

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTOR-SPECIFIC BEHAVIORAL MODELS IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS: THE CASE OF SADDAM HUSSEIN OF IRAQ

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The Carnegie Commission on Avoiding Deadly Conflict stressed the critical role of leadership both in promoting and in avoiding deadly conflict. Emphasizing that there was no “one size fits all” model of deterrence, a member of the Commission, Alexander George, emphasized the importance of clear actor-specific behavioral models in support of coercive diplomacy. This is particularly true in leader predominant societies.

Analysis and policy implementation in both Gulf wars were in part impaired because of insufficiently taking into account the unique personality and political behavior of Iraq’s predominant leader, President Saddam Hussein.

In this chapter, after presenting the political personality profile of Saddam Hussein the author presented in testimony to both the Armed Services Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives in December 1990, two key intervals will be analyzed in detail, the run-up to the first Gulf conflict, and the run-up up to the March 2003 Gulf conflict.

SADDAM HUSSEIN OF IRAQ: A POLITICAL PERSONALITY PROFILE¹

INTRODUCTION

This is one of those unique moments in history when the personality and political behavior of one key political actor are of determinative significance. The answers to many of the key questions with which this committee is grappling depend upon a clear understanding of the motivations, perceptions, and decision-making of Saddam Hussein. To provide a framework for this complex political leader, a comprehensive political psychology profile has been developed.

Saddam Hussein, president of Iraq, has been characterized as “the madman of the Middle East.” This pejorative diagnosis is riot only inaccurate but also dangerous. Consigning Saddam to the realm of madness can mislead decisionmakers into believing he is unpredictable when in fact he is not. An examination of the record of Saddam

Hussein's leadership of Iraq for the past 22 years reveals a judicious political calculator, who is by no means irrational, but is dangerous to the extreme.

Saddam Hussein, "the great struggler," has explained the extremity of his actions as president of Iraq as necessary to achieve "subjective immunity" against foreign plots and influences. All actions of the revolution are justified by the "exceptionalism of revolutionary needs." In fact, an examination of Saddam Hussein's life and career reveals this is but the ideological rationalization for a lifelong pattern: All actions are justified if they are in the service of furthering Saddam Hussein's needs and messianic ambitions.

Saddam Hussein was born in 1937 to a poor peasant family near Takrit in central Iraq. His father died before he was born, and, in keeping with tradition, a paternal uncle married his mother. From early years on, Saddam, whose name means "the fighter who stands steadfast," charted his own course and would not accept limits. When Saddam was only 10, he was impressed by a visit from his cousin who knew how to read and write. He confronted his family with his wish to become educated, and when they turned him down, he left his home in the middle of the night, making his way to the home of his maternal uncle Kairallah in Takrit.

Comment: As I have elaborated in subsequent publications Saddam's wounded personality can be traced back to the womb. His father died of cancer during the fourth month of Saddam's mother's pregnancy with Saddam; her first born son died under the surgeon's knife in the eighth month of the pregnancy. Understandably, she became severely depressed, both trying to commit suicide and to abort herself of the pregnancy. When Saddam was born, she turned away from her new born son, evidencing a profound depression, and Saddam was turned over to her brother Kairallah, who raised him in his extended family for the first 2 ½ years of life, until Saddam's mother remarried. Saddam's new step-father was both physically and psychologically abusive to Saddam. It is difficult to imagine a more traumatic entrance into this life. This would have produced what is called "the wounded self," with a major impairment in self-esteem. Most individuals with such a background would be faltering, dependent, weak as adults. But for Saddam, because of the later intervention of his uncle Kairallah, he was to take a different course.

Kairallah was to become not only Saddam's father figure but also his political mentor. Kairallah had fought against Great Britain in the Iraqi uprising of 1941 and had spent 5 years in prison for his nationalist agitation. He filled the impressionable young boy's head with tales of his heroic relatives-his great grandfather and two great uncles-who gave their lives for the cause of Iraqi nationalism, fighting foreign invaders. Kairallah, who was later to become governor of Baghdad, shaped young Hussein's world view, imbuing him with a hatred of foreigners. In 1981, Saddam republished a pamphlet written by his uncle entitled "*Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews, and Flies.*"

Kairallah tutored his young charge in his view of Arab history and the ideology of nationalism and the Ba'th party. Founded in 1940, the Ba'th party envisaged the creation of a new Arab nation defeating the colonialist and imperialist powers, and achieving Arab

independence, unity, and socialism. Ba'th ideology, as conceptualized by its intellectual founding father, Michel Aflaq, focuses on the history of oppression and division of the Arab world, first at the hands of the Ottomans, then the Western mandates, then the monarchies ruled by Western interests, and finally by the establishment of the "Zionist entity." Thus inspired by his uncle's tales of heroism in the service of the Arab nation, Saddam has been consumed by dreams of glory since his earliest days, identifying himself with Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylonia who conquered Jerusalem (586 B.C.), and Saladin, who regained Jerusalem in 1187 by defeating the Crusaders.

COMMENT: Thus at his core, Saddam had a "wounded self," the psychological impoverishment of which was represented by the mud hut in which he was born. But his uncle filled him with compensatory "dreams of glory," and Saddam established a grandiose messianic self concept; but always underlying it, was his deeply wounded extremely insecure self.

Saddam was steeped in Arab history and Ba'thist ideology by the time he traveled with his uncle to Baghdad to pursue his secondary education. The schools, a hotbed of Arab nationalism, confirmed his political leanings. In 1952, when Saddam was 15, Nasser led the Free Officer's revolution in Egypt and became a hero to young Saddam and his peers. As the activist leader of PanArabism, Nasser became an idealized model for Saddam. Only by courageously confronting imperialist powers could Arab nationalism be freed from Western shackles.

At age 20, inspired by Nasser, Saddam joined the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in Iraq and quickly impressed party officials with his dedication. Two years later, in 1958, apparently emulating Nasser, Army General Qassem led a coup which ousted the monarchy. But unlike Nasser, Qassem did not pursue the path of socialism and turned against the Ba'th party. The 22-year-old Saddam was called to Ba'th Party headquarters and given the mission to lead a five-man team to assassinate Qassem. The mission failed, reportedly because of a crucial error in judgment by Saddam. But Saddam's escape to Syria, first by horseback and then by swimming a river, has achieved mythic status in Iraqi history. During his exile, Saddam went to Egypt to study law, rising to the leadership ranks of the Egyptian Ba'th Party. He returned to Iraq after 1963, when Qassem was ousted by the Ba'ths and was elected to the National Command. Aflaq, the ideological father of the Ba'th party, admired young Hussein, declaring the Iraqi Ba'th party the finest in the world and designating Hussein as his successor.

Despite-or rather because of-fellow Ba'thist Hafez al-Assad's success in taking control of Syria, Saddam confronted the new Syrian Ba'th leadership in a party meeting in Iraq in 1966. The split and rivalry persist to this day, for there can be only one supreme Arab nationalist leader, and destiny has inscribed his name as Saddam Hussein.

With the crucial secret assistance of military intelligence chief Abdul Razzaz al Nayef, Saddam mounted a successful coup in 1968. In gratitude for services rendered,

within two weeks of the coup, Saddam had arranged for the capture and exile of Nayef, and subsequently ordered his assassination.

This act was a paradigm for the manner in which Saddam has rewarded loyalty and adhered to commitments throughout his career. He has a flexible conscience: commitments and loyalty are matters of circumstance, and circumstances change. If an individual, or a nation, is perceived as an impediment or a threat, no matter how loyal in the past, that individual or nation will be eliminated violently without a backward glance, and the action will be justified by “the exceptionalism of revolutionary needs.”

Nothing must be permitted to stand in “the great struggler’s” messianic path as he pursues his (and Iraq’s) revolutionary destiny, as exemplified by this extract from Saddam Hussein’s remarkable “Victory Day” message of 8 August:

This is the only way to deal with these despicable Croesuses who relished possession to destroy devotion ... who were guided by the foreigner instead of being guided by virtuous standards, principals of Pan-Arabism, and the creed of humanitarianism....The second of August . . . is the legitimate newborn child of the struggle, patience and perseverance of the Kuwaiti people, which was crowned by revolutionary action on that immortal day. *The newborn child was born of a legitimate father and an immaculate mother. Greetings to the makers of the second of August, whose efforts God has blessed.* They have achieved one of the brightest, most promising and most principled national and Pan-Arab acts.

Two August has come as a very violent response to the harm that the foreigner had wanted to perpetrate against Iraq and the nation. The Croesus of Kuwait and his aides become the obedient, humiliated and treacherous dependents of that foreigner ... What took place on 2 August was inevitable so that death might not prevail over life, *so that those who were capable of ascending to the peak would nor be brought down to the abysmal precipice, so that corruption and remoteness from God would not spread to the majority ... Honor will be kept in Mesopotamia so that Iraq will be the pride of the Arabs, their protector, and their model of noble values.*

Capable of Reversing His Course

Saddam’s practice of revolutionary opportunism has another important characteristic. Just as previous commitments must not be permitted to stand in way of Saddam’s messianic path, neither should he persist in a particular course of action if it proves to be

counterproductive for him and his nation. When he pursues a course of action, he pursues it fully; if he meets initial resistance, will struggle all the harder, convinced of the correctness of his judgments. But circumstances demonstrate that he miscalculated, he is capable of reversing his course. In these circumstances he does not acknowledge he has erred but rather is adapting to a dynamic situation. The three most dramatic examples of the revolutionary pragmatism and ideological flexibility concern his ongoing struggle with his Persian enemies.

Yields on Shatt al Arab To Quell the Kurdish Rebellion

In March 1975, Saddam signed an agreement with the Shah of Iran, stipulating Iranian sovereignty over the disputed Shatt al Arab waterway in return for Iran's ceasing to supply the Kurdish rebellion

Saddam had forced a mass relocation of the Kurdish population in 1970. In 1973, he declared that the Ba'ath party represented all Iraqis, that the Kurds could not be neutral, and that the Kurds were either fully with the people or against them. Indeed, this is one of Saddam's basic principles—"He who is not total with me is my enemy." The Kurds were therefore seen as insidious enemies supported by foreign powers, in particular the Iranians. In 1973, the Kurdish minority, supported by the Shah of Iran, rebelled. By 1975, the war against the Kurds had become extremely costly, having cost 60,000 lives in 1 year alone. Demonstrating his revolutionary pragmatism, despite his lifelong hatred of the Persians, Saddam's urgent need to put down the Kurdish rebellion took (temporary) precedence.

The loss of the Shatt al Arab waterway continued to rankle, and in September 1980, sensing weakness and confusion in the Iranian leadership, Saddam invaded Khuzistan province, at first meeting little resistance. One of his first acts was to cancel the 1975 treaty dividing the Shatt al Arab waterway. After Iraq's initial success, Iran stiffened and began to inflict serious damage on not only Iraqi forces but also the Iraqi cities. It became clear to Saddam that the war was counterproductive.

Attempts to End the Iran-Iraq War

In June 1982, Saddam reversed his earlier militant aggression and attempted to terminate hostilities, offering a unilateral ceasefire.

Khomeini would have none of it, and the Iran-Iraq War was to take a dreadful toll, estimated at more than a million. In 1988, an indecisive ceasefire was agreed to, with Iraq sustaining an advantage, retaining control of some 700 square miles of Iranian territory and retaining control over the strategic Shatt al Arab waterway. Saddam, who maintained 500,000 troops in the disputed border, vowed he would "never" allow Iran sovereignty over any part of the waterway, until Iran agreed to forgo its claim to the disputed waterway. Hussein declared he would not agree to an exchange of prisoners, nor would he withdraw from Iranian territory. But revolutionary pragmatism was to

supersede this vow, for Hussein desperately needed the 500,000 troops tied up in the dispute.

Reverses Policy on Disputed Waterway

On August 15, 1990, Hussein agreed to meet Iranian conditions, promising to withdraw from Iranian territory, agreeing to an exchange of prisoners and, most importantly, agreeing to share the disputed Shatt al Arab waterway.

Never is a short time when revolutionary pragmatism dictates, which is important to remember in evaluating Saddam's vow to never relinquish Kuwait.

Reversal of Hostage Policy

The decision to release all foreign hostages fits this pattern. As with other misdirected policies in the past, Saddam initially pursued his hostage policy with full vigor, despite mounting evidence that it was counterproductive. When it became clear to him that it was not protecting him from the likelihood of military conflict, as initially conceived, but was actually unifying the international opposition, he reversed the policy. The announcement followed an especially strong statement by Secretary Baker concerning the use of "decisive force," but the anger of his former ally, the Soviet Union, was undoubtedly important as well. Moreover, the timing was designed not only to play on perceived internal divisions within the United States but also to magnify perceived differences in the international coalition's demonstration of the sense of timing of the shrewdly manipulative Saddam.

SADDAM PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS: MALIGNANT NARCISSISM

The labels "madman of the Middle East" and "megalomaniac" are often affixed to Saddam, but in fact there is no evidence that he is suffering from a psychotic disorder. He is not impulsive, only acts after judicious consideration, and can be extremely patient; indeed he uses time as a weapon.

While he is psychologically in touch with reality, he is often politically out of touch with reality. Saddam's worldview is narrow and distorted, and he has scant experience outside of the Arab world. His only sustained experience with non-Arabs was with his Soviet military advisors, and he reportedly has only traveled outside of the Middle East on two occasions—a brief trip to Paris in 1976 and another trip to Moscow. Moreover, he is surrounded by sycophants, who are cowed by Saddam's well-founded reputation for brutality and who are afraid to contradict him. He has ruthlessly eliminated perceived threats to his power and equates criticism with disloyalty. In 1979, when he fully assumed the reins of Iraqi leadership, one of his first acts was to execute 21 senior officials whose loyalty he questioned. He had his senior officials form the execution squads. In 1982, when the war with Iran was going very badly for Iraq and Saddam wished to terminate hostilities, Khomeini, who was personally fixated on

Saddam, insisted there could be no peace until Saddam was removed from power. At a cabinet meeting, Saddam asked his ministers to candidly give their advice, and the Minister of Health suggested Saddam temporarily step down, to resume the presidency after peace had been established. Saddam reportedly thanked him for his candor and ordered his arrest. His wife pleaded for her husband's return. The next day, Saddam returned her husband's body to her in a black canvas bag, chopped into pieces. This powerfully concentrated the attention of the other ministers who were unanimous in their insistence that Saddam remain in power. Thus he is deprived of the check of wise counsel from his leadership circle. This combination of limited international -perspective and a sycophantic leadership circle has in the past led him to miscalculate.

Saddam's pursuit of power for himself and Iraq is boundless. In fact, in his mind, the destiny of Saddam and Iraq are one and indistinguishable. His exalted self-concept is fused with his Ba'thist political ideology. Ba'thist dreams will be realized when the Arab nation is unified under one strong leader. In Saddam's mind, he is destined for that role.

In pursuit of his messianic dreams, there is no evidence he is constrained by conscience; his only loyalty is to Saddam Hussein. When there is an obstacle in his revolutionary path, Saddam eliminates it, whether it is a previously loyal subordinate or a previously supportive country. In pursuing his goals, Saddam uses aggression instrumentally. He uses whatever force is necessary, and will, if he deems it expedient, go to extremes of violence, including the use of weapons of mass destruction. His unconstrained aggression is instrumental in pursuing his goals, but it is at the same time defensive aggression, for his grandiose facade masks underlying insecurity. While Hussein is not psychotic, he has a strong paranoid orientation. He is ready for retaliation, and, not without reason, sees himself as surrounded by enemies. But he ignores his role in creating those enemies, and righteously threatens his targets. The conspiracy theories he spins are not merely for popular consumption in the Arab world, but genuinely reflect his paranoid mindset. He is convinced that the United States, Israel, and Iran have been in league for the purpose of eliminating him, and finds a persuasive chain of evidence for this conclusion. His minister of information, Latif Jassim, who is responsible for propaganda and public statements, probably helps reinforce Saddam's paranoid disposition and in a sense is the implementer of his paranoia.

It is this political personality constellation-messianic ambition for unlimited power, absence of conscience, unconstrained aggression, and a paranoid outlook-which makes Saddam so dangerous. Conceptualized as malignant narcissism, this is the personality configuration of the destructive charismatic, who unifies and rallies his downtrodden supporters by blaming outside enemies. While Saddam is not charismatic, this psychological stance is the basis of Saddam's particular appeal to the Palestinians who see him as a strongman who shares their intense anti-Zionism and will champion their cause.

Saddam Hussein genuinely sees himself as one of the great leaders of history, ranking himself with his heroes: Nasser, Castro, Tito, Ho Chi Minh, and Mao Zedong, each of whom he admires for adapting socialism to his environment, free of foreign domination. Saddam sees himself as transforming his society. He believes youth must be “fashioned” to “safeguard the future” and that Iraqi children must be transformed into a “radiating light that will expel” traditional family backwardness. Like Mao, Saddam has encouraged youth to inform on their parents’ antirevolutionary activity. As God-like status was ascribed to Mao, and giant pictures and statues of him were placed throughout China, so too giant pictures and statues of Saddam abound in Iraq. Asked about this cult of personality, Saddam shrugs and says he “cannot help it if that is what they want to do.”

Saddam Hussein is so consumed with his messianic mission that he probably over-reads the degree of his support in the rest of the Arab world. He psychologically assumes that many in the Arab world, especially the downtrodden, share his views and see him as their hero. He was probably genuinely surprised at the nearly unanimous condemnation of his invasion of Kuwait.

SADDAM AT THE CROSSROADS

It is not by accident that Saddam Hussein has survived for more than two decades as his nation’s preeminent leader in this tumultuous part of the world. While he is driven by dreams of glory, and his political perspective is narrow and distorted, he is a shrewd tactician who has a sense of patience. Able to justify extremes of aggression on the basis of revolutionary needs, if the aggression is counterproductive, he has shown a pattern of reversing his course when he has miscalculated, waiting until a later day to achieve his revolutionary destiny. His drive for power is not diminished by these reversals, but only deflected.

Saddam Hussein is a ruthless political calculator who will go to whatever lengths are necessary to achieve his goals. But he is not a martyr and his survival in power—with his dignity intact—is his highest priority. Saddam has recently been characterized by Soviet Foreign Minister Primakov and others as suffering from a “Masada complex”, preferring a martyr’s death to yielding. This is assuredly not the case, for Saddam has no wish to be a martyr, and survival is his number one priority. A self-proclaimed revolutionary pragmatist, he does not wish a conflict in which Iraq will be grievously damaged and his stature as a leader destroyed.

While Saddam’s advisors’ reluctance to disagree with Saddam’s policies contributes to the potential for miscalculation, nevertheless his advisors by providing information and assessments are able to make significant inputs to the accuracy of Saddam’s evaluation of Iraq’s political/military situation. Moreover, despite their reluctance to disagree, the current situation is so grave that several officials reportedly expressed their reservations about remaining in Kuwait. Saddam has now dismissed a number of senior officials in the last month, replacing them with family members and

known loyalists. He replaced the Petroleum Minister Chalabi, a highly sophisticated technical expert, with his son-in-law, Hussein Kamal. Moreover, he replaced his Army Chief of Staff General Nizar Khazraji, a professional military man, with General Hussein Rashid, commander of the Republican Guards and a Tikriti. Tough and extremely competent, Rashid is both intensely ideological and fiercely loyal. It is as if Saddam is drawing in the wagons. This is a measure of the stress on Saddam, suggesting his siege mentality is intensifying. The fiercely defiant rhetoric is another indicator of the stress on Saddam, for the more threatened Saddam feels, the more threatening he becomes.

While Saddam appreciates the danger of the current crisis, it does provide the opportunity to defy the hated outsiders, a strong value in his Ba'ath ideology. He will continue to attempt to cast the conflict as a struggle between Iraq and the United States, and even more personally as a struggle between the gladiators Saddam Hussein versus George Bush. When the struggle becomes thus personalized, it enhances Saddam's reputation as a courageous strongman willing to defy the imperialist United States.

President Bush well understands the importance of not personalizing the struggle. His depicting the conflict as the unified civilized world against Saddam Hussein hits a tender nerve for Saddam. Saddam has his eye on his role in history and places great stock in world opinion. If he were to conclude that his status as a world leader was threatened, it would have important constraining effects on him. Thus the prospect of being expelled from the United Nations and Iraq being castigated as a rogue nation outside the community of nations would be very threatening to Saddam. The overwhelming majority supporting the most recent Security Council resolution must have confronted Saddam with the damage he is inflicting on his stature as a leader despite his defiant rhetoric dismissing the resolutions of the United Nations as reflecting the United States' control of the international organization.

Defiant rhetoric has been a hallmark of this conflict and lends itself to misinterpretation across cultural boundaries. The Arab world places great stock on expressive language. The language of courage is a hallmark of leadership, and there is great value attached to the very act of expressing brave resolve against the enemy in and of itself. Even though the statement is made in response to the United States, when Saddam speaks it is to multiple audiences; much of his language is solipsistic and designed to demonstrate his courage and resolve to the Iraqi people and the Arab world. There is no necessary connection between courageous verbal expression and the act threatened. Nasser gained great stature from his fiery rhetoric threatening to make the sea red with Israeli blood. By the same token, Saddam probably hears the Western words of President Bush through a Middle Eastern filter. When a statement of resolve and intent is made by President Bush in a public statement, Saddam may well discount the expressed intent to act. This underlines the importance of a private channel to communicate clearly and unambiguously. The mission by Secretary Baker will afford the opportunity

to resolve any misunderstandings on Saddam's part concerning the strength of resolve and intentions of the United States and the international coalition.

Throughout his 22 years at the helm of Iraq, Saddam Hussein has languished in obscurity, overshadowed by the heroic stature of other Middle Eastern leaders such as Anwar Sadat and Ayatollah Khomeini. Now, for the first time in his entire career, Saddam is exactly where he believes he was destined to be, a world-class political actor on center stage commanding world events, with the entire world's attention focussed upon him. When his rhetoric is threatening, the price of oil rises precipitously and the Dow Jones average plummets. He is demonstrating to the Arab masses that he is an Arab strongman with the courage to defy the West and expel foreign influences.

Now that he is at the very center of international attention, his appetite for glory has been stimulated all the more. The glory-seeking Saddam will not easily yield the spotlight of international attention. He wants to remain on center stage, but not at the expense of his power and his prestige. Saddam will only withdraw if he calculates that he can do so with his power and his honor intact and that the drama in which he is starring will continue.

Honor and reputation must be interpreted in an Arab context. Saddam has already achieved considerable honor in the eyes of the Arab masses for having the courage to stand up to the West. It should be remembered that, even though Egypt militarily lost the 1973 war with Israel, Sadat became a hero to the Arab world for his willingness to attack and initially force back the previously invincible forces of Israel. Qadhafi mounted an air attack when the United States crossed the so-called "line of death." Even though his jets were destroyed in the ensuing conflict, Qadhafi's status was raised in the Arab world. Indeed, he thanked the United States for making him a hero. Thus Saddam can find honor in the present situation. His past history reveals a remarkable capacity to find face saving justification when reversing his course in very difficult circumstances. Nevertheless, it is important not to insist on total capitulation and humiliation, for this could drive Saddam into a corner and make it impossible for him to reverse his course. He will only withdraw from Kuwait if he believes he can survive with his power and his dignity intact.

By the same token, he will only reverse his present course if his power and reputation are threatened. This requires a posture of strength, firmness and clarity of purpose by a unified civilized world, demonstrably willing to use force if necessary. The only language Saddam Hussein understands is the language of power. Without this demonstrable willingness to use force, even if the sanctions are biting deeply, Saddam is quite capable of putting his population through a sustained period of hardship.

It is crucial to demonstrate unequivocally to Saddam Hussein that unless he withdraws, his career as a world class political actor will be ended. The recent announcement of a major escalation of the force level was presumably designed to drive that message home. The U.N. resolution authorizing the use of force unless Iraq

withdraws by January 15 is a particularly powerful message because of the large majority supporting the resolution.

The message almost certainly has been received. In the wake of the announcement of the increase in force level, Saddam intensified his request for “deep negotiations”, seeking a way out in which he can preserve his power and his reputation. That President Bush has signaled his willingness to send Secretary Baker to meet one-on-one with Saddam is an extremely important step. In the interim, the shrewdly manipulative Saddam will continue to attempt to divide the international coalition.

Considering himself a revolutionary pragmatist, Saddam is at heart a survivor. If in response to the unified demonstration of strength and resolve he does retreat and reverse his course, this will only be a temporary deflection of his unbounded drive for power. It is a certainty that he will return at a later date, stronger than ever, unless firm measures are taken to contain him. This underlines the importance of strategic planning beyond the immediate crisis, especially considering his progress toward acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. If blocked in his overt aggression, he can be expected to pursue his goals covertly through intensified support of terrorism.

Saddam will not go down to the last flaming bunker if he has a way out, but he can be extremely dangerous and will stop at nothing if he is backed into a corner. If he believes his very survival as a world class political actor is threatened, Saddam can respond with unrestrained aggression, using whatever weapons and resources are at his disposal, in what would surely be a tragic and bloody final act.

AFTERWORD²

In the political psychology profile prepared for the congressional hearings on the Gulf crisis in December, it was observed that Saddam was by no means a martyr and was indeed the quintessential survivor. The key to his survival in power for 22 years was his capacity to reverse his course when events demonstrated that he had miscalculated. We believed he could again reverse himself if he concluded that unless he did so his power base and reputation would be destroyed, and if by so doing he could preserve his power base and reputation.

How can it be, then, that this self-described revolutionary pragmatist, faced by an overwhelming array of military power that would surely deal a mortal blow to his nation, entered into and persisted in a violent confrontational course?

Cultural factors probably contributed to his calculation and miscalculation. Saddam may well have heard President Bush’s Western words of intent through a Middle Eastern filter and calculated that he was bluffing. It is also possible he downgraded the magnitude of the threat, likening the threatened response to the characteristic Arab hyperbole. Even though he expected a massive air strike, he undoubtedly was surprised by the magnitude of the destruction wrought on his forces.

But more importantly, the dynamic of the crisis affected Saddam. What began as an act of naked aggression toward Kuwait was transformed into the culminating act of the drama of his life. Although he had previously shown little concern for the Palestinian people, the shrewdly manipulative Saddam had wrapped himself and his invasion of Kuwait in the Palestinian flag. The response of the Palestinians was overwhelming. They saw Saddam as their hope and their salvation, standing up defiantly and courageously to the United States to force a just settlement of their cause. This caught the imagination of the masses throughout the Arab world and their shouts of approval fed his already swollen ego as he went on a defiant roll.

Intoxicated by the elixir of power and the acclaim of the Palestinians and the radical Arab masses, Saddam may well have been on a euphoric high and optimistically overestimated his chances for success. For Saddam's heroic self-image was engaged as never before. He was fulfilling the messianic goal that had obsessed him--and eluded him--throughout his life. He was actualizing his self-concept as leader of all the Arab peoples, the legitimate heir of Nebuchadnezzar, Saladin, and especially Nasser.

His psychology and his policy options became captives of his rhetoric. He became so absolutist in his commitment to the Palestinian cause--to not yielding Kuwait until there was justice for the Palestinian people, and U.N. resolutions 242 and 338 had been complied with, that it would have been extremely difficult for him to reverse himself without being dishonored--and to lose face in the Arab world was to be without authority. Unlike past reversals, these absolutist pronouncements were in the full spotlight of international attention. Saddam had in effect painted himself into a corner. The Bush administration's insistence on "no face-saving" only intensified this dilemma.

Not only, then, had Saddam concluded that to reverse himself would be to lose his honor, but he also probably doubted that his power base would be preserved if he left Kuwait. Saddam doubted that the aggressive intention of the United States would stop at the border of Iraq. For years he had been convinced that a U.S.-Iran-Israeli conspiracy was in place to destroy Iraq and remove Saddam from power.

Earlier, Foreign Minister Aziz had indicated "everything was on the table," but by late December the semblance of diplomatic flexibility had disappeared, and Saddam seemed intent on challenging the coalition's ultimatum. Saddam, in my estimation, had concluded that he could not reverse himself and withdraw without being dishonored. He had concluded that he needed to enter conflict to demonstrate his courage and to affirm his claim to pan-Arab leadership.

Saddam expected a massive air campaign and planned to survive it. In the succeeding ground campaign, he hoped to engage the U.S. "Vietnam complex." As he had demonstrated in the Iran-Iraq War, his battle-hardened troops, he believed, could absorb massive casualties, whereas the weak-willed United States would not have the stomach for this, and a political-military stalemate would ensue.

By demonstrating that he had the courage to stand up against the most powerful nation on earth, Saddam's credentials as pan-Arab leader would be consolidated and he would win great honor. In the Arab world, having the courage to fight a superior foe can bring political victory, even through a military defeat. Sadat had won great honor in 1973 by his leading the attack against previously invincible Israel, even though Egypt lost the military conflict. Indeed, his enhanced prestige permitted him to approach Israel as equal negotiating partner, and ultimately led to the Camp David Accords. Saddam's political hero and model, Nasser, gained great honor for attacking the imperialists in the 1956 Suez campaign, even though he lost.

Saddam hoped to consolidate his place in history as Nasser's heir by bravely confronting the U.S.-led coalition. On the third day of the air campaign, his minister of information, Latif Jassim, declared victory. To the astounded press he explained that the coalition expected Iraq to crumble in 2 days. Having already survived the massive air strikes for 3 days, the Iraqis were accordingly victorious, and each further day would only magnify the scope of their victory.

It was revealed in January that under Saddam's opulent palace was a mammoth bunker, fortified with steel and pre-stressed concrete. The architecture of this complex is Saddam's psychological architecture: a defiant, grandiose facade resting on the well-fortified foundation of a siege mentality. Attacked on all sides, Saddam remains besieged and defiant, using whatever aggression is necessary to consolidate his control and ensure his survival.

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Comment: Thus the attempt to coerce Saddam into withdrawing from Kuwait with the prospect of overwhelming force insufficiently took into account that he could only reverse himself if he believed he could do so without losing face and would retain power, a double contingency, and in the event the insistence on "no face saving" guaranteed a humiliating capitulation, which in Saddam's world would translate as not only loss of power but loss of life. Moreover, the impact of ascent to the pinnacle of recognition as an important world leader was insufficiently weighed. At last he was where he was supposed to be, a recognized powerful world leader. He was the hero of the Palestinian people. It was "dreams of glory" fulfilled, an explosion of narcissism. . The prospect of him meekly withdrawing to the status quo ante was psychologically impossible.

The run-up to the 2003 conflict insufficiently considered his personality and political behavior in two regards and was based on two flawed assumptions.

1. Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden were plotting together. In the first place, both Saddam and Osama bin Laden were bitter rivals, each intensely narcissistic, each striving to be the recognized leader of the Arab/Muslim world, with Osama bin Laden on the one hand seeking a Wahabi Sunni theocracy, while Saddam was demonstrably a secular modernizing Arab leader, despite his late pretense to Muslim piety. They were bitter rivals, and the premise that they were cooperating was on the face of it absurd.
2. It was assumed that Saddam would give his assumed nuclear weapons to terrorists—"the smoking gun will be a mushroom cloud." Moreover, the notion that it was imperative to invade to avert Saddam using weapons of mass destruction or turning them over to a terrorist group was

equally without foundation,. On the basis of analysis of his political personality. In the first place, he was fundamentally a prudent man, although he often miscalculated to be sure. There would be no prospect of his proactively taking on the world's remaining superpower. Might he use such weapons as a last resort in a conventional military conflict when he was backed into a corner? Yes, he could in this contingency lash out against US troops. But particularly absurd was the premise that he might turn over WMD to a terrorist group out of his direct control. . Saddam was a very prudent man, and knew to a fare thee well that if terrorists, who had no fixed address, were given such weapons and used them and they were traced back to Saddam that Iraq would be incinerated. He would never give up control over such powerful and dangerous weapons.

Concluding Note

The Post Cold War security environment is inherently unstable and unpredictable, with crises frequently precipitated by rogue leaders. The relatively stable super-power rivalry has been replaced by regional conflicts often instigated by previously unknown or poorly understood leaders. There has been a proliferation of destructive power in the hands of leadership with hostile anti-Western agendas, such as Iran and North Korea. Several of these leaders are seeking or already have WMD. To counter effectively the range of threats in the new post-cold war security environment requires accurate nuanced assessments of the personality and political behavior of adversary leaders and their strategic culture.

ENDNOTES

¹. This profile was presented in testimony before the hearings on the Gulf crisis of the House Armed Services Committee on December 5, 1990 and of the House Foreign Affairs Committee on December 12.

². Appeared in *Political Psychology*, Vol. 12 (4), 1991, pp. 723-725. Draws upon an article which appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, 26 January, 1991.