

PARADIGM SHIFTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: PERCEPTIONS, MISCALCULATIONS AND THE FIRST GULF WAR

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Abstract

This article interrogates America's involvement in the Gulf region and the decisions that led to the First Gulf War in 1990. It adopts the individual level of analysis theory, which argues that perceptions, choices and actions of individual human beings, such as great leaders often influence the course of history. The study therefore, argues that the First Gulf War could have been averted. This is because there was no overwhelming systemic pressure that brought the belligerents into conflict. Indeed, if both actors, George Bush and Saddam Hussein had widened their perceptions in the prelude to the conflict, it is unlikely that the operation, which was coded "Desert Storm" would not have transpired. To be sure, Saddam Hussein would not have underestimated America's military resolve, and the United States would have taken Saddam's overtures more seriously. It further argues that Margaret Thatcher and George Bush turned to history for guidance when they responded to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Indeed, Bush and Thatcher used analogies to Hitler of the 1930s, the Vietnam War and the Falklands War to frame the crisis, which ultimately influenced their policy of the coalition force Operation Desert Storm to liberate Kuwait in February 1991. The article concludes that despite the much-heralded success of military victory, multilateral diplomacy and international law, the First Gulf War has continued to elicit reactions from experts, professionals and scholars across the globe, many years after it had been fought, won and lost.

Key Words: Cease-fire, perceptions, miscalculations, Invasion, coalition forces.

Introduction

On August 2, 1990, Iraq troops streamed across their southern border into Kuwait seizing control of the oil-rich desert kingdom. Kuwait was subsequently annexed as the 19th province of Iraq. This move gave Saddam Hussein a significant percentage of world oil production. As the Iraq tanks launched into the Saudi Arabian border, fear reverberated around the world that the map of the middle East was about to change forever.

However, Saddam's act of aggression was not allowed to stand. On 24th February 1991, after a 38-day air campaign UN sanctioned coalition troops rolled through the desert, evaporating the little Iraqi resistance that was met in one of the most decisive routs in military history. Indeed, the coalition ground forces liberated Kuwait in less than 100 hours, but the impact of the war echoed far beyond the sandy shores of the Gulf.

Essentially, the Operation Desert Storm marked the beginning of a new post-Cold War world order, the one dominated by one country, America. The conflict provided the springboard to demonstrate America's overwhelming military might and technological superiority as well as her profound diplomatic influence. Indeed, America decade had begun.

The war was generally perceived as a resounding success and a harbinger of more conflicts. Friendly nations came together to punish aggression in defence of international peace and security. The Cold War has just ended and it no longer provided the lenses through which international conflicts could be perceived. Thus, there was latitude for international cooperation in defence of just principles and the punishment of aggression. Indeed, the gulf crisis signified the first time that the Permanent Five members of the Security Council acted in unison with regard to the use of force. (Childers, 1991:4) To be sure, Russia and China, former Cold War foes of the United States offered their tacit support to the US-led invasion, a development that was hitherto unthinkable five years earlier.

Historical Background to the Crisis in the Gulf Region

Historically, Iraq's claims on Kuwait dates back to the early 20th century. King Faysal claimed in 1938 that Kuwait was actually Iraq's 19th Province and that the separation of the two countries was a burden of colonialism. Iraq's claims to Kuwait remained until relations were normalized, somewhat ironically under the Ba'thist regime of al-Bakr. (Gause, 2001: 7) However, under Saddam, Iraq looked at Kuwait so as to assuage growing domestic turbulence. Given Iraq's reliance on oil revenues, Saddam equated Kuwait's exceeding of OPEC oil quota as an act of war and demanded that Kuwait curtail production. Indeed, every \$1 drop in the price of oil equated to about \$1 billion a year in lost Iraq revenues. In the Spring of 1990, Iraq also reasserted claims to the Rumaila oil field- one of the world's largest, which is close to the Iraq-Kuwait border. It is estimated that about 90% of the oil reserves in the field lie under Iraqi territory.

Furthermore, Iraq demanded that Kuwait forgave \$10 billion in war debt, pay Iraq a direct subsidy of \$12 billion in compensation for reduced prices due to over-production, and lease or cede control of the island of Babayan, which controls the entrance to Iraq's only port. (Smith, 1992: 21)

Evidently, Saddam proved his belligerent tendencies shortly after assuming power in 1979. In the wake of the chaotic wake of the Iranian Revolution, Saddam declared war on Iran ostensibly over the Shatt al Arab, a strategically important and historically disputed waterway close to the Iran-Iraq border. The roots of the decade long conflict is traceable to the more profound schism between secular Arab nationalism and the revolutionary, universalist ideology of Iran's Islamic regime. (Hiro, 1989: 1) The war cost about \$500 billion and it occupied a quarter of the nation's workforce. Both nations emerged from the war in a state of economic ruin.

The support of neighbouring Sunni Arab states, notably Kuwait and Saudi Arabia sustained Iraq throughout the war. These two countries gave Saddam their support as a defender of the established Sunni order in the region against the unpredictable Shi'ite revolutionaries in Iran. Consequently, Iraq emerged from the war with over \$580billion in debt. The United States played a decisive, though covert role in supporting Iraq. Rattled by the threat of a

revolutionary Islamic movement, hostile to the United States' interest sweeping across the Middle East, as well as the Iranian hostage crisis following the Iranian revolution of 1979, the US channelled support at critical moments during the conflict, including the granting of a \$4 billion loan to Iraq in 1985 and 1986. Indeed, the US Ex-Im Bank insured exports of \$297 million of US goods to Iraq during the same period. (Colhoun, 1992: 35)

Although, the US was suspicious of the nationalist-socialist origins of Iraq, she was not unwavering in her support of the country because she preferred Iraq to Iran. Therefore, her foreign policy during the Iraq-Iran conflict was essentially to ensure that the war lasted as long as possible, thereby weakening both sides and reducing both side's chances of rising as a regional hegemony to challenge American interests in the region.

Iraq emerged from the Iraq-Iran war as a friend of the Gulf States, cognizant of their support over the decade. Thus, Iraq signed a non-aggression pact with Saudi Arabia, founded the Arab Cooperation council, and passed a foreign investment law that gave favourable treatment to investors from neighbouring Gulf States. Kuwait was no exception; the Kingdom's relations with Iraq throughout 1989 were rather cordial. In fact, the ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Jabir al-Ahmed Al Sabah visited Baghdad in the spirit of friendship. Even rhetoric towards Israel, long a thorn in the side of Ba'thist aspirations to unite the Arab world in a single political entity was toned down. (Gause, 2001: 8)

However, the economic costs of the war with Iran left Iraq in a perilous domestic position, heavily indebted and in desperate need of foreign exchange. The low oil prices of the 1980s further put pressure on Iraq to find additional source of income and to alleviate massive war debt. To make matters worse, a privatization program of the erstwhile government-controlled economy could not help the situation, but instead spiked unemployment as companies cut work forces just as troops were returning from the war front. As Saddam had claimed victory in the war with Iran, funds were desperately needed to demonstrate the triumphant reconstruction of the country. As Chaudhry notes, the policies of liberalization produced high levels of inflation, unemployment, shortages in basic goods, growing and highly visible economic inequality, and the emergence of a brisk black market in foreign currencies. (Chaudhry, 1991: 17) Moreover, the reforms instituted to shore up funds to repay debt and finance reconstruction alienated the traditional base of the Ba'thist regime: the poor, organized labour, and the bureaucracy. Faced with a situation of potential rebellion against his rule, Saddam looked beyond his borders for a solution to the brewing domestic crisis.

Throughout the summer of 1990, Iraq assumed an increasingly threatening posture along its border with Kuwait. However, Kuwait seemed reluctant to concede. Although some analysts thought that Kuwait was willing to pay, it is widely assumed that the kingdom was unwilling to concede the island of Babayan, as she thought there were large untapped oil reserves beneath its sandy shores. (Chaudhry, 1991: 22) Thus, on July 31, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia convened a meeting along with Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian president, and King Hussein of Jordan, to try and reach a peaceful settlement regarding the evolving crisis. Although, the exact details of that meeting are unavailable, it is clear that neither of the contending parties capitulated.

Perception and Miscalculation: The Logic behind the Crisis in the Gulf

In a world of perfect information and effective communication, the Gulf could have been averted. This is because there was no overwhelming systemic pressure that brought the belligerents into conflict. Indeed, if both actors, George Bush and Saddam Hussein widened their perception in the prelude to the conflict, it is unlikely that Desert Storm wouldn't have materialized as it did. Saddam Hussein would not have underestimated America's military resolve, and the US would have taken Saddam's overtures more seriously. Yet, both parties miscalculated. Saddam threatened by economic turmoil, instability at the domestic front and in dire need of an avenue to reduce pressure on his regime, failed to take the United States seriously. He calculated that America would be hesitant to spend precious blood and treasure defending the small desert kingdom of Kuwait. Conversely, the United States wary of a long and drawn-out battle and convinced of the need to engage only with clean objectives and a preponderance of force, failed to adequately deter Saddam from his military adventures.

It was against this background that on August 2 1990, Iraqi Republican Guards and Special Forces streamed across the desert border into Kuwait. As a armoured division sped south towards Al Jahar and then east to Kuwait City, helicopters carried Special Forces directly into the capital city while commandoes made an amphibious landing from the sea. The offensive was well-coordinated and smoothly undertaken. Irrespective of the little resistance to the invading forces, Iraqi troops failed to capture the Sheikh Al-Sabah of Kuwait who fled to Saudi Arabia in a column of black Mercedes. His younger brother was however killed in the attack on the palace. There were few casualties aside from the one brother who stayed to defend the family's honour. (Gordon and Trainor, 1995: 30-33)

Essentially, there are three general explanations as to why Saddam decided to invade Kuwait. They are all predicated on Saddam's gamble that the United States will be hesitant to shed American blood for an oil-rich State of the desert. Saddam believed that American resolve to fight, if there was indeed any would falter after the first or second bloody fire-fight.

First, some scholars have pointed to Saddam's psychotic personality as the primary factor in his decision to go to war. (Karsh and Rusti, 1993) However, brutal and prone to violence as Saddam was, he has been a fixture of the Iraqi political scene since the 1970s and had proved himself to be a logical decision -maker. For instance, during the Iraq-Iran War, Saddam's initial strategy was one of limited arms, although it was ultimately unsuccessful. Also, Saddam was deterred from using unconventional weapons by clear American threats. Despite its military capacity, Saddam never attacked Saudi Arabia, knowing that such action would provoke strong American response. It is therefore doubtful, that Saddam's psychosis alone can explain his reasons for invading Kuwait.

A second explanation focuses on ambition for regional power or systemic concerns. Kuwait was an easy target and would have increased Saddam's clout in the region and influence over world oil reserves. However, this explanation cannot account for the timing of the attack. An invasion in the early 1980s in the wake of the Iranian revolution would have been a more opportune time to mount an offensive as the United States would have been unlikely to retaliate. The Cold War would have put a danger on US coalition building efforts and military adventurism in the Middle East.

Conversely, if Saddam had waited until his nuclear program, which was well underway at the time of the Gulf-Crisis was completed he would have invaded with little fear of US or Arab reprisal. (Gause, 2001:21)

The third explanation focuses on the domestic political economy of Iraq in the early 1990s. As noted above, economic chaos and the demands of reconstruction fomented a political crisis in Iraq that threatened Saddam's hold on power. Therefore, President Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait both for economic reasons as well as to distract the citizens of Iraq from growing discontent at home and the meagre result of the Iran-Iraq conflict. Indeed, there are reports of several coup attempts between 1989 and 1990. This clearly explains the timing and rationale for the invasion of Kuwait.

Furthermore, the lack of American gestures of deterrence convinced Saddam that he could get away with an invasion of Kuwait and likely end up with at least some of his demands satisfied. However, political economy does not explain why Saddam decided to remain in Kuwait in the face of mounting US pressure. It is likely that initially that Saddam intended to leave Kuwait taking only the disputed territories and installing in his wake a friendly government. There was significant support on the Arab streets for this move as Kuwait was the subject of much jealousy and disdain in the Arab world due largely to the kingdom's preponderance of wealth. (Telhami, 1993: 437) This partly explains why Arab governments viewed the crisis much the same way at the initial stage. The evidence available suggests that Arab leaders' conversations with President Bush, urged the United States to stay aloof and permit some time for an Arab settlement. Mubarak of Egypt, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and King Hussein of Jordan were convinced that in the days following the invasion, that Iraq would not annex the territory but quickly return to the negotiating table looking for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. (Smith, 1992: 62) To be sure, Saddam made direct diplomatic overtures to the US Administration on August 6th, saying he desired normal relations with the United States, but he was rebuffed by the President's men.

As President Bush broadcast stern words around the world a few days after the invasion, the United States military started to pour into Saudi Arabia and American diplomats worked hard to muster support at the UN and amongst America's allies. (MacDonald, 2002: 33-37) It was soon clear that America was serious about her intentions in the Middle East. Throughout the fall, it became increasingly clear both in the rhetoric of the Bush Administration and by the number of troops on the ground that America was serious in her commitments to defend Kuwait. Yet, Saddam did not leave Kuwait.

Saddam Hussein waited because he was convinced of America's determination to remove him from power. Just like economic threats to his regime convinced Saddam to invade Kuwait, it was his fear of deposition at the hands of the Americans that motivated him to stay with the hope of winning in a war of attrition. As Gause argues:

"A simple cost benefit analysis content explains why Saddam took the risks he did, first in invading Kuwait and then in not withdrawing in the face of superior force. Only by factoring in his sense of the threats around him, his fear that the course of events, if not altered would ultimately destabilize his hold

on power, can we come to a complete explanation of Iraqi decision-making in the Gulf crises of 1990-91”.

Indeed, fear of regime change was a decisive factor in keeping Iraqi forces in Kuwait. Even before the US intervention, and especially after it had begun, Saddam was afraid of attempts to wrest him from control of the Iraqi state.

Consequently, Saddam relied on his initial presumption that the US fold in the face of sustained casualties. As American bombs rained down on Baghdad, Saddam remained in Kuwait, relying on the defensive fortifications of his Republican Guard troops to hold-up Coalition forces just enough to convince the US leadership that forcing regime change in Iraq was not worth the cost in American lives. Saddam managed to remain in power, although not for the reasons he originally calculated. The US decided to stop short of Baghdad for political reasons, and not because the price of American blood was too high. The war left Iraq in a more devastated position with much of its army, nuclear and chemical weapons practically destroyed. Moreover, sanctions and no-fly- zone enforcement in the north and south left Saddam constrained internationally, although he managed to maintain his grasp on power.

Against Evil: The US Rational for War

Until 1979, the United States strategy in the Middle East depended on what was described as the “two pillars approach”- the support of Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, following the deposition of the Shah, what was once a firm stand became but a wobbly, one-legged stool. Although, hesitant to deal with an ostensibly socialist-nationalist government, strategic concerns during the Iran-Iraq War necessitated support of Iraq, at least according to US policy-makers. Following the Iranian revolution of 1979, President Carter also pronounced what is now referred to as the Carter Doctrine. The doctrine essentially states that control over the Persian Gulf and its oil supply is vital to the interests of the United States. However, Carter never backed up this doctrine with any military manoeuvres, it took President Bush, who was not so anodyne to do it. (O’Sullivan, 2005:2)

Fundamentally, US policy in the build-up to the Gulf crisis can best be described as ambivalent. American support for Iraq had waned following the resolution of the conflict with Iran, due to widespread publicity of Saddam’s atrocities during the war. President however favoured constructive approach to engaging Iraq. For instance, in 1990 he issued an executive order waiving economic sanctions against Iraq in legislation approved by Congress. (Colhoun, 1992: 37) President Bush also believed, at least initially, that Saddam could have moderated through diplomatic engagement and aid. Thus, he encouraged American companies to get involved in reconstruction efforts following the conflict with Iran.

The evidence available suggests that despite consistent warnings from both the CIA and the Pentagon, the Bush Administration did not acknowledge the possibility of an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Or if they did, they failed to use one of the myriad deterrent options at their disposal. For instance, no warships were diverted to the Gulf and White House rhetoric featured no warnings either implicit or explicit. (Gordon and Trainor, 1995: 29) Shortly before the invasion, the State Department was ambivalent. For instance, when pressed to comment on the situation in the Gulf it said; “the US remains strongly committed to supporting the individual and collective self-defence of our friends in the Gulf with whom we have

longstanding ties. This rhetoric served to encourage both the Kuwaitis and Saddam. The former was assured by the United States' pledge of support while the latter was emboldened by the lack of reference to the use of force.

Evidently, the Bush Administration could have been convinced that Iraqi aggression was a bluff to gain further leverage in negotiations with Kuwait. In an extra-ordinary meeting between Saddam Hussein and the United States Ambassador to Iraq, April Gillespie, a few days before the invasion, Saddam stressed his desire to maintain friendly relations with the US.¹ However, both CENTCOM, (The US military command for the Middle East) and CIA were convinced that Saddam was aiming for more than bargaining power and made these projections available to the White House. Conversely, the Bush Administration, especially the President himself, was dedicated to the then existing Iraqi policy of engagement. However, Bush was careful not to alarm Arab allies by increasing US military presence in the region.

Finally, General Colin Powell, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, did not favour limited engagement. Haunted by Vietnam, Powell was dedicated to a doctrine predicated on the use of overwhelming force with clear objectives, now generally referred to as the Powell Doctrine. Limited, Open-ended engagements were frowned upon as risky. Whatever the reason, the Bush Administration clearly failed to make clear the costs of Iraqi aggression should the policy of working with the Iraqis fail. There were clearly no landmarks of repercussions and reprisals and it was this that gave Saddam an open hand to exploit what he wanted from US policy of engagement and then tossed it aside when he decided to invade with no clear, foreseeable consequences. This equally reinforced Saddam's view that the United States was unwilling to risk American lives to liberate Kuwait.²

From Containment to Roll-back: The Kuwaiti Strategy

Five months after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, the United States launched, "Operation Desert Storm". Indeed, two days after the deadline set by the UN Security Council resolution demanding complete Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, the US and its 36 Coalition partners commenced a massive actual bombardment of Iraq. Strategic targets all over the country were pounded by a myriad of high-tech weaponry. Evidently, the next 38 days provided an opportunity for a showcase and brazen demonstration of American military technology, including the first sustained use of the F-117 Stealth bomber and Tomahawk missiles.³

The Iraqi strategy was to hunker down and weather the air war. Saddam Hussein doubted American resolve and thus focused his efforts on a defensive strategy that would exert just enough pain to convince the coalition forces to go home. A drawn out and bloody battle was what Saddam Hussein anticipated. Thus, at the beginning of the air war, Saddam Hussein prepared for a long fight by scaling back his forces and dispersing his caches of weapons and supplies. Hussein has a limited view of the effectiveness of airpower and had spent significant amounts of money on an air defence system following the war with Iran. Despite the massive destructive power of the coalition airplanes, Saddam Hussein was able to weather 38 days of sustained air attacks without compromising his control over the regime (Press, 2001: 9).

On 24th February 1991, the United States and her allies principally the British, French and some Arab troops commenced the ground war. Four days later, on February 27, Bush proclaimed that "Kuwait had been Liberated" and ordered a cease-fire. The fighting lasted only 100 hours

and was a complete defeat by the coalition forces. Kuwait capitulated easily, and little resistance was meant by the US Marines who led the attack into Iraq. Some stiffer resistance was given by the Republican Guards units but it was no match for the US and coalition forces. Saddam had been defeated and Kuwait was returned to a grateful Sheikh.

Undoubtedly, with president Bush's mind made up, it seemed that the use of force in the Gulf conflict was preordained. Despite real diplomatic efforts by the French and Russians and some overtures from Saddam Hussein himself to reach a peaceful settlement, the United States wanted outright war. Explanations at the systemic and domestic levels are not persuasive. There was no pressing domestic need for the United States to go to war, although public opinion was firmly behind the military build up in Iraq. Secondly, Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait and an eventual negotiation over territory would not have unduly harmed US interests in the Gulf region. Indeed, Saudi Arabia, the largest oil producer would still have been a sovereign country; and the oil would still flow. Conversely, Iraq needed more than anything else foreign exchange and thus, would have been forced to sell its oil regardless. Finally, Iraq did have a nuclear weapons program, but if it was considered an existential threat to the United States, then why didn't the US continue with regime change rather than negotiating a cease fire with Iraq. (MacDonald, 2002: 37)

This puts the burden on President Bush as the decisive factor in the decision to go to war. The Bush's White House was a close circle. The president depended on a small clique of advisors to formulate foreign policy and was therefore susceptible to group think and other problems associated with closed decision circles (Smith, 1992: 5). Evidently, George Bush saw Saddam Hussein as a lunatic, an evil Hitler-like character that must be defeated at all costs. Specifically, after his discussion with Margaret Thatcher, Bush saw the crisis in Manichean terms: Saddam Hussein had undertaken an illegal act of aggression that must be punished, not contained or appeased (MacDonald, 2002: 40-49). Jean Edward Smith argued this point convincingly in his book, when he posited that:

"For George Bush, the war against Iraq was fought for high principles. Aggression must be punished. The war was a personal crusade, a black and white struggle between good and evil, an opportunity to stand up for what's right and condemn what's wrong. Bush's certitude provided resolute direction for American policy. (Smith, 1992: 10)

Once the president had decided that Saddam Hussein's aggression must be rolled back, the military option never left the table.

The Negotiation of a Cease-Fire: Victory for the Coalition Forces

Although the victory of the US-led coalition troops was decisive, they did not continue all the way to Baghdad. The coalition forces actually stopped short of destroying Iraqi's army. The advancing forces were even ordered to stop before they could block all routes of escape for Iraqi armour. Air strikes against retreating forces were called off as the road to Baghdad was labelled "the Highway of Death" by CNN. About half of the Republican Guards equipment remained intact and under Saddam Hussein's control at the end of the war. (Gordon and Trainor, 1995: 423) For all the talk of overwhelming force, the coalition victory was less than complete. American and British forces remained throughout Bush's term in office to enforce

no-fly zones in the North and South. The evidence available suggests that after Bush, President Clinton also waged a low-intensity war on Saddam Hussein. Economic sanctions were maintained as Saddam Hussein was thought to still be pursuing nuclear weapons. (Gordon and Trainor, 1995: 461) The much-heralded victory ultimately realized less than stellar results. Saddam maintained his grasp on power and it only became clear in the subsequent conflict in the gulf that his nuclear and chemical weapons program were not sustainable. Yet American forces remained in the Middle East in contradiction to initial promises made by the Bush Administration.

The generally accepted explanation for the early stop to the war was that the ceasefire was declared for political reasons. Indeed, Bush who was fighting a war against aggression didn't want to be seen as another aggressor. Public opinion, which had strongly supported the military build-up was beginning to wane in the face of reports about the wanton destruction along the "Highway of Death" Besides, Bush was eager to present a clean finish to his brilliant coalition-building efforts and avoid a potentially messy and protracted domestic conflict.

Obviously, the political explanation does not tell the whole story. However, geopolitical and strategic concerns were also important. With no real plan for a post-Saddam Iraq, President Bush was hesitant to get embroiled in a protracted and bloody conflict for Iraqi leadership. Characterized by deep religious and ethnic divides, Iraq has historically been a difficult country to govern. It was believed that a power vacuum in Iraq would leave the Middle East open to Iranian aggression. However, a weakened Iraq was perhaps a better hedge against Iran than none at all.⁴ The United States was also hesitant to inflame her allies who had been so supportive during the initial call to arms. Turkey, a country with a large Kurdish minority frowned upon any outcome of the war may grant autonomy to the Kurdish-dominated North. Similarly, there were some important domestic concerns that mitigated America's enthusiasm for regime change. In the two weeks following America's victory, uprisings were relatively successful. Government administrations were overthrown and local garrisons overrun. (Abd al-Jabbar, 1992: 2) The rebellion however, was isolated and fragmented. Kurdish rebels mobilized in the North while Shi'ite groups were responsible for the uprisings in the South. The middle-belt of Iraq, which included Baghdad where Saddam Hussein had concentrated majority of his remaining troops was firmly under control. Consequently, a coordinated rebellion would have been difficult to manage.

Furthermore, there were slim pickings among potential political organizations to fill Saddam's position. The Kurdish and communists' political organizations in the North were both ideologically and ethnically unfit to rule a united Iraq. This problem persists till date. The Southern Shi'ite enjoyed the support and influence of Iran and the splinter B'ath party enjoyed close ties with Syria and had little support in the North or among the Shi'ites. (Abd al-Jabbar, 1992: 10) Evidently, without any support from the United States, the rebellions were quickly suppressed with characteristic brutality, which led the US to enforce no-fly zones in the North and in the South, ostensibly to protect the Kurds from poison gas attacks that were launched following the Gulf War in retribution for Kurdish rebellious activities.

Ultimately, however, the war ended when it did for ideological reasons. The neoconservative position, advocated by Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defence, was of complete regime change. (O'Sullivan, 2005: 10) They wanted to take advantage of America's

newfound position in global affairs to fundamentally realign the Middle East by encouraging pro-American democracies in the region. With US forces on the ground, Iraq was an excellent place to start. Conversely, realists like Colin Powell, Brent Scowcroft, the National Security Advisor, and James Baker, Secretary of State were wary of long, drawn out nation-building missions for the US military. (Gordon and Trainor, 1995: 455) They were hesitant to upset the strategic balance in Iraq for the sake of ideology. Ultimately, they won the ear of President Bush, who prudently, at that time decided to leave Saddam Hussein in power.

Conclusion: The Legacy of Miscalculation and the Power of Perception

The legacy of the Gulf War is generally perceived as a positive one among historians of different persuasions. It signified a triumph of diplomacy and military prowess in the face of naked aggression. For liberal internationalists, the conflict in the Gulf heralded a new era of lawful war sanctioned by the UN in defence of international law. Evidently, a closer investigation of the conflict gives rise to numerous questions, however and brings to light a litany of miscalculation and failures. Why did Saddam Hussein fail to calculate the true cost of the invasion of Kuwait? – a US counterattack- and why did the United States fail to deter Saddam Hussein in the prelude to the crisis? Why did Saddam refuse to withdraw in the face of superior US force? And finally, why did the United States stop the war when they did, leaving Saddam in power with a large portion of his army intact?

Strategically, the Gulf War was not one of geostrategic importance for either side. Proper signals from the United States probably would have deterred Saddam Hussein. After all US deterrence did work with regards to Saddam's use of non-traditional weapons and Saudi Arabia.⁵ Moreover, it is likely that a diplomatic solution could have been found to the crisis that would not have radically changed the geopolitical features of the region. An Arab brokered peace with the backing of the United States, probably would have left a slightly attenuated Kuwait, but a peaceful resolution to the conflict and oil would have continued to flow. Therefore, what the Gulf War demonstrated was the importance of individual decision-makers in the decision to wage war. Indeed, the war was unique in that it was not caused by strategic or systemic necessities but by the decisions and perceptions of the key players involved that caused the conflict. It was the calculations, perceptions and misperceptions of George Bush and Saddam Hussein that provoked the war.

Finally, Bush's decision to use force was decided largely by him and his association of Saddam's aggression with Hitler's and the crisis of the 1930s. Similarly, it was Bush's decision to stop the war where he did, preferring a clean end to a nation-building exercise. Bush exited the war with a realist strategy in mind as opposed to an idealist, neoconservative stance on the issue. As for Saddam Hussein, although he was initially motivated by domestic concerns to invade Kuwait, his decision to hold his position in the face of overwhelming United States' coalition force was based on his perception of the United States and their desire to usurp his regime.

Notes:

1. Interview with Ambassador Kunle Adeyemi, A former Nigerian ambassador to Egypt, (Lagos: NIIA, 5th February 2021, Time: 1:30- 230pm).
2. Interview with Ambassador Hassan Tukur, A former Nigerian ambassador to Jordan, (Lagos: NIIA, 5th February, 2021, Time: 11:00- 12noon).

3. Interview with Ambassador Ibrahim Kazaure, A former Nigerian ambassador to Saudi Arabia, (Lagos: Lawn Tennis Club, 15th February 2021, Time: 3:30- 4:20pm)
4. Interview with Dr Jamiu Oluwatoki, an Associate Professor at the Lagos State University, (Lagos State University, Main Campus, Ojo, 20th January 2021, Time: 3:00- 3:50pm).
5. Interview with Ambassador Kunle Adeyemi, Op cit, 5th February 2021.

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