stability.

> After an initial review of courses of action, CINCCENT approved the basic planning idea for the defense of the Arabian Peninsula which involved

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trading space for time as U.S. forces reduced
attacking Iraqi forces. This approach would permit
U.S. forces to continue their deployment into Saudi
Arabia and complete their subsequent movement to
defensive positions. U.S. ground forces would fight
a delay and avoid decisive engagements while tactical
air and indirect fire by other forces continued to
reduce attacking Iraqi forces. When U.S. forces had
sufficient combat power, they would conduct a counter
offensive to regain lost territory.[39]

In fairness to U.S. military planners, this new strategy
represented a step in the right direction. It identified
Iraq, and not the Soviet Union, as the major threat in the
region. Also, it emphasized the need to protect the Saudi
Arabian Peninsula and its oil fields which President Carter
identified as U.S. vital interests back in 1980. CENTCOM
tested the validity of the plan in July 1990 in an exercise
called Internal Look 90. An after action review of this
exercise revealed OPLAN 1002 had some serious problems. To
work against Iraq, the plan needed a revised troop list
along with an armor heavy, highly mobile force to fight
effectively in the expanses of the Arabian Desert.[40]

While it identified these deficiencies, Internal
Look missed other potential problem areas. For instance, as
the plan stood, it assumed the Iraqis would go for all the
oil fields in the peninsula, thus threatening the Saudis who
would then ask for U.S. assistance. By assuming U.S. entry
into Saudi Arabia in this manner, the CENTCOM planners
seemed to be ignoring precedents. As far back as 1981,
President Reagan had declared the United States would deploy

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the RDF to Saudi Arabia if Islamic fundamentalism threatened
to topple the Saudi government as it had done in Iran.
However, the Saudis refused to give the U.S. basing rights,
thus confounding the U.S. RDF strategy.[41] And in 1984,
during the Iran-Iraq war, press reports related that
Washington approached the Saudi government seeking access to
the air base at Dahahran. In return for basing rights, the
U.S. would provide air cover for Kuwaiti and Saudi oil
tankers. According to the reports, the Saudis again refused
the U.S. request.[42]

The Saudi government's hesitation resulted largely
from religious sensitivities. As guardian of the Muslim
holy cities of Mecca and Medina, King Fahd held the
responsibility of maintaining the purity of these sites. By
allowing Western troops on his soil, he risked criticism
from radical Islamic elements, such as those in Iran, for
allowing foreign troops on Saudi soil. Although CENTCOM
planners were no doubt aware of King Fahd's predicament,
this political problem was ignored. In doing this, the
United States made the same mistakes it had in assuming the
Iranians would invite U.S. forces into Iran if it came under
attack from the Russians. However, the administration did
not address this issue. Instead, U.S. planners took the
position that, when threatened by an Iraqi force, the Saudi
government would automatically call for U.S. military
support. Thus, for the plan to work, the Saudis had to feel

threatened. The plan never addressed what would happen if the Saudis and the U.S. disagreed over the need for a U.S. deployment.

The failure to address this critical question highlights a major weaknesses of OPLAN 1002. However, because 1002 was the only plan available, by default, the U.S. administration developed the mindset that it sufficiently addressed any contingency which might occur in the Gulf. Therefore, in the upcoming months, U.S. officials tended to make interpretations of Baghdad's increasingly hostile actions that fit the deterrence capabilities of the plan, but were discordant with reality. Specifically, Washington's interpretations failed to consider the possibility of an Iraqi attack directed only against Kuwait. By taking this position, U.S. officials ignored strong evidence which indicated the most likely scenario was, in fact, an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and not Saudi Arabia.

First, there was Iraq's long-standing claim that Kuwait was one of its provinces. These disputes between Iraq and Kuwait as to the legitimacy of the latter's government were not uncommon. A succession of Iraqi rulers over the years had disputed the Uqair Protocol of 1922 whereby the British established Kuwait. Baghdad's rulers had continually accused the British government of arbitrarily drawing the borders in the region to divide the various Arab populations, thus making it harder for a

potential rise of Pan-Arabism. When Britain granted Kuwait
its full independence in 1961, the Iraqi leader Qasim
reacted by demanding Kuwait instead be restored to its
rightful position as part of Iraq's southern province of
Basra. At that time Qasim expressed disgust with the
Kuwaitis, calling them irresponsible people under the sway
of imperialism.[43]

When Qasim dispatched troops from Basra to attack
the Kuwait Shiekdom, the British reacted by moving troops
from its garrison in Bahrain into Kuwait the next day.
Their force increased to 6,000 soldiers within a week and
Qasim backed down. "However, the basic threat to Kuwait's
territorial integrity, inherent in its smallness and
geographical position and heightened by its stupendous oil
riches, had not been totally banished."[44] Saddam's actions
obviously proved this statement to be true. In contrast to
the situation in 1961, modern day Kuwait could not call on a
friendly power and expect to have that nation's troops in
country within 24 hours. United States forces, as scheduled
in OPLAN 1002, certainly could not meet this time table.
Therefore, the United States dismissed the historical
precedent of Qasim's actions, electing instead to believe
Saddam was only trying to browbeat the Kuwaitis.

Taken by itself, this evidence hardly justified any
strong reaction by Washington to Saddam's military
movements. However, other indicators also suggested Saddam

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might pick this time to risk an invasion. For one thing, even though Iraq had vast oil deposits, Saddam desperately needed money. Part of the reason he found himself in this position was again rooted in the history of the region. When Britain divided the remains of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, Iraq found itself left literally high and dry. England effectively cut Iraq off from the Persian Gulf by awarding Kuwait the islands of Warba and Bubiyan, at the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. In order to trade by sea, the Baghdad government had secured access to the Gulf by negotiating with Tehran to use the Iranian-owned Shatt al Arab waterway which also emptied into the Persian Gulf. This arrangement satisfied Saddam's needs until the Iran-Iraq war erupted. During the war, numerous ships were sunk in the passage, making it impossible to navigate. This situation continued after the war with the Iranians blocking any United Nation's move to clear out the canal.[45]

In the period just after the war, Saddam could hardly afford the economic blow constituted by the continued loss of access to the Gulf. Iraq's victory over Iran had cost Saddam dearly. During the war Baghdad spent $95 billion in 95 months. Additionally, Saddam owed foreign loans and grants amounting to $85-95 billion. Besides coping with these staggering debts, Saddam wanted additional income to rebuild and maintain his military that had grown to be the fourth largest in the world.

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Saddled with this potential economic disaster, Saddam expected oil-rich Kuwait to help. He believed that the Kuwait government of Shaikh Jaber al Ahmad al Sabah owed Baghdad a debt of gratitude because Iraq's eight-year struggle against Iran had protected the Kuwait emirate from the Ayatollah's fundamentalist threat. The brutal and protracted fighting had, at conservative Western estimates, killed 105,000 Iraqi soldiers.[46] While Iraq sacrificed money and blood to defeat Iran, Kuwait, which benefited from the victory, got off relatively cheap. For the protection of their country, the Kuwaitis contributed an initial $2 billion to the Iraq war effort, and then tossed in another two payments of $1 billion each later in the war.[47]

Contrasted to its own expenditures, Baghdad no doubt felt Kuwait's contribution constituted a rather paltry sum. What made this imbalance more infuriating to the Iraqis was, that with the war over and the threat to Kuwait removed, the Kuwaitis now expressed indifference to Iraqi monetary problems. In fact, the Kuwaitis added to Iraq's economic woes. Not only did the Kuwaitis refuse Saddam's request to be relieved of his war debt to them, the Kuwaitis rubbed more salt in Baghdad's economic wounds by undercutting world oil prices.

> The nub of the problem, in Baghdad's eyes, was the open flouting of the OPEC output quota by Kuwait (as well as the United Arab Emirates). Overproduction by these two states in the spring of 1990 depressed the oil prices well below OPEC's reference price of $18 a barrel, fixed in November

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1989. . . . For every US dollar drop in the price of
a barrel of oil, the Iraqi loss amounted to $1
billion annually.[48]

Adding to these injuries, there were persistent
feelings in Baghdad that the Kuwaitis were siphoning
millions of barrels of oil from the Rumeila oil fields.
This large oil deposit straddled the border between Iraq and
Kuwait making it the subject of a long border dispute
between the two countries. Similar to the present day
situation, in 1973, the Iraqis had also moved troops to the
Kuwaiti border. At that time, Baghdad demanded the right to
build oil refineries in the area and a deepwater oil
terminal off Bubiyan Island, which had been the source of an
additional border dispute since the British partition had
awarded this vital land mass to Kuwait after World War I.
When the Kuwaitis refused to grant Baghdad's demands, Iraqi
armored elements invaded the northern portions of Kuwait.
Eventually, under pressure from the pro-American Shah of
Iran, the Iraqi forces withdrew. In subsequent talks,
Saddam Hussein, then deputy head of the Iraqi Revolutionary
Command Council, suggested that his country and Kuwait
divide Bubiyan Island in half. This proposal came to
nothing.[49]

Based on this past animosity between the two states,
and the present-day perception that the Kuwaitis were taking
advantage of Iraq's post-war economic difficulties, Saddam
became incensed at the ungrateful emirate. He retaliated

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against the Kuwaiti's refusal to cut oil production by first stepping up his rhetoric against the al-Sabah government, and then by concentrating troops on the Kuwaiti border.

It was these troop movements that caught Washington's attention. At the Defense Intelligence Agency in Washington, Walter P. "Pat" Long, Defense Intelligence Officer for the Middle East and South Asia, studied daily satellite images of the region. In the space of a few days, he observed divisions of the Iraqi Republican Guard armored units and other Iraqi troops crowding against the border with Kuwait. Lang sent several classified messages up his chain of command in an attempt to alert his superiors of a possible invasion. However, his alarm warnings went unheeded. "The terrible truth, he realized, was that when policy makers had some idea or interpretations in their minds, intelligence assessments, even thunderclaps, would not move them. The mind-set not to believe could be a potent force."[50]

Reflecting back on Clausewitz's statements concerning surprise, Lang's analysis depended upon the very precise tracking of an enemy's movements which supposedly invalidated the concept of strategic surprise. However, this premise requires a correct interpretation of the enemy's intent. In the case of the Iraqi troops, the Bush administration assessed the movements only as a measure of intimidation directed against Kuwait. CJCS General Powell

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found the movement troubling but not alarming, and chose to
believe the JCS intelligence analysts who reported that it
looked as if Baghdad was using the deployment as a
threatening lever in the ongoing dispute wit'. Kuwait over
oil pricing.[51] By 19 July 1990, the only public statement
on the subject had come from Defense Secretary Cheney who
told reporters that the U.S. considered threats to its
friends or interests in the region a serious matter.[52]

This pledge by the U.S. to protect its friends
apparently grabbed the attention of Saddam who summoned the
U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, to a meeting in
Baghdad on 25 July. This marked the first time in her two
years in Iraq that Glaspie had personally met with the Iraqi
leader. At the meeting, Saddam attempted to dissuade the
American government from becoming involved in the situation.
He reassured Glaspie it "was a dispute within the Arab
'family' and should not concern the United States with which
he wanted good relations.[53]

In a separate message to President Bush, which
Saddam passed to Glaspie during the meeting, the Iraqi
leader took a stronger position against Kuwait. He accused
the Kuwaitis of killing his people by destroying their
humanity through economic warfare.[54] Near the conclusion of
the meeting, Glaspie found encouragement in Saddam's
positive response to an initiative by Egypt President Hosni
Mubarak, asking Iraq to send a representative to meet with

the Kuwaitis in Saudia Arabia to search for a peaceful solution to the situation. However, as Glaspie left the meeting, Saddam warned her that if this meeting did not go well, Iraq would not accept the death which would result from the economic hardships Kuwait had placed upon it.[55]

At the conclusion of the Hussein-Galaspie meeting, the U.S. ambassador sent an "all's well" message to Washington and added that, in light of the meeting, she would go ahead with her planned vacation. Five days later, on 30 July 1990, Glaspie boarded a flight out of Baghdad to begin her holiday. On 1 August 1990, in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, it was announced that the Iraqi-Kuwaiti talks had failed. By the end of the next day, 100,000 Iraqi troops had conquered Kuwait and were digging in. The invasion basically caught the U.S. flat-footed.

Conclusion

Iraq's invasion invalidated the strategic assumptions of OPLAN 1002-90 and surprised the United States. Commenting on the incursion, Secretary Cheney stated Saddam's move against Kuwait brought home the fact that Iraq did not have to take Saudi Arabia to dominate the Gulf.[56] The U.S. found itself in this position because it had fixated for too long on the Soviet Union's threat to American interest in the Persian Gulf. This Cold War mentality caused major problems because it prevented U.S.

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planners from reassessing their strategic plans even after regional powers, such as Iran and then Iraq, began to represent a dangerous threat to U.S. interests. When the U.S. finally began to realign its defensive stance to counter these regional threats, the action came too late. By this time, Iraq's powerful military had outgrown America's existing deterrence capabilities as they were detailed in OPLAN 1002-90.

To compensate for this shortcoming, U.S. officials developed a mindset which tended to illogically mold events in the Gulf to fit the tenants of 1002-90. Afflicted with a flawed mindset, or cognitive dissonance as it is termed in this study, the U.S. never realized how its interpretation of events in the Gulf had become increasing out of tune with reality. As such, the U.S. administration was strategically surprised by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

CHAPTER III

SADDAM'S COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

> What stunned me is that when this second
> increment of 250,000 troops started to move toward
> Saudi Arabia, [Saddam] Hussein still did not
> understand, as any junior military officer in the
> United States would have understood, he was going to
> lose.[1]
>
> General Colin L. Powell

Faulty Assumptions

When President Bush announced plans to double the

U.S. troop strength in early November 1990, many analysts

joined General Powell in expressing disbelief that Saddam

Hussein still failed to comprehend the magnitude of his

miscalculation in invading Kuwait. In the aftermath of

Desert Storm, this failure proved to be one of monumental

proportions for the Iraqi leader. Although Saddam remained

in power, he lost heavily in the war not only in military

strength, but also diplomatic standing and economic

resources. As result of the war, Saddam's country went

"from being the most powerful Arab military force, with an

advanced industrial-military complex, . . . to a second-rate

status in the region."[2]

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Obviously this was not the endstate Saddam visual

ized when he ordered his forces to overrun Kuwait. The

question which continues to confound most observers is, why

did Saddam not realize, as General Powell and the majority

of the world did, that inevitably he would lose in his

gamble to annex Kuwait? Mao Tse-Tung's quote from the

beginning of this study offers a probable answer. In

deciding to take Kuwait, Saddam developed a strategy based

on his perceptions of the world. As events unfolded, it

should have become evident to Saddam that his plan, flawed

by faulty assumptions, did not, as Mao put it, reflect

reality. However, Saddam refused to perform a follow-on

assessment of his original plan after his troops crossed

into Kuwait.

> [Such an assessment] requires painful
> soul-searching and the willingness to admit a mistake
> in one's original basic calculations, if not the
> rejection of one's entire analytical framework. This
> is never easy--even in the face of overwhelming
> evidence--and especially after having staked one's
> reputation and made a major commitment, as in
> Saddam's case.[3]

Unwilling to perform an inward looking reassessment

of his situation, Saddam never perceived the need for a

radical shift in his selected course of action. In

maintaining his original plan, even when world events

invalidated the assumptions on which it was constructed,

Saddam's actions became increasingly out of tune with

reality. Saddam's heavy-handed, highly centralized style of

governing Iraq only intensified this situation. The Iraqi leader had brutally eliminated most of his opposition while rising to power. That left him surrounded only by yes men and family cronies who knew the fatal consequences of disagreeing with Saddam's policies. In this environment, Saddam began to display symptoms of cognitive dissonance. This malady of the mind created an environment that allowed the U.S. led coalition to achieve strategic surprise on both political and military levels.

To understand Saddam's cognitive dissonance, it is useful to once again return to the analogy of the student navigator who plotted his course using a map which did not accurately depict the territory over which he would travel. Once upon his journey, the student refused to acknowledge real world terrain features pointing to inconsistencies in his course. As a result, the novice wandered farther and farther off track until he no longer had any hope of gaining his objective.

In Saddam's case, he mapped out his Kuwaiti course of action based on the world view as he envisioned it in the wake of his victory against Iran in 1988. As described in the previous chapter, Saddam emerged from the Iran-Iraq War militarily strong but monetarily weak. Kuwait exasperated Iraq's monetary woes by undercutting world oil prices and denying Iraq access to Persian Gulf ports. Feeling he had protected Kuwait against the scourges of Iranian

Fundamentalism, Saddam became incensed by Kuwait's post-war ungrateful attitude. As a result, he renewed old arguments claiming Kuwait was a province of Iraq, and used this as an excuse for his invasion.

Being a shrewd and calculating individual, Saddam realized the invasion was a gamble. Even though it would take a mere flex of his military muscle to overcome the tiny armed force of Kuwaiti leader Shaikh Jabor al Ahmad al Sabah, he still faced the danger of a hostile world reaction. At the time, no one possessed the clairvoyance to anticipate Saddam's plan to deal with his reactions. In retrospect, however, Saddam's actions throughout the crisis remained consistent, thus giving some insights to his pre-invasion strategic mindset. It appears Saddam anticipated protest to his invasion to come from two main camps. The first protest would come from those industrialized nations depending on Kuwaiti oil. In general these were Western nations with the superpower United States leading the way. Additionally, Saddam figured fallout would come from neighboring Arab nations alarmed by Baghdad's open aggression against Kuwait.

To counter adverse Western reaction, Saddam viewed the United States as the center of gravity. If he could deter the U.S. from interfering with his plans to make Kuwait Iraq's nineteenth province, the other Western countries would probably fall in line. To avoid open

confrontation with the U.S., Saddam felt he could count on his longstanding relationship with the Soviet Union to counterbalance U.S. reactions to the invasion. As discussed in the last chapter, Iraq-USSR relations improved toward the end of the Iran-Iraq war. As a result, Saddam apparently gambled Russia would step in if it looked like U.S. military action was imminent.[4] In adopting this line of reasoning, Saddam made the assumption that the traditional superpower rivalry would overcome the Soviet's new cooperative spirit with the West developed by President Mikhail Gorbachev.

Even if the Soviets offered no assistance, Saddam still assumed he could effectively deal with the United States. To accomplish this, he planned to target U.S. national will. He presumed the national malaise resulting from America's involvement in Vietnam remained a sensitive issue. It became his intention to ward off any possible U.S. intervention in Kuwait by raising the specter of a second Vietnam. Failing in this effort, Saddam felt he could always fall back on taking hostages. Using this method, Iran had prevented U.S. military intervention after radical Iranian students forcibly attacked the American embassy in Tehran and detained its American occupants. With thousands of U.S. and Western citizens living in Kuwait and Iraq, Saddam saw hostage taking as a means to prevent Western interference with his plans to annex Kuwait.

As for objections the Arab states might raise, the invasion of Kuwait was in itself a strong deterrence. By taking this bold step, Saddam demonstrated his intentions to build Iraq into an Arab superpower. With Baghdad's ascending military credibility after its surprising victory over the Iranians, few would argue Iraq possessed the military strength to realize Saddam's aspirations. Still, despite his military superiority, Saddam remained realistic enough to understand he would have to deal with political and religious objections to the invasion. If this was not done properly, he risked world isolation, which ran counter to his dreams of being the undisputed leader of the Middle East.

Besides complaints from individual states, Saddam faced possible dissension from regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League Council, and the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO). Saddam apparently assumed he could fracture these organizations and dilute the impact of their actions against him. In making this assumption, historically the odds favored Baghdad. Traditionally, infighting had prevented Arab coalitions from being effective. Past failures against the Israelis served to prove this statement. Saddam's plan to fragment these groups actually started long before the Kuwait invasion. As detailed in the previous chapter, Saddam attempted to package his invasion, not as

Arab-on-Arab violence, but as a noble Arab nation righteously ousting an imperialist sponsored puppet government. Taking this approach allowed Saddam to claim any Muslim state opposing him must also be under the corrupt influence of imperialism.

Additionally, Saddam cultivated his relations with influential Arab states hoping they would either support, or at least not actively oppose, his invasion. In 1989, Saudi Arabia's King Fahd visited Baghdad to sign a mutual non-agression pact. Among other items, the accord contained pledges by both countries not to use military force against each other.[5] That same year, Baghdad attempted to gain a higher profile in the Arab world by establishing the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC), a group pledged to economic cooperation. In forming the council, Iraq strengthened ties with fellow member states Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen.[6]

Beyond these arrangements, Saddam assumed Arab states would tolerate his annexation of Kuwait because of Iraq's victory in the Iran-Iraq War. In winning the war, Saddam saw himself as saving the Arab world from the perils of Khomeini's Fundamentalism. He expected secular orientated Muslim states to go along with his Kuwaiti invasion in return for his continued resistance to Iran. In a similar vein, Saddam expected the Muslim world to support him because of his anti-Israeli stance. Saddam's military prowess represented a source of Arab power that stood a

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realistic chance of defeating Jerusalem. Iraq portrayed its efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction as an undertaking designed for this end. Because he embodied this hope for Israeli annihilation, Saddam calculated Arab nations would look the other way concerning his actions against Kuwait.

This represents a summary of Saddam's strategic plan for dealing with world reaction to the invasion of Kuwait. In devising this plan Saddam made a number of assumptions that turned out to be invalid. This in itself did not lead to Saddam's eventual military defeat. As the Prussian staff officer Helmuth von Moltke observed, no plan survives the first engagement.[7] The Baghdad leader's error instead resulted from his cognitive dissonance. Because of his mindset, he continued to navigate along his original course of action, even when the reality of world events clearly showed him to be drifting badly.

Loss of the Soviets

When contemplating the decision to invade Kuwait, Saddam had to consider the reactions of the United States. To keep the U.S. out of the picture Saddam decided he could play the Soviet Union against the American Government. If successful in doing this, he could factor the Western superpower out of the equation needed to maintain Kuwait.

He counted on his long-standing ties with Moscow along with and the traditional Cold War superpower rivalry to make this possible.

For years the Baghdad regime had bought staggering amounts of military equipment from Moscow. Indeed, the front line armored vehicles and aircraft which had spearheaded the Iraqi invasion forces were all of Soviet manufacture. The deals which bought this hardware to Iraq proved beneficial to both sides. Saddam built a modern military machine while pumping billions of petro-dollars into the cash strapped Soviet economy.

For these reasons, Saddam had cause to feel the Russains would not object to his foray into Kuwait. Additionally, he could use this friendship to stave off interference from the United States or other Western powers if they chose to oppose his forces. The fear of confrontation between the world's two nuclear titans would make his invasion of the tiny Kuwaiti emirate seem trivial in comparison. As Saddam saw the situation, at worst, all the Western world had to fear from Iraq's presence in Kuwait would be paying a few more cents at the gas pumps. After all, Saddam had no intention of restricting the export of Kuwaiti oil. Using these revenues to pay off his war debts and keep his military financed constituted a major reason for his attack.

At least Saddam hoped the U.S. would come to these conclusions. But external indicators in the late 1980s began to cast doubt upon the Iraqi leader's hopes. Those external indicators were the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The opening up of the Soviet society in 1989 resulted from the realization by the country's leaders that communism was in decline. To solve its myriad problems, Soviet leadership sought new economic and political ties. In seeking these closer ties, the Soviets hoped to decrease the military tensions resulting from the bipolar world order existing since the end of World War II.

Saddam apparently failed to understand he was part of Moscow's problem. Soviet statistics showed that economic hardships brought about by Iraq's war with Iran had caused Baghdad's cash-up-front policy with Moscow to slip badly in 1988. By 1989, Iraq owed the Soviets $5 billion. Additionally, as the Soviet Union became more tolerant toward internal dissent, more and more Russian citizens had criticized weapon shipments to radical regimes on both moral and economic grounds. Because of economic necessity and a new found sensitivity to its constituents, the Soviet government moved away from Iraq and leaned more toward moderate states in the region such as Saudi Arabia.[8]

Although Saddam failed to see the threat this Soviet trend presented to his gameplan for holding Kuwait, the United States quickly capitalized upon it. In a fortunate

turn of events for the U.S., on 3 August 1990, the day after the Kuwait incursion, Secretary of State James A. Baker III happened to be in the Soviet Union meeting with Soviet Foreign Soviet Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. In a demonstration of the new U.S.-Soviet relationship, the Soviet Union announced "it was suspending military sales to that [Iraq] client.[9] This historic show of solidarity between the two superpowers essentially squelched any design by Saddam to hold off retaliation against his army with the threat of nuclear escalation. Saddam admitted in an interview on 22 December 1990, the USSR-USA display of solidarity caught him by surprise.[10] With his invasion one day old, he had no idea how many more surprises the future held for him.

Failure of the Human Shields

Having obtained the support of the Soviets, President Bush next huddled with his top advisers and constructed a response to Iraq's aggression. The result was a two pronged attack. First, the president made the decision to build an international coalition, seeking to use its combined economic, diplomatic, and military power to force Saddam out of Kuwait. Next, the administration made the decision to send U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia. The previous chapter detailed the problems the U.S. administration encountered in convincing the Saudis to

overcome their traditional reservations and allow American soldiers on their soil. After a week, however, Washington surmounted these obstacles and U.S. forces began arriving in the Mideast on 8 August 1990.

The U.S. found the going easier in finding international support for a coalition against Baghdad. On the same day of the invasion, the British government joined in with the U.S. in condemning Saddam's action. On 4 August 1990, the European Community foreign ministry officials meeting in Rome agreed to support economic sanctions against Iraq. On 5 August 1990, Japan announced a ban on oil imports. The next day, the U.N. Security Council also imposed economic sanctions. Finally, on 10 August 1990, the Arab League, meeting in emergency summit in Cairo, agreed to send a Pan-Arab combat force to Saudi Arabia.[11]

This rapid and broad response against Baghdad should have prompted Saddam to rethink his strategy for maintaining Kuwait. Obviously his strategic assumptions about how to keep the American led Western powers from interfering with his designs on Kuwait were flawed. However, Saddam's reactions indicated that he never arrived at this conclusion. To the contrary, he chose to navigate through the storm of world criticism by sticking to methods which had worked so well for him in his rise to power inside Iraq. In Iraq, when Saddam could not directly attack one of his

opponents, he often sent out his security forces to take the person's family members hostage until the individual capitulated.[12]   Saddam now sought to expand this concept as a method of destroying the coalition.   His effort in this area eventually exposed a major flaw in his plan to maintain Kuwait.

On 9 August 1990, Iraq announced the closure of its land borders to all foreigners except diplomats.[13]   This effectively trapped approximately 3600 Americans, 6700 Western Europeans, 2.2 million person from various Mideast countries, and 490,000 other Asians in Iraq and Kuwait.[14] Although the international community generally denounced the move as barbaric, there could be little doubt it gave Saddam a great deal of leverage.   Obviously he knew of the particularly sensitive nature of the American public regarding hostages.   The Iranians, after all, had used the same tactic as a rallying point in their victory over the U.S. backed Pahlavi regime a decade earlier.   The fiasco of the Desert One rescue attempt had shown the American administration to be virtually ineffective in such a crisis. Overall, Iran's use of the American hostages had proved quite effective in neutralizing the United States military.

In the present situation, Saddam hoped to repeat Khomeini's success on a much larger scale.   The Iraqi leader wanted to use the hostage issue to hold off any immediate military action against his forces in Kuwait.   Preventing a

military response would provide him time to manipulate world opinion and perhaps dilute the coalition's power. During the first few weeks of the hostage drama, Saddam's plan seemed to meet with success. Without any real options to guarantee the hostage's safety, the affected governments could only caution Saddam that they held him responsible for the hostage's safety. This response posed no real threat to Saddam but instead signaled him that his plan to drag out the crisis was on track. While the coalition states grappled with the dilemma, Iraqi troops continued to dig in on the Saudi border.

The situation remained stagnate until 18 August 1990 when Iraq directed thousands of Westerners in Kuwait to go to three hotels for relocation to strategic military and civilian sites.[15] This move carried dark connotations for the allies. By using the hostages as human shields, Saddam hoped to guarantee the safety of much of his strategic infrastructure.

On 23 August 1990, Saddam attempted to use the hostages as a conduit for presenting his side of the Kuwaiti crisis to the world. To this end, he held a highly publicized meeting with a number of detained British families. During the interview, Saddam tried to present an avuncular image of himself, inquiring if the hostages were comfortable and offering to provide tutors for the children. Although staged to appear as a spontaneous chat, Saddam made

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sure he got across several points which he hoped would improve his image among the world community. To that end, Saddam made the following statement.

> And in any case your presence now and in this sort of atmosphere is not a source of pleasure to us. It does not make us happy. What would make us happy would be to see you back in your countries or to see [you] roaming the streets of Baghdad in the normal way, as you used to do. So please forgive us because we, like you, have our own children, like Stewart, and like Ian. And we also have our own women like you and have our own families. And we would know how you feel, but we are trying to prevent a war from happening.[16]

Throughout the meeting, Saddam attempted to convey the idea that the U.S. led coalition had forced him to hold the foreigners hostages in the pursuit of a greater good. That is, he had to use his guests as human shields to ward off coalition attacks against Iraqi women and children.

Saddam used the forum to introduce other factors which he hoped would soften world reaction against him. For instance, he attempted to present the invasion as a reuniting of Iraq with its nineteenth province. He explained, "we have our viewpoint, in any case the Arab nation is one nation, a single nation. British colonialism cut away the Arab nation. All that happened was the rich part, called Kuwait, had now come back to its motherland."[17] In making this statement, Saddam tried to gain the sympathies of Arab members of the coalition. Knowing some of the Arab states had granted only hesitant support to the

coalition, Saddam hoped to use this anti-imperialist angle to win their support away from the coalition and into his camp.

Additionally, he attacked the United States for its unyielding stance against commencing dialogue until Iraqi troops were withdrawn. Because President Bush insisted on this as a prerequisite to starting talks, Saddam claimed the U.S. was resorting to blackmail. On the other hand, the Iraqi leader presented himself as a peace-loving man, anxious to find a diplomatic, nonviolent solution to the impasse. Using this line of reasoning, he tried to convince the world that he was the true humanitarian in the situation. That is, he wanted peace, while the coalition simply clamored for a war that would kill many innocent civilians in his country.[18] At the conclusion of the meeting with the hostage families. Saddam explained all these factors had reluctantly forced him to keep the foreigners in his country as "guests."

Until this interview, Saddam's handling of the hostage situation had worked to his advantage. Washington and the coalition leaders remained frustrated in their efforts to find a workable solution to the crisis; Iraqi troops were becoming firmly entrenched in Kuwait; and Saddam gained the chance to present his side of the conflict to the world. However, this highly publicized meeting proved a public relations disaster for Saddam. The world saw the

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meeting as the sick act of a barbarian. On the TV screen, Saddam's actions completely blotted out his words. As he calmly patted a British youngster's head and asked about his care, "the child's body language spoke volumes. He was very frightened."[19] Because of the meeting, Saddam came across as a manipulating tyrant not above terrorizing a helpless child to achieve his ends. As a result, instead of gaining support for his policies, this meeting helped gel the coalition against him. Few nations would now support Iraq. In doing so a country risked the appearance of seeming to condone Saddam's sick exploitation of innocent women and children.

In fact, Saddam's debacle with the British families opened him up to counterattacks on the hostage issue. Speaking to the British House of Commons, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher commented, "it is strange for someone who claims to be the leader of the Arab world, the latter day Saladin, to hide behind women and children."[20] Thatcher's remarks apparently left Saddam's ego stinging because on 29 August 1990, just six days after his ill-fated meeting with the British families, he ordered the release of all Western women and children. Apparently, his lack of political acumen prevented Saddam from coming up with any other response to this unexpected attack by a woman on his manhood. Commenting on the release, American Under

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Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz stated that it was a positive reinforcement to the administration that they could get under Saddam's skin and provoke positive results.[21]

Attempting to regain his prestige, especially among the Arab nations in the coalition, Saddam released the women and children. He continued to try to use the male hostages as bargaining chips, but met with little success. On 7 December 1990, he announced all foreigners were free to leave the country. Each time he had tried using the hostages to his benefit, coalition leaders turned the tables and denounced him for employing cowardly tactics. These attacks destroyed Saddam's hopes for using the hostage issue to disrupt the coalition.

The entire incident highlighted a major shortcoming in Saddam's approach to international diplomacy. Because Saddam had seldom ventured outside his borders, he possessed only a rudimentary knowledge of world affairs. With little experience in international relations, he tried unsuccess fully to disrupt the coalition using the same methods which had worked so well for him during his rise to power in Iraq. These methods mainly consisted of using violence and intimidation to consolidate his political power. While these techniques worked well for him in quelling dissension within Iraq, outside his borders, this brute force approach proved ineffective. President Bush, Prime Minister Thatcher, and other world leaders refused to bow to such

threats of violence. Thus, Saddam found himself powerless while these leaders exposed him not as the champion of Pan-Arabism, but simply a common thug.

Testing the U.S. National Will

When United Nation planes loaded with the last hostages left Baghdad, they carried with them Saddam's hopes for using this method to prevent a coalition attack. His ill-advised attempt to use foreigners as a defense had failed. However, he did realize one secondary benefit from the situation: it had bought him some time. In a speech to his National Assembly concerning the hostage release, Saddam stated, "we have now reached the time when, with God's care, our blessed force has become fully prepared."[22] Thus, while President Bush and the allies grappled for a response, Iraqi ground troops had firmly entrenched themselves in Kuwait. Rooting them out held the potential of involving the U.S. in a meat grinder ground war in which casualties might run into tens of thousands. With his guests gone, Saddam now intensified his psychological campaign against the American public by utilizing this bloody spectar.

The foundation of his plan consisted of making the vision of a U.S. led attack against his forces in Kuwait too costly for the American public to tolerate. Understanding he stood little chance of a military victory, Saddam hoped instead to cancel out the possibility of military action by

preying on the American public's sensitivity to war casualties. He figured the chance of causing mass U.S. deaths was a risk the Bush administration would hesitate to take.

Saddam based the viability of this strategy on a seemingly strong historical precedent.

> Iraqis believed that the U.S. defeat at the hands of a small but determined developing country [Vietnam], . . . could be replicated. The Vietnam experience was to be a frequent source of analogies for Iraqi officials and the media, and Saddam warned repeatedly that any war in the Gulf would be a "new Vietnam" . . . .[23]

To reinforce the idea that a U.S. attack would be a bloody renewal of Vietnam, Saddam continued to pump forces into Kuwait. Additionally, Iraqi combat engineers, who had refined their skills in the Iran-Iraq War, constructed a formidable defensive line along the Kuwait-Saudi Arabia border. They constructed two major defensive belts besides extensive fortifications and obstacles along the coast. The first belt paralleled the border roughly five to 15 kilometers inside Kuwait and contained continuous minefields varying in width from 100 to 200 meters, with barbed wire, antitank ditches, berms, and oil filled trenches intended to cover key avenues of approach. Covering the first belt were Iraqi platoon and company-size strongpoints designed to provide early warning and delay any attacker attempting to cut through.

The second belt, up to 20 kilometers behind the first, began north of Al-Khafji and proceeded northwest of the Al-Wafrah oil fields until it joined with the first near Al-Manaqish. This second obstacle belt actually formed the main Iraqi defensive line in Kuwait. Obstacles and minefields mirrored those of the first belt.[24]

To augment these elaborate ground defenses, the Iraqi air defense network consisted of a variety of state-of-the-art equipment. During the 1980s, the Iraqi defense industry's dealings with the French had allowed them to secure a sophisticated air defense system to warn of incoming attacks. Also from the French came Mirage fighter aircraft used to fire air-to-surface weapons, like the Exocet missile, which Iraqi pilots had used against Iranian oil platforms and tankers. In addition, to counter airborne threats, the Iraqi arsenal included advanced Soviet made surface-to-air (SAM) missiles and top-of-the-line Mig-29 Fulcrum interceptors.

Possessing this kind of hardware made the Iraqi forces a respectable threat. Although most military experts agreed the United States and its coalition partners would still prevail against the Iraqis, Baghdad's forces could inflict a great deal of damage in the process. This was especially true if Iraq chose to fight to the last man. As the Iraqi engineers strengthened their defensive positions, Saddam strengthened his campaign to impress upon the United States the cost of assaulting such fortifications. In an English language broadcast aimed at the American public, the

Baghdad propaganda machine said Iraq would fight with great force to defend its sovereignty and independence, and the aggressor would suffer unimaginable losses. The cost of aggression would be too heavy to be tolerated by the Americans this time.[25]

Casualty estimates coming from various United States agencies reinforced this psychological attack on the American conscience. A study by the Center for Defense Information, Washington D.C., estimated that 10,000 American troops would be killed. The worst scenario by the Pentagon visualized 30,000 military personnel dying in 20 days.[26] As the U.S. press reported these predictions, Saddam likely felt his decision to attack the American public had produced favorable results. To him, it no doubt made perfect sense to stick to this plan of attack.

An indication of his apparent success came in New York Times-CBS poll published on 20 November 1990. Results showed 51% of the American people felt President Bush had not given adequate justification for the deployment of troops. Also, 62% found protecting oil supplies was not a cause worth fighting for. Overall, Bush's approval rating fell to an all time low of 50%.[27] Although these numbers indicated a trend which no doubt bothered the White House, Bush did not panic. Rather than dwell on public opinion

polls, Bush and his planners instigated actions to invalidate Saddam's plans for undertaking a war of attrition.

A central part of the administration's plan was to ensure U.S. forces did not inadvertently cooperate with Saddam. The Iraqi leader believed the coalition attack would be a frontal assault across the Kuwaiti border, perhaps with a corresponding amphibious assault along the Kuwaiti coast. With the extensive deployment of Iraqi forces in Kuwait, any combination of such an attack would be into the teeth of the Iraqi army. Saddam dismissed the idea of coalition forces moving across the desert for an enveloping attack because he felt U.S. men and equipment could never withstand the rigors of the Arabian inner desert. So strong was Saddam's belief that the Iraqi deserts would swallow up any U.S. flanking movement, he completely ignored his right flank.[28]

Iraq's decision to concentrate most of the forces on the Kuwaiti border represented a logical initial plan. Early in August, CENTCOM planners looked at starting offensive operations based on existing troop numbers. The options were few and not optimistic. The one possibility they had offered was a plan to attack straight into Kuwait, thereby cutting the Iraqi supply lines. But that was a high

risk mission that could waste thousands of American lives.[29] This type of high casualty frontal attack would allow Saddam to realize his goal of eroding American support for a war.

In light of this bleak assessment, President Bush decided to better his position. For weeks, the president's military advisors had been pushing for the deployment of additional troops and equipment in case an offensive campaign became necessary. Now the president agreed. On 8 November 1990, he announced his intentions to more than double the size of the force in the region. The plan involved moving the entire U.S. VII Corps from its Cold War stations in Germany, doubling the number of aircraft in theater, and sending three more aircraft carrier battle groups to the Persian Gulf area to give the Allies an offensive combat option.[30]

The decision represented a political gamble for President Bush. Congressional criticism was immediate, generally holding the view the president had not adequately consulted with congress.[31] Despite the wave of protest, the president continued with the announced troop movements. Militarily, the build up was an expert parry to the Saddam's armored thrust into Kuwait. The influx of military men and machines now gave the CENTCOM planners the forces they needed to defeat the Iraqi forces while running a much lower risk of casualties.

CENTCOM forces could now capitalize on Iraq's weak western flank. On attacking an enemy, the Chinese military strategists Sun Tzu advised, "Go into emptiness, strike voids, bypass what he defends, hit him where he does not expect."[32] This is exactly what General Schwarzkopf could now accomplish. His new attack option for a ground campaign would consist of an envelopment. He decided to fix the enemy on the Kuwaiti border, then end run the Iraqi army to the west. The addition of the VII Corps from Germany added the mobility and killing power need to make this campaign successful.

Not only was the plan significant in that it would attack Iraq's military weakness, it had the added benefit of assailing Saddam's flawed strategic mindset. Saddam's course of action depended on the U.S. impaling itself on his strong Kuwait defensive force. He found numerous reasons, such as the lack of American mobility in the desert, to convince himself this was the only alternative available to United States forces. The additional armored corps should have set alarm bells ringing in his head, but it did not. This would not happen until it was too late and the surprise of the envelopment had already taken place.

In other aspects the call-up helped the administration counterattack Saddam's psychological campaign against American national will. As mentioned earlier, congressional criticism resulted from the troop increase due

to its offensive nature. Many felt the government had not given sanctions against Iraq ample time to be effective. However, waiting for the embargo to take effect was a long term proposition, and the president could not afford to have his forces sitting in the desert for months on end. Not only did it affect troop morale and public opinion, it also brought into question his authority under the War Powers Act to keep troops deployed longer then 90 days without congressional approval. Soon after the announcement of the troop increase, congress began holding hearings on the legality of the president's actions. This debate no doubt reinforced Saddam's confidence that America lacked the resolution to support a drawn out, costly war. If that were so, his plan was working.

In fact, that was not the case, because the increase of troops brought with it an influx of United States National Guard and Reserve personnel.

> At their peak strength these Army and Air National Guard and Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine, and Coast Guard Reserve men and women constituted 228,561 personnel, including some 106,000 in the Desert Storm area of operations. Now the entire nation was involved.[33]

This mobilization of the nation's reservists and Guardsmen brought the distant possibility of war home too almost every community in America. This was not done during the Vietnam conflict when only a few thousand nonactive duty

military members were called to serve. In this situation, an emotional link between the fighting forces and most of the people back home was never established.

As the November build up added guard and reserve personnel in the Gulf, it additionally helped solidify public support behind President Bush. By mid-December American support for use of force in the Gulf rose to around 60 percent and continued to grow."[34] The president received more good news when, just after Christmas, Congress voted to allow him to use force in the Gulf if he felt it was needed.

This sequence of events ended Saddam's gamble to erode U.S. public support. The U.S. national will remained firmly behind the president. This solidarity of American national will no doubt surprised Saddam because he lacked the political expertise to understand the intricacies of governments other than his own. It had been Saddam's experience that internal dissension, if not severely dealt with, ultimately led to coups attempts against the government. Therefore when public support in the U.S. dipped in late November, he incorrectly interpreted it as success for his plan to turn the American public against the Bush administration. He apparently did not comprehend that this public questioning of the administration was perfectly normal in a healthy democracy.

Furthermore, he missed the underlying significance of the U.S. deployment of large numbers of guard and reserve units. Besides doubling the combat forces in theater, the deployment meant the U.S. had no intentions of repeating the mistakes of Vietnam. Although he did not seem to realize it, this deployment largely invalidated Saddam's efforts to fend off a U.S. military attack by eroding U.S. public support for such an option. Again the root of Saddam's trouble resulted from cognitive dissonance. In the case of his attempts to dissolve U.S. national will, cognitive dissonance caused Saddam to continue threatening the American public with a second Vietnam even when the November deployment should have shown him this plan would not work.

The Coalition Holds

As discussed earlier, Saddam made the strategic assumption he could prevent the invasion from being viewed by other Arab nations as aggression against a brother state. If this effort failed, Iraq ran the risk of alienating other Islamic nations which would object to the attack on both political and religious grounds. To this end, Saddam attempted to pass off the invasion as a reuniting of Iraq, which imperialist powers had unjustly divided following World War I. Despite this argument, a majority of the Arab states quickly joined the U.S. led coalition aligned against Baghdad.

At this point, Saddam denied the reality of the situation, choosing instead to intensify his futile efforts to bring the Arab nations into his camp. To accomplish this, he attempted to justify his invasion not only as a blow against Western imperialism, but also a battle to protect Islam from Godless Western influences. In fact, he took this argument a step farther and portrayed Baghdad's attack on Kuwait as a heroic blow against Israeli and Zionist forces in the region. From the start of this campaign, most Arab states refused to be duped by Saddam's attempt to package his aggression as a fight to preserve Islam. However, due to his cognitive dissonance, Saddam failed to acknowledge, until too late, that most Arab states were firmly against him. By this time, he had already been strategically surprised by the presence of Pan-Arab forces on the Desert Storm battlefield.

Coinciding with Baghdad's attack against Kuwait on 2 August 1990, the Iraq government began issuing statements to justify its actions. Early in the day, Baghdad Radio broadcast a statement by the Revolutionary Command Council claiming Iraqi troops had entered Kuwait at the request of revolutionaries who had overthrown the Kuwaiti government. Later in the day, Kuwait's new "transitional free government" announced the Kuwaiti Emir had been ousted and the National Assembly dissolved. Then, on 8 August 1990, an Iraqi government spokesperson read a statement from Saddam

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Hussein explaining that Kuwait had decided to establish a formal union with Iraq. Under terms of this union, Kuwait returned to its historic position as a province of Iraq.[35]

Collectively, Baghdad's statements represented an attempt to package the invasion as Saddam helping Kuwait return to its rightful place as a province of Iraq. As the wording of the statements attempted to prove, this reunion came about as a free decision by the legitimate Kuwait government with no coercion from Baghdad. Thus, Saddam dismissed protests coming from the exiled Kuwaiti Emir who presented the whole matter as a sham to cover Saddam's aggression. Unfortunately for Saddam, most of the Arab states agreed with Kuwait's displaced Emir.

The day after the invasion, the Arab League, meeting in Cairo, issued a statement denouncing the aggression against Kuwait. However, in the same statement, this body, in an apparent warning to the West, rejected any outside attempts to meddle in Arab affairs.[36] Saddam probably received some solace from this statement. Although the council condemned his actions, they seemed intent on solving the conflict on a regional level. Backed by his massive military, and fresh off his victory over archenemy Iran, Saddam no doubt felt he had the means to quiet Arab criticism to his attack. Additionally in an attempt to

reassure Saudi Arabia, he issued a statement telling them he had no intentions of violating the 1989 non-aggression pact between the two countries.[37]

But this criticism turned to be much more serious than indicated by the initial Arab League statement. On 3 August 1990, the Gulf Co-operation Council issued a statement demanding for the immediate withdrawal of Iraqi forces. The next day, the Islamic Conference Organization joined in and also called for an immediate withdrawal and declared its support for the Emir of Kuwait.[38]Supplementing these actions, individual Arab states led by Saudi Arabia and Egypt also pledged their support to the Kuwaiti Emir.

On 7 August 1990, the Saudis made a much stronger statement against Saddam, in agreeing to permit U.S. forces on its soil. At first this seemed a unilateral decision by the Saudis in view of the Arab League's 3 August 1990, warning against Western interference in this Arab problem. But in a complete reversal, on 10 August 1990, the Arab League changed its position to one of support for the U.S. deployment. Furthermore, under the urging of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, this body furthered agreed to send a Pan-Arab military forced to deploy shoulder to shoulder with the Americans.[39]

One U.S. diplomat called this U.S.-Arab relationship truly remarkable considering that as a body, most Arab leaders viewed foreign interference with feelings ranging from simply negative all the way to xenophobic.[40] What caused this surprising Arab response? Simply, they did not buy Saddam's contrived explanation for his Kuwaiti invasion. Furthermore, they feared for their own sovereignty if Saddam's legions were allowed to swallow up Kuwait unchecked. And, even as a combined force, the Arab armies could not match the forces assembled by Baghdad. For these r~sons, they joined the coalition and gave their support to the U.S. troop deployments.

Even in light of the Arab response Saddam refused to budge. In maintaining this intractable position, despite the growing odds against him, Saddam shed some light on the depths of his commitment to hang on to Kuwait. As already outlined, part of his reason for invading Kuwait came from Iraq's critical money shortage. But the invasion involved more than just Saddam's need for money. Shortly before the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam ordered himself photographed in a replica of the war chariot of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar.[41] In doing so Saddam unabashedly attempted to draw parallels between himself and the powerful old testament king. While this might seem a megalomaniac sign to Western observers, it was in keeping with Saddam's vision of himself as the leader of a new Pan-Arab nation.

Therefore, as the first U.S. detachments began
arriving in the region, Saddam saw an opportunity not only
to divide the Arab states from the coalition, but also a
chance to fulfill his compulsion to lead a Pan-Arab
revolution. From Baghdad came the following statement on 10
August 1990.

> Arabs, Muslims, believers in God, wherever you
> are: This is the day for you to stand up to defend
> Mecca, which is the captive of the spears of the
> Americans and Zionists. Revolt against the spears of
> the foreigners that defiled your sancitites. Keep
> the foreigners clear of our sacred places . . . . O
> Arabs everywhere, your brothers in Iraq have resolved
> to carry out jihad without hesitation or retreat.[42]

In making this call to enjoin all true Muslims in
the struggle against the infidels and Zionists, Saddam
attempted to discredit the Arab leaders supporting the
coalition. He insinuated that their actions had betrayed
Islam by allowing the holy cities of Mecca and Medina to be
despoiled by foreigners. Additionally, taking a position
which meshed nicely with his megalomaniac illusions, Saddam
presented himself as the man who could lead a jihad to
destroy these forces.

Unfortunately for Saddam, his delusions of grandeur
prevented him from seeing the new reality of the situation.
Most Arabs categorically rejected his attempts to link the
Kuwait invasion to a religious war. Saddam's call for a
jihad completely contradicted the secular ideology of Iraq's
Baathist Party.[43] Since Saddam had risen to power in this

markedly non-Islamic atmosphere, his sudden attempts to
declare himself a leader of Islam, while justified in his
own mind, were recognized by the rest of the Arab world as a
hypocritical, illogical, and desperate gamble to keep
Kuwait.

In fact Saddam's attempts to present himself as the
protector of Islam actually backfired and instead solidified
Islamic leaders against him. On 13 September 1990, a
meeting of 400 Islamic scholars representing the Muslim
World League met in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, and endorsed the
temporary deployment of U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia and
authorized a jihad to drive Iraq out of Kuwait. The Muslim
League's so called "Mecca Statement" declared Saudi Arabia
had religious justification in calling on foreign troops to
defend against Iraqi aggression.[44]

Despite these substantial setbacks, Saddam continued
to see the coalition as a fragile union which he could
fracture. In particular, the Iraqi leader believed any hint
of Israeli involvement in the coalition would trigger
popular indignation and compel the Arab governments to scale
back or end their support for the coalition.[45] In his
initial call to jihad, cited previously, he introduced an
Israeli link by claiming Zionist soldiers made up large
portions of the foreign military force in Saudi Arabia. In
keeping with this theme, on 15 August 1990 Baghdad's
Minister of Culture and Information, Latif Nusayyif Jasim,

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asserted the U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia included Jewish
officers and soldiers and that these individuals had
desecrated the most holy places of Muslims and Arabs.[46]
Throughout Desert Shield, these claims had little effect on
the Arab members of the coalition.

The Israelis helped out by remaining quietly behind
the scenes, apparently satisfied with the U.S. response to
Saddam's aggression. But Iraq severely tested Israel's
restraint on 17 January 1991, when its forces, in
retaliation for the opening of the coalition air campaign,
launched a barrage of seven Scud missiles at Tel Aviv.
Although no one died, seven people suffered injuries and the
Israeli population clamored for a military response. No one
could predict how the Israelis would react, but if Jerusalem
opted for military action it would put enormous pressure
upon the coalition. No one expected to see Pan-Arab forces
fighting a combined battle with the Israelis.

Fortunately, Jerusalem continued to show restraint
and the coalition held. President Bush's extensive pre-war
diplomatic exchanges with the Israelis seemed to pay off.
To keep the Israelis from committing any rash acts which
might disrupt the coalition, Washington started a dialogue
with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir early in the
Desert Shield deployment. To ensure communications,
President Bush had authorized a special top-secret, secure,

voice communications link between the Pentagon operations center and the Israeli Defense Force headquarters in Tel Aviv."[47] Code named HAMMER RICK, this system was part of the many efforts taken by Washington in its attempt to convince the Israelis not to take military actions which would damage the coalition.

After the Iraqi attacks on Tel Aviv, President Bush quickly ordered two U.S. Patriot anti-missile air defense batteries to deploy to Israel. In another move, the President sent Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger to Jerusalem to discuss the attacks with Prime Minister Shamir. Although this was a diplomatic mission, Eagleburger later stated his biggest success came when he went to Tel Aviv to visit the Scud impact sites.[48] This visit occurred on 21 January 1991, a time when the city continued to be heavily targeted by Iraqi Scuds. According to Eagleburger, Israelis saw his visit as a sign that the U.S. had committed itself completely to defeating Iraq. By exposing one of its top diplomats to the Scud danger, Washington calmed the Israeli public's calls for an Israeli Defense Force response against Baghdad.

This failed bid to provoke an Israeli response represented the collapse of Saddam's campaign to make the Arab states desert the coalition. Actually, the failure of this gambit came early in the crisis when Saddam failed to convincingly package the invasion as a anti-imperailist

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effort. Instead of acknowledging this failure and selecting a different course of action, Saddam intensified his efforts along his original lines. Prodded on by his desires to lead a Pan-Arab empire, Saddam next attempted to portray his actions as a battle against anit-Islamic forces. Attempting to further incite Arab forces to buy this argument, he also attempted to link Israel to the coalition. The Arab states refused each of Saddam's arguments in turn. However, blinded by cognitive dissonance, Saddam continued with these efforts despite the growing solidarity of the coalition. Continuing until too late to think he could disrupt the coalition, Saddam became strategically surprised when the opening salvos of Desert Storm began systematically destroying his forces.

Conclusion

The destruction of Iraq's forces resulted from Saddam Hussein's failure to acknowledge his strategic plans for maintaining Kuwait were not working. First, the Soviets failed to provide an obstacle to American involvement. Next, the hostages did not give Saddam enough leverage to prevent coalition military invention. Additionally, the American national will solidified behind President Bush despite Saddam's threats of mass casualties. And finally, the Arab members of the coalition rejected Saddam's attempts to split them off from the coalition.

Each of these events invalidated the strategic
assumptions Saddam used in calculating his gamble to grab
Kuwait would end in success. Despite the obvious signs his
plans were badly off track, Saddam maintained the same
course of action. Cognitive dissonance caused Saddam to
take these illogical actions. Because his mind was out of
tune with reality, Saddam failed to see the need to make a
reassessment of his plans as they began to fail. Therefore,
as Saddam attempted to navigate his country through the
crisis, his position became increasingly untenable. In the
end, Saddam drove so far off course, he failed to see the
very real possibility of a coalition attack. He thus became
strategically surprised when the first coalition aircraft
began bombing his country, later to be followed by coalition
ground forces.

CHAPTER 4

THE CASE FOR STRATEGIC SURPRISE

> The process of knowing a situation goes on not only before the formulation of a military plan but also after.[1]
>
> Mao Tse-Tung

Over two hundred years ago, Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz turned his thoughts to the subject of military surprise. After some reflection, he concluded that because Napoleonic era armies had grown so large, it would be impossible to mask their movements. Therefore, the possibility of strategic military surprise no longer existed. Twentieth century military doctrinal texts such as U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5 and U.S. Air Force Manual 1-1 echo Clausewitz thoughts. Yet, despite these claims, strategic surprise did occur in the course of the Persian Gulf War. Specifically, Saddam surprised most of the world with his invasion of Kuwait. The Iraqi leader was then strategically surprised by the coalition attacks on his country. As this study has demonstrated, these cases of strategic surprise transpired as a result of cognitive dissonance.

Once again, using the analogy of the student navigator is helpful to arrive at some conclusions about cognitive dissonance and its relationship to strategic surprise. As mentioned previously, when the navigator selected his course, he simply pulled some maps from the shelf and plotted a likely tack. However, after beginning his journey, he found the terrain differed significantly from the depictions on his maps. At this point, the situation called for a navigational fix to verify the student's exact position.

However, due to the human tendency to resist change, the novice failed to accomplish this procedure. Instead, he either rationalized the inconsistencies or made minor corrections which produced little change in his overall course. Proceeding in this manner, the navigator's mind became further out of tune with reality as he persisted in ignoring obvious landmarks signaling he was off his course. Eventually, the student had to stop, surprised he could not locate his destination, and not comprehending where his mistakes had occurred. The navigator's illogical actions are an example of cognitive dissonance. As the example illustrates, his problems began when he failed to update his course when the initial inconsistencies appeared.

America's Navigational Errors

By drawing parallels between the student navigator and various participants in the Gulf crisis, one can understand how cognitive dissonance led to strategic surprise in that conflict. As discussed earlier in this study, the United States developed a plan to defend SWA in response to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The invasion put Soviet forces close to the strategically important Strait of Hormuz and the oil fields of Iran and the rest of the Mideast. In response, the United States decided to take measures designed to prevent its Cold War adversary from gaining control of these vital areas. Thus, in January of 1980, U.S. President Jimmy Carter introduced the Carter Doctrine which declared the Persian Gulf an area of vital interest to the United States. Additionally, the president stated that the U.S. would take all measures, including using military force, to protect these newly declared vital interests.

As a means of backing up this position, President Carter created a rapid reaction military force designed to quickly project a military presence into Iran should the Soviets make a move toward the Gulf. When President Reagan took office later that year, he took a more hard line stance against the Russians, expanding the rapid reaction force with further troops and funding. In light of the Soviet invasion, establishing the Carter Doctrine and the rapid

reaction force represented an appropriate response for the time. However, problems began to arise when U.S. decision makers, like the student navigator, failed to reassess their position when uncharted obstacles began appearing.

For the U.S., the 1979 Iranian Revolution presented such a obstacle. Since the Iranians were avowed opponents of the United States, it became highly unlikely to believe Khomeini's government would allow U.S. forces into his country even if the Russians did cross over the Afghan-Iran border. Still, the U.S. plan continued to call for just such a deployment. As such, the U.S. contingency plan to defend its vital interest in the region began to fall out of step with reality. In other words, cognitive dissonance had started to exert an influence on U.S. decision making.

When the Iran-Iraq war broke out in 1980, it marked another point when the U.S. strategists should have re-evaluated the strategic outlook for the region. During the first few years of the war, it often looked as if Iran might win. If this happened, Tehran's forces would be within easy striking distance of the vast oil fields in Kuwait and northeastern Saudi Arabia. Given the animosity of the Iranian government toward Washington, this development should have sparked a major re-orientation of the U.S. defense posture in the Gulf region. However, the United States administration, enamored with a Cold War mentality, continued to view the Soviets in Afghanistan as

the primary threat. The U.S. view toward the Iran-Iraq war was basically not to become involved, hoping the two combatants would eventually wear each other out without either side making significant gains.

But the U.S. unwittingly upset this balance by becoming involved in the 1987 tanker war. When Kuwaiti tankers came under attack from Iran naval vessels, the oil rich emirate sought help from both superpowers. Fearing the Soviets might realize some political profit from aiding the Kuwaitis, the U.S. government decided to rush to Kuwaits aid and reflagged Kuwaiti oil tankers under U.S. colors. In their dash to cut the Soviets out of the picture, the U.S. failed to see it had unintentionally entered the Iran-Iraq war on the side of Baghdad. Again, this happened largely because of Washington's overriding attention on the Soviets. Eventually, the U.S. navy largely destroyed its small Iranian counterpart. The U.S. attacks proved to be a major blow to war-weary Iran. The following year, Iran fell to Saddam's renewed offensive efforts. Thus in 1988, Baghdad emerged as the victor in the war and the overwhelming military power in the region. Occupied for years in defending against the USSR, the U.S. never anticipated Saddam as a major power figure in the region.

Almost immediately, Saddam began making aggressive gestures against his oil rich neighbors. Unable to ignore this situation any longer, the U.S. began, in 1989, to

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reassess its position in the Mideast. As a result, CENTCOM determined the major threat to the country's vital interest in the region now came not from Moscow, but from Baghdad. However, like the student navigator, this realization came only after the U.S. had wandered so far off course, getting back on track had become almost an impossibility.

Yet the U.S. tried to do just that. CENTCOM planners quickly drew up OPLAN 1002-90 as a blueprint for defending the Arabian Peninsula. Under this plan, U.S. forces would now deploy to Saudia Arabia instead of Iran. Their mission would entail defending against Iraqi forces attempting to take over strategic oil fields in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The reasoning used to conceive the plan shows cognitive dissonance was having an effect on U.S. thinking. In formulating the plan, the U.S. ignored several critical facts. First, the CENTCOM staff assumed Iraq would focus on capturing the oil fields in both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. This ignored the historical fact that Baghdad, for decades, had claimed Kuwait as part of its country. In fact, on several instances since the First World War, Iraq had tried to reclaim the Kuwaiti emirate.

Baghdad had no such disputes with Saudi Arabia and had signed a non-agression treaty with Riyadh in 1989. U.S. defense planners did not address these developments and pressed on with OPLAN 1002, still using the assumption Saudi Arabia would automatically invite American forces into the

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Kingdom if Saddam made military moves south. Further complicating the U.S. plan was the fact that the Saudis, on several cases in the past, had shown a marked reluctance to allow foreign troops on its soil. Instead, t e traditionally closed country preferred to keep its Western friends, such as the United States, at arms length and over the horizon. Again, U.S. planners failed to address this Saudi aversion to foreign military forces on its soil.

Considering the position of the Saudis, it seems irrational that Washington did not address the possibility of difficulties with OPLAN 1002. But, because of cognitive dissonance, the U.S. had spent years preoccupied with the Soviet threat to the exclusion of a serious evaluation of regional threats. Now, no viable plan existed to stop an all-out Iraqi invasion. As a result the stopgap OPLAN 1002, which represented the only plan, became America's best plan. Although the U.S. attempted to correct some of the plan's deficiencies with the Internal Look exercise in 1990, it came too late. Saddam's forces, massing on the Kuwaiti border, invalidated the premises upon which 1002-90 was built.

Rather than admit they had no valid plan to counter Saddam's forces, U.S. officials chose to believe Saddam was only trying to intimidate his tiny neighbor. This U.S. mindset persisted even when intelligence reports strongly indicated Baghdad's forces meant to attack. As a result,

the 2 August 1990 invasion caught Washington by surprise. While Iraq consolidated its forces in Kuwait, the Bush administration scrambled to convince the Saudis that Saddam meant to continue driving south. Initially, the Saudis remained unconvinced. It took a week of intense diplomatic efforts before King Fahd finally allowed U.S. forces to begin their deployments. By that time, however, Iraqi forces had firmly established themselves in Kuwait. Thus, when the first U.S. forces touched down in the Saudi Kingdom, they faced a firmly entrenched Iraqi force consisting of over 100,000 troops and growing daily. OPLAN 1002-90 never envisioned any scenario resembling what the U.S. now faced.

The U.S. troops in the Arabian desert faced such an uninviting situation because of cognitive dissonance. Back in the early 1980s, the U.S. administration's view of the situation in SWA had become out of tune with reality. As a result, the U.S. became fixated on the Soviet threat to Mideast oil supplies even though regional threats began to equal the Soviet menace. The country's failure to reassess and update its plans, in light of the regional threats, led to the failure of OPLAN 1002-90. Therefore, in early August 1990, Iraq strategically surprised the United States by capturing Kuwait and its vital oil supplies.

Saddam's Strategic Failure

Fortunately for the U.S., Saddam also experienced
cognitive dissonance during the course of the Persian Gulf
crisis. In the end, his faulty strategic mindset allowed
the U.S. planners to overcome their initial setbacks and
launch a surprise attack which defeated Iraq's military
forces. Saddam's troubles started when he used faulty
assumptions to plan his actions against Kuwait. However,
like the student navigator, his greatest error came in not
making a critical review of his plans in light of
unanticipated obstacles thrown up by the U.S. and its
coalition partners. Instead of altering, he merely
dismissed or rationalized these unplanned barriers. In
doing so, Saddam's view of the world became out of synch
with reality. Attempting to navigate through the crisis
with this faulty world view, Saddam unwittingly drifted
farther and farther off course. As such, he became
strategically surprised wh n coalition aircraft began
bombing his forces in the early hours of 17 January 1991.

Saddam's dilemma started on 3 August 1990 when the
USSR issued a joint announcement with the United States
condemning the Kuwaiti invasion. The Iraqi leader assumed
the Soviets would continue their traditional support to
Baghdad even after the move against Kuwait. Based on this
assumption, Saddam meant to use the traditional superpower

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rivalry to counterbalance any actions the Americans might take to oppose his invasion. But this standoff never materialized. To the contrary, the Russians used the incident as an opportunity to further cement their new ties with the West. Even though the Soviet's move struck a major blow to the foundation upon which Saddam had built his plans, he stubbornly refused to leave Kuwait.

After losing the Russian support, Saddam elected to take hostages. During his rise to power, if one of Saddam opponents proved too elusive to corner, the Iraqi leader sometimes had the individual's family members taken hostage. This proved effective in forcing his enemies to capitulate. Since this attempt had worked well in quelling internal opposition, Saddam gambled it would also be effective in dealing with outside threats. To buttress this assumption, Saddam needed only to remember how Iranian students had taken U.S. diplomats hostage after storming the American embassy in Tehran in 1980. So Saddam ordered several thousand Western hostages detained.

Saddam's hostage gamble initially worked. The U.S. remained stymied in its attempts to deal with the hostage issue. And while Washington and its allies struggled for a response, Iraq's position in Kuwait became stronger. Based on these positive results, Saddam further gambled he could use the hostage issue as a method to influence world opinion. Pursuing this end, on 23 August 1990, he arranged

a televised meeting with several British families held
captive in Baghdad. In arranging this meeting, Saddam
sought to create a forum whereby he could present his side
of the Kuwaiti issue to the world. During the meeting
Saddam went through the motions of showing concern for his
"guests" welfare. He also voiced his opinions about why the
invasion of Kuwait had been necessary. Chiefly, he claimed
Kuwait had always been a province of Kuwait. Therefore,
his invasion merely corrected the injustices of the colonial
powers which had drawn arbitrary Mideast borders after World
War I.

However the meeting caused Saddam to lose his
hostage gamble. The fear in the faces of the British
children more than canceled any gains Saddam might have made
by airing his reasons for invading his neighbor. Saddam
emerged from the whole affair looking like a brutal thug.
British Prime Minister Margarte Thatcher immediately
attacked him for being a coward who hid behind helpless
women and children. Her words delivered a telling blow to
Saddam. Just six days after the meeting, he realized
Thatcher's opinion represented a world majority, and quickly
ordered the release of all the women and children. Saddam
understood that by continuing to hold the women and
children, he contradicted the impression he had been trying
to foster during the meeting.

Additionally, the meeting proved Saddam's misunderstanding of the intricacies of international politics. Never having traveled far outside Iraq's borders, he just assumed the methods he had used to rise to power, such as hostage taking, would work equally well outside Iraq. What he failed to realize was his bully boy methods did not threaten world leaders. They could not be silenced with threats of violence or death.

Even after failing in his bid to capitalize on the hostages, Saddam refused to reassess his position and make some basic changes. Instead he shifted his efforts to attacking the U.S. national will. Since adverse U.S. public opinion caused America's inglorious withdrawal from Vietnam, Saddam calculated he could elicit the same response from the U.S. public. To carry out this plan, he attempted to convince Americans their forces would suffer devastating losses if they attempted a frontal assault on his well-established front line forces. He embellished this psychological attack on the U.S. public using colorful images such as "rivers of blood" and "the mother of all battles."

But again, Saddam ignored the reality of events occurring around him. President Bush had mobilized U.S. public support by activating large numbers of guard and reserve forces. This represented a move which had traditionally solidified U.S. support by bringing the crisis

home to almost every community in America. U.S. support
remained solidly with the president. Lacking any
understanding of the American culture, Saddam persisted with
his attacks against the U.S. national will even when U.S.
public opinion polls proved they were having no effect.

Concurrent with these efforts, Saddam sought to
prompt the desertion of Arab members from the coalition. In
doing so he offered himself up as an emerging champion of
Pan-Arabism who had invaded Kuwait in an attempt to oust
corrupt colonial powers. He insinuated Kuwait's ruling al
Sabah family was a mere dupe of the imperialists and needed
to be removed. Following this logic, Saddam indicated the
other Arab leaders now supporting the coalition were also
corrupt agents of the Western imperialists powers.
Attempting to further incite Arab sensibilities against the
coalition, he tried to destroy the cohesion of the alliance
on religious principles. He claimed Saudi Arabia and other
Arab members of the coalition were allowing the holy land of
Islam to be desecrated by godless Western infidels. In
order to get the Westerners away from the holy cities,
Saddam called for an Islamic jihad to destroy the outsiders.

This argument had little effect with the Arab states
supporting the coalition. In general the Arabs were quick
to realize the hypocrisy of Saddam's call to jihad. Iraq,
under the rule of Saddam's Baath party, was a strictly
secular nation. Therefore, Saddam's sudden impassioned

concern for the preservation of Islam had a false ring.
Finally, in a move which no doubt took Saddam by surprise, a
meeting of Islamic scholars reversed the situation and
declared the presence of foreigners on Saudi soil was
appropriate in light Baghdad's aggression. Furthermore the
Islamic clerics stated Kuwait could legitimately declare a
jihad against the Iraqi forces occupying their country.

Still trying to salvage the situation, Saddam made a
last ditch attempt to fracture the coalition by playing his
Israeli card. Knowing no Arab nation could survive even an
appearance of being aligned with Israel, Saddam claimed that
the American forces in Saudi were heavily interspersed with
Jewish soldiers. Because of this he contended the Western
powers were clearly agents of Jerusalem. Saddam brought up
these accusations continually through the Desert Shield
portion of the conflict with little success. Most Arabs
seemed to dismiss Saddam's claims of a Jewish presence as
one more attempt by Baghdad to mask its unjustified
aggression against a fellow Arab state. Fearing they might
be Saddam's next victim, the Arab members remained committed
to the coalition.

The Israelis helped in this effort by maintaining a
low profile throughout the crisis. Much of this
uncharacteristic response from Jerusalem could be credited
to President Bush's efforts. He used a great deal of
diplomatic maneuvering to ensure the Israelis the situation

could be resolved without their involvement. To the president's credit, the Israelis remained behind the scenes even after Iraq launched Scud missiles at Israeli population centers. By quickly sending Patriots and high ranking U.S. diplomats to Israel, the President kept Israeli Prime Minister Shamir from taking unilateral military action against Baghdad. In turn, by keeping Israel out of the picture, President Bush preserved the coalition and thwarted Saddam's last desperate attempt to save his military from a devastating defeat.

As a result, the coalition attacks took Saddam by surprise. Up until the first bombs dropped, he continued to think he could prevent a military attack against his country. That he continued to believe this, despite ample warning signs he was wrong, can be attributed to cognitive dissonance. Saddam's initial strategic plan to maintain his Kuwaiti conquest had been built or faulty assumptions. Therefore unforeseen problems began arising almost as soon as his first forces crossed into Kuwait. Still, Saddam refused to alter his course. This failure to reassess his position and make corrections resulted in the failure of his Kuwaiti gamble.

Conclusion

Strategic surprise occurred in the Persian Gulf War. And, as this study has shown, it took place despite ample warning signs which, according to Clausewitz and modern military doctrine, should have precluded it from happening. As this study has demonstrated, cognitive dissonance created the conditions that allowed strategic surprise to take place. As cognitive dissonance began affecting the major decision makers involved in the Gulf conflict, their world views became increasingly out of synch with reality. As this situation developed, these individuals failed to make critical reassessments of their plans when unanticipated events demanded such evaluations. Failing to compensate for the changes affecting their plans, they drifted farther and farther away from their objectives. As a result, they never understood the events which eventually led to their being strategically surprised.

Recommendations

In 1973, British historian Michael Howard, while addressing the Royal United Services Institute, commented that "the task of military science in an age of peace is to prevent the doctrines from being too wrong."[2] Building on Howard's thoughts, this study indicates the task of strategic planners during peacetime is to keep their plans from being too wrong.

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After a plan is written, it requires periodic
evaluations to determine if the strategic assumptions upon
which it was built remain valid. If these recurrent
appraisals are not undertaken, the changing world situation
tends to make a plan invalid to the point of being unusable.
However, when a crisis situation arises, planners seldom
have the time or inclination to make sweeping changes
required to properly update a preexisting plan. In this
situation, the human propensit. is to develop cognitive
dissonance which allows the mind to interpret current
situations so they fit the provisions of existing plans.
This happens even if there exists obvious indications that
the assumptions upon which the plans rely are faulty. To
avoid this situation, the overall recommendation of this
study is to task strategic planners to undertake periodic
evaluations of existing plans in order to avoid the pitfalls
of cognitive dissonance.

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