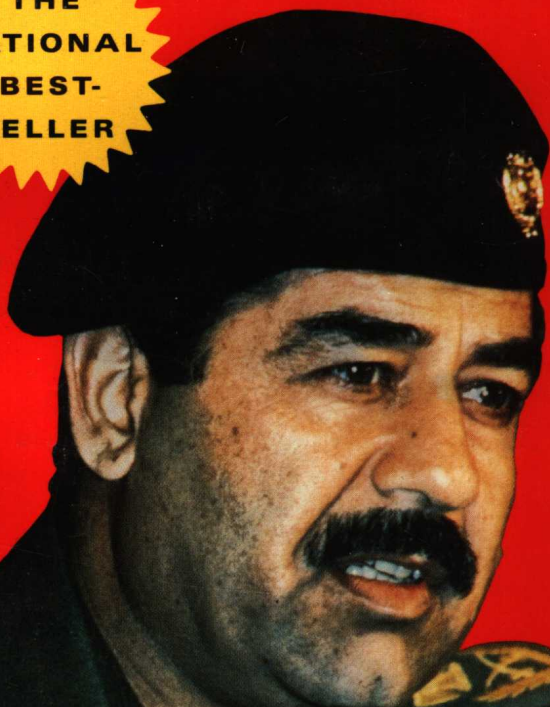


SADDAM HUSSEIN

AND THE CRISIS IN THE GULF

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JUDITH MILLER AND LAURIE MYLROIE
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SADDAM HUSSEIN and the **CRISIS in the GULF**

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and
LAURIE MYLROIE



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Introduction

Why this book?

Because of Corporal Sean M. Pulliam, a twenty-two-year-old American marine from Damon, Texas, who wasn't at his wife's bedside when their first child was born. Since mid-August, Corporal Pulliam, a tank gunner, has battled 120-degree temperatures and a variety of poisonous snakes which inhabit the Saudi desert. To avoid a confrontation, he has taken to sleeping on top of his tank.

Because of Karin Oliver, age thirty, who has worked for nearly ten years in the public library in Bloomington, Indiana. A former Navy Seabee, Oliver was informed in mid-August that her reserve unit might well be called up on twenty-four hours notice for service in the Persian Gulf. She was told to be reachable by phone, day or night, and to ensure that her legal affairs were in order—including her will.

Another reason is Barbara Bodine, an intrepid State Department foreign service officer who serves as the number two at the U.S. embassy in Kuwait. The embassy's skeleton staff refused to leave Kuwait City when the Iraqis ordered all diplomats out in late August and then cut off electricity and water to encourage their departure. With hundreds of Americans in hiding in the capital or held hostage in Iraq, Bodine and her colleagues were intent on staying. They survived from

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then on by drinking boiled water from the embassy pool and eating chicken and turkey they had smoked themselves to retard spoilage in the intense summer heat. In late August, Iraq permitted the first large group of hostages (or "official guests," as Iraqis call them) to leave from Kuwait. After Bodine saw off the first convoy of tired and terrified Americans, she allowed herself a small flouting of protocol. From that point on, she declared to her colleagues, no more high-heeled shoes.

Ashraf Bak, an Indian national, led what he called the good life in Kuwait City until August 2, the day Iraq invaded. Employed by a Kuwaiti investment bank, he earned about \$15,000 a year and managed to send money to relatives in India. Two days after the invasion, his wife had a child. Unable to collect his paycheck and fearful of the hungry and marauding invaders, he and his wife decided to flee as soon as she was able to travel. In a minivan crammed with four other equally desperate families, they braved the desert heat, the car-killing sand pits, and the Iraqi patrols. Three days later, they crossed the border into Jordan, but soon after arriving at the refugee camp, Bak's infant daughter became severely ill. Homeless, penniless, and waiting endlessly on lines for a daily ration of bread and water, this once proud man was transformed into a beggar, a mere statistic in a pool of human misery—one of some 400,000 Asian and Near Eastern refugees who fled Kuwait and Iraq and who do not know whether, when, or how they are to return home.

Mohammed al-Sager had it all until Iraqi tanks rolled into his country and took over, among other things, his newspaper. A member of one of the sheikdom's wealthiest and most influential families, Sager was a happily married man with a large family, a thriving investment business, an elegant home in Kuwait City, vacation houses in Europe, and friends in the Gulf, Europe, and

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America. Educated at the University of Southern California and fascinated by the Western press, he helped turn his family's newspaper, *al-Qabas*, into one of the Arab world's most respected journals. Like so many Kuwaitis, he and his family were vacationing in Europe when the Iraqis invaded. But even he feels the pangs of luxurious exile, which he fears may be permanent. With Saudi help, the Kuwaiti government began republishing *al-Qabas* in late August as an opposition newspaper from London. In its pages, the outrage of the dispossessed has found a voice.

Samir al-Khalil is not his real name. A slight man with fine features, wavy hair, and sensitive eyes, he has been living in Europe under this pseudonym for many years, ever since he decided to oppose Saddam Hussein's regime; life in Baathist Iraq, he explained, was unbearable for an intellectual with integrity. Khalil received more than sixty rejection slips before a university press agreed in 1989 to print a token number of copies of his aptly titled book on Iraq, *Republic of Fear*. Academic in tone, relentless in its hatred of pan-Arabism, loaded with insights about Saddam's use of terror and intimidation to secure legitimacy, Khalil's book has been rescued from obscurity by the invasion. But personally he has not been as fortunate. Fearful of the regime's revenge, he has continued to live in virtual seclusion, with only a few friends knowing his real name, address, or telephone number.

For all of these people—Americans, Asians, Kuwaitis, Iraqis, and other Arabs—life has changed dramatically (for some, permanently) because of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. Many Americans have already been or soon will be affected by this event more than 10,000 miles from our shores. Some have friends or relatives involved in what has been the single largest deployment of American forces overseas since Viet-

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nam; for others, the effect has been limited to paying more for gasoline at local pumps. But the crisis that unfolded throughout August and September has potential implications for many people in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East that go far beyond what was experienced in the immediate aftermath of Iraq's action.

The Bush administration, which has won praise for its management of the crisis, has nonetheless offered curiously shifting and often grandiosely vague descriptions about what is at stake in the Gulf for the United States and the West. President Bush, who initially stated that no American intervention was contemplated, corrected himself only hours later. When on August 8 he announced his decision to send American forces to the area, he stressed they were for "purely defensive purposes." Gradually, however, the list of goals—some implied, others explicit—expanded, as did their ambitiousness. Bush subsequently described the stakes in Saddam's invasion of Kuwait as a threat to no less than "our way of life." He did not hesitate to compare Saddam's territorial conquests with those of Adolf Hitler. A half century ago, Bush said, "our nation and the world paid dearly for appeasing an aggressor who should, and could, have been stopped. We are not going to make the same mistake again."

Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d, testifying before a congressional committee in early September, elaborated on these statements. The Iraqi invasion, he said, was a "political test of how the post-Cold War world will work." This, he said, was a "critical juncture in history . . . one of the defining moments of a new era." The end of the Cold War did not mean an end to violence or conflict, he argued. America and its allies had a simple choice: "Do we want to live in a world where aggression is made less likely because it is met with a

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powerful response from the international community, a world where civilized rules of conduct apply? Or are we willing to live in a world where aggression can go unchecked, where aggression succeeds because we somehow cannot muster the collective will to challenge it?"

But others saw different motives. What was really at stake, wrote Thomas L. Friedman, diplomatic correspondent of *The New York Times*, was free access to and effective control over the price of oil—indispensable to the West's economic engine. In an assessment that shocked official Washington barely ten days after the Iraqi invasion, Friedman bluntly stated that American boys were being asked to be willing to die for oil, "five cents more a gallon."

Throughout the crisis, the administration has vigorously rejected arguments that what was really at stake was President Bush's standing in the polls, his reelection prospects, or most significant, low energy prices that would allow Americans to continue their voracious gas guzzling. "This is not about increases in the price of a gallon of gas at the local service station," Baker retorted, his voice laced with anger. "It is rather about a dictator who, acting alone and unchallenged, could strangle the global economic order, determining by fiat whether we all enter a recession or even the darkness of a depression." The burden of higher energy prices, he warned, would threaten not only the United States, but the 1989 anti-Communist revolutions in Eastern Europe, as well as the poorer nations of Central America, South Asia and Africa.

Which interpretation is accurate? Has this crisis really been about whether aggression will be tolerated in a critical and highly volatile part of the world? Or is it really, as Republican analyst Kevin Phillips has asserted, "the first war this country has fought over economics—

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that is, over oil"? What is really at stake for the United States in the Persian Gulf?

And who is Saddam Hussein? A modern-day Hitler, the demented irrational "Butcher of Baghdad" portrayed in early breathless articles that followed the invasion? Or, as Arab and Western diplomats have described him, a ruthless, cunning, rational thug intent on dominating the Middle East and the West through a stranglehold on the supply of oil?

What kind of country is Saddam Hussein's Iraq? What do Iraqis really feel about their leader? Why, after eight long years of war with Iran, would his people support his attack on the Arab neighbor that had helped pay for the weapons which enabled Iraq to claim victory over the Iranians? Why did so many ordinary Arabs not oppose Saddam's blitzkrieg invasion, the first such incursion by one Arab state against another in modern times? Why were America's allies so slow to respond and, in some cases, so niggling in their contributions to the campaign to force Iraq to withdraw?

Why was almost every government stunned by Iraq's action? Why did America, Europe and the Soviet Union believe that the support they had given Saddam would moderate his policies toward Kuwait? Has Western assistance helped turn Saddam into a monster by building his powerful military? How many chemical weapons does he have? What kind of biological weapons does he have? Does he possess a nuclear bomb?

Finally, will the Arab world ever be the same? Or will America? How will the crisis affect American interests—its presence in the Persian Gulf and its relations with Arab states and with Israel? Indeed, how does Israel fit into this state of affairs?

At the beginning of the summer, few Americans had thought much about Iraq, let alone about such questions. Today, after the abrupt dispatch of more than

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100,000 U.S. troops to the Middle East, many Americans hunger for answers and a deeper understanding of the conflict. Unfortunately, there are almost no books available for a general audience about Saddam Hussein, Iraq, and Persian Gulf politics. And the few that exist are written by scholars for scholars. This book, written quickly, before the resolution of the crisis and therefore without the benefit of hindsight, raises some of these key questions. It also attempts to offer some preliminary answers. And it seeks to provide some basic insight into Saddam Hussein—the kind of man he is, the kind of society he has built, and the way in which his Arab neighbors, the United States, and the Western European nations have reacted to him. In sum, it seeks to be a primer, a guide to appreciating the immediate and deeper roots of this conflict.

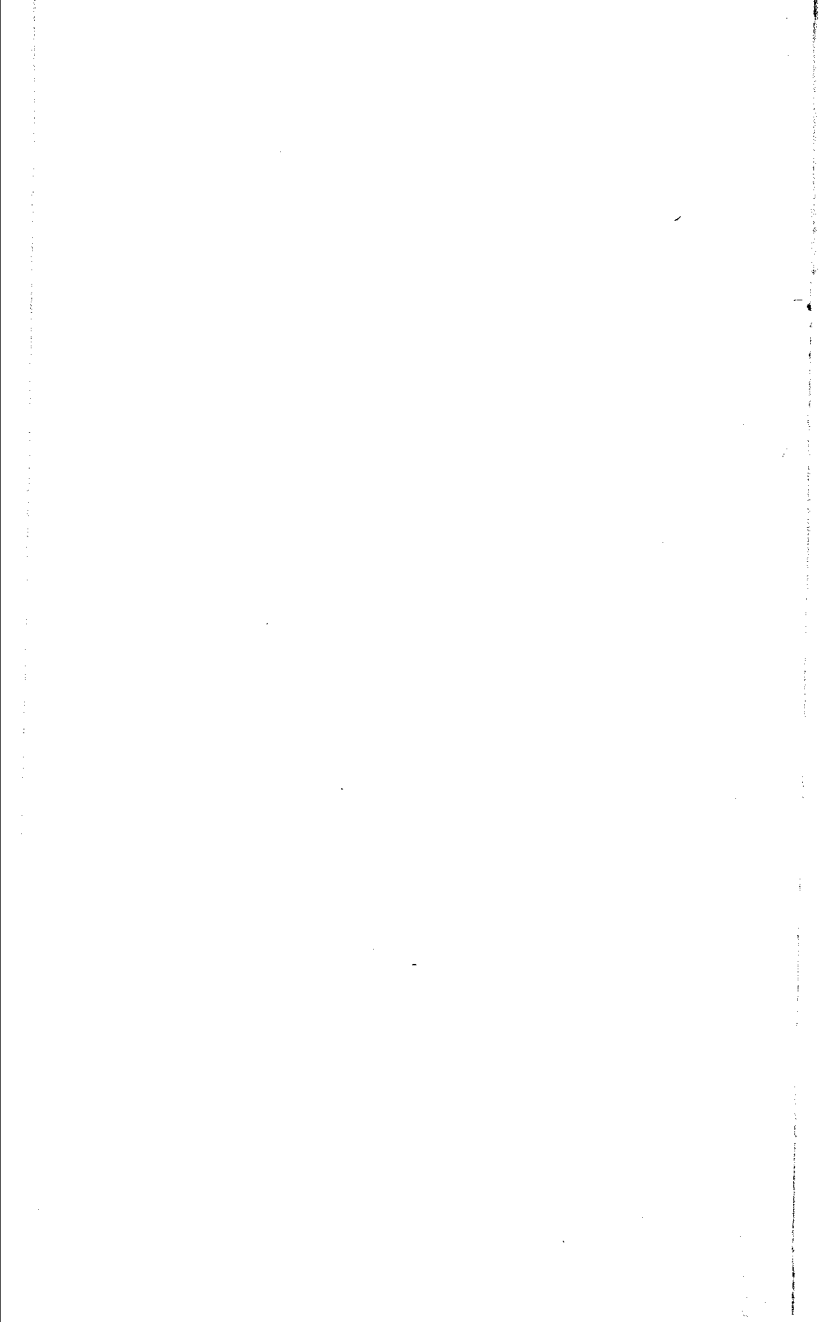
After the United Nations voted in late August to support the limited use of force against Iraq, to give teeth to the economic sanctions it had previously approved, Thomas R. Pickering, the American ambassador to the United Nations, called the action a “historic” moment for the United States and the international organization. “We have drawn a firm line in the sand,” Mr. Pickering told one reporter.

“Fine,” a sympathetic Arab diplomat replied, upon hearing his colleague’s statement. “Now let us pray we can control the winds.”

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I

Hijack

In the eighth century, Abu Jafer al-Mansur, the second caliph of Iraq, decided to build a capital befitting his powerful kingdom, the ancient site of Sumer and Babylon. So he summoned his finest architect and instructed him to design a city like nothing that had ever been built before.

The architect produced a unique plan: a city in the shape of a circle. The design would ensure that the caliph's subjects would be equidistant from one another, and that those at the farthest reaches of the capital would be equal distances from the city's center—the caliph's palace.

But Mansur could not imagine such a city. So the architect ordered his assistants to dig a vast trench around the perimeters of the future city and fill it with wood and straw. Then he escorted the caliph to a promontory not far from the area. At his command, the workmen set the trench ablaze so that the caliph could envisage his future capital, Baghdad. The flames raced through the trench and formed a perfect ring—a circle of fire.

In mid-September 1990, Saddam Hussein sat in his innermost sanctum—the presidential compound in central Baghdad—encircled yet again by a political firestorm of his own making.

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His invasion and seizure of tiny Kuwait, or "The Revolution of August 2," as it was trumpeted in the Iraqi state-controlled press, had enraged the world in a way he had not anticipated. The United Nations, at the behest of the Americans, had quickly approved five resolutions condemning his invasion, demanding his unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait and the immediate release of the three thousand Americans and thousands of other Westerners taken hostage, some of whom he had sent to military and chemical production facilities to serve as human shields in case of attack. And the U.N. Security Council, traditionally paralyzed by ideological and often petty disputes, had unanimously endorsed a financial and trade boycott of Iraq and its oil, 95 percent of his country's foreign exchange. The world was closing in on him.

To his north was hostile Turkey. The Turks, members of NATO, deeply in debt to the Americans and eager to join the ranks of the European Community, were among the first to side with the United States. President Turgut Ozal had personally assured President Bush in a telephone conversation the night of the invasion that he would block oil in the pipeline that ran from Iraq through Turkey, cutting off one-third of Iraq's export capacity from reaching its markets. Ozal had also taken to the phone the next morning, urging others, including King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, not to yield to Iraqi intimidation.

To the west was Syria, a fellow Baathist state headed by Saddam's most bitter adversary, Hafez al-Assad. Syria and Iraq had long been divided by ideological and personality conflicts between their leaders and by recent memories of Syria's ardent support for Iran, a non-Arab state, in the Iraq-Iran war. Syria was a hard-line foe of Israel and of what it called American imperialism in the region, as well as a haven for terrorists, including

those who had masterminded the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland—the most deadly action ever staged against American civilians. But Damascus, too, had eagerly joined the American-led boycott. President Assad agreed to aid his newfound enemy-of-his-enemy by sending an initial installment of 3,200 Syrian troops to help defend Saudi Arabia from Iraqi aggression, one of initially only three Arab states outside the Gulf to do so. And in early September, Syria promised the Saudis it would send an armored division of about 20,000 troops and an additional 270 Soviet-made tanks and artillery.

Jordan also lay to the west, just south of Syria. After the invasion, King Hussein astounded the Bush administration by criticizing Washington for sending troops to defend Saudi Arabia. The king, Saddam knew, could ill afford to offend the country that protected Jordan from Israeli intimidation and which provided Amman with 95 percent of its oil and roughly 25 percent of its gross national product. Moreover, the king had grown close to Saddam during Iraq's long war and stood in awe of Saddam, whom he viewed as the first Arab to stand up to the West since Gamal Abdel Nasser. But even the "plucky little king" (as Hussein had long been known in diplomatic cables) had agreed to honor the embargo. And he had rushed off to Kennebunkport in late August to explain to an unmoved President Bush why he could not be more forthcoming. No, King Hussein, Saddam's namesake but no blood relation, could not be trusted to help Iraq.

To Saddam's east was Iran, the Shiite fundamentalist rival for hegemony in the region whom he had attacked in 1980 and had fought to a standstill after eight long years. Tehran had also initially endorsed the embargo. To neutralize Iran, Saddam was forced in August to relinquish the precious Shatt al-Arab waterway he had

won in the war—his only access to the Gulf before his seizure of Kuwait and the only trophy from a conflict that had reportedly cost more than a million casualties. The Iraq-Iran war had been the region's bloodiest since the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century.

Tehran seemed to appreciate Saddam's gesture. On September 12, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme religious leader, called in a broadcast for a "holy war" against the United States to force American troops to leave the Gulf. He also said that Iran would provide food and medicine and other "humanitarian assistance" to Iraq. But Saddam knew that the Iranian government was deeply divided, and that it was still unclear whether Tehran, desperate for Western credit, aid and technology to rebuild its war-ravaged country, would risk alienating the West by openly flouting the embargo. Maybe a little cheating, yes. But real support was unlikely. Moreover, Iranian officials were already pressing Gulf states to see what price could be extracted for Iran to adhere diligently to the embargo. Besides, the enmity between Iraq and Iran was so great, the mistrust so deep, that Saddam knew to be wary of Iranian pledges.

His most pressing concern though, was Saudi Arabia to the south. Before the invasion, Riyadh had not permitted a single American soldier to be stationed on Saudi soil. Even keeping enough technicians on the ground to maintain the billions of dollars worth of exotic military equipment the Saudis had purchased from America had been a source of tension. The invasion had stunned Riyadh, which had attempted to mediate a solution to the crisis. The night of the invasion King Fahd was said by a source who knows him well to have been "quaking with fear." But by mid-September, the ever-cautious Saudis were privately calling upon fellow Arabs and George Bush to get rid of Saddam—permanently. They were also playing gracious host to more