

## FIGHTING TO WIN IN THE PERSIAN GULF

(Updating *Executive Memorandum* No. 279, "How to Defeat Iraq," August 23, 1990.)

The United Nations-imposed deadline of January 15 for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait is approaching. George Bush may have to decide whether he commits American men and women to battle and puts their lives at risk. If he does so, it should be in a cause that justifies the great sacrifice. It must be for victory — defined as destroying Iraq's ability to wage war against its neighbors. If George Bush is not prepared to fight for this victory, he should not fight.

Before Bush gets America involved in what could be a costly war, he must answer some nagging questions about the aims of the war and how he will fight it. He then must explain clearly to the American people what he hopes war will achieve and how much it will cost. If he cannot do this, then he cannot expect public support of his actions.

### Question #1: What is military victory?

One answer is the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. This could take a full-scale invasion of Iraq costing up to 20,000 American lives. Another answer is ousting Iraqi forces from Kuwait and restoring the emir to his throne. If so, the U.S. must reckon with the possible continuation of Saddam's rule in Iraq and the indefinite deployment of U.S. peacekeeping forces to protect Kuwait and Saudi Arabia from Iraq. Neither answer suffices. America should not go to war only to remove Saddam Hussein from power or only to push the Iraqis out of Kuwait. No matter who is in power, real victory also would require the destruction of Iraq's chemical, biological, and possibly nuclear weapons plants and the other facilities by which Iraq wields military power. To achieve this victory, the U.S. must be ready to bomb deep inside Iraq. Is George Bush ready to do this?

If not, he will be settling for only partial gains. A liberated Kuwait, for example, will require a permanent military presence to defend it and Saudi Arabia from a wounded but still surviving Iraq and Saddam Hussein. This could not only mire America in a no-win political situation in the Persian Gulf, but involve the U.S. in future wars and expose it to attack. It is no victory if America indefinitely must keep large numbers of U.S. forces in Kuwait. Surrounded by enemies and undependable friends, American forces in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf would be exposed to terrorist attacks, and they could be dragged into a future war started by Iraq or Iran.

### Question #2: Will the war be as short and casualties as low as Bush Administration officials project?

Administration officials believe that a war against Iraq will be short. Vice President Dan Quayle said on December 31 that any war would be "quick, massive and decisive." Estimates of battle casualties

range from several hundred to 20,000. These are based largely on the fact that the technology, training, and quality of American forces are superior to those of Saddam Hussein.

But what happens if U.S. forces bog down? Street fighting in Kuwait, for example, could be bloody and long. Moreover, Saddam could try to fight to the finish, which could force a costly and prolonged U.S. invasion of Iraq to secure Kuwait's borders. And if Saddam carries out his threat to launch missiles at Israel, subsequent Israeli involvement could shatter the anti-Iraq coalition. Finally, Palestinians in Kuwait could join with the Iraqis for a guerrilla and terrorist war of attrition against U.S. forces. Is Bush ready to fight a long and costly war? If not, he either should not start the fight or he should launch the massive air attacks against Iraq that are the best guarantee of keeping the war short and the cost in American lives low.

**Question #3: Should America be paying so much more in blood and money than those nations that stand to gain more than the U.S. from a military victory over Saddam Hussein?**

The U.S. has deployed 400,000 troops to the Persian Gulf at a projected cost of up to \$30 billion this fiscal year. Japan has provided no troops and only \$426 million in cash and \$50 million in material assistance from its \$2 billion pledge; yet Japan gets roughly 60 percent of its oil from the Persian Gulf (the U.S. gets only 9 percent). Germany has pledged \$1.072 billion (so far only \$610 million in aid has been given to Turkey); yet Germany gets 11 percent of its oil from the Persian Gulf. The French sent 15,000 troops to the region, an embarrassing four percent of the amount sent by America, though France is 22 percent the size of the American population. Even the British, who are doing more than any other ally, are not doing as much as the U.S.: only 7 percent of their forces are serving in the Gulf, while 14 percent of U.S. forces are. Doing little also, in terms of what is at stake, is the exiled government of Kuwait; it has paid only \$2.5 billion in cash even though it stands to gain the most from Saddam Hussein's ouster from Kuwait. Kuwaitis inside Kuwait, meanwhile, have suspended their guerrilla resistance against the Iraqi occupiers. To make matters worse, the Gulf nations tend to view the multinational force as hired mercenaries rather than true allies.

These figures show that Bush's "grand coalition" against Saddam is international in name only. As it stands, American men and women will die and suffer in a war, while those who will benefit the most — particularly the Japanese and the Germans — provide only paltry assistance. Given this lack of support from America's allies, the U.S. should not feel bound by the diplomatic and military preferences of its allies and should therefore be prepared to wage war for victory even if the putative allies object.

**Question #5: Should the U.S. rely so heavily on the United Nations?**

The cornerstone of Bush's political strategy in the Gulf has been to build international support for his policies through the United Nations. While it may be comforting to use the U.N. to promote U.S. interests, Bush has done so in a way that implies that U.S. action would be illegitimate without U.N. sanction. Bush even implies that U.N. approval will be sought for other American actions. He, for instance, has said that he sees a special role for the U.N. in establishing what he calls a "new world order." Does Bush mean that the next time the U.S. must use military force — for example, against another Manuel Noriega in Central America or another Muammar Qadhafi elsewhere — that the U.S. will need U.N. permission?

Is Bush willing to fight against Iraq in a way that could lose the U.N. support? If not, then Bush should not start to fight. He must be ready to launch a quick, massive attack against Iraq regardless of what lowest common denominator policy prevails at the U.N.



**Question #6: Does the U.S. want a NATO-like “security framework” in the Persian Gulf once Saddam is forced out of Kuwait?**

Secretary of State James Baker told the House Armed Services Committee on September 4 that “If we’re going to build a new regional security structure [in the Persian Gulf]... there would be some continuing [military] presence there.” A NATO-like military alliance in the Gulf would entail a sizeable and indefinite deployment of American ground, air and naval forces there. It would commit the U.S. to preserve the security not only of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, but possibly the entire Gulf region. The U.S. alone cannot — and should not — do this.

**Question #7: Should U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union be driven by the need for Gorbachev’s approval of U.S. military action against Iraq?**

To gain Soviet support for U.N. Resolution 678, allowing the use of force against Iraq, Bush courted Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and promised him \$1 billion in U.S. credit guarantees for purchases of U.S. food. Fearful of offending Gorbachev, Bush also has looked the other way as Gorbachev has become more dictatorial and has made increasingly bellicose statements against the breakaway Soviet republics. Bush seems to have wedded U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union to his policy in the Persian Gulf. Is Bush now ready to wage war against Iraq in a way that loses Gorbachev’s backing? If not, then Bush should not start to fight.



Bush was right to rush American forces to Saudi Arabia after the August 2 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Saddam Hussein threatened to dominate the Persian Gulf, which possesses two-thirds of the world’s oil reserves. Bush thus did a good job responding quickly to the Gulf crisis, and he has shown considerable diplomatic skill forging an unprecedented international coalition against Iraq.

But five months now have passed. The vaunted international coalition is a coalition in name only; Americans are bearing almost all of the risks. Even more troublesome, Bush’s courting of international support and his persistent concessions regarding the date of direct U.S. talks with Saddam Hussein raise questions about Bush’s willingness to order the kind of attack that will yield a real victory. If Bush is not prepared to destroy Iraq’s ability to wage war and to drive Iraqi troops completely out of Kuwait — and to do so quickly with massive use of force — then Bush should start thinking of the most honorable way to bring the troops back home.

War indeed may be necessary, but before Bush orders the attack, he should be very certain that victory can be completely and quickly achieved, that the American public is fully informed of his objective, and that the political settlement following the war is worth the sacrifice in blood and money.

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