

we had done everything possible to avert conflict and Saddam was wholly at fault.

GEORGE BUSH

On the morning of August 2, Barbara and I were still in bed with the papers when Brent arrived just before 5:00. Visibly exhausted, he filled me in on the emerging details of the invasion and the discussions he'd had the night before. Iraq's official story was that it had moved in on the pretext that there had been a coup and that its "leaders," purporting to be the "legitimate" government in Kuwait, had requested their help. Our immediate options were limited. We had not yet officially been asked for help by the Kuwaitis or Saudis, but it was important to display promptly our support. I ordered our already alerted warships at the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean to head for the Persian Gulf. Our next requirement was to get air forces into the area. Brent explained that Bob Kimmit was already checking with the Saudis to obtain approval for sending an F-15 squadron. He handed me an Executive Order freezing the assets of Iraq and Kuwait in the United States. I signed it. At least we could take some economic measures.

After I showered, I headed for the Oval Office. At 6:30, Tom Pickering phoned to report on the UN Security Council's actions. Like Brent, he had been up all night working through the details of a resolution with the Kuwaitis and the other Council members. By morning, the Council had voted 14-0 in favor of UNSC Resolution 660, condemning Iraq's aggression, demanding that it withdraw its troops from Kuwait, and demanding that the dispute be resolved by negotiations. I was disappointed and concerned that Saudi Arabia's neighbor Yemen had abstained, probably in an effort to curry favor with Iraq. I knew President Ali Abdullah Saleh and didn't feel he would recklessly side with Saddam. Still, the UN action was good news. The Soviets had supported us, and that was step one in building opposition.

At about 7:00, Brent arrived in the Oval Office and at 7:30 Bill Webster and Hank Applebaum (the CIA briefer) appeared with a bundle of papers to give the daily CIA general briefing. During it, and with Brent on the line, I called Jim Baker, who was in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on a side trip from an arms control meeting with Shevardnadze in Irkutsk. Jim had been warned of the ominous signs in the Gulf and had already spoken with Shevardnadze about the danger of an invasion. Shevardnadze said he believed, as we had earlier, that Saddam was simply "strong-arming" the Kuwaitis. With the news of the invasion, Jim had urged the Soviets to join an arms embargo of Iraq, and Shevardnadze departed for Moscow to consult with Gorbachev.

A little after 8:00, I joined Brent and the rest of the NSC in the Cabinet Room. In the "photo-op" just before our discussion began, I spoke briefly to reporters, who had been speculating wildly about what we were going to do. Among the forest of boom and hand-held microphones, I was careful in my remarks. I condemned the invasion and outlined the steps we had taken, as well as the fact that this was an exploratory meeting concerned with reviewing all options for defending our interests in the Gulf. Right off, Helen Thomas of UPI asked me whether I was considering intervention as one of those options.

I did not want my first public comments to threaten the use of American military might, so I said I was not contemplating intervention, and, even if I knew we were going to use force, I would not announce it in a press conference. The truth is, at that moment I had no idea what our options were. I did know for sure that the aggression had to be stopped, and Kuwait's sovereignty restored. We had a big job ahead of us in shaping opinion at home and abroad and could little afford bellicose mistakes at the start. What I hoped to convey was an open mind about how we might handle the situation until I learned all the facts.

#### BRENT SCOWCROFT

The President's comment that he was not contemplating intervention has been taken by some to indicate he was passive or indecisive about the notion of doing anything about the Iraqi invasion until Margaret Thatcher "put some stiffening in his spine" at their meeting later that day. Such speculation is wrong, although his choice of words was not felicitous. His language was picked with two thoughts in mind: First, don't say anything at this early point which would telegraph his thinking. Second, make clear that the NSC meeting was not a decision session but a discussion of the situation and options for reacting.

The NSC meeting was a bit chaotic. We really did not yet have a clear picture of what was happening on the ground, and the participants focused mainly on the economic impact of the invasion and what Saddam would do next. Webster outlined the extent of the invasion, and some of the responses from other countries. The Arab League had passed a resolution condemning Iraq, but there was no call for armed action. Moscow had still not said anything officially. NATO and Japan had called for Iraq's withdrawal. "The stock market in Tokyo is down; oil prices are increasing," said Webster. "The British have declared a grave threat to regional peace. It appears there was no military objective but Kuwait."

Bob Kimmit, sitting in for Baker and Eagleburger, spelled out the

diplomatic steps we had already taken. State had called in the Iraqi ambassador, who claimed to know nothing more than what Baghdad had told the world. Diplomatic posts had all been briefed, and the Europeans were already working with us. No one was supporting Iraq. We had sent out cables asking others to join our economic measures. The British were in a cabinet meeting debating what to do. We were also asking the Soviets, French, Italians, and Chinese to stop arms shipments to Iraq. There were no reports of harm to any of the 3,800 American civilians and 130 embassy staff in Kuwait, or the 500 Americans and 42 embassy personnel in Baghdad.

Nicholas Brady pointed out that the source of Iraq's power was its oil. Without it, Baghdad would have no money to keep its military going. He proposed that we shut off Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil and ask other countries to make up the difference. Cheney added that if only economic and political sanctions were in effect, Iraq could become a major oil power overnight. "The rest of the world badly needs oil," said Dick. "They have little interest in poor Kuwait. It may be difficult to organize a good package of economic sanctions."

The discussion moved to the effects of cutting off oil, and then Colin Powell introduced our military options. "For several weeks the CINC [General Norman Schwarzkopf] and the [Joint Chiefs of Staff] have prepared military options should the need arise," he said. Schwarzkopf, Commander-in-Chief of Central Command (CENTCOM) and responsible for implementing any military response in the region, had been invited to the meeting as well. He now described what was at hand for air strikes, a naval bombardment of Iraq, when they could act, and also how quickly we could move forces to defend Saudi Arabia. While we had a few ships in the Gulf that could hit some targets within hours, it would take a few days to get a broader force prepared. We had F-15s and F-16s on standby and they could be deployed to defend Saudi Arabia. However, this would require that they be based there. So far, the Saudis had said no.

Schwarzkopf added that there was also a rehearsed plan for defending the Saudi oil region, using forces in the area, and he was confident we could blunt an Iraqi attack there. If we wanted an air campaign against Iraq itself, however, we would need far more forces and more time. We were facing over a million Iraqi troops. It would take about twenty days to deploy sufficient aircraft and carrier battle groups.

"Let's step back," said Scowcroft. "The most significant option economically is oil. . . . There are some things we can do: shut off the two pipelines [through Turkey and Saudi Arabia], tell tankers going into Kuwait to stop—in theory it's easy, but in practice it will be difficult. . . ."

We should mount an embargo of Kuwaiti and Iraqi oil purchases." A long debate ensued over the effects of disrupting oil, and which countries would be affected. President Bush asked Brady to get an analysis on the issue and asked about international economic sanctions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which provides for mandatory observance by members. Pickering said we were ready to propose the matter at the UN. "International sanctions will give us security cover," said the President. "They will give some spine to Saudi Arabia and others to take difficult actions, like closing the pipeline."

Kimmit reported that State was reviewing the question of evacuating Americans from Kuwait and Baghdad. They had also discussed breaking off diplomatic relations, but decided against recommending it. The safety of American citizens was at stake, and we needed our officials in Baghdad to protect them.

President Bush suggested we ask Congress to pass resolutions imposing unilateral sanctions, commending the UN action, and supporting our responses. But we needed more information, he said. We didn't want to make statements committing us to anything until we understood the situation.

"Saudi Arabia and others will cut and run if we are weak," warned Cheney. Powell asked if we should declare that Saudi Arabia was a vital interest to the United States. "I think there is no choice," he said. "The question is how do you lay it out to the public."

"I agree," said the President, adding that we could not overlook getting the other major powers involved either. So far the reaction of the Soviets had been good. "We can get them to kick in," he said. "That is, no adventurism, but get them to agree to some action. US-Soviet relations are good, but we don't want to overlook the Soviet desire for access to warm water ports. We don't want to resurrect that. Maybe something positive like a joint statement." The next step was at the UN and the Security Council. "In New York we should press to put the heat on Saudi Arabia and the others. . . . Let's get [US] sanctions in place before noon."

#### BRENT SCOWCROFT

I was frankly appalled at the undertone of the discussion, which suggested resignation to the invasion and even adaptation to a *fait accompli*. There was a huge gap between those who saw what was happening as the major crisis of our time and those who treated it as the crisis *du jour*. The remarks tended to skip over the enormous stake the United States had in the situation, or the ramifications of the aggression on the emerging post-Cold War world. While some statements seemed to reflect the