

INTO THE DESERT

REFLECTIONS ON THE GULF WAR

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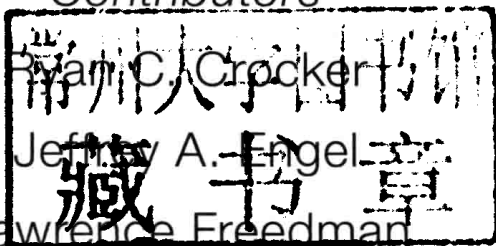
PREFACE BY RYAN CROCKER

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*Dedicated to the memory of Elkie Rodney,
a caring soul who truly served her public*

FOREWORD

August 1990. I had just returned to Washington from an assignment to Cairo and was awaiting confirmation as Ambassador to Lebanon when the Iraqis invaded Kuwait and was asked to head up the State Department's Iraq-Kuwait task force. For the next several months, I had a front row seat for many of the events described in this book.

The invasion marked the end of the post-World War II Cold War era and the beginning of a new multipolar or nonpolar world in which individual state and nonstate actors found they had much greater latitude to challenge major powers and the old status quo. As I write this from Afghanistan as 2011 draws to a close, I can say with some certainty that this is the world that still challenges us and will for years to come. To study the events of twenty-one years ago is to better understand the present and prepare for the future.

For the United States, this was a defining moment. Would we allow the invasion to stand as many in America argued, or would we roll it back? And if the latter, how and with whom? President Bush answered the first question decisively just days after the

invasion: "This will not stand." In so doing, he committed not only to the defense of the Gulf and the liberation of Kuwait but also to American resolve and credibility as the world watched to see how we would respond to the first great challenge after the Cold War.

In the region, where our oil-rich allies had long feared Saddam's Iraq, our decision to fight was greeted with great relief: the United States was a reliable partner and ally. Within days, Saudi Arabia agreed to the hitherto unthinkable—the stationing of American forces on Saudi soil in defense of the Kingdom. From the meeting of Ibn Saud and Franklin Roosevelt in 1944 aboard a US warship in Egypt's Great Bitter Lake, the fundamental understanding between our two nations was a simple one: oil for security. Saudi Arabia would be a reliable supplier of oil to the world market, and America would insure the Kingdom's security from external threat. We lived up to our end of the bargain at a time of crisis, and the Gulf never forgot it. The security arrangements that we subsequently developed with the Gulf States have allowed us to prosecute Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in 2001 and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. Had we not stood with them in 1990, we would not have had these facilities in 2001 or 2012. New threats have emerged, such as the Iranian nuclear quest. Our regional alliances endure because of our decisions and actions taken two decades ago.

And the Gulf War mattered to the world. In the most sustained and successful diplomatic effort in modern times, the Bush Administration put together a multinational military coalition that included divisions from Egypt and Syria, as well as units from the Gulf. For the first time, Arab states were prepared to confront another Arab militarily under US command. An international coalition that included the Soviet Union in its waning moments provided the legal basis for intervention through a series of Chapter

VII Security Council resolutions. The world understood the economic importance of the Gulf region. But it also understood that unchecked aggression in a nonpolar political environment was an unacceptable threat to international peace and security.

The expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait, of course, did not end the Iraqi threat to the region or its own people, some brief, initial optimism notwithstanding. There has been much debate over whether we should have overthrown the regime in 1991. I personally believe that the decision to stay within the parameters of the Security Council resolutions, which stipulated the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait, and our understandings with our allies was not only correct but essential. I was also part of the next episode, traveling in the Kurdish north of Iraq in 2001 and 2002 and deploying to Baghdad immediately after the fall of Saddam in 2003. I returned as ambassador from 2007 to 2009. That intervention and its aftermath also have generated much debate, and that would require another book and another introduction. But now, with the last American soldiers out of Iraq, the nation will chart its own course. Whatever it is, it is unlikely that the new Iraq will ever pursue the aggressive policies of the Saddam regime.

Since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, the West and the world has had a huge stake in the broader Middle East. An Anglo-French condominium in the area ended with World War II, and the region became an early theater of engagement between the United States and the Soviet Union as the Cold War took shape. American Presidents from Truman to George W. Bush have promulgated doctrines declaring the region vital to US national security. As we contemplate the consequences of the Arab Spring and continue to fight against terrorists who have attacked us at home and would no doubt do so again if they were given the time and space to organize, it will remain so. Its security

and stability will also remain vital to the oil-dependent economies of the West. Our engagement will be essential in defense of our own interests for the indefinite future.

This region has been my life since I began my Foreign Service career as a vice consul in Iran in 1972. I have served as an ambassador six times—in Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, and now Afghanistan. I have seen acts of great courage and vision, and I have seen the consequences of ill-conceived and executed policies. The policies of 1990/91 and their execution were without doubt among the finest moments of American diplomatic and military achievement.

During my tenure as Dean of the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M, I had the enormous privilege of coordinating and moderating a retrospective on the 20th anniversary of Operation Desert Storm. Assembled together for the first time since the Bush Administration left office were former President Bush, former Secretary of State James Baker, former Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and retired general Walter E. Boomer. As they discussed the challenges they confronted, the discussions they had and the decisions they made, one was reminded vividly that people make history, and that people count. In my long Foreign Service career, I have never seen a finer or more cohesive national security team working together when America the region and the world needed them most. This is their story.

Ryan C. Crocker

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

More than most, this book is a group effort. It originated as the “academic” portion of a day-long commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the commencement of Operation Desert Storm, the active military component of the coalition effort to liberate Kuwait from Iraq. This commemoration occurred in January 2011, ably coordinated by Dean Ryan Crocker of the Bush School before his return to overseas duty. His office masterfully oversaw an event attended by thousands, including Gulf War policymakers. Special thanks to Jean Becker and the Office of George Bush, the Office of the President of Texas A&M, Ambassador Roman Popadiuk and the Bush Foundation, Ambassador Larry Napper and the Scowcroft Institute for International Affairs, and Dean Crocker’s able assistants for making the commemoration a memorable success.

The aforementioned academic portion of the day owes its existence to the Scowcroft Institute, and specifically the Ansary Conference Fund ably administered by Ambassador Larry Napper with assistance from Dr. Peggy Holzweiss. Larry did more than

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

anyone to make commemoration of the Gulf War only somewhat less logistically complicated than the original. A highlight of our academic portion of the day were newly released documents from the Bush Library, for which the public and scholarly community have Warren Finch, Robert Holzweiss, and a slew of marvelous archivists to thank. Their work makes the work of writing history possible.

At Oxford University Press, David McBride saw the book to publication, with insightful political, as well as editorial, comments. Thanks as well to Caelyn Cobb for logistical help, and the indefatigable pair of Susan Ferber and Katherine Carté Engel as fonts of advice. Thanks too to Abby Doll and Sarah Saunders, research assistants extraordinaire, as well as Professor Charles Hermann, Dr. Abdul-Reda Assiri of Kuwait University, and Ms. Janeen Wood for their invaluable assistance when the papers that became the chapters in this book were first presented to the public. Mary Finch and Bonnie Burlbaw of the Bush Presidential Library helped locate and secure the pictures included with this book, several published for the first time within these pages. Needless to say, to Ambassador Crocker, Lawrence Freedman, Michael Gordon, Richard Haass, and Shibley Telhami, the thanks of everyone from Aggieland for your insights and thought-provoking commentary and analysis of the Gulf War twenty years on.

Jeffrey A. Engel

CONTRIBUTORS

While serving as Ambassador to Afghanistan, **Ryan C. Crocker** is on leave as Dean, Executive Professor, and Edward and Howard Kruse Endowed Chair at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. He retired from the Foreign Service in April 2009 after a career of over thirty-seven years. He served as an Ambassador five times: Iraq (2007–2009), Pakistan (2004–2007), Syria (1998–2001), Kuwait (1994–1997), and Lebanon (1990–1993). He was a member of the faculty at the National War College 2003–2004. From May to August 2003, he was in Baghdad as the first Director of Governance for the Coalition Provisional Authority. He served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs from August 2001 to May 2003. In September 2004, President Bush conferred on him the personal rank of Career Ambassador, the highest in the Foreign Service. Crocker received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian award, in 2009. In May 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced the establishment of the Ryan C. Crocker Award for Outstanding Achievement in Expeditionary Diplomacy.

Jeffrey A. Engel is the founding Director of the Presidential History Project at Southern Methodist University. Until the summer of 2012 he served as the Verlin and Howard Kruse '52 Founders Professor at Texas A&M University and Director of Programming for the Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs. A graduate of Cornell University, he additionally studied at St. Catherine's College, Oxford University, received his Ph.D. in American History from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and served as an Olin Postdoctoral Fellow in International Security Studies at Yale University. His books include *Cold War at 30,000 Feet: The Anglo-American Fight for Aviation Supremacy* (Harvard University Press, 2007), which received the biannual Paul Birdsall Prize from the American Historical Association for Outstanding work in European Military and Strategic History; *Local Consequences of the Global Cold War* (Stanford University Press, 2008); *The China Diary of George H.W. Bush: The Making of a Global President* (Princeton University Press, 2008); *Rethinking Leadership and "Whole of Government" National Security Reform*, with Joseph R. Cerami (Strategic Studies Institute, 2010); and *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

Sir Lawrence Freedman is the Professor of War Studies and the Vice Principal for Research at King's College London. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Manchester, a Bachelor's of Philosophy degree from the University of York, and a Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of Oxford. Sir Freedman's main research interests are in contemporary defense and foreign policy issues, and he has close links to the Centre of Defence Studies, the Royal College of Defence Studies, and the British Academy. He is the author or editor of twenty-six

books, including *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East* (Public Affairs, 2008) and *The Gulf Conflict, 1990–1991* (Princeton University Press, 1995), and has written extensively on nuclear strategy and the Cold War. In 2003, Sir Freedman received the title of Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George.

Michael Gordon, who holds a journalism degree from Columbia University, is the chief military correspondent for the *New York Times*, where he has worked since 1985. Along with General Bernard E. Trainor, Mr. Gordon has written two books including *The General's War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf*, which covers the 1991 Gulf War, and the best-selling *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*, which covers the Iraq War that began in 2003. In 2002, Mr. Gordon produced and hosted the award-winning documentary *Deadlock: Russia's Forgotten War* for CNN, which chronicled his risky trip into dangerous and highly restricted areas of Chechnya to capture the scenes of war. Mr. Gordon, together with Steven Engelberg, won a 1989 George Polk Award for international reporting following their series of articles on nuclear proliferation.

Richard N. Haass is president of the Council on Foreign Relations, an independent, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to helping others better understand the world and the foreign policy choices facing the United States and other countries. Dr. Haass is the author or editor of eleven books on American foreign policy, including *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* (Simon and Schuster, 2009) and has served as the director of policy planning for the Department of State, US coordinator for policy toward the future of Afghanistan, and special assistant to

President George H. W. Bush. Dr. Haass received the Presidential Citizens Medal for his contributions to the development and articulation of US policy during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Dr. Haass holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Oberlin College, and the Master and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from the University of Oxford.

Shibley Telhami is the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, College Park, and a nonresident senior fellow at the Saban Center at the Brookings Institute. He received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of California at Berkeley. Outside of the university environment, Dr. Telhami is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and has served as a member of the Strategic Environment Working Group in the topic area of Iraq. He also served on the US Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World. Dr. Telhami's best-selling book, *The Stakes: America and the Middle East*, was selected by Foreign Affairs as one of the top five books on the Middle East in 2003. Dr. Telhami was awarded the Distinguished International Service Award by the University of Maryland in 2002, and the Excellence in Public Service Award by the University System of Maryland Board of Regents in 2006.

EDITOR'S NOTE

One war. Six perspectives. The purpose of this book is simple: to task scholars, policymakers, and journalists with considering anew a central conflict of the post-Cold War age. Twenty years after the conclusion of the 1990–1991 Gulf War, the passage of time and the addition of ensuing events has surely altered perceptions of the war. Its instigation, meaning, purpose, and aftermath each appear far different with hindsight. There are within these pages perspectives on American foreign policy, American decision making at the crisis moment of 1990, the war as it appeared to international observers and to residents of the Middle East in particular, and the war's long-term effect on American and Iraqi military thinking, which became all too prevalent a topic when conflict arose between the two nations yet again at the onset of the twenty-first century.

There is in fact a quirk of fate within the timing of this book conceived as reflections on a generation-old conflict. It was submitted for publication just as the last American military forces departed Iraq after their post-2003 invasion and subsequent

occupation. Rarely have two nations been so intertwined over the course of a generation, with such far-reaching effects, and with arguably as little cultural exchange between the two, as have the United States and Iraq. We hope by shedding light on the first phase of their long struggle to in some small way illuminate the longer story. Contrary to popular wisdom history does not in fact repeat itself. But it does rhyme. By studying our collective history, we can never guarantee selection of ideal choices tomorrow, but at least we can strive for more thoughtful decisions when the time comes.

Jeffrey A. Engel
Princeton, New Jersey
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