Explaining Foreign Policy

U.S. Decision-Making and the Persian Gulf War

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Contents

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Why did Germany invade the Soviet Union in World War II? Why did Pakistan support the U.S.-led war on terrorism following the devastating September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? How did the United States make the decision to impose tariffs on imported steel in 2002? Such questions are vital to explore because the behavior of governments shapes not only our lives but also the course of states and of history.

In this book, I develop and apply an integrated approach that generates and integrates insights from multiple perspectives for explaining government behavior. I then use this approach to explore a major foreign policy event: how did the United States make the decisions that took it to war in the Persian Gulf in 1991, and why did it choose war?

To what extent were the decisions made through careful cost/benefit analysis of the options available? Did analogies to World War II and the Vietnam War play a key role? In what measure did domestic politics shape the decisions that led to war? How can an understanding of the dynamics in the president's inner circle illuminate us? To what extent were bureaucratic politics and rivalry important? The integrated approach considers and explores such questions, using five perspectives that can be applied to myriad foreign policy cases. In so doing, the approach outlined in this book can help us understand the Persian Gulf War case better and advance the study of government behavior in general.

The Persian Gulf crisis of 1990–91 was triggered by Iraq's stunning invasion of next-door Kuwait on August 2, 1990. It proved to be one of the defining events of the 1990s, an anachronism that clashed with visions of a more peaceful post–Cold War era. Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein, was infamous for using force abroad and killing enemies both real and perceived at home, but few leaders fathomed that he would launch such an ambitious attack, leaving Kuwait at his mercy and a region with over two-thirds of the world's oil reserves in turmoil.[1]

Like many other countries, at the time the United States was focusing on the unification of Germany, the domino-like fall of communist dictators in Eastern Europe, and the end of the Cold War, all three developments a partial product of

the economic and political reforms of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. In the view of U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, "We were living in a revolutionary time. What I had known all my life had changed. We weren't thinking about balance of power in the Middle East because power was changing all over the world."[2] After the invasion, the focus rapidly shifted from how to end the Cold War to how to contain Iraq.

By invading Kuwait, Iraq placed itself on a warpath with the soon-to-be-formed, U.S.-led coalition composed of twenty-eight countries. On August 6, Iraq annexed Kuwait as its nineteenth province, seeking to erase it from the global map altogether and raising fears that it might invade oil-rich Saudi Arabia as well. Ultimately, Iraq refused to withdraw from Kuwait after more than five months of occupation, despite numerous attempts to come to terms peacefully and various threatening U.N. resolutions, including a U.S.-led ultimatum that Iraq would face war if it were not to withdraw unconditionally. The war to expel Iraq from Kuwait was launched on January 16, 1991. Iraq's military capability was trimmed substantially, it was forced to sign a cease-fire on February 27, 1991, and Saddam faced the most serious challenge to his rule he had ever faced. However, as is well known, he survived the war, despite being targeted by U.S. aircraft and despite postwar uprisings by anti-regime Shia Muslims in the south of Iraq and Iraqi Kurds in the north.[3] His survival generated concern, especially among Kuwaitis, that he might decide to invade Kuwait again one day.[4] After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the question arose of whether or not the United States should force him from power in the broader war on terrorism.

The Integrated Approach

The integrated approach is not complex. It consists of presenting different perspectives on government behavior, testing them against the record, integrating the resulting insights into better explanations of government behavior, and bridging areas of theory that tend to be treated as separate. I argue that this approach enhances the study of government behavior in several ways.

Existing approaches often advance just one perspective or model preferred by the analyst.[5] While the model will vary with the analyst, most of us tend to use one model consciously or subconsciously when trying to explain government behavior. We assume that states carefully weigh the costs and benefits of various options for dealing with the issue at hand, and then choose, or try to choose, the best option for advancing national interests.[6] We then describe their behavior as

if they had acted as unitary, coordinated units rather than as amalgamations of competing groups, bureaucracies, organizations, committees, and individuals, all with their own interests, preferences, and modes of behavior. To use a common metaphor, we portray states as akin to billiard balls, bouncing off each other on the "table" of world affairs, and pursuing national interests *rationally* when faced with a strategic problem. This conception of government behavior is captured explicitly in the state-centric version of the rational actor model (RAM).

To be sure, mono-theoretical explanations, such as those derived from the RAM, can certainly help us understand aspects of government behavior. Often, they are crucial building blocks to more complex explanations. And, in some cases, they may capture enough of what is vital to be satisfactory on their own. But they are just as often misleading or incomplete because each seeks to force a complex reality into a single, preexisting box.[7]

In sharp contrast, the multiple perspectives used in this book cover different, key elements of government behavior, and thus offer alternative and sometimes competing explanations.[8] It is through this explanatory tension that we can gain leverage on government behavior and understand the perspectives better as well. In this book, I apply the RAM as a baseline explanation for U.S. government behavior. It then becomes possible to compare explanations derived from the other perspectives used in the book against aspects of the RAM explanation, and to use the RAM to explore explanations derived from the other perspectives. This fills an important gap in the literature. Indeed, critics of the RAM have been taken to task for not comparing it to other plausible explanations.[9] Criticism of the RAM has also been overwhelmingly theoretical, rather than empirical.[10] This book offers a case study and general analysis of the model. Beyond exploring government behavior from multiple perspectives, the integrated approach calls for testing them against the record. Many scholars have called for such tests, but, thus far, largely in vain.[11] By testing multiple perspectives side by side, we can see which ones are the most telling in a given case and interrogate the perspectives in general as well. We also gain the ability to integrate the insights that they yield, which is important. For instance, as Valerie Hudson points out in her exhaustive review of the literature, "Integrative studies are few and far between . . . and scholars working at a particular level of analysis should consider how to incorporate findings from other levels."[12] As former International Studies Association President Michael Brecher puts it, failure to do so has "long bedeviled International Studies."[13]

The integrated approach requires that we use multiple perspectives, but it

does not presume *a priori* which one is best overall or which should be used as a first or predominant cut on reality. Nor does it preclude the use of perspectives other than those used in this book. Rather, it requires only that the chosen perspectives cover basic aspects of government behavior, as Table 1 in the next section of the introduction illustrates.[14] This does not mean that all of the perspectives will be telling in each case, much less equally telling. Rather, it means that we should explore all of them as part of a systematic process that decreases the common risk of ignoring, overlooking, or exaggerating any one of them.

Integrating insights into one account can yield better explanations of events, but the approach also allows for theory development, a process that is demonstrated towards the end of the book, and for another type of integration, which is an area of growing interest: integrating areas of theoretical study that are commonly treated as separate and distinct. For now, I will simply describe these areas as domestic and international relations theory. The use of multiple perspectives allows us to draw varied insights, which can bridge these areas. In chapter 10, I will elaborate on such integration, after the groundwork for doing so is in place and the reader is better able to absorb the effort.

The Perspectives of the Book in Brief

Before laying out the central arguments of the book, it makes sense to provide at least a thumbnail sketch of the five perspectives that it uses, four of which are existing perspectives and one of which, the domestic politics model, is developed by the author in its present version. I will elaborate on each of them in chapters 2 through 6, respectively, but they are described below in a simple overview so as to give the reader a reference point. The perspectives are chosen because they are based, as Table 1 suggests, on different assumptions about what level of analysis is most crucial (*Level of Analysis*), what the direct or indirect goals or results of the behavior of the central actor posited in the perspective are (*Goal or Result*), and how that actor makes decisions consciously or subconsciously (*Decision-making Mode*). For its part, the RAM, as we have already noted, explains government behavior by focusing on the state in a broader strategic setting whose goal it is to maximize perceived national interests. That is accomplished largely through undertaking a cost/benefit analysis for various options. The cognitive approach offers a different explanation, or part of an explanation, for government behavior by focusing on the minds of decision makers. It assumes that they consciously or subconsciously use mental shortcuts, such as analogies to past events, to simplify

Table 1. Five Perspectives: An Overview

	Level of Analysis	Goal or Result	Decision-making Mode
RAM	Unitary actor/ strategic context	Maximize perceived national interests	Cost/benefit analysis
Cognitive	Human mind/ information processing	Simplify reality and decision making process	Schema/analogies/ biases
Domestic Politics	Politicians/domestic politics	Meet domestic objectives/distract public attention from domestic problems	Constrained by domestic concerns
Groupthink	Group of like-minded decision makers	Defective decision making likely	Group dynamics
Government Politics Model	Individual in Committee Setting	Push agency interests/generate collage	Bargaining/conflict

reality in order to facilitate decision-making. The domestic politics model, a version of which I have developed, focuses not on how the minds of leaders work, but rather on how government behavior is shaped by leaders who wish to meet their own domestic-level goals at least as much as, if not more than, national objectives. Unlike the other models, it sees leaders as concerned with their position, influence, and reputation in the domestic realm, and as seeking to use the media to construct the adversary as a major threat.

By contrast, the theory of groupthink, which has spawned a growing literature, mainly outside the field of political science, focuses on the impact of group dynamics on decision-making. For its part, the government politics model, which remains important in political science and informs other disciplines, such as business management, centers chiefly on individuals within a committee setting who bargain with others and take positions driven by the interests and politics of their respective bureaucracies.[15]

These perspectives help explain government behavior, which in this book means two things: how decisions are made (decision-making) and why governments do what they do. Decision-making explores process and choice. It exam-

ines the factors that shape how decisions are made as well as the way actors choose among different options. By contrast, asking why governments do what they do addresses the reasons for their actions. All of the perspectives of this book can offer insight into these two dimensions of government behavior. For instance, the RAM suggests that the United States made its decisions through rational choice, and that the chief reasons that it went to war are located in the broader strategic context. These two dimensions are related, because the manner by which decisions are made can sometimes explain the reasons for actions as well. Thus, for instance, this book will show how the theory of groupthink provides insight into how group dynamics shaped decisions, but those group dynamics also explain why brakes were not put on the move toward war. Group dynamics created conditions wherein the president's move toward war was not challenged or even questioned within his inner circle.

Another distinction is important. All five perspectives explain aspects of government behavior, but this book characterizes perspectives two through five as domestic theory explanations for government behavior and the RAM as an international relations theory explanation. There has been much useful debate about how to categorize different perspectives, and this discussion has involved many important issues.[16] For our purposes, a domestic theory explanation for government behavior will have the following characteristics: It will refer fundamentally to one or more domestic actors and make predictions about an individual state's behavior (Level of Analysis). At a minimum, it will allow for, and possibly emphasize, motivations that do not aim at protecting and advancing national interests (Goal or Result). And it will stress decision-making that is either nonrational or that predicts suboptimal foreign policy choices for the nation as a whole (Decision-making). By contrast, an international relations theory explanation of government behavior will have these characteristics: It will treat states as unitary actors that interact with other states in a broader strategic or international setting (Level of Analysis). It will presume that the motivation for behavior is to protect or advance national interests (Goal or Result). And it will assume that the manner by which decisions are made is rational (Decision-making).

As a last point here, some thinkers might prefer to call the perspectives of this book "models," "frameworks," "theories," or even "paradigms." I prefer the word "perspective" simply because it applies to all of them. They are all lenses through which we can explain government behavior. They focus attention on some causal factors and divert our attention from others, thus simplifying the complex thicket of reality that daily bombards us. As a result, in using them side by side in one book, we are forced to ask new questions about a case or explore old

questions that had seemed to be answered, and to consider insights that we may have discounted, ignored, or overlooked.[17]

The Central Arguments of the Book

The integrated approach is intended for application to the study of government behavior in general. In this study, however, it yields three main arguments, which are described below in simpler form so as to orient the reader.

The RAM and Its Discontents

The RAM yields useful insights into why the United States went to war. Most importantly, it highlights the broader strategic environment, one in which Iraq's invasion of Kuwait threatened significant U.S. regional and global interests. The threat Iraq posed made it quite tempting not only to reverse the invasion but also to eviscerate its military capability. The RAM also illuminates the unstable nature of Iraq's strategic interaction with the United States. On that score, this book argues that, with some important exceptions, Iraq became increasingly pliant as the crisis proceeded, and the United States became increasingly implacable. As a result, the window of opportunity for their preferences to meet in favor of non-war was either short or did not open at all. Iraq's minimal demands for withdrawal probably at no time met Washington's maximum concessions, making the United States more inclined to go to war. This can help explain why a farrago of private and public diplomatic efforts, chiefly by France, Russia, Jordan, and Egypt, never managed to bear much fruit.

But while the RAM illuminates the broader context of the crisis and of U.S.-Iraqi strategic interaction, it only partly informs us — when not actively misleading us — about how decisions were made. Using the RAM, we would presume that the United States carefully weighed the costs and benefits of options for dealing with Iraq. In fact, the reality is far more complex and deserves to be understood better. Nonrational behavior was prominent, as we shall see when we open up the black box of decision-making, where the wheels of government turn. The other perspectives allow us to do so and create the potential to complement and challenge the RAM's emphasis on rational decision-making. They assume that domestic actors can be driven by fundamentally different dynamics and interests than a unitary actor would be, and that the independent or combined interaction of these dynamics and interests may yield a potentially nonrational outcome.

The RAM, for instance, cannot explain why President Bush sometimes re-

sponded impetuously to Saddam's challenge, or why some officials, such as National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, had to caution him about using emotional rhetoric against Saddam.[18] The cognitive approach, which emphasizes Bush as someone significantly affected by past events, does address this, so it can help explain why negotiations failed as well. The RAM, because it "black boxes" decision-making and because it assumes that the decisions we observe result from a calculated form of cost/benefit analysis, cannot by its nature account for some of the important decisions in the Persian Gulf War case that were made without carefully considering alternative options. The other perspectives offer the potential for doing so.

As we shall see as the story unfolds, all this is not to say that U.S. decision-making was without rhyme and reason. Rather, it is to say that we would frequently be misled if we assumed that it did result from rational processes, as defined academically, no matter how useful the rationality assumption may be for theory-building. This finding introduces a puzzle. As Mark Schafer and Scott Crichlow point out, scholars from "business schools, public policy programs, social psychology departments, and political science departments have taught for many years the very general proposition" that the quality of the decision-making process is "important for achieving better outcomes."[19] Yet I argue that in the Persian Gulf War case we have a counterintuitive outcome: nonrational behaviors were prominent in decision-making, but the outcome was at least nonnegative. Why was there no apparent correlation between the quality of decision-making and the outcome? I address that question in chapter 9.

The non-RAM perspectives provide the possibility of opening up the black box of decision-making and yield insight into why the United States went to war. For instance, the cognitive approach tells us that Bush personalized the conflict and was less likely to negotiate with Iraq. The theory of groupthink helps explain why no real brakes were placed on the road to war.

The Individual as a Force

The second argument is that, by applying and evaluating the five perspectives, we find that while some are revealing in their own right, their successes and failures as explanations highlight the importance of the individual, specifically of President Bush. The RAM, that is, cannot account for how Bush shifted the course of the crisis at critical junctures. The cognitive perspective highlights how analogies influenced his perception and behavior. The domestic politics model suggests, though not convincingly in the present case, that Bush's behavior could

be related to individual, party, and institutional interests. The theory of groupthink strongly highlights Bush's leadership role in shaping and decreasing challenges to group consensus, although not strongly enough, as we shall see. The government politics model, meanwhile, fails in the Persian Gulf War case, partly because Bush helped preempt the petty politics of bureaucratic competition. He operated within a context of personal, domestic, global, and historical constraints — which the multiple perspectives highlight — but he was a decisive actor in direct and subtle ways. It is too simple to say that he wanted war with Iraq. His behavior was conflicted on that score at times, and he did at least emphasize sporadically in private correspondence, and with foreign leaders such as Mikhail Gorbachev, that he would "have been satisfied with the political settlement," meaning Iraq's unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait.[20]

However, this book argues that by late October 1990, the president and key members of his inner circle strongly tended toward war as a desirable option. Bush not only moved the United States to a war footing, as is well known, but in many ways sought to create and foster conditions that would allow the coalition to cut Iraq down to size in war. Over time, his inclination toward war carried the day. This was despite strong domestic and international pressures to give economic sanctions against Iraq a chance to work. Such pressure came especially from France, which had longstanding political and economic ties to Baghdad and had been Iraq's number two arms supplier, and from the Soviet Union, which also had had a highly developed strategic relationship with Baghdad, and was Iraq's top arms supplier.[21] But these pressures did little to deter President Bush.

We should expect the president to play a key role in crises, but that expectation does not tell us much about how far that role extends, how the role is executed, when the president is crucial, and how the president behaves in a broader decision-making setting involving a plethora of domestic and international actors. Indeed, since presidents have played quite different roles in crises, we know that crises alone can tell us only part of what shapes the role and behavior each adopts in each case. The argument presented here — that the president, and in turn the United States, viewed war as a desirable option by October — is certainly not one that we could assume would apply to any president in this situation.

Bush was crucial for several key reasons. His foreign policy experience ranked among the highest for American presidents. He was driven by the Munich analogy and his own personal experience in World War II to act determinedly against Saddam Hussein. Partly as a result of this, he drove group dynamics in ways that

generated some key elements of groupthink, and he also preempted petty bureaucratic politics. But Bush also had good luck. He benefited from trusted and pliable colleagues. He confronted Iraq at the end of the Cold War, which allowed for U.S.-Soviet cooperation and for the freeing of U.S. forces in Europe for the Persian Gulf crisis. And he also benefited greatly from a decade-long buildup of U.S. rapid deployment capability and of regional military bases, both of which were essential to the U.S.-led efforts against Iraq.

This study demonstrates that while some of the complex perspectives were revealing in their own right, we must not forget the impact of individuals in history as a separate explanation. None of the perspectives feature the individual centrally as driving history, although they do offer some of their own insights into that question. The state-centric RAM ignores the individual as a unique and vital actor. As Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack have shown, political scientists tend to ignore the role of individuals in international relations altogether, placing a preference on impersonal forces in history.[22] Meanwhile, the other perspectives do feature the individual prominently but posit or emphasize a particular set of assumptions that sets them apart from a core argument that individuals matter in driving history. The cognitive perspective, for instance, does inform us about how decision makers process information, but it does not tell us that they are vital actors in driving history. Their mental processes could, in fact, make them inconsequential by rendering them indecisive.

This book argues that individuals *can* count in the broader scheme of things, and that they *can* drive historical events in fundamental ways. And it largely rejects the determinism promulgated by thinkers across disciplines such as Leo Tolstoy, the nineteenth-century Russian novelist who believed that prior history determines everything that follows, and that no particular individual can alter history much, if at all.[23] This book emphasizes the need to balance the parsimony and structure that each of the perspectives bring to our analysis with the unique, capricious role of the individual, a role that is not easily captured or structured by any perspective or model. It forces us to understand the myriad influences that shape us as human beings and sometimes allow us, by design or serendipity, to change history in ways that are hard to predict and systematize.

The Domestic and International Determinants of Government Behavior

The third argument is a reflection of the first two, but ties into a central theoretical debate. It argues that the best explanations for government behavior ultimately integrate empirical insights yielded from the use of both international and domestic theory. Scholars often view these theories as analytically separate — indeed, entire sub-disciplines focus on one or the other — but this dichotomy, while useful for theory-building by isolating causal variables, is problematic for explanation.[24]

The RAM, which has international relations theory dimensions, offers a compelling portrait if we want to explain how and why the United States went to war in terms of international determinants such as U.S.-Iraqi dynamics, power politics among nations under conditions of global anarchy (there is no highly effective government and policing force above them), and the Iraqi threat to perceived U.S. national interests. But that only solves part of the puzzle, partly because the RAM purposefully ignores domestic-level factors. To achieve parsimony, which is central to theory-building, it assumes that states are broadly similar in terms of their decision-making approaches, preferences, and interests. They all seek in rational ways to protect and enhance their security. They are socialized by anarchy to do so. For RAM analysts, what varies significantly, rather, lies at the international level, which is privileged as an explanation for government behavior.

The propensity to privilege international over domestic explanations is not limited to the RAM. It is also true of the more modern and/or parsimonious international relations theories of neorealism developed by Kenneth Waltz, the neo-institutionalism most often associated with Robert Keohane (sometimes also referred to as neoliberal institutionalism), and game theory approaches.[25] Waltz, for instance, prefers to study state behavior using an "outside-in" approach that focuses on the structure of the broader system, rather than an "inside-out" approach that explains state behavior by referring to domestic factors.[26] The outside-in approach emphasizes that good or bad states would suffer a similar fate because of the difficult situation in which they must operate. Neorealism explains state behavior by focusing only on the systemic level of world affairs. It assumes that anarchy pushes states to behave in similar ways. For example, nearly all states in the world have an army and spend significant amounts of money on weapons and defense. Neorealism has a matter-of-fact explanation for this: failure to conform to the pressures imposed on states by a system in which anarchy is the distinguishing feature will be punished. Under anarchy, military forces are crucial to ensuring self-help, because states in world affairs cannot count on a government or policing force above them for protection. Anarchy thus socializes them. For Waltz, the intentions and preferences of actors do not matter because outcomes in international relations can seldom be explained by

them and because we cannot derive useful theoretical generalizations from them.[27] Rather, outcomes can be explained by understanding the impact of anarchy and the distribution of capability. As Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman describe it, from the neorealist viewpoint "foreign policy leaders live in a rarefied world of high politics that is responsive to external pulls and tugs but is relatively inattentive to and unconstrained by the low politics of domestic affairs."[28]

In fact, many leading theoreticians in the field of political science exhibit such a penchant.[29] As Andrew Moravcsik points out, most international relations theorists recommend that the analyst give priority to international explanations and use other theories, such as those of domestic politics, only to explain anomalies.[30] They believe that we need not examine domestic factors much in order to understand government behavior and outcomes in world affairs and that we can explain them adequately with parsimonious models cast at higher levels.[31] In this sense, the nature of and variations in domestic factors, including the decision-making process itself, are unlikely to matter much. Commenting on this state of affairs, Helen Milner points out that to "understand the major issues of international politics, such as the likelihood of peace, the sources of conflict, and the possibility of cooperation among states, international relations theorists must bring a systematic analysis" of domestic-level variables into the field.[32]

This book is designed to do so. While the RAM black boxes what occurs inside states by treating them as actors that speak with one voice, the other four perspectives help us look inside the black box. They explore such things as the roles, peculiarities, dynamics, and psychological dimensions of individuals acting alone and in interaction with others, the impact of domestic politics, and decision-making in groups and bureaucratic settings. This fills a vital void. Systemic pressures and incentives can shape the broad contours of government behavior, but they are too broad to explain why states in a similar structural position sometimes do not act alike, to explain specific actions, or to explain a range of behaviors that appear irrational or are motivated by non-national interests like individual, group, or institutional goals. Similarly, domestic theories can illuminate the domestic context, but do not account for international factors and the complex strategic interactions between states that shape government behavior. They also cannot explain why states that have similar domestic contexts behave differently or why a state in fact may pursue its perceived national interest, despite a plethora of domestic actors with non-national interests to protect or advance.

To be sure, some scholars increasingly recognize the need to draw on domestic theories, concepts, and variables to inform international relations theories and analyses.[33] However, the integrated approach seeks to move us in that direction more systematically by applying, juxtaposing, and evaluating international and domestic theory within one broader approach for explaining government behavior.

The Key Decision Makers, Groups, and Decisions of the Crisis

While this book considers the interplay of global and domestic factors, it focuses attention on three decision-making groups in the United States responsible for many of the key decisions: the group of four, the group of eight (also referred to as the "gang of eight" by some of its members), and, to a smaller extent, the deputies committee, which has been ignored in books on the crisis and which I will discuss later in the book. While President Bush sometimes made decisions alone or in one-on-one interactions, the group of four was the smallest decision-making group. It included President Bush, Vice President Dan Quayle, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and Chief of Staff John Sununu. After Scowcroft and Sununu received a CIA briefing early in the morning, they met with Bush virtually every day, in staff meetings from 8 a.m. until as late as 10 a.m., often with Quayle present as well. While Scowcroft would broach security questions, Sununu would focus on political ones, especially in the domestic arena, such as those relating to Congress. These meetings would in part help prepare the agenda for the group of eight meetings.[34]

The group of eight met less frequently than the group of four. It consisted of the group of four, plus Secretary of State James Baker, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, and Deputy National Security Advisor Robert Gates; the latter acted as a link to the deputies committee. White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater also joined the group and participated in its deliberations, particularly on questions of public relations. However, according to Fitzwater, he was not officially appointed because making the press secretary a member of the exclusive group of eight would have generated jealousies outside the White House. Given Washington's politics, high-ranking officials in various bureaucracies would have argued that they also should be included in the group of eight. An informal role for Fitzwater avoided that problem.[35]

The Persian Gulf War case was a crisis because of the speed of the invasion, the urgency of the response, the perceived threat to national interests and values, and the potential for major conflict. Because they involve high stakes, crises are of special interest.[36] Yet the Persian Gulf War case also included noncrisis elements. The buildup to war took months, which meant that many decisions could be made slowly, without the time pressure that we associate with crises. In this sense, the case can offer insight into both crisis and noncrisis situations.

While the crisis was *sui generis*, it also brought to light many questions that affect the current foreign policy debate. To what extent could great powers cooperate? Was the concept of a "new world order" a chimera? Did collective security function or was the United Nations simply political cover for U.S. unilateralism? Why did diplomacy fail? To what extent could Western forces operate within an Islamic context without causing a political backlash?

The crisis was composed of innumerable different phenomena; this book does not ignore those phenomena, but rather focuses on the following decisions, associated approximately with the following meetings and dates:

— the decision to deploy forces to the Persian Gulf (August 3 National Security Council (NSC) meeting).
— the decision to reject the option of protecting Saudi Arabia in favor of reversing the invasion of Kuwait (partly the August 3 NSC meeting but especially the August 5 statement by Bush that the invasion would not stand).
— the decision to move away from the use of economic sanctions toward a proclivity to use force (October 11 NSC meeting).
— the decision to double the size of U.S. forces deployed to the Persian Gulf (October 31 NSC meeting).
— the decision to cast Saddam Hussein in Hitler-like terms. This was not so much a clear-cut decision as a sporadic response to the crisis by President Bush outside the group setting, but it had weighty implications.
— the decision to issue Iraq an ultimatum (November 1 to 8).

Each of these decisions is analyzed, as are many others that are related to them, including how to deal with the U.S. Congress, states around the world, and the United Nations. However, the decision to go to war is also treated as an aggregate of all of these decisions, because they all contributed to it. Disaggregating the decisions is useful for understanding each one, and for evaluating

the usefulness of the perspectives at different junctures, but putting these decisions back together in the broader process is of obvious importance.

Breaking Some New Ground

The contributions of the book are suggested in the foregoing discussion, but two additional points are worth mentioning. The journalist Bob Woodward offers an interesting account of decision-making in Bush's inner circle in his book *The Commanders*, which has been heavily cited by scholars. Outside of the work by Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, which focuses on the military dimension of the crisis, Woodward's is the only account of the crisis so far that draws on a wide set of interviews with the key decision makers.[37] However, beyond the obvious fact that Woodward was unconcerned with the academic issues and approaches pursued in this book, which involve their own arguments and debates, he chose not to cite interviewees, making it hard to judge his sources and re-creation of events. He also did not explore the dynamics in the deputies group, which played an important role in the crisis. Much information, furthermore, has come out since his book was published in 1991, including thousands of pages of memoirs, documents at the George Bush Presidential Library, secondary sources, and subsequent author interviews with many of the key players. This book draws on those sources, as well as on the widest set of cited interviews with the key players until now, including those in President Bush's inner circle and the deputies committee that reported to the inner circle.

The second point is about the use of multiple perspectives. This book draws inspiration from the classic work by Graham Allison on the 1962 Cuban missile crisis — *Essence of Decision*. Although Allison recently revised this book with historian Philip Zelikow to good effect, little work has examined world events since the Cuban missile crisis using developed multiple perspectives.[38] And yet the world has changed significantly, making it interesting to do so in a more modern case that takes into consideration the ending of the Cold War and other global changes.

The integrated approach of this book, however, extends well beyond *Essence of Decision*. That book, while pathbreaking in its original formulation, uses models as frames of reference. Allison's goal was to generate important insights from these models, not to integrate them into one tale of the Cuban missile crisis, to test the models against the evidence, or to bridge areas of study that are often

treated as separate. Nor did he seek to develop theory about the models, as I do in chapter 9 regarding the theory of groupthink and the government politics model. Moreover, while the revised edition of *Essence of Decision* discusses cognitive models and the theory of groupthink, it does not actually use them as perspectives, nor does it include a domestic politics model.[39] This book does so. It uses three perspectives not used in *Essence of Decision*: cognitive, domestic politics, and groupthink. The RAM, cognitive, groupthink, and government politics perspectives are existing perspectives, while the book develops its own version of the domestic politics model, as will become clear in chapter 4. As a final point, while this book focuses on U.S. decision-making, it treats the crisis in no small part as a strategic interaction between the United States and Iraq, and makes arguments about U.S. decision-making and the road to war within that context.

The Overview of the Book

The book is divided into four parts. The first section is the introduction and chapter 1, in which I place the U.S. regional role in historical and general perspective, as well as U.S.-Iraqi relations in particular. This provides background for a better understanding of the Persian Gulf War case as well as contemporary affairs in the region.

The balance of the book is organized simply. It executes the integrated approach. The next major section of the book explores, from different perspectives, how the United States made decisions and why war was chosen over other options. Each chapter lays out the relevant perspective. It then puts forth the best, reasonable explanation from that perspective without distorting the facts of the case.

The setup of the book allows scholars from different theoretical camps, purveyors of the crisis, and students grappling with theory and/or with the crisis to engage in sensible debate without necessarily agreeing with any one perspective. The book is also designed so that the reader can cycle back through the evidence and decide on his or her own which perspectives are most telling, if any. While we have excellent case studies of government behavior, we do not often see case studies and perspectives side by side in one book. Doing so, while it might be slightly repetitive, can improve understanding of the salient case and theory for students, decision makers, and scholars of world affairs.

While chapter 2 lays out the RAM perspective, chapter 3 offers another cut on the case. Drawing on one key strand of the cognitive perspective, it argues that

historical analogies played a key role in affecting the way that key U.S. decision makers viewed Iraq's invasion, Saddam's ambitions, the issue of U.S. credibility, and the best way to resolve the crisis. In chapter 4, I develop and present a version of what I call "the domestic politics model" and then lay out an explanation of U.S. decision-making and why war was chosen based on that perspective. Chapters 5 and 6 take us into Bush's inner circle and into the workings of the deputies committee, focusing on the groupthink and government politics model, respectively. For some important reasons discussed in chapter 6, the approach in that chapter differs from that of the previous chapters, while still following closely in line with the integrated approach.

Following the integrated approach, chapter 7 cycles back on the evidence to test the perspectives, and chapter 8 draws on the resulting insights to tell a more complete tale of the crisis. Using these approaches leads us, in important ways, towards an understanding of how and why President Bush, as an individual, was important in driving the crisis.

The end of the book is more theory-oriented. Chapter 9 explains in theoretical terms the puzzle of how important elements of groupthink can exist, as in the Persian Gulf War case, and yet not produce a fiasco, which is what the theory predicts. It develops a theory to explain when government politics is unlikely to take place, and also shows how this theory can help us understand the Persian Gulf War and the Cuban missile crisis cases better. And it explains more broadly why nonrational behaviors did not produce a negative outcome. Chapter 10 picks up on the theme of multiple perspectives and integration, and shows how we can integrate insights from international and domestic theory. The concluding chapter elaborates on how the integrated approach can be used in other cases, and offers a brief example with respect to the war on terrorism.

Appendix 1 follows the concluding chapter and explores the end of the Persian Gulf War and the question of how to judge the success of the war. This is important because our view of the extent to which it succeeded depends fundamentally on our definition of success. While this book has treated it as a military victory, I offer a competing interpretation of success as well. Following this discussion, it is sensible to offer the postscript to the book. This section explores the period preceding the 2003 Iraq War and that war itself. It then applies a scaled-down version of the integrated approach in a preliminary manner to the task of thinking about this war.

The United States, Iraq, and the Crisis

Some Background

The goal of this chapter is to offer a brief sketch, rather than a deep historical analysis, of how and why the Persian Gulf became important to the United States. It also seeks to explain the backdrop to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and to argue that numerous outcomes other than war were possible. That sets up the central questions of this book: how did the United States make the decisions that took it to war and how did war result as an outcome? Following this chapter, we will then begin to explore the crisis by use of multiple perspectives, beginning with the rational actor model.

U.S. National Interests: How the Persian Gulf Entered the American Consciousness

The Persian Gulf, a region that includes Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, is now emblazoned on the American psyche. But it entered the American consciousness slowly. Washington began to appreciate the vital role of Saudi oil as an economic source at least as early as the 1930s. It made informal commitments to Saudi security in the early 1940s, and, depending on one's interpretation, formally committed itself as early as 1947, when President Harry S. Truman and King Abdul Aziz bin Saud, the founder of the modern Saudi kingdom, made a pact. Described in a State Department cable, the United States pledged that if Saudi Arabia were attacked by another power or were under threat of attack such as the one that Iraq would pose in 1990, Washington would take "energetic measures under the auspices of the United Nations to confront such aggression."[1]

However, while the United States did make certain commitments to the Saudis from 1945 to 1971, Britain was largely responsible for regional security, with Uncle Sam playing a distant second in the region. In 1968, Britain announced that it would withdraw "East of Suez," and did so by 1971, thus leaving principal responsibility for regional stability to the United States.

The Arab-Israeli War and the Arab oil embargo, both of 1973, linked the Arab-Israeli and Persian Gulf arenas and underscored the vital importance of Persian Gulf oil to world stability. While that raised consciousness in Washington about events in and around the Persian Gulf, the United States still preferred not to assume the responsibility of protecting Persian Gulf stability directly. Rather, Iran and to a much lesser extent Saudi Arabia formed the pillars of the Nixon Doctrine or "twin pillar" strategy. Under this approach, Washington would rely primarily on Iran, and secondarily on Saudi Arabia, to safeguard regional security and safe access to oil at reasonable prices in exchange for American arms and technical support. That would obviate the need for the United States to intervene directly in the region, or even to build a major capability to do so, in the post-Vietnam period when the U.S. public was wary of such commitments.

Little did the United States know that its reliance on regional actors would leave it highly vulnerable. In the late 1970s, the region became such a hotbed of activity that the United States had to take notice. During the Iranian revolution, the Shah of Iran fled his country on January 16, 1979; American hostages were seized by Iranian militants in November. Meanwhile, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan on December 24, 1979. These events forced Washington to become committed to Persian Gulf security in a direct role, which increased throughout the 1980s. On January 23, 1980, President Carter issued the Carter Doctrine, one of the most forceful statements of his presidency; it indicated a major change from the noninterventionist U.S. role of previous decades. In response largely to the Soviet invasion, the Carter Doctrine committed the United States to deter or respond to "outside," as opposed to internal, threats to Persian Gulf security.[2]

Concerned with global and regional threats to Persian Gulf security, Washington was determined not only to improve its capability to deter "outside" pressure on the Persian Gulf, but also to deal with pressures arising within the Persian Gulf. In that spirit, President Ronald Reagan stated in October 1981 that there was "no way" the United States could "stand by" and see Saudi Arabia threatened to the point that the flow of oil could be shut down.[3] This statement and others of a similar kind later became known as the Reagan Doctrine, which represented a U.S. commitment to protect Saudi Arabia against not only external but also internal threats within the Persian Gulf region and in terms of domestic threats to the regime. The United States had made a tacit agreement to protect the Saudis in the 1940s, the Carter Doctrine had asserted a U.S. commitment to protect the free flow of oil from threats outside the region, and now Reagan was

elevating the U.S. commitment one more notch. Saudi Arabia would become the linchpin of U.S. security in the Persian Gulf region.

The events of 1979 also awakened the U.S. public, at least temporarily, to the region's vital importance. But Americans remained oblivious to the rise of a dictator who, a decade later, would transform the Persian Gulf from an area of rising importance to a *bona fide* American priority. News of Saddam's rise to power in July 1979 received little attention in the newspapers.

The Saddam Factor: Two Invasions in Ten Years

When we think of modern conflict, few leaders come to mind more prominently than Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein. He assumed the position of second-in-command in Iraq in 1968 when the ideological, secular Baath political party in which he was active seized power in a bloodless coup. In July 1979, after a decade as the *de facto* dictator of Iraq under then–President Bakr, Saddam officially became president. Less than one year later, he invaded next-door Iran, confronting the Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution and triggering one of the century's bloodiest wars, with more than one million casualties. That war ended in a cease-fire in 1988, but Saddam was not done. Just two years later Iraq would invade Kuwait.

It is useful here to offer a brief sketch of why Iraq invaded Kuwait.[4] In September 1980, Iraq, a state slightly larger than California, launched a major war against Iran. In many ways, the bloody and lengthy Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) set the stage for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The first war devastated Iraq's economy and left it heavily in debt to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. They had loaned Saddam considerable amounts for the war against revolutionary Iran, which at the time they feared more than Iraq. Estimates suggest that Iraq began that war with $35 billion in reserve and ended the war $80–$100 billion in debt. Interestingly, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz claimed shortly after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 that Baghdad was forced to "resort to this method" of invasion because its economic situation had deteriorated to the point that it had no alternative.[5] Kuwait was quite a tempting economic prize.

Iraq also emerged from the first war a much stronger military power than Iran. That Iraq no longer had to contend with a powerful Iran on its border presumably made an invasion of Kuwait more possible.[6] Moreover, Iraq's huge standing army, expanded during the Iran-Iraq War, could not be effectively reintegrated into the shaky Iraqi economy after the war. Like Napoleon, Saddam may

have understood that an idle, restless army could pose a much greater threat to his regime than one kept busy in war. In addition, the war taught Iraq that its short coastline was a major vulnerability. Iran cut Iraq off from the Persian Gulf when it took the Faw peninsula in a major military victory in February 1986. Occupying Kuwait would give Iraq much greater access to the Persian Gulf.

The invasion also appealed to Iraqis who viewed Kuwait as part of historic Iraq.[7] Since Iraq's rise as an independent state in 1932, it consistently challenged Kuwait's right to exist. In the 1930s, the Iraqi King Ghazi openly demanded the incorporation of all of Kuwait into Iraq, a demand reiterated by Abd al-Karim Qassim, the Iraqi ruler who overthrew the monarchy in July 1958. In 1961 Iraq actually invaded Kuwaiti border posts, only to retreat under severe British political and military pressure. Again, in 1973, Iraqi forces occupied Kuwaiti territory along a narrow border strip on the pretense of protecting the Iraqi coastline against an alleged impending attack by Iran. These forces remained there for a decade, against Kuwaiti wishes.

The merger of Iraq and Kuwait after the 1990 invasion wed the two countries, and from Iraq's perspective, corrected a historical wrong.[8] Under Ottoman rule, Iraq was not a unified or independent state. Rather, it consisted of three disparate provinces — Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. From Iraq's perspective, Kuwait was always part of Basra under the Ottoman Empire. Kuwait, however, viewed such Iraqi claims as a smoke screen for aggression. After all, the royal family had established an autonomous sheikdom in Kuwait in 1756, and Iraq, for that matter, was artificial as well, having been carved out of the Ottoman Empire in an *ad hoc* manner.

Iraq's Baathist Party ideology also may have played a role. It sought to sweep away artificial borders, and Saddam wanted to unite the Arab world behind Baghdad. He would even assert that it was during war that the Iraqi army "rose to the level of the [Islamic] mission," trying, in a Herculean feat, to pass off Baath party ideology as holy.[9]

We can surmise that Saddam's personal ambitions, up and beyond state or institutional interests, further pushed Iraq to invade Kuwait. A few months before the outbreak of the war, he spoke in typical terms of Iraq achieving great "glory," calling on the faithful to play a role in this unfolding of history.[10] It is not too much to assume that Saddam's visions and, some might say, delusions of grandeur were at play, among the many other motivations for invading Kuwait.

However, while these motivations may very well have been key underlying causes for the invasion, the more immediate cause was Iraq's growing tensions

with Kuwait. At the Arab League summit meeting in May 1990, Saddam attacked the other Persian Gulf states, particularly Kuwait, for ignoring oil production quotas, keeping oil prices down, refusing to forgive Iraq's war debts from the Iran-Iraq War, and failing to provide war reconstruction credits.[11] Despite the fact that Iraq had attacked Iran in September 1980, Baghdad repeatedly argued that it had sacrificed treasure and blood to check Iran's fundamentalist Islamic threat to all Arab states, especially the Persian Gulf monarchies that Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini wanted to overthrow through political means. Thus, from Iraq's perspective at least, Iraq deserved Arab allegiance and economic support, and Kuwait could not expect to get a free ride on Iraq's military back.[12]

Because the Kuwaitis and Saudis were not particularly forthcoming with postwar economic support and because Iraq's economy was devastated, Saddam sought to raise money for economic recovery by limiting OPEC production, thus increasing the price of oil. By agreeing to production quotas, the many members of OPEC, which included the Persian Gulf states, could control the price of oil. The less oil they pumped, the more expensive oil would be on the market. States that sought a short-term fix were more interested in pumping much oil, while those with a long-term view were less interested in doing so.

Moreover, Kuwait indirectly lowered oil prices by pumping too much oil, some from the Rumaila oil field, over which Iraq laid joint claim. Iraq also accused Kuwait of slant-drilling into this oil field. By starting oil wells on their side of the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border, and angling their oil equipment under the border, the Kuwaitis could draw on oil from Iraqi sources. In January 2001, Aziz would reflect back and assert that Kuwait "got what it deserved" in 1990 because it had undermined Iraq's oil prices and undertaken slant-drilling.[13]

Despite his status as a dictator, Saddam also justified the invasion by citing the Emir of Kuwait's dissolution of the 1986 Kuwaiti National Assembly, Kuwait's lack of elections, and its status as a rentier state that in effect was a royal family exploiting its control of an oil state—in effect, he pointed to the regime's illegitimacy. As reflected in initial communiqués from Baghdad, Iraq asserted that it would support a popular revolution against the illegitimate Kuwaiti monarchy, organize elections, and then withdraw.[14] Kuwait was reluctant to bend to Saddam's brinkmanship, perhaps not recognizing his seriousness.

By July 30, Iraq had eight divisions, 100,000 well-trained troops, and 350 tanks poised on the Kuwaiti border, in formation for extensive operations. The CIA, however, was not predicting an invasion, nor were Arab leaders, who told Washington that Saddam was just bluffing. On July 25, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

April Glaspie had met with Saddam Hussein. In responding to Saddam's queries about U.S. intentions, she made the now-infamous statement that the United States had "no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait."[15] While Saddam asserted in an interview in 1992 that he saw her statement as providing a green light to invade Kuwait, it is unclear to what extent we should view his statement at face value, given the gravity of his invasion and the fact that conspiracy theory was very prevalent in Baghdad. Why should we assume that Saddam saw a "green light" when he was just as likely to see a trap at play?[16]

What is clearer is that Glaspie's remarks, as well as subsequent ones by State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler and Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asian Affairs John Kelly before the House Foreign Affairs Committee two days before the invasion, did in fact reflect broader administration policy. That policy, within the context of U.S. accommodationist policies of the 1980s, which are discussed in the next section of this chapter, may very well have contributed to Saddam's belief that even if he had not been given a green light *per se*, at least his invasion would not lead to a dramatic response by Washington over Kuwait, much less to war.[17] In this sense, we may surmise that Saddam was not so naive as to see a "green light," but at the same time he did not expect a massive U.S.-led response.

On August 2, into Kuwait roared 140,000 Iraqi troops and 1,800 tanks, spearheaded by two Republican Guard divisions, the Hammurabi and the Medina. What had been viewed as mere brinkmanship in late July in the effort to scare the Kuwaitis into making some key economic and territorial concessions, was suddenly a full-blown invasion using Iraq's best forces. The United States responded a few days later with Operation Desert Shield, which was intended to protect Saudi Arabia from any further military action by Iraq.

The Guard was conceived as the dictator's personal military force, equipped with the best weapon systems. It was very loyal to Saddam and politically committed to the ruling Baath Party. It is no surprise that Saddam spared these forces from the wrath of the U.S.-led alliance, which attacked Iraq in order to evict Iraqi forces from Kuwait in Operation Desert Storm on January 16, 1991. He pulled these forces back to Baghdad at the end of the war and kept some Guard divisions out of the conflict altogether. They not only fought for Iraq, but much more importantly, they protected Saddam himself. And for any dictator, that is the key goal. The lightning-fast attack on Kuwait was conducted professionally and successfully. While a limited number of Kuwaiti A-4 aircraft, armored vehicles,