

Address to the Nation Announcing Operation Desert Storm, 1991

Introduction

On January 16, 1991, President George H. W. Bush announced the beginning of the military campaign to end an Iraqi occupation of neighboring Kuwait. The address was broadcast live on radio and television. It was the culmination of five months of lobbying by Bush for the United States to pursue a military response rather than economic sanctions against Iraq.

Iraq's army had invaded the small, oil-rich country of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and quickly overwhelmed the Kuwaiti forces. Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq, wanted to control Kuwait's oil supply and regain land that had been a province of Iraq before World War I. In response, the United Nations, the United States, and other countries denounced the invasion and demanded Iraq's withdrawal. Four days later, President Bush sent Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney—rather than Secretary of State James A. Baker—to meet with King Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. The two entered into an agreement for the United States to protect Saudi Arabia from the threat of an attack by Iraq. On August 8 the first US fighter planes arrived. More than 500,000 US troops were eventually stationed in Saudi Arabia.

On November 29, the UN Security Council passed a resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq if it failed to withdraw by January 15, 1991. Massive bombing and airstrikes, known as Operation Desert Storm, began on January 16.

Bush had faced a lot of criticism for pursuing military action instead of economic sanctions against Saddam Hussein. To support his stance, in his speech on January 16 he drew attention to some of the atrocities committed in Kuwait by the Iraqi military:

While the world waited, Saddam Hussein systematically raped, pillaged, and plundered a tiny nation, no threat to his own. He subjected the people of Kuwait to unspeakable atrocities—and among those maimed and murdered, innocent children.

While the world waited, Saddam sought to add to the chemical weapons arsenal he now possesses, an infinitely more dangerous weapon of mass destruction—a nuclear weapon. And while the world waited, while the world talked peace and withdrawal, Saddam Hussein dug in and moved massive forces into Kuwait.

Bush also assured Americans that this conflict would not become another Vietnam:

I've told the American people before that this will not be another Vietnam, and I repeat this here tonight. Our troops will have the best possible support in the entire world, and they will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their

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back. I'm hopeful that this fighting will not go on for long and that casualties will be held to an absolute minimum.

The ground assault, known as Desert Sabre, began on February 24 and lasted only four days. On February 28, President Bush declared a cease-fire. On April 3, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 687, specifying conditions for a formal end to the conflict. Three days later Iraq accepted the resolution, and on April 11 the Security Council declared it in effect.

Excerpt

From George H. W. Bush, Address to the Nation Announcing Allied Military Action in the Persian Gulf, January 16, 1991¹

As I report to you, air attacks are underway against military targets in Iraq. We are determined to knock out Saddam Hussein's nuclear bomb potential. We will also destroy his chemical weapons facilities. Much of Saddam's artillery and tanks will be destroyed. Our operations are designed to best protect the lives of all the coalition forces by targeting Saddam's vast military arsenal. Initial reports from General Schwarzkopf are that our operations are proceeding according to plan.

Our objectives are clear: Saddam Hussein's forces will leave Kuwait. The legitimate government of Kuwait will be restored to its rightful place, and Kuwait will once again be free. Iraq will eventually comply with all relevant United Nations resolutions, and then, when peace is restored, it is our hope that Iraq will live as a peaceful and cooperative member of the family of nations, thus enhancing the security and stability of the Gulf.

Some may ask: Why act now? Why not wait? The answer is clear: The world could wait no longer. Sanctions, though having some effect, showed no signs of accomplishing their objective. Sanctions were tried for well over 5 months, and we and our allies concluded that sanctions alone would not force Saddam from Kuwait.

¹George H. W. Bush, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George H. W. Bush, 1991, Book I, January 1 to June 30, 1991*, (Washington DC: Government Publishing Office, 1992), pp. 42–45, www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1991-book1/html/PPP-1991-book1-doc-pg42-3.htm.

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While the world waited, while Saddam stalled, more damage was being done to the fragile economies of the Third World, emerging democracies of Eastern Europe, to the entire world, including to our own economy.

Questions for Discussion

Respond to these two prompts based on the introduction and your knowledge of American history.

1. Compare President Bush's approach to foreign policy related to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait with a previous administrations' approach to another twentieth-century foreign policy crisis. Consider the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, the Carter administration, or the Reagan administration. Cite evidence to support your argument.
2. What portions of the short quotations from President Bush's speech in the introduction justify the use of American military force against Iraq in the Persian Gulf crisis? Are these legitimate justifications for the use of force? Why or why not?

Respond to this prompt based on the introduction, the excerpts, and your knowledge of American history.

1. Based on this excerpt from President Bush's speech, identify the audience(s) President Bush had in mind. Who was he speaking to? In other words, was it just the American public he wanted to hear this? Be as broad or as specific as you like. Cite one piece of evidence from the excerpt that supports your claim. Analyze and explain how that evidence supports your claim.

Respond to these two prompts based on the introduction, the full text of the speech, and your knowledge of history.

1. The transcript provided here is from President Bush's televised address on January 16, 1991. (You can also view this speech on C-SPAN's YouTube channel). Compare the

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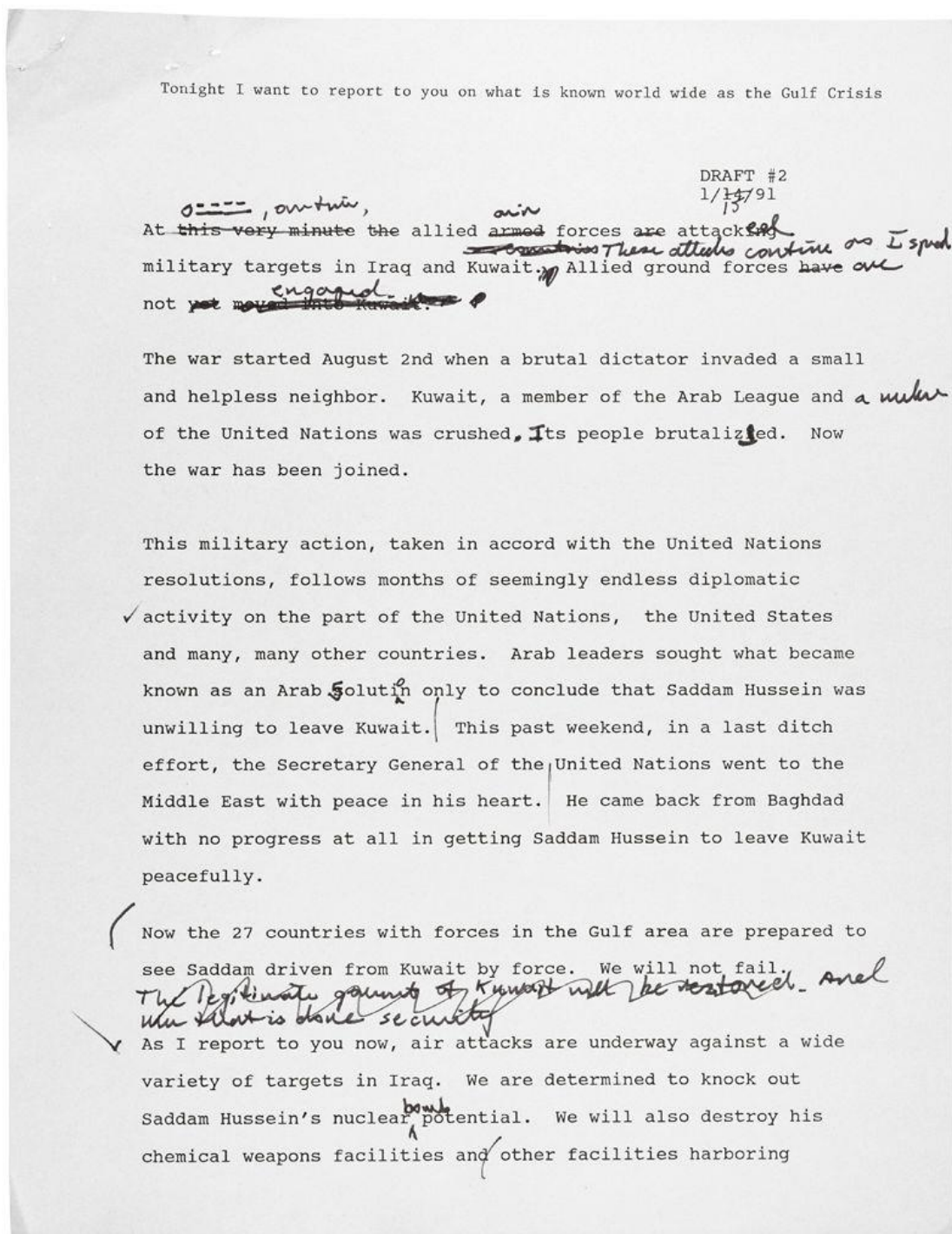
transcript with the typed second draft and the handwritten edits President Bush made on January 15. Identify any significant differences that stand out to you.

2. Was the plan of action that President Bush laid out in this address representative of a singular/unilateral decision on behalf of the United States? What language, rhetoric, and/or other devices does he use in his speech to support your answer? Please cite evidence from the transcript to support your response.

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Image

Second Draft of the Address to the Nation on the Gulf War, January 15, 1991



George H. W. Bush, Second Draft of the Address to the Nation on the Gulf War, January 15, 1991
National Archives, 595211, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/595211>

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unconventional weapons.) In addition, we will protect the lives of all the coalition forces by targeting Saddam's vast military arsenal.

The objectives are clear. Saddam Hussein's forces will ~~leave~~ ^{eventually} leave Kuwait. The legitimate Government of Kuwait will be restored to its rightful place, and Kuwait will again be free. Much of Saddam Hussein's armor will be destroyed. Iraq will ^{eventually} comply with all United Nations resolutions. ^{relevant} And then, when peace is restored, Iraq will guarantee to leave live as a peaceful member of the family of nations. This enhancing the security & stability of the Gulf. Prior to ordering our forces into battle, I instructed the military commanders involved to do everything in their power to protect the lives of the allied forces and to guard against the indiscriminate loss of innocent civilian life in Iraq and in Kuwait. Having said that, I have also ordered that they take whatever steps are necessary to prevail quickly and with the greatest degree of protection possible for American and Allied soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen. I have told the American people before that this will not be another Viet Nam. And I repeat this here tonight. Our troops will have the best possible protection in the entire world, and they will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back.

Prior to the initiation of hostilities Saddam Hussein was warned over and over again that he must leave Kuwait in accord with twelve resolutions of the U.N. Security Council -- or that he would ^{be} driven out. Saddam has refused to heed the warnings. Instead he tried to make this dispute a dispute between Iraq and the United States of America.

Well, he was wrong! Tonight the world is united against Saddam

George H. W. Bush, Second Draft of the Address to the Nation on the Gulf War, January 15, 1991
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Hussein.

Tonight 27 countries from all around the world have forces in the Gulf area alligned against Saddam Hussein. Each one of those countries had hoped that the use of force could be avoided. Each conc^{ld}uded as we did, that only force will make him leave --
 ? our extensive diplomacy and the diplomacy of many other countries having failed/ I am hopeful that this fighting will not go on long. I am hopeful that casualties will be at an absolute minimum.

This is an historic moment ~~in the history of the world~~. When we are successful, and we will be, we have a real chance at a new world order. An order in which a reactivitated United Nations can use its peace-keeping role to fulfill the promise and vision of the UN's founders. We have no argument with the people of Iraq. It is my hope that somehow the Iraqi people can, even now, convince their dictator that he must lay down his arms, leave Kuwait, and let Iraq itself rejoin the family of peace-loving nations.

Thomas Paine wrote many years ago: " ...These are the times that try men's souls....." and that is so very true today ...but even as our planes (from---countries) attack Iraq at this very minute, I prefer to think of peace, not war. I am convinced not only that we will prevail, but that out of the horror of combat will come the recognition that no nati^on can stand against a world united in its belief that one nation must not brutally assault its neighbor.

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I could not have ordered our forces into battle unless I had become convinced that Saddam Hussein was determined not to do that which the world was calling on him to do. Leave Kuwait. No President could easily commit these sons and daughters to war. They are our finest. Ours is an all volunteer force, highly motivated, beautifully trained.

We are grateful to you.

I will bring you home as soon as possible for we do not seek, nor will we have U.S. troops permanently stationed in the Gulf area.

James Russell Lowell wrote: "Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide...." This, young soldiers, is our moment to decide -- decide between good and evil, decide that by this action we can help bring the dawn of a new and more peaceful world.

You are in our prayers. May God hold each of you in His loving arms until the victory is won. God bless you all -- and may God bless the innocent citizens in Iraq, the gallant men and women fighting at our side in the Gulf, and may God bless the United States of America.

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Transcript

[Final Version] George H. W. Bush, Address to the Nation Announcing Allied Military Action in the Persian Gulf, January 16, 1991²

January 16, 1991

Just 2 hours ago, allied air forces began an attack on military targets in Iraq and Kuwait. These attacks continue as I speak. Ground forces are not engaged. This conflict started August 2d when the dictator of Iraq invaded a small and helpless neighbor. Kuwait--a member of the Arab League and a member of the United Nations--was crushed; its people, brutalized. Five months ago, Saddam Hussein started this cruel war against Kuwait. Tonight, the battle has been joined.

This military action, taken in accord with United Nations resolutions and with the consent of the United States Congress, follows months of constant and virtually endless diplomatic activity on the part of the United Nations, the United States, and many, many other countries. Arab leaders sought what became known as an Arab solution, only to conclude that Saddam Hussein was unwilling to leave Kuwait. Others traveled to Baghdad in a variety of efforts to restore peace and justice. Our Secretary of State, James Baker, held an historic meeting in Geneva, only to be totally rebuffed. This past weekend, in a last-ditch effort, the Secretary-General of the United Nations went to the Middle East with peace in his heart--his second such mission. And he came back from Baghdad with no progress at all in getting Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait.

Now the 28 countries with forces in the Gulf area have exhausted all reasonable efforts to reach a peaceful resolution--have no choice but to drive Saddam from Kuwait by force. We will not fail.

As I report to you, air attacks are underway against military targets in Iraq. We are determined to knock out Saddam Hussein's nuclear bomb potential. We will also destroy his chemical weapons facilities. Much of Saddam's artillery and tanks will be destroyed. Our operations are designed to best protect the lives of all the coalition forces by targeting Saddam's vast military arsenal. Initial reports from General Schwarzkopf are that our operations are proceeding according to plan.

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Our objectives are clear: Saddam Hussein's forces will leave Kuwait. The legitimate government of Kuwait will be restored to its rightful place, and Kuwait will once again be free. Iraq will eventually comply with all relevant United Nations resolutions, and then, when peace is restored, it is our hope that Iraq will live as a peaceful and cooperative member of the family of nations, thus enhancing the security and stability of the Gulf.

Some may ask: Why act now? Why not wait? The answer is clear: The world could wait no longer. Sanctions, though having some effect, showed no signs of accomplishing their objective. Sanctions were tried for well over 5 months, and we and our allies concluded that sanctions alone would not force Saddam from Kuwait.

While the world waited, Saddam Hussein systematically raped, pillaged, and plundered a tiny nation, no threat to his own. He subjected the people of Kuwait to unspeakable atrocities--and among those maimed and murdered, innocent children.

While the world waited, Saddam sought to add to the chemical weapons arsenal he now possesses, an infinitely more dangerous weapon of mass destruction--a nuclear weapon. And while the world waited, while the world talked peace and withdrawal, Saddam Hussein dug in and moved massive forces into Kuwait.

While the world waited, while Saddam stalled, more damage was being done to the fragile economies of the Third World, emerging democracies of Eastern Europe, to the entire world, including to our own economy.

The United States, together with the United Nations, exhausted every means at our disposal to bring this crisis to a peaceful end. However, Saddam clearly felt that by stalling and threatening and defying the United Nations, he could weaken the forces arrayed against him.

While the world waited, Saddam Hussein met every overture of peace with open contempt. While the world prayed for peace, Saddam prepared for war.

I had hoped that when the United States Congress, in historic debate, took its resolute action, Saddam would realize he could not prevail and would move out of Kuwait in accord with the United Nation resolutions. He did not do that. Instead, he remained intransigent, certain that time was on his side.

Saddam was warned over and over again to comply with the will of the United Nations: Leave Kuwait, or be driven out. Saddam has arrogantly rejected all warnings. Instead, he tried to make this a dispute between Iraq and the United States of America.

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Well, he failed. Tonight, 28 nations--countries from 5 continents, Europe and Asia, Africa, and the Arab League--have forces in the Gulf area standing shoulder to shoulder against Saddam Hussein. These countries had hoped the use of force could be avoided. Regrettably, we now believe that only force will make him leave.

Prior to ordering our forces into battle, I instructed our military commanders to take every necessary step to prevail as quickly as possible, and with the greatest degree of protection possible for American and allied service men and women. I've told the American people before that this will not be another Vietnam, and I repeat this here tonight. Our troops will have the best possible support in the entire world, and they will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back. I'm hopeful that this fighting will not go on for long and that casualties will be held to an absolute minimum.

This is an historic moment. We have in this past year made great progress in ending the long era of conflict and cold war. We have before us the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations a new world order--a world where the rule of law, not the law of the jungle, governs the conduct of nations. When we are successful--and we will be--we have a real chance at this new world order, an order in which a credible United Nations can use its peacekeeping role to fulfill the promise and vision of the U.N.'s founders.

We have no argument with the people of Iraq. Indeed, for the innocents caught in this conflict, I pray for their safety. Our goal is not the conquest of Iraq. It is the liberation of Kuwait. It is my hope that somehow the Iraqi people can, even now, convince their dictator that he must lay down his arms, leave Kuwait, and let Iraq itself rejoin the family of peace-loving nations.

Thomas Paine wrote many years ago: "These are the times that try men's souls." Those well-known words are so very true today. But even as planes of the multinational forces attack Iraq, I prefer to think of peace, not war. I am convinced not only that we will prevail but that out of the horror of combat will come the recognition that no nation can stand against a world united, no nation will be permitted to brutally assault its neighbor.

No President can easily commit our sons and daughters to war. They are the Nation's finest. Ours is an all-volunteer force, magnificently trained, highly motivated. The troops know why they're there. And listen to what they say, for they've said it better than any President or Prime Minister ever could.

Listen to Hollywood Huddleston, Marine lance corporal. He says, "Let's free these people, so we can go home and be free again." And he's right. The terrible crimes and tortures

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committed by Saddam's henchmen against the innocent people of Kuwait are an affront to mankind and a challenge to the freedom of all.

Listen to one of our great officers out there, Marine Lieutenant General Walter Boomer. He said: "There are things worth fighting for. A world in which brutality and lawlessness are allowed to go unchecked isn't the kind of world we're going to want to live in."

Listen to Master Sergeant J.P. Kendall of the 82d Airborne: "We're here for more than just the price of a gallon of gas. What we're doing is going to chart the future of the world for the next 100 years. It's better to deal with this guy now than 5 years from now."

And finally, we should all sit up and listen to Jackie Jones, an Army lieutenant, when she says, "If we let him get away with this, who knows what's going to be next?"

I have called upon Hollywood and Walter and J.P. and Jackie and all their courageous comrades-in-arms to do what must be done. Tonight, America and the world are deeply grateful to them and to their families. And let me say to everyone listening or watching tonight: When the troops we've sent in finish their work, I am determined to bring them home as soon as possible.

Tonight, as our forces fight, they and their families are in our prayers. May God bless each and every one of them, and the coalition forces at our side in the Gulf, and may He continue to bless our nation, the United States of America.