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PREFACE

This book is the culmination of 15 years in studying U.S. policy and Middle East politics. All of my opinions, much of the material, many of the anecdotes, and the unattributed quotes are the result of direct observation and private discussions with American and regional policymakers and experts.

In addition, this volume is also part of a broader inquiry into the sources of political belief, behavior, and misunderstandings between cultures. In *Paved with Good Intentions*, I described the history of U.S.-Iran relations and of U.S. involvement in the Gulf up to the 1979 revolution and hostage crisis. *Secrets of State* was a detailed history of the U.S. foreign policy-making process and the American way of dealing with the world. *Modern Dictators* looked at the Third World's prevalent systems of political rule. A number of more specialized studies presented the background to these events (*The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1941-1947*; *The Arab States and the Palestine Conflict*) and particular issues in Middle East politics (*Islamic Fundamentalists in Egyptian Politics*; three edited books on terrorism and the co-edited *Israel-Arab Reader*).

In this endeavor, I am grateful for the assistance of a number of people and institutions. Even a brief account must mention the textual advice of Judith Colp, the keen-eyed editing assistance of Naomi Landau, some emergency computer wizardry by Robert Rosenberg, and the economic consultation of Dr. Patrick Clawson. Professor Amatzia Baram and Ofra Bengio helped my understanding of Iraq. Silvia Cherbakoff-Rosenberg and Gabi George did some indispensable research work.

Financial support has come from the Fulbright exchange program, the Harry Guggenheim Foundation, the Ford and Bradley foundations, and the U.S. Institute of Peace. Especially
acknowledged is the generous use of facilities offered by the Moshe Dayan Center of Tel Aviv University. The meticulous, conscientious editing of Claire Wachtel and the help of my agent, Barbara Lowenstein, are also most gratefully acknowledged.
TO JUDITH COLP.
In the early morning we mounted and started. And then a weird apparition marched forth at the head of the procession....A tall Arab [carrying a gun] splendid with silver plating....The sunbeams glinted from a formidable battery of old brass-mounted horse pistols...and...a crooked, silver-clad scimitar of such awful dimensions and such implacable expression that no man might hope to look upon it and not shudder....

"Who is this? What is this?" That was the trembling inquiry all down the line.

"Our guard! From Galilee to [Bethlehem] the country is infested with fierce Bedouins, whose sole happiness it is, in this life, to cut and stab and mangle and murder unoffending Christians. Allah be with us!"

I rode to the front...and got him to show me his lingering eternity of a gun...desperately out of the perpendicular....The muzzle was eaten by the rust of centuries into a ragged filagree work, like the end of a burn-out stovepipe. I shut one eye and peered within--it was flaked with iron rust like an old steamboat boiler....The ponderous pistols...were rusty inside, too....It came out then....The Sheik imposed guards upon travellers and charged them for it....

We reached Tabor safely and considerably in advance of that old iron-clad swindle of a guard. We never saw a human being on the whole route, much less lawless hordes of Bedouin.

Mark Twain, The Innocents Abroad, 1869.
The most important goal...is opening our eyes to the mistakes and disasters of the past so that we can avoid them and prevent anyone else from repeating them. The major task for the person who wields his pen and thinks is to expose the face of the truth.

Tawfiq al-Hakim, *The Return of Consciousness*

BAGHDAD 1989
A human body with a lion's head,
anti-sphinx of the riddle-waved Tigris
flowing over its secret dead; where a man's
form is more frightening than a cat's,
a lion's face over French suits or
Bedouin burnoose.

where Manna from Heaven is the favorite
pastry, where wobbling Abu Nuwass, poet and
libertine, stands, lost in statuary, lifting
his emptied cup of wine; and the taxis' song
under the marshbirds at dawn, after the warbling
call to prayer, and the bronzers banging in
the souqs, and soldiers lifting rifles in the
square.

noonime bright in a land without light, where
the stranger is greeted once but not twice,
where meat is not butchered but dies of fright.

and evening deep in a nation of sleep, creeping
in on all fours as the great cat roars, Babylonian
beast boasting all the old names, all of the
titles both rolling and sonorous, among them the
great Nebuchadnezzar's "Victorious."

someday the silt shall lift up the head that a
false human body now raises instead; like
Nebuchadnezzar, victorious, and dead.

--Raymond Stock
CHAPTER ONE
INNOCENTS IN THE BAZAAR

Hojja borrowed a neighbor's copper pot and returned it a week later with a smaller one inside. "What's this?" asked the owner. "Good news!" Hojja replied, "Your pot had a baby!"

A month later, he again borrowed the pot but this time kept it. When the neighbor complained, Hojja sadly told him, "Alas, your pot died."

The enraged man demanded, "How can a pot die?" "If a pot can have a baby," replied Hojja, "it can die as well."

--Middle East folktale

There once was a wealthy American manufacturer of bathroom fixtures named Charles Crane, a well-educated, public-spirited man who became interested in international affairs. In 1919, President Woodrow Wilson asked him to serve on a commission investigating conditions in the Middle East after World War One. An aide to Wilson explained that the president thought the main qualification for men like Crane being emissaries to the Middle East was that "they knew nothing about it."

For 300 years, the Ottoman Empire of the Turks had ruled most of the Arab world from its capital in Istanbul. But the empire's long-term decline and a fatal decision to join the losing side in World War One had brought it to collapse in 1918. The British and French were busily carving up the former empire. It was time to create a new order in the Middle East.

After several weeks of travel in the area and meetings with vocal Arab nationalists, the U.S. commission concluded that everyone in the region wanted a single Arab state and endorsed that goal as the people's will. The commissioners did not realize that the tiny elite which gave them this information had a vested interest in a solution creating a vast empire for itself to rule.
President Wilson paid no attention to the commission's advice. The United States was still uninterested in playing any political role in the Middle East. Crane himself, however, remained actively interested in the area. A few years later, in a spirit of international brotherhood and tolerance, he decided to build a memorial at the grave of some great Moslem. But who? To find an appropriate subject for this honor, Crane travelled to Istanbul. There he found a candidate. Jamal al-din al-Afghani, who died in 1897, was a thinker, intriguer, and advisor to princes. In the Ottoman sultan's service, al-Afghani had proposed the doctrine that all Moslems should unite politically against the West and its ideas.ii

Actually, al-Afghani and his ideology were both a fraud and a failure. His concept of Islamic political unity, disguised as a transnational utopian creed to benefit all Moslems, was really designed for the Ottoman empire's partisan political advantage. During the nineteenth century, the empire had been gradually losing its European Christian provinces as the new force of nationalism inspired revolts that eventually gave birth to Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria.

In contrast, the Ottoman empire's Moslem subjects had remained loyal because they accepted the empire as their rightful Islamic ruler. For them, the sultan was still God's Shadow on Earth and Commander of the Faithful. Al-Afghani suggested that the rulers manipulate this Islamic legitimacy in order to discourage these Moslem citizens from a secular nationalist disaffection. Thus, an ideology masquerading as a mass movement was actually a state's imperialist tool for ruling other peoples. In the end, Islam did not save the Ottoman empire. In the twentieth century, the Arabs would discover nationalism for themselves. And since each Arab or Iranian ruler would try to use Islam for his own benefit, Moslems could never unite under a single banner.

Theological as well as nationalist disputes also doomed Islamic unity. Al-Afghani’s notion of Moslem solidarity was also refuted by his own need to lie about his own identity. The name
al-Afghani--meaning "the Afghan"--was an alias he took to hide his true, Persian, origin. Like most Persians, al-Afghani was a Shia Moslem, a minority sect looked down on by the majority Sunni Moslems.

Over a thousand years before, during Islam's early era in the seventh century, The prophet Mohammad's son-in-law Ali and his two sons had been murdered during a struggle for Moslem leadership. A less pious dynasty seized control of the Islamic empire. Ali's defeated partisans became the Shia branch of Islam; the victor's supporters became the Sunni Moslems. Doctrinal differences widened over the centuries. The Shia were more inclined to follow charismatic, independent clerical leaders and were bitter at Sunni oppression; the Sunnis often saw the Shia as heretical. In political terms, however, the issue was not theology so much as it was a struggle between factions which in the course of time became separate communities each with its own structure and identity.

By posing as an Afghan, al-Afghani was trying to masquerade as a Sunni, since most Afghans belonged to that group. He knew that the prejudiced Sunni would not accept a Shia as their Islamic leader, a fact which contributed to their rejecting the claim to leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, another Iranian Shia, a century later.

Al-Afghani's decision to hide his true identity was one more piece of evidence that the concept of Moslem unity was not very effective in an Islamic world which, then as now, was badly split over issues and loyalties. Although twentieth-century Westerners trembled to think that millions of Moslems might launch a holy war, this could never come close to happening. When, for example, the Ottomans followed al-Afghani's earlier advice and called on all good Moslems to fight the British in World War One, most of their Arab subjects ignored them.

On the contrary, small Arab groups, well-subsidized by the infidel British, allied with England against their Moslem Ottoman rulers. The British officer T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) was their most famous military advisor and paymaster. This contradiction between theory
and reality put no dent in Western credulity about Islam as an international political force.

Ignoring the anti-Western aspects and actual failures of al-Afghani, Crane thought him a good choice as a hero for cross-cultural amity. Even so, the well-intentioned American had a problem. No one knew exactly where in Istanbul al-Afghani had been buried. Persistent inquiries failed to resolve the question.

Then, one day, an apparent miracle happened. A Moslem visitor came to Crane's hotel suite in Istanbul, claiming to have been one of al-Afghani's students. For a generous fee, he offered to show where the body was interred. Being a sincere, honest American, Crane assumed that others acted likewise. Accompanying his guide to an old graveyard, Crane experienced a dramatic moment as they walked along, ever more slowly. At last the man stopped. He looked around, thought a moment and then proclaimed, "Here is the resting place of al-Afghani!"

Crane built a monument on that spot, an unintended symbol of Americans' recurring naivete in dealing with the Middle East. It was one more manifestation of an American tendency toward foolish innocence when, a half-century later, Saddam Hussein fooled the United States by feigning moderation, then surprised it by seizing Kuwait. The syndrome again reappeared when President Bush let Iraq's dictator retain power after defeating him.

The story of Crane and al-Afghani also ends, however, with a symbolic lesson in American power. Once Crane had authenticated al-Afghani's importance and identified a specific body as belonging to the man, the Afghan government accepted this judgement. If the Americans thought al-Afghani was a hero, that was good enough for the Kabul regime. It disinterred "al-Afghani" and brought him "home" to bury with honor as a great citizen of their country despite the fact that the corpse was probably the wrong one and the man himself had been no Afghan. The Afghans, like many Arabs and Moslems, still thought Western acceptance was necessary to authenticate their own doctrines--even the anti-Western ones. If the West bowed to Khomeini or Saddam, the region's people were likely to assume that these dictators would win and accept them as patriarchs.
and powerbrokers. Given the local penchant for conspiracy theories, U.S. inaction would have enhanced the dictators' influence since their neighbors would then think these men were acting with Western backing.

Almost every time an Arab leader met with Westerners or made a speech, he ritualistically invoked the inevitability of Arab unity, the centrality of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the weakness of the U.S. position in the region. American experts, journalists, and government officials often accepted as true the words of the Arab politicians and intellectuals, ignoring the fact that their actions constantly contradicted this party line. Given this chorus of rhetoric, Arab nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, radical regimes, terrorist groups, and the Palestinian revolution seemed powerful movements riding the wave of history to an inevitable victory.

In their own romance with illusion, Arabs and Moslems inflicted wounds on themselves far worse than anything done by the West. By blaming America for their own mistakes, Arabs or Iranians were escaping from responsibility and refusing to face their true inner problems, a pattern of behavior which ensured they would find no solution. The result of all this activity and struggle was a horrendous loss of life and resources and great suffering in five Arab-Israeli and two Gulf wars, over 15 years of civil war in Lebanon, numerous coups, Iran's revolution, and many incidents of terrorism and assassination.

For decades, the circus played to a sell-out crowd: radical dictatorships pledged socialist equality and populist democracy; Arab states warred to destroy Israel; Palestinian and Islamic fundamentalist terrorists machinegunned civilians; rival ethnic groups fought over Lebanon; Egypt, Libya, and Syria bid to lead the Arab world; Iran strained to spark Islamic revolutions; Iraq tried to conquer its neighbors.

The Arabs and Iranians fell prey to false prophets and ideologies which promised a short-cut to victory yet blocked peace and progress. Khomeini was unable to expand his Islamic empire. The Palestine Liberation Organization could not destroy Israel. Saddam lost the war in
Kuwait against an Arab-American alliance. Many Arabs still believed that the militant route could work but they were also cynical about actually resolving conflicts which cut so deep and had gone on for so long.

The outlook of Americans came from a very different tradition, a relatively happy history that extolled pragmatism over ideology and claimed that peace and prosperity were inevitable as history's happy ending. The strength of the Middle East's militants was judged as considerable. But it was expected that they would see the light of reason and make a deal if offered a reasonable compromise by America.

In short, the Middle East's continuing strife, hatred, and terrorism was so "abnormal" by their own standards that Americans reasoned there must be something the United States could do to solve these problems. When this approach did not work, many Americans assumed that it was because U.S. policy had not tried hard enough. Thus, many Americans accepted the charges emanating from the Middle East that crises and oppression were their own country's fault. The fact that many Arabs or Iranians hated America was taken as further proof of its culpability. When Lebanese terrorists hijacked a TWA plane to Beirut in 1985, a citizen wrote the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "We are the most hated nation in the world. And rightly so!"

Having enemies, though, was not necessarily conclusive proof of American guilt or a cause for shame. Extremist politicians like Ayatollah Khomeini, Saddam Hussein, Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi and Syrian dictator Hafiz al-Assad--who wanted to rule the Middle East--or PLO leader Yasir Arafat--who spent most of his career trying to destroy Israel--were neither deluded nor crazy to hate the United States. They knew what they wanted and were right to see the United States as blocking their way. And the United States was right to stand in their way. The fact that those opposed to peace, democracy, or freedom reviled America was actually evidence of that country's virtues and principles.

Just as Washington did not cause the area's conflicts, it could not so easily solve them. Both
Washington and Moscow discovered that it was not so easy to order around the region's small powers. The United States could not end the Iran-Iraq war or Arab-Israeli conflict until the belligerents wished to do so. Nor could America persuade Lebanon's ruling Christians to institute reforms, the Saudis to help the peace process, Israel to give up land to the Arabs in exchange for peace, or Jordan's King Hussein to negotiate with Israel.

The USSR was similarly frustrated with its allies. It wanted the Arabs to unite against the United States. When Syria took advantage of Lebanon's disintegration in civil war to occupy most of that country in 1975 or tried to split the PLO in order to seize control of that organization in 1983, and when Iraq invaded Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990, they acted against Moscow's wishes. "The Arabs," a Soviet joke admitted, "take everything from us except advice."

Thus, while U.S. policy had faults, it was not to blame for the region's various crises. Such Western self-vilification is really, as the French writer Pascal Bruckner explained, a kind of "perverted boastfulness" to assert that "we are still at the apex of history....We are still the master race." Under the guise of sympathy, the Arabs and Iranians are portrayed as having no will or ideas of their own. Such eternal victims are considered to be like children, the objects of history who cannot be held responsible for their own acts. The Third World's disasters, repression, corruption, and stagnation must be Western creations. Torture in the prisons of Arab dictators must be because their police were Western-trained; Terrorism must be a response to the mistreatment by Western policies.\(^iv\)

Of course, not all Americans thought alike on such matters but this type of thinking was most common in the circles of academics and experts generating most of the policy debate and the main criticisms of U.S. policy in the Kuwait crisis. At a meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where I spoke in late 1990, one audience member after another rose to denounce the evil imperialist United States which was allegedly using Saddam's invasion of Kuwait as an excuse to seize the Gulf for itself.
While not embracing the anti-Americanism of a considerable minority in the universities, journalists and Middle East experts often shared this perception of American guilt. Many of them, however, mitigated this notion by further suggesting that much of the U.S.-Iran or U.S.-Arab disputes were caused by a lack of communication rather than a clash of interests. If U.S. policy only treated Middle East dictators and radicals fairly and cleared up misunderstandings, they would no longer be antagonistic toward America; if Washington forced its local allies to give ground, enemies would meet them half-way. Yet the real problem was that the two sides had very different visions of life, society, and politics.

The cycle of American misunderstanding was particularly hard to break since a new American president and his appointees came to office every few years with little experience in the region. Each administration in turn thought it rather easy to free hostages in Lebanon, resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, or convince dictators to be mellow by proving America's good will. This was how President Carter treated Khomeini until his followers seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran and how President Bush handled Saddam before he invaded Kuwait. U.S. leaders expected others to be as eager for peace and cooperation as they were. They thought problems too easy to solve and concessions too likely to defuse grievances. Repeatedly expecting their proposals for bilateral cooperation or Arab-Israeli negotiations to win quick acceptance from these and other Middle East dictators, Presidents Carter, Reagan, and Bush and were left looking foolish when this did not happen.

In 1986, I accompanied Senator Gary Hart on a Middle East trip. At breakfast with the director-general of Israel's Foreign Ministry, the senator inquired, "What would you do if King Hussein invited Prime Minister Shimon Peres to Amman?"

The diplomat showed his professionalism by not missing a beat as he took another bite of omelette. "I think I can say, senator, that if King Hussein invited him for tomorrow we would have his bags packed tonight."
The senator smiled and added confidently, "I believe he is ready to invite Peres."

Taking another forkful of omelette and giving a polite, slight smile, the official asked, "What makes you say that, Senator?"

"That's what he told me," answered Hart, referring to their meeting a few days earlier. King Hussein had indeed given him a Bedouin banquet in a tent and in their conversation had made polite assurances of his moderation and friendship for America, but had never indicated any willingness to go further in making peace.

Hart had heard what he expected to hear rather than what he was told. Convinced now that he was going to bring peace to the Middle East, the senator undertook a secret mission back to Jordan. He believed that it was really a simple matter to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict, Hart told his staff, since everybody said they wanted peace. The main thing lacking, he concluded, was someone as smart or persuasive as himself to bring the warring parties together. When Hart secretly returned to Amman, however, the king denied having made any offer to meet Peres. The senator had been one more victim of the Middle East's tendency to make Americans confuse wishful thinking with reality.

Such expectations proved consistently wrong. The extremists were both more irreconcilable and more feeble than most American observers expected. Arabs and Moslems were divided and the moderates among them wanted U.S. protection from their brothers. The demagogues' threats to set off earthquakes and volcanoes in the region were hot air, but only if the United States acted to counter them.

An Arab politician once accurately noted that Russians want to be feared, the British crave respect, and Americans yearn to be liked. No Americans wanted more desperately to be liked than those in government, academia, and journalism who dealt with the Middle East. It is a natural human trait to seek acceptance and to develop empathy with the people one studies. There were occasional threats to Western journalists, particularly from Syria, for making criticisms. A high
Iraqi official told a British reporter visiting Baghdad, "In politics we have enemies and sometimes we have to kill them. Perhaps some day you'll be an enemy and we will have to kill you."

To make matters worse, the study of the Middle East became the first academic discipline to be intimidated by Politically Correct standards. Edward Said charged in his 1978 book, Orientalism, that Western scholars who criticized Arab states or political culture--following practices standard in studying other parts of the world--were tools of imperialism and Zionism. At public meetings, Said read lists of these scholars whom he deemed enemies of the Arabs.

The accusation that Middle East experts were prejudiced against Arabs could not be more inaccurate: the opposite was true. The dominant approach to understanding the Middle East among American experts has been called "Arabism," a word implying that they had a good understanding of Arab culture, history, and politics. Many of those holding such views had no such knowledge. "All you need to be an expert," snorted one of the most knowledgeable State Department officials, "is an atlas and a copy of the New York Times."

Direct observation often bore out his cynicism. Those who set themselves up as guides to the Middle East were often the most ingenuous of all. The expert most often featured on American television during the Kuwait crisis spoke no regional language and had neither done serious research nor ever produced an in-depth study. Another oft-televised "specialist" and ex-government official told a conscientious subordinate, uncertain of her qualifications to speak on the Middle East, "Why don't you fake it? That's what I always do."vi

Instead of indicating a high level of wisdom, "Arabism" came to have a political meaning: to identify and agree with the Arabs' views and self-image as conveyed by their official spokesmen. In effect, the Arabists argued that the Arabs can be understood only by their admirers and unconditional supporters.vii

Those in government, seeing their task as smoothing U.S. relations with the Arab states, frequently became advocates representing Arab grievances or, more accurately, the claims of Arab
dictators. U.S. ambassadors to Jordan, Syria, and Iraq became, in effect, the ambassadors from Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. Once retired, the envoys and officials often became these states' lobbyists in Washington or made their livelihood in major commercial deals which depended on those rulers' good will.

The academics specializing in the Middle East saw themselves as courageously fighting an uphill battle on behalf of a misunderstood, mistreated people. Personal friendships, lavish hospitality, and time spent in that part of the world makes one see its residents as personal "clients." Understanding easily slides into sympathy which may quickly become uncritical partisanship. Voicing support for Arab causes seemed the best way to obtain visas, invitations, information, audiences with Arab leaders, and lucrative jobs for regimes or those companies doing business with them.

At a scholarly conference I attended in 1981 at Britain's Exeter University, for example, the meeting's chairman sent Baghdad a telegram of support for Saddam Hussein which the participants had supposedly voted unanimously to send. An Arab scholar browbeat a British academic, whose paper cited a work by an author considered too critical of Arab states, until the professor apologized.

A famous British expert, Peter Mansfield, gave a talk listing a dozen ways in which Saddam was a great leader, the equal of Nasser. An American professor named Eric Davis made a slavish speech about the prevalence of democracy in Iraq, then rationalized that behavior privately by saying that he was only angling for Iraqi permission to do research there.

This circus atmosphere was broken dramatically by Hanna Batatu, a diminutive, timid-looking Arab scholar, who had the temerity to mention Iraq's murder of dissidents. A towering young Iraqi "student," stood up in the audience and growled, "You are not allowed to say these things!" Batatu replied, "I am a free man and say what I choose!"

This meeting was an extreme case. Nonetheless, for personal and professional reasons,
these specialists in universities, think-tanks, or government were eager to prove themselves to be pro-Arab. The profession blamed its inability to shape U.S. policy to, "The unmatched influence of the Israel lobby in American politics [which preempted] other vital interests in American policy." This situation, claimed another, made "open and rational discussion of the issues" almost impossible. In general, though, when the experts' advice was followed, the results were often adverse.

Scores of these government officials, journalists, academics, and analysts make a living by talking and writing about the region, discussing it endlessly at seminars, conferences, and expense-account lunches at posh Washington restaurants. It was only a short step for them to decide that they were the ideal peacemakers. In an endless round, the experts jetted off on fact-finding expeditions to the region where they heard what the local governments and intellectuals said and then came home to repeat it.

Remarkably few of them know much about the workings of Middle East politics or the countries outside the luxury hotels or the salons of the elite who flatter them and seemed to be just like them. Yet to heed the party line of Arab governments, state-controlled media, and intimidated intellectuals was to miss much of what was really happening. It was easy for Westerners to assume that regimes talking so much about the oppressed must be progressive and, since no open dissent was allowed, popular. One reason the United States was unprepared for Iran's Islamic revolution was that the experts and journalists got their information from the Shah's offices and wealthy Iranians who themselves were oblivious to the threat.

During the 1980s, many experts and journalists extolled Iraq as the "good guy" in the Iran-Iraq war. American high school texts became apologists for Saddam's regime, ignoring the fact that Iraq had been the aggressor and celebrating the alleged freedom and prosperity there.

One night in 1983, I dined at the popular Philadelphia restaurant in East Jerusalem with an American diplomat from the U.S. Embassy in Jordan. After the dozen dishes had been cleared
away and the sweet Turkish coffee served, it was time to pose the question I had been aching to ask all evening: Why did the U.S. Embassy in Amman keep wrongly assuring the secretary of state that King Hussein would soon negotiate with Israel.

"Well," he explained, "that's what they told us."

"But don't you do more than report conversations? Aren't you supposed to analyze situations as well?" I was genuinely puzzled. If U.S. diplomats were merely to record what Middle East leaders said, a stenographer would be best qualified for the task. Whatever Saddam or Arafat or Assad wanted the Americans to think became what the U.S. government believed.

Amman, Jordan, is one of the world's most claustrophobic capitals. Its tiny elite of families close to the palace acts as an echo chamber, intensifying every rumor and conspiracy theory to the edge of hysteria. U.S. envoys stationed there often fell under this spell. When I spoke to the Amman World Affairs Council in 1982, the first questioner complained that the Jews controlled U.S. foreign policy, a claim that would have been less surprising if it had been made by a Jordanian rather than from one of the U.S. embassy's top diplomats. The U.S. ambassador at the time later became Jordan's main lobbyist in Washington. Arab governments' real intentions and capabilities were lost in this mass of concealing verbiage, inexperienced listeners, and captive interpreters.

Ironically, by misinforming the Arabs about Western views and misleading the West about Arab politics, the pro-Arab officials and experts did far more harm to their friends than did those who criticized Arab policies. Condemning U.S. support for Israel as contrary to its interests, Arabists made Arab rulers expect that this help would decline, further persuading them that they need not make compromises since Washington would pressure Israel to give them what they wanted.

When Arabists accepted the private assurances of King Hussein or Saudi leaders as to their own moderation, the United States did not pressure them to put it into practice. When American experts and diplomats advocated concessions to radical states, dictators like Saddam Hussein
concluded that the United States was too frightened to respond if they did something like invade Kuwait.

Strolling into the midst of the region's violent, persistent conflicts, Americans like Crane and Hart, Carter and Bush, academics and diplomats, often acted like innocents in a bazaar. They accepted what people in the region told them like a shopper accepting a merchants' description of his carpet's high value. Poor bargainers, they declared, "This is the most beautiful rug I've ever seen! How much is it?" Shoddy tourist trinkets were billed as valuable antiques and eagerly purchased for a high price. In the end, though, like the well-heeled, naive tourists it breeds in such profusion, the United States could afford its follies. American power was at such an advantage that the United States was able to sustain its overall interests quite well.

The years were far less kind to the Arab states. Neither national independence nor radical revolution brought them the power and economic development they desired. It should have been clear that these states badly needed the kind of self-criticism and reform which had been so healthy for Western societies. The persistence of regional problems came from local shortcomings, not foreign conspiracies or American ineptness. Arab nationalism created its own imperialism; Arab inflexibility made it impossible to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

If the Arabs wanted a solution to the region's problems, the Arabs would have to change their own systems and policies. In the words of Lebanese-American Professor Fouad Ajami, there were, "real limits" to any U.S. ability to shape events. "In the final analysis, all societies must work out their own problems and shape their own destiny. No regime can be propped up forever by outside forces, and no amount of external pressure can remake societies, spare them the agonies of historical change, shelter them from a turbulent world, or immunize them from underlying forces opposing their structures."

No foreign leaders looked at politics more differently from Americans than did Khomeini and Saddam and no Middle East leaders were greater champions of the traditional outlook than
were these two dictators. They tried to fulfill the old Arab and Moslem dreams by demanding unity behind themselves, insisting on the centrality of the battle against Israel, and trying to expel Western influence in the region. The very extremism of their ideology, however, would test these Middle East and Arabist myths, just as the extent of their hostility to the United States would challenge the American fable about the possibility of conciliation with the radicals.

ii. For telling me this story, recounted in Crane's unpublished memoirs, I am deeply indebted to Professor Martin Kramer.

iii. Just as he was a patron for the author of Pan-Islam, in the 1930s Crane financially sustained George Antonius, a Palestinian Christian who worked with the British and wrote The Arab Awakening, the book most responsible for formulating the myth of Arab nationalism as the centerpiece and inevitable future of Middle East history.

iv. Pascal Bruckner, Tears of the White Man, (NY, 1986), p. 117, 121, 122-24. This can lead to effects bordering on the comical. More than one commentator claimed that Americans in Lebanon were targeted as retribution for U.S. shelling of rebel artillery which accidentally hit villages in 1983, failing to realize that those places were Druze, while anti-American terrorism emanated from the Shia Moslems.

v. Intellectual iconoclasts have never fared well in the Arab-Islamic world. An Egyptian scholar, Ali abd al-Raziq, became a pariah after writing a book in 1925 suggesting that Muhammad was only a religious, not political authority. Sadiq al-Azm, scion of a famous Damascus family, was persecuted by Lebanese Moslem clerics and lost his Lebanese university teaching position for writing a book suggesting that Islam should be excluded from politics. Author Salman Rushdie found that he could not write freely about Islam even from the sanctity of London, when the Iranian government threatened to kill him and he had to go into hiding.

vi. Personal conversations.


ix. For a survey of these textbooks, see the author's article in Josh Muravchik, Global Education (Washington, 1992). None of the texts examined mentioned, for example, that Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, that Iraq's government was repressive, or that it used chemical weapons against its own citizens.

x. Fouad Ajami, "The Arab Road," Foreign Policy, Summer 1982, pp. 23-4; Fouad Ajami, "Stress in
the Arab Triangle," *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1977-78, p. 106.
CHAPTER TWO
AMERICAN GRAFFITI

"The veneration and affection which some of these men felt for the scenes they were speaking of heated their fancies and biased their judgment, but the pleasant falsities they wrote were full of honest sincerity, at any rate. Others wrote as they did because they feared it would be unpopular to write otherwise. Others were hypocrites and deliberately meant to deceive...But why should not the truth be spoken of this region? Is the truth harmful? Has it ever needed to hide its face?"

--Mark Twain, The Innocents Abroad

It is hardly surprising that Americans find Middle East politics to be frustrating and unfamiliar. How could they easily understand someone so alien in background and behavior as Saddam Hussein or comprehend an Islamic fundamentalist revolution in Iran? U.S. policy, too, was slow to comprehend these personalities and events. Until Khomeini seized hostages and Saddam seized Kuwait, the U.S. government tried to appease them, doubting these men would be so militant.

In no small part, the problem for U.S. policy was compounded by serious flaws in the thinking which often guided it and pointed U.S. policymakers, experts, and journalists--and hence their audiences--in the wrong direction. The root of the difficulty was the pervasiveness in America of four myths about the Middle East: the beliefs that the U.S. regional position was weak and shaky, that Arabs--or Moslems--would unite against the United States, that the Arab-Israeli conflict was the area's overwhelming central issue, and that the United States could succeed only by making concessions to dictators rather than by confronting them.

First, the U.S. position in the Middle East was said to be fragile--dependent on Arab good
will and imperiled by Soviet gains—whereas actually its situation was quite strong. Malcolm Kerr, the scholarly president of the American University in Beirut gave the most succinct summary of the views of those who thought the United States was itself to blame for this mess. Kerr wrote in 1980:

"The Camp David strategy has led to an Egyptian-Israeli deadlock over the question of Palestinian autonomy, and to a visibly growing irritation elsewhere in the Arab world, as well as in Israel. The Lebanese crisis, always in danger of precipitating a new Arab-Israeli war, is as far as ever from any solution. The Iranian revolution--itself the product of American folly in the past--continues to baffle and dismay Washington policymakers." The Afghanistan and Iran-Iraq wars showed America's "strategic disadvantage vis-a-vis the Soviet Union in the Gulf area....In short, all over the Middle East, signs point both to dangerous situations and to the inability of the U.S. government to control events--or perhaps even to understand them."

"The peoples in the area--even those who have been and still want to be associated with the United States," the radical Palestinian-American literature professor Edward Said wrote in 1979, "have been losing hope in the credibility, sincerity and willingness of American administrations to act decisively, even in their own long-term best interests. Over the years many Arabs have turned to Moscow, not because they wanted to but because they felt they had been left with no alternative."

Since America supposedly needed them more than they needed it, the Saudis, Egyptians, or others would lose patience with U.S. policy and turn Marxist or fundamentalist. They were not, Kerr claimed, "The exclusive clients of any great power" but would choose sides based "on who assists them in solving problems that they cannot solve alone."

Author Robert Lacey agreed, "We should not assume that the House of Saud will continue to be as pro-Western as it is at present. When people discuss radical, fundamentalist pressures
inside Saudi Arabia, they forget that the House of Saud could very easily shift itself in a more radical direction.\textsuperscript{iv}

The region was allegedly on the verge of an anti-American earthquake and the fall of friendly regimes. But was the sky falling? This was not true. These regimes' maneuvering room was limited. The leaders of Saudi Arabia's conservative ruling family were not going to favor becoming a Marxist monarchy which allied itself to Moscow or become an eager ally of those Islamic fundamentalists eager to destroy them. They needed the United States because they did not trust their neighbors who wanted to grab their money. U.S. protection meant the difference between their continuing to enjoy a life of luxury and their being murdered by foreign invaders or domestic revolutionaries.

Arabists' predictions that U.S. mistakes would bring major Soviet gains proved to be wrong. The radicals had turned to Moscow in the 1950s and 1960s not from disillusionment with America but because they saw the USSR as a model for statist economic development, an ideological soul-mate, a source of arms for aggression, and an ally in their drive to take over the area. Syria, for example, allied itself with Moscow because the United States would never support its ambition to rule Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, and the Palestinians. In contrast, the Soviets were willing to furnish it with 7000 military advisers plus huge stocks of the most advanced planes, missiles, and tanks.

Nonetheless, U.S. interests flourished and Soviet influence declined during the 1970s and 1980s. A decade after Kerr's and Said's litany of woe, Egypt and Israel remained at peace, Arab states fought alongside America against Iraq, the Russians had retreated from Afghanistan, Iran was trying to rebuild relations with the West, and multilateral Arab-Israeli peace talks were taking place under U.S. sponsorship and based on the Camp David accords.

Moreover, the regional upheavals which occurred were largely natural outcomes of the
destabilizing birth of nations and traumas of development parallel to those happening in other parts of the Third World. The new Arab states were in disorder until some power balance could be achieved among their factions and communities. Ideas and social innovations—secularism, nationalism, land reform, socialism, women's equality—also brought conflict and sometimes revolution. These changes also made it necessary to establish a well-founded regional structure. But this was impossible as long as Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Libya wanted to take over the area, efforts which the United States tried to block.

Ironically, it was Soviet policy, which most closely followed the Western experts' advice, that ended in disaster. It opposed Israel and helped radical regimes and the PLO, only to lose influence in one country after another. Moscow found the radical clients unreliable as allies and constantly threatening to draw it into dangerous confrontations with the United States.

Although the radicals—like those elsewhere in the world—used anti-American demagoguery to muster domestic support, they only confronted the United States directly when they thought it too weak or timid to harm them. In contrast, moderate Arab regimes like Saudi Arabia preferred to remain on good terms with Washington, recognizing its strategic, military, economic, political, and technological power. The radicals—as Iraq's takeover of Kuwait would show—would be the big losers in challenging America, the moderates were the big winners by soliciting its help.

The second myth was that the U.S. regional standing was in such danger because all Arabs or Moslems were liable to unite against it. When a self-proclaimed Moslem leader—like Khomeini— or a self-declared chief of the Arabs—like Saddam—appeared, it was feared that their influence would sweep the region. In fact, the constant conflicts within these groups was the usual motive force for disorder in the region. During the Cold War, the Arab states split between the Soviet and American camps, getting the superpower patron to aid them in their local disputes. The
rise of powerful dictators like Khomeini and Saddam only deepened these regional conflicts, fostering the Iran-Iraq and Kuwait wars, not some cross-national alliance of peoples.

Given their own conflicts, rivalries, and differences, Arabs were incapable of joining together to rule the Middle East or to fight America. While most Arabs agreed in theory that they should unite or at least cooperate, in practice the notion provided an excuse for never-ending battles among countries. No state would subordinate itself to any other state. The only merger among different Arab countries was the United Arab Republic created by Egypt and Syria in 1958. In less than three years, the Syrians were so fed up with Egypt's treating them as second-class citizens that they broke up that union.

The same pattern prevailed among the Moslems. In the early decades after their religion spread in the seventh century, Moslems had indeed been governed by a single political authority. But it was not long before factions went to war and separate states formed. This was how the Middle East had functioned for well over a thousand years. Even most of the modern Islamic fundamentalist movements were localized and inward-looking, trying to build an Islamic society in their own country rather than erase national boundaries and create a single state ruling all Moslems.

Arab cooperation was, of course, a more realistic goal than Arab unification. Even here, however, the expectations of Arab intellectuals and Western experts proved to be greatly exaggerated. They frequently argued that U.S. pressure against any Arab country would bring the enmity of all Arabs. What happened was the exact opposite. For example, on April 15, 1986, a U.S. air raid against Libya retaliated for Libyan-sponsored terrorist attacks which had killed Americans at the Rome and Vienna airports and at a West Berlin discotheque. The air strike was wildly popular among Americans.

The private reaction of Arab governments was not so different from that of the Americans.
Accepting the myth of Arab unity, the magazine *U.S. News and World Report* ran a headline claiming, "Revenge and Anger [against America] Resound in Arab World," yet most Arab states were privately pleased to see Libyan dictator Qadhafi hurt and embarrassed. No Arab government did anything to help him, refusing even to hold a summit condemning the U.S. attack. The Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC) rejected Qadhafi's call for an oil boycott; Algeria did not postpone sending a high-level delegation to Washington to improve relations. Egypt allowed a U.S. aircraft carrier to sail through the Suez Canal.

This pattern recurred frequently from the days when Arabs had joined Britain in World War One to fight their own Moslem rulers to the 1990-91 Kuwait crisis when most Arab states aligned with America against Saddam. In the end, nothing contributed more to Arab and Moslem disunity than did the fact that Arab countries or Islamic Iran invoked the idea of unity as a license to undermine their neighbors' sovereignty. And the more the radicals tried to force the moderates into such a shot-gun wedding, the more the latter needed the United States to protect them from their militant brethren.

The third myth was that the Arabs were so obsessed with the Palestine question that almost nothing else counted in setting their own policy and attitude toward America. Kerr called the issue: "The number one preoccupation of many of the countries of the area throughout the period since World War II." The cost to America, Kerr claimed, included, "The radicalization of half a dozen Arab regimes, the strengthening of their ties with Moscow...their hostility to the United States; [and] the destruction of Lebanon."

"The Palestine question remains a formidable obstacle and burden to U.S. relations with the Arab world, added another respected scholar, John Campbell. "It undermines the moderates and strengthens the wild men. It plays into the hands of the Soviet Union. It threatens to isolate the United States with Israel as the only friend in the region."
The Arabists' claim was that the United States could win the Arabs only by concessions on the Arab-Israeli conflict and that unless America quickly resolved the issue on terms satisfactory to the Arab states and PLO, American interests would be destroyed. If not for Israel, ran these arguments, the Arab world would be wholeheartedly in the Western camp.

Professor Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote in 1975: "It is impossible to seek a resolution to the energy problem without tackling head on--and doing so in an urgent fashion--the Arab-Israeli conflict." But except for a brief oil embargo against the United States during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Arab exporting states never used the "oil weapon" as part of the conflict. The West handled the skyrocketing oil prices and resulting financial problems remarkably smoothly, quickly, and totally apart from that struggle. Western banks and companies sold the Arabs so many products, investments, and arms to recycle their new-found petroleum income that, in a little over a decade, the Gulf oil-exporting states were running budget deficits.

Clearly, the conflict was a major issue in the Arab world but it rarely had the obsessive centrality so often claimed. While the Arab-Israeli dispute was the most highly publicized Middle East issue, there were other equally or more significant points of conflict in the region which had little or no relation to it. These included the struggle between Arab radicals and conservatives for power in each state and in the region, the stress and slow pace of economic development, rivalries among Arab states trying to dominate their neighbors, the fall of Iran's Shah, the Iran-Iraq war, the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan, Lebanon's civil war, and Iraq's seizure of Kuwait.

The Arab-Israeli issue preoccupied far more Arab rhetoric than action, in part because it was easier to rail at Israel than to address difficult, divisive problems at home. Moreover, each Arab regime manipulated the matter--and often in conflict with each other--to promote its own interests, mobilize domestic support, and gain an edge over rivals. Syria defined Israel and the West Bank as its own property, "southern Syria." Jordan asserted its own claim to the West Bank.
Lebanon's Christians tried to win their civil war against the Lebanese Moslems in 1982 by obtaining Israeli assistance. Every Arab country accused the others of being too soft on Israel. Within each state, rulers and opposition forces branded each other as Zionist agents.

Calculated self-interest also determined how Arab rulers acted toward the PLO. They promoted their own puppet Palestinian factions in an effort to seize control of the organization. Jordan fought and expelled the organization by force in 1970 when it threatened the country's internal stability. Egypt made a unilateral peace with Israel in 1979 in order to regain the Sinai and its oilfields which Israel had captured in the 1967 war. Syria's alleged devotion to the Palestinian cause did not stop it from splitting the PLO in 1983 in a takeover attempt. The Syrian army chased pro-Arafat forces from Lebanon; Syria's Lebanese clients attacked refugee camps in Lebanon, killing thousands of Palestinians.

As time went on, the Arab states became even less involved with the issue, being unwilling either to wage war or to make peace. By 1980, Egypt and Israel were at peace while the Jordan-Israel and Syria-Israel borders were quiet. The Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories after 1987 showed their own nationalist fervor. But the Arab states' lack of reaction demonstrated their indifference. And as long as neither side was willing to make major compromises, the United States could not resolve the problem no matter how hard it tried.

Most important of all, neither the conflict nor U.S. support for Israel kept Arab states from having close relations with the United States when it was otherwise in their interests. In fact, the U.S.-Israel relationship made Washington the conflict's inevitable mediator which held, in the words of Egypt's President Anwar Sadat, "99 percent of the cards" for making peace. The U.S.-Egypt alliance began in the mid-1970s when Egypt desperate economic situation and Sadat's understanding that the effort to defeat Israel was futile made him decide that the time had come to use Washington's services for that purpose.
The actual behavior of Arab states and politics, however, had little or no effect on the perception of the media and experts which continued to insist that the Arab-Israeli conflict was the beginning and end for all the region's troubles and the factor bringing the imminent collapse of U.S.-Arab relations.

"Arab states which had thrown Egypt out of the Arab League because Sadat had made peace with Israel with American encouragement and help would not be willing to join Egypt in a new alignment under American sponsorship," explained the American Middle East expert Campbell in 1981. The Arabs, Time magazine claimed in 1986, felt betrayed because America "has moved closer to Israel than ever before, thus endangering U.S. strategic interests and abandoning claims of being an honest broker."ix

Many Arab and American writers asserted that a shift in U.S. policy away from Israel was the key to safeguarding the Persian Gulf as well. Without a diplomatic settlement "which will correspond approximately to [the Arab states'] views of a `just' solution--then close cooperation with the United States cannot fail to operate in a destabilizing manner for the states of the [Gulf] region," wrote one expert in 1983. Professor Charles MacDonald claimed that "U.S.-Israel ties are increasingly forcing the Gulf governments to detach themselves from close cooperation with the United States for fear of undermining their own legitimacy."x

Yet again, these predictions were all wrong. In the face of Iran's revolution and Iraq's imperial ambition, most of the Arabs did align with the United States and the Gulf states cooperated closely with Washington throughout the 1980s. They continued to buy American arms and technology, invested heavily in the United States, begged for U.S. convoys of tankers to save them from Khomeini in 1987, and wanted U.S. troops to save them from Saddam in 1990.

Ironically, Arab refusal to be more anti-American frustrated Western experts who needed such a threat to reinforce their argument for changing U.S. policy. Kerr wrote that the Arabs had
erred by letting the United States get away with having Israel as a strategic asset. "Certainly," he concluded, "the United States has been far luckier than it deserved in managing to befriend Israel without sacrificing important interests in the Arab world."

History showed, however, that U.S. relations with Israel and the Arabs was no zero-sum game in which one side's gain was the other's automatic defeat. As Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy pointed out in 1986, "Friendship with one party to the Arab-Israeli dispute has not diminished--nor should it--the reliability of U.S. ties to the other. We are the only superpower trusted by both Israel and the Arabs. By establishing friendship and confidence on both sides, we have made it possible to move Arabs and Israelis toward greater peace and security. We have brokered six peace agreements serving Israeli, Arab, and Western interests. In contrast to the role the United States has played, the Soviet Union, without diplomatic relations with Israel and with limited diplomatic ties and bilateral relations in the Arab world, has only a peripheral role to play."

The fourth misconception was that the best way to preserve U.S. interests was to make concessions in order to get along better with its enemies, endeavoring to convince them that the United States was not their enemy.

Such an effort was both undesirable and futile. The endeavor was dangerous because it encouraged the dictators to become more aggressive since they concluded that no one would stop them. The enterprise was futile because it was no accident, after all, that the most anti-American Middle East states--Khomeini's Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Libya--were those which sought to rule the Arab world. Similarly, the region's anti-American movements like the PLO, Islamic fundamentalist and Marxist revolutionaries sought to destroy Israel or the existing Arab states.

These forces hated America because it was the defender of the more moderate or weaker states which were their intended victims. Since the area's states were in conflict, the United States
could never have everyone on its side. U.S. help for Saudi Arabia, for instance, would inevitably anger Iran and Iraq.

Radicals, Arab nationalists, and Islamic fundamentalists thought that the United States was inevitably evil and hated American cultural and political influence because it seemed to be the main force Westernizing Arab and Moslem society. Edward Said wrote from his Marxist perspective that America's real priority in the region was to sell "Kentucky fried chicken franchises, Coca-Cola, Detroit automobiles, and Marriott hotels." This alleged agenda was not seen merely as a way of making imperialist profits but as a way of dissolving the very foundations of the existing society by substituting other mores.

Unfortunately, no matter how America behaved its wealth and power inevitably provoked anger and envy. Said claimed that America's aim in the Middle East was "to oppose nationalism and radicalism" and support each "client regime (no matter how oppressive and unpopular) despite the much-touted official interest in human rights."

The underlying point here, of course, was that U.S. policy ran counter to what the radicals wanted to do. The militant nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists had learned to use the language of human rights, self-determination, and democracy as propaganda, employing them in the same cynical way as did the Communists. The radicals offered America the unpalatable, unacceptable alternative of proving that it respected Arabs by watching--or, even better, helping--Syria, the PLO, or "popular forces" like Saddam while they undermined or overthrew its own tested friends.

After all, Syria, Iraq, and Libya were far more oppressive and anti-democratic than Jordan, Saudi Arabia, or Israel. Even such patronage would not persuade the radicals to abandon their goals of ruling the region but would simply make it easier for them to succeed.

In short, radicals and terrorists attacked America not because the United States was doing wrong by acting oppressively but because it was doing right by opposing them. There was no way
that U.S. concessions would satisfy the radicals since they desired the complete exclusion of its influence from the area. As part of their rivalry, Syria, Iraq, and Iran taunted each other for not being sufficiently militant and for allegedly being American puppets. And when Islamic fundamentalists took American hostages in Iran and Lebanon their ultimate goal was to force U.S. citizens and institutions to leave those countries.

Radical regimes and forces were not mollified but further antagonized by U.S. efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 1970s and 1980s. Syria, Iraq, Islamic Iran, Libya, and the PLO opposed a diplomatic solution because they rightly expected that it would strengthen U.S. regional influence and guarantee Israel's survival. These countries sponsored campaigns of terrorist attacks not as a protest insisting the United States do more but in order to block peace when they feared diplomacy might make some progress.

Actually, American attempts to win over the extremists made things worse. In private life, kind words or a turned cheek may avert conflict, but this was not a valid principle for U.S. Middle East policy. The United States had only two choices in the Middle East: either the Iranians and Arabs would see America as a powerful elephant whose interests they would have to respect or they would view it as a paper tiger which might be easily and profitably defied. This was a case, if there ever was one, to prove the maxim that nice guys finish last.

In the end, though, the Americans would intervene and Iran and Iraq would be the ones who retreated. These displays of U.S. fortitude would not stir firestorms of region-wide outrage and anti-Americanism. U.S. power had more effect in winning its goals than American misunderstandings did in sabotaging them. Soviet expansionism was turned back and its influence limited in the Middle East many years before the USSR collapsed from internal problems. Anti-American radicalism was contained, commitments to allies kept, and oil supplies maintained.

Despite blunders and setbacks, the U.S. position in the region was stronger at the end of the
1980s then it had been years earlier. The United States had better relations with more Arab states than ever before. Regardless of the continued strong U.S. alliance with Israel, they did not turn toward Communism or radical Islamic fundamentalism.

Ironically, the American myths on the Middle East promoted by those claiming to be pro-Arab actually depreciated that people. The majority of Arab leaders acted not as blind fanatics but as rather typical politicians who weighed their rational self-interest. They knew that the regional situation put certain constraints on their actions and forced them to give lip-service to certain ideas; they wanted to see which superpower or local state would win before committing themselves. But when threatened by their local brothers, the Arab regimes preferred turning to U.S. power to being taken over by Iran or Iraq.

Khomeini and Saddam stumbled into disaster in large part because they believed many of the myths prevalent in the United States. Mesmerized by their own propaganda and ignoring overwhelming odds, they believed victory inevitable. They underestimated the United States, provoked it, and then had to suffer the high cost of its enmity. They left neighbors no choice but to join a U.S.-led coalition in order to survive. To make sense of the U.S. miscalculations and Gulf crises of the 1980s and 1990s, the following chapters first explain the origins of Saddam and Khomeini in the 1960s and 1970s.


iii. Kerr, op. cit., p. 11.


xii. Assistant Secretary of State Richard W. Murphy, Testimony to the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, March 6, 1986.

xiv. Ibid.
CHAPTER THREE
THE DISCREET CHARM OF SADDAM, 1959-1979

Hojja dreamed that a man promised him ten
gold coins and put nine in his hand. "You
promised me ten," complained Hojja. Suddenly,
he awoke and saw his hand was empty. He quickly
shut his eyes again, reached out a hand and
said, "All right, I'll settle for nine."

--Middle East folktale

The man who would confront the United States in a war over Kuwait and confound all its expectations about the region had a drastically different background and world view from that of every American leader. At the beginning of his career, Saddam the revolutionary would command a half-dozen guns in an ambush. Twenty years afterward, he would make himself president of Iraq and within a few months order his nation's army to invade Iran, setting off the largest war in Middle East history. Precisely a decade later, he would attack Kuwait, shaking the region and precipitating a full-scale war of Iraq versus the world.

Even the briefest summary of his career shows Saddam's impressive talent and equally remarkable capacity for political iniquity, ruthlessness learned in a political system where such behavior was a necessity to rise and survive. He was no fool or fanatic but simply, as often happens in Middle East politics, a man who combined extremist tactics with a pragmatic strategy in the pursuit of an extremely radical goal.

He took a critical step on that road on October 7, 1959. At 6:30 PM that day, a big car pulled out of the Defense Ministry and roared toward Baghdad's eastern gate, taking Iraq's dictator Abd al-Karim al-Qasim to the East German embassy for its national day reception. As the auto turned onto Rashid Street, the city's main boulevard, a look-out gave the signal. Across from a school and close to Dr. Hasan al-Bakri's clinic, a half-dozen armed men--one of them a young revolutionary named
Saddam Hussein—hurried down to the street.

Then everything began going wrong. One of the get-away drivers, nervously rushing to get the car ready, locked his key inside. An artist absentmindedly wandered among the fighters taking notes for a picture. Every second, Qasim's car came closer. Should they attack or wait for another day? One of the assassins, Abd al-Wahab al-Urayri, settled the matter by running into the street in front of the car. He opened fire, killing the driver and wounding Qasim's assistant.

The other gunmen began shooting. Their two machine-guns quickly jammed. One of them threw a grenade at Qasim's car but missed; another wounded attacker could not pull a grenade from his pocket. The assassins were in total confusion, though Qasim's entourage had not fired a single shot at them. The car started rolling down the hill. Al-Urayri ran around it, pushing his gun up against the window and trying to finish off Qasim at point-blank range. But one of his comrade's bullets hit him in the back and al-Urayri fell dead. Saddam and another man, standing in front of the others, were also wounded by their friends' fire.

The gunmen ran away without checking to see if Qasim was dead, though they had been ordered to fire into the dictator's head to make sure. They carried the two injured revolutionaries, leaving behind al-Urayri's body, and jumped into a car which drove them to a safe house. Forty-three bullets had hit the dictator's vehicle; three of them had wounded Qasim, who lay bleeding on the car's floor. The stunned bystanders finally approached the battered limousine, pulled out Qasim, and rushed him to the Dar al-Salaam hospital.

The Iraqi dictator was saved in a ninety-minute operation by Russian doctors. His bloody, bullet-riddled uniform was publicly exhibited to show how miraculous was his survival. Suspects were rounded up and under torture gave away the conspirators. Fifty-six officers and opposition politicians were arrested. A disguised Saddam escaped to Cairo.¹

Although the assassination attempt had failed, Saddam had showed himself to be no armchair
revolutionary. The story of that shoot-out became a central part of his self-image and self-made mythology. Saddam later spread the tale that he had dug a bullet out of his own body, though actually a doctor had done it. Still, even if Saddam exaggerated his fearlessness, there could be no doubt of his courage.

The botched operation to kill Qasim also taught Saddam a valuable lesson which would help him become a successful dictator: when you strike an enemy, make sure that he is dead and finished. Saddam would also always put the highest priority on his personal security and on rooting out any anti-government plots.

But for an Iraqi leader to survive, good bodyguards alone were not sufficient. To stay in power, whoever would rule Iraq also had to reconcile its local identity as a separate country with its sense of having a mission to rule over the Arab world. Certainly, Iraq's claim to Arab preeminence was as good as that of any other country. It was home to a civilization as old as Egypt and had been capital of the great Arab Islamic empire far longer than Damascus or Mecca, from 750 until 1258 when the Mongols pillaged it. Much of the golden era of Arab and Islamic history had taken place on its territory. Thereafter, it was considerably reduced in importance, continuing to decline during the centuries of Turkish rule down to the Ottoman empire's collapse in 1918.

Iraq had never previously existed as a country. It was divided among three Ottoman provinces before 1918. Britain occupied that land during its battle with the Ottoman Empire in World War One. After the empire collapsed, the British obtained a League of Nations mandate to run the area and, during the 1920s, created Iraq as a state. As king, they installed Prince Feisal from the Hashemite family in western Arabia, one of the leaders of the wartime Arab revolt against the Turks.

Iraq achieved independence in 1932 and accepted the borders with all its neighbors, including Kuwait. The new country's boundaries, like virtually all Middle East frontiers, could be considered artificial. Yet Iraq was far more beneficiary than victim of those whimsical map lines. To the north,
Iraq was awarded the oil-rich Mosul district despite Turkey's objections. To its east, Iraq was given the whole Shatt al-Arab river to Iran's great disadvantage. Not content with the bounty brought it by colonial borders, Iraq also occasionally asserted its claim to Kuwait as early as 1937. "Is it possible," asked Saddam many years later, "for a civilization which is 6000 years old to have been isolated from the sea? A part of Iraq's land was cut off by English scissors."ii

But after achieving independence Iraqis did not talk so much about expanding the country's borders--a manifestation of Iraqi nationalism--as they did about becoming the core of a unified Arab state--Arab nationalism. Baghdad soon became an Arab intellectual and political center, a mecca for militant nationalists from Syria, Palestine, and other places still under British or French control.

Many of the emigres and local activists thought Iraq destined to play the role Prussia and Piedmont had filled in the previous century by creating and dominating the new states of Germany and Italy. One of the most dynamic of these Arab nationalist ideologues, Sami Shawkat, director-general of Iraq's Ministry of Education, asked, "What is there to prevent Iraq from dreaming to unite all the Arab countries?" iii  Saddam was heir to that dream.

Born on April 28, 1937, in the northern town of Tikrit, Saddam was given a name meaning "one who confronts," a prophetic foreshadowing of his future. Two features of his early life had an important effect on his character: his father's death when Saddam was a boy and the influence of a radical nationalist relative. A fatherless boy in Arab society is often the butt of ridicule and bullying. Although his mother remarried, from an early age Saddam became sensitive about his honor and ready to fight in its defense.

His mother's brother, Khayrallah Tulfah, became a formative influence when Saddam went to live with him to attend school in Baghdad. The move brought Saddam from the provinces to the center of Iraqi political life and under the wing of this bitter, politically extremist uncle. Tulfah had been a career army officer who supported a quartet of colonels, the so-called "golden square," in
staging a pro-Nazi coup against the pro-British king Feisal II in 1941. Iraq was too far away from the German lines for Berlin to offer much help and the radicals further isolated themselves by mistakenly shooting down the German plane flying in a liaison officer to arrange aid.

The British responded quickly, bombing Iraqi bases and marching a column of troops to capture Baghdad. Iraq's army crumpled ingloriously, though its supporters first staged a vengeful pogrom killing over 180 people in Baghdad's Jewish quarter. The British soon restored Iraq's old regime and the monarchy thoroughly purged the army, including Tulfah who forever after hated the West, the British, and Iraq's monarchy.

Given such influences at home, Saddam joined the leftist, nationalist Ba'th (the Arab word for "renewal") party--which had begun in Syria as a support group for the 1941 Iraqi coup--while still in school. The party's ideology mixed Communist and fascist ideas with a strong streak of Pan-Arab nationalism, advocating both socialism and Arab unity. From his teenage years, Saddam had been a professional revolutionary, an armed politician fighting for Arab unity and socialism. He spent his time on politics rather than studies, engaging in street fights with rival groups and organizing an underground apparatus to prepare for the king's overthrow.

The revolution did come in July 1958 and the monarchy was overthrown. But the leader was General Qasim--not the Ba'th party. The coup-makers seized the city and murdered the royal family. The body of the pro-Western prime minister Nuri al-Said--himself a veteran of the World War One Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire--was dragged through Baghdad's streets. Qasim soon began persecuting the rival Ba'th party and Saddam's assassination attempt in October 1959 had been its unsuccessful retaliation against the dictator.

For the next four years Saddam was a political refugee in Cairo. For the young Iraqi, to be living in the capital of Arab revolution must have been an intoxicating experience. By overthrowing his own country's monarchy in a 1952 coup, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had achieved
precisely what Saddam wanted to do. Nasser eliminated his Islamic fundamentalist, Communist, and moderate opponents by controlling the army and appealing to the masses.

Four years later, Nasser defied Britain by nationalizing the Suez Canal Company. U.S. and Soviet intervention saved him from a British-French-Israeli retaliatory attack, but the Arab world gave Nasser all the credit. Thereafter, until his death in 1970, most Arabs considered Nasser to be the greatest Arab leader. His voice calling for revolt was heard and often heeded in every corner of the region.

During Saddam's time in Cairo, Nasser was in his heyday. To the still-obscure Saddam, Nasser was an irresistible role model, a hero who had remade Egypt and now called the Arabs to unity, victory, and revenge, Israel's destruction and the West's expulsion. The dictator enjoyed the masses' veneration for making them feel strong, even if these passionate feelings were based on illusions. "We would clap in proud surprise," the great Egyptian writer Tawfiq al-Hakim later recalled with embarrassment. "When he delivered a powerful speech and said about [the United States] which had the atomic bomb that `if they don't like our conduct, let them drink from the sea,' he filled us with pride."

Regardless of the facts, those glowing images persuaded the people. "We saw ourselves as a major industrial state, a leader of the developing world in agricultural reform, and the strongest striking force in the Middle East," wrote al-Hakim. "No one argued, checked, verified or commented. We could not help but believe, and burn our hands with applause." The regime's massive rallies--whose participants were transported, fed, and housed at state expense--were scripted in order to seem spontaneous: "Cheer in unison: `Nasser, Nasser, Nasser!' Cheer by section, `Long live the victor of Arabism!' Unison: `Long live the hero of the revolution...The leader of the Arab nation!'"

Saddam was buoyed up by the conviction that he, too, would one day be the object of such worship. Indeed, he did not have to wait all that long.
Although Qasim had survived Saddam's gunfire, he was finally overthrown and murdered in 1963 after a coup organized by a coalition of radical officers, including Ba'thists. Saddam quickly returned to Baghdad. For a few months, his Ba'th party had the upper hand in the government, but its leaders were too indecisive and lacked a strong enough base in the army. Nasser, who had his own followers in Iraq, mistrusted the Ba'th which he saw as too independent-minded despite its claim to support him. So the powerful Egyptian dictator threw his considerable weight against the party. Ousted by its even more pro-Nasser rivals, the Ba'th party was again on the run and Saddam as one of its rising middle-level cadres spent some time in prison. But the new rulers made the mistake of not killing him. The young revolutionary would not return such mercy when his own opportunity came.

In July 1968, the Ba'th finally regained power in its own coup and Saddam was among the leaders. During his years in underground politics, Saddam had attracted a following but was still a relatively junior figure and, as a civilian, could not hold the army's loyalty. Knowing that the officers must be won over, the Ba'th party selected as the figurehead president General Hasan al-Bakr, an older, respected military man.

Understanding the value of organization, the 31-year-old Saddam stayed in the background during the next few years while consolidating personal control over the party apparatus and patiently placing his followers in key positions. He and his colleagues outmaneuvered, imprisoned, exiled, or killed all the competing forces, including Nasser's supporters and ambitious military officers.

Then he wiped out rival factions and leaders in the Ba'th party. After a series of complex purges and maneuvers, he was soon vice-president and the power behind the throne--the country's real ruler--at an age when most men of political genius are just starting the first steps up the ladder to power.

Iraq's political tradition and Saddam's personal experience had been harsh. Saddam's predecessors had paid with their lives for being too soft. He had learned that one must kill or be killed,
destroy one's enemies or be overthrown by them, and ruthlessly centralize power or face national disintegration. This experience shaped a very different kind of politician than did a society where power is won or lost in free, peaceful elections. Saddam intended to stay in control and his maxim for doing so was not unlike that attributed to the hard-driving American World War Two General George Patton: the point is not to die for one's own cause but to make the enemy do so.

Achieving power was not the end, but the beginning, of Saddam's struggle. Maintaining peace among Iraq's three communities was an especially urgent task. His own Sunni Moslem group, the traditional ruling elite, comprised only about 20 to 25 percent of the population, albeit the most urbanized and educated segment. The Sunnis dominated the government, the Ba'ath party, and the officer corps. They knew that if the regime fell the other groups might seek revenge against them, and thus the Sunnis had a particular incentive to support the government.

The Kurds of the northern mountains, about 20 percent of Iraq's people, were not even Arabs. They spoke their own Indo-European language, and still followed their own tribal chieftains. They were fierce warriors yet were so unintegrated into Iraqi society that they were not drafted into the army. In the 1960s, before the Ba'ath came to power, they had frequently rebelled under the leadership of the Kurdish Democratic Party to demand autonomy. But while troublesome, the Kurds were only a secondary threat since they did not want to take over the country but merely to kick the central government out of their home territory.

The primary potential threat came from the Shia Moslems of the south who comprised the majority in Iraq. There were relatively few Shias in the Sunni-dominated Ba'ath party. Aside from their religious differences with the Sunni, the Shia had some important, potentially dangerous political distinctions. They had close contact with their co-religionists in Iran and the possibility that Iraqi Shias would join with Iranian Shias was one of Saddam's worst nightmares. In addition, Iraq's Shias were loyal to their own clerical hierarchy which provided an alternative political leadership to
Saddam's government and resented the Ba'th regime's secular policies. Finally, the Shia community was unhappy at its poverty and lack of power relative to that enjoyed by the Sunni rulers.

The Ba'th regime used a combination of repression and material incentives in dealing with these communities. It granted autonomy to the Kurds, then reneged on this promise as soon as it felt strong enough to do so. The Kurds revolted again with covert Iranian, U.S., and Israeli help. Saddam sent his army into the northern mountains and, in 1975, made a treaty with the Shah giving up half the Shatt al-Arab river on their border in exchange for Iran agreeing to shut off all external aid to the insurgents. The rebellion sputtered out and government authority was reestablished.

But Saddam did not operate through repression alone. He built a mass base of support by encouraging Iraqi nationalism and using Iraq's growing oil income to improve living standards and carry out a concerted development program. The lives of most Iraqis improved. Those Shias and Kurds loyal to the regime faced no discrimination. Everyone in Iraq was indoctrinated heavily with Ba'th party ideology and young people had a chance to obtain a good education and to rise in the government, party, and army. Saddam made sure that Sunnis kept a large majority at the highest levels of these institutions but there was plenty of opportunity for all communities in the prosperous 1970s.

Although Saddam and the Ba'th party were totally secular in ideology, they knew the importance of securing support from the largely religious masses. The government paid millions of dinars to Shia clerics to win their loyalty and showed its respect for Islam by, for example, enforcing the public observance of such key Moslem tenets as the annual fast during the month of Ramadan. Military units were renamed for historic Shia leaders and the birthday of the prophet Mohammad's son-in-law Ali, the Shia's particular hero, was made a national holiday.

As important as keeping the communities quiet was the need to maintain control of the army. During the 35 years of Iraq's history up to 1968, there had been five successful coups and numerous
attempted ones. Saddam broke this cycle. The government's tight control over the military, however, 
was paid for at the cost of greatly reducing the army's effectiveness.

Since Iraq's pre-Ba'th party regimes had always purged the party's supporters from the army, 
Saddam had few high-ranking career officers on whom he could depend. As long as he kept General 
al-Bakr as president, the civilian-dominated regime had a respected military figure at the top. But 
Saddam was also sensitive about his own lack of soldierly credentials and made himself an honorary 
general and later a field marshal. He constantly wore fancy uniforms and used military phrases in 
speeches.

Saddam's main technique, however, was to interfere constantly in the running of the armed 
forces. He made senior appointments on the basis of political loyalty rather than skill, constantly 
shifted officers, and removed generals who became too popular. The regime's intelligence services 
closely watched the officer corps, sifting for the slightest sign of disloyalty or disaffection.

In governing the society and economy, Saddam followed the Soviet model of ensuring that 
the party controlled the state and the state dominated all aspects of public life. Young people, for 
example, were organized into Soviet-style pro-regime groups: the Vanguards, ages 10 to 15; the 
Youth, ages 15 to 20. By recruiting so many activists through Ba'th party-directed trade unions, 
women's organizations, and professional associations, Saddam placed his eyes, ears, and supporters 
throughout the society.

As a way of monopolizing power, this method was brilliantly successful.

The regime also controlled the economy--foreign oil companies were nationalized in 
1972--and just about everything else. All newspaper articles and radio broadcasts reflected the 
government line. Everyone's career and even personal survival depended on collaborating with the 
regime, mouthing its ideas, and rising through its institutions. Compared to other Arab dictatorships, 
Iraq was severely repressive and tightly controlled. Given the choice between being tortured or
rewarded by the regime, most Iraqis backed Saddam or kept their mouths shut.

During his first decade of power, Saddam concentrated on solidifying his rule at home. While never forgetting his ultimate goal of ruling the Gulf and the whole Middle East, he put this dream on the back burner. The Iraqi regime talked a very militant line but acted cautiously in its foreign policy during the 1970s. Saddam's predecessors had broken relations with the United States during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and, after taking power, the Ba'th could not appear so unmilitant as to restore them. Iraq ignored the United States except to attack it verbally or to sponsor terrorists to attack it. Baghdad aligned itself, though never submissively, to the Soviet Union.

In inter-Arab relations, Baghdad's propaganda and intelligence services tried to encourage Ba'thist revolutions in the Gulf Arab states and increase its influence in Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinian movement. But Saddam knew that his own country still took a back seat to Egypt and Syria, the main contenders for Arab power.

While at the start of Saddam's rule Iraq spoke in the name of an Pan-Arab nationalist ideal, it moved steadily throughout the 1970s toward an Iraqi nationalism, which had several advantages over Arab nationalism for Saddam. The Kurds were not even Arabs; the Shia were unenthusiastic about Arab nationalism which they saw as a guise for the domination of the Sunni elites which already ruled Iraq and most of the other Arab countries. Together these groups comprised almost three-quarters of Iraq's people. vi

To make matters worse, these ethnic majorities had potential foreign allies against Saddam. "When we talk of the great [Arab] homeland," he warned, "we must not push the non-Arabs among our people to look for a country outside Iraq." vii The Kurds at times looked to Iran, Israel, the United States, and even the USSR--a disproportionately large number of Iraq's Communist party members were Kurds--to help them achieve independence or autonomy. The Shia could seek help in neighboring Iran, ruled by fellow members of their sect and possessing its own large Kurdish
minority. To meld these disparate communities into a nation would take more than Arab nationalism.

It was better to build a sense of Iraqi nationhood and a common pride in their history. Saddam thus tried to revive the glories of ancient, non-Arab civilizations in the land of Iraq like the Babylonians and Chaldeans, and Assyrians. He compared himself to the great emperor Nebuchadnezzar, conqueror of Jerusalem some 2500 years earlier. Another useful hero was Saladin, vanquisher of the Crusaders, who not only came from Saddam's home town of Tikrit but was a Kurd as well.

Iraq was part of an Arab nation but also its predestined ruler and if such conquests were to be made, they would provide booty which Iraqis would share. Thus, for Saddam, Iraqi unity was more important than Arab unity. Iraq would act opportunistically in its self-interest by allying with Washington or Moscow and defending or attacking neighbors as its interests dictated.

At first, Baghdad inveighed against the "reactionary" Arab monarchies led by Saudi Arabia as being feudal, pro-Western, and doomed. "It is our duty," said President al-Bakr, Saddam's surrogate, "to liberate the Arab people everywhere....We should ignite the Arab revolution in every Arab land." A top party theoretician rejected as criminal the idea of "distracting the masses" by building up individual states instead of merging them by force. viii

Yet Iraq was strengthening itself rather than struggling for change in the Arab world. Rather than siding with fellow Arab revolutionaries against traditionalists, Iraq pursued its own interest by hypocritically cooperating with conservative Arab regimes like Saudi Arabia and Jordan while quarreling with Saddam's radical rival Syria. In 1970, when Jordan's army fought a civil war with the PLO, an Iraqi army unit stationed there stood passive, not helping its radical Palestinian allies.

By 1975, Saddam was explaining the need for a "balance" between Iraq's interest and that of the Arabs as a whole. In 1979, he went further: A unified Arab state, he admitted, was still only a dream; Iraq already existed and was its people's real homeland. By 1986, Saddam went even further,
"The Arabs are today 22 states, 22 situations, 22 rulers and leaders, 22 economic and social situations and 22 special national situations."ix

Iraq's role in the conflict with Israel was a good example of this pattern for Iraqi policy. Saddam was violent in his anti-Zionist rhetoric and sponsored Palestinian terrorism against Israel. But since Iraq had no border with Israel he could talk belligerently while remaining disengaged in practice. Egypt, Syria, and Jordan suffered the losses in war, the Saudis and Kuwaitis paid the bills, and Iraq criticized them for not fighting harder and more often.

Baghdad's view of the issue, like its attitude toward Arab politics, became more openly Iraqi nationalist over time. In 1970 an Iraqi leader called the Palestine issue, "the core and essence" of Arab politics to which all else must be subordinated. But 11 years later, Saddam complained in a speech that since Iraq fought by itself to liberate land from Iran in the Iran-Iraq war, the Palestinians should defeat Israel by themselves. A Ba'ath party resolution at that time made a rare confession of past error: Iraq had spent too much time and effort on "the Palestinian question, in a way that largely exceeded its capacity."ix

Iraq did send some forces to fight Israel in the 1948, 1967, and 1973 wars but its army did not perform well. In 1967, Israeli planes crossed Jordan to hit Iraq's totally unprepared air force base at the H-3 oil-pumping station near the Jordanian border. In 1973, Iraq's tank brigade on the Golan Heights took a wrong turn at night on its way to the front. Astonished Israeli soldiers watched as the lost Iraqi tanks, lights ablaze, rolled directly toward them. The Israeli forces finally opened fire and virtually wiped out the unit.

The main mission of Iraq's army, however, was not to fight Israel but to repress the Kurds and block coup attempts by anyone in the regime foolish enough to think he could replace Saddam. In June 1973, Major General Nazim al-Khazar, head of the secret police and one of Vice-President Saddam's right-hand men, invited the defense and interior ministers to visit his new, high-technology
investigation center. Instead of feting them, Khazar had the two officials stripped and thrown into a cell. Khazar had no particular ideological ax to grind, he simply wanted power for himself.

Later that day, President Bakr was returning from a visit to Poland and Saddam was supposed to welcome him at the Baghdad airport. Having earlier ordered his men to blow up the terminal, Khazar sat down in front of his television to watch the reception end with Saddam’s death. But nothing happened: Bakr was delayed and security was so extensive that Khazar's men canceled the attack, thinking their plan had been discovered. Apparently, however, the panic was unnecessary. Saddam was just being typically cautious.

Since their coup had failed, Khazar and 15 accomplices tried to escape over the Iranian border, taking along the defense and interior ministers as hostages. Hunted down by helicopters and trapped just three miles from the frontier, Khazar's men killed the defense minister and wounded the interior minister before being captured.

Khazar was brought back to Baghdad barefoot and with torn shirt to see Saddam, who mocked him. Such a face-to-face meeting was part of Saddam's method, to publicize the personal nature of his victory and the certainty of his vengeance. Khazar and 21 others were executed.

Iraq led the Middle East in political executions during the 1970s, averaging 100 each year. Saddam also used terrorism against opponents who took refuge abroad. Britain expelled 11 members of the Iraqi embassy staff in 1978 after an exiled Iraqi prime minister was shot in London. Other Iraqi dissidents were murdered in South Yemen, Kuwait, and Sudan.\textsuperscript{xii}

Secret police units, often headed by Saddam's relatives, used beatings, electric shock, burnings with cigarettes, and sexual abuse against the regime's victims. In this way, opposition in Iraq was crushed. The classic torture was the falaqa--burning the soles of the feet--but prisoners were also hung up by handcuffed wrists on hooks. They were told that they were about to be shot and forced to stand in front of firing squads, then whisked back to their cells.\textsuperscript{xii}
Saddam cultivated a fearsome image to deter other would-be self-nominated successors. Videotapes of executions were sent to the leaders of the Gulf Arab states to show them the price of defying Saddam. An American journalist interviewing the dictator once asked Saddam about some of the Shia leaders he had shot as opponents, estimating the number at seven.

Saddam yelled, "Seven!"

The journalist, thinking he had angered Saddam by overestimating his repression, said, "Well, maybe five."

"I'll have you know," said Saddam proudly, "that I shot 600 of those traitors and they all deserved it." Westerners never easily grasped that Arab dictators prized ferocity above felicity.

Gradually, Saddam reshuffled party and government leaders to install more of his associates. Step by step, he purged party veterans, accusing some of trying to unseat him, perhaps in conjunction with Saddam's next-door rival, Syria. When he caught Iraq's Communist party recruiting in his army in 1978, Saddam executed 21 of its leaders and banned the party, calling it, "A rotten, atheistic, yellow storm which has plagued Iraq." He reduced Iraq's dependence on Moscow, criticizing the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and buying more Western arms and goods.xiii

By this late 1970s, he was also becoming interested for the first time in rebuilding relations with the United States, where there was a growing interest in Iraq's commercial potential. American magazines like Business Week and Newsweek ran headlines like, "The Dramatic Turnaround in U.S.-Iraq Trade," "Iraq Starts to Thaw," and "New Scramble for $8 billion in Contracts."xiv

In May 1977, President Jimmy Carter, announcing a plan to "aggressively challenge" Moscow for influence in radical states, sent a high-ranking State Department official to Baghdad offering conciliation. Carter and the Commerce Department were eager to let General Electric sell Iraq's navy engines for its four new Italian-built frigates. Congress stopped delivery as "contrary to common sense," given Iraq's extremism. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski announced
in April 1980, "We see no fundamental incompatibility of interests between the United States and Iraq." The United States and Iraq, Brzezinski said, wanted the same thing, "a secure Persian Gulf." Whatever their intention, Baghdad took such statements as an encouragement to attack Iran.\textsuperscript{ xv }

Saddam was certainly not the saint described by his son, Uday, as a benefactor of "widows, orphans, families of martyrs and the needy," who hated money, feared God, and enjoyed "fishing and looking after sheep."\textsuperscript{xvi} Nonetheless, he was a strong and pragmatic leader who had made Iraq powerful and prosperous. In Iraqi politics, it was more important to be feared, respected, and secure than to be popular or--perhaps more accurately--having such attributes was the only way to be popular.

By July 1979, Saddam's control of Iraq was so complete that he sent the 68-year-old President Bakr, who had suffered a heart attack, into retirement and made himself president. "I will be a commander among commanders and not the only commander," Saddam said in his inaugural speech. But he immediately began ensuring his monopoly on power with a new purge. Scores of party leaders were accused of planning a coup in cahoots with the United States, Israel, "and the powers of darkness." Five members of the top-level Revolutionary Command Council and sixteen others were executed by firing squad.\textsuperscript{xvii}

Saddam's timing was understandable: dramatic changes in the Gulf and a revolution in Iran were offering him what seemed to be the best possible chance to conquer the region.


v. Ibid.


vii. Ibid.

viii. Ibid., pp. 190-191.


xvii. *Le Monde*, August 5-6 1979; *New York Times*, July 30 and August 9, 1979. Among those executed were former Deputy Prime Minister Adnan Hussein, the leader of the trade union federation, former education and industry ministers, and the commander of a Baghdad garrison.
CHAPTER FOUR
IRAN'S REVOLUTION AND GULF WAR ONE, 1979-1985

Hojja tried to save money by feeding his donkey less and less hay. One day, the donkey died. "Oh no!" Hojja explained. "And just when I had it used to living on nothing."

--Middle East folktale

While Saddam was consolidating power in Iraq, the Persian Gulf area was making a dramatic leap from being a backward, backwater area to becoming one of the world's most strategically significant, financially powerful places. The main countries along the Gulf's shores--Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates--were all major oil producers and contained most of the world's petroleum reserves. The combination of extraordinary wealth and rapid change with so many old conflicts and dictators made this a very rough, dangerous neighborhood.

The genie of oil brought many riches to the area. The fact that it was the Gulf's sole resource made it all the more precious. By 1973, all the Gulf regimes had nationalized petroleum, wresting management from Western companies, and pushed up prices quickly. At first, the Gulf states' rising oil income seemed a pure blessing. But petrodollars also unleashed a tidal wave of modernity threatening to unglue the traditional Gulf Arab way of life based on merchants, caravans, and nomadic livestock-raising, with its strict adherence to Islam, family and tribal loyalties, and suspicion of change. In a single generation, the Gulf's peoples were catapulted from camels to jets, from tents to skyscrapers, from being poor herders to becoming cosmopolitan businessmen dwelling amidst luxury.

Alongside these internal changes was a red-hot political ferment. The first place to feel this danger was Kuwait, a particularly vulnerable tiny country whose very name, meaning "little
fortress," was a reminder of a long history of defending itself from tribal raids and conquests. Before the oil boom it was a center for fishing, trading, and pearl-diving, the place where caravan routes from Iraq and the Saudi desert met the picturesque dhow ships at the water's edge. The ruling al-Sabah family already reigned there in the eighteenth century when the United States was still a British colony.

Mutual interests brought Kuwait and Britain together in 1899. To escape from the domination of the Ottoman empire, which then ruled the lands that would later become Iraq, the al-Sabah family accepted British protection. London intervened there to block the efforts of its rivals, Germany and Russia, to extend their influence into the area. In 1913, the British and Ottomans drew Kuwait's boundaries, which Iraq would accept when it became independent in 1932.

Nonetheless, just after London gave Kuwait full independence in 1961, Iraq claimed that territory as its own, coveting that country's oil wealth and 120 miles of Gulf shoreline. In self-defense, Kuwait invited back British troops for a few months and then replaced them with an Arab League peacekeeping force--including soldiers from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan--that stayed two years until the danger dissipated. Kuwait also paid Iraq a bribe to leave it alone.\(^i\)

In addition to Kuwait, Britain had also become the protector of other small states on the Gulf's Arab coast: Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the half-dozen tiny sheikdoms that would band together as the United Arab Emirates. London's administrators and soldiers had fended off the covetous ambitions of Iran, Iraq, and Nasser's Egypt. But in 1971 this era came to an end when Britain called home its 10,000 soldiers in the Gulf as an economy measure.

Britain's departure had some advantage for the Gulf monarchs since the local Iraq-sponsored radicals could no longer demand that the area be liberated from the British military presence.\(^ii\) But these little states--plus Saudi Arabia and Kuwait--worried about who might try to
take over next, since they could not defend themselves against Arab brothers who would gladly loot their treasure and sovereignty. Iraq was the most immediate threat since it was allied to Moscow, advocated anti-monarchical revolution and periodically revived its claim to Kuwait.

The Gulf monarchs, then, were eager to establish new security arrangements. Ironically, that Arab nationalism posed the greatest menace made non-Arab help more appealing to them. Any Arab advisors or soldiers brought in might turn out to be subversives. Thus, the Gulf states preferred to import British advisors and Pakistani soldiers and to obtain U.S. and Iranian security guarantees.

As a fellow conservative king, the Shah of Iran was a reliable ally for his fellow monarch on the Arab side of the Gulf. Although he wanted to be the leading power in the region, the Shah--unlike Iraq--was not interested in taking over the Arab states. Thus, the Gulf Arab monarchies did not object when Iran occupied three of their small strategic islands near the Gulf's mouth in November 1970. When a Marxist insurgency broke out in southern Oman, that government turned to Tehran for troops--and British officers serving as consultants--to defeat it.

Since Iran and Iraq were the two most powerful and populous states bordering the Gulf, it was not surprising that they were geopolitical rivals for primacy there. But the conflict went back far into history and deep into their societies. Over a dozen centuries earlier, at the battle of Qadisiyya in 637, Arab armies destroyed the Persian empire and spread their own rule and new religion. Almost all Persians became Moslems. But while the Arabs triumphed militarily, theologically, and politically, Persia remained a distinct civilization whose more advanced culture dominated the great medieval Islamic states. Religious differences intensified national distinctions: while Iraq was generally ruled by Sunni Moslems, Iran was a center for Shia Islam. And the Iranian empire often fought its neighbor to the west for control of the fertile lands near today's Iran-Iraq border.

Thus, the power struggle between Saddam and the Shah--and later between Saddam and
Khomeini--was simultaneously a battle between two religious sects (the Sunni and Shia), two
nations (the Arab and Persian), and two philosophies (radical Arab nationalism and the Shah's
conservatism, later replaced by Islamic fundamentalism), each seeking to control the Gulf and the
Middle East. This web of rivalries was compounded in the 1960s and 1970s by the Cold War
conflict between the Shah's pro-Western stand and Iraq's alliance with the USSR.

The United States was another protector for the Gulf monarchies as it gradually became
involved in this area. A U.S.-Iran relationship was already well established. When a nationalist
prime minister in Iran had challenged the Shah's power back in 1953, the U.S. government became
convinced that this anti-Shah movement would turn toward Moscow. The CIA helped organized a
coup to restore the monarch to power.

On the Arab side of the Gulf, the Americans had always taken a back seat to the British.
Still, a consortium of U.S. oil companies controlled Saudi oil and a U.S. airbase operated in
Dhahran until 1961. A tiny U.S. naval force, docked in a corner of Britain's Bahrain base, stayed
after the British left.

The emerging power vacuum and the region's growing significance engaged U.S. attention
in the 1970s but Washington was not eager to play a bigger role there. The Gulf was far from
America's shores or bases; U.S. policy was preoccupied with the Vietnam war. The Shah was
lobbying for American support so that he could guard his weaker neighbors from radical Iraq and
this idea struck the Nixon Administration as a good solution to the problem of regional security.

In May 1972, President Richard Nixon visited Tehran and agreed to back Iran as the Gulf's
policeman--to preserve stability and block revolution there--promising it huge arms sales, military
training and technical help. This U.S. strategy was referred to as the "two-pillar" policy, making
Iran and Saudi Arabia the foundations for regional stability though Iran was the real strongpoint.

In less than a decade, however, Iran itself would prove the weak link among the local
states. The main causes of unrest were internal. The massive oil income pouring into Iran after
prices and profits shot up in 1973 brought social disruption. Economic development, modern education, urban migration, and other innovations created large, impatient expectations for a better life which the Shah's government could not satisfy.

This same modernization process undermined the society's historic foundation and the regime's traditional base of support. Millions of peasants, who had been politically passive in their isolated villages, were attracted to the cities by the lure of jobs and higher living standards. Their hopes were often disappointed in the rapidly expanding slums of south Tehran and other places. The move from countryside to town was in itself quite disorienting, plunging the migrants into a totally unfamiliar style of life which seemed more influenced by Western than by Iranian customs. Islam was one of the few guideposts left to them from their former lives.

The old middle class of craftsmen and bazaar merchants was also shaken up. Competition from Western manufactured goods and the monopolies of the Shah's privileged courtiers threatened their economic security and status. This culturally conservative class disapproved of the new, Westernized middle class of professionals and government bureaucrats. The Islamic clergy, closely allied to the old middle class, feared a tidal wave of atheism from imported Western ideas and growing secularism.

The new Western-educated middle class should have been a pillar of support for the Shah since it was the main beneficiary of his politics. But its members, too, felt little loyalty toward the regime. Torn between their cultural roots and a yearning for more Western-style freedom, this well-educated group resented the stifling atmosphere of fear and repression maintained by the Shah's omnipresent secret police.

The most active dissident groups came from among the growing number of students at Iranian schools or those returning from studies in the West which had been financed by government scholarships. They formed anti-Shah groups advocating Marxism, Islamic fundamentalism, or some blend of the two ideologies.
The spark which set off the explosion was a demonstration by Islamic theology students in January 1978, violently put down by the authorities. A wave of anti-government demonstrations began popping up all over the country and escalating month after month. When it became clear that the government could not cope with the crisis, strikes, marches, and increasingly vocal criticism mounted throughout the year. The Shah was weak and uncertain; his army's sporadic use of force created martyrs without suppressing the disturbances. By September 1978, the heterogeneous opposition rallied around the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, an old enemy of the Shah exiled for over a decade.

Khomeini had been imprisoned for attacking the Shah's policies, then allowed to leave Iran in the mid-1960s. He took refuge at the Shia seminaries in Iraq. When the Shah requested his expulsion in 1978, Baghdad complied, wanting to ensure that Khomeini's ideas did not spread further among its own Shia minority. The ayatollah went to France where, from his rented villa outside Paris, he waged an effective propaganda war against the Shah through the international news media and by tapes of sermons smuggled into Iran. Within Iran, his talented lieutenants--many of them his former students--established a well-organized network of agents and supporters.

Rejecting any compromise with the Shah, Khomeini demanded a total Islamic revolution that would completely destroy the monarchy and expel U.S. influence. The Western-educated middle class and Marxist-oriented left went along with Khomeini, believing that they would outmaneuver the elderly cleric once the Shah was gone. Their analysis of the situation was wrong but the Khomeini's overwhelming popularity left the liberals and leftists with little choice but to join his united front.

By the time the Shah appointed a moderate opposition cabinet in December it was too late to save the regime. The next month, he fled Iran. In February 1979, Khomeini's forces took power and, amidst massive rejoicing, the ayatollah returned to Tehran.
For Khomeini, Iran was only the first step in making the whole Gulf an Islamic empire which would bring, in his words, "absolute perfection and infinite glory and beauty." Iran's revolution turned the Gulf's whole security system upside down. Instead of Iraq and its puppet Arab nationalist groups subverting the Gulf monarchies, the threat now came from Iran and its Islamic fundamentalist followers. Iran, formerly the Gulf's defender and the West's ally in the 1970s, was now the villain; Iraq's role had switched from a hostile role to being the shield of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and the West's great hope.

Khomeini was no impractical fanatic. He had outmaneuvered all rivals and proven himself a man of action, among the century's most successful politicians in mobilizing millions of people with his vision through demagoguery, ideology, and organization. In addition, the ayatollah was blessed with a number of shrewd, capable lieutenants who immediately started building institutions to ensure that the revolution stayed in power.

His ideas were as seamless in internal logic as they were horrifying in an unremitting paranoia and hatred, showing how movements begun to build heaven on earth degenerate into systems obsessed with selecting enemies to be killed. "You the meek of the world, you the Islamic countries and world Moslems," Khomeini urged, "rise up! Grab what is yours by right through nails and teeth! Do not fear the propaganda of the superpowers and their sworn stooges. Drive out the criminal rulers!...March towards an Islamic government!" If only all Moslems cooperated, they would be "the greatest power on earth." v

But if Khomeini was so clearly right, why had not Moslems embraced his ideas already? Why didn't the Islamic masses rise up elsewhere? Some creeds would blame humanity's intrinsic fallibility or argue that people must wait for God to choose His own time. Khomeini's answer was that "despotic rulers and wicked clerics misused Islam to create oppressive, corrupt regimes at odds with its principles. Only a popular leader could force people to reject these temptations; only Western agents would resist this virtuous effort.
Thus, Khomeini insisted that his enemies also had to be enemies of God and humanity as well. To him, the pious Saudis--themselves Sunni Moslem fundamentalists--were heretics, and the radical Iraqis were merely U.S. stooges. America was the satanic force preventing utopia on earth, deliberately keeping most of the world backward. Many Moslems followed this ideology but its intolerance toward its co-religionists alienated millions more.

Yet Khomeini's thinking also addressed a central problem for the Third World in general and the Gulf in particular: the need to explain why some states are more developed than others. If relative backwardness was due to the shortcomings of local cultural or political traditions, these must be changed to be more like Western ones in order to achieve modernization. The road to development would be long and hard. If, however, the essential problem was external, this would validate Arab and Moslem pride and mean that progress would be more easily attained by overthrowing a reactionary regime and ejecting U.S. influence.

One of the Shah's main crimes according to Khomeini was linking progress to Westernization. In pre-revolutionary Iran, as elsewhere in the Middle East, tradition was unfashionable while things Western were seen as representing progress. Indifference to religion, Khomeini charged, was taken to be a symbol of civilization, while piety was a sign of backwardness to an elite which would rather be tourists in Europe than pilgrims in Mecca.

To make matters worse from Khomeini's standpoint, this Western cultural invasion was also popular in many ways. People wanted cheaper, better-quality goods and liberating ideas. Assertions of defiance barely concealed a nagging conviction that Western ascendancy was inevitable and that one might as well join the winning side.

If, as Khomeini claimed, all governments during 1400 years of Islam had failed, why should his experiment be different? Human nature did not change so easily. In Khomeini's Iran, too, there were self-seeking leaders, bitter factionalism, and differences of opinion. This fragility made Khomeini all the more determined to stop America from blocking the thoroughgoing Iranian
and regional revolution he had in mind.

Khomeini had good reason to consider Washington to be his most dangerous enemy. The United States, of course, had been a mainstay for the Shah. Yet Khomeini's problem was that Iranians liked or feared America so much that they did not want to fight against its influence. Even many of his top aides wanted to compromise with Washington, following an Iranian tradition of appeasing the strongest foreign power. They publicly denounced America, then secretly asked it for money, support, and favors.

The ayatollah feared that this U.S. leverage might temper his revolution by supporting moderate factions against militant ones—or overthrow it altogether. And he knew that Washington would do everything in its power to prevent the spread of Islamic revolution to Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf monarchies. Thus, Khomeini and his most radical followers wanted a decisive break with the United States to eliminate its influence and show Iran's people that it could not defeat the Islamic revolution. Anti-Americanism would then be a useful device to rally the masses around the new regime.

In this situation, Carter did precisely the wrong thing by seeking rapprochement during the revolution's first months in power in 1979. Carter wanted to show Iran that America was benevolent but merely made the radicals even more suspicious that Washington might subvert them with kindness.

These are the reasons why Iranian militants stormed the U.S. embassy in November 1979, kidnapped its staff, and held most of them hostage until January 1981. Khomeini called this a "second revolution" which would banish forever Iranians' servility toward America. "For centuries," said Khomeini, Western propaganda "made all of us believe that it is impossible to resist." Now, he rejected compromise because he wanted to show that America could do nothing against Iran, that its strength was an illusion. vi

The revolution could be made safe only by cutting contacts with the United States, "the
center for world imperialism," Iran's ambassador to the U.N. called it, which "can under no circumstances" be trusted. The powerful speaker of parliament Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani boasted, "Today we don't make any decisions, great or small, under the influence of foreign powers [including] a blasphemous country like the Soviet Union or an imperialist aggressive country like America."  

Thus, Iran's rulers saw the crisis in practical terms. The radicals used it to displace moderates in the regime and unite the country around themselves. At first, the imbroglio cost Iran almost nothing. It did not need the United States. Iran could still sell oil to others. Khomeini correctly calculated that Iran could thumb its nose at both the United States and the USSR, knowing the superpower rivals would prevent each other from attacking him.

But Khomeini was not interested in merely being on the defensive. He thought the hostage crisis was an Iranian victory over America that would inspire Moslem revolt against the West. Each day the hostages were held, Washington's credibility would fall among Iran's people and the Gulf Arabs. Iran was in no hurry to make a deal. Negotiations went slowly, intermediaries made no progress, and the Western media counted off the number of days of "America held hostage."

America's main goal was to free the hostages. A successful rescue was as much of a strategic as a humanitarian gesture, to show Iran and the whole Middle East that U.S. power must be taken seriously. If such an attempt were to be made in 1980, however, it could not wait beyond April because of the coming hot temperatures, short nights, and wild summer winds, the same barriers facing U.S. forces a decade later in the Kuwait crisis. The U.S. military prepared a necessarily complex rescue plan since Tehran, near the USSR and far from U.S. bases, was about the hardest place in the world to reach and save hostages.

According to the plan, U.S. RH-53D "Sea-Stallion" helicopters took off from the aircraft carrier USS Nimitz and C-130 transports flew from Egypt across Saudi Arabia. They were to traverse Iran's desert and meet at a flat, isolated expanse of sand designated as Desert One in Iran's
Dashit-e-Kavir desert. There, the helicopters were supposed to refuel and then fly 200 miles more to another site near Tehran. They would be met there by U.S. undercover agents who would put the 90-man rescue team into trucks and take them to a rented garage where they would hide during the next day.

The following midnight, a five-truck convoy was supposed to take the unit downtown to Amjadieh Stadium, across the road from the U.S. Embassy where almost all the Americans were held. Using folding ladders, the commandos were to climb the embassy walls, kill the guards, and take the hostages to the stadium. A smaller unit would rescue the other three diplomats, detained at Iran's Foreign Ministry. The helicopters would sweep down into the stadium: four to pick up hostages and rescuers, two to fly air cover, and two more in reserve. They would rendezvous with the C-130s and leave Iran with U.S. fighter planes riding shotgun.

But everything would go wrong due to a combination of bureaucratic mismanagement, the misuse of technology, and bad luck. Two hours after the takeoff on a dark, moonless night in April 1980, one helicopter developed a serious mechanical problem and had to go back. An unexpected dust storm engulfed the formation and a second helicopter turned around with a broken navigation system.

On landing at Desert One, a third helicopter had a bad leak in its hydraulic system. With fewer than the requisite six helicopters left, mission commander Colonel Charles Beckwith of the elite "Blue Light" counterterrorism unit recommended the mission be aborted and the aircraft return to base. President Carter agreed.

A few minutes later, one of the helicopters rose fifteen or twenty feet off the ground to start the flight home. It was just a little too low and that slight miscalculation sent it crashing into a C-130 cargo plane on the ground, slicing a deep gash just behind the cockpit. The commandos in the C-130s passenger cabin pulled an injured crew member from the wreck and ran out the rear door as both plane and helicopter burst into flames. The entangled wreckage burned, killing eight
soldiers. Five other men were badly burned.

Quickly abandoning the site on the remaining five C-130 transport planes, the survivors left behind the other five helicopters, and many secret documents which Iran’s army would recover the next day.

The Iranians, who had detected none of these activities, were able to reach the scene so quickly and recovered so much intact because the over-earnest Carter, eager to take personal blame, broke the cardinal rule of never acknowledging covert operations and announced the failure on television. This broadcast was made before the equipment left behind at Desert One could be destroyed or American agents in Tehran were safely away.

Tehran claimed the U.S. rescue mission was blatant aggression against a country which had done nothing to deserve it. Nothing, that is, except hold 53 Americans hostage. The documents which the Iranians recovered at Desert One apparently showed that some of their air force commanders had helped the rescue mission by overlooking its presence. Iranian planes mysteriously bombed the site while Iranian soldiers were searching it, killing one of them and injuring two others, probably in an attempt to destroy this evidence. Several high-ranking Iranian air force officers were executed shortly thereafter.

The darkness and confusion of that grim, cool night when the rescue mission failed symbolized the shame congealing around a seemingly incompetent U.S. political and military establishment from 15 years of debacle abroad and at home. Vietnam had brought down Lyndon Johnson; Watergate had wrecked Richard Nixon; the sight of Americans being held hostage in Iran helped derail Carter. It was a low point in U.S. history.

Vietnam, where a bloated U.S. military was defeated despite all its falsely optimistic reports, had already divided America and damaged its international prestige. Over 50,000 Americans died there for no good result; Americans had fled Saigon in humiliating disorder as the victorious Communist armies entered the city in 1975. At home, John and Robert Kennedy and
Martin Luther King had been assassinated in the 1960s; President Richard Nixon, caught in a welter of crimes and misdemeanors, resigned in disgrace in 1974.

Carter had been elected in 1976 as a supposed antidote to this mess. His moralism, uncertainty and diffidence seemed virtues compared to his predecessors' arrogance of power. But then Iran's revolution displayed bound and gagged U.S. diplomats as booty in a calculated spit in America's face. Carter's last hope of vindication went crashing with that helicopter in the Iranian desert.

Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon complained that the rescue attempt "was fraught with elements of the gamble. The risks were far greater than any possibility of success." Congressman Jim Wright of Texas called the failure, "an almost unbelievable...chain of bad luck." Yet this failure exposed incompetence at the highest levels. The key problem was the breakdown of three helicopters which--the official military inquiry determined--had been poorly chosen and maintained. Helicopters and pilots so unsuited for such a long flight had been included for bureaucratic reasons because the U.S. Navy demanded a share in the operation.

As if this were not enough, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance resigned from office over the rescue attempt because he could not morally countenance a resort to violence, although the United States had exhausted every peaceful procedure in five months of fruitless negotiations. Having previously told European allies that the United States would not use force, Vance did not want even the appearance of having misled them.

All these aspects of the affair raised chilling questions: Was it really immoral for the United States to employ minimal force to free its diplomats kidnapped and tortured for many months? What could the United States do about anything, anywhere in the world? Was America's only legitimate use for its own strength to apologize for having it and refrain from using it?

If the United States could not free its own diplomats held hostage, it could hardly protect Gulf monarchs. For the United States, inaction was not safe but extremely costly since such
restraint was interpreted by Iran and Iraq in 1980--and by Iraq in 1990--as weakness to be exploited by aggression.

The knowledge that the United States would not interfere was a major factor encouraging Saddam to attack Iran. On the one hand, he saw that country as weak. Having gone through so much disorder and purged its own army, Iran might crumble before an Iraqi invasion. Iranian political exiles who opposed Khomeini whispered to Saddam that the Iranian regime was on its last legs. "If the door of a derelict house is kicked in," an Iraqi officer said, "the house will collapse." And since Tehran had expelled its American protector and so totally isolated itself, Saddam reasoned, it could expect no help from anyone else.

On the other hand, Saddam was also prompted to attack Iran because Khomeini was staking his own claim--in the name of Shia fundamentalism--to the Gulf and Iraq. Saddam had no intention of letting Iran rule the Gulf since he saw that as his own destiny. Most immediately, Saddam was motivated to strike at Iran because Khomeini's call for Islamic revolt threatened his own survival. Tehran was doing its best to foment an Iraqi Shia uprising, sponsoring an assassination attempt on Iraq's foreign minister and other terrorist acts. Iraq's already restive Shia majority might respond by rebelling against the ruling Sunni minority.

Even before Iran's revolution, Iraqi Shias had been organizing revolutionary cells. Shia underground groups ambushed government officials and bombed offices. Demonstrations broke out in the Shia holy cities at the annual processions marking Hussein's martyrdom 1200 years earlier by the Sunni ruler Yazid, to whom Iranian propaganda was comparing Saddam. The crowds chanted, "Saddam, remove your hand! The people of Iraq do not want you!" A popular young Shia cleric, Baqr al-Sadr, was a prime candidate to be Iraq's Khomeini. The regime struck back with ferocious repression. About 600 clerics and activists were shot, including al-Sadr and his sister. Iraq also deported over 200,000 ethnic Persians who might conceivably be supportive of Iran.

While repressing the Shia opposition, Saddam also wooed Iraq's Shias by promoting more
of them to top posts in the government, party, and army. They were, he reminded them in speech after speech, Iraqis by citizenship and Arabs by ethnicity. "God destined the Arabs to play a vanguard role in Islam," he ingeniously explained, so "any contradiction between a revolution which calls itself Islamic and the Arab revolution means that the revolution is not Islamic." Tehran's real inspiration was Zionism, "Persianism," and the reactionary concepts of "the Khomeini gang."

Saddam also went on the offensive with his own ethnic subversion, encouraging rebellions among Iran's Kurdish and Arab minorities. Tensions rose steadily and there were artillery duels along the frontier during the summer of 1980.

The war's immediate cause was a border dispute over a small but strategic area. Much of the Iran-Iraq border was formed by the Shatt al-Arab river. While most boundaries run along a river's midpoint, Iraq's then-ally Great Britain helped it gain the whole waterway in a 1937 treaty with Iran. This situation placed Iran in a tenuous strategic position since Iraq controlled the approaches to its main oil port, Abadan. In 1975, when Iraq was fighting a strong, Iran-backed Kurdish revolt, Saddam made a deal with the Shah to split the river. Now that the balance of forces was again in his favor, Saddam renounced the 1975 treaty and demanded the whole waterway.

On September 22, 1980, Saddam ordered his army to march into Iran, expecting a quick, easy victory to make him master of the Gulf and Arab world. Instead it was the start of a long, bloody war which would set back his ambitions by a decade.

The battle would seesaw for eight years, reducing the two prosperous states to near-bankruptcy. The result was heaps of bodies, hundreds of thousands of refugees, the black smoke of burning oil, tons of noxious rhetoric, and undreamed of political tests for the United States. For the first time since World War Two, missiles were fired at cities. Iraqi chemical weapons brought horrifying deaths to thousands of civilians and soldiers.

The conflict would be a struggle for supremacy and survival between two dictators
indifferent to casualties, and two systems--radical Arab nationalism and revolutionary Islamic fundamentalism--each determined to destroy the other. In the end, no one would gain anything from all the suffering and sacrifice of this thoroughly unnecessary conflagration.

During its early years, though, the war was certainly popular on both sides. "I may have the power to stop Iraqi citizens from demonstrating against Saddam Hussein in Baghdad," commented Saddam, "but I do not have the power to make these same citizens fight" so bravely inside Iran.\textsuperscript{ix}

Iraqis did not want their country to be conquered by Khomeini. Saddam's efforts with Iraq's Shia Moslems largely succeeded in keeping them in line, either from fear or because they saw themselves as Arabs. Having made more progress in Iraq than in practically any Arab country, the urban middle class women did not want to don the full-length black cloaks forced on their counterparts in Tehran. The Baghdad statue of the great medieval poet Abu Nuwas--himself of Persian descent--holding aloft a wine cup displayed another popular Iraqi custom opposed by Iranian fundamentalists, who banned all alcohol.

Although the war intensified patriotism among most Iraqis, Saddam took no one's loyalty for granted. As always, he used material incentives as well as fear to control Iraq's people. Families who lost sons were given cars, and the regime imported more and better food than Iraqis had enjoyed in peacetime.

One of the main growth items in Iraq was posters of Saddam. His picture was everywhere, showing him dressed in battle fatigues and commando beret with a pistol holstered on his hip, or depicting him as a peasant, Kurd, or heir to ancient Babylon's glories. This campaign arose from Saddam's megalomania and his toadies' ingenuity at finding new ways to glorify him--also made sense. Iraqis, like Iranians, wanted a strong leader whose wisdom and ruthlessness would lead them to victory.

Iran had its own propaganda assets. Tehran played its Moslem card, pointing out that Michel Aflaq, the founder of Iraq's ruling party, was a Christian, as was Foreign Minister Tariq
Aziz. Iran's radio referred to the former as "the Jew and criminal Begin's ally," and the latter as "Hanna" Aziz, using a typically Christian first name. "Revolution by the Arabs," declared Iran's Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi, "can never triumph unless it is through Islam." In the eyes of Islam, said Ayatollah Hussein Montazeri, Khomeini's designated successor, all Moslems should live under a single government.

This plan for forcible unification also applied to the Gulf Arab monarchs. "Brothers in struggle!" Radio Tehran told Arab listeners, "Vengeance against the enemies of Islam, unbelievers, hypocrites, and tyrants may be delayed. However, God gives respite but does not forget!" As for the Saudi and Kuwaiti rulers, "It is necessary to rob them of their wealth by all available means; the simplest is to burgle them and take by force their money and jewelry." Western influence must be thrown out and every Arab regime destroyed to establish "the government of Islam on its ruins."

All the small, oil-rich Gulf Arab states trembled at such words. The Saudis and Kuwaitis knew, of course, that Iraq was their first line of defense against Khomeini. Still, to be defended by Iraq was like having a hungry lion as a bodyguard: Saddam had to be constantly fed lest he devour his clients. The Gulf monarchies nourished Iraq by secretly shipping its goods through their ports and donating around $30 billion to its war effort. In addition, the Saudis and Kuwaitis sold a million barrels of their own oil each day and gave Iraq the profit.

Saddam insisted he was doing them a favor by accepting their help. "The glory of the Arabs," he said, "stems from the glory of Iraq." In short, what was good for Iraq was good for the Arabs. To which one might have added, "Or else!"

Officially the Gulf monarchies insisted on defending themselves. Their efforts to do so, however, were feeble. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, and Oman formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981 and put a token unified force in Saudi Arabia. This was little more than a joke. They were banking on Iraq to stop Iran's armies. And if
that did not work—a premise that Iran's battlefield successes made questionable—only the United States could save them.

Victory for either side in the war scared them since the winner would claim the small states as prizes. Who would protect them if Iraq collapsed and who could preserve them if Saddam won? They would only call on America in their real hour of need—since a U.S. military presence would upset Iran, Iraq, and domestic opinion—but they would not hesitate to do so if the alternative was suicide or surrender.

Like the Gulf countries, the war faced the United States, too, with a difficult dilemma which Washington also resolved in favor of backing Iraq. The United States did not want Iran to win a victory letting Khomeini control the globe's main oilfields. But while it was imperative to keep Iran from destabilizing the Gulf Arab states, the United States also did not want to push it into the Soviet camp. This paradox was handled by the U.S. government's ostensible neutrality.

President Jimmy Carter warned in 1981 that the United States would fight any "outside force" trying to control the Gulf "by any means necessary, including military force." This "Carter Doctrine" was ostensibly aimed to deter a Soviet invasion of Iran while also putting Khomeini on notice that the United States would, if necessary, defend the Arab monarchies against him. To back up this warning, the United States set up a Rapid Deployment Force to move troops quickly to the Gulf and fight there if necessary. The U.S. government also sold huge amounts of arms to Saudi Arabia. Almost unnoticed in the rush of events, it had entered into an unofficial defensive alliance with the Gulf monarchs.

Like the U.S.-USSR alliance against Hitler in World War Two, The U.S. association with Iraq was wrought by necessity. As in the pact with Stalin, though, Americans quickly forgot their temporary friend's true nature. The Wall Street Journal insisted in 1981 that Saddam's "rhetoric shouldn't obscure the fact that Iraq, probably more than any other Mideast nation except Israel, is embracing Western values and technology." It was becoming an advanced secular society, "with a
car in every garage, a television set in every living room, universal education, and chic French fashions for emancipated Iraqi women. Such a society should eventually become congenial to the West.\textsuperscript{xiii}

Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perl took a more skeptical and ultimately accurate view, "It is foolish to think that a pro-Marxist, pro-Soviet Ba'thist regime, the leader of Arab radicalism and rejectionism, is about to become an American ally or even a tacit partner without exacting an enormous price." Especially dangerous, he warned, was encouraging Iraq's "imperial ambitions" to dominate the Gulf.\textsuperscript{xiv}

Nonetheless, Secretary of State Alexander Haig claimed Iraq showed, "a greater sense of concern about the behavior of Soviet imperialism in the Middle Eastern area" and sent a delegation to Baghdad in April 1981 to test the waters for improving relations. Trade increased and the U.S. government cleared the sale of International Harvester dump trucks and five Boeing transport planes. The number of Iraqi students in America tripled to 2500. Among the evidence ignored by the United States was Iraq's drive for nuclear weapons and threats against Israel. France had helped Iraq build reactors and provided a three years' supply of uranium sufficient for three bombs; Italy was reportedly ready to train Iraqis to handle radioactive substances which could be used to make plutonium. In August 1980, Saddam urged the Arabs to destroy Tel Aviv, Israel's largest city, with bombs as soon as possible. Saddam also said he would use nuclear weapons against it when they were available.\textsuperscript{xv}

Israel took his threat seriously. On June 7, 1981, just as the reactors near Baghdad were about to begin operation, Israel destroyed them in a daring bombing raid with its planes flying low, fast, and undetected across Saudi territory. Although Iraq--as Saddam liked to remind everyone--was in a state of war with Israel, the raid was widely criticized. President Reagan condemned Israel's attack, though noting its "reason for concern in view of the past history of Iraq." Vice-President George Bush was more categorical in castigating Jerusalem's action as "not
in keeping with international standards," urged suspending U.S. aid to Israel, and endorsed a UN resolution against it.

Yet while U.S. leaders assumed the Arab world wanted them to condemn Israel, the Arabs themselves did nothing in retaliation, rejecting Saddam's request to use the "oil weapon" against the United States and withdraw funds from U.S. banks. They were not especially enthusiastic about Iraq having nuclear weapons which might some day be used to threaten or attack them. And if Israel had not destroyed the installation, Baghdad might have had a bomb in time to use against Iran or, certainly, to intimidate out of existence any opposition to its occupation of Kuwait.\textsuperscript{xvi}

At first, even the Iran-Iraq war did not break the ice between Baghdad and Washington. Iraq feared that once the hostage crisis was over the old U.S.-Iran alliance would be restored. But when Washington and Tehran remained at odds even after the return of the 52 remaining hostages in January 1981, Baghdad saw its own opportunity. Assisted by Saudi and Kuwaiti lobbying, Iraq launched a multi-media campaign to court the United States.

During the first months of fighting, though, Iran seemed closer to collapse than to triumph. With the advantage of surprise, Iraq advanced against a disorganized defense and captured a large slice of Iranian land. Appearances were, however, deceptive. Baghdad had no strategic plan to force Tehran's surrender. Trained in clumsy Soviet steamroller tactics, the Iraqis advanced slowly. There were no Iraqi pincer moves to cut off and encircle Iranian units, no daring raids to seize crossroads in the enemy's rear and block reinforcements.

Saddam's ignorance of military affairs handicapped Iraq. His commanders were inflexible, afraid to take the initiative without the dictator's direct orders. Politics also imposed restrictions: the army's Shia units were not considered completely reliable and Saddam wanted to keep casualties low lest heavy losses or the depletion of loyal Sunni units endanger the regime. Thus, Iraq fumbled its advantage and the advance faltered, giving the Iranians time to regroup and dig in.

Rather than begging for peace, Iran rallied in a war of national defense. Younger, more
competent U.S.-trained officers had replaced the Shah's inept favorites. Determined volunteers from the new Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, eager to be martyrs, rushed forward in human wave attacks. Iran encouraged its warriors to seek martyrdom. "The path of jihad is the path to heaven," said Radio Tehran. Afraid to retreat lest Saddam execute them, tens of thousands of Iraqi troops stayed in place to be surrounded and captured by Iran. Baghdad's armies were pushed back toward the border.\textsuperscript{xvii}

Iran also gradually gained the economic and strategic advantage over its enemy. By releasing the U.S. hostages, Iran recovered $8.5 billion of its financial assets previously frozen by the United States.\textsuperscript{xviii} It was also able to continue shipping oil through the Gulf while its navy blockaded Iraq's short coastline and cut off Baghdad's petroleum exports. Iran closed another major Iraqi export route by bribing Syria to close a pipeline that ran across its territory to the Mediterranean. Thus, Iran was able to sell abroad over two million barrels of oil a day while holding the exports of money-starved Iraq to about one-third that level.

On July 14, 1982, Iranian troops had so reversed the initial phase of the war that they advanced across the border into Iraq. The possibility that Iran might seize Baghdad gave many Arabs a nightmare. If Khomeini won the war, his troops might turn toward Jordan or Saudi Arabia. The very fact of a fundamentalist triumph could set off rebellions in a half-dozen countries. With Israel's army simultaneously invading Lebanon and besieging Beirut at the time, panic increased. Arab headlines screamed, "Khomeini and Zionism are Two Bayonets in Conflict with Arab Nationalism."\textsuperscript{xxix}

Iran's leaders now faced a major decision. Having driven Iraqi troops off their own soil, should they end the war or fight on to topple the Baghdad government? Khomeini did not hesitate to choose total victory over Iraq as his goal, thinking it only a matter of time until Iraq collapsed from bankruptcy or Iran's army broke through to Baghdad. Success would be the ultimate proof of the Islamic system's superiority and Khomeini believed that Saddam's fall would make the Gulf
states erupt in revolution like a row of volcanoes.

While Khomeini believed victory to be inevitable, his lieutenants hoped it was possible. Each military advance or claimed triumph in battle encouraged them. Meanwhile, the war helped maintain Iran's internal unity and kept unemployable youths and the army busy. Any Iranian politician who urged peace was branded a traitor, as happened to President Abol Hassan Bani Sadr, who had fled to exile in Paris in 1981. When Moscow and Iran's Communist party criticized the continuation of the war in 1982 as a distraction from fighting the United States and Israel. Iran's government banned the party and arrested its leaders. To Soviet statements that the war was "mindless," Iran angrily replied that this better described Soviet aggression in Afghanistan.

The battlefront was now a 300-mile-long line from the Zagros mountain's foothills down to the Gulf. In the mountainous north, Iran aided insurgent Iraqi Kurds while Iraq helped rebellious Iranian Kurds. Most of the fighting took place in the swampy center and south, where trench warfare came to resemble the futile, endless, and bloody campaigns of World War One. Indeed, Iraq's survival did hang by a thread. Unless it held the vital road connecting Baghdad and Basra, just west of the front line, Iran would cut the country in two and be only a few miles away from these two main cities. Iran's leaders predicted the next campaign would be the "final offensive."

Still, Iraq did not crumble. Its economy and morale survived thanks to Western credits, Saudi-Kuwaiti aid, and two oil pipelines bypassing the Iran-patrolled Gulf by traversing Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Iranian human wave assaults that had worked so well against demoralized Iraqi forces on Iran's territory were now stopped with heavy losses by well-entrenched Iraqi forces defending their own soil. The offensives of October-November 1982, February and November 1983, and February 1984 all failed miserably.

The Gulf monarchies, however, were not persuaded that the danger was over. As the tide had turned in Iran's favor by 1982, the Kuwaitis, who could literally hear the sounds of battle across the border, became increasingly nervous. They tried to buy peace by offering to pay Iran
huge reparations, a proposal which made Iraq very nervous. Tehran refused, demanding that Kuwait pressure Saddam to resign. Iran's prime minister accused the Gulf monarchies of being collaborators with America and sneered, "Do you not realize that you are facing a revolution that has roots in all countries, and that the populations of your countries are less than that of Tehran alone?"

Thus, just as Iraq hoped, Iran's radicalism and aggressiveness, the endless war, and the fear of a wider Gulf conflagration were pushing together a loose alignment of neutrals--the United States, Gulf Arab monarchies, and the USSR--all wanting to prevent an Iranian victory and a consequent spread of Islamic fundamentalism. The threat forced this trio to cooperate among themselves for the first time ever and to help Iraq. The United States, the only country able to break the deadlocked war, was about to become the protector of last resort for Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and even for Iran itself.


iii. Throughout this book, the phrase Gulf Arab monarchies will be used to refer collectively to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman.

iv. All these issues are described in more detail in Barry Rubin, Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran, (NY, 1980).

v. Quotations are from Khomeini’s last testament.


xi. Ibid., p. 194.


xviii. $3 billion went directly to Iran, $1.4 billion was returned after being held a few additional months to ensure U.S. bank loans were repaid, and $4 billion was eventually remitted after arbitration of other claims. Iran used an additional $3.7 billion of assets to pay off U.S. bank loans. All this money, of course, belonged to Iran in the first place. Tehran was paid no ransom.


CHAPTER FIVE
IRAQ's VICTORY, 1985-1988

"Why are you digging a hole?" Hojja's neighbors asked him.
"To bury all the dirt in that pile."
"But what will you do with the dirt from the new hole?"
"I can't deal with all the details!"

--Middle East folktale

In 1985, the Iran-Iraq war was still raging after five years of bloody fighting. Thousands of men were dying in the front-line's mountains, sun-baked plains, and marshes to gain a few yards of territory at best. With the battle deadlocked, Baghdad and Tehran desperately sought another road to victory. They both saw the United States as the key to success.

This was a remarkable situation. The world's two most radical, anti-American states were competing in auctioning their souls to the devil to get America on their side. Iran secretly negotiated with America for arms; Iraq escalated attacks on Iran's tankers and oil facilities to force U.S. diplomatic intercession to end the war and protect neutral oil shipping. The Kuwaitis and Saudis, too, would seek U.S. protection, disregarding their own years of complaints against its intervention in the area. Anti-American, Arab nationalist, and Islamic rhetoric was all meaningless. Everyone wanted to win the strongest superpower's favor.

In its earlier days, the war had made Khomeini's regime more popular as the masses rushed to defend the revolution and the motherland. But by 1985 Iran was in serious trouble. Casualty lists grew ever longer; the promised victory was nowhere in sight. Iraqi planes made psychologically devastating attacks on Iran's cities and many people fled Tehran. Even strict laws and vigilant patrols could not stop draft-dodging. The army command and Khomeini's aides began to realize the fight was hopeless but could do nothing against the ayatollah's stubborn insistence on destroying Saddam.
Iran still hoped that Iraq would collapse or its own forces break through. But Saddam continued to survive—as he had done so many times before—by resourceful innovation. Baghdad's defense lines held and it bought all the modern arms it wanted. The unending war seemed to be a pyre consuming Iran and Iraq whose fire might easily spread outward.

With the war deadlocked in the field, Baghdad had counterattacked in 1984 by striking against Iran's economy. Saddam had purchased French-built Super-Etandard fighter-bombers and Exocet anti-ship missiles to attack Iran's tankers and the main oil terminal at Kharg island. Baghdad hoped that spreading the fighting into the Gulf would force the West to end the war or even to fight Iran in order to protect the shipping lanes. By not objecting to these sales, the United States became Iraq's accomplice in expanding the war.

As a result of this escalation, Iran's economy was in bad shape. Low oil prices, world over-production, and Iraqi attacks on tankers reduced its income from $23 billion in 1983 to only $6 billion for 1986, by which time Iran could sustain its spending levels for only two more years. There was inflation, unemployment, shortages, and signs of growing domestic unrest. Khomeini himself admitted that Iran must escape its isolation. When the huge crowd at a March 1985 Persian new year rally chanted, "War! war until victory!" Khomeini replied with a shocking fatalism, "Victory and defeat lose all meaning because service to God and obedience to his orders is what matters."

Khomeini fell into Saddam's trap of the tanker war by retaliating in kind. Iranian speedboats shot at tankers carrying Kuwaiti and Saudi oil or stopped freighters thought to be carrying goods to Iraq. The world oil glut kept the international energy market from disruption; the fact that there were more ships than cargoes encouraged owners to continue risking the Gulf route. But this new phase of the war unnerved Kuwait and Saudi Arabia while drawing Western attention to the danger this fighting posed for an oil-dependent world economy.

As President Reagan began his second term in January 1985, the war and its dangers were
much on his advisers’ minds. At a time when Tehran was generally thought to be winning the war, they rightly expected it might lose. They also worried, unnecessarily, that the Soviets might take over Iran. True, Iran’s long border with the USSR and the presence of 100,000 invading Soviet troops in neighboring Afghanistan were geopolitical realities. But the Soviet troops were too badly bogged down there to consider attacking Iran, whose rugged terrain and hostile population made it a much tougher target. The Soviet regime was also increasingly preoccupied by the internal problems which would bring its own collapse a few years later. Further, any Soviet move into Iran could bring a military confrontation with the United States. Nonetheless, many high U.S. officials could not be shaken from a belief that the Soviets were about to gain power in Iran.

At the same time, the White House was frustrated and humiliated by its inability to free American hostages in Lebanon held by Iran-backed terrorists. Reagan made resolving this emotional issue--kept in the public's mind by frequent media interviews with grieving relatives--into a personal crusade.

Up to that point, the Administration had taken a consistent position on the war: neutral in theory, tilting toward Iraq in practice. By not openly taking sides, it avoided entanglement in the fighting or pushing Iran into an alliance with Moscow. Yet by tilting toward Iraq, Washington ensured Iran would not win a victory which might transform the Gulf into an anti-American inferno of radical fundamentalism.

The United States and Iraq steadily grew closer together in the first half of the 1980s. In 1982, Iraq expelled its terrorist protege, Abu Nidal, whose anti-PLO Palestinian group had staged many attacks on civilians. His colleagues continued to operate from Baghdad but the State Department dropped Iraq from the list of states sponsoring terrorism and allowed it to buy U.S. civilian planes.

The next year, 1983, U.S. envoy Donald Rumsfeld visited Baghdad. The Reagan Administration granted Iraq huge credits to buy grain and secretly gave Iraq satellite photographs
of Iran's military deployments. Meanwhile, the United States launched Operation Staunch to block arms sales to Iran while encouraging allies to sell weapons to Iraq. The United States and Iraq restored full diplomatic relations in 1984. In many ways Iraq was treated as a U.S. ally and it was never censured for having invaded Iran or starting the tanker war.ii

Given this U.S.-Iraq rapprochement and the fact that Islamic Iran and America already thought each other to be the world's most evil country, a U.S.-Iran rapprochement seemed about the least likely possible event in the mid-1980s, as ridiculous a notion as the Berlin Wall coming down or the USSR ceasing to be Communist. Iran's U.N. Ambassador Said Rajai Khorasani wittily explained that Iran's relations with the United States were exactly what Iranians wanted--none whatsoever--and hoped that "the situation will remain the same."

U.S. intelligence also assumed that this pattern would not soon change. A CIA-State Department report in late 1984 argued that Iran's virulent anti-American and anti-Soviet policy would continue as long as Khomeini lived. Some officials in the National Security Council (NSC) were more worried about Soviet influence. George Cave, a retired CIA official, met regularly with Iranian emigres who purveyed wild tales of Khomeini's imminent fall and the alleged Communist leanings of Iran's clerical leaders. Cave passed these claims on to credulous White House officials.

Both Israel and Gulf Arab states, each for its own reasons, hoped Washington could persuade Iran to be more moderate. Israel sought to weaken Iraq--an enemy still at war with the Jewish state, sponsoring terrorism and daily threatening its extinction--and rebuild its alliance with Tehran which had flourished under the Shah. To keep communications open and secure the emigration of Iranian Jews, Israel had sporadically sold a small amount of military equipment to the Islamic regime. Obviously, Iran was not about to reestablish relations with Israel, but there were hopes of a behind-the-scenes understanding.

The Saudis and Kuwaitis wanted Iran to end a war which was being fought on their borders, attacked tankers shipping their oil, and carried out terrorism on their territory. Conscious
of the many threats around them, the Saudis and Kuwaitis kept almost $200 billion in assets abroad and imported huge amounts of arms. Their oil income had declined from almost $150 billion in 1981 to only $45 billion in 1985. To circumvent the tumultuous Gulf, the Saudis had built a pipeline to the Red Sea.

In the spring of 1985 there seemed a chance for change. Manouchir Ghorbanifar, an Iranian broker who sold everything from carpets to guns to political access, approached Israel claiming to represent Iranian moderates who wanted to reestablish good relations with the West. Although the Israelis did not know it at the time, he was acting on behalf of the Rafsanjani faction which wanted U.S. help to win control over Iran.

This was one of three political blocs in Iran--the other two were led by Ayatollah Hussein Montazeri, Khomeini's designated successor but a weak leader, and President Ali Khamenehi--that were competing for power out of ambition, not ideological motives. Ghorbanifar's mission was to portray Rafsanjani's faction to the Americans as moderate and to paint its rival Montazari group as pro-Moscow extremists. Tehran blamed the United States for Iraq's ability to continue fighting so effectively. Yet if America was so powerful, it was all the more urgent for Iran's leaders to reduce U.S. hostility.

It is unclear how much, if anything, Khomeini knew about his followers' dealings with the Americans. Given his great age and lack of involvement in day-to-day affairs, however, the factional battle had already raged out of Khomeini's control and the combatants largely ignored his repeated calls to stop it.

The Americans dealing with Ghorbanifar never fully understood the Iranian politics behind his approach. They did, however, appreciate that this was a significant opportunity if Ghorbanifar genuinely represented someone in Tehran. It meant that the Islamic Republic of Iran which had kidnapped U.S. diplomats and daily denounced the United States as the "Great Satan" was now talking about detente.
The first task for the Israelis and Americans was to verify Ghorbanifar's credentials. He was a questionable character who once reportedly worked for SAVAK, the Shah's secret police and later became a double agent involved in conspiracies which were complex even by Iranian standards. Sometimes he acted for the Khomeini regime and at other times helped its enemies. Apparently, he supplied arms for a plot to kill Khomeini, then betrayed it to Iran's authorities, who executed those involved.

To prove that this time he was on the level, Ghorbanifar provided in 1985 a detailed, credible account of the captivity of William Buckley, the CIA station chief in Beirut kidnapped by pro-Iranian terrorists and the hostage the U.S. government most wanted back. Unbeknownst to Washington, he had already died from torture. Ghorbanifar's information was forwarded to National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane. The Americans approved Israel's dealing with Ghorbanifar.

Next, Ghorbanifar worked with Adnan Kashoggi, the controversial billionaire and Saudi agent, to prepare a 35-page memo in July 1985 analyzing Iran's inner workings for the U.S. government. This report gave the NSC a rationale for bypassing the CIA, the agency usually charged with covert operations. The argument was ironic given what would happen later: "None of the Iranians whose help we need," it said, "would consent to work with the CIA [because they] don't want to wake up one morning to read their names in the New York Times."

Labelled "strictly confidential, for your eyes only," the Ghorbanifar-Khashoggi paper described Rafsanjani's faction as pro-Western moderates, Montazeri's faction as pro-Soviet leftists, and Khamenehi's faction as neutral. Ghorbanifar asked the Americans to help the moderates win and end "Iran's destructive capacity."

This characterization of Montazeri was quite false. He was more conservative than radical, favoring a free-enterprise economy and not being especially militant in urging the spreading of revolution abroad. He was certainly not pro-Soviet. The real issue was that Khomeini had chosen
Montazeri to replace him when he died and thus, for Rafsanjani, Montazeri was the man to beat. By posing as a moderate fighting Soviet puppets, Rafsanjani was playing the old Iranian game--despite all Khomeini's teachings--of persuading foreigners to put him into power.

Developments in Iran made U.S. officials more willing to believe the situation there was ripe for change. In March 1985 Iran had lost its last real chance for victory against Saddam as still another massive offensive bogged down in south Iraq's swamps. Iran's dead there, suffocated by Iraqi poison gas, lay heaped in no-man's-land. Baghdad had made good on its boast to "turn the Huwaiza Marshes into a floating graveyard."

Iraq also carried the war into the heart of Iran. At a nationally broadcast Friday prayer meeting in Tehran University, a man detonated a bomb strapped to his waist, killing himself and five others. "We will retaliate for this savage act with the utmost strength and power," asserted President Khamenehi a few minutes later, "Every punch will be answered by a harder punch." But Iraq was punching hardest. Its missile attacks and air raids on 24 Iranian towns left 700 dead and 1200 wounded. Between March 6 and 19, Iraqi planes bombed Tehran seven times. Hundreds of thousands fled to the mountains north of the city. In poor south Tehran, hitherto a regime stronghold, demoralized slum-dwellers rioted for two days in mid-April. Between late May and mid-June, there were a dozen more air attacks on Iran's capital.

On July 7, Ghorbanifar hosted a meeting at a hotel in Hamburg, Germany, dramatically introducing the Americans to a genuine Iranian leader, Ayatollah Hasan Karoubi, a close associate of Rafsanjani and friend of Khomeini's son. Karoubi said he was representing Iranian moderates who wanted to defeat the "pro-terrorist, pro-Soviet" forces in power. Iranians knew that the easiest way to persuade America was manipulate its fear of Soviet expansion. Unless the United States helped "restore Iran to the West," Karoubi claimed, it would blow up in civil war and "in a few months--two years at the most--it will turn into a satellite of Communist Russia."

A week later, Karoubi sent a letter to the U.S. government from Qom, Khomeini's
headquarters, with "Top Secret, please destroy after reading," written across the top. It listed dozens of groups, politicians, military commanders, and officials--a widely disparate collection of moderates and militants--allegedly ready to support a pro-U.S., moderate line. Karoubi asserted that an Iranian leader would publicly confirm his offer of conciliation with the West. As promised, a few days later Rafsanjani stated that Iran would be willing to renew diplomatic relations with the United States if America "took the initiative and redressed its past wrongs to Iran."vii

How could the United States do this? Tehran was uninterested in a U.S. apology for supporting the Shah or a change in U.S. policy toward Israel. In the best realpolitik fashion, Iran's leaders were quite willing to go against their own ideology and public statements to obtain weapons through Israel.

Despite Khomeini's verbal thunderbolts, those officials running Iran's government and war effort were neither fools nor fanatics. They had to worry about such mundane matters as paying the bills and counting the casualties. Since Iraq's defense lines depended on well-entrenched tanks acting as massed artillery, Iran needed anti-tank weapons to break through. Since Iraq's bombing attacks on Iran's cities sowed panic and opposition to the war and regime, Iran needed anti-aircraft missiles to shoot them down. Iran's president, seeing off 100,000 more troops to the front, admitted to them that human wave attacks could not defeat modern weapons. Obtaining missiles to blow up Iraqi tanks and Hawks to shoot down Iraqi planes was Iran's highest military priority, important enough to justify dealing with the Great Satan itself.

Equally, despite its own arms embargo against Iran, the U.S. government was ready to supply them--albeit indirectly at first--by letting Israel sell Iran over 500 U.S.-made anti-tank missiles from its own stockpiles. On the day this delivery was completed, September 14, 1985, an American hostage, Reverend Benjamin Weir, was freed in Lebanon.

Hoping to win release for all the hostages, Washington next approved a shipment of 120 HAWK antiaircraft missiles. Israel sent the first 18 in November but the Iranians returned them
because they were not the latest model. On October 27, Ghorbanifar, Karoubi, the Israelis, and a
U.S. representative Michael Ledeen, an NSC consultant unfamiliar with Iranian politics, met in
Geneva, Switzerland. The basic deal was that the United States would supply weapons in
exchange for the release of all the Americans held hostage in Lebanon.

With such sensitive issues at stake, the U.S. government put the negotiations and logistics
into the hands of top officials. The key operational man was Lt. Col. Oliver North, an energetic
NSC staffer with a strong personal commitment to the Nicaraguan Contras. North and his
superiors--first National Security Adviser McFarlane, later his replacement Admiral John
Poindexter--had little experience with diplomacy or the Middle East. Having been given the task
of freeing hostages, they acted in the best military tradition of doing anything necessary to fulfill
this designated mission. Instead, the situation required a longer-term, strategic view of U.S.-Iran
relations and Gulf politics. Ironically, the Reagan Administration had followed the example of the
much-criticized Carter by giving hostages such a high priority as to make U.S. policy hostage to
the terrorists and their sponsors.

The American negotiators also did not understand what they were doing in terms of Iranian
and Gulf politics. They subverted Kuwait's position by promising to press it to release 17 Shia
terrorists from an Iranian-backed group imprisoned for 1983 attacks there. North and retired
General Richard Secord, who handled the operation's logistics for a profit, took the remarkable
liberty of telling Iran that the United States would help remove Saddam, a commitment which
Reagan had never approved.

By the end of 1985, the Reagan Administration was split over whether to keep trying the
arms-for-hostages effort. Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar
Weinberger opposed further sales, preferring to maintain the pro-Iraq approach; Poindexter and
CIA Director William Casey supported the secret deal. Reagan agreed with the latter and gave
Poindexter control of the operation. In February 1986, the United States sold Iran 1000 U.S.-made
anti-tank missiles. Casey and North used some of the funds generated by these sales to buy arms for the Nicaraguan Contras despite Congress's ban on direct aid.

Although Iran had not kept its end of the deal by obtaining the release of all the American hostages in Lebanon, in May the Americans again offered Iran HAWK missile parts if all American hostages were set free. The retired National Security Advisor McFarlane returned to government service in order to travel to Tehran secretly on a Southern Air Transport plane. The Iranians seemed unprepared for his arrival and only low-level Iranian officials met him. His interlocutors in Tehran did not want their dealings to be so open. After four days in the Tehran Hilton, he left bitterly disappointed. Hopes were once more reignited on July 26 when a second American hostage, Reverend Lawrence Jenco, was released. Although McFarlane had warned Iran that no further arms would be forthcoming, the Administration again sent more HAWK parts.

The American connection was now such a poorly kept secret, and so financially and politically lucrative that Khamenehi's faction joined the negotiations in September. The Rafsanjani and Khamenehi factions were now aligned against Montazeri, and the United States found itself an instrument in this struggle.

Five hundred more anti-tank missiles were sold in late October 1986 and a third hostage, David Jacobsen, was released in November, just before all these arrangements were made public by Montazeri's supporters, published in a Lebanese magazine, and quickly reported in the American media. At that point, the whole enterprise collapsed.\textsuperscript{ix}

The prevalent interpretation of the U.S.-Iran affair was that Iran's leaders had conned Washington into providing arms by pretending to be moderates. The Reagan Administration was said to be so eager to free hostages, gain a diplomatic success, and finance the Contras that it was suckered into dealing with Iran.

The Iranians did exaggerate the Communist threat to Iran and their own moderation. Still, Rafsanjani's men were basically telling the truth. They did want to follow a more moderate policy
than Khomeini, escape from the ruinous war with Iraq, rebuild relations with the West, resolve the hostage issue, and downplay support for Islamic revolution or terrorism. Rafsanjani’s later behavior would show that he was not bluffing because he knew that detente with the West was necessary for his regime's survival.

Reagan once told McFarlane, "The key element is whether or not these people are indeed devoted to change and not just simply opportunists, self-serving radicals." This was a typically American misreading about the Middle East and one which the operation's critics would later repeat by ridiculing the idea that Iran's leaders were moderate. But this was beside the point. These politicians needed American help because they wanted power. Selling arms to free hostages was a mistake, using Iran's weakness to force it to change policy was not.

Alongside the politics of survival and factional maneuvering, the Iranians' third motive was personal greed. Rafsanjani’s men paid for the arms with funds they took from the Swiss bank accounts of Iran's state-owned oil company, then pocketed a sizeable percentage as commissions. To subsidize their Iranian collaborators, the United States and Israel agreed to inflate the weapons' prices for this purpose, which also meant more money for the American and Israeli arms merchants involved and for North to use to buy weapons for the Nicaraguan rebels.

When Iran paid $5.1 million for anti-tank missiles in 1985, $500,000 went to Ghorbanifar and $600,000 in $100 bills was passed in an attache case to Karoubi in Switzerland. On the Hawk deal, $6.7 million was to go to Ghorbanifar and the Iranian politicians. Iran's regime, Karoubi chortled at one secret meeting, "will be overthrown with its own money." An Israeli participant later commented, "This Iranian government is more corrupt than in the days of the Shah."

North was more naive about Gulf politics. The hostage issue, he wrote in a memo to Poindexter, was a necessary first step and arms sales a "confidence-building" measure to handle a "primitive, unsophisticated group who are extraordinarily distrustful of the West."

In fact, the fundamental American error was not to bargain with Iran but to bargain so
badly. Three times Iranian interlocutors pledged to deliver the hostages from captivity, three times the United States sent arms, and three times they were unable to fulfill the promise. Rafsanjani's faction was handicapped because it could not control the Lebanese terrorists, whose links were to more extremist circles in Iran's government.

Nonetheless, the Administration remained willing to try again, while the number of American hostages in Lebanon actually increased as more kidnappings took place. As had happened during Carter's earlier Iranian crisis, the more Washington played up the hostages' importance, the more Iran raised the price and the harder it became to win their freedom.

While Washington had Tehran over a barrel it acted as if the situation was reversed. Iran was in terrible shape, unable to obtain new arms or keep its economy going while stuck in an unwinnable war. America held all the cards: it could threaten to intervene against Iran, subvert the regime, or help selected politicians gain power. By emphasizing the hostage issue, America's weakest bargaining point, the Reagan White House put itself into the position of begging for their release.

The relatively small amounts of arms supplied by the United States and Israel had no effect on the war and were apparently never even used on the battlefield. The real impact in Tehran was political. Rafsanjani turned the whole intrigue to his advantage as he consolidated his mastery over Iranian domestic politics. When pro-Montazeri activists revealed his secret dealings with the Great Satan, Rafsanjani so maneuvered the situation as to make them seem to be the traitors. Some of Montazeri's supporters were arrested. By controlling access to Khomeini, Rafsanjani and his allies persuaded the ayatollah to change his mind about having Montazeri as his successor.

Ironically, the exposure of the U.S.-Iran tryst had far more negative fall-out in the United States than in the supposedly fanatically anti-American Islamic republic. The White House forced North and Poindexter to resign following disclosure of the financial diversions and the president's chief of staff Donald Regan quit a few weeks later. Critical investigations were made by a special
commission, a congressional committee, and an independent prosecutor. The public overwhelmingly condemned the Administration's inconstancy in breaking its own embargo on Iran and policy of not paying ransom for hostages. Constitutional objections were raised on the failure to inform Congress. Legal questions were raised about the misuse of U.S. funds and weapons, enrichment of private individuals, and destruction of official documents.

Yet many of the critics among the media and public also bore some responsibility for having made the hostage issue too high a priority. The strong reaction against the Iran affair reversed public opinion, turning it so decisively against making deals with kidnappers that when Saddam seized hostages in 1990, no one advocated concessions to gain their release.

Despite the greater embarrassment and controversy in the United States, the secret negotiations showed up Iran's weakness. Rafsanjani put the best face on things, claiming that Iran was "so powerful that [the Americans] come and beg...to arouse our sense of pity." But the Iranian leaders' eagerness to make deals with America showed that the revolution had failed to transform Iran's political culture and strategic circumstances.

Without admitting so openly, Tehran was retreating, accepting defeat in the war, reopening contacts with the West, and giving up serious efforts to spread revolution. Islam's triumph brought neither prosperity nor a new utopian order. Although Rafsanjani claimed that Khomeini had vanquished Iranians' fear that the superpowers "were demons who could destroy everything any time they roared," Rafsanjani's own behavior belied these words. By inventing such a fearsome, omnipotent America, Khomeini made the United States seem so frightfully powerful that Iranian politicians like Rafsanjani were more careful in trying to avoid its vengeance and win its favor.

Nor did the affair do the United States any lasting harm. The congressional investigation asserted that "the United States undermined its credibility with friends and allies, including moderate Arab states, by its public stance of opposing arms sales to Iran while undertaking such arms sales in secret." This assumption was wrong: there was no loss of U.S. credibility with
Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. After all, such secret maneuvering and preference for realpolitik over ideology was precisely the way they played the political game themselves.

In fact, the Gulf war's deadlock and escalation was making the Saudis and Kuwaitis more trusting and dependent on the United States than ever before. At the very moment in 1985 when Iran approached the United States for arms, Iraq was escalating the war to encourage U.S. intervention and Iran was avenging itself on Iraq's ally Kuwait. One morning in May 1985 as Kuwait's ruler was being driven to the al-Sif palace, a terrorist from the Iran-backed Islamic Jihad group drove a bomb-laden car into the motorcade, killing himself, two bodyguards and bystanders. The royal limousine sped directly to a hospital where the emir was treated for cuts and bruises from flying glass. Kuwait, the crown prince said, "will not give in to any threats or blackmail."xiv

There were many other acts of sabotage and terrorism in 1985 and 1986. Two Kuwaiti Shias were killed trying to plant bombs in a Kuwait City shopping center. The men had disappeared months earlier while fishing in the Gulf and claimed on returning, to have been prisoners of Iran's navy. Actually, they had been training as saboteurs. Iran mined Kuwait's offshore waters, fired missiles at oil installations, and stopped Kuwait-bound neutral ships it suspected of carrying war material for Iraq. Iran's surrogate terrorists attacked two Kuwaiti oil refineries. Iran's last advance, in February 1986, resulted in its seizing Iraq's Faw peninsula on the border, a few miles from Kuwait City.xv

The Kuwaitis were understandably frightened of becoming the war's main battlefield. As Iran and Iraq had already done, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait dealt with this dangerous situation by trying to arrange U.S. intervention on their side.

In November 1986, the very moment the U.S.-Iran arms deal came to light, Kuwait began a quest to gain U.S. protection for its tankers in the Gulf by trying—as Iran had done—to frighten America by threatening to turn to Moscow for help. Even the Kuwaitis were bemused by how eagerly and totally the United States swallowed their bait: a Foreign Ministry official attributed
America's dramatic response to a "Hollywood mentality." Soviet tankers, he said, "have been quietly sailing in the Gulf for some time. So what has changed?"

What had changed was Kuwait's urgent desire to reregister its ships as American, to run the stars-and-stripes up the flagpoles so that U.S. Navy convoys would guard them. Once that happened, Kuwaiti leaders explained, protecting the tankers would be a U.S. problem for which Kuwait had no responsibility. After all, Kuwait's foreign minister explained, that was why Kuwaiti-owned subsidiaries paid taxes in the United States.

The Reagan Administration argued that America must rush in to prove itself the guarantor of Gulf security. If the United States did not act, said National Security Adviser Frank Carlucci, its allies would have to choose between "giving in to Iranian intimidation or accepting Soviet offers of protection, and not just for shipping." Secretary of State Shultz spoke in apocalyptic terms: "The worst thing that can happen to the United States is to be sort of pushed out of the Persian Gulf [and] find the Soviet Union astride the supplies of oil to the free world." President Reagan said, "In a word, if we don't do the job, the Soviets will."

The Administration had a hard time convincing Congress--especially the Democrats--to accept the convoying plan. Experience in Vietnam made them worry about entering a new quagmire, just as they later feared U.S. intervention during the 1990 Kuwait crisis. In the colorful words of Representative Toby Roth of Wisconsin, "At best the Persian Gulf is a snakepit and we're going to be bit again." Senator Dale Bumpers of Arkansas said, "We're courting disaster...a lot of sons aren't going to come back from the Persian Gulf." Even the usually hawkish Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia warned that there were "substantial risks" of violent confrontation with Iran.

If Reagan did send ships, the Democrats wanted to invoke the War Powers Act requiring the president to remove the soldiers unless Congress approved the operation within 90 days. The Republicans had to filibuster for several weeks before the Senate finally defeated this proposal by a 50-41 vote. In the end, the majority in Congress respected the president's role as chief executive
and feared appearing indifferent to a Soviet advance in such a critical region.\textsuperscript{xix}

Yet while reflagging and convoying Kuwaiti tankers did make strategic sense for preserving Gulf security, it had little rationale in the Cold War context of a Soviet threat or an immediate danger to the oil supply. "The odd aspect of the crisis is that nothing significantly new has happened," former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote in an op-ed article. America was risking, "an expanded military role that cannot be decisive."\textsuperscript{xx}

Of course, the importance and potential vulnerability of Gulf oil was beyond question, since it yielded 66 percent of Japanese and 40 percent of West Europe's imports. The Gulf's entrance, the Straits of Hormuz, was barely 20 miles across at its widest point, bringing ships in sight of Iran's Larak island. Through this chokepoint flowed 7-8 million barrels of oil a day.

Indeed, so much petroleum was being successfully shipped from the Gulf that prices had declined and producing states were desperately trying to hold down the supply. Iran and Iraq were selling every possible barrel to finance the war. Iran was the country most damaged by the tanker war. Most of the 300 attacks on shipping and 200 seamen killed were due to Iraqi planes attacking ships carrying Iran's oil. The U.S. reflagging and convoying, of course, had no effect on this situation.

The real need for U.S. intervention was to show Saudi Arabia and Kuwait that it was willing and able to protect them and their oil exports. Otherwise, these states would quickly bow to the anti-American dictators in Iran or Iraq who sought to dominate the Gulf. Their most serious fear was that Iran would attack or subvert them. And while Iran made only a limited effort to foment revolution in practice, its rhetoric was quite scary.

To minimize U.S. intervention, Iran tried even harder to intimidate the Gulf Arabs and Washington by appearing bellicose. President Khamenehi put it bluntly, Iran would first "send Saddam to hell," then do the same to his collaborators, the Gulf monarchs who "supported unbelief against Islam." "However long the United States may linger in the Gulf," another Iranian leader
explained, "it will eventually pull out...and let those states bear the consequences." Iran's Revolutionary Guard commander Mohsen Rezai claimed that Moslems all over the world wrote Tehran asking permission to attack U.S. embassies. "We do not take decisions in haste," he threatened, "but when we do, hurricanes and earthquakes erupt." He predicted that the Americans would run away. An Iranian diplomat jokingly referred to a gift dessert McFarlane had brought on his trip to Tehran, "One day [the U.S] sends us cake and another day it threatens us with bombs and missiles."

More solemnly, the Tehran daily Kayhan wrote, "The very possibility, though faint, that [Iran's forces] will get an opportunity to encounter American troops in the Persian Gulf is drawing huge crowds to the recruitment centers." Why was the chance of confrontation "faint"? Because Iran was bluffing. It had no intention of starting an unwinnable fight with the much stronger United States. Tehran's mistake--like Saddam's a little later--was not in expecting to defeat America but in thinking that the Americans would be frightened away by words.

In fact, despite the militant rhetoric, Iran was already backing down. Rafsanjani explained, "We do not wish to get into a conflict with the United States and we say so explicitly." Iran's actions mirrored Rafsanjani's caution. The first U.S. convoy entered the Gulf on July 22, 1987, and arrived safely at Kuwait's oil terminal two days later. The Iranians stayed away from the convoys, which each consisted of two to four reflagged tankers and two or three warships. To ensure the operation's success, the U.S. Navy was present in overwhelming force: 11 warships and 17 supply, patrol, and minesweeping craft staffed by about 4000 sailors in the Gulf; just outside were 16 more ships, including an aircraft carrier and battleship, with 12,000 crew members. The mission, which would last a little over a year, cost U.S. taxpayers $15 to 20 million a month.

As Iraq and Kuwait had hoped, this show of strength was accompanied by U.S. diplomatic efforts to push Iran into a ceasefire. On July 20, 1987, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 598 demanding an end to the war. But Tehran blocked U.S. efforts to impose U.N. sanctions
against it by persuading Moscow to oppose the plan and offering to accept a ceasefire if the U.N. first found Iraq guilty of aggression.

Generally, though, the Iraqi and Kuwaiti strategies of bringing U.S. intervention worked quite well. Iran was steadily pushed onto the defensive in 1987 and 1988 by three factors: First, the United States assembled a multinational coalition--including Britain, France, and Italy--to convoy tankers. Second, the readiness of U.S. forces to fight any Iranian interference with Gulf Arab shipping persuaded Iran that the United States might enter the war against them. Third, Iraq launched successful offensives on the southern front.

On September 21, 1987, for example, night-flying U.S. helicopters using infra-red sensors spotted an Iranian ship dropping mines in international waters. The Americans attacked, setting it on fire and capturing 26 crew members. The mines still aboard were shown reporters as proof of the ship's activities before it was scuttled and the crew returned to Iran. On October 8, U.S. helicopters sank three Iranian gunboats that opened fire on them. Afterward, the Iranians were even more careful to keep their distance from U.S. convoys, though they continued to attack unprotected tankers.xxv

The United States even extended its coverage. The original U.S. position had been that the tankers would not be protected while docked in Kuwait. But when an Iranian missile by chance hit the reflagged tanker Sea Isle City in Kuwait's harbor on October 17, wounding the American captain, U.S. forces ordered Iranian personnel off an oil platform they used as a communications station and destroyed it in retaliation.

The Gulf Arabs were unconcerned about calling on the infidel Americans to smash a fellow Moslem country, while themselves staying on the sidelines. "It would be easy to enter into battles with Iran," explained Kuwait's ambassador to Washington Saud Nasir al-Sabah, "and hard to bring those battles to an end." A Saudi official commented, "The American military presence, in order to be justified by us, must insure our total security by insuring Iran to total paralysis.xxvi
The United States must so intimidate Iran that it would not dare seek revenge later.

Obsessed with gaining U.S. help, the Gulf Arab states were also more openly disinterested in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The November 1987 Arab summit ignored the issue while implicitly endorsing the U.S. presence in the Gulf. The Gulf, it said, was the priority, the place where the real life-or-death confrontation was going on.\textsuperscript{xxvii}

While wishing for a U.S. triumph, however, the Gulf monarchies gave only limited help, acting as if they were doing the United States a favor by letting it defend them. Saudi-based AWACS and P-3 reconnaissance planes from Kuwait provided intelligence but Kuwait sought to preserve its "neutral" stance by refusing to let U.S. minesweeping helicopters take off from its territory. In private conversations, U.S. officials and officers voiced dissatisfaction with the level of assistance. Following its usual way of doing business with the region, Washington accepted this brazen posture and exacted no political price for saving them.

Still, the war would only end when Khomeini himself could be persuaded to agree. A step in this direction was Khomeini's appointment of Rafsanjani, the architect of secret contacts with America who believed the war to be unwinnable, as commander-in-chief of Iran's military. Rafsanjani released hostages to rebuild relations with Britain and France, the way they had tried to do with the United States. France, for instance, repaid $330 million of a loan left over from the Shah's era, allowed an Iranian embassy official suspected of involvement in terrorism to leave, and expelled anti-Khomeini activists. In exchange, Iran quickly arranged for two French hostages to be released in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{xxviii}

Iraq's military offenses made ending the war even more urgent for Rafsanjani. In March and April 1988, Iraq fired about 200 missiles at Iranian cities. When Iraq advanced in the south in April, Iranian forces, fearing Iraq's chemical weapons, broke and ran. The Iranians were short of willpower and equipment, while Iraq had recaptured all its territory up to the pre-war boundary.

At 10:10 AM on the morning of July 3, 1988, several small Iranian gunboats opened fire on
a helicopter from the 9600-ton cruiser USS Vincennes. The warship, equipped with the latest computerized systems and sensors, gave chase and a half hour later sank two Iranian boats and damaged a third.

In the midst of battle, the Vincennes detected an aircraft taking off from Iran's Bandar Abbas field--an airport used by both civilian and military planes--and approaching at high speed. Three times the Vincennes warned the plane to turn away. But the mysterious plane did not respond, nor did it carry a device identifying civilian aircraft. Instead, it seemed to be descending and accelerating, as an attacker would do. The American commander was not inclined to let the plane come closer. A year earlier, the frigate USS Stark was approached by an Iraqi Mirage fighter which fired an Exocet missile which killed 37 Americans. Iraq claimed this was a mistake but offered no proof.

Having only seconds to make a decision, the Vincennes' captain concluded at 10:51 that the plane was an American-built Iranian air force F-14, which U.S. Intelligence had reported were being operated from Bandar Abbas. He ordered two missiles to be fired at the intruder.

Three minutes later, they scored a direct hit on the plane nine miles away and it crashed into the sea. The misidentified plane, however, was an Iran airlines passenger flight from Bandar Abbas to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. None of the 290 passengers survived.

"The United States is responsible for the consequences of its barbaric massacre of innocent passengers," roared Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati. "We will not have the crimes of America unanswered," said an Iranian radio commentary. "We will resist the plots of the Great Satan and avenge the blood of our martyrs from criminal mercenaries!"

Iran did seek revenge by hiring a Palestinian terrorist group, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine--General Command, to bomb U.S.-bound passenger planes in Europe. One such operation may have blown up a December 1988 Pan American Airlines flight from London to New York over Lockerbie, Scotland, causing the deaths of 261 people. Terrorists hired by Iran
were arrested in Germany while trying to place several bombs on other planes.

But Iran's political reaction was to retreat. As his faction had promised the Americans, Rafsanjani did stop the war with Iraq, keep Iran out of the Soviet orbit, and restrain Iran's most militant revolutionaries. He did so not out of moderation but in his own and Iran's interests. Arguing that the United States had now entered the war on Iraq's side and might attack Iran directly, Rafsanjani urged Khomeini to stop the war immediately. Rather than defy America, Khomeini buckled under to end a war he now believed was endangering the Islamic regime, though he described the decision as being akin to drinking poison. On July 20, 1988, he regretfully told his 50 million subjects that a ceasefire would take effect in one month.

Iran had learned the cost of trying to conquer the Gulf or challenge the Americans. In 1979, Khomeini argued that America could do nothing to free the hostages held by Iran; in 1988, he ended the war because he feared U.S. intervention. In the eyes of Tehran's leaders, America had changed from being an object for insults to a power which had to be respected.

Khomeini's death in June 1989, began an era of lower revolutionary zeal. Rafsanjani became president and openly rated pragmatism more important than Islamic ideology, a pattern close to that of China where the pragmatism of Deng Shiao-ping triumphed after Mao died. "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white," said Deng. "as long as it catches mice." In his first sermon after Khomeini's funeral, Rafsanjani announced: "We do not have anything against having good relations with the East and the West." For all his might, Khomeini--like Mao--could not ensure his policies would outlive him by a single day.

As for Iraq, when the ceasefire came into effect on August 20, its people celebrated as they had never done before. Tens of thousands of people filled the roads and parks, workers came out of offices and factories to cheer the end of their long ordeal. The women sang songs and made their high-pitched trilling sound of joy. There was dancing in the streets. Onlookers pounded on drums and waved olive branches from the sidewalks. Teenagers leaned out of cars decorated with Iraqi
flags and colored ribbons; drivers honked their horns and flashed their lights to the beat. Loudspeakers loudly blasted out patriotic songs. Although shots fired into the air in celebration killed a number of people during the three-day festival, everyone agreed that the war and Iraq’s troubles were now over. The soldiers would come home and life would be better. Wouldn’t it? xxix

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were also hopeful. They had narrowly avoided being swallowed by Iran or engulfed in war. Ironically, Iran's revolution had pushed most Arab countries closer to America, in the opposite direction from what Khomeini had predicted. The Reagan Administration had been correct in its policy of reflagging and convoying the Kuwaiti tankers. Even the arms deal with Iran--mistaken as it was--had caused no problem with the Gulf monarchies.

Contrary to many experts' predictions, the Gulf states did not let Arab nationalism, Islam, or the Palestine question stand in the way when they needed U.S. help. They were increasingly preoccupied with their own neighborhood.

Many observers also expected Iraq to become more moderate. Its wartime financial and political needs had pushed Iraq into an alliance with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Egypt. Yet this was only a tactical move. Saddam was still the same man who had begun and escalated the war. By defeating Iran, Baghdad thought it was the natural ruler over the region, Saddam's goal when he started the war in the first place. Saddam had helped save Saudi Arabia and Kuwait from Iran in order to devour them himself. The United States would only understand his intentions when Saddam had gone so far that America would be able to save the Gulf a second time only by the barest of margins.


iv. On Montazeri, see Iran Times, May 17 and November 29, 1985. Both Montazeri and Khamenehi were Khomeini's former students. During the Shah's regime, Montazeri was in prison or internal exile for 12 years and was reportedly tortured. He was released in late 1978 and Khomeini gave him a series of high-level posts.


vi. Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres picked as negotiators David Kimche, director-general of the Foreign Ministry; Jacob Nimrodi, former Israeli defense attache in Tehran; and Al Schwimmer, founder of Israel Aircraft Industries.


x. The role of U.S. politics in the affair is not entirely clear. Israeli officials say that North sought to transfer the Hawks faster so that hostages might be released as a public relations' gimmick for the November 1985 U.S.-Soviet summit meeting. Hakim testified that North pressed hard to have the hostages freed to help Republicans in the November 1986 elections. The Contra diversion scheme and the plan to obtain funds for other covert operations added to Casey's and North's incentive to sell arms.

xi. The Tower Commission Report, op. cit., pp. 18-19, 63. Actually, the possibilities for a rescue were higher than the administration realized and it rejected proposals to try for fear of failing. For a first-hand account, see William Cowan, "Intelligence, Rescue, Retaliation, and Decision Making," in Barry Rubin, Terrorism and Politics, (NY, 1991).

xii. The story was broken by an article in al-Shira, November 3, 1986. (FBIS, November, 6, 1986, pp. I-1-3). See also FBIS, November 5, 1986, p. 16.


xv. See, for example, New York Times, October 5, 1984; Al-Dustur (Amman), "The Tuesday Fires," June 30, 1986; Arab Times (Kuwait), July 18, 1987.


CHAPTER SIX
THE EVIL GENIES OF HISTORY

The Sultan insisted on taking the reluctant Hojja bear-hunting. When Hojja returned, a neighbor asked what had happened.
"It was perfect," replied Hojja.
"How many bears did you kill?"
"None"
"How many did you chase?"
"None."
"How many did you see?"
"None."
"Then how was it so perfect?"
"When hunting bears it's always best not to find one."

--Middle East folktale

If Americans found it hard to understand the Middle East, this shortcoming was matched by the Arabs own difficulty in explaining events there in light of their own expectations. The Arab political predicament and U.S. difficulty in handling it would be a major factor behind the Kuwait crisis.

Although the Iran-Iraq war had finally ended in 1988, the Arab world was still in disarray. The region's states were as mutually belligerent as ever; the individual citizen's rights were totally insecure. Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism still rejected the status quo, Iran and Israel were feared as dangerous rivals, Soviet support for the Arabs had disappeared, and the economic outlook was bleak.

Judging from their acts and statements, Arab leaders and intellectuals were not convinced by these problems of any need to change the political system or philosophy which had been guiding them for many years. They denied responsibility for the region's lack of peace and surplus of suffering. Just because their concepts had not worked did not mean that they were wrong. After
all, argued the Arab writer Hassan Nafan in 1983, Marxism was not proved a bad system simply because "it failed to unify the workers of the world."\textsuperscript{i}

The analogy to Communism was more accurate than Nafan intended: The political ideas dominating the Middle East had a great deal in common with that system which, as events were about to show, was on the verge of collapse. Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism, like Marxism, claimed to be scientific analyses of the world--in the sense that they were objectively true--as well as practical guides for solving existing problems and creating a utopian society. In all these cases, however, the idea claiming to be liberating was actually oppressive, a rationale for dictators.

The mythology that undermined American understanding of the Middle East suggested that fundamentalism, Arab nationalism, radical regimes, and terrorist movements could win and so U.S. policy had to conciliate them or make concessions to reduce their appeal. The truth was the exact opposite. The most important regional development was--as in the USSR--the system's failure producing a series of disastrous crises for the Arabs culminating in the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq and 1991 Kuwait wars.

The central problem of Arab and Moslem political thought was to explain and remedy the fact that the supposedly morally and spiritually superior civilization was so weak while the West was so strong. Modern Arab history was largely a parade of unsatisfactory solutions and destabilizing riposte on this issue.

Marxism claimed that society was based on capitalist exploitation and called on the workers to unite, overthrow it, and create socialism. Arab nationalists like Saddam and Islamic fundamentalists like Khomeini both attributed the Middle East's ills to Western domination but then criticized America from opposite directions: fundamentalists attacked it for undermining traditional society; radical nationalists complained that it preserved conservative forces and ways.

As the historian Hisham Sharabi put it, the Arabs made the West their scapegoat, blaming it
for their own repressive societies, separate states, faltering modernization, communal conflicts, and the self-serving rule of small elites. In its Islamic fundamentalist version, as expressed by Egypt's Moslem Brotherhood, the villain was an "alliance of united enemies (Zionism, Christianity, Marxism, Buddhism and cow worshippers [Hindus])" that sought the "breaking, subjugating and smashing" of Moslem and Arab societies.

The nationalists insisted that the solution was for Arabs to unite, expel Western influence, and create a single Arab state. The fundamentalists replied that the answer was for Moslems to unite, expel Western influence, and build an Islamic republic. Every few years, a new version of these arguments arose to cause political upheaval. In the 1950s, Egyptian dictator Gamal Abdel Nasser urged Arabs to rebel against conservative Arab regimes and the West in the name of radical nationalism and socialism, inspiring a series of coups which brought men like Saddam to power in the 1960s. By the 1970s, new groups--especially among Palestinians and in Lebanon--tried to adopt the revolutionary innovations of China and Cuba to Arab conditions, ridiculing the radical military regimes as too cautious. In the 1980s, Khomeini's Iran called for Moslem uprisings. At the dawn of the 1990s, Saddam made his bid to lead the Arabs into a showdown with the West.

None of these movements fulfilled its aspirations to unite the region, expel U.S. influence, and destroy Israel. Each failure only deepened what Sharabi called, "A sense of impotence and fear...inferiority and frustration which often expressed itself in nihilism and despair." By the close of the 1980s, the Arabs faced a choice between abandoning the effort to achieve these goals or--the option Saddam favored--working even harder to accomplish them. Examining three key Arab aims shows why their pursuit was so self-destructive and, contrary to what Saddam and most American Middle East experts thought, doomed to failure.

First, if Arab unity was so appealing why could it not overcome the existence of separate nation-states, even when so many leaders proclaimed this was their goal? The answer is that none of the states wanted to merge. Everyone agreed that Pan-Arab brotherhood should be established,
no one agreed who would be Big Brother. Each country and every ideology—radicals and conservatives; Nasserists, Ba'athists, Communists, and Islamic fundamentalists—saw itself as the proper one to run the region. Within states, communal groups struggled for control: Alawite (a composite religion closest to Shia Islam), Druze, and Sunni Moslems in Syria; Christians and Sunni and Shia Moslems in Lebanon; Sunni and Shia Moslems and Kurds in Iraq.

Disputes among different groups of Arabs and Moslems were not so easily settled. In the mid-1970s, Arab and Iranian dissidents organized a solidarity rally in New York to show that conflicts among their countries were merely illusions promoted by reactionary regimes. An Iraqi student lambasted the Shah to the audience's delight but when he listed among the monarch's misdeeds the seizure of three small Gulf islands, one of the Iranian hosts went on stage. The Iranian radical whispered in the speaker's ear that his group believed the territory belonged to Iran. The speaker had to withdraw his words or step down. The man stalked off angrily and the meeting almost turned into a brawl. Several years later, the Iranian revolution did overthrow the Shah, kept the islands, and began subverting neighboring Arab governments. Before long, the anti-imperialist Iranian and Iraqi brothers in Islam were fighting each other in an extraordinarily vicious war.

Dictators gave lip-service to Arab interests and real attention only to their own. This passage from universalist philosophies to nation-state patriotism in the Middle East produced more, not less, instability. As had happened in nineteenth-century Europe, the greatest wars and imperial expansion took place in an age of growing patriotism for individual countries. Syria, Iraq, and Libya tried to build empires in, respectively, Lebanon, the Gulf, and North Africa. Arab nationalism gave each country a license to subvert the others.

Second, the Arabs were unable to expel foreign influence from the region partly because they were too busy trying to recruit the outsiders to support themselves. Fantasies of easy, total victory over the West alternated with a cynical competition about who could make the best deal with it. The Lebanese-American scholar Fouad Ajami called this behavior, "alternating between a
search for foreign patrons and an equally frenzied search for foreign scapegoats and demons."vi
During their war, Iraq and Iran both epitomized that principle by trying to persuade the United States to help them. Even the politicians who most loudly proclaimed their passionate opposition to Western intervention avidly solicited such intercession—as long as it was on their side.

This hypocrisy was nothing new. The early Arab nationalists sought British or French subsidies; Britain armed, financed, and directed the 1915 Arab revolt against the ruling Turks. The conservative monarchies that emerged in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and the Gulf Arab states during the 1920s and 1930s were British clients. Radical Arab nationalists in the opposition turned to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in the 1940s; Nasser's Egypt from the 1950s and Ba'th party regimes which came to power in Iraq and Syria in the 1960s were Soviet clients, as was the PLO from the 1970s. When Iran threatened the Gulf in the 1980s, Iraq and the monarchies turned to the United States; when Saddam invaded Kuwait most of the other Arab rulers quickly summoned the Americans to save them.vii

Ironically, by making the West seem so powerful, Arab nationalist and Islamic fundamentalist doctrine intensified the feeling of inferiority and weakness already paralyzing their people. The Arab belief that regional politics was just "a game being played by the Great Powers," wrote the great Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz, made him ask, "Are we rubbish? Have we no minds?...Have we Arabs become a kind of toy or plaything? Is there humiliation greater than this?viii

If Western power always overwhelmed helpless Arabs, this gave them an incentive to join the inevitably winning side. When the West acted in a way which made it seem to bow to any self-proclaimed regional leader, the Arab world was far more willing to follow him. For example, when Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company in 1956, Prime Minister Nuri al-Said, leader of Iraq's conservative regime, urged the West to overthrow Nasser, warning that unless it stopped him Nasser would destroy the Arab moderate rulers to make himself the Arab world's chief.
Heeding this advice, Britain, France, and Israel attacked Egypt and pushed Nasser's regime to the brink of defeat. The United States, however, saw this assault as a renewal of colonialism which would antagonize the Arabs and pressured its allies to withdraw. Having survived, Nasser became the political victor. Within a few months, his pro-Soviet, anti-American policy made the U.S. government realize that its mercy had been misplaced. Two years later, as the call of radical nationalism echoed in the region, a coup overthrew Iraq's monarchy and al-Said's government. Nuri al-Said's prophecy was fulfilled when a pro-Nasser mob killed him and dragged his body through Baghdad's streets.

In 1967, however, Nasser miscalculated. Convinced that Israel was afraid to fight, Nasser provoked a war in which he and the other Arab states were decisively defeated in only six days. Nasser, it appeared, had lost the West's mandate. To excuse his own defeat, Nasser exaggerated U.S. help for Israel. Still, American opposition and defeat tarnished Nasser's reputation. The radical wave was dammed. The Kuwait crisis could only follow the 1956 or the 1967 pattern. If the West let Saddam keep Kuwait, Arabs--convinced that he was the wave of the future--would leap on his bandwagon. Otherwise, they would ignore their own professed ideology to side with the West.

Third, the Arab states' fight against Israel also tested and showed the inadequacy of their ideas and political systems. The Arab scholar Constantine Zurayk wrote of this contrast between confident expectations and dismal truth in the 1948 war when Israel gained its independence: "Seven Arab states declare war on Zionism in Palestine, stop impotent before it and turn on their heels. The representatives of the Arabs deliver fiery speeches in the highest international forums, warning what the Arab states and peoples will do if this or that decision be enacted. Declarations fall like bombs from the mouths of officials at the meetings of the Arab League, but when action becomes necessary, the fire is still and quiet, and steel and iron are rusted and twisted, quick to bend and disintegrate."
Israel's very existence symbolized the painful hollowness of Arab and Islamic ideology as well as the emptiness of the dictators’ boasts. This fact could neither be wished away with words nor washed away in a sea of blood. To make peace with Israel would force a reexamination of all the basic Arab political tenets. Thus, by portraying the Arab-Israeli conflict as the main factor of modern Middle East history—"the great alibi," in Ajami’s words--Arab rulers and intellectuals avoided reexamining their own premises which did not accord with reality.  

All the Arab states and factions exploited this self-deception. Conservative Arabs told domestic revolutionaries and radical neighbors to stop attacking them in order to cooperate against Israel. Radical nationalists insisted that the battle with Israel could be won only if the "reactionary regimes" were overthrown and Western influence thrown out.

Aside from being impossible to implement, however, the Arab effort to fight the West was the wrong answer for their problems. After all, Arab society was not a creation of Western imperialism but the product of the very heritage that the nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists celebrated. "It was hard," Ajami explained, "for the Arab nationalists to acknowledge the simple facts of post-colonial life: that men beget the history they deserve, that Arab life is what the Arabs have made of it."  

The real answer to the riddle of Arab and Moslem weakness was to admit that their own societies, ideas, and political institutions required profound change, a long constructive process rather than overnight and violent solutions. Arab defeats had arisen from excessive radicalism and an inability to compromise, not from too much moderation; internecine conflict instead of cooperation; and strong rhetoric which could not be matched by successful action. Every time the Arabs went to war with Israel or the Palestinians refused diplomatic offers, they ended up in a worse situation.

There could be little progress as long as tyranny blocked democracy, repression choked intellectual and cultural life, arms purchases used up all the available money, war disrupted normal
life, and corrupt bureaucracies stifled economic productivity. But the power of demagoguery, conformism, and wishful thinking periodically overcame the Arabs' better judgment as they hailed some new hero until his crashing defeat renewed their pessimism and inferiority complex.

But for many years it was too politically dangerous and psychologically difficult to admit all this and challenge the absolutist doctrines which inevitably fostered undemocratic systems. Instead, Assad, Qadhafi, Khomeini and Saddam sought to excuse their own tyranny at home and expand their empires by working even harder to pin the blame for the region's ills on U.S. imperialism, Zionism, and traitorous Arabs.\textsuperscript{xii}

As Sharabi noted, "Power-holders throughout the Arab world seem to have found it fairly easy to get away with the contradiction between their verbal and actual behavior."\textsuperscript{xiii} Arabs and Iranians were being victimized not by America but by their own rulers who--like their Soviet counterparts--papered over their crimes and avarice with "progressive" rhetoric.

Like communism--as well as fascism--the dominant Arab ideologies preached that only dictatorship could impose progress and reform, a program best foreseen by the Egyptian Islamic reformer Mohammad Abdu who called in the early 1900s for "a despot who would force...parents to be charitable, neighbors to be fairminded, and people generally to adopt his view of their interests, be it by intimidation or by joyful consent." Within 15 years, "Their souls will be purified by the most efficacious means available, by amputation and cauterization if need be."\textsuperscript{xiv}

Arab despots found it easier to obtain "popular consent" and carry out "cauterization" than they did to deliver real benefits. "Freedom ran on the tongues in speeches, songs and anthems," complained the Egyptian writer Tawfiq al-Hakim, "at a time when no single free word which the ruler did not want could be expressed without its author entering prison." Despite populist slogans, crowds waited long hours in line at stores "for a piece of meat to be thrown to them." Political revolutions which spoke of progress and populism only brought subversion and strife, "inducing Arab to kill Arab, and Arab to use burning napalm and poison gas against Arab!" "Are the people
made happy," al-Hakim asked, "because they hear socialist songs although they are submerged in misery which everyone sees?" 

The Arab dictators used three main techniques to hold onto power at home. First, they amassed a large group of active supporters. The monarchs had alliances with tribal leaders and Islamic clerics. The Ba'th party regimes in Baghdad and Damascus built disciplined political organizations based on communal solidarity within, respectively, the Sunni Moslem and Alawite minorities in their countries. For the dictator, socialism meant—as in the USSR—state control of the economy to ensure his complete control and ability to distribute wealth among his supporters. Aside from career and financial benefits, the regime's followers were motivated by a fear that its fall would expose their community and families to revenge from those they had subjugated.

Second, the regime showed the people that opposition would be punished by ferocious repression. Modern technology, Professor Adeed Dawisha explained, "placed in the hands of the rulers methods of social and coercive suppression that made earlier means of...control pale into insignificance."

Few citizens would say that the emperor was naked when he had a machine gun pointed at them. Violence was at the foundation of this kind of politics. Iran's ambassador to the United Nations smiled as he told heckling Iranian exiles in New York, "Our enemies can try to kill us but we will kill them instead!" Explaining why he closed his shop during West Bank strikes, a Palestinian shopkeeper said, "The [Israeli] police can only arrest you but your own people will kill you." The PLO assured its credentials as sole Palestinian representative by murdering any critics in its community. Syria's government assassinated independent-minded Lebanese leaders and journalists as well as thousands of its own citizens. The memory of Egypt's beloved dictator Nasser was not dimmed when, after his death in 1970, former political prisoners came forward with horrifying accounts of his torture chambers and concentration camps.

Third, the ruler persuaded the masses that he was their hero by not only putting "fear in
people's hearts," noted Dawisha, but also trying "to win their support, no matter how grudgingly given." xviii All the region's dictatorships benefitted from historic ideas and social structures justifying that type of government. "For centuries," explained Dawisha, "the pattern of political loyalty in the tribal and village communities was hierarchical," while Islam gave legitimacy to "the centralized structure of political authority." xix

This cultural background helped the most modern and secular governments by encouraging popular passivity. The French and American revolutions had proclaimed the people's sovereignty as the foundation of liberal democracy. In the words of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the people's voice is the voice of God. But this notion was unacceptable to Islamic society, where only the voice of God--as presented in Islamic law--is the voice of God.

The people must follow, an Islamic philosopher wrote, "A regime and a set of laws imposed by God, which they cannot change or modify in any case." A Lebanese fundamentalist explained, "The state in Islam obeys Divine Law, not the people." xx God's law was determined by the clergy which among the Sunni Moslems--contrary to Iran's example--was usually controlled by the government. At any rate, this foundation of absolutism made open debate and criticism less acceptable.

Another force strengthening the hand of dictatorship was the popular fear that democracy brought instability. Pluralism was dangerous, an Egyptian intellectual explained, "Dialogue is the beginning of altercation. Altercation is the beginning of internal war and disunity."xxi The idea that tyranny is better than anarchy has deep roots in Middle East history when life in Iran and the Arab lands alternated between eras of high centralization and those in which rulers lost control of the provinces leading to anarchy and decline. Having a weak leader usually meant the country would suffer bloodshed, war, and economic collapse.

According to the American view, free speech is expected to ease tensions and concessions to bring peace, while repression only breeds revolt. But this is not how Middle East politics
worked. Concessions were taken as signs of weakness provoking more demands and turmoil. With both government and opposition composed of anti-democratic forces, the former's enfeeblement—as Iran's revolution and Lebanon's civil war showed—brought not pluralism but chaos. Each faction's belief that it possessed absolute truth entitled it to crush enemies, who were considered traitors and foreign agents. A paranoid, intolerant style resulted from this pressure-cooker environment.

A third factor promoting dictatorship was the rulers' demagoguery in manipulating slogans of radicalism, Arab nationalism, socialism, anti-imperialism, and anti-Zionism within each country. As often happened with Marxism in the West, the intellectuals fell in love with totalitarianism, arguing that a dictatorship governed by these correct ideas was better than democracy. Both the elite and common people cheered the self-proclaimed nationalist or Islamic messiahs, many—perhaps most—of them still believing that utopian doctrines and extremist policies were the solution, not the cause, of disorder and disaster.

To be considered moderate in America is a political necessity since no one seen as an extremist can win elections. Ronald Reagan had to prove himself safely non-radical to become president; Barry Goldwater and George McGovern, unable to do so, lost by landslides. But in the Arab-Islamic world, the means of seizing or losing political power are radical in themselves. Flexibility was considered more sinful than zeal since it hindered the pursuit of absolute righteousness and virtue.

"That Saddam was a murderer at home," notes Ajami, "was of little concern to the Arab intelligentsia who saw him as an answer for the ills and weaknesses of his world." His "two decades of cruel deeds" was unimportant for those who believed that "The end--some dream of national power--justified the means."xxii

Charismatic dictators claimed to reduce the two great threats to stability: factionalized domestic politics and vulnerability to foreign influence. Only someone invested with tremendous
legitimacy and authority could enforce discipline on his highly individualistic countrymen. An Iranian politician explained, "We need a focus for the people's emotions." One-man rule was a necessity, an ayatollah insisted, because only a single leader could inspire intense devotion. Iranians rallied in huge numbers to chant, "We are your soldiers, Oh Khomeini!" They would hardly shout, "We are your soldiers, Oh Leadership Council!"

How did this system perform for the Arabs during the 40 years leading up to the Kuwait crisis? It was a disaster. The taboos blocking an unflinching self-examination made the myths of Arab politics a constant danger since, at any time, a dictator like Khomeini or Saddam could nominate himself to unite the region, destroy Israel, and expel America. After meeting the flamboyant Libyan dictator Qadhafi for the first time, Egyptian journalist Mohammad Heikal warned, "It's a catastrophe!" Qadhafi would cause trouble since he really believed all the propaganda about revolution and Arab unity and intended to implement it.

Through ambition, belief or both, Arab dictators were prone to take--in al-Hakim's words--"foolhardy gambles" and provoke unwinnable conflicts like Arab-Israeli wars, the Iran-Iraq conflict, or Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Their contempt for democracy also made them underestimate America. Once the dictators realized that the United States was not ruthless and expansionist like themselves, they quickly concluded that it must be too decadent to stop them.

During the two decades between 1967 and 1988, the Arab states and Iran suffered from four major sets of disasters, each bringing instability, bloodshed, defeat, and wasted resources. These events would bring the Kuwait imbroglio as a culminating--but not necessarily fatal--crisis for the system.

The first disaster was the 1967 Arab-Israel war. Egypt, Syria, and Jordan threatened to attack Israel but their bluster backfired when Israel launched a first strike and destroyed the Arab armies in six days. These regimes were so badly defeated that Ajami called the event, "The Waterloo of Pan-Arabism." The Arab states' refusal to make peace with Israel left it in control
of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and the Sinai peninsula.

In 1973, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat joined with Syria to try to break the deadlock by attacking Israel. Although Israel won in the end, Arab hopes rose on the basis of their improved military performance. In addition, spiralling oil income seemed to promise rapid development and a favorable shift in the balance of power between the Arabs and the West. "The dreams that had for some time tantalized the minds of politically conscious Arabs appeared to be coming true," Ajami later wrote. "A traditionally divided Arab world was acting in unison and Arab armies were finally getting a chance to redeem their honor in a sharp break with a humiliating record of defeats....It seemed as though wrongs were beginning to be righted, that the Arab world had managed to find its place in the sun."xxvi

But these hopes were soon dashed in a second series of plagues between 1975 and 1982. The regional and internal situations did not improve. Egypt was overpopulated, poor, and near economic collapse while 40 percent of its resources went to finance the army. Unevenly distributed oil wealth split the Arabs between wealthy states like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and near-beggars like Syria, Egypt, and Jordan. Radicals worried that the region would become too conservative because the balance of power was shifting, in the words of Egyptian Marxist Mohammad Sid Ahmad, from the forces of "thawra" (revolution) to those of "thrawa" (fortune).xxvii

In fact, the forces of disorder were still ascendant. A more apt metaphor would be that instead of bringing an Arab "nahda" (renaissance), each year brought a new "nakhba" (disaster). The Lebanese civil war broke out in 1975; Syrian intervention there followed in 1976. Sadat went to Jerusalem to make peace with Israel in 1977 and signed the U.S.-mediated Camp David accords in 1978, splitting the Arab world. Khomeini came to power in Iran and the USSR occupied Afghanistan in 1979; the Iran-Iraq war began in 1980; Israel destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981.
Nowhere in the region could one "find two neighboring countries which have amicable relationships untarnished by some historical dispute or rivalry over a host of issues," was the Arab writer Mohammad Anis Salem's pessimistically realistic assessment of the situation in early 1982. There was no leader with the charisma and credentials, no country with the wealth and achievements, to bring together the Arabs. Egypt was a pariah for making peace with Israel. Not only had the Arabs failed to destroy Israel, but the effort had damaged them more than the intended victim. Libya launched troublesome subversive campaigns against other regimes. Arab oil revenues declined. The Iran-Iraq war raged on, with Arab Syria supporting non-Arab Iran and the fighting threatening to expand into Kuwait.

That year 1982 would bring a third, even worse, series of disasters contradicting Arab ideology and its reflected version among American experts: Syria's massacre of dissidents, Israel's invasion of Lebanon, and fear of Iran winning the Gulf war.

In February, Syria drowned in blood the myth of the progressive Arab regime by destroying one of its own cities. The predominantly Sunni town of Hama was a center for fundamentalist groups opposing the regime's secular, socialist policies and domination by the minority Alawite sect. After a gun battle between the army and fundamentalists escalated into an uprising, President Assad ordered a three-week, all-out military assault on Hama.

Syria's army destroyed and looted mosques, churches, and historic buildings. Scores of women were raped, hundreds of prisoners were shot. The city's center was wrecked and between 10,000 and 30,000 people--mainly women and children--were slain by their own government, more casualties in a few days than a decade of fighting inflicted on Beirut. The regime built a row of new buildings to hide the destruction from the main road. No Arab state protested the massacre of Arabs; Iran, Syria's ally, said nothing about the killing of fellow fundamentalists. These events bared the brutality, torture, and terrorism that lurked behind populist slogans.

In June, Israel invaded Lebanon, where bloody civil war had raged for seven years among
Arab communities--Christians, Druze, Shia and Sunni Moslems, Palestinians, and Syrians. Contrary to all Arab propriety, the Christians secretly asked Israel to destroy the PLO's rule in south Lebanon and establish a strong Christian-led regime. Israel quickly defeated PLO and Syrian forces, then besieged Beirut. The trapped PLO bargained for a safe passage to Tunisia, fleeing Lebanon under U.S. protection. Lebanese Arab Christians massacred several hundred Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

Beyond verbal protests, Arab countries did nothing to help Syria, the PLO, or Lebanon. Syria's response was to split the PLO by helping rebels angry at their leaders' incompetence and corruption. Moscow remained passive, proving to be an unreliable ally. The Arabs could take little comfort in Israel's casualties and diplomatic damage: its power, though limited, was still sufficient to defeat them. Arab rulers--if not the masses--knew how risky would be another war with Israel, whose strength deterred Egypt, Syria, and Jordan from military assault or allowing cross-border terrorist attacks from their own soil.

In July, the Iranian army's advance onto Iraqi soil raised the specter of it winning a victory that would inspire new revolutions against Arab rulers. Iran aided fundamentalist groups among Lebanon's and Iraq's Shia communities--"the stepchildren of the Arab world," in Ajami's phrase--for whom Arab nationalism had meant in practice their subordination to Sunni minorities. Iran's soldiers established a foothold in Lebanon dubbed "the Iranian Republic of Baalbek."

This high-water mark of Iranian influence also coincided with a fourth plague, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Arab world, a doctrine dividing it further and threatening governments with terrorism and revolution. Islam, like Arab nationalism, portrayed itself as a road to unity but became just another area of contention.

Who was the true Moslem and who the traitor? As with Arab nationalism, no one agreed. Conflicts among Persians and Arabs, Sunni and Shia Moslems, Iranians and Iraqis, and even
different fundamentalist factions prevailed over the commonality of Islam. Those disagreeing with him, Khomeini said, were imperialist agents but few non-Iranian Moslems followed him. Most Arabs did not see revolutionary fundamentalism as Islam's proper incarnation; Iran's defeat in war and economic stagnation did not encourage emulation.

In theory, all Moslems accepted Islam as the proper organizing principle. Practice was altogether different. Moslems had thought themselves religious for centuries without ever acting as Khomeini prescribed. The great Shia theologians had preached passivity until the messiah returned to put the world right; Moslems usually obeyed their rulers--even impious ones--in accord with other long-standing Islamic teachings. "Islamic Thought in the last 100 Years is Largely un-Islamic," was the paradoxical protest of an Iranian newspaper headline. By so rejecting the way Islam was actually practiced, the radical fundamentalists were turning most Moslems into their enemies.

The fundamentalists were also unable to block the West's alluring, influential onslaught with its movies, love songs, fashions, merchandise and luxuries, science, and education. Most of their compatriots were not quite so eager to boycott Western culture or ideas, and an urgent desire for the West's respect infected even the most militant, anti-Western leaders. "The grandeur of the Islamic revolution" was proven, Iranian speaker of parliament Rafsanjani said proudly, because it impressed the West so much that Iran was now compared to the USSR and France rather than to mere Third World states like Algeria or Vietnam.

Even Islamic Iran preferred to sell oil to the West for hard currency and buy its superior products. Many of the revolution's leaders had Swiss bank accounts and their taste for modern comforts was the butt of many jokes in Tehran. When a poor women complained about the lack of soap powder, ran one popular anecdote, a pro-Khomeini cleric scolded her by saying, "The Prophet Mohammad's daughter didn't have that."

"Yes," replied the woman, "but Mohammad didn't ride around in a Mercedes limousine
either."

In Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, though, government repression rather than ridicule crushed the radical fundamentalists. Fundamentalist terrorist groups failed to take over among the Palestinians or Lebanese Shia. The regimes in Jordan and Algeria outmaneuvered and defeated fundamentalist parties which appeared close to winning power through elections.

The Iran-Iraq war was the ultimate confrontation of Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism, yet the combatants had much in common. Indeed, what happened to the Gulf during the twentieth century's second half was surprisingly similar to what befell much of Europe in the first half. The revolutions that put Saddam and Khomeini in power were upheavals as transforming as those fomented by Lenin in Russia and by Hitler in Germany. There were some striking parallels between communism and fascism, Khomeini's fundamentalism and Saddam's radical nationalism.

They were all products of rapid social change that swept away traditional landmarks and made people embrace extreme doctrines to cope with their fear and confusion. Beneath their vastly different trappings, all these movements were based on a modern, Western notion that humanity must shape its own fate rather than waiting for divine intervention.

"Miracles are exceptions," Khomeini said. Lenin, Hitler, and Saddam would have agreed with him. History was made by mobilizing the masses for a cause. But first the people had to overcome false consciousness and, since they did not know what was good for them, a dictator had to force them down the right path. This new order could only be born amidst a purifying revolutionary bloodshed that wiped out the classes and defeated the foreign conspirators which blocked progress.

Both Khomeini and Saddam--like Hitler and Stalin--were self-made leaders of underdog countries bullied by history and eager for revenge. Willing to use everything the twentieth-century could offer, they all created highly centralized states and promised their subjects to expel foreign
influence, revive lost pride, repudiate parliamentary democracy for a higher form of community, accelerate economic development, and create a just society. They wanted industrial and scientific progress to underpin their countries' independence and build systems that would last a thousand years.

In foreign policy, the quartet of dictators pledged to join together those—Arabs, Moslems, Germans, workers—illegitimately ruled by other regimes. Iranian fundamentalism and Iraqi Arab nationalism, like German fascism and Soviet communism, were presented as universalist ideologies while actually being instruments of empire-building for the countries they ruled. Instead, dreams of glory turned into the reality of ruins. At home, they spilled their countrymen's blood and slowed progress; by subverting neighbors they brought war and defeat on themselves.

After so many catastrophes under such regimes, it was no wonder that Arabs could hardly have been gloomier in the late 1980s. "Today the Arab reality and the Arab dream," wrote Sharabi, "appear separated by an unbridgeable gap. The hope that has animated the past generation's struggle...turned into cynicism and despair." Progress was impossible, King Hussein complained at the 1985 Arab summit, with so much "disintegration instead of congregation, regionalism instead of Pan-Arab solidarity, plotting instead of harmony, hegemony instead of fraternization, destruction instead of construction, and placing obstacles instead of their removal." Egypt's President Husni Mubarak spoke of growing "dismemberment, estrangement, and infighting." Heikal mourned, "All dreams are gone and no dreams are replacing them."

Forty years of effort at unity left the Arabs more divided than ever. The struggle for preeminence "has ruined us all," noted al-Hakim. Their obsession with cooperation meant the Arabs did so less effectively than people in any other part of the world. NATO and the Common Market in Europe, the Organization of African Unity, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Organization of American States were all more effective groups than the Arab League. Ajami summed up the lesson: Arabs desperately needed a whole new political framework,
"Pan-Arabism had dominated Arab political life for nearly half a century. It had gripped the young and made life difficult for many rulers. But it was never able to transform the Middle East."

A generation of Arabs had dreamed and the result was Nasser and the Ba'th party. Just when the seductive fantasies seemed to be vanishing, a new wave of heroes had appeared promising to realize all their hopes. The perverse genies of history again granted Arab wishes, and the result had been Khomeini and Saddam. The Arab choice was to break the pattern or to repeat it, to turn away from the dead-end or again to run head-long into a wall.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait would be the culmination of this crisis. Saddam offered the old-time ideology once more as his answer to the Arabs' dilemma. The Arab world's past ordeals, wrote Ajami, should have made it "immune to another pied piper." But at least up until the invasion of Kuwait, it suffered from an acquired immune deficiency syndrome in this regard. The United States should have learned from the experiences with Nasser and Khomeini. Yet until Saddam launched his invasion, it showed no interest in challenging him. Like Dr. Frankenstein, the Arabs and America created a monster that would turn on them.

ii. Hisham Sharabi, Arab Intellectuals and the West, (Baltimore, 1970), see pp. 98-101, 130-36. The title of a 1930s' article was, "Why are Moslems Lagging Behind the Christians?" Its author, Shakib Arslan, urged Islamic unity. His brother, Adil, favored Pan-Arab nationalism and later became a Nazi collaborator.


iv. The notion of an Arab nation had occurred to no one before the 1880s and only to a tiny group of intellectuals or army officers before 1920. Nonetheless, Arab writers never tired of claiming that Arab identity has always been the central theme of Middle East history and that Arabs would inevitably form a single state due to their common language, territory, and culture. See, for example, Awni Farsakh, "History and Identity in the Arab Homeland," al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi, May 1983. pp. 24-53, and Sabri Ismail Abdallah, "The Arab Nation: The Scientific Truth Versus Error and Confusion," al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi, December 1985, pp. 4-19. Radical movements in Lebanon played a major role in the civil war. Other groups included the region-wide Arab National Movement, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.


viii. Al Mustaqbal, July 1984, cited in Elie Kedourie "Critics in Despair," New Republic, March 24, 1986, p. 33. This is not meant to understate the historical basis for such attitudes. The fact that apparent rivals Britain and Russia divided Iran into spheres of influence in 1907 and the Anglo-Soviet accord forcing abdication of the shah in 1941 reverberated in Khomeini's view of the Cold War as a facade behind which Washington and Moscow were united in exploiting the rest of the world. The return of Shah Mohammad Pahlavi to power in 1953 with the CIA's help was a basis for the idea that the United States controlled the country.


x. Ajami, "The End of Arab Nationalism, op. cit., p. 25.

xi. Ibid.

xiii. Ibid.


xvi. The same rule applied among competing political movements. Thus, despite its name, Lebanon's leftist Progressive Socialist Party was led by a feudal clan chief and consisted of his Druze followers.


xix. Ibid.


xxi. Lewis Awad, "The Arab Society: Possibility of Dialogue, The Egyptian Experience," in Edward Said, *The Arabs Today: Alternatives for Tomorrow* (Columbus, Ohio, 1973,) pp. 62ff. In the same book (p. 42), Arab sociologist Sadiq al-Azm writes that "Reactionary anthropologists have declared showmanship and emotionality as constant traits of the Arab. These are in reality ill symptoms of a backward society." But these traits exist even if they are only "symptoms."


xxxii. To hear this message's flavor and power, listen to a sermon by Khomeini: Islam "has answers for the needs of men from the beginning to the end...for daily life and for issues that might arise in the future and about which we know nothing now....[It] satisfies all the material, spiritual, philosophical, and mystical needs of all humanity at all times until Judgement Day." It was a duty to fight to put this regime into authority everywhere. If Muhammad had stayed home and preached, said Khomeini, "we would have followed his example." Instead, he launched "an armed struggle and established a government. He then sent missionaries and representatives everywhere...He brought the glad tidings that we are going to conquer the entire world and destroy everybody." Moslems today should imitate the prophet, "He set up a government, we should do the same. He participated in various wars, we should do the same. He defended Islam, we should also defend it." Even the occasion of Khomeini's sermon, Muhammad's birthday, showed divisions within Islam: Sunni Moslems generally don't celebrate it; Sunnis and Shias do not even agree on the date. Thus, Iran's call for an Islamic "unity week" for the anniversary set off heated criticism from abroad. Speech on Tehran radio, November 10, 1987, in FBIS-SA, November 12, 1987. See also Kayhan International, May 19, 1985.

xxxiii. Iran Times, December 22 and 27, 1985. The amounts from Western countries and Turkey exceeded 78 percent.

xxxiv. See above, note 123. Islamic fundamentalism, he notes, is not against "new inventions, innovations, and industries." It merely rejects, "freedom to do all that is forbidden and corrupt." He advocated a capitalist system with some state direction, emphasizing restraint and social justice. "Islam is not in favor of amassing great wealth at the expense of depriving the meek and oppressed masses."

unattainable leaves the Arab "embittered or apathetic, his leaders have as little regard for him as he has vague passion for them." Said, op. cit., pp. 5-6, 137-8.


CHAPTER SEVEN
AMERICA's FRIEND SADDAM, 1988-90

Hojja went to a mill and began taking grain and putting it in his own sacks. The miller saw him and yelled, "What are you doing?"
"I am a fool," Hojja replied, "I just have to do whatever comes into my mind."
"Well, how come you don't take wheat out of your sack and put it into mine?"
"Sir," he replied, "I am just a normal fool, not a complete idiot."

--Middle East folktale

"Barring unforeseen circumstances," wrote the Arab journalist Fuad Mattar in a London-based Arab newspaper in July 1989, "1990 and 1991 should be the year of Saddam Hussein in the United States." But he was expecting something far different from a crisis or war. On the contrary, he predicted, "Americans would love to see him on the television screen." They would find Saddam, "as handsome as any star on the 'Dynasty' television series and like the hero of the famous 'Bonanza' television program who is always depicted as a brave man preserving his land and abiding by the law." Indeed, Americans might even ask, "Why should Saddam Hussein not be the region's policeman, given the real vacuum?"

Such expectations were obviously off the mark. Yet it is easy to understand why an Arab writer saw U.S.-Iraq relations as being so amiable at the time. A few days earlier, a delegation of top business executives had come to Baghdad to see Saddam. They were led by A. Robert Abboud of the First City Texas bank and included ranking executives from General Motors, Westinghouse, Mobil, Amoco, Bankers' Trust, Caltex Petroleum, ex-senator Charles Percy, and Alan Stoga of Kissinger Associates. Abboud told Saddam that the group represented companies which were collectively rich enough to form the world's third greatest economic power after the United States
and Japan. If you plan to start your own country, Saddam joked, Qadhafi might be willing to help you make a revolution.

The businessmen told reporters that they found Saddam pleasant, handsome, charismatic, frank, decisive and intelligent—in short everything an executive would see in a foreign leader from whom he wanted billions of dollars in contracts. "In the past," said Abboud, "there were political differences between our countries, but it is possible to overcome them by improving communications and understanding." This kind of wishful thinking was at the root of American ignorance about Iraq and it was much in evidence during the 1980s in Washington.

On a warm night in November 1984, I walked up the path of a luxurious house in northwest Washington which served as the Iraqi ambassador's mansion. That very day, the two countries had announced the resumption of diplomatic relations and Iraq's flag flew outside for the first time in many years. The charming, worldly Nizar Hamdoun was promoted from director of Iraq's interest section in Washington to be its ambassador there. To mark the occasion, Iraq's Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz was visiting Washington and Hamdoun invited a few Middle East specialists to dinner. A call from Hamdoun was one of the hottest tickets in a city where even one's companions at meals is a matter of competition. As if to illustrate that point, the man standing ahead of me in line to shake Hamdoun's hand tried to score points with the ambassador by warning him that I had written articles critical of Iraq.

Aziz, the dinner's guest of honor, strongly resembled the British actor Peter Sellers, a fact that softened his menacing presence as representative of such a violent regime. With his Cuban cigars and fondness for Johnny Walker black label scotch, he had an engaging way of hinting at cosmopolitan proclivities and implying that he was more civilized than the tough guys who were his colleagues. Aziz had also perfected one of the great diplomatic skills: he could lie persuasively. "Oh, no, he said, "Iraq has never used chemical weapons," while his eyes conveyed a world-weary, sophisticated regret at being compelled to utter such an obvious falsehood.
Not so long before, the moderator at a Washington think tank where Aziz was giving a lecture paid homage to the foreign minister by refusing to let an Israeli journalist ask the Iraqi any questions. Iraqis must not be assaulted by American norms of free speech. This night, in a newly reopened embassy and at the height of his power and influence, Hamdoun no doubt thought he was providing the foreign minister with an equally friendly forum.

Aziz was visiting Washington to secure additional American help in Iraq's war with Iran. Significantly, the main course included a garnish of bacon and a generous supply of fine wine, a culinary gesture of defiance at Khomeini’s fundamentalism since the Moslem religion dictates that pork and alcohol are forbidden.

Aziz made a strong pitch for the United States to support Iraq in the Gulf. Unfortunately, however, one of the guests--a senior wire-service correspondent--was showing the effects of the liquid refreshments. Suddenly, she interrupted Aziz, "Why didn't you retaliate," she asked, "when Israel destroyed your nuclear reactor?" The foreign minister stopped his talk and tried to brush away the question. The wire-service reporter did not find the response acceptable, "Just yellow, I guess," she heckled in a slurred voice.

Ambassador Hamdoun looked uncomfortable. Insulting the foreign minister might have been a capital offense in Baghdad, but Aziz soldiered on. He was just explaining why the Iran-Iraq war was the most important issue in the Middle East when another somewhat tipsy writer, Rowland Evans, co-author of the well-known Evans & Novak column, interrupted him. "You must not talk like that!" he lectured the startled Iraqi foreign minister. The columnist instructed Aziz to tell the U.S. government that the Arab-Israeli conflict was the Middle East's central issue and that the lack of peace was all Israel's fault. Unaccustomed to being attacked for excessive softness on Israel, Aziz looked astonished. Perhaps it was easier to deal with the inner circles of Saddam's regime, where fear bred discipline, than with these wild, unpredictable Americans. It made one better appreciate why Islam banned alcohol.
One of the most intriguing aspects of Baghdad's charm offensive was the role of Ambassador Hamdoun, the articulate and Westernized son of a general. Hamdoun was the first Arab envoy who really appreciated the distinctive nature of the American political system. He realized that contacts with the State Department alone were insufficient, it was also vital to sway Congress, the media, and public opinion by cultivating journalists, experts, and interest groups. While few people in Washington can be bribed, an ambassador's flattering attentions and confidences over lunch at an expensive restaurant can be far more effective in spreading influence. Those who are personally liked will almost always be believed.

Washington's culture is largely an oral one. A word said in confidence by an official may often have more impact than a hundred analyses of another country's interests and behavior, a thousand hardline, anti-American speeches in Arabic, or perhaps even ten thousand dead Kurdish civilians.

As Iraq's representative in Washington from 1982 until relations were reestablished in 1984 and then its ambassador until 1987, Hamdoun befriended a wide range of policymakers and opinion-makers, even in the Jewish community, to convince them that Iraq was now moderate and deserved U.S. help. One of his most striking stunts was to send a map purportedly captured from Iran's army that showed Tehran's ultimate target was to be Jerusalem. Hamdoun quoted Khomeini as saying, "Israel must be vanished from the face of the earth." The deliberate, but carefully unstated, implication for Hamdoun's American audience was that, objectively, Iraq was fighting to protect Israel as well as the Gulf monarchies.

When U.S. embassy officials in Baghdad parked on a vacant lot owned by an officers' club, Iraqis slashed the tires to send a message. In Washington, however, Iraq could not gain anything from intimidation. For Hamdoun to obtain leverage, he tried to find a way to help important Washington figures advance their own careers. The journalists wanted visas to Iraq and the chance to interview the country's top leaders; the specialists sought access to Hamdoun, free trips to
Baghdad, and audiences with Saddam. Such opportunities, and the inside information Hamdoun offered, gave them the chance to write articles and to build their own reputations as Iraq experts. Hamdoun, a master of this game, fed each of them his theme that Iraq was a friend which deserved U.S. support.

Some of Hamdoun's conquests were particularly valuable. There was the former U.S. ambassador who headed the U.S.-Iraq Chamber of Commerce and wrote a letter in The Washington Post explaining why sanctions against Iraq for human rights violations were counterproductive. Another ex-State Department official became a paid lobbyist for Iraq who, on one occasion, forced a major study group report on U.S. policy to be made more in line with Baghdad's interests by refusing to sign it otherwise. Iraq also assisted some young, ambitious "experts" to build their careers by giving them information, trips to Iraq, and audiences with Saddam. Several of them wrote books, subsidized or circulated by Saddam's regime, without a word of criticism about Iraq. One of these people was appointed to a key State Department post monitoring the proliferation of unconventional weapons to Iraq; others became the leading commentators on Iraq in the media and academia. It was a superb innovation: Iraq created its own sympathetic American experts on Iraq.

As a result of Ambassador Hamdoun's labors, when the Iran-Iraq war ended, the U.S.-Iraq relationship had enough momentum to sustain itself. Hamdoun was already back in Baghdad as deputy foreign minister but a fitting testimonial for his achievement was Iraq's July 1988 national day celebration at the Vista International Hotel in Washington, crowded with hundreds of American officials, journalists, socialites, and Middle East experts. By coincidence, it was the very day that Khomeini accepted the ceasefire ending the Iran-Iraq war, making the event even more of a celebration. There was one notable difference between this party and other embassy affairs in Washington: at the head of this receiving line was a larger-than-life-size cardboard cut-out of Saddam himself. I wondered whether protocol required that guests shake hands with it. But the
symbollism was clear: Big Brother was always watching. Saddam's ego knew no bounds and Iraqi officials would indulge it to the maximum.

Hamdoun largely succeeded, of course, because U.S. policy was already receptive to Iraq. U.S. and Iraqi interests did overlap during the Iran-Iraq war. Many individuals in Washington also had a personal stake in his efforts since Iraq and its Arab allies were paying lavishly in business deals and consulting arrangements for cooperation. Iraq became a large market for U.S. agricultural products which supplied around 30 percent of its imports, endearing it to farm state legislators like Senator Robert Dole of Kansas. These sales were conducted under U.S. government programs that eventually totalled $1 billion a year. As the second-largest beneficiary of U.S. export loans and the seventh-largest subsidy recipient, Iraq obtained about $4 billion during the 1980s.iii

Rather than ask for something in exchange for its support, U.S. policy sought few concessions from Iraq and did nothing to discourage Saddam from considering his war against Iran as a service for which the United States must pay. No U.S. official condemned Iraq's continuing anti-American verbal assaults or internal repression. The name for this approach is appeasement.

Whatever the origin of American credulity--naivete, expediency, or commercial greed--Saddam exploited it at every opportunity. The White House allowed 45 Bell transport helicopters to be sold to Iraq in 1985 on condition that they not be used for military purposes. When Baghdad violated this promise by employing the helicopters to move soldiers, the U.S. government voiced no complaint and permitted Saddam to buy 60 more Hughes helicopters. Iraq's Ministry of Industry and Minerals filed fictitious export applications in order to obtain weapons'-related technology. An Egyptian-born U.S. citizen working at Aerojet General in California was jailed in 1988 for trying to smuggle a material used to make nose-cones for joint Egypt-Iraq missile projects.iv

Iraq even defrauded American banks in its desperate search for funds. In a complex
money-laundering scheme, the Atlanta branch of the Italian Banco Nazionale del Lavoro acted as Iraq's hired agent to borrow $3 billion from U.S. banks, then secretly issue an astounding 2500 letters of credit to Iraq for a total of $3 billion between February 1988 and July 1989. The branch office kept two sets of books to conceal the loans. As evidence of this scheme came to light, the State Department cautioned the Justice Department, according to press reports, not to be too tough in its prosecution. The Italian bank had to reimburse the lenders; the branch manager was convicted of fraud.¹

Saddam's whole career had prepared him to view the United States as an enemy trying to block his regional ambitions and even, if possible, to overthrow him. America, Iraqi leaders and newspapers claimed, kept the Iran-Iraq war going because it wanted Iraq to be weakened. U.S. influence in the area was inherently against Saddam's interest since Israel or Arab states could seek American help to attack or resist him. The secret U.S. arms deals with Tehran reinforced this existing suspicion, providing a case in which there really was a U.S.-Israel-Iran conspiracy against Iraq.

Since the purpose of U.S. and Gulf Arab support for Iraq was to stop Iranian expansionism, Saddam reasonably expected that they would turn away from him as soon as the fighting ended in September 1988. In fact, the irony was that Saddam did not fully appreciate how successful his own wooing of America had been. The friendly U.S. policy toward Iraq did not change, and the same was true for Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, even in the face of mounting Iraqi antagonism toward them.

While the shooting had stopped, UN-mediated negotiations between the two countries bogged down, and the Iran-Iraq ceasefire did not develop into a peace treaty. The reopening of the disputed Shatt al-Arab river became a complex dispute in its own right and over 100,000 prisoners of war were still in captivity on both sides. But no one wanted to fight again. At a 1989 regional athletic competition in Kuwait, the Friendship and Peace Games, Iran and Iraq played a soccer
match--with a European referee to ensure neutrality--before 25,000 spectators. Baghdad's streets were deserted as Iraqis were glued to their television sets. The final score, 0-0, was a fitting metaphor for the war itself.

But Saddam's ambition to be master of the Gulf only kept growing after the war. He first appeared to be concentrating on reconstruction. "War brings big economic losses, sacrifices and bloodshed," said Iraq's dictator. "Peace is easier than war. Peace is a natural way of life." A new strategy of restraint seemed necessary to keep on good terms with the Gulf Arab monarchies that held the purse strings. "An Arab," Saddam commented in November 1988, "does not have the right to occupy another Arab country. Instead...our relations should be based on dialogue, affection, and interaction." Iraq would not force any special relationship on Kuwait. "How will it be possible for us to live together...if the minimum mutual trust is lacking?" Otherwise, with everyone so heavily armed, Arab leaders would be like "Chicago gangsters."

Saddam's talk of brotherhood, however, soon gave way to more sober considerations. For years, Iraq had been insisting that it could have both guns and butter. "The Iraqi economy is stronger than ever before," an Iraqi newspaper claimed. In reality, economic development was at a standstill during the war. Living standards had steadily declined as inflation rose. Iraq had a higher proportion of men in uniform than any other country--triple the Soviet rate and five times that of the United States--and Saddam did not reduce the army's size despite the ceasefire. Iraqis were impatient for some material reward after fighting so hard and suffering so much. Returning soldiers rioted in early 1989 and murdered Egyptian workers whom they accused of stealing their jobs.

The war also left Iraq with gigantic foreign debts. Aside from $30 billion in grants from the Saudis and Kuwaitis, Iraq owed the Soviet bloc $10 billion, $25 billion to Western and Third World countries, and $5 to 10 billion to banks and suppliers. Iraq argued it had earned this money by saving the Gulf from Iran. The creditors disagreed. Saddam's strong-arm methods had their
limits. While the banks could not force him to repay Iraq's debts, they would give no more loans. Yet Iraq had to find $30 billion just to repair war damage, and $5 billion of its $14 billion annual earnings was needed just to pay interest. Even Iraq's huge oil reserves--virtually its sole source of income--fell short of this challenge, especially since petroleum prices were relatively low.

No amount of cooperation with Jordan, Egypt, or the PLO could resolve Iraq's problems, Saddam realized. "We are all bankrupt," he joked. The only way to increase Iraq's income was to sell more oil at higher prices. Yet Iraq could do neither: its OPEC quota limited exports to 2.6 million barrels a day. By agreement of the OPEC member states, each of them was assigned an export quota so as to avoid a glut on the market that would send prices downward. The Saudis raised their own exports at times to hold down prices and keep consumers in industrialized countries from switching to coal, natural gas, and a more efficient use of energy.

This system for balancing prices was a good long-term strategy for states like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia which had surplus money. But the plan was disastrous for a country like Iraq which needed lots of money immediately and thus wanted to sell as much oil as possible at the highest price. To make matters worse, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates cheated by exporting more oil than their quotas permitted. Saddam easily convinced himself that Saudi policy and Kuwaiti cheating were bankrupting Iraq.

While not all the problems were its fault, though, Saddam's regime had effectively taken a rich country and run it into the ground. A balanced reconstruction program might have dug Iraq's way out of this mess. After all, only Saudi Arabia had larger oil reserves than Iraq which also--unlike the Gulf monarchies--had a large skilled labor force and good farmland along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The regime could have cut military spending but Saddam wanted to maintain his expensive army and high-priority programs to build super-weapons. It could have liberalized the economy, but decentralizing authority and expanding free enterprise would reduce the government's tight control. The fall of the Communist regimes on which Iraq's government had
modeled itself made reform seem frightening as a step more likely to produce chaos than prosperity.

Saddam sometimes talked about political changes like democratic elections, a multi-party system, and more freedom for the press. In the April 1989 parliamentary elections, only 160 of 900 candidates were party members, yet all contestants were carefully screened. Saddam explained that reforms were not needed, "We in Iraq consider ourselves successful...and have no problems." Referring to Germany and Japan after World War Two, Saddam suggested that, since defeated countries—not victorious ones—became more democratic, Iraq's triumph over Iran proved that its system was correct.\textsuperscript{ix}

Instead of reforming its system, Iraq tried to use the prospect of lucrative reconstruction contracts to lure foreign investors and lenders, but since prospects for Iraqi repayment seemed poor, few deals were made. Iraq's demand that companies selling it goods or services arrange their own financing was particularly unattractive. Egyptian workers left when the regime broke its promises to send their earnings home to Egypt. Foreign airlines stopped flying because Iraq would not let them take their earnings from ticket sales out of the country. Turkey cut Iraq's water from the Euphrates river for a month to fill its own reservoirs. Even paranoids have enemies and Saddam had reason to conclude there was an international conspiracy against him.\textsuperscript{x}

Meanwhile, he planned too much reconstruction without being able to pay for it. High-priority projects included the city of Basra, a Baghdad subway system, a Mosul airport, almost 2000 miles of railway, a highway from Basra to Turkey, a steel-making complex, an auto plant in cooperation with General Motors, fertilizer and petrochemical factories, the Mandawa and Badush dams, a power station, and an oil refinery near Baghdad. Basra, the city most damaged in the war, was to be the showcase. Saddam insisted it be renovated by May 1989. Damage from years of rocket and artillery fire was cleared away, canals dredged, roads cleared, and a gleaming international airport reopened. Despite this facade, though, there were no industries there to create
jobs and earn money.$^{xi}$

In Aesop's fable, the prudent, hardworking ant was well-supplied for winter; the spendthrift grasshopper starved. Similarly, Kuwait had wisely invested its $50 billion of income from the 1980s and doubled these holdings to $100 billion, while Iraq had squandered the same amount in war and was left with nothing. But in politics, like nature, a hungry carnivore can prey on fat grazers. Iraq argued that the oil-rich kingdoms had never worked for their wealth while it had heroically defended them. Baghdad had no better use for its army—which had grown from 12 divisions in 1980 to over 77 divisions at the war's end—than to seize the savings of neighbors it saw as undeservedly rich grasshoppers.$^{xii}$

Iraq’s leaders, then, were armed and dangerous, drawing confidence from their total control at home, victory over Iran, and possession of a huge military machine. Energetic and youthful, Saddam himself was barely 50 years old. The country's rulers believed they had only begun their careers of conquest. A Ba'th party slogan said that it required 20 years in power, after taking over in July 1968, to ensure its authority in Iraq before uniting the Arabs. This period coincided almost to the day with the Iran-Iraq war's end, which marked the start of the new era in this glorious history. In tribute to his old idol, who had come closest to winning the mantle of Arab leadership, Saddam put a statue of Nasser in one of Baghdad's main squares and named a street after the late Egyptian leader.

The Bush Administration neither understood that Saddam was about to unleash his ambition nor that he was ready to sacrifice an effective reconstruction program for political reasons. Most U.S. officials and experts expected Iraq to be sensible, to concentrate on development and reduce military spending. After all, what country would be more likely to follow a pacific course than one which had just barely survived a terrible eight-year war? This seemed logical for those accustomed to democracy but was far from a radical dictator's mentality.

Thus, the Reagan and Bush administrations remained largely passive despite Iraq's crimes
against U.S. laws and a State Department report calling Baghdad's human rights record "abysmal" and "unacceptable," The presidents resisted congressional demands to put pressure or sanctions on Iraq for its murderous treatment of the Kurdish minority. Immediately after the war, Saddam forcibly moved as many as 500,000 Kurds to camps and razed 700 villages to create a depopulated security zone along the Iran-Iraq border. Amnesty International reported that hundreds of children had been imprisoned, tortured, or murdered. British and American doctors found symptoms in Kurdish refugees showing that chemical weapons had been used on them. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Schifter estimated that chemical attacks on Kurdish towns had killed about 8000 people.

In September 1988, the House of Representatives voted by a margin of 388 to 16 to invoke economic sanctions against Iraq at a time when U.S. credits to Iraq were around $1 billion annually. But the White House called sanctions "terribly premature and counterproductive [endangering] billions of dollars" of business for U.S. companies. Senator John Heinz of Pennsylvania said, "Getting tough on the use of chemical weapons by Iraq [was just being] tough on certain U.S. exporters." The Administration succeeded in having this proposal so watered down in the Senate that Iraq merely had to promise not to use chemical weapons again in order to obtain Export-Import Bank credits. There were no restrictions on agricultural credits.

And so, in response to Saddam's actions and threats, Washington acted in a way which convinced Baghdad that the United States was weak. Saddam interpreted U.S. attempts to avoid conflict as proof that America feared confrontation with him. Each act of appeasement only increased Iraq's boldness without persuading it that the United States wanted to be its friend. The Americans "are out to hurt Iraq," one of that country's top leaders claimed. The problem was not that U.S. actions alienated Iraq but that the nature of Iraq's regime inevitably made it antagonistic to the United States.

Allowing Saddam to threaten the United States without reacting also made other Arabs see
Baghdad as a winner and let Iraq think it could get away with seizing Kuwait. No less an expert on this point than Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister Nizar Hamdoun--albeit in reference to Iran--explained, "Aggressors thrive on appeasement. The world learned that at tremendous cost from the Munich agreement of 1938....How could the German generals oppose Hitler once he had proven himself successful?" If America did not stop Khomeini or Saddam, their neighbors and underlings would certainly not try to do so.

Iranian Planning and Budget Minister Mas'ud Zanjani, ridiculing U.S. intervention to defend Gulf shipping from Iranian attacks in 1987, expressed the type of thinking about America that lured Middle East dictators and extremists into more than one confrontation with America. The United States would never fight in the Gulf, explained Zanjani, because its forces were so vulnerable, the American people and their European allies would oppose intervention, and the Americans would quickly retreat if they suffered casualties.

Like the Iranians--and other past dictators in Japan, Germany, and the USSR--Saddam underestimated America while he played the dangerous game of exaggerating outside menaces to justify his incompetence at home and aggression abroad. The Zionists and other enemies--a category including Iran, Syria, and the United States--were said to be so frightened and jealous of Iraq's victory that they were conspiring to block its rightful leadership role by economic warfare and military attack.

Iraq's attitude toward Israel was simultaneously paranoid and cynical. Saddam tried to use the Arab-Israeli conflict for his own purposes as a useful tool to unite his people at home and appeal to Arabs abroad. But he probably also believed that Israel was the embodiment of evil and would inevitably attack Iraq. Although Iraqi intelligence officers met secretly with Israeli counterparts in February 1986--when Iran still seemed able to win the war and Iraq was exploring every alternative--these efforts went nowhere. Iraq remained extremely hostile to Israel. A leading Iraqi poet opened his country's 1989 Babylon cultural festival by proclaiming that Iraq would tear
up the Zionists' Torah scrolls as it had destroyed Iran's dreams. Zionism, said Saddam, could not "bear the idea of an Arab victory in battle." He took comfort in the hope that foreign Jews were criticizing and abandoning Israel.

"Direct aggression from Israel is expected," said Saddam repeatedly. Iraq was persuaded that there would soon be a new Israeli air raid to repeat the humiliation of the 1981 destruction of its nuclear reactor. Iraqi gunners were so nervous that they accidentally shot down an Egyptian fighter-bomber arriving for the April 1989 Baghdad air show. Nonetheless, the Iraqis claimed they were not frightened. "The Zionists should realize," said an Iraqi newspaper, "that Iraq in 1989 is different from Iraq in 1981," having become too strong to challenge. Baghdad's arsenal now included weapons so terrible--missiles, chemical, and eventually atomic--as to deter or destroy Israel.

Further, Iraq was ready to fight a long war which Israel, an Iraqi journalist asserted, could never survive. During the Iran-Iraq conflict, Iraq had "swum under water for eight years." Iraq's state-run press proclaimed: "Iraq emerged from the war triumphant, familiar with the details of science and technology," so advanced as to break "the myth of Israeli superiority." Now the Arabs could crack the Arab-Israeli deadlock and achieve total victory.

Since the Iraqi regime thought peace to be impossible and Arab victory inevitable, it wanted to prevent a negotiated settlement of the conflict. Such a solution, after all, would permanently thwart Iraq's ambitions by strengthening Israel, helping Arab moderates, and intensifying U.S. influence. Thus, as always, Baghdad took a hard line on the conflict. "Assuming the Palestinians agree to take the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to set up a state there," asked First Deputy Prime Minister Taha Yasin Ramadan, "do you think it would in practice lead to a comprehensive and lasting peace, when every Palestinian knows the rest of his country is occupied by Israel, which is there by force of arms?" He doubted it.

One element in Iraq's effort to block diplomacy and seize Arab leadership was to dominate
the PLO. The Palestinian cause still had prestige among the Arab masses as the most salient nationalist struggle. Baghdad could not be chief of the Arabs if Egypt, Syria, or Jordan was the Palestinians' patron. With the PLO weakened by the erosion of Soviet support, opposed by Syria, and nagged by Egypt to be more moderate, Arafat needed Saddam even more than the Iraqi dictator needed him.

In December 1988, Arafat had promised to accept Israel's existence, UN resolutions calling for a compromise settlement, and an end to terrorism. The United States and PLO opened a dialogue. But Arafat chose to pursue the radical option by working with Iraq, moving PLO offices and top-level meetings from Tunisia to Baghdad, and visiting there every few weeks in 1989 and 1990. Baghdad courted Arafat by giving him full honors as a head of state, a huge embassy compound, training facilities for military and terrorist operations, money, and a personal airplane.

While plying Arafat with gifts, Saddam also used his power over some PLO groups to push the organization in the direction he wanted. One of the Baghdad-directed factions--the Palestine Liberation Front--launched a big seaborne terrorist attack against Israel in May 1990, using Palestinians recruited in Iraq and rehearsed in Libya. The terrorists, under orders to shoot as many civilians as possible on Israel's beaches, were themselves quickly killed or captured by Israel's navy. Arafat neither condemned the terrorism nor punished the PLO leaders involved. The United States responded to this behavior by suspending talks with the PLO. From Iraq's standpoint, the peace process's breakdown was an achievement averting the threat of a diplomatic solution.

At the same time as Iraq sponsored terrorism and sabotaged peace, it also maintained a facade of innocence. Baghdad insisted that reports about its efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction were fictions from Israeli intelligence and U.S. imperialism, a propaganda campaign to discredit Iraq and justify a military attack on it. Ironically, though information about these programs was often ignored in the West because it came from Israel or pro-Israel sources, this material would later prove correct or even underestimates of Iraq's activities.
Iraq's massive military build-up, however, was a self-fulfilling prophecy, since it increased the very U.S. and Israeli antagonism that Saddam claimed to fear. As an Arab proverb puts it, "He hits me, then he complains." When Iraq bragged about new super-weapons to impress its populace and other Arabs this publicity sparked more Western news coverage and export controls. "Iraq is building an advanced arms industry to match any in the world," said Hussein Kamil, Saddam's cousin and the minister supervising Iraq's missile and military plants. Kamil had done such a good job that Saddam promoted him to defense minister. At the First International Baghdad Fair for Military Industrialization, Iraq spoke of building 200 kinds of sophisticated weapons, ranging from cluster bombs to missiles to copies of the advanced Soviet T-72 tank.

Many companies were eager to help Iraq for profit. For example, Marcel Dassault-Breguet, chairman of the French Dassault Company was peddling his Mirage-2000 fighters at the fair. "I would answer `yes' if Iraqi pilots want to use our planes," he said. Moscow's desperate need for money made it eager to sell Iraq whatever it could pay for in hard currency, including some of the Soviet arms being removed as the Soviets withdrew from Eastern Europe.xxv

German companies, some of which had once contributed greatly to Hitler's war effort, were particularly cooperative with Iraq. A Social Democratic legislator protested to Prime Minister Helmut Kohl that Germany had a special moral responsibility, "The Jews will not forget, the Americans have not forgotten and the Germans are not allowed to forget."xxvi But while the German government intensified investigations, legal charges for violating export laws were only filed after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

Of course, Iraq was not the only Middle East country to have a big army nor was it alone in developing missiles, chemical, and nuclear arms. Israel had some nuclear weapons and launched its own experimental rockets in 1987 and 1988. Saudi Arabia was buying Chinese missiles. Libya and Syria were also busily obtaining unconventional weapons. But Iraq's record--it had already fired missiles and chemical weapons against its own Kurdish citizens and Iranian enemies--and
rhetoric showed that it was the country most likely to use them.

By the early 1980s, Iraq's plants were already making 1000 tons of chemical weapons a year. When the West restricted exports to Iraq of the raw materials needed for such products, the country worked to become self-sufficient in producing the needed ingredients and equipment. Items were also smuggled by circuitous routes. For example, a Baltimore company shipped chemicals through Jordan before U.S. authorities discovered the real destination and made arrests.

Iraq followed the same pattern of buying, smuggling, then domestic manufacturing to obtain the technology and raw materials for building long-range missiles. It began by improving Soviet prototypes. Equipment was purchased from many places, including the United States, to build its Saad-16 missile-building complex near Mosul. A special espionage group reporting to Saddam handled illegal procurement in 22 countries. Parts were shipped through third countries--especially Jordan--or dummy companies, many of them in Switzerland. Contraband goods were flown in on Iraqi planes directly from Europe. Iraq also bought shares in European companies to increase its chance to buy advanced tools or steal technological data. As time went on, Iraqi scientists and factories were able to make more of these things at home.xxvii

Results were achieved quickly. The Iraqis were preparing typhoid, cholera, and anthrax in underground facilities at Salman Pak, 35 miles southeast of Baghdad. Iraq was making rapid progress on developing nuclear weapons, too, with reported help coming from China. U.S. intelligence estimated that Baghdad was only a few years away from being able to build an atomic bomb. Whether it could succeed, said the American military expert Anthony Cordesman, would only be known "when one sees a mushroom cloud above northern Iraq.xxviii

Most successful of all was Iraq's long-range missile program. In April 1988, Iraq unveiled a new al-Abbas Scud-B missile. By March 1989 an Iraqi official announced that its missiles had the long-range capacity to hit Tel Aviv. In December 1989, it tested two Tamouz-1 missiles with a range of 1200 miles.xxx
While the West was relatively indifferent to these developments, Israel--Iraq's openly declared target--was anxious about the new arms, Western companies' eagerness to arm Saddam, and Western governments' willingness to let it happen. In light of all this information, the United States responded to help Israeli defend itself from a missile attack. U.S. aid was already partly funding Israel's own Arrow defensive missile but this was several years away from deployment. In January 1990, Israel ordered two batteries of U.S. Patriot missiles to be delivered in late 1991 at a cost of $200 million.

The United States and Great Britain also stepped up efforts to block Iraqi smuggling of raw materials and high-technology equipment. This campaign slowed Iraq's efforts but had less than enthusiastic support from the U.S. Commerce Department which freely granted export licenses in order to promote business. For example, only a warning by former Defense Department official Stephen Bryen prevented a proposed sale to Iraq of a high-temperature furnace useful for its nuclear program. Baghdad claimed the device was for medical purposes. Secretary of Commerce Robert Mosbacher, whom Bush later chose to lead his 1992 presidential campaign, and the department's counselor Wayne Berman were ready to approve almost any sale to Iraq.

If Saddam had been more patient, he could have continued developing his unconventional weapons, invading Kuwait only when he possessed an arsenal--paid for by his intended victims and sold him by democratic states--sufficient to discourage any opposition. But his own miscalculation and Iraq's economic woes would make him act too hastily.

While Iraq's state-controlled media talked about importing American Chevrolets as a "new symbol of affluence," there was rationing and shortages of meat and eggs in Baghdad. The authorities threatened to punish those standing in the long lines waiting to buy food if they were not more orderly. The minister of trade called bakers into his office to insist they maintain bread supplies and warn of stern punishment for selling on the black market. Yet Iraq could not free up enough foreign exchange to import spare parts to replace their worn-out equipment.
Given Iraq's fiscal weakness, a U.S. threat to cut its huge subsidies and credits would have so undermined the regime's stability as to provide a big incentive for restraint. Instead, Iraq was allowed to go on using U.S. aid to subsidize indirectly its oversized army and weapons' research programs, since this money left Baghdad with more of its own funds to buy arms. Iraq's government remained so sure of American help that it saw no need to make economic reforms by expanding private enterprise, reducing taxes and military spending, or selling off inefficient state companies.

The fact that other Arabs also had economic and political problems encouraged Saddam to think they might rally behind him in a common assault on America, Israel, and the wealthy Gulf Arabs. The general mood of despair was well-described by a Jordanian, "The situation is terrible. The whole world is getting democracy except for us. Our economies are a mess, we are weak, we are being left behind. We can't even stop the Russian Jews from immigrating to Israel."xxxiv

At the same time, Saddam's brotherly rhetoric scarcely concealed the fact that his goal was to isolate Egypt, undermine Syria, dominate Jordan, and milk Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for every possible penny. All the Arab states, too, tried to have it both ways. They sought to stay on Saddam's good side, since it was always good to maintain Arab solidarity for appearances' sake and wise to remember that Iraq might emerge triumphant. Publicly, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Syria extolled Iraq's reasonableness, pacifism, and good intentions, insisting that Saddam merely wanted to defend himself and concentrate on domestic reconstruction.

Privately, however, they talked in a different way. The Gulf Arab states so feared Iraq as a dominant ally that they wanted to avoid dependence on it. Egyptian leaders called Saddam a "psychotic" and Jordanian officials whispered that they were trying to civilize the crude Iraqi dictator. Moreover, while Iraq's anti-American and anti-Israel rhetoric might score some points among their people, most Arab rulers feared America and Israel enough to prefer avoiding confrontation. If the post-Cold War world was going to be an era of U.S. domination, this very fact
made it all the more sensible to stay on good terms with the world's sole superpower. The moderates wanted it to protect them from Iraq and Iran; the radicals felt weaker than ever at seeing the collapse of the USSR which had been their economic and political model as well as superpower patron.

Arab rulers liked to attack Israel with words or by covertly supporting terrorism, but risking another military defeat by the Jewish state was less appealing. Israel seemed to be growing stronger, with hundreds of thousands of new Soviet Jewish immigrants arriving there. The Palestinian intifada achieved nothing material and did not force Israel out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

There was a great deal of resentment toward the rich Gulf monarchies among poorer Arabs. In the late 1970s, the Saudis and Kuwaitis committed themselves to a large, ten-year aid program for Syria and Jordan so that they might confront Israel. Without providing any particular rationale, the donors did not renew these subsidies when they expired in 1988. The poorer Arabs were bitter that their supposed brothers invested more securely and profitably in the West rather than providing more charity or aid.

But most of the needy states preferred to keep good relations with the Gulf monarchs rather than fight them, hoping that honeyed words would persuade them to give more aid. As rivals with Iraq for regional hegemony, Egypt and Syria assumed that Iraqi hegemony over the Gulf would be at their expense. Saudi and Kuwaiti oil riches would flow to Baghdad rather than to Cairo or Damascus.xxv Egypt, as America's closest Arab ally and the only Arab state at peace with Israel, wanted no Arab confrontation with Washington or Jerusalem. Having feuded with its neighbor Saddam for almost 20 years, Syria's regime felt that it would only be victimized if Iraq became stronger.

The situation in Jordan was somewhat different from that prevailing in Saudi Arabia, Syria or Egypt. As Saddam's weakest neighbor, Jordan was intimidated into an alliance with Saddam.
But King Hussein thought he could pursue this policy without any cost. He expected to stop short of becoming involved in an Iraq-Israel confrontation. Similarly, the king knew that Jordanian criticism of America would not destroy his old connection with that country. If necessary, he could count on the United States and, indirectly, Israel, to save him from Saddam's strangling embrace. It was a dangerous game, but the king had survived many such experiences in his long reign. Jordan's inherently hazardous geopolitical position gave him no choice.

In domestic politics, Jordan's cooperation with Saddam had real advantages for the king. Iraq's radicalism was popular among his Islamic fundamentalist and Palestinian subjects. By cheering Saddam, the monarch sounded like an Arab militant to the mob and he thus outmaneuvered the local radicals. How could they oppose a government which pursued such a patriotic nationalist policy?

Antagonism against the Saudis and Kuwaitis was especially high in Jordan and, lacking any leverage over them, King Hussein could only hope to share in loot obtained by Iraqi pressure on the monarchies. Jordan was racked by inflation, unemployment, and a $6 billion foreign debt. In April 1989, riots over rising prices left 8 dead and 100 injured as hitherto loyal citizens attacked banks, burned tires, smashed cars, and battled the police. Crown Prince Hassan blamed the disturbances on Islamic fundamentalists, "the bearded gentlemen." But soon the king was growing his own beard to win their favor. xxxvi

In practical terms, King Hussein permitted Iraqi reconnaissance flights along his border with Israel and allowed the formation of a joint Jordan-Iraq fighter squadron. Jordan also served as a conduit for shipping weapons' technology and strategic materials to Iraq, bypassing Western export restrictions. In response to Israeli warnings, he secretly promised that cooperation would remain limited. xxxvii

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were also willing to help Iraq but they did not want to surrender their sovereignty to Saddam or follow him into a conflict with Israel and America. They offered
Baghdad pay-offs while also continuing to buy large amounts of Western arms and tightening their relations with the United States. Washington was ready to provide these weapons for the profits as well as the strategic purpose of ensuring Gulf stability. In 1989, the Bush Administration proposed to sell Saudi Arabia $850 million in aircraft parts, missiles, and training plus $3 billion of 315 Abrams tanks.\textsuperscript{xxxviii}

Asked to approve the sales, members of Congress inquired whom the Saudi arsenal was aimed against, wondering if Israel was the ultimate target. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Richard Clarke justified the Administration's proposal in November 1989 by explaining, "Saudi Arabia lives in a bad neighborhood....The principal military threat in the region is Iraq."

Congressman Mel Levine asked, "Do you believe that Saudi Arabia could repulse an Iraqi invasion?"

A strong Saudi force, Clarke replied, might deter Baghdad or "slow that attack down until the United States and other friendly forces were able to do something."

Deputy Assistant Secretary Edward Gnehm, about to be named ambassador to Kuwait, leaped into the exchange, "I don't think it is appropriate to focus on Iraq as the principal threat because, in truth, at the present time, Saudi-Iraqi relations are good." The Bush Administration rejected the possibility of Iraq becoming an aggressor. The Saudis made the same mistake, categorically denying Iraq was dangerous and praising Saddam.\textsuperscript{xxxix}

After evincing no strong reaction to Iraq's use of chemical weapons against the Kurds, threats against Israel, outspoken anti-Americanism, or the ultimatum to Kuwait, the United States had helped convince Saddam that he could get away with occupying and annexing his neighbor. By seeking to avoid any trouble with Iraq, U.S. policy had helped precipitate a much bigger crisis.\textsuperscript{xl}

ii. Ibid.


xi. My thanks to Dr. Patrick Clawson for this list of projects.


attack.

xxxi. Not all American politicians understood the importance of nonproliferation. Former President Jimmy Carter announced, "It may be that the very knowledge that there are chemical, biological and nuclear weapons in the Middle East will cause these leaders to be cautious in what they do."


xxxvii. Middle East Mirror, February 19, 1990, p. 2.


xxxix. House Foreign Affairs Committee hearings, November 7, 1989, Federal Transcripts; Middle East Mirror, November 15, 1989, p. 25.

CHAPTER EIGHT
BRAVE NEW GULF

When the call to prayer sounded from the minaret, Hojja ran away from the mosque. "Where are you going, Hojja?"
"That was the loudest, most convincing call ever! I am going to find out how far it can be heard!"

--Middle East folktale

Mr. Toyoda, the head of the vast Toyota Japanese automotive empire, listened carefully to a briefing in the Washington conference room. He was talking to a group of American experts about political conditions in the Gulf where Toyota had extensive business dealings. He knew how costly a misreading of the area's future could be. Another Japanese company, Mitsui, had lost over $1 billion on a massive Iranian petrochemical project disrupted by the revolution and bombed during the Iran-Iraq war. The Japanese industrialist also understood that the situation in the Gulf had a tremendous impact on international business conditions since most of Japan's and much of West Europe's oil came from there.

He listened politely as the experts spoke and their words were translated into Japanese. Then, in his own language, Mr. Toyoda asked a question: "This is all very interesting. But what I really want to know is the date on which the Saudi monarchy will fall."

"We know the date," one of the American consultants joked, "but before telling you we have to renegotiate our contract for a higher fee."

The revolution in Iran made more than a few foreign observers and--more importantly--Iraqi and Iranian leaders, expect that it would only be a matter of time before the Gulf Arab monarchs would go the way of the Shah. The only question was the timing of their fall and the beneficiaries from their demise.

Those who expected this outcome, however, underestimated the Saudi and Kuwaiti rulers'...
tenacity and ability. They eventually outmaneuvered Iran and Iraq to succeed in preserving their security. Similarly, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait proved themselves pragmatic rather than fanatic, as prone to self-interest and rational calculation as any other countries in the world. By persuading U.S. policymakers otherwise, however, the Gulf monarchies also managed to obtain what they wanted from America. at the lowest possible political cost.

Just as Iran and Iraq were the predators in the Gulf which the United States had to block; Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were the potential victims which America had to protect. Compared to Iran and Iraq, these societies--ruled by monarchs and organized by more traditional structures and ideas--were even harder for Americans to understand.

It is not surprising that the myths which so misled American thinking about the region did so with extra intensity in the cases of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Those regimes used so much Arab nationalist and Islamic rhetoric that it was easy to conclude they believed these words. They spoke with such fervor about the Palestinian issue and their hatred of Israel that one might think this was their most passionate concern. Given the cultural gap, it could well appear that the Saudis and Kuwaitis wanted to keep themselves distant from the United States. Their vast oil wealth implied they were independent of any need for American assistance; their supposed fragility made them seem easy prey for radical ideas and revolutions.

Events in the 1970s and 1980s proved each of these preconceptions to be wrong. Saudi and Kuwaiti behavior belied the claims that the U.S. regional position was shaky, dependent on resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict while foolishly undermining the very moderates it sought to support. Rather than the U.S. standing in the area leaning on Saudi kindness, Saudi Arabia's survival was reliant on U.S. good-will.

Beyond appearances, this reality should have been evident. Saudi and Kuwaiti rhetoric was a substitute for action and a cheap way to buy off radical Arab states and movements. Outside of words, and relatively sparse donations, the Saudis and Kuwaitis largely ignored the Arab-Israeli
conflict. They were eager to obtain Western goods even if they did not always want to imitate Western culture, and were badly in need of U.S. protection and arms. The fact that oil wealth was transforming those desert kingdoms at such astounding speed made them more cognizant of their need for American help.

For Americans to grasp how Saudi Arabia and Kuwait functioned, it was useful to consider Winston Churchill's comment on how it felt to be 90 years old: "Terrible! But consider the alternative!" The Gulf Arab monarchies were puritanical oligarchies but the alternative--to be like Iraq or Iran--was not wildly attractive. The fact that the Saudi and Kuwaiti kingdoms provided peace and security for the lives and property of their citizens was no mean achievement by regional standards. In short, they deserved to be defended from the radicals by the United States on ethical as well as strategic grounds. Only by examining their unique societies and politics, however, can one understand how much these states differed from the American mythology about them and how U.S. policy missed opportunities to use its own leverage on them.

Up to the 1970s, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had been among the most closed societies on earth. Some Islamic traditionalists in Saudi Arabia protested the introduction of radio and automobiles there in the 1920s and television in 1964 as dangerously anti-Islamic innovations. Now, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were being deluged by Western goods, technology, and ideas. But the Gulf states wanted to separate the import of Western civilization's products from an imitation of its society. Bahrain's minister of development explained in 1985, "Nobody was ready for all the money that descended on us. People became confused, and they ran away to find comfort in Islam," though not in its radical fundamentalist form.

Two incidents from the 1970s symbolize this fear of social disintegration in Saudi Arabia. In 1975, a young Saudi prince returned from his studies in the West to assassinate King Feisal, sparking concern that there might be some radical conspiracy against the kingdom. After a thorough investigation, it was concluded that he had acted alone from a personal grudge: his
brother had been killed a decade earlier during an anti-television demonstration. In 1978, worldwide attention was drawn to the execution of a young Saudi princess and her lover, charged with breaking the country’s strict sexual code.

What was truly remarkable about Saudi Arabia--and Kuwait, too--was how stable they remained in the face of such rapid change. The regimes were too much in control, too alert to the threat, and too well-endowed with money to fall so easily. The Gulf Arab monarchies had much more oil income and far fewer people to divide the benefits than did Iran, where the oil boom whetted more appetites than it satisfied. Since Iran's Islamic revolution was ethnically Persian and theologically Shia, it had only a limited appeal for the Arab and mainly Sunni Moslem majority in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Wealth without hard work may not seem virtuous but it is a very pleasurable way of life. This welfare state provided a cushion enabling the Saudi and Kuwaiti rulers to preserve enough of traditional society while giving their subjects the benefits of a higher living standard. These regimes used their Arab identity, material benefits, and repression to keep all but a tiny number of people from following Khomeini.ii

Dramatic as were the changes brought by oil wealth in these societies, they were just beginning a long process which might take many decades before it undermined the existing regimes. No cohesive revolutionary class or group existed in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait among army officers, officials, businessmen, intellectuals, or workers. The old loyalties were still strong and these people lacked a collective political consciousness, remaining more oriented instead to the divisive appeals of family, clan, and tribe.

The Saudis and Kuwaitis also defused any potential political challenge from a discontented working class by giving the menial jobs to hundreds of thousands of imported foreign workers from Pakistan, South Korea, Yemen, and the Philippines. More educated foreigners from Europe or Arab countries held professional positions which the local citizens were not willing or trained to
fill. Since the local residents saw these guest workers as servants, not masters, the presence of so many foreigners made them content rather than angry. The imported employees were too diverse and transient to pose a political threat, considering themselves lucky to be making an income far beyond what they might have earned at home. Those instigating dissent could be easily deported. The Kuwaiti government admitted to expelling 27,000 foreigners in 1986 alone, though independent estimates were far higher.iii

Despite their conservative anti-communism, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait practiced a kind of paternalistic socialism which made them commercial paradises. The state's control of the oil which furnished almost all the national income let it subsidize and protect local businesses. Saudi and Kuwaiti companies were tied to the government because most of their income came from commissions or kickbacks on its contracts. Saudi and Kuwaiti technocrats educated abroad were linked to the system because they mostly worked for the regime's bureaucracy. This bourgeoisie knew how much it had to lose if the system was overturned, having seen too many failures by Marxism, radical Arab nationalism, and Islamic fundamentalism to be mesmerized by such alleged panaceas.

In no Arab state was country and regime more inseparable than in Saudi Arabia, whose very name enshrined the Saudi family's domination. The royal house, however, was like a political party, not an in-grown cabal. Compared to the Shah's small household, there were perhaps 20,000 members of the Saudi family in all, including 4000 princes scattered in key spots throughout the country's institutions. Many of the armed forces' commanders were princes; a separate National Guard under Prince Abdallah functioned, in effect, as the family's private army. Through intermarriage, subsidies, and rewards, the family's alliances extended throughout the tribes, clergy, merchants, officers, and the state's bureaucracy.

The Saudi religious establishment, too, was closely allied to the royal family and had been for more than two centuries. Even when the government had to cut spending, it kept up the clergy's
subsidies. In 1986, having learned a lesson from the Shah's fate, Saudi King Fahd stressed his personal religious status as protector of Islam's most sacred sites in Mecca and Medina by taking the title of "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques."

The royal family was also adept at maintaining its own unity. The king was its leader but also listened to his relatives, who restrained and informed him in an on-going private debate. The system smoothly handled each transition to a new monarch and choice of the next crown prince, a process which happened four times between 1953 and 1982. When a weak king was on the throne—as were two of the five monarchs in this century—the crown prince played a powerful role. In contrast to the system common in the West, the king's eldest son did not automatically succeed him. Instead, the selection process took into account the candidates' personal ability and the balance of power among the family's different branches.

The leading triumvirate in the 1980s and 1990s—King Fahd, Crown Prince Abdallah, and Minister of Defense Prince Sultan—worked well together. The six-foot-tall Fahd had long experience as interior minister and was the power behind the throne during the reign of his often ill predecessor King Khalid. Fahd ascended the throne when Khalid died in 1982. Prince Sultan, one of the royal family's smartest and most popular members, had been Fahd's close ally for many years and was a strong advocate for modernization.

Crown Prince Abdallah, who had a special interest in inter-Arab diplomacy, preferred a slower pace for development. His frequent contacts with Damascus and marriage to one of Syrian President Assad's relatives gave rise to rumors that he was relatively radical and anti-American. But during the Kuwait crisis, Abdallah would prove especially determined in opposing Iraq's aggression and cooperating with the United States. Even if there were some differences among its members, the family enjoyed a consensus on the great majority of issues.

Saudi development strategies were reasonably effective and although wasting a great deal of money on luxuries it could afford to do so. No matter how much cash the royal family took for
itself, there was plenty left to distribute as patronage to ensure popular support. Since so many people shared in the pay-offs, the system's corruption was often a politically beneficial form of economic redistribution to a large portion of the population. By way of contrast, Iran's structure of corruption under the Shah had become a monopoly that only enriched a small elite and thus bred discontent.

Still, even the Saudi family's funds were not unlimited. A typical analysis during the 1970s' oil boom days claimed that Saudi Arabia, "can literally buy any future." The goods purchased and investments made in the United States deepened the American stake in Saudi Arabia's sovereignty and stability. Yet riches that once seemed infinite shrank as oil prices fell and income was committed to domestic development projects and subsidies. Lower oil earnings in the 1980s pressed the Saudi and Kuwaiti rulers to slow down ambitious development plans, cut foreign aid, and borrow abroad. These governments had to consider reducing domestic subsidies, a step which could bring unrest among their spoiled citizens.

While in 1980-81 the Saudis ran a $36 billion budget surplus, by the late 1980s their annual deficit ranged between $14 and $20 billion annually. Monetary reserves fell from $150 billion at their peak in 1982 to $63 billion at the end of 1988, of which more than half was in uncollectible loans to Iraq, Egypt, and others. Kuwaiti revenue also declined from $19 billion in 1979-80 to $9 billion in 1984.iv

But spending less money and slowing the pace of development also had advantages. The very modernization that had created jobs and raised living standards also eroded the traditional relations, ideas, and loyalties which preserved the system. Conservatives, clerics, and tribal leaders were already complaining about un-Islamic innovations and their own reduced influence. The rulers had to be careful not to be--or let the country become--too quickly and completely modernized or Westernized. The royal family generally did find the right balance between keeping citizens happy and balancing its checkbook. For example, instead of thousands of Saudi students
going abroad and picking up potentially dangerous Western ideas, men were encouraged and women were forced to attend newly developed universities at home.

While the Saudi royal family had domestic affairs and oil policy well under control, though, foreign threats were harder to manage. Unlike Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, the Saudis had no ambition to lead the Arab world. They simply wanted to be left alone in order to enjoy their wealth, preferring to avoid making enemies among the Arabs and trying to buy off potential adversaries or problems. Rather than realpolitik, a joke went, Riyadh used its currency to engage in "riyalpolitik." When Bahrain and Qatar argued over who owned a tiny Gulf island in the mid-1980s, the Saudis found the ideal solution by hiring a ship to dredge it out of existence.

In the Saudis' suspicious eyes, Arab nationalism was really an excuse for others to demand their wealth. After all, if the Arabs were one people and one nation, they collectively owned the oil and money in Saudi Arabia as a matter of right, not just a small portion of it doled out as Saudi charity. To keep their wealth and independence, the Saudis needed U.S. help to balance the stronger Arab states and Iran which wanted to take it over.

True, a dependence on America which was too openly acknowledged would have been counterproductive since it could expose the Saudis to accusations of consorting with an infidel power that was the Arabs' enemy. Yet the necessary adjustments were easy to make. Instead of U.S. bases in Saudi Arabia, then, there were thousands of American military technicians and advisors on Saudi bases. Saudi Arabia's tightly regulated newspapers were allowed to attack U.S. policies but Saudi leaders rarely criticized the United States. The Saudis balanced their support for U.S. naval convoys in the Gulf by proclaiming themselves to be better and stricter Moslems than the radical fundamentalists.

Yet the Saudis always distinguished between the need to make the gestures necessary to defuse Arab or Iranian criticism and the setting of a foreign policy aimed to ensure their own survival. The informal nature of the alliance should not have obscured the fact that the Saudis' link
to the United States was not a matter of choice but of necessity for them.

When it came to internal matters, the Saudis did not hesitate to crush any threat, no matter how much it dressed itself in Islamic garb. In 1979, when a small band of armed fundamentalists took over the most hallowed mosque in Mecca--where no non-Moslems were permitted--the authorities secretly called in German commandos to wipe them out. In July 1987, Saudi police fired on demonstrating Iranian pilgrims at the Moslem shrines in Mecca, killing between 400 and 600 people.

Just as the Saudi regime could not become a radical opponent of the United States, it was uninterested in moving to the Soviet side in the Cold War. Riyadh knew that Moscow supported the Arab radical states which wanted to devour the kingdom, coveted its wealth, and opposed its system. The Saudis strongly preferred capitalism along with Western goods and living standards. They were equally convinced of the superiority of U.S. arms--ironically, from watching Israel's triumph over Soviet equipment in Arab hands--and technology. A strategic relationship with the USSR would pose the risk of Saudi officers being recruited as revolutionaries during studies in Moscow while Soviet advisors subverted the country from within. Despite some U.S. experts' fear, the Saudis and Kuwaitis never considered the USSR as a preferable protector to the United States.

Similarly, the Saudis carefully avoided direct involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict because they had no desire to be dragged into war or risk being the target of an Israeli attack. In its rhetoric, Riyadh was a fiercely bitter enemy of Israel second to none. The Saudis sincerely believed the most extreme anti-Jewish and anti-Israel slanders and conspiracy theories. They were known, for instance, to distribute copies of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and other anti-Semitic works. The Saudis barred Jews from visiting the country, a regulation they began to ease only after Secretary of State Henry Kissinger came there, accompanied by American Jewish reporters, in the mid-1970s.

Yet other than subsidizing the PLO and Syria, Saudi Arabia did little more than talk about
the issue. In private meetings with Americans, Saudi officials often began with a recital of Israel's alleged sins. Then, with this formality out of the way, the hosts would say, "Now let's get down to business." Saudi sentiments on the Arab-Israeli conflict had little practical effect on their policy.

The Saudis bought arms not to fight Israel but for self-defense against Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Arab nationalism merely prevented the regime from admitting that fact but did not stop it from acting in its own interest. The country became the world's largest importer, buying almost exclusively from the United States, because it had so much to protect and so many dangerous neighbors from whom to safeguard itself. Knowing the purpose of these purchases, American presidents were happy to sell munitions to the Saudis.

Unable to trust or fight Iran and Iraq, incapable of even maintaining the billions of dollars of U.S. arms they had purchased without help, Saudi leaders knew that U.S. protection was their true source of security. Consequently, Saudi officers were trained in the United States; hundreds of American technicians went there to service equipment and teach the Saudis how to use it. The United States also sold Saudi Arabia advanced AWACS early-warning planes to protect the oilfields from air attack and provide the U.S. military with detailed intelligence about Iranian and Iraqi operations. The regime over-built its own military facilities for the day when American forces might have to be summoned.

Certainly, the United States had a vital interest to preserve Saudi Arabia so as to keep anti-American radicals from seizing its oil and petroleum money. Yet since the Saudis already gained U.S. protection at no political cost, they had no reason to make their foreign policy more congenial to Washington. Giving little in exchange except payments for the weapons, the Saudis understandably came to see the strategic relationship with America as a business deal rather than an alliance with mutual obligations. The Saudis still talked like militant Arab nationalists to the radicals, posed as Islamic militants to the clerics, subsidized Palestinian terrorist groups, and spoke moderately to the West all at the same time.
By the same token, the Saudis never lifted a finger to help U.S. peacemaking efforts. Why should Saudi Arabia assist U.S. efforts to make Arab-Israeli peace when Washington never demanded anything as a precondition for guarding them? It refused to back the Camp David accords and instead joined the Iraqi-led front that punished Egypt for signing that 1978 treaty with Israel. The Saudis also deterred King Hussein from entering proposed peace talks in 1982 and 1985, by hinting they would cut aid, and sabotaged a 1983 U.S.-backed Israel-Lebanon peace treaty by supporting Syrian opposition to it.

This Saudi attitude created a problem for U.S. presidents trying to persuade Congress to approve massive arms sales to the kingdom. The Carter, Reagan, and Bush administrations made much of alleged Saudi moderation. "Saudi Arabia is the center of the pro-Western forces in Islam, [exerting] leadership and influence in the Arab world," the Reagan Administration's Undersecretary of State James Buckley told Congress in the mid-1980s. Whether from conviction or expediency, Fred Ikle, Buckley's counterpart at the Pentagon, erroneously claimed that Saudi Arabia was about to make peace with Israel. vi

While the White House took the Saudis' private pro-American rhetoric at face value, pro-Israel legislators took the Saudis' public anti-Israel rhetoric seriously. Remembering how Iran's revolution seized the Shah's arsenal, members of Congress worried that a radical regime in Saudi Arabia might use the weapons to attack U.S. forces or Israel and feared that stoking the arms race would destabilize the region. Of course, the purpose of selling these arms was a correct assessment that they would make less likely a conquest by neighbors or revolution to seize that arsenal--and Saudi money, too--for aggressive purposes.

Congressional opposition often forced the White House to reduce planned sales to avoid defeats by the pro-Israel lobby. In the end, though, the lure of profits and jobs for U.S. companies helped push through the overwhelming majority of arms sale to Saudi Arabia. After the Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988 and Iraq's threat increased in Israel's eyes, the pro-Israel lobby became less
active in fighting such deals as a $4 billion sale to Saudi Arabia proposed in the summer of 1990.\textsuperscript{vii}

Much of what was true for Saudi Arabia also applied to Kuwait. But that smaller, more vulnerable country could not even hope to defend itself by purchasing weapons. Kuwait's weakness and dangerous location between Iraq and Iran made it more eager to appease those radicals and less willing to associate itself with the United States. "He who stands too close to the blacksmith gets burned by the sparks," Kuwait's foreign minister once said of his country's geopolitical situation.\textsuperscript{viii} Nevertheless, when it came to preserving its internal security and vast wealth, Kuwait was not sentimental about Arab nationalism, Islamic solidarity, anti-Americanism, or the Palestinian cause.

Although Kuwait was young as a modern independent state, it was an old political entity whose people's strong bonds had been forged by tribal loyalty and the traditional way of life. The royal family held tightly onto power to preserve this system and, as in Saudi Arabia, its many members held the key offices. To avoid having to integrate outsiders who might not be loyal to it, the regime only gave citizenship to the descendants of families living there before the mid-1920s.

Limiting the number of citizens to a minority--about 600,000 people in a population of over 1.4 million--also maximized the share of Kuwait's wealth each of them received. Kuwait's citizens paid no income tax while enjoying virtually free education and medical care along with generous payments for each child. One of the country's symbols was the gigantic air-conditioned Sultan Center shopping mall, open 24 hours a day and featuring imported luxuries from all over the world. The citizens had Asian servants and every modern convenience. A joke about this phenomenon recounted that an American, a German, and a Kuwaiti were discussing whether sex was work or pleasure. The American said, pleasure; the German, work. "It must be pleasure," said the Kuwaiti, "or I'd have a Filipino servant do it for me."

If Kuwaitis wanted them, good jobs were available in the government bureaucracy and state institutions. Much of the real labor, though, was done by Kuwait's more than 800,000
non-citizen residents, including about 400,000 Palestinians, who made up roughly 80 percent of the work force. Kuwaiti banks, financial companies, and investment firms, for example, employed 15,000 Kuwaitis and 286,000 non-citizens. The latter group, many of whom had lived there for decades, made lots of money but could not own land and had no political standing. "I worked in Kuwait for 35 years," said a Palestinian resident, "and still we didn't get Kuwaiti passports and we are not citizens of Kuwait."

Already proud of their desert pedigrees, the Kuwaitis were snobbish and motivated by a narrow sense of self-interest. Lavish in their own life styles, their charity to others was relatively parsimonious. The aid that was given fellow Arabs often came accompanied by unwelcome advice to the recipients about the need to work hard and live more austerely.

Egyptians, Iraqis, Jordanians, and Palestinians did not try very hard to hide their resentment and jealousy at the Kuwaitis' good fortune, unearned wealth and alleged laziness and greed. In private, Arab criticisms of Kuwaitis and Saudis were often harsh and petty. Visitors to Egypt and Jordan heard people ask what the Gulf Arabs had done to deserve their good fortunes. Wealthy Gulf tourists who spent lots of money and bought up local real estate provoked resentment. But other Arabs also restrained their feelings in the hope that they could wheedle more aid from their rich cousins.

By Western standards, Kuwait was a tightly controlled society, but it was far less totalitarian and repressive than Iraq or Iran and there was more social freedom than in puritanical Saudi Arabia. Still, the ruling family barely permitted more than the semblance of a political role for commoners. The fact that Kuwait was surrounded by dangers and that many of those clamoring for democracy were Islamic fundamentalists or radicals subsidized by Syria and Iraq made a parliamentary system seem even more destabilizing.

In 1976 and 1986 the regime suspended the National Assembly when some of its more radical members began criticizing the royal family and suggesting that its power be reduced.
the opposition began holding weekly rallies in December 1989 demanding that parliament be
reopened, police used tear gas, water cannons and stun-grenades to disperse them. The regime
offered a new National Council with little power, but few people voted in the June 1990 balloting
for it and dissidents continued to be arrested. On the eve of Iraq's invasion in August 1990, the
Kuwaiti regime was at a low point in domestic popularity.

Kuwait thus treated non-citizens as second-class people, foreign Arabs as unwelcome
beggars, and its own citizens as subjects who were not consulted on the country's governance.
These selfish practices made it all the more necessary for the regime to boast loudly of its Arab
nationalist stance and to humor Iraq and Syria. In contrast, Kuwait was officially downright hostile
to the United States. The large Palestinian community dominating Kuwait's educational system
and press also set a tone of verbal extremism.

Kuwait's UN ambassador could speak in 1980 of a "cabal which controls and manipulates
and exploits the rest of humanity by controlling the money and wealth of the world....It is a
well-known fact that the Zionists are the richest people in the world and control much of its
destiny." In 1983, Kuwait refused to accept an American Foreign Service Officer, Brandon Grove,
as ambassador because he had technically served in Israel, though he was there as the U.S.
diplomatic liaison to the Palestinians on the West Bank. In July 1985, National Assembly speaker
Ahmad al-Sadun demanded that Kuwait cut off aid to the PLO and Jordan, because they were
allegedly excessively moderate for even considering negotiations with Israel.\textsuperscript{x}

Yet this kind of thing was done for appearances. Kuwait restricted itself to symbolic and
rhetorical militancy. Like other Arab states, Kuwait would announce donations to the PLO but
never actually send the money. Kuwaitis mouthed standard lines about Arab brotherhood and U.S.
imperialism while putting their children in American schools and their capital in American banks.
Using its funds to help the Arab world or put political pressure on the West was a low priority.

Kuwait preferred investments in the West as more secure financially and yielding the best
rate of return. Sending money overseas also kept it safe from Kuwait's Arab brothers and Moslem Iranian neighbors if they ever decided to invade. By 1990, Kuwaiti private investment abroad totalled $50 to $75 billion. The state itself had about $50 billion in the United States, $30 billion in Europe (mostly England), and $20 billion elsewhere. Ten percent of its oil income went to the Reserve Fund for Future Generations, to remain untouched until after the year 2001. The Kuwaitis bought real estate, chains of gas stations, 15 per cent of the Mercedes-Benz company, a share of Volkswagen, the Kiawah Island resort in South Carolina, and many other enterprises.

Yet although America was their choice for consumer products and economic ventures, the Saudis and Kuwaitis gave ground to Iraq when it came to politics. They could take America but not Iraq for granted, appeasing Saddam not because he was friendlier but precisely because it was more threatening, closer, and readier to use force than the United States.

While the Saudis and Kuwaitis were placating Iraq, American experts urged the United States to appease Saudi Arabia and Kuwait by changing its policy to please them. Although U.S. policymakers usually rejected this advice, they certainly did not ask the Gulf monarchies for concessions or support on U.S. positions. Consequently, the Saudis and Kuwaitis manipulated America, using it--like the foreign guest workers--as a mercenary, to convoy tankers or provide protection then dismissing it with a payroll check. The slogans used to keep their neighbors happy were also handy in fending off American requests for, say, help in making Arab-Israeli peace, combatting international terrorism, or logistical assistance in protecting Gulf shipping.

Publicly taking Iraq's side in disputes with the West, the Saudis and Kuwaitis denied that Saddam threatened them, insisting he was only acting in self-defense. Their failure to build a moderate Arab coalition or urge U.S. opposition to Iraq would endanger their survival when Saddam, no longer satisfied with a large, reliable supply of golden eggs, decided to butcher the goose that laid them.

But the Saudis and Kuwaitis were not fools either. Privately, they spoke of Saddam in
terms of a Middle East proverb: Respect him but suspect him. They knew that the United States was the only one who could save them in their time of need and when that moment came neither Arab nationalist rhetoric, nor Islam, nor the Arab-Israeli conflict would stand in their way of securing its succor. Unlike their American counterparts, the Gulf monarchs were not blinded by these ideological myths, toward which they had a healthy cynicism. In the end, the Saudis and Kuwaitis comprehended the United States far better than it understood them.

ii. About 30 percent of Kuwaitis and 10 percent of Saudis were Shia Moslems.


v. See Chapter Two.


viii. Cited in *FBIS*, April 12, 1988, p. 27.


CHAPTER NINE
THE DESERT ROAD TO KUWAIT, JANUARY-AUGUST 1990

The pilgrims stood upon the shore of the lake and sent a frantic hail after the ship. "How much to take us?...Tell him we don't care what the expense is!" "He says two napoleons." "Too much! We'll give him one!"

In a single instant...that ship was speeding away like a frightened thing. The two napoleons were offered--more if necessary--and pilgrims shouted themselves hoarse pleading to the retreating boatmen to come back. But they sailed serenely away and paid no further heed.

--Mark Twain, The Innocents Abroad

"The post-Cold War world is arriving ahead of schedule," warned The Wall Street Journal at the end of 1989, commenting on Iraq's military build-up. Indeed, the events of 1990 would shake the Middle East every bit as much as the fall of Communism and the Berlin Wall did to Europe. Neither the Kuwait crisis nor its outcome were inevitable, yet Iraq's drive for power was certain to lead to some major conflict. There were lots of portents: What had the Iran-Iraq war been fought over if not who would rule the Gulf? Why was Saddam not demobilizing part of his war-time million-man army and putting such a high priority on building an arsenal of unconventional arms worthy of a regional superpower?

Changes in global politics also pushed him toward taking the offensive. This new era was dangerous for Saddam. The Soviet bloc's collapse was ending the Cold War; Mikhail Gorbachev's dramatic reforms were dismantling Communism. If Communist dictators fell, so might an Iraqi regime which, for over 20 years, had based its state-controlled centralized economy and party-controlled society on a Soviet model that was now totally discredited. The end of Soviet emigration restrictions was allowing hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews to go to Israel, strengthening that state. Saddam's foreign policy had been based on an alliance with the USSR
and, later, on playing off the superpowers against each other. These options were also gone.

To make matters worse, the world's sole remaining superpower, the United States, was allied to his rivals or intended victims: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, and perhaps Iran again some day. Saddam told visiting Assistant Secretary of State John Kelly in February 1990 that America was the only outside power which counted in the Middle East. For him, that was more a problem than a compliment. Saddam assumed the United States would use its overwhelming power as he would in its place: to eliminate the radical regimes and seize control of the region.

Two weeks after meeting Kelly, Saddam made one of the most important speeches of his career, openly launching Iraq's new radical phase. Ironically, he fired this salvo at the first anniversary meeting of the Arab Cooperation Council, a loose grouping of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen whose formation had been hailed in the West as an alliance of Arab moderates. Speaking at the Royal Cultural Center in Amman on February 24, 1990, Saddam urged a new offensive against the United States and Israel.

What could the Arabs do, Saddam asked, to save themselves from American domination? In essence, he suggested, the Arabs had three choices. They could wait until a new balance of power would be restored--perhaps allowing them to play off Europe against the Americans--but by then it could be too late. Or the Arabs could give up, arguing that there was "no choice but to submit" to America and follow its dictates on making peace with Israel and other matters. This second alternative would require that the Arabs give up forever the hope of destroying Israel or of uniting themselves.

There was, he suggested, a third possibility. Rather than revise their own thinking, the Arabs might change the situation. Saddam claimed that Arab pessimism--not Arab nationalism--was the delusion. If Arabs united behind a strong leader they could still defeat the United States and Israel, or at least hold their ground against the alleged U.S. and Zionist conspiracies to destroy them. Having earlier appointed himself the Arab world's protector from
Iran, Saddam now nominated himself as leader in the war he was declaring on America and Israel. Saddam's unconventional weapons would replace the lost Soviet nuclear umbrella by making Iraq the Arab's own superpower.

Saddam demanded the withdrawal of U.S. naval forces from the Gulf, even though the American military presence there had declined from the peak reached during the Iran-Iraq war. Behind nationalist slogans were imperialist ambitions. Just as Iran had called for a Gulf controlled by Moslems in order to remove Western forces blocking its hegemony, Iraq now wanted to remove any Western military presence to eliminate the outside protectors of the monarchies he wanted to dominate.

Insisting that the Arabs should not give up the idea of destroying Israel, Saddam claimed that Iraq's triumph over Iran "on the eastern front" and the Palestinian intifada showed the "reconquest of Palestine" to be possible. The Baghdad regime was building missile launchers in western Iraq to hit Israel. If American military experts were convinced, as the Boston Globe reported, that Iraq's progress meant "Israel's supremacy in the Middle East will not continue much longer," it is not surprising that Saddam had the same idea.

The United States, he claimed, was far weaker than it seemed because it feared military confrontation and losses. America had shown "signs of fatigue, frustration, and hesitation" in Vietnam and Iran and had quickly run away from Lebanon when terrorist suicide bombers inflicted heavy losses on its Marine peacekeeping force in Beirut in 1983. He believed that if Iraq acted boldly, America would not dare confront it. The fact that the U.S. did not react to the threats made in Saddam's February speech only made Iraq's dictator firmer in this opinion.

These Iraqi declarations were not merely a challenge to the United States, they were also a dare to the Arab world. Would the Arab leaders and peoples heed recent history's unpleasant lessons or would the old ideas and behavior patterns overwhelm common sense and carry them into another adventure? The apparent result was just as Saddam had hoped: the Arab masses
cheered, the Arab governments--whatever their private contempt and fear of Iraq--jumped on his bandwagon. The United States stayed out of his way.

Both events and weak Western reactions confirmed Saddam's view that his strategy was working. In September 1989, Farhad Bazoft, the 31-year-old, Iran-born correspondent of the British newspaper, The Observer, arrived in Baghdad at the government's invitation. He had visited Iraq before and apparently the regime had liked the stories he had written. But after the authorities refused to grant him permission to investigate reports of a huge explosion at an Iraqi weapons' plant the previous month, Bazoft went to the site, making no secret of what he was doing. There he took pictures, collected soil samples, and drew a sketch.

A few days later, he was arrested along with a British nurse who had driven him there. Charged with espionage and probably tortured, Bazoft eventually gave a televised "confession" saying he was a spy for Israel and Britain. When the British government denied the accusation and asked mercy for Bazoft, the Iraqi regime organized massive demonstrations outside the British embassy in Baghdad. Britain recalled its ambassador and expelled six Iraqi military trainees but imposed no economic sanctions. Despite warnings from Britain that killing Bazoft would damage bilateral relations, Iraq executed him in March 1990. The nurse was later released from prison.

To the United States and Britain, the Bazoft case was a question of human rights and press freedom. For Iraq's government, however, this was a symbolic test of wills between the Arabs and the West by which Iraq showed itself to be defiantly independent and stronger than its foes. Iraq's information minister proudly rejoiced. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, he declared, "wanted Bazoft alive. We gave her the body." Saddam portrayed the deed as an anti-imperialist victory. Westerners, he said, "apparently still cherish the days of the sahib." Times had changed, he warned. Iraq's dictator was proud of his defiance and, like Khomeini, saw it as proving his country's independence from the West. In response to Western coverage of Iraqi human rights violations, Baghdad's television ran a program on scandals in Britain claiming that Prince Charles
danced at "cheap night clubs, frequented by drug addicts and alcoholics."

King Hussein supported Saddam's claim that the West was conspiring against him. In response to its complaints about the execution, the king replied, "There has been a concentrated attack on Iraq for a long period of time without any reason to justify it." The Arab League and Arab Cooperation Council also defended Iraq and condemned Western criticism, feeding Saddam's view that confrontation with the West was the best route to leadership over the Arabs.

Now Saddam escalated the conflict another notch upward. On April 2, with no apparent provocation, Saddam threatened to destroy half of Israel with chemical weapons if it attacked any Arab state. Baghdad would decide what constituted such an attack. Saddam's rabidly anti-Israel stance was partly demagoguery--since condemning that country verbally was popular in the Arab world--and partly due to the fact that Israel was the strongest local power blocking his ambition to lead and unite the Arab world. Most immediately, Israel was the only state likely to act militarily against his growing power and non-conventional arms' arsenal.

In this context, Saddam claimed that U.S. and British media charges that Baghdad was developing unconventional weapons--something Iraq itself bragged about--was a plot to give Israel an excuse to attack. Whether Saddam really--and wrongly--believed that Israel was about to attack him to destroy Iraq's chemical and nuclear weapons or was simply stirring hysteria in order to rally Arab support, his threat was still another test of whether the United States would respond.

U.S. policy toward Baghdad again failed that test, putting the emphasis on soothing rather than deterring Iraq. President Bush's only response was a routine disapproval of Saddam's statement. Later in April, with Bazoft barely in the grave and Saddam's threats still hanging in the air, five U.S. senators visited Saddam in the northern city of Mosul, gave him a conciliatory letter from Bush, and left favorably impressed.

Iraq released a transcript of the encounter, which none of the Americans present denied, showing that not one critical word was spoken at the meeting. The group was led by Senate
Republican leader Robert Dole who had earlier called for reducing U.S. aid to Israel while opposing sanctions against Iraq. Dole recalled his own condemnation of Israel's 1981 attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor. He joined the dictator in attacking the U.S. media, assuring him--inaccurately--that a Voice of America radio commentator had been fired for comparing Saddam's rule to the fallen dictator in Romania.

"I realize you are a strong and an intelligent man and that you want peace," said Senator Howard Metzenbaum, the senior Democrat there. "If a certain shift in your thinking makes you concentrate on the peace we need in the Middle East, there will be no other leader in the Middle East who can be compared with you." The senators were, of course, trying to foster good relations with Saddam, but this flattery to him implied that America might even support Iraq as the Gulf's dominant power.

Ignoring Saddam's threats to Israel and the United States, Dole told the Senate back in Washington, "We came away feeling that this is an intelligent man" whose long war with Iran and large inclined him toward seeking peace. "There might be a chance," Dole told reporters, "to bring this guy around" to a moderate, pro-American position.

Dole's stance was in line with Bush's policy of avoiding friction with Iraq. Assistant Secretary of State John Kelly said the Administration wanted, "A trial period to see whether there's potential for improvements in their behavior and in our relationship." Another senior official said in April 1990 that Saddam "is more moderate than he was in the past and there is a good chance he will be more moderate in the future."

The other Arab states made the same error about Iraq. Saddam made a rousing anti-American speech at the May 1990 Arab summit meeting held, appropriately, in Baghdad. Iraq's positions dominated the conference and the final resolution supported Saddam's political line, taking a far more extreme position than the previous year's summit. It denounced U.S. policy while endorsing Iraq's "right to take all necessary measures to guarantee and defend Iraq's national
security." Once again, there was no reaction by the Bush Administration.

The result was a vicious circle. Intimidated and somewhat carried away by Saddam's promises, the Arab states supported Baghdad, exacerbating Iraq's already over-confident stance. Since the United States was not countering Saddam, the Arab states would not stick their necks out to confront him. At the same time, this Arab support discouraged Washington from opposing Saddam, in part because of its propensity to believe that Arabs and Moslems would unite around him against an outside threat. The Americans, Saudis, Kuwaitis, Jordanians, and Egyptians all failed to realize that appeasement was the strategy most likely to bring a dangerous confrontation.\textsuperscript{vi}

In July 1990, Iraq escalated the region's tension even further. Now, however, Saddam shifted targets from Israel, which could defend itself, to Kuwait, a far richer and weaker victim. Saddam falsely insisted that Kuwait was demanding repayment for its wartime loans, conveniently forgetting his own regime's frequent statements of gratitude calling them gifts. For example, Subhi Frangoul, governor of Iraq's central bank, had recently thanked Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for the money as "a grant from our Arab friends."\textsuperscript{vii} The Gulf monarchies only kept these transactions listed as loans on their account books to make their own financial situation look better.

Another serious accusation was Saddam's claim that Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates were cheating on their OPEC oil export quotas, thus driving down prices. This charge was accurate, though Iraq itself also exceeded these quotas when possible and Saddam's estimate that these actions cost Iraq $14 billion in lost sales and revenue was a great exaggeration. He also insisted that Kuwait was stealing oil from Iraq's Rumayla field near their common border.

The motive for these claims was clear: Saddam wanted to make more money for reconstruction and regain Iraqi oil markets lost when production levels plummeted during the Iran-Iraq war. Iraq needed high petroleum prices to finance its military machine and economic development. Yet expensive oil encouraged consumers to conserve, switch to alternative fuels, and find new sources of supply.
Saudi and Kuwaiti oil interests conflicted with those of Iraq. Their large oil and financial reserves, coupled with a smaller population, gave them an incentive to think in the long term about production and pricing. Thus, the Saudis periodically raised production to keep prices lower in order to protect their market share and discourage consumers from reducing imports.

The two monarchies were also greedy. No matter how much they earned, the Kuwaitis and the Saudis wanted more money for themselves and they, too, were eager to make up for the profits lost during the eight-years Iran-Iraq war. Iraq's very dependency on financial support from these monarchies made him nervous and he labelled their behavior a plot to subvert him.

Saddam was also using his charges against the Gulf Arab monarchies to achieve strategic control over them. He demanded that Kuwait turn over to him Warbah and Bubiyan islands. Iraq had no particular historical claim to this territory but possessing it would give Iraq more access to the Gulf and a better military situation in the event of a renewed war with Iran. Unfortunately for Kuwait, handing over this land to Iraq would also let Baghdad control the approaches to Kuwait's harbor, while Iran would seek revenge against Kuwait for so strengthening its enemy. Kuwait had no intention of ceding any territory.

Arab diplomatic efforts were quickly mounted to defuse this dangerous situation. The Saudis and Kuwaitis asked for international arbitration and put their forces on alert. Egypt's President Mubarak tried to mediate. At an emergency OPEC meeting in Geneva on July 26, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates yielded to one of Iraq's demands by accepting lower oil export quotas for themselves. When the Iraqis assured everyone they had no intention of invading Kuwait, their neighbors relaxed and demobilized. It was easy for them to conclude that—as had happened several times before—Iraq's threats were just intended to extort some money from Kuwait.

While these events were going on, the Bush Administration saw its job as demonstrating to Saddam that America was not conspiring with Kuwait against him. Such behavior was in line with
the American myth that the United States was weak, that U.S. criticism would make the Arabs rally behind Iraq, and that concessions would make dictators less radical. In practice, however, Saddam took the fact that no one was going to stop him as an invitation for aggression.

The State Department put its trust in an "Arab solution," merely restating the traditional U.S. position favoring freedom for navigation and oil exports in the Gulf. A Pentagon official, telling the House Foreign Affairs Committee that Saddam wanted peace and quiet to focus on economic reconstruction, blamed Israel for not making more concessions to the Arabs and thus allegedly forcing Baghdad into an "adversarial" position. The United States should move closer to Iraq, not try to isolate it, said the expert, since reducing U.S. trade and aid for Iraq would shut off their dialogue.

Why didn't the United States pressure Iraq? One reason was a bureaucratic disinclination to admit that the current policy was wrong and to change course. There was some talk of a U.S. policy reevaluation on analyzing Iraq's new policy and considering whether Washington should take a tougher stand. But this never happened. Since U.S. policy had put it on Iraq's "side" during the 1980s, government officials identified Baghdad as a friend and sought excuses for its actions. They were convinced that Iraq would stay on a moderate course and few were willing to revise their conceptions. Seeing their task as maintaining good, confrontation-free relations with the Arab world they wanted to avoid any friction.

The two key government officials dealing with this issue were largely amateurs on the Middle East. Assistant Secretary Kelly's only experience in the region had been to serve a short time as ambassador to Lebanon during the Reagan Administration. In 1987, Secretary of State Shultz had publicly reprimanded Kelly for helping the White House implement its arms-for-hostages deal behind the State Department's back. This violation of discipline, however, made Kelly seem a White House loyalist and thus helped him gain the much coveted promotion. In short, Kelly's presence in the assistant secretary post was a triumph of political influence over
expertise.

His counterpart, National Security Council (NSC) staffer Richard Haass, also knew relatively little about the area and was well-known for his disinclination to listen to others' opinions. Haass was known in the government as a strong supporter of the pro-Iraq policy and, according to other officials, rejected the idea that Iraq might invade Kuwait up until the moment when Saddam's army crossed the border. In short, the Administration's team on the Gulf was slow to react and loath to rethink policy.

This was the context of a meeting between U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie and Saddam in Baghdad on July 25. The dictator had called in Glaspie on short notice for the purpose of--unbeknownst to her at the time--probing how the United States might respond to an invasion of Kuwait. "Yours is a society that cannot accept 10,000 dead in one battle," Saddam told Glaspie. He added the veiled threat that America was vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Saddam made the remarkable claim that, having conspired with Iran against Iraq, the United States was now backing Kuwait in an economic war against him, stealing Baghdad's oil income by overproduction and low prices. He warned that any U.S. opposition would be met by Iraqi "pressure and force."ix

To placate the dictator, Glaspie correctly pointed out that the Bush Administration had rejected the idea of sanctions against Iraq for violating human rights or threatening Israel or Kuwait. The U.S. government wanted good relations, not conflict. As part of her flattery, Glaspie called an ABC television program criticizing Saddam, "cheap and unjust....I am pleased that you add your voice to the diplomats who stand up to the media." She praised Saddam's "extraordinary efforts" at reconstruction. "I know you need funds." She also told him that the United States would not intervene against Iraq: "We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts like your border disagreement with Kuwait....[Secretary of State] James Baker has directed our official spokesman to emphasize this instruction."

The dilemma was not that Saddam disbelieved Glaspie but that her reassurances convinced
him there was nothing to fear from Washington if he went ahead and invaded Kuwait. Glaspie later
defended herself by claiming to have warned that the United States would react if Iraq settled its
dispute with Kuwait by violence. No one ever thought, she would explain, that Saddam would be
so "stupid" as to invade Kuwait. The problem was not Saddam's inadequacy as a student but the
U.S. government's incompetence as his teacher. Saddam knew Kuwait could not defend itself; he
doubted the United States would do so. Although Baker and Kelly would later protect their own
careers by making her the scapegoat, Glaspie had accurately conveyed U.S. policy to Saddam. Her
comments were in line with all the State Department's statements and positions. In fact, the
Glaspie-Saddam encounter was the culmination of all the myths which had led Americans to
misunderstand the region for 50 years. x

Even after this fateful meeting and on the eve of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, the White
House was still opposing sanctions against Iraq. The Bush Administration was holding up a
guarantee for $400 million in loans to Israel, a U.S. ally, for building homes for Soviet Jews. In
Israel's case, it used aid as leverage to discourage settlements in the occupied territories. At the
very same moment, the White House was trying unsuccessfully to block a July 27 Senate vote to
cut agricultural credits for Baghdad. Congressional calls for sanctions against Iraq made the
Executive Branch angry at "interference" in its own prerogatives and dismissing critics as being
part of a pro-Israel lobby. Unfortunately, the White House was the pro-Iraq lobby.

As CIA and military intelligence reports in late July warned about the imminent danger of
an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, higher-ranking officials refused to believe them. The president did not
have to know Iraq was going to commit aggression in advance to realize that he should act to deter
Baghdad. But only on July 31, after confirmed reports of an Iraqi build-up of 100,000 men on the
border--five times the size of Kuwait's army--did the Administration even start to react. That day,
Assistant Secretary of State Kelly told the House Foreign Affairs Committee of "increasing
concern" over Iraqi activities. But by then it was too late.
When Iraqi and Kuwaiti delegations met in Saudi Arabia to try to resolve their disputes that same day, the talks broke down after two hours. Saddam ordered his army across the border. On the night of August 1-2, 1990, Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait and quickly overran the country.

There was no effective resistance. Kuwait's emir and crown prince, almost all the royal family, and a large portion of the army fled into Saudi Arabia. Eventually, 400,000 Kuwaitis would be exiled temporarily from their homeland; hundreds of thousands of foreign workers fled, most never to return. The Iraqis closed the ports and airport, invoked a curfew, and cut off communication to the outside world. There were mass round-ups of Kuwaiti civilians and Iraq's army pushed on toward the border with Saudi Arabia.

Almost immediately, Saddam announced he planned to withdraw in 48 hours. Wishful thinking again rose among the American experts some of whom predicted Iraq would pull out of Kuwait. But Saddam made no move to leave and nothing more was heard of this supposed plan. He instead announced within a few days that the occupation was irreversible, Before the month was out Iraq had annexed Kuwait as its nineteenth province.

Six factors had shaped Iraq's policy on this road to crisis. First, Saddam badly needed money. This was his most easily comprehensible motive in Western terms. The famed American bank robber Willie Sutton had a simple explanation for the reason he held up banks: "That's where the money is." For Saddam, Kuwait was the neighborhood vault. But the financial aspect was far from a sole or sufficient reason for invading Kuwait. If booty had been his only object, Saddam would have found it easier and safer to continue collecting tribute from that country.

Second, Iraq's leader believed everyone was planning to undermine him: democratic enemies (the United States and Israel), Arab moderate allies (Saudi Arabia and Kuwait), and radical rivals (Syria and Iran) alike. Thus, he followed the old strategy of a paranoid toward purported enemies: to get them before they got him. Ironically, if Saddam had felt the danger to him was greater he would not have been so adventurous. It was the lack of Arab or American
opposition—not his fear of it—that prompted the dictator to attack. Moreover, the fact that Saddam was wrong in believing himself besieged did not mean that the United States could talk him out of this delusion by appeasement.

Third, Saddam's fundamental, longer-term motive was his desire to dominate the Gulf and the Middle East, to become the savior which Arab ideology had prophesied and Arab politics sought for so many decades. In this context, invading Kuwait was not a violation of the Western principle of national sovereignty but a fulfillment of Arab nationalist duty. Baghdad's first priority was not to obtain money or defend itself but rather the desire to grab an apparent opportunity to fulfill its ambition.

Fourth, the Iraqi dictator expected that a desperate Arab world and its masses would rally behind him. His message was that the Arabs' accumulation of defeats meant not that they should rethink their whole worldview but rather that they should strive harder to achieve their goals. Perhaps his yes-men misinformed Saddam on the situation in the Arab world, and perhaps he too thoroughly believed his own ideology. But only his fellow Arab rulers had convinced Saddam that they might follow him.

Fifth, at the same time as Saddam tried to wrap himself in the banner of Arab nationalism, he was continuing his policy of promoting Iraqi nationalism. Seizing Kuwait would provide booty and glory that could be shared among his subjects and would give the country increased coherence in the face of its economic and communal problems. It was no accident that Saddam appointed a Kurdish military commander and a Shia defense minister at the moment of crisis.

Sixth, the lack of opposition let Saddam conclude that an unchallenged takeover of Kuwait would be an easy, painless resolution to all his domestic problems and regional ambitions. Without this last assurance, provided by U.S. and Arab appeasement, he would not have carried out his aggression. Iraq was not afraid to invade Kuwait for the same reason it had been ready to attack Iran almost exactly 10 years earlier: there was no concern about America protecting the target.
The greatest miracle of the Kuwait crisis, then, was that it became a defeat for Iraq. Under slightly different circumstances, Saddam might have succeeded in keeping Kuwait and would have gone down in history as a conqueror, not a fool. If he had handled the crisis better, his influence would have spread like wildfire in a region where popularity grows from power. As always, there would be those in America and the Arab world who would put a priority on avoiding trouble, rationalizing the unprovoked conquest in hope of gaining a share of the loot or avoiding the dictator's vengeance. Saddam made this hard for anyone to do. He offered so little and the material odds against him were so great as to force even those who preferred appeasement to resist.

By being more patient before launching an attack, Saddam might have first consolidated an anti-Israel Arab coalition, then waited until Iraq obtained more powerful arms—including atomic bombs—before seizing Kuwait. In that case, other local states would not have raised a peep. Had Saddam avoided over-intimidating the Saudis—by using fewer soldiers, keeping them away from the Kuwait-Saudi border, and inviting the Saudis to inspect his forces—they would have been less likely to have panicked and invited in the Americans.

Saddam also neglected other steps which might have brought him success. If he had offered—even better, begun—to share the loot with other Arabs like Egypt or Syria, they may have hesitated to oppose him. If he had used the invasion as diplomatic leverage, quickly starting talks with the Saudis and Kuwaitis to get money or some territory, he could have made a deal.

Indeed, according to the myths governing the thinking of American experts and many officials, Saddam should have won since they expected the Arabs to unite against an infidel, pro-Israel United States. Their theories said the Arabs and Moslems would stick together, gladly allowing themselves to be looted in the name of Arab nationalism, Islam, and the Palestinian cause. Instead, most of the Arab states—except for Jordan, which hoped to share in the booty—and citizens acted like normal people and countries anywhere. They yelled for help.

Saddam made his neighbors an offer they had to refuse. If the Arab world joined America
in opposing Iraq's invasion, said the Egyptian newspaper Al-Akhbar, "it will be punishing a sister Arab state it is supposed to support. By doing nothing, "it will be...approving the supremacy of jungle law in international and inter-Arab relations." A Kuwaiti activist, jailed earlier in 1990 by that regime, reflected this disorientation by complaining that Iraq's army "headed toward its brethren rather than its enemies. Instead of advancing nearer to Jerusalem, it headed in the opposite direction." America is our enemy, he continued, but there was no other choice. Purporting to bring to life Arab aspirations, Saddam simply acted as an imperialist. Kuwait did not want to be liberated by Saddam. When he held the knife to the throat of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the victims called the much-maligned American cop to save them.

Having protected Saudi Arabia and Kuwait from Iran in the 1980s, the United States now faced the task of saving them from Iraq. Otherwise, Saddam--as master of 20 percent of OPEC's production--might be able to dictate oil prices and production levels, use his income to build more and more weapons, subvert other Arab governments, and drive U.S. interests from the Gulf. An Iraqi success in mobilizing and radicalizing the Arab world would also have reheated the Arab-Israeli conflict by either fomenting an Iraqi attack on Israel or so threatening it as to force a preemptive Israeli attack against nuclear, missile, and poison gas installations with which Saddam threatened its extinction.

If the crisis over Kuwait were "only" a major upheaval in Middle East politics that would have been sufficient to secure its importance. Yet the issue was also the first test of what kind of world order could emerge at the end of the Cold War. While the nature of U.S. interests made a strong reaction seem inescapable, it was not inevitable that the American government would fight to stop Saddam.

This was, however, the kind of crisis which Americans could most easily understand, a seeming return to earlier cases where appeasement had endangered a world facing Nazi Germany or Soviet Communist aggressors. By taking leadership in this enterprise, the United States had a
chance to establish the kind of united front which had not appeared to stop German aggression before World War Two. The timing, since the United States was neither tied down elsewhere in the world nor facing the USSR in a superpower confrontation also made easier the decision to oppose Saddam's aggression. Still, a president other than Bush or a slightly different chain of events might have let Saddam be the victor, leaving future historians to record Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as the start of a new era of global instability and massive bloodshed.


CHAPTER TEN
BE MY BROTHER OR I'LL KILL YOU, August-December 1990

Poor hungry Hojja wanted to go to a fancy banquet but had no invitation. So he borrowed a good cloak, making him appear rich. Thinking him important the guards let Hojja in. Out of gratitude, he pushed the garment’s sleeve toward the food, saying, "Eat, my cloak, eat."

--Middle East folktale

Iraq's seizure of Kuwait was one of the most remarkable events in Middle East history, equivalent to the 1941 Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor in its shocking suddenness. Saudi King Fahd called the invasion, "The most horrible aggression the Arab nation has known in its modern history."i

Within hours of the occupation, President Bush condemned the assault and demanded a quick Iraqi withdrawal. The United States and the European Common Market froze all Iraqi and Kuwait assets and imposed sanctions on Iraq. The USSR, Iraq's main arms' supplier, invoked its own embargo. The Arab League, in a meeting Iraq refused to attend, voted 14 to 5 in criticizing the invasion and demanding that Iraq pull out.

As three Iraqi divisions armed with tanks and missiles moved toward the Kuwaiti-Saudi border, a U.S. mission led by Deputy National Security Advisor Robert Gates was dispatched to Saudi Arabia. The Americans showed Saudi leaders satellite photos proving that Iraq was reinforcing its army and might invade Saudi Arabia. In a total reversal of all previous Saudi policy, King Fahd asked for U.S. troops to protect his kingdom.

Iraq's own behavior made the Saudis logically conclude that they were in danger. In the occupation's opening days, there had been several small Iraqi incursions of up to five miles into
Saudi territory. Riyadh knew that Iraqi forces could seize its oilfields in a few hours and the whole country in a few days. Since Iraq had lied about plans to attack Kuwait, it might also be dissembling about attacking Saudi Arabia. In retrospect, Western intelligence analysts concluded that Saddam was not planning a further advance. Yet the Saudis would retain precious little independence if Saddam kept Kuwait and they could expect to be next on the list when Iraq finished gobbling their neighbor.

ii Contrary to Saddam's expectations, the immediate Saudi reaction--once U.S. support inspired courage by ensuring protection--became more enraged than fearful. Everyone knew, as a Saudi newspaper put it, that the United States was the only country able to counter Iraqi expansionism. Saudi Ambassador to the United States Bandar ibn-Sultan said that Saddam, "lied to us and the world and, as a result, he has lost his credibility and we realized he has aggressive designs." Prince Khalid ibn-Sultan, commander of the Saudi armed forces, mused that Iraq must never have expected King Fahd to respond so quickly and decisively.

iii Bush immediately accepted Fahd's invitation to send U.S. troops. Saudi Arabia's defense, he said on August 8, was a vital U.S. interest, meaning that the United States would go to war to preserve it. Bush listed four main goals for U.S. policy: defending Saudi Arabia and the Gulf; protecting American citizens there; the complete, immediate, unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi troops from Kuwait; and restoring Kuwait's legitimate government. He refused to call for Saddam's overthrow, still hostage to the myth that Middle East dictators might best be convinced through compromise. Bush hoped that a deal, rather than pure intimidation, would secure Iraq's withdrawal. Later, Bush added that he would not be disappointed if Iraq's people got rid of the dictator, but only subsequently would it be clear how little the United States was prepared to help them do so.

iv The president ordered a massive U.S. military airlift to Saudi Arabia, starting with F-15 fighter planes and the 82nd Airborne Division. It took months to move large numbers of troops and
equipment to the Gulf but plans that the Pentagon had been preparing for a decade were now implemented with remarkable efficiency. Within six weeks of the invasion, over 100,000 American military personnel had arrived in Saudi Arabia to stay, said Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, "as long as we're needed and until we are asked to leave." Bush also approved a quick $2.2 billion sale of 24 F-15 fighters, missiles, tanks, and anti-tank shells to Riyadh.

In addition, Saudi Arabia counterattacked Baghdad on the economic front by shutting down a large pipeline (1.5 million barrels a day) that carried Iraqi oil through Saudi territory to a Red Sea port. Turkey backed the emerging anti-Saddam coalition by closing the pipeline that took Iraq's petroleum (1.2 million barrels a day) across its land. Since 96 percent of Iraqi revenue came from oil exports--virtually all through these two routes--this was a serious blow against Baghdad's fiscal strength.

Meanwhile, the Saudi position was supported at an August 10 Arab League meeting which voted to condemn Iraq's annexation and decided to send a peacekeeping force to Saudi Arabia. Among the resolution's backers were Egypt, Syria, and the six Gulf monarchies; Iraq, Libya, the PLO, and Jordan were among the minority refusing to support it. The next day, Egyptian and Moroccan troops began landing in Saudi Arabia.

Historically, the Arab League's power had been stifled by the principle that all decisions must be unanimous. Iraq's aggression had shattered that rule and now the Arab states adopted decisions by a majority vote. The anti-Saddam forces took over the League and endorsed the UN-imposed sanctions against Iraq. King Hussein's pessimism reflected the division in the organization, "It could be our last summit," he said.

At the end of September, the League moved its offices back to Cairo, the original headquarters abandoned to punish Egypt after Sadat's peace with Israel. The Arab League's Secretary-General Chadli Klibi, a Tunisian, and Ambassador to the U.N. Clovis Maksoud, a Lebanese national, both thought to be too sympathetic to Saddam, were forced to resign and were
replaced by officials eager to carry out anti-Iraq measures.

There were now two blocs in the Arab world: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the other Gulf monarchies, and Syria were in the anti-Iraq coalition. Only Jordan, anti-Saudi Yemen, Sudan, and the PLO were left in the soft-on-Saddam camp. Saddam's Arab enemies were not eager to compromise with him. Meeting with Bush in early September, Egyptian President Mubarak and Fahd agreed not to negotiate with Iraq until its troops left Kuwait.

In Jordan, where many Western reporters were stationed to cover the crisis, the regime allowed and encouraged the people to cheer Iraq. Stories of tens of thousands of Jordanians "volunteering" to fight for Saddam impressed the West, but such coffee-house heroes never turned up on the front lines. An ABC journalist opined from Amman in August, "I think there is no doubt that the whole Arab population will be side to side with Saddam, even if it has to be suicide." This was not a reliable indicator of Arab views, nor did it take into account the fact that in dictatorships, the rulers—not the masses—make decisions and, by repression and propaganda, shape public opinion. Iraqis questioned in Baghdad supported Saddam, Syrians queried in Damascus backed their government's anti-Iraq policy.

An average American—or a politician unfamiliar with the region—might be astonished that any Arabs at all supported Iraq, which was so obviously an aggressor against a fellow Arab state. But the real story was how few Arabs and Arab states supported Saddam, far less than Western experts predicted or Baghdad expected. In the context of Arab politics, it was far more impressive that rulers would dare call in non-Arab, non-Moslem U.S. forces and send troops of their own to fight Iraq, a fellow Arab state, under an American military commander. The Saddam tried three kinds of appeals to convince the Arab support based on what were supposedly their most firmly held, basic beliefs: Pan-Arab nationalism, Islam, and antagonism toward Israel. All of these efforts failed.

Contrary to Pan-Arab doctrine, most Arabs genuinely identified with their own "local"
state. By breaking the unwritten rule of Arab politics—that Arab states might revile and subvert, but never invade, each other—Saddam freed the Kuwaitis, Saudis, and Egyptians to fight him as well. Arab commentators were quick to point out that Saddam seized Kuwait's loot for Iraq's benefit, Saudi Arabia called in U.S. help to save its own wealth, Egypt and Syria acted in their own national interests to oppose Baghdad's aggression since an Iraqi monopoly on Kuwait's wealth endangered their own independence and robbed them of aid.

In line with the usual American myth about Arab and Islamic solidarity, former Navy Secretary James Webb claimed that Egypt's regime was shaky because its resistance against Iraq brought criticism from others and would trigger "an internal backlash." But Egyptians saw Iraq as a rival, not a brother. Egypt's government, main opposition party (the Wafd), and most of the public would not support Iraq to lead the Arab world against Egypt's claim to that role. Egyptian Islamic fundamentalist groups like the Moslem Brotherhood were motivated less by patriotism than by knowledge that the Saudis would stop financial subsidies if they supported Saddam.

Egypt had needed a decade to rebuild relations with the rich Gulf Arabs who put an embargo on it for making peace with Israel. Now Egyptians did not want to stand by while Iraq annexed Kuwait and dominated Saudi Arabia to renew a cut-off of aid and investment in Egypt. There was also bad blood between Iraq and Egypt on other issues. Iraq had mistreated hundreds of thousands of Egyptian workers there during the late 1980s. To keep money for itself, Iraq had ordered its banks not to send their savings home. Demobilized Iraqi soldiers rioted, murdering 1000 Egyptian workers who held jobs they wanted. In contrast, by joining the anti-Iraq coalition Egypt received huge economic benefits. The United States, Gulf monarchies, and European states canceled about half, $25 billion, of Egypt's debts. Thus, Cairo's part in the struggle against Saddam was built on secure foundations in government policy and public support.

Syria, too, had ample motivation for joining the coalition. The country was in bad economic shape and had no reliable allies or aid donors. The Damascus and Baghdad regimes had
been enemies for many years. In Gulf War One, Syria had supported Iran against Iraq. If Saddam won in the Kuwait crisis, Syria was high on his list as a target for revenge. Syria was bogged down in Lebanon's endless civil war and the Cold War's end cost it the Soviet support on which it was so dependent as a source of arms and strategic support.

The Kuwait crisis was a welcome relief to this dismal situation, giving Syria a chance to escape isolation and obtain large amounts of Saudi aid by supporting the coalition, which was already in its best interest. Syria had to do little to make these gains. It was not asked to make peace with Israel, reduce support for terrorism, or ease its control over Lebanon. Since the Syrian regime was so unpopular--especially among the Sunni majority--there was more sympathy for Saddam in Syria than in Egypt or Saudi Arabia. But the regime had no trouble keeping it under control.

Saddam's Islamic appeal fared no better than his Pan-Arab sloganeering. He could try to portray himself as an Islamic leader fighting Western infidels in order to gain the support of the religious Arab masses and the Islamic fundamentalist forces. But as Saudi Ambassador Bandar ibn-Sultan put it in August, "You cannot call for a holy war if you're not holy yourself."

The Saudi government mustered its own Islamic assets by inviting Moslem clerics to observe that the Islamic holy places were not being violated by U.S. or other foreign non-Moslem soldiers in the country. The most senior Egyptian cleric, Shaykh Jadd al-Haqq, issued a decree in August denouncing Saddam: "The tyrant has to be contained lest his tyranny spread." Islamic fundamentalist groups knew that the price of supporting Saddam was the loss of Saudi financial aid.

Finally, the coalition's Arab members opposed calls to link the Gulf and Arab-Israeli conflicts, totally rejecting Baghdad's attempts to wave the anti-Israel banner. They knew that it would be impossible to obtain Iraq's withdrawal if Kuwait's future was subordinated to an issue still unresolved after a half-century. And if the Arabs did make progress in their claims against Israel, Saddam would exploit the gain by taking credit for it. "We know very well," Israeli Prime
Minister Yitzhak Shamir commented, "that Iraq's intention is to present the conflict as an Israeli-Arab conflict. [Saddam] can achieve this only by attacking Israel. So we...will not help Iraq realize its diabolical plan."

The Kuwait crisis had a paradoxical effect on U.S.-Israel relations. On the one hand, it rescued them from a tense period of friction over the peace process. On the other hand, the close U.S.-Arab alignment worried Israel. Shamir was well-received on a trip to Washington early in the Kuwait crisis since the United States wanted his cooperation on that issue. The success of the visit, Shamir commented, was a miracle like that commemorated by the Jewish festival of Chanukah, when the lamp at the Temple in Jerusalem burned eight days on one day's supply of oil. An opposition member of Israel's parliament replied, "and it will last about as long."

The crisis forced Israel to mount an expensive military alert for many months and wiped out the tourist industry. More dangerously in the long run, Israelis feared there might be a diplomatic settlement that would leave Saddam's military machine intact, with Israel as an obvious future target. Israel itself might be pressured to make concessions--as many voices in the West and Arab world were urging--to appease Saddam.

There was much irony in this situation. First, Israel had been the first to warn the West about Saddam. The United States and Europe had sharply criticized it for destroying Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981 and ignored or ridiculed its cautions about Saddam's aggressive intentions. Second, the Kuwait crisis had very little to do with the Arab-Israel conflict. Iraq invaded Kuwait for its own gain. Even the Saudis, Syrants, and Egyptians rejected linkage to that issue as an Iraqi plot to distract attention from Kuwait. Third, the Arab turn to America for help and protection demonstrated clearly that U.S. standing in the region had not been hurt by long support for Israel.

Bush asked Israel to keep a low profile and it agreed. But this was insufficient, some experts warned, since the Arabs would allegedly find it hard to stay in the coalition because of the U.S.-Israel alliance. Their solution was to make a deal: Iraq would make concessions on Kuwait in
exchange for Israel giving up the West Bank and Gaza. They did not see that such a prospect would send Saddam's popularity soaring in the Arab world. The Bush administration correctly rejected this idea of linkage as undermining U.S. interests. Israel, which gained nothing by an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, would not have jeopardized its security on behalf of Arab states at war with it. Even Saddam gave no real indication that he would leave Kuwait under such conditions.

Aside from Israel, Turkey and Iran, the other non-Arab states in the region, also opposed Saddam's effort to lead the area. Turkey's President Turgut Ozal volunteered for a leading role by beginning an anti-Iraq embargo in August though this cost Turkey its lucrative Iraqi market and revenues from the Iraqi oil pipeline, made a powerful neighbor into an enemy, and risked embroilment in a war. Ozal was seeking to ensure Western strategic and financial aid since, with the Cold War over, Turkey was no longer on the front line against Soviet expansionism. But another factor was his country's yearning for acceptance as part of the West, not only for commercial advantage but as a certificate of civilization. It was a proud moment for Ozal when, in a German television interview, he admonished that country for failing the West by not sending troops to the Gulf.

Turkey's defense and foreign ministers and army chief of staff all resigned in October, complaining that Ozal had not consulted them on the Kuwait crisis. Thus, a key pillar of coalition strategy rested on a very narrow base of support since Ozal's stand hardly represented a national consensus. Still, Turkey's cooperation was indispensable in isolating Iraq.

Iran also observed the anti-Iraq embargo and, despite its own anti-Western rhetoric, did not lift a finger against the U.S. presence in the Gulf. From the Iranians' standpoint, anything bad that happened to Saddam was good. Tehran was eager to exploit Saddam's troubles. When Iraq offered it concessions, Iran agreed to turn their ceasefire into a peace agreement on terms favoring its interests. Iraq withdrew from disputed border areas and accepted the prewar boundaries. This accord allowed Iraqi troops to move from the Iranian border to the Kuwait front. Yet the cost to
Saddam was high: surrendering all his material gains from the Iran-Iraq war.

With such broad-based anti-Iraq support, the United Nations passed a series of resolutions that became the coalition's legal basis and operational guidelines. In August, Security Council Resolution 660 condemned the invasion, demanding immediate, unconditional Iraqi withdrawal. Resolution 661 banned trade to Iraq and UN Resolution 662 rejected Iraq's annexation of Kuwait. The economic noose around Iraq was tightened in September by UN resolutions 666 and 670. The only permissible exports to Iraq would be medical supplies or food shipments approved by the UN and distributed by international agencies. Economic sanctions were so effective and universal that even Switzerland accepted the justice of the cause and joined for the first time in its history. Iraq's imports, about 75 percent of its food calories, and exports--mainly oil--were effectively stopped.

The embargo against Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil caused a loss of 4 to 5 million barrels a day in the world market, about 9 percent of total production. OPEC, especially the Saudis, boosted exports to make up for the loss and increased its members' quotas. Combined with these steps, the already existing 2 to 3 million barrels a day surplus production prevented any shortfall.

For a time, though, fear sent prices steadily upward, from $18 a barrel on August 2 to $25 the day following the invasion, and $28 on August 6. On August 24 prices hit $30.90, declining after hitting this nine-year high. Ironically, Saddam had achieved his goal of raising prices and income for oil-exporting states, though at Iraq's additional expense. Saudi Arabia and others reaped a windfall profit, some of which paid for the coalition's military expenses and economic losses.

As troops from many countries poured into Saudi Arabia, Baghdad responded with defiance, sabotaging its Arab friends' effort to mediate an "Arab solution." The most active of these allies, Jordan, was losing its standing in the West. After the invasion, Jordan trained Iraqi soldiers on U.S. equipment captured from Kuwait, repeated Iraqi propaganda and gave Baghdad communications facilities. Despite its denials, Jordan never completely respected the embargo, as
evidenced by ammunition cases later captured in Kuwait which carried markings showing they were shipped from Amman during the crisis.

King Hussein went to America in mid-August trying to improve his worsening image and resolve the conflict threatening to crush Jordan between stronger powers. He came straight from seeing Saddam and others--Arafat and the presidents of Tunisia and Yemen--who opposed sanctions and the U.S. military presence. Shortly before King Hussein's meeting with President Bush in Maine, Saddam made such a strong personal attack on the president as to put Jordan's monarch in an embarrassing position. The king desperately tried to play on his relationship with Bush, whom he called, "an old friend." Instead, an angry Bush demanded Jordan close its ports to cargo bound for Iraq. To lock Amman into this position, Bush quickly announced the king's private--and not altogether sincere--promise to enforce UN sanctions.

The UN had endorsed stopping ships by force if necessary to inspect them for contraband. The U.S. Navy and coalition forces began intercepting hundreds of ships in the Gulf and Red Sea and inspecting them to find any goods going to or from Iraq. This procedure was called "interdiction" rather than "blockade" since the latter was an act of war.xii

The situation was rich in irony. To avoid war and secure Iraq's withdrawal, the United States had to convince Iraq of its readiness to attack. To keep Kuwait, Iraq had to convince the Americans of its fearlessness and the futility of fighting. This situation was a recipe for confrontation.

Nonetheless, many Americans--and even a higher proportion of Middle East experts--believed Saddam would decide to withdraw. Their political culture told them that problems were solvable and that leaders inevitably become moderate through experience. This was the same reasoning that said Iran wanted good relations with the United States in 1979, Syria sought a face-saving way out of Lebanon in 1983, Iran would quickly end its unwinnable war with Iraq in 1984, King Hussein was eager to enter peace talks with Israel, the PLO was obviously...
ready to abandon terrorism and make a deal for a West Bank/Gaza state in 1988 and, most recently, that Iraq wanted to rebuild from war and would not invade Kuwait in 1990.

Instead, Iraq felt that threatening confrontation was its best weapon to make the Americans back down, as Baghdad thought they had done in Vietnam, Iran, and Lebanon. If the Americans fought Iraq, said Saddam in August, "it will be a greater tragedy for you than Vietnam....The United States would no longer be number-one in the world....God is on our side and Satan is on the side of America. Can Satan win over God?" An Iraqi newspaper extended the analogy, "The U.S. military establishment lost in Vietnam thousands of victims and the army's military reputation against local forces who were less in power and ability." Americans could not bear the desert climate or accept the heavy losses that would be inflicted by Iraqi forces better armed and more experienced than the Vietnamese. Iraqi newspapers frequently cited articles in American publications, like Time magazine, as admitting their country was powerful and feared by the West.\textsuperscript{xiii}

Then, by stalling long enough, Iraq would make the Saudis lose heart, seek a deal, and ask the Americans to leave. By the spring of 1991, the melting mountain snows would cause flooding downriver, making it harder to fight in southern Iraq. The Saudis would prefer not to have a huge U.S. military presence in their country during the Moslem holy month of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca in those same months, sensitive times which brought heightened religious fervor and hundreds of thousands of foreign Moslem visitors.

In a speech broadcast on Iraqi television in September, Bush had explained to Iraq's people, "The pain you are now suffering from is a direct result of the course of action chosen by your leadership." He assured them, "It is impossible for Iraq to succeed."\textsuperscript{xiv} Unfortunately, Bush never convinced Saddam.

Meanwhile, to gain additional leverage against the West, Saddam kept thousands of Western residents in Kuwait as unwilling "guests," taking several hundred into custody and
refusing to let the rest leave. These people could go, Saddam said, only if Bush withdrew U.S. troops from the Gulf and dropped the boycott against Iraq. Otherwise, they would be held as "shields" at Iraqi industrial and other facilities to ensure the coalition did not bomb them. Iran's seemingly successful use of hostages a decade earlier in its conflict with America played some role in inspiring Iraq's move. But this was also the kind of act, in its use of force and intimidation, which Saddam had often used against domestic opponents and neighbors. Now, for the first time, he was employing it directly against the West.

There were some superficial signs at first that the ploy might work in undermining the anti-Saddam forces. Many ex-politicians and other figures who liked to be in the public eye went to Baghdad to free hostages from their respective countries: ex-West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, ex-Nicaraguan leader Daniel Ortega, ex-boxer Mohammad Ali, rightist French leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, leftist British politician Tony Benn, and left-wing former U.S. Attorney-General Ramsey Clark. Each supplicant strengthened Saddam's conviction that he was in the driver's seat, splitting the coalition and magnanimously handing out favors to those who pleased him.

But these were all marginal or discredited people. The taking of hostages had no effect whatsoever on the coalition's growing pressure against Saddam. The most memorable symbol of the attempt to show Saddam's humane side at this time was a broadcast in which he met some hostages and patted the head of a small, terrified British boy. Dictators or terrorists might maneuver Western television into showing their pictures, but seeing these images make viewers hate them more.

Rather than weaken the coalition and dissuade it from fighting Iraq, Saddam soon realized that his holding their citizens was making his enemies more angry and united against him. Since Saddam was trying to forestall a Western military assault, he realized that the scheme had become counterproductive. By raising tensions it made war more likely; keeping civilian prisoners who
might need to be rescued could move up rather than postpone the timing for an assault on Iraq.

Consequently, having shown his toughness by seizing the foreigners, the Iraqi dictator tried to show his magnanimity by releasing most of the Western women and children in September and the remaining hostages in November and December. In a sense, Saddam's handling of this matter paralleled what he was trying to communicate in his broader handling of the Kuwait crisis, to show himself as such a remorseless foe, who would go to any lengths to win. By letting them go, he thought to demonstrate his flexibility, a readiness to make a deal over Kuwait.

One reason why Saddam's hostage-taking did not bring him Western concessions was due to an important change in American public opinion. Popular disgust with the Reagan Administration's covert arms-for-hostages deals in 1985 and 1986 had changed the mainstream view from support for doing anything to free hostages to a sense that the personal tragedy of such prisoners and their families should not dictate U.S. policy.

Saddam similarly miscalculated with his second effort to pressure his enemies: shutting down embassies in Kuwait. Since Baghdad claimed that Kuwait no longer existed as a country, it ordered all foreign missions there to close. Iraqi troops surrounded the offices and cut off their power and water. At the Scandinavian embassies, the Iraqis arrested Kuwaiti workers and threatened to kill them until those ambassadors agreed to leave.

The United States, in contrast, insisted that its embassy in Kuwait would stay and retaliated by reducing the number of Iraqi diplomats in Washington from 55 to 19. There was worldwide condemnation when Iraqi soldiers escalated the battle by briefly invading the grounds of the Canadian, Belgian and French missions in September. The French, sensitive on points of national honor, responded by sending more troops to Saudi Arabia. The U.S. mission held out as long as possible, using its swimming pool as a water reservoir. Gradually, all foreign diplomats left Kuwait but the coalition members still officially considered their missions to Kuwait open. Western embassies continued to function in Baghdad until most were closed on the eve of the war.
Again, the Iraqi hardline style that had worked well between 1988 and 1991, now brought Western defiance rather than acquiescence.

Iraq's main effort in September and October was to split European powers--especially the USSR and France--and Arab states from the coalition. In the end, Paris and Moscow both cooperated with U.S. policy, though their steadfastness may have owed as much to Saddam's intransigence as to their own constancy.

France's foreign minister favored appeasement and resigned; President Mitterand made occasional statements that seemed to undercut the U.S. position by suggesting the coalition should offer Saddam a deal in which he could keep part of Kuwait. Nonetheless, France put one of the largest contingents of troops into Saudi Arabia and stayed loyal to the coalition.

Moscow followed a similar pattern of hinting at a willingness to appease Iraq. Yevgeny Primakov, the top Soviet diplomat on Middle East issues, visited Baghdad and returned to Moscow claiming that Iraq was softening its position. The USSR wanted to avoid war since thousands of Soviet technicians were still in Iraq and a U.S. military victory so near to its southern border would seem to swing the balance of power too much in Washington's direction.\textsuperscript{15}

Nonetheless, Gorbachev played an extremely useful role on behalf of the coalition. Gorbachev and Soviet Foreign Minister Edward Shevardnadze urged Iraq to come to its senses or face disaster. Shevardnadze preferred improving relations with the West and Israel to backing radical Arab clients whom the faltering Soviet economy could no longer afford to subsidize. Iraq already owed the USSR more than $6 billion. It seemed far wiser to gain lucrative ties with Saudi Arabia, which reestablished relations as a reward for Moscow's support for the coalition.

U.S.-Soviet cooperation marked an end to their competition in the Middle East. In September, Gorbachev met Bush to coordinate their stands and quoted the American president as telling him that, during the Cold War, the United States thought the USSR had "no business" being in the region. Now Washington was accepting a Soviet role because it knew Moscow could do
little to threaten U.S. interests.

Reinforced by Western support, the Arab states also stood their ground, ignoring Saddam's threats. By mid-November, there was little interest when King Hassan of Morocco proposed an Arab summit to work out a compromise. The Arab coalition members condemned those who were supporting Saddam. A Kuwaiti writer asked the PLO and Jordan, "Why do you interfere in a matter that does not concern you?" The Saudi newspaper al-Yom castigated the coalition's critics as echoing Iraq's argument that its victims had "no right to seek the assistance of [their] friends when we decide to occupy you." In retaliation for Jordan's pro-Iraq stance, the Saudis expelled Jordanian diplomats, stopped oil supplies, and closed its borders to Jordan's trucks and products.\(^{xvi}\)

The Palestinians were the only group displaying real enthusiasm for Saddam. The intifada and its own diplomatic initiatives had given the PLO an opportunity to seek better relations with the United States and a negotiated settlement with Israel. Instead, the PLO began shifting from Egyptian to Iraqi patronage, escaping pressure from Cairo to moderate and make peace with Israel by siding with a strongman brandishing missiles and chemical weapons to threaten war on Israel. As part of this change, PLO offices were quietly transferred from Tunis to Baghdad and most top-level PLO meetings were held in the Iraqi capital. A terrorist attack on Israel by an Iraq-sponsored PLO member group in May 1990, which Arafat refused to denounce, brought the suspension of the U.S.-PLO diplomatic dialogue.\(^{xvii}\)

Frustrated at the intifada's inability to make any political gains through militancy or negotiations, West Bank Palestinians issued statements, leaflets, and newspaper articles calling on Saddam to attack Israel. Even the most moderate leaders in the occupied territory succumbed to the temptation to hail Saddam as their idol. About 1000 Palestinians marched in the West Bank town of Jenin, chanting, "Saddam, you hero, attack Israel with chemical weapons!" A few PLO leaders were horrified at the cost of their pro-Iraq stance but Arafat firmly kept his boat steered toward the rocks. As an Arab writer put it, "God save this nation from its heroes!"
The Palestinians had not learned from their misplaced faith in Egypt's dictator Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s. Disappointed by Arafat's record in the 1970s and 1980s, they again sought a more stalwart defender. The PLO believed in Baghdad, said the Israeli dovish politician Yossi Sarid, as it once expected Moscow or Pan-Arab nationalism to be its savior, moving "from bed to bed," never comprehending that Arab leaders would merely use it, then toss it aside.\textsuperscript{xviii} 

In the Kuwait crisis, as during the Iran-Iraq war, the Arabs shoved the Palestinians onto the back burner, contradicting in practice the claim that the Arab-Israel conflict was the central issue around which all else in the Middle East revolved. The PLO, said a Saudi newspaper in October, needed a new leadership "who can speak to the world in a more civilized way and who oppose any kind of aggression and occupation, if it is by Israel, Iraq, Palestinian terrorists or others." A columnist for the Egyptian newspaper \textit{Al-Ahram} described Arafat as looking toward Saddam like "a child pleading for chocolate" or a "worshipper before his deity."\textsuperscript{xi} 

The Gulf monarchies cut off aid to the PLO as long as it supported Iraq. In anger, Abbas Zaki, a member of al-Fatah's Central Committee, called the loss of Saudi contributions the price of "Palestinian dignity." "The presence of foreign forces has overshadowed, indeed wiped out, the justice of Kuwaiti demands," he said in September. The multinational forces had "2800 Jewish rabbis in their ranks" and Kuwait was now in Israel's camp. Arafat himself claimed in speeches and interviews that the United States was trying "to take control of the world's sources of oil" and said Israel was about to invade Jordan. Many, though by no means all, Palestinians in Kuwait collaborated with Iraq.

By November, the United States and the coalition could no longer postpone their own fateful decision. At this point, they had three options: to wait in hope that economic sanctions and diplomatic sanctions would force Iraq to yield, to make a deal with Saddam, or to go to war.

The counsel of wishful thinking opted for a long siege. The embargo and boycott, wrote \textit{New York Times} columnist Tom Wicker in November, were "squeezing Iraq" into a resolution,
whereas war "would shatter the anti-Iraq coalition" since it was uncertain that Arab states could "lead their populations into full-scale war against a brother Arab nation."xx

The facts pointed in the opposite direction: waiting was a greater danger to the coalition. Iraq produced enough food itself and possessed sufficient spare parts--coupled with some smuggling through Jordan--to let it survive easily for well over a year without being starved by the embargo. The economic shutdown was hurting Kuwaitis more than Iraqis, who had seized their food reserves. Kuwait was also suffering under an intense reign of terror. Iraq's policy was to plunder the country for loot and to destroy Kuwait so thoroughly that it could never be reconstituted. Thousands of Kuwaitis fled; many of those who remained were arrested, tortured, or killed. Anything moveable, from money to cars to zoo animals, was carried off to Iraq.xxxi

Domestic factors in both Saudi Arabia and the United States also gave the coalition a time limit. Within a few months, continued inaction would steadily weaken the coalition's hand. Saudi Arabia would conclude that the United States was bluffing, make its own peace with Baghdad and ask the expeditionary force to leave. The war must start before March 1991, explained an Egyptian magazine, because once the Moslem holidays and hot summer made military operations difficult, Iraq would stay in Kuwait for over a year and hence, perhaps, forever. In America, too, the longer the crisis, the more anxious complaints there would be for the return of loved ones on military duty in the Gulf. There would surely be a growing insistence by the public, media, and Congress that the issue be quickly resolved.

The second option, to negotiate with Iraq, was a mixed blessing at best. As long as talks were being held, there would be tremendous pressure against the coalition taking any military action and Iraq could spin out talks endlessly. If Iraq was compelled to withdraw from Kuwait without gaining any advantage, it would be a defeat for Saddam. But if inducements were added to entice Saddam--like money, border changes, an Iraqi protectorate over Kuwait--the adventure would have seemed a triumph.
Iraq was not bargaining in a tough manner, it was simply not bargaining at all. Baghdad could have used diplomacy to give U.S. public opinion and the allies enough hope for a peaceful solution to postpone war, divide the coalition, and throw U.S. policy into confusion. Saddam did none of these things. Instead, he moved to blot out any memory of Kuwait permanently: renaming Kuwait City as Qadhima; dividing Iraq's new province into three sections; and ceding part of the country to the Basra district, naming this new area after himself.xxii

In November, Iraqi Information Minister Latif Nassif al-Jassim announced that Kuwait no longer existed and therefore the world should forget about it. Hussein Kamil, Saddam's brother-in-law and right-hand man, added, "We have nothing to worry about from a war with the United States. The Americans are not prepared to pay the price of a war with Iraq." Saddam himself said Iraq would no more leave Kuwait than Americans or British might give up one of their cities.xxiii

Clearly, these were not the actions of a man who intended to pull out soon. Contrary to the way Americans played the game, Iraq saw concessions as an invitation to more pressure, not a prelude to compromise. Saddam felt surrendering would lose him more face at home and among the Arabs than being defeated. Since the regime's legitimacy rested on intimidating its own subjects, an appearance of cowardice by Saddam could shatter the Iraqi public's awe and fear of the ruling elite, and hence its obedience. This loss of credibility could produce an internal revolt, as would later happen after Iraq lost the war. Besides, once he withdrew, Saddam believed America would be all the more likely to attack, not only to liberate Kuwait but to throw him out of power altogether. This is what Saddam would do if he were Bush.

Why should Saddam accept a total defeat in advance of a battle he had some reason to hope would never take place? The cost of war in lives and resources did not frighten Saddam. He was a revolutionary, not an accountant. "When men offer their blood," Saddam said, "they want men to lead them, men who are also ready to offer their own blood." In this light, his blunder to stand
The coalition's only real alternative, then, was to prepare to use the troops from two dozen countries arriving in Saudi Arabia. These included the Egyptian Third Armored Division; the U.S. Third Armored Cavalry Regiment and First Cavalry Division, with some units of the Second Armored Division; and the British Seventh Armored Brigade. In early November, the United States and Saudi Arabia agreed that the U.S. commander Lieutenant General Norman Schwarzkopf would direct any offense while Saudi Lieutenant General Prince Khalid ibn-Sultan was in overall command of the joint forces. Both countries would have to approve an attack on Iraq. The Saudis were ready to do so. Saudi diplomats commented, "A mere Iraqi withdrawal is not enough." Since no one could guarantee that Iraq would not try again some day, the only solution was "a military strike that will close the page on Saddam Hussein's regime in its entirety."xxv

Meanwhile, Bush had to mobilize four constituencies whose support he needed to take military action: his own Administration, U.S. public opinion, Congress, and the international coalition. Saddam made this effort easier by offering no attractive compromise that might have split these groups.

Every president, of course, is the leader of his own government. There is a story that John Kennedy, once a minority in his own cabinet, proclaimed after a vote, "One for and ten against, the ayes have it." Nonetheless, a chief executive must muster support throughout the government to ensure his policy is implemented. When the Kuwait crisis began, Bush's lieutenants were divided over whether the United States should fight if Iraq did not withdraw. Defense Secretary Richard Cheney was Bush's closest ally in urging a tough policy. The other three top officials playing a leading role on the issue--Secretary of State James Baker, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell--were far more doubtful.

Baker, an old associate of the president who lacked foreign policy experience, worried
about European and Arab reluctance to be steadfast. A veteran deal-maker, he preferred a compromise even if it meant making concessions to Baghdad on the Gulf or Arab-Israeli conflict. Scowcroft, a career military officer who also held many high-level foreign policy posts, had been an architect of the pro-Iraq policy before the invasion and also favored making a deal with Saddam. Within less than two months after the crisis started, though, both men concluded that there was no alternative.

Powell, the 53-year-old son of Caribbean immigrants, was the first black and youngest officer ever to be chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He had run the NSC for a time during the Reagan Administration and served two tours of duty in Vietnam. To him, as to many American officers, Vietnam's lesson was a warning that the U.S. military should not go to war without the civilian leadership guaranteeing the necessary forces and the public providing strong support. No one expressed the army's view of the Vietnam factor better than General Schwarzkopf, "I hate what Vietnam has done to our country! I hate what Vietnam has done to our Army! The government sends you off to fight its war. It's not your war, it's the government's war.... And suddenly, a decision is made, "Well, look, you guys were all wrong." After spending almost two decades rebuilding their reputation, no one in the U.S. military wanted this to happen again."

Thus, Powell and the Pentagon wanted Bush to assure them of the tools, freedom of action, and forces they deemed necessary before committing themselves. The president's early November decision to raise U.S. troops levels in the Gulf to over 400,000 was a turning point. The military then enthusiastically focused on fulfilling its mission of defeating Saddam in battle.

Bush's subordinates were bound to follow his orders, but events--and news of atrocities in Kuwait--also persuaded them that the president was right. Saddam's behavior indicated no willingness to compromise; intelligence reports predicted the embargo could not succeed by itself.

Bush's greater difficulty in winning popular and congressional support at home was partly his own fault. His speeches failed to arouse the American people, many of whom professed in polls
and conversation not to understand the issues at stake. Being weak at formulating a political vision, he never quite succeeded in explaining what the crisis was all about.

Baker made a better case for the war. Iraq's aggression was threatening to destroy "one of those rare transforming moments in history" when there was a chance for a better world," he explained in an October 29 speech to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council. America was acting on "hard and terrible experience." Appeasement would only postpone and deepen the crisis as Iraq grew stronger and built biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons. By controlling so much oil Saddam could plunge the world into deep recession. "If his way of doing business prevails, there will be no hope for peace in this area." Saddam would not stop until he was stopped.

The coalition was "exhausting every diplomatic avenue to achieve a solution without further bloodshed," continued Baker, and it was winning: "Every day as the sun sets, Iraq gets weaker. Every day as the sun rises, the international community remains firmly committed to implementation of the Security Council resolutions." But force must be used if need be to ensure Iraq reaped no reward for aggression:

"Let no nation think it can devour another nation and that the United States will somehow turn a blind eye. Let no dictator believe that we are deaf to the tolling of the bell as our fundamental principles are attacked. And let no one believe that because the Cold War is over, the United States is somehow going to abdicate its international leadership."

These arguments, along with Republican partisan support and patriotic sentiments, were persuasive. There was also genuine popular outrage over Saddam's brutality and Kuwait's suffering. It was hard for liberal politicians or leftist and pacifist demonstrators to portray the issue as a new Vietnam or Nicaragua. Iraq was a ruthless aggressor; Kuwait was an undemocratic but genuine victim. The strategic stakes were undeniably high. The United States could not be said to be acting unilaterally given the broad supportive coalition and extensive UN role. In this case, force and morality, American leadership and multilateralism, were closely linked. Before the end
of 1990, Bush had won support from most of the American public.

There were a number of problems in Congress, however, and Bush had a harder time obtaining a political mandate to conduct a military attack. After so many battles over Vietnam, Nicaragua, and other issues, members of Congress wanted to defend their institution's own prerogatives to help set foreign policy. Democrats were suspicious about what seemed the White House's propensity to do anything it wanted without Congress's approval. A number of them argued that Bush had no legal authority to commit U.S. troops to war.

No politician wanted to be held responsible for a long, bloody, or disastrous war. Even Senator Sam Nunn, a Democrat from Georgia generally seen as a hardliner on defense matters, preferred waiting for sanctions to work. The Republicans were nervous about the potential for a political catastrophe if the war went wrong. Faced with an almost hopeless task of getting back into the White House, the Democrats were eager to gain some partisan advantage from Bush's mistakes.

The Bush administration pushed for a deadline. On November 29, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 678 demanding that Iraq withdraw or face war by January 15, 1991. Iraq rejected it. Bush offered to invite Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz to Washington and send Baker to Baghdad to negotiate. Iraq proposed December 17 as the date for the first visit and January 12 for the second, a schedule the United States saw as a stalling tactic. The United States responded by suggesting fifteen dates between December 20 and January 3, 1991, all refused by Iraq.

As a last-ditch effort to avoid war, Bush offered Iraq one more chance. When it was announced that Baker would meet Tariq Aziz on January 7, 1991, Iraq claimed victory since the United States had earlier rejected talks before Iraq left Kuwait. Iraqi officials hinted that a deal was in the making, persuaded that their analysis had been correct all along. Now that war was imminent, Baghdad believed, Washington was flinching. Misunderstanding had reached an all-time high.
Thus, in the seven-hour meeting at the Intercontinental Hotel in Geneva, a delighted Aziz exuded confidence, telling Baker everything could be resolved. "If the American administration changes its position and works with us," he announced, Iraq "would love to be partners" in a new world order. Baker's assessment was different. He was there not to negotiate but to give a warning. Clearly, Baker did not communicate it persuasively. Western intelligence reported that Saddam's brother and personal emissary at the meeting, Barzun Tikriti, told Iraq's dictator that the United States would not go to war.

In London, Iraqi officials approached bankers to arrange future ventures. "But," asked the British financiers, "what about the crisis and the sanctions?"

"Oh," replied the Iraqis. "The crisis is already over and we won."

The bankers did not believe them but bizarre as this dialogue seemed it reflected Baghdad's expectations. Saddam believed that time was on his side, that America could not fight and lacked the stamina to continue the confrontation for very long. For him, the fact that the United States had more airplanes than Iraq was irrelevant; the real question was whether America would use them. Thus, he played for time, reasoning that Bush would be unable to hold together his international alliance and to hold off domestic criticism. Surrounded by yes-men and profoundly ignorant of the outside world he was walking into a trap of his own making.

Ironically, every antiwar speech or demonstration in the United States fed Saddam's belief that the Americans would not fight and, hence, made war more likely. Iraqis, living in a dictatorship where no dissent was permitted and democracy was poorly understood, interpreted open dissent as a sign of weakness. Bush seemed to face a virtual domestic revolt. The United States had retreated from Vietnam and Lebanon, and deserted the Shah, Iraqi officials told Western journalists and diplomats, while Saddam was ready to sacrifice tens of thousands of lives. They asked, "Do you really believe that Bush is ready to do the same? No," they shook their heads, "this is unlikely."
All of Saddam's techniques which had served him so well in the past--intimidate your enemy, force him to surrender by giving no quarter, make clear that the alternative would be costly to him--were used yet again. The United States, too, had followed its own patterns, believing that moderation and compromise would prevail. This same policy also increased Saddam's confidence that he had won and that Bush merely wanted a face-saving way out.

Five days after Baker and Aziz met in Geneva on January 7, 1991, Congress passed a joint resolution after a sharp debate--in the Senate, 52 to 47; in the House, 250 to 183--authorizing Bush to use force. The deadline came on January 15. With no Iraqi pullback, the United States and the coalition implemented the UN ultimatum and attacked at dawn on January 16, 1991.


iii. Saudi Gazette, October 2, 1990; Le Monde August 30, 1990; Pike, op. cit.


vi. The other two Iraqi export routes--a pipeline across Syria and by tanker through the Gulf--had been sealed off during the Iran-Iraq war. The naval embargo would keep the sea route closed.


xiii. See, for example, al-Thawra, October 1, 1990. Other Iraqi propaganda themes--as in al-Thawra,


xvii. Israel refused to negotiate with the PLO but was willing to meet with pro-PLO Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a framework the PLO accepted after the 1991 Gulf war. The PLO's refusal to make clear its willingness to recognize Israel and renounce terrorism also kept it from being accepted as an interlocutor. The point is not that the failure of diplomacy was completely the PLO's fault but that the organization could have done more to make progress. The PLO and Palestinians, of course, were the biggest losers from Arafat's failure to do so.

xviii. Ha'aretz, August 17, 1990.

xix. Al-Nadwa, October 1, 1990.


xxi. UN Resolution 674 (October 29) condemned Iraqi human rights abuses, while Resolution 677 (November 28) criticized the demographic changes.

xxii. My thanks to Dr. Amatzia Baram for suggesting some of these points.


xxvii. Transcript.
"Fear only the person who sets no limits on his bad behavior."

--Arab proverb cited by Saddam Hussein

Like some sequel to the American Western film "High Noon," the two combatants slowly advanced toward each other up the long main street, fingering their triggers as the January 15 deadline approached. The United States would not back down after sending over 500,000 soldiers to the Gulf; Saddam gave it no peaceful alternative.

In "High Noon," however, the townspeople ran away leaving the brave sheriff alone to face a bandit gang. The Gulf crisis went the opposite way: everyone rallied around the United States; Iraq was deserted. Most Arab regimes had joined the side that seemed the obvious winner; the others watched, ready to accede to whoever proved stronger.

Saddam had badly misread America and the Arab world. In this frame of mind, Iraq's leaders ignored all the danger signs: the U.S. troop build-up, the public scheduling of a coalition attack for January, Soviet warnings that it would support the use of force, more troops sent by Egypt and Syria, the coalition's continued solidity, and a lack of sanctions-busting activity. Bush had the coalition's green light and the American people's strong support.

Yet it is easier to comprehend Saddam's misplaced confidence listening to those American politicians and Middle East experts who also misunderstood the situation in terms of all the wrong, traditional myths about the region. Once again, although many argued otherwise, there was no shortage of others who claimed that the Arabs and Moslems, galvanized by an obsession with the Arab-Israeli conflict, would unite around Saddam and against the West. They predicted that war would set off a wave of anti-Americanism from Morocco to Oman and overestimated Iraq's military strength.
"Within six months," said Senator Ernest Hollings, a Democrat from South Carolina, "every fundamentalist mullah, every Arab nationalist, will say, 'the United States came here and invaded this Third World country for oil.'...And, face it, they will be speaking the truth!" Former Undersecretary of State George Ball, a veteran Arabist, commented, "There will be bitter talk of the Crusades and Western colonialism, and all the occasions in history where the Western world has appeared to intervene in what the Arabs regards as [their] own affairs."

*New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker had proclaimed, "Bush stands warned--Congress is unlikely to support a war." Opposition continued during the last-minute congressional debate in January. Senate Democratic leader George Mitchell, cautioned, "There has been no clear rationale, no convincing explanation for shifting American policy from one of sanctions to one of war." The risks, included high casualties, "billions of dollars spent, a greatly disrupted oil supply and oil price increases, a war possibly widened to Israel, Turkey or other allies, the possible long-term American occupation of Iraq, increased instability in the Persian Gulf region, long-lasting Arab enmity against the United States, a possible return to isolationism at home."

In the words of Judith Kipper, a Brookings Institution fellow who was the Middle East expert most often appearing on American television, "We will be seen as the big bullies, no matter how many Arabs we have around us." Professor Michael Hudson of Georgetown University declared, Saddam was "going over the heads of the Arab leaders and appealing directly to the people. And he seems to be having some success." Professor L. Carl Brown of Princeton, who had earlier opined that Europe was replacing the United States as the area's chief power, warned, "A crushing military defeat of Saddam Hussein will convert the bully of Baghdad into a martyr."

In fact, the United States had been invited in the first place by a majority of Arab rulers and most Arabs did not blame the United States for the crisis. Saddam, explained an Egyptian writer, "talks about holy war to purge Arab land of the foreign forces that but for his foolishness would not have come here." Arabs would only follow Saddam if he became a proven winner by succeeding
in his aggression. In that case, the 1990s would have made the previous 30 years of Middle East history seem a picnic in comparison. And given the way Arab conspiracy theories were invented, if the United States had not countered Iraq's invasion, it would soon be taken for granted that Saddam was America's designated agent to rule the region. But since the United States was challenging Iraq, the tide went in the opposite direction and those who otherwise might have ignored sanctions abided by them.

The terrorist factor, like the innate Arab support for Saddam, was overestimated. Representative Lee Hamilton, a Democrat from Indiana, considered the most knowledgeable member of Congress on the Middle East, said, "If war comes, it will be difficult to imagine where Americans will be safe in the Middle East for some time to come." Senator John Kerry, a Democrat from Massachusetts, former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, the columnists Evans and Novak, and many others agreed that terrorism would be widespread and effective.iv

Such predictions missed two important points: the United States should not allow terrorists to set its foreign policy and those countries sponsoring terrorism were intimidated by the United States. Other than Iraq itself, the terrorists' patrons--Syria, Iran, and Libya--were anti-Saddam or neutral, having no interest in ordering attacks on the coalition. The Communist regimes' collapse eliminated the terrorists' best non-Arab friends making their operations, especially in Europe, more difficult. Even Iraq refrained from using its terrorist assets--the Palestine Liberation Front and Arab Liberation Front, among PLO member groups, as well as its own intelligence services--since it wanted to avoid, not provoke, a U.S. attack.

The most effective operation was carried out by Abu Nidal's pro-Saddam Palestinian terrorists against the PLO's main critic of Iraq, though it was not clear whether this was a personal vendetta or a mission undertaken on Iraq's behalf. On January 15, Abu Iyad and two other al-Fatah officials were shot by their own bodyguard in Tunis.

Abu Iyad, a comrade of Arafat since they entered politics in the 1950s, was a leading figure
in PLO intelligence and terrorism operations. An austere man who saw himself as an intellectual warrior, he had smiled at me in a 1989 interview only when enthusiastically affirming his claim to be the PLO's number-two man. In fact, Abu Iyad was a poor politician and a loner who was ultimately loyal to Arafat, though often questioning his positions from a more hard-line perspective. Distrustful of the PLO's subordination to any Arab state, Abu Iyad had criticized Arafat's subordinate attitude toward Saddam.

The killer, a member of Abu Nidal's anti-Arafat Palestinian group, had pretended to defect to the PLO. Abu Nidal had his own motive to kill Abu Iyad arising from a long struggle with the PLO but he usually acted as a "hired gun" and was said to be working for Saddam at the time. Had Iraq's dictator eliminated a PLO leader who opposed him or did anti-Saddam Arab states order the killing to strike at their enemy's PLO ally? Whatever the answer, it was--like the PLO's support for Saddam--another in a long series of self-inflicted Arab and Palestinian wounds.

The mercurial Libyan dictator Qadhafi proved cagier than Yasir Arafat in this crisis and did nothing to help Iraq. As usual, rivalry, not Arab solidarity, prevailed. On one hand, Qadhafi considered himself--not Saddam--the rightful Arab leader. On the other hand, he wanted to escape his own isolation from the West, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. Despite all his Arab nationalist, anti-imperialist, anti-American rhetoric, Qadhafi watched passively while his "brothers" fought the United States. He was also made more cautious by a respect for U.S. power considerably deepened by the American air attack against him several years earlier. In the end Saddam was left only with Yasir and Yemen, the weakest forces in the Arab world with nothing to offer him.

Yet many American politicians and experts still doubted that the coalition be able to sustain itself in battle as it had in peace. Hamilton said a few days before the war began, "Support for the United States from coalition partners will be questionable in the case of hostilities." War, he added, would "split the coalition; estrange us from our closest allies; make us the object of Arab hostility; endanger friendly governments in the region; and not be easy to end, once started."
claimed, "The coalition would almost fall apart overnight" and the United States would be left "with not a single friend except Israel" in the region.\textsuperscript{v}

Iraq's biggest boosters in earlier days were now among the most ardent defeatists about America's chances. The columnists Evans and Novak published assertions that almost all Arab leaders agreed that the death of a single Iraqi soldier would make them desert the coalition. They insisted that Iraq's conquest of Kuwait, "cannot now be undone from outside," proclaimed that Syria and Iran would do nothing against Saddam, and virtually rejoiced in claiming that Bush's policy was losing domestic and international support.\textsuperscript{vi}

Former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, originator of the idea that the United States could make Iraq an ally in the 1970s, warned that an attack would lead to a split with European allies, Arab anti-American hostility, financial disaster, and the loss of any gains from the U.S. victory in the Cold War. He forecast "a global wave of sympathy for Iraq" and reflected the most extreme Arab propaganda in claiming that Israel might "take advantage of an expanded war to effect the expulsion of all Palestinians" from the West Bank.\textsuperscript{vii}

On the contrary, the coalition's Arab members never wavered since they knew that the Americans would hand them a quick, total victory. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia sought vengeance and vindication, knowing that only Saddam's defeat could preserve their sovereignty. Iran and Syria wanted Iraq weakened and Saddam eliminated as a rival who would be all the more threatening if he made himself master of Kuwait and victor over America.

After Bush obtained congressional support to attack, Senator Joseph Biden, Democrat from Delaware, warned the president on the Senate floor, "The Senate and the nation are divided on this issue. You have no mandate for war." Senator Ted Kennedy, Democrat from Massachusetts, added in his speech, "There is still time to save the president from himself--and save thousands of American soldiers in the Persian Gulf from dying in the desert in a war whose cruelty will be exceeded only by the lack of any rational necessity for waging it." If these powerful
Americans inveighed against war, why should Saddam expect the United States to fight?

In one sense, however, Saddam was totally correct. American eagerness to bring U.S. troops home and retreat from foreign responsibility had made it fumble the diplomatic outcome after winning military victories in two world wars. The Vietnam war and Iran hostage crisis became political disasters because, win or lose, they could not be concluded fast enough. Saddam understood that the United States could not fight a war if it could not win fast, keep casualties low, and get out quickly. The dictator's mistake was his disbelief that Bush could fulfill these conditions in defeating Iraq. But the same need to keep the war short, losses low, and bring the troops home soon also meant that the United States lacked the will power and staying power to bring down the Iraqi dictator.

Still, in the days up to January 15, this congenital American impatience operated against Iraq. Bush's eagerness to end the crisis sooner made him want to attack Iraq rather than wait longer. There were already constant media stories about the force's low morale, frictions in the coalition, problems of repairing equipment, and the troops' longing for alcohol. If Bush retreated, he would seem a fool and appeaser at the next election; if he procrastinated, Bush would have to face rising expenses and domestic complaints entailed in keeping several hundred thousand soldiers marooned in the Saudi desert.

Wishful thinking also prevailed in Iraq when it came to its own military preparations. If the Bush Administration's lack of credibility with Baghdad made war inevitable, it also brought a huge U.S. military advantage. Saddam would never believe that the real U.S. war plan could be so freely published in American newspapers. Iraq was unprepared to fight despite five months of threats to spill rivers of American blood.

The dictator was too accustomed to defining reality at home to take seriously the probability of intense aerial attacks, and hence the need for civil defense. The country's oil minister had been fired in late October for imposing strict rationing. Putting such restrictions on Iraqis
would seem like an admission of the sanctions' effectiveness. "Rambo films will not be played out on the land of Iraq," said Saddam on November 29, the day the UN gave him six weeks to get out or be thrown out of Kuwait. Few Iraqis believed there would be a war, even fewer believed American air attacks would get through. In Baghdad, windows were not taped and there were no black-out regulations, air-raid drills, or plans to evacuate civilians. "It is almost," commented the British magazine The Economist, "as though President Saddam Hussein had always planned to take his country to the brink of war--but not beyond." Indeed, that was true, but the decision was no longer in his hands.

On the morning of January 16 in the Middle East, a full 24 hours after the UN deadline, U.S. and allied planes took off from aircraft carriers or airfields in Saudi Arabia and Turkey. They hit their targets in Iraq with devastating effectiveness. Still, Saddam brimmed with confidence, "You may be capable of starting aggression and war," he told Bush through an interviewer. "But after taking the first step along this path, you will not be able to define the battlefield, the kinds of weapons that will be used in the showdown, or its duration....The battle will be prolonged, and much blood will be shed in it. Israel, offspring of American wickedness...will come under the hammer." Schwarzkopf was more accurate than Saddam in his own assessment that day: "The Iraqis have no concept of what they were getting involved in."

The U.S. strategy played to its own high-technology strength which Iraq had no way to counter. Contrary to Saddam's claim, the United States could "define the battlefield," "kinds of weapons," and "duration." Most Arabs appeared awed by the initial attack and Iraq's seemingly inability to retaliate. Even Qadhafi spoke of Saddam's "irresponsible actions." Completely outclassed in the air and bombed on the ground, Iraqi pilots soon began flying to Iran to escape the fighting. Baghdad ordered most of the air force to join the stampede in an admittedly slim hope of saving it. Iran gladly confiscated the 147 arriving planes as "reparations" for the Iran-Iraq war and kept them.
The U.S., British, and French air forces pounded Iraq in thousands of sorties, using incredibly accurate bombs and missiles to destroy military installations, factories, and communication centers with few losses to themselves. The sky over Baghdad lit up in the deadly fireworks of Iraqi antiaircraft fire and American cruise missiles. The planes moved on to smash Iraqi army units at the front, pinpointed by satellites and reconnaissance planes. The Iraqis had no aerial defense to stop the rain of bombs or reliable intelligence to tell them about the coalition's troop movements.

Baghdad had only one way of retaliating. Near Jerusalem's Damascus gate, Palestinian youths sold plastic sheets to cover windows against Iraqi chemical attacks, excitedly shouting, "Saddam is coming! Saddam is coming!" Indeed, his Scud missile messengers were about to arrive in Israel and in Saudi Arabia. Foreigners fled Israel; well-intentioned relatives and friends called from abroad urging people to go.

Just before January 15, a delegation of American journalists and experts met Prime Minister Shamir. At the meeting's end, the group's leader said, "Thank you for seeing us. We're leaving tonight because we don't want to be around on January 15," he laughed at his own tasteless joke. "I guess you don't have a choice."

"Oh yes," said one of the prime minister's aides. "We do have a choice. We just happen to like it here."

Few Israelis went to work those days. Schools were closed for what children called the "Saddam holiday." Food stand owners sat by their radios all day waiting for a code word calling them up to the army. Social workers found that psychologically disturbed people often took the actual outbreak of war in stride: external reality overpowered personal problems. Customers besieged hardware stores seeking plastic tape for sealing their windows. People took home bolts of plastic sheets to seal their windows.

Everyone, everywhere, carried the gas mask boxes resembling large Chinese takeout food
containers which many soon covered in bright wrapping paper. Comedy was called into service to combat fear. The popular comedian Doron Nesher transformed his box into a nest for a dove. One joke asked, "Why is land near the Iraqi Scud sites so expensive? It's only five minutes from downtown Tel Aviv!" Tel Aviv mayor Shlomo Lahat commented that the Iraqi Scuds might take only five minutes to reach the city but would then need at least ninety minutes to find a parking space. In the unintentional black humor department, Israel television cheerily showed "War and Remembrance," a television drama about World War Two full of scenes of bombing and air raid sirens.

After news of the U.S. air strike on Iraq, Israeli radio instructed people to stay inside and prepare for an Iraqi reprisal raid. A special program for new Russian immigrants explained the use of gas masks and anti-chemical war equipment. Water and food were taken to rooms; windows and doors were sealed with tape, glass crisscrossed by adhesive to keep it from becoming deadly projectiles. Gas masks were tried on, the dark, rubbery smell making one nauseous at first, drying the throat and making it sore. Everyone was hoping that the war would be an anticlimax.

Later, at 2 am on January 18, I was getting ready to sleep, listening to music on the radio. The phone rang and, to my surprise, it was Ralph Begleiter of CNN News in Washington. "Barry," he said, "there's a report that Iraqi missiles have hit Tel Aviv." Perhaps he had some source in the U.S. military, which was watching by satellite for Iraqi Scud launchings.

"That's ridiculous," I replied, "it's perfectly quiet here." I held up the phone to confirm this fact. That very second, there were seven loud explosions outside, bright flashes of light came through the window, and the building shook. Immediately, though belatedly, air raid sirens began their chilling up-and-down wave of sound, and the radio broadcast a warning to take shelter and put on gas masks right away.

My first thought was that I did not want to be the one who announced to the world--and Saddam's gunners--that Iraqi Scuds had hit the city, earning an ignominious place in history as
Iraqis fired salvoes to the same coordinates.

"Um, Ralph, I have to go," I said calmly and politely.

"Don't hang up! Don't hang up!" he insisted.

"No, really, I'm sorry. I can't talk now. Bye."

Later, when I recounted the story someone asked, "What was more important, your life or the story?"

"If you can't guess the answer is the second one," I answered jokingly, "you haven't known many journalists."

At the moment, though, there were other concerns. I had to break the two seals on the gas mask filter and screw it into the mask, seal the door with tape and a wet towel shoved against the bottom and huddle down to wait, watching the television and listening to Israel's station for instructions and the BBC for news. I sat quietly to control my heartbeat and breathing. On my nightstand was food, water in a covered container, and the special gauze, powder, and emergency syringe to be used if any chemical mist landed on one's skin. Only later did I realize that since I was sitting opposite the taped window, any near-by hit would have riddled me with flying glass. From then on, I sat on the floor.

For the next four hours, five million people waited until told they could take off their masks. Even then, they were instructed to stay inside the sealed room for several hours more. Few had much sleep that night. Only months later was it revealed that one Scud landed near a textile plant. When monitors picked up substances used in the cloth-processing, they thought it might be part of a chemical weapon.

The U.S. and Israeli intelligence assessments that Iraq did not have usable chemical warheads were kept secret. After all, nobody wanted to be the one who confidently predicted Saddam could not possibly use such arms, only to see scores of people die a horrible death from them. Yet Saddam did not fire these unconventional weapons. On top of the technical
shortcomings, he must also have been restrained by the fear that a single chemical warhead could bring Israeli nuclear retaliation.

Slowly, one learned the essentials of this strange type of warfare. The sirens gave exactly five minutes' warning and a remarkable amount of a life-time could be packed into that space. The real danger point was the next 60 seconds, when the missiles hit. As old war movies taught, being able to hear the blast meant you were still alive and safe. But meanwhile, five million people lived in fear every night.

The country was split into areas, with Tel Aviv--Region A--usually the last to receive an all-clear since it was the main Iraqi target. Boredom and anxiety competed as car alarms, the noise of buses and especially motorcycles in the night sounded chillingly like the start of a siren's wail. For each real alert, false ones set off the nervous system a dozen times. Very late at night, there was a more soothing sound: the motors of El Al planes flying in thousands of Soviet Jewish immigrants despite the crisis.

The greatest burden was borne by those caring for frightened children, who had to be put in special cribs or masks, and elderly relatives. At the gloomiest moment, a huge Israeli flag was strung across a whole wall of Habimah, the national theater and like the image in "The Star-Spangled Banner" was still flying after each perilous night.

Everyone claimed to know where each missile struck, dropping hints over the telephone ("...near the third stop of the bus you used to take to school.") Despite the efforts of Israel's government to keep the exact locations out of the media, State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler announced during Defense Minister Moshe Arens' visit to Washington that one had fallen near his house, giving Iraq potentially priceless intelligence. It was just fortunate that the missiles were so inaccurate, the warheads so small, and the Iraqi gunners so negligent and harried by air attack. If Israel had not destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor in 1981--an act condemned by America and the world--Iraq would have weapons a thousand times more devastating and
death-dealing.

Undersecretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger had come to Israel just before the war to urge patience and promise that the U.S. air force would knock out the missile launchers. At the end of December 1990, the United States had offered two batteries of Patriot defensive missiles. When the fighting began, Israeli crews were still training at Ft. Bliss, Texas, and Washington rushed American-crewed batteries to defend Israeli cities, the first time in the country's history that foreign troops had come to help it fight. At America's request, Israel waited for the coalition's bombing and secret commando raids to knock out the Scud launchers.

The U.S. government was trying to forestall Israeli retaliation against the missile sites in western Iraq, arguing that any Israeli action might make Arab members drop out of the coalition. Yet the Arab states were not in the coalition as a favor to the United States but in pursuit of their own vital interests. The Kuwaitis wanted to recover their country, the Saudis needed America to defend them, Egypt could not accept Saddam as the Arabs' leader, and even Syria openly said it would do nothing if Israel attacked. If Israel had hit their common Iraqi enemy and Syria and Saudi Arabia acquiesced, the taboo against making peace with Israel would have been collapsed.

According to an old pattern, the siege of Israel was occasion for temporary sympathy from the West. As the French writer Pascal Bruckner noted, "The Jews...were adored as long as they were persecuted, wandering, and uprooted but were detested as soon as they obtained a land, a State, and an army....What was loved was a depersonalized, suffering victim." × Israelis hoped--and the Bush administration promised--that the world would remember their sacrifices after the war, that restraint would bring political credit and economic support later. But they doubted that this memory would linger long and were right to do so.

In contrast, virtually every Palestinian leader, even the most moderate of the West Bank middle class, let themselves be carried away by wishful thinking in repeating Iraq's claims--conveyed by Amman's radio and television--that it had shot down many allied planes and
was winning the war.

The atmosphere of illusion was heightened by wild rumors that Israel would expel massive numbers of Palestinians, invade Jordan, or even hit West Bank towns with chemical weapons and then blame Iraq. The PLO accused the United States of "cowardly aggression" against Iraq: "We are all exposed to aggression when [Baghdad] is bombed." It warned that "blood, catastrophe and destruction will sweep the world." The preacher at East Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque, Shaykh Daoud Atallah, told worshippers, "God destroy Israel! God destroy the United States! God give victory to Saddam!" Another Palestinian said, "Our fate now is in the hands of Iraq," precisely the kind of intransigent, fatalist thinking which had so long crippled their cause.\textsuperscript{x1}

Palestinians in the West Bank--living under a tight curfew--and Jordan were heartened by the fact that Iraqi rockets had struck Tel Aviv. Palestinians not only cheered from roof-tops but held parades with floats carrying mock-ups of Scuds. Trying to convince Arabs to bolt the coalition, the PLO claimed that Israeli planes were operating out of Turkey or even Saudi Arabia. Arafat asserted that U.S. cruise missiles were being fired at Baghdad from Israel's Negev desert. In south Lebanon, the PLO tried to start its own war by firing katyusha rockets and sending terrorist squads into northern Israel.

Elsewhere, the coalition's military success discouraged Saddam's supporters, for whom wishful thinking jostled with a fatalistic pessimism that, once again, the Arabs would be humiliated. No one wanted to sacrifice himself for a loser. This, too, was Jordan's game.

King Hussein had faced many problems in his long rule but never before had he seemed so pessimistic and passive, looking far older than his 54 years of age. His Palestinian subjects naively thought Saddam would destroy Israel for them; the Islamic fundamentalists, who controlled 34 of 80 seats in parliament, cynically wanted to use Iraq to put themselves into power. The king played to the mob, condemning the coalition's attack on Iraq, claiming it was waging war on all Moslems and trying to take over the area.
This political game was played at a frightful price. Although Amman unilaterally wrote off its debt to Kuwait after Iraq's invasion, it was by far a net loser. The coalition's embargo cut revenue from the port of Aqaba and the profitable transit trade to Iraq and the Gulf. Unemployment rose and, ultimately, 300,000 Jordanian citizens, mostly Palestinians, returned from Kuwait or from other Gulf states where they were fired as potential fifth columnists. Yet aside from militant talk, Jordan's government and people did little to help Saddam.

Some non-Arab members of the anti-Saddam coalition tried harder to save Iraq as the bombing continued through January and February. The USSR, Iran, and European leaders urged a quick end to the war, allowing Saddam to save face and preserve his army from destruction.

Once again, though, Saddam hardened his heart like Pharaoh faced with the ten plagues, refusing to take advantage of these offers even just for the purpose of manipulating their sponsors into pressuring Washington to stop military operations. He still did not assume that Iraq would be defeated, expecting the coalition's ground forces could be pinned down in a protracted war with heavy casualties. Saddam was a great believer in the eventual victory of the side willing to suffer the most. The United States could damage but not defeat Iraq, he earlier told an American diplomat. The enemy may occupy some territory, Saddam said, but "We have staying power in battle."xii

But Iraq's military proved more of a facade than an effective foe. Its million-man size hid the fact that its soldiers were largely untrained and poorly led. An officer corps selected for political loyalty had made the regime more secure from coups but less able to fight wars. Saddam and his inner circle did not trust the army to make its own decisions but lacked the proper military know-how to do so themselves. While Saddam loved to wear a field marshal's uniform he had no real experience as a soldier. Mubarak and Assad, professional officers before they were political leaders, had a more realistic understanding of warfare. Perhaps this explains the difference between Saddam's recklessness and their relative caution in waging war.
Some could not understand why Iraq's professional officers did not talk sense to the dictator. "Saddam's military leaders are not fools," said Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia in January, arguing that Iraq would make a political compromise rather than go to war. But precisely because they were not fools, Iraq's generals had no wish to tell Saddam the unpleasant truth and risk execution.

Facing U.S. maneuver warfare and bombs was quite different from the war with Iran, when Iraq's army sat securely in trenches facing an enemy lacking any air power. The Iraqi soldiers' spirit was shattered. In one intercepted radio message, an officer under bombardment could be heard screaming hysterically, begging for supplies and crying for his mother. The regime's rigid control and the officers' fear of taking initiatives—the classic bane of Arab armies—was disastrous once air attacks broke communication lines between headquarters and the front. As soon as defeat seemed likely, morale collapsed; the officers fled and the soldiers surrendered.

The coalition's aerial battering of Iraq was just a prelude to the ground attack. With Iraq's army disorganized and demoralized, the coalition's tanks and troops advanced northward into Kuwait and Iraq beginning on February 24. The ground war lasted 100 hours. Tens of thousands of Iraqis gave up without firing a shot. As they retreated, the Iraqi army set afire Kuwait's oil wells on fire and much of Kuwait city. The coalition captured all of Kuwait and much of southern Iraq, then U.S. forces wheeled eastward to cut off the enemy columns.

Once again, Saddam resisted making concessions to end the war while, out of humanitarian and political considerations, others tried to save him. Some of the Europeans feared that defeating Iraq completely would be too costly in casualties and might lead to an Arab backlash against the West. The Soviets put forward a ceasefire plan for a gradual Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait in tandem with the lifting of sanctions, an accord that would allow Saddam to claim victory and delay implementation.

Bush refused. Eager as he was to end the war, nothing short of a clear Iraqi defeat was
acceptable. Finally, with coalition armies surrounding Iraq's remaining forces and penetrating closer to his cities, Saddam accepted all the UN resolutions. Bush quickly agreed to a ceasefire. Otherwise, he feared a march on Baghdad would be necessary to unseat Saddam, entailing heavier casualties, a protracted war, and a long-term U.S. military presence in Iraq. The problem was, though, that Saddam could not be trusted to keep to the terms. Schwarzkopf later stated publicly that he wanted to fight a little longer to destroy Iraq's forces, pressure which might have inspired the regime's breakdown or Iraqi generals to revolt. Instead, the president ordered Schwarzkopf to stop.

On February 26, Baghdad cheered the news that still another war was about to end. "You have faced the whole world, you great Iraqis," said the government radio. "You have won." Such an illusion could barely be maintained even within Iraq. American casualties totalled 148 killed and 467 wounded, many of them from friendly fire. Perhaps 200,000 Iraqi soldiers and several hundred civilians had died.\textsuperscript{xiv}

Arab supporters of the coalition were jubilant; Iraq's friends were stunned into silence. In Tel Aviv, I tore down the plastic sheets and tape from the window and flung open the wooden shutter. It was spring and birds were singing in the trees. An old man walked down the street carrying his gas mask box. Bystanders tried to assure him that he didn't have to carry it any more. He smiled and opened it: he was just using it to carry home eggs from the store.

For Iraqis, life was far grimmer. Much of the country's infrastructure was in ruins. Yet while the dictator had lost everything he seized on August 2, 1990, he kept all that he had before. Unwilling to let Saddam have Kuwait, the United States would let him keep Iraq. This policy corresponded to the original U.S. war aims but, given the magnitude of the coalition's victory, was a case of a foolish consistency. Bush left the dictator in place to wreak vengeance at home and plan revenge against his enemies abroad. A large part--though by no means all--of the victory had been thrown away.
"Our policy," said an NSC staffer, "is to get rid of Saddam Hussein, not his regime." XV Bush overestimated the likelihood that Saddam's colleagues and generals would throw him out. They were too dependent on their leader and too fearful of Saddam's excellent intelligence system to act against him. In the Middle Eastern fashion, they were waiting for the Americans to present them Saddam's head on a platter or at least give the signal for starting a coup which would receive U.S. support.

Iraq's Kurds and Shias thought Bush's earlier speeches expressing hope that Saddam would be overthrown by his own people gave them the go-ahead. On March 2, the Shias rebelled in Basra. Fighting spread to other southern cities and then to the Kurdish north. Although Bush had urged Iraqis to overthrow Saddam, he disclaimed all responsibility for the upheaval and any intention to help it.

The Iraqi army units which Bush had not allowed Schwarzkopf to destroy--due to allies' squeamishness and a desire to spare the Iraqis more suffering--now fired on their own people. They started by surrounding and shelling the southern cities. Hundreds of Shia civilians were killed; tens of thousands fled across the American lines or the Iranian border.

The situation in the north was even worse. In earlier years, the regime had destroyed hundreds of Kurdish mountain villages and forced people into closely controlled towns. Now Baghdad's Kurdish militia defected in revolt. Nationalist guerrillas seized army equipment and took over; Kurdish warriors briefly danced in the streets. Then Iraq's army marched north. The coalition did not interfere. Fearing Saddam's wrath, over two million Kurds fled over the frontier to Turkey and Iran. The whole region was emptied. As March ended, Saddam again controlled Iraq, except for the coalition's dwindling occupation zone in the south and a small safe haven it established for the Kurds in the north.

Bush had mistakenly let Saddam survive because he accepted arguments rooted in the old myths about American weakness, Arab unity, and the radicals' strength in the Middle East. The
first assumption was that Arabs and Iraqis would hate America for winning too big a victory. As regional history and the local revolts had shown, though, once Saddam fell the Iraqi people would have thanked America for helping rid them of that bloodthirsty tyrant. Iran, Syria, and other regional states would have been even more eager to propitiate a superpower capable of such domination. Instead, millions of Iraqis paid the price for America's last-minute trepidation.

The second argument was that the fall of Iraq's regime would lead to that country's dissolution and a severe power vacuum in the Gulf. In fact, the United States was now the dominant regional power and everyone in the Gulf--if not in Washington--knew it. Neither Syria nor Iran were about to challenge this hegemony or risk huge losses after seeing the outcome of Gulf Wars One and Two.

The likelihood of Iraq's disappearance was also wildly overstated. No matter who its ruler, Iraq's geopolitical weight would always be considerable since it was the sole Arab state combining a large population with enormous oil wealth. The Gulf Arab monarchies had riches but no manpower for large armies; Egypt and Syria were populous but poor. Further, there was no one else left to take advantage of Iraq's weakness. The USSR was impotent; Iran had neither obtained new planes, ships, or tanks since 1977 nor even begun to recover from defeat in its war with Iraq. Syria was too distant as well as economically weak, and militarily preoccupied in Lebanon and against Israel.

Iraq's partition was also extremely unlikely. None of its neighbors had any major claims to ownership of Iraq's territory. Turkey never challenged Baghdad's post-World War One border in the north, whose revision would only give Ankara a larger, unwanted Kurdish minority. Iran, which had failed to conquer Iraq at the height of its power, hardly wanted a rematch that would also bring confrontation with the United States. Iraq's own Kurds and Shias, as their failed revolt showed, were far from being able to secede. Their goals were not to create a new state but, respectively, to gain autonomy or to take over Iraq.
The third wrong notion was the customary myth that the way for the United States to win influence was to make concessions to Arab regimes, particularly its enemies among them. In fact, the United States's standing rested on the exact opposite ability: to demonstrate overwhelming power in order to persuade regional states that confrontation was futile and encourage cooperation was beneficial.

Making an example of Saddam would have achieved this end, deterring future aggressors and letting Washington broke new arrangements on Gulf security, arms control, and Arab-Israeli peacemaking. A few Arab and Iranian newspapers might grumble that the United States was an imperialist bully--which they would do anyway--but the regional governments would compete to have the United States as an ally or at least to avoid having it as an active enemy.

To achieve this real, full victory would not have required an American march on Baghdad or additional casualties. A few more days of continuing operations against Iraq's military would have eliminated the troops needed to put down the popular rebellions. The specter of destruction would have given Iraqi officers and officials a far greater incentive to move against the dictator.

In fact, the U.S. interest was the exact opposite of the Bush Administration's interpretation in March 1991. The best outcome of the war would have been to weaken Iraq's central government so as to render it less able to threaten the Gulf or anyone else. Supporting Kurdish autonomy was an easy way to do that. Bush was wrong on strategic as well as moral grounds to do nothing as the rebellions were crushed and hundreds of thousands of people were turned into refugees. But those Americans who had opposed the war altogether--in effect, being prepared to see Saddam go on ruling both Iraq and Kuwait--were in no reasonable position to criticize him for not having gone further.

Having successfully survived by using his brutality, Saddam was ready to wait patiently for alliances to rearrange themselves as they always did in the region, the coalition army to leave and the sanctions to erode away. Iraq hid as much as possible of its missiles, nuclear technology,
and chemical warfare capacity. Saddam hoped that in a few years, he would rebuild his strength and changes in Arab politics would allow him to pursue his ambitions again.

The experience had not changed Saddam's ideas, even as it reduced his ability to implement them. As soon as the United States let Saddam survive, its plan for a postwar new world order was badly subverted though not altogether ruined. The other Arabs and the Americans had learned more from the Kuwait crisis and their own past mistakes.


vi. Columns of August 13, 29, 30, and 31; September 21; October 22; November 7, 12, 16, and 30; and December 28, 1990, and January 7, 1991.


x. Bruckner, op. cit., p. 216.


xiv. According to Pentagon figures, 35 of the dead and 72 of the wounded were hit by their own side.

CHAPTER TWELVE
THE EMPEROR's NEW ORDER

To chase away some noisy children, Hojja told them there was a free banquet at the mayor's house. When they ran to see, he was pleased with his cleverness, then thought, "I'd better go see if it's true!"

--Middle East folktale

"USA! USA!" joyfully chanted Kuwaitis who had once cheered anti-American Arab leaders. Americans, too, were swept away by a wave of pride and patriotism in what appeared to be a new era of their history. Within nine months--much faster than expected--the fires were out, the refugee citizens back home, and Kuwait was back in business. The region's psychological and political dislocations would not be so easily restored.

The parades and celebrations did not eradicate the fact that the Arabs and the United States could not simply blame what had occurred on an evil dictator's deceit. The Arabs in general, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in particular, Europe, and the United States were also responsible for the crisis, having led Saddam on and built him up. A Kuwaiti poet, Souad al-Sabah, who had once cheered Saddam wrote:

He who killed Kuwait is our own flesh and blood
He is the embodiment of all our ways.
We made him in accord with our own measurements....
We all applauded the tyrants and tyranny
We can't complain about our idols.\(^i\)

Saddam had just too faithfully heeded the lessons that experience taught him. No wonder he expected that U.S. vacillation, European cowardice, Arab nationalism, Islamic radicalism, Saudi appeasement, and anti-Israel passion would give him an easy victory. Before August 1990, the Bush Administration had been pusillanimous as long as it could avoid trouble. Between 1985 and 1990,
U.S. companies sold Iraq items with military applications worth $1.5 billion, a figure that would have been higher if Baghdad could have financed additional deals. West Germany and France helped Saddam far more.ii

Even after Iraq seized Kuwait and the U.S. government awoke, many in the West were ready to collaborate in Saddam's scheme. Part of the intelligentsia was still obsessed by the idea that America--not Communism, dictators, or terrorism--was the world's cancer. Bush's domestic critics--Democrats, liberals, and isolationist conservatives alike--complained he was being too tough, urging patience and a deal with a tyrant they should have been the first to oppose. But dangerous bad counsel called to bribe Iraq to withdraw, doubts that Arab states would stay in the coalition, and the refusal to destroy Saddam or help the Kurds.

If Iraq had given them some encouragement it might still own part or the whole of Kuwait. "All of the so-called diplomatic options," Henry Kissinger explained, "would have made matters worse. Each would have left Iraq in a militarily dominant position."iii The Kuwait crisis showed how much the United States could achieve when willing to shed--at least temporarily--the myths often promulgated by experts and sometimes swallowed by politicians. To its credit, the White House rejected defeatist advice. Drawing on experience with other dictators, it insisted that aggression be thwarted.

Could these same leaders, experts, and journalists learn something from experience? The immediate postwar prognosis was inauspicious. Wishful thinking and all the ideas that helped produce the crisis in the first place again took control in Washington. Bush refused to fight a few more days to destroy the remaining half of Saddam's army, trapped in southern Iraq, or ensure the dictator's fall. His rationale for this ill-considered mercy was wrong on all counts. Instead of the war's quick end defusing domestic criticism, he was blamed for letting Saddam survive.

The proper American task had not been to occupy Baghdad and set up a new regime but to
destroy enough of Iraq's army to let officers know they must oust the dictator to survive or ensure that a revolt overwhelmed the tyrant. The only way to break the cycle of Arab politics was to prove to the regimes that aggression and demagoguery were suicidal, convincing them that they must change their ways or disappear.

As usually happened, America far better at having a vision than at implementing a strategy. It resolved the immediate problem of the Kuwait crisis but missed much of a chance to change the region's underlying structure and to create a real new order there. Like outposts which did not yet know the battle was over and lost, American Middle East experts fought on for the old myths. They spoke as if the United States had been defeated or would have been better off if Iraq had won the war in the Gulf. Too complete a U.S. triumph, they warned, would surely make Arabs consider America an imperialist bully. The United States did not need to eliminate Saddam, wrote former State Department official James Akins, since he would "soon be dead at the hands of his own countrymen" or in exile. Nonetheless, the United States would be seen as the "destroyers" not "the saviors of Arabs or Islam. There would be growing anti-American demonstrations and terrorism, U.S. allies in Egypt, Syria and Morocco "will be shaken and could be overthrown," and the Saudi regime would only last a few years longer. There might be some hope, Akins suggested, only if the United States gave in to all the Arab demands on the Arab-Israeli conflict and other issues.

Such people still did not comprehend that power was more important than popularity and that the United States had in fact saved Arabs from Saddam's unwelcome embrace. Those Arab leaders who already doubted U.S. staying power would be less, not more, cooperative with Saddam still looking over their shoulder.

Though dissenting from Bush's order to stop fighting, even General Schwarzkopf himself was something of an innocent in the bazaar on these matters. Iraq "suckered" him by breaking promises it made at the truce talks, he told interviewer David Frost. When Iraq's delegates asked to be trusted,
Schwarzkopf recalled, "You almost feel like coming back and saying `Why.'" But why just "almost"? Because despite all that had happened, even this tough, worldly American commander could not quite believe that they would look him in the eye and lie. Schwarzkopf also believed in fair play. If Iraq's rulers "broke the rules," he asserted, "they would pay for it." The men who ran Iraq knew better: by lying and cheating they had always made others do the paying. And now the United States again did not retaliate when they breached those rules.

Bush's denial that there was any formal U.S. commitment to the Kurdish or Shia Iraqis was technically true. But the rebels understandably interpreted Bush's clear, oft-voiced wish that the dictator be deposed as a call to action and an offer to help. Both for realpolitik and humanitarian reasons, U.S. policy should have backed Kurdish autonomy to weaken Iraq's central government so it would not again be a threat. Instead, America spared Saddam's soldiers and weapons so they could kill Iraqis and reestablish control. Saddam quickly returned to his old tricks: hiding chemical, nuclear, and other weapons; finding ways around the embargo; and stalling for time to outwait the coalition's patience in maintaining it.

Some observers felt that that little had changed. The Washington correspondent of the British newspaper Financial Times summarized the case against Bush--and U.S. policy--in June 1991: "The Middle East looks as confused and chaotic as ever." There was no peace conference, much less a solution, for the Arab-Israeli conflict. "Plans for a new security system in the Gulf appear to be in disarray." There were "widespread reports of human rights violations" instead of elections in Kuwait. The White House had to concede that much of Iraq's arsenal remained intact--U.S. military claims of destruction had been greatly exaggerated--and that Baghdad was continuing to build missiles. In exchange, it could only offer wishful thinking that Saddam would fall without being pushed too hard.

A lot of this critique was valid. But the region's system had also undergone significant
changes even if they were less than might otherwise have been achieved. Already undermined by the events of the 1970s and 1980s, any chance for Arab unity, Islamic revolution, destroying Israel, joining the Soviet camp, or expelling Western influence--the mainstays of Arab rhetoric for almost four decades--was gone. Actually it was already to late, the ideas were obsolete, before Saddam, Khomeini, and their friends made their last-ditch effort. It was only left to admit that fact and act accordingly.

Of course, the old ways would continue to close minds and shape behavior. As Ajami put it, "Cultures often stubbornly refuse to look into themselves. They retreat into the nooks and crannies of their received history, offer up the standard evasions, fall back on the consolations they know." Societies first react to change by revising rhetoric and tactics in order to preserve their substance. In politics, having one's cake and eating it, too, is the optimal solution.

New trends, however, developing for years had now culminated in a crisis that pushed toward moderation, the West, and the first real prospect of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. The main factors included: Egypt's return to Arab preeminence; the political failure of Arab nationalism and radical Islam; a stronger Israel and the Arab states' withdrawal from battling it; Moscow's collapse and the Cold War's end; America's emergence as the Gulf's protector; and a maturity arising from the Arab world's own experience and development.

First, after a decade's isolation for the "crime" of making peace with Israel, Egypt had come back as a new kind of Arab power. Arab embassies reopened there in 1987; Assad and Qadhafi visited to concede Egypt's absolution. Cairo dominated the 1989 Arab summit with a call to jettison radicalism, work with the United States, and recognize Israel. Saddam had understood that without a radical alternative, Egypt's influence would shift the direction of Arab politics.

Second, behind a smokescreen of Pan-Arabism, Arab states had become viable entities on their own. Since Nasser's death in 1970, no charismatic figure appeared to unite the Arabs or even to
enjoy any real following outside his own borders. Qadhafi's bid to do so was a farce revealing the hollowness of the enterprise. It meant far more to be an Iraqi, Jordanian, or Syrian in the 1990s than before, when many of their citizens could remember a time before these independent states existed. Each country had a steadily more divergent political and economic structure, history, and geopolitical situation.

Although Saddam first seemed a throwback to earlier times, his isolation would prove how much things had changed. Saddam acted so selfishly and unilaterally as to show himself to be a thoroughgoing Iraqi nationalist; Saudi Arabia's rulers acted as Saudi nationalists by inviting U.S. troops. What a strange, ultimately unworkable system it was which required the Saudis and Kuwaitis to donate the instruments of their own destruction, to praise those who would murder them, and to dance in the streets to celebrate impending defeat.

For a time, at least, radicalism was discredited. Terrorism and revolutionary Islamic fundamentalism succeeded nowhere in the Arab world despite all the noise they made. In Lebanon, fundamentalist groups did not even win hegemony in their own Shia community, much less in the country as a whole. Tehran was not a highly attractive model to emulate and its revolution was not exported. Fundamentalist movements formed the main opposition in several countries but did not--certainly in their more extreme forms--seem poised for victory.

Third, Arab states were less able to afford radicalism or fight the United States or Israel because they could no longer look to Moscow for help. Communism's collapse destroyed the Arabs' alternative arms supplier and diplomatic champion, forcing them to be friendlier and more dependent on the United States. Syria, for example, was plagued by high inflation, population growth, and foreign debt. "As time went by," said Mohammad Aziz Shukri, dean of Damascus University law school, "our defeats were repeated and we realized that Israel is not alone." Many Syrians were "sick and tired" of fighting and were more concerned about the price of gasoline than calls to battle.
Fourth, the United States was now the area's sole superpower. Overall U.S. engagement in the world might decline but the Middle East would remain a relative priority. While much of U.S. involvement there had derived from the Cold War, Moscow's decline did not eliminate the conflict with local extremists. After all, the United States opposed Iranian and Iraqi aggression in the Gulf though neither was acting as a Soviet client.

The Arab states' and Iran's need for good relations with Washington gave it an opportunity to use power as leverage for resolving the Arab-Israeli and Gulf security problems. Now their leaders had to worry more about pleasing the America than about keeping Arab or Iranian demagogues happy. Even Iran acted to settle old quarrels, helping to release the American hostages held by its Lebanese clients before 1991 ended.

There were, of course, limits on U.S. influence. The local states wanted to concede as little as possible and America often gave its favors too cheaply. Bush quickly pardoned King Hussein's scandalously pro-Iraq behavior. And while Saddam's case showed that U.S. help for radical dictators would not stop them from turning on it later, Bush forgave Syria's anti-American terrorism and human rights abuses, gave it a free hand in Lebanon, and let the Saudis pay it $2 billion in aid to spend on new arms.

Fifth, it was easier to make progress toward solving the Arab-Israeli conflict though there were still many barriers to a negotiated solution. Arab states had already been gradually disengaging, learning from the defeats suffered in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982.

The Arabs saw that time was clearly not on their side. Israel was getting stronger, tightening its hold over the captured West Bank and Gaza Strip by building more Jewish settlements. The Palestinian uprising had failed to dislodge Israel from that land. The immigration of several hundred thousand Soviet Jews into Israel underlined that country's staying power.

The new era brought by the Kuwait war further altered these circumstances. Saddam's Scud
offensive was, politically, an anticlimax; direct U.S. military intervention in the Gulf forced each Arab leader to wonder if an attack on Israel might bring similar retaliation. For Arab regimes, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had become too dangerous to toy with any more.

Instead of appeasing the most radical forces and the PLO, Arab states needed better relations with Washington and had to show some interest in making peace. For the Palestinians, diplomacy seemed the only way to end their suffering. Palestinians had been isolated by their support for Saddam. Over 300,000 of them were expelled from Kuwait and other Gulf states. Americans showed more interest in these deportees rights than did their supposed Arab brothers. A Kuwaiti banner hung outside al-Fatah's offices there, read: "Anyone who is a Palestinian is a traitor. This is the home of the enemy collaborators against Kuwait." In Lebanon, the reviving government disarmed most of the remaining PLO forces.ix

Syria, Jordan, and the West Bank/Gaza Palestinians had said they would never negotiate directly with Israel, go to the conference table without the PLO, or accept the Camp David framework with its plan for an interim stage of autonomy in the occupied territories. Now they accepted all three and more. Yet the new regional situation also brought peace closer than ever before.

The historic October-November 1991 Madrid peace conference, the ensuing follow-up bilateral talks in Washington, and the January 1992 regional meeting in Moscow--though boycotted by Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinians--were genuine breakthroughs. In Madrid, Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian delegations talked face-to-face with Israel in a way unthinkable before the Kuwait crisis. In Moscow, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Morocco, and Tunisia sat down with Israel for the first time.

Israel itself remained suspicious after so many years of Arab threats, terrorism, and wars. Its people were split between those believing that peace talks and a changing Arab world provided a wonderful opportunity to trade land for real peace, and others eager to talk but--suspecting a
trap--refusing to surrender real strategic assets for what they feared would be vague, short-lived promises.

The conservative Israeli government did not want to yield territory. Aside from ideology, it was concerned that a smaller state would be more vulnerable to Syrian or Iraqi aggression, Jordanian instability, and Arab support for Palestinian extremism. The lack of visible change in Syria or the PLO made it skeptical. Saddam's escapade created a harrowing scenario of Iraq's missiles and army being invited into a Palestinian-ruled West Bank in order to attack Israel. Compared to these dangers, the conservatives argued that the existing situation was not so bad, failing to realize that it could become far better.

Still, while belligerency had turned into passivity by the 1980s and then into a willingness to negotiate after the Kuwait crisis, it would still be a while before talking turned into agreeing. Arab states were not eager to risk abandoning their most fundamental policies. They knew that political conditions could soon change again and hoped that it would be possible to build a good image in Washington without making real concessions.

The fact that Arab-Israeli peace was more possible than ever before did not mean it would be easy to achieve. Americans assumed that countries always want to resolve conflicts. In the past, though, many factors--ideology, hope of victory, neighbors' opposition, and fear of instability--made Arab regimes consider peace with Israel as unnecessary and dangerous. More effective arrangements to avoid another war--a condition of "no war, no peace" or, more properly, "no fighting, no treaty"--made the status quo more acceptable.

Jordan had shunned talks fearing Arab radical states would subvert it, oil-producers stop subsidies, and its own people might revolt. Even success at the negotiating table was problematic: regaining the West Bank would bring Jordan more potentially rebellious Palestinian citizens; an independent PLO-led state could destabilize Jordan by subverting its own Palestinian majority. For
Syria, peace would eliminate its role as most militant anti-Israel state and the Soviet military and Arab financial rewards that brought. If Israel became an accepted regional power, it would align with Jordan and Egypt against Syrian interests in Lebanon and elsewhere. Syria's only gain from a settlement--the Golan Heights--was an economically inconsequential place whose main use was as a base for attacking Israel.

The new situation mitigated but did not eliminate many of these historic problems. Every likely solution also posed considerable drawbacks for Syria and Jordan. The PLO was excluded from direct participation in the negotiations because, even after the Gulf war, it was still unwilling to make the kind of clear commitments to recognize Israel and stop terrorism that were the price of admission to sit at the bargaining table.

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had an easy way out by telling other Arab states to make peace while they stayed mainly on the sidelines. Syria already had Lebanon and did not see the need for any concessions. Other Arabs hoped that the United States would force Israel to hand them the West Bank, Gaza, and Golan without giving up anything directly. Both sides often acted as if the United States was the party that most needed peace. Syria's government newspaper Tishrin greeted visiting Secretary of State James Baker in May 1991 by claiming that diplomatic failure damaged countries directly engaged in the conflict less than "it jeopardized American credibility."\footnote{CAULDRON OF TURMOIL | The Emperor’s New Order | Barry Rubin}

Israel was tempted to stall, the Arabs were tempted to wait for the United States to give them what they wanted. For both sides, the status quo had real attractions. A peace process would be measured in years, not months, yet despite all the frustrations, circumstances were gradually moving forward, each year and each round of negotiations, closer to some resolution.

The sixth new regional reality was that the United States had become the guarantor of Gulf stability and security even without troops on the scene or formal defense treaties with the local states. This was quite sufficient for U.S. purposes since, which never sought to seize the Gulf's oil but
merely to keep it out of the hands of enemies. After the demonstration of U.S. power against Iran and Iraq, there would be no challengers for some time. The Saudis wanted to keep arrangements informal. Paradoxically, the overwhelming U.S. advantage rendered all the more unnecessary the formal Gulf security structure Washington advocated, secured by treaties and guarded by the permanent presence of outside troops. The Saudis’ very need to invite U.S. troops made them want to show independence by not having them stay.

Sensitive to the myth of Arab solidarity, the United States had favored an "Arab solution" to Gulf security in a March 1991 agreement to station Egyptian and Syrian troops there. The Saudis themselves rejected this idea of accommodating politically correct—but potentially subversive—foreign Arab units. After all, the Saudis felt they had the U.S. army, the world's best, on retainer. The Kuwaitis also had little interest in Arab protection, signing an agreement to preposition American equipment in their country, where a relatively small U.S. force remained behind.

Just as the region preferred American protection to mutual agreements, it had a similar attitude toward arms limitations. After all, explained the British magazine The Economist, the lessons of the Kuwait crisis "point in the other direction. Iraq's neighbors have learnt that it was a mistake to let their own power fall so far behind Saddam Hussein's. Israelis will conclude that, but for their country's undeclared nuclear deterrent, Iraq would already have doused them in toxic chemicals. And Mr. Hussein has been taught to acquire nuclear arms, if he has the chance, before next pouncing on a weaker neighbor."

Thus, the U.S. victory in the Gulf eased the pressure for a slower arms race by lowering the risk of local war. Only U.S. preeminence could handle the threat of proliferating missiles and nuclear weapons by leading international efforts to limit their influx. Since there were enough greedy companies and indigenous scientists to ensure that such arms can be smuggled or locally produced, U.S. deterrence would have to block their use. The fact that this pressure would be applied unequally
was simply a recognition of the differences among the parties involved: the United States sold arms to Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, while trying to block the spread of nuclear arms to Syria, Libya, and Iraq; and tacitly accepting Israel's possession of them.

Political ideas had often been powerful weapons in the Middle East. Democracy was the new buzzword in the Arab soul-searching that followed the Kuwait crisis. Too many other ideological gods had failed. The heirs of revolutions once hailed as fulfilling the masses' aspirations— in Algeria, Egypt, and elsewhere—were now seen as corrupt, inefficient establishments.

Certainly, the proportionately huge new Arab generation, growing up at a more advanced stage of modernization and Westernization, had less respect for the status quo. Development and science, education and communications, urbanization and travel, along with other factors might eventually create a stable, democratic society. Yet this was no sure thing. During the 1950s and 1960s, many Western scholars had identified dictators like Nasser as agents of modernization who would dissolve traditional society and bring progress.

Might the dictators and monarchs be swept away altogether? This seemed as doubtful to happen quickly as it was pleasant to contemplate. The kind of social development and cultural change necessary to produce democracy was neither a fast nor certain process. France had taken a century to advance from bloody revolution to ingrained democracy. The road to stable, representative government in Germany, Italy, Russia, and Japan had been even rockier.

The Middle East was far from being the American Midwest. In contrast to Eastern Europe, there was no democratic tradition or independent-minded middle class to demand such reforms. There were serious barriers to the spread of multi-party parliamentary democracy, an import into the Arab and Islamic world which—whatever cultural, historical, sociological or other factors are blamed—had not done well or survived long there. Far more than much of Africa and Asia, the Middle East had strong alternative traditions hostile to many Western ways and institutions.
The Middle East situation of rapid change, discredited rulers, and economic downturns were a recipe for anti-democratic instability. Reforms often brought instability; extremists tried to use democracy to seize power themselves; opportunists posed as noble democrats to persuade foreigners to help them gain power. The parliamentary regimes installed on independence in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s had been discredited and were overthrown by populist military coups in the 1950s. The Shah's limited efforts to open up his political system spun out of control and led to the Islamic revolution.

Khomeini's rise to power, Lebanon's civil war, Syria's repression, Iraq's treatment of the Kurds, and the role of radical Islamic fundamentalists as the main opposition, show that moderate, non-violent forces were not the most likely heirs to power. Tough dictators armed with advanced weapons and ready to use force were not easily displaced.

Nor were the self-proclaimed "democrats" themselves necessarily forces for moderation. In Kuwait, the most outspoken before Saddam's invasion had been backed by Iran, Iraq, or Syria. In Algeria and Jordan, those claiming to support civil rights were mainly anti-American fundamentalists who were Saddam's most enthusiastic supporters and bitterly opposed peace with Israel.

A political culture favoring extremism and demagoguery can turn pluralism into its own enemy. If the public itself supports anti-democratic values, elections and free speech may merely bring new dictators to power. The Arab world could see more internal upheavals, fueled by the friction between social mutations and rigid political systems, though democratic revolts are the less likely outcomes.

As they had done with nationalism and Islam, regimes in Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Iran, Lebanon, and Tunisia manipulated parliaments, elections, and multiple parties as a safety valve. At the same time, they used control over the state, media, and ballot boxes to guarantee their own victory. The opposition accepted its permanent status in exchange for being allowed to function and
share some privileges. When the Algeria's and Jordan's experiments with democracy looked as if they might let Islamic fundamentalist oppositions gain power, the regimes changed the rules.

Only in the future will it be possible to know if the Middle East went toward convergence with the West or a path of its own in the twentieth century. One of history's great questions is whether technology will make societies more homogenous or make it easier for them to preserve their distinct traditions. Does an industrial society inevitably create an educated middle class demanding more freedom or can technology just as easily be used to reinforce the existing way of life?

People do not simply walk away from their own history and political culture but always carry some of it along as baggage. The Gulf crisis and the events before it shook but did not break the region's system. Some regimes would continue hitting their heads against the wall, albeit less hard.

Iraq, Libya, Syria, Iran, and the PLO were still led by extremists who accepted a temporary, tactical need to make some compromises with U.S. power while still considering it as antithetical to their ambition and looking for a way out. On a regional level, though, they could not dictate the future for others. As so often happened in Middle East history, the barking of the dogs did not interrupt the caravan's progress. Middle East dictators and extremists paid for miscalculating America's peculiar combination of naivete and great power when they provoked that country, which could not have been less inclined to fight them.

Still, since the Middle East never lacked the capacity to astonish, it should have lost the ability to surprise the United States. The likelihood was that the region would remain a cauldron of turmoil though the temperature would be somewhat reduced. Equally, the United States was learning more about the region as its responsibility grew while retaining a large measure of miscomprehension. Perhaps the best metaphor for this situation was a story told by Mohammad Mossadegh who himself had been a victim of American gullibility. A moderate Iranian prime minister, Mossadegh had been misperceived as pro-communist by the United States and was overthrown by the CIA in 1953.
As a young student in Switzerland, Mossadegh wanted a driver's license for his motorcycle. The test required that he drive around on the vehicle for an hour. A Swiss policeman at the starting point noted the time. Off went Mossadegh. A few feet beyond the first streetcorner and out of the official's sight, he crashed into a vegetable stand, sending produce flying in all directions. The vendor started Screaming at Mossadegh; Mossadegh yelled back. A crowd gathered, taking sides in the dispute. Finally, Mossadegh and the merchant agreed on a price for the damage. Mossadegh mounted his motorcycle and rode back around the corner. The Swiss policeman looked at his watch. "Congratulations," he said, "you passed."

The U.S. experience in the Middle East was not so different from Mossadegh's ride--the road to success was paved with miscalculations and disasters--but the result was closer to the policeman's viewpoint. The course of U.S. policy was like that of a roller-coaster which weathers all the bumps and dips to arrive safely. Its stand was based neither on imperialism nor on isolationism but rather a careful watching for extremes of aggression or instability that needed to be deterred or balanced.

Each time there had been a real life-or-death confrontation, the United States acted as a preserver of relative liberty. In a fashion that was always better late than never, it saved the globe in World War Two; endured a long, costly struggle against Soviet communism; and helped stop Iran from exporting revolution and Iraq from expansionism. In the end, the United States arrived at the finish line, achieving its goals. But it failed to understand what had happened along the way.
i. Souad al-Sabah, "Who Killed Kuwait?" translated and cited by Fouad Ajami, "The End of Arab Nationalism," op. cit., p. 27.


xi. The Economist, October 6, 1990, p. 45.