

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

Historically, the Soviet Union and Russia had been virtually indistinguishable. Now Yeltsin for the first time was drawing a distinction and asserting Russian interests against the Soviet Union.

As in the old czarist empire, Russia and Russians formed the geographical and political heart of the republics and their imposed union. Russia was by far the largest republic in both territory and population—with close to 140 million people, over 80 percent of whom were ethnic Russians. As Gorbachev often pointed out, Russians also formed substantial minorities in some of the other republics. Russia was inextricably associated with the political system of the Soviet Union, as well as the dominance of the Communist Party over the republics and the nationalities they represented. What emerged in the 1920s as the Soviet Union was not only the child of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, but also a powerful echo of the old empire. In the throes of those upheavals, along with the post-World War I settlements, the empire had broken up, some of its nationalities asserting and briefly enjoying independence and sovereignty after centuries of Russian rule, only to be bloodily recaptured by revolutionary Russia in the name of international communism. Lenin and Stalin brutally imposed a union of republics—ostensibly a free association of socialist states each governed by its own one-party system, but all controlled by what was then still called the Russian Communist Party. They began a calculated and systematic campaign to remove or repress nationalism and national cultures—including the Russian—in the hope of establishing a broader, socialist identity.

BRENT SCOWCROFT

In retrospect, when Yeltsin started to reject the authority of the Union and the Party and to reassert Russian political and economic control over the republic's own affairs, he was attacking the very basis of the Soviet state, shaking its political structure to the roots. In withdrawing Russian support, Yeltsin, perhaps at this point unintentionally, may have helped remove the very means by which the other republics were forcefully bound to the Soviet center, emboldening them to pull further away. Without Russia, the ability of the center to enforce its will on the other republics would be cast into doubt—although ultimately much still hung on the loyalty of the military and KGB forces.

Gorbachev may not have recognized the depth of the smoldering resentment of national groups to Soviet authority, or the full threat of the nationalities problem to the survival of the Union. Apparently, he confi-

dently (or naively) believed that they saw their economic and political futures wrapped in the Union and that the republics, and the nationalities they represented, would remain in the voluntary association set up under the new Union Treaty. He seemed convinced (or at least hoped) that, once reforms were introduced, resentment of the center would fade. Instead, nationalists found in Gorbachev's reforms an opportunity to challenge the center. In some ways, the United States may have made the same kind of mistake in reading the situation. For years we had tended to assume the Soviets had had more success in stamping out parochial nationalism than proved to be the case.

Moscow's political, economic, and social problems continued to multiply, and no leader was emerging with answers to any one of them, let alone a coherent program that addressed them all. The Soviet Union was, we thought, in a prerevolutionary condition. I summarized the situation in a March 7 memo to the President:

There are any number of events, particularly during the next month, that could touch off a conflagration. Coal miners threaten to strike. . . . and the Communist party is preparing to force recalcitrant republics to participate in the all-Union referendum on March 17. The more visible and aggressive posture of the KGB, the police, and the army could spark violence at any time. The already dysfunctional economy is likely to get worse in the next few months and it is not clear how much longer Soviet citizens can muddle through and feed themselves. No one knows for sure where the army stands. . . . The situation in the Soviet Union is so bad that it is hard to believe that explosion can be avoided. . . .

It was the most difficult context in which to steer a steady course in US-Soviet relations. We had to sort out our priorities. We suggested three to the President: nail down what we had accomplished in the last two years; push cautiously ahead on the US-Soviet agenda, recognizing and accepting that progress was likely to be slow; avoid involvement in Soviet domestic political wars. After so much rapid progress, the window of opportunity appeared to be closing. It was time to consolidate our gains.*

*Late in March, Condi Rice left the White House to return to Stanford. Ed Hewett, one of the top-ranked scholars on the Soviet Union, replaced her. I knew Ed from many conferences and joint appearances, and his views were solid and balanced. My only hesitation was that he had always operated in the academic world of total independence. I was unsure of his ability to make the transition to the bureaucratic world of the White House and the give-and-take environment of the interagency process. I needn't have worried. Ed took immediately to his new circumstances, and his superb intellectual qualities were matched by an awesome bureaucratic competence. He was the perfect man for the job during the complicated final travails of the Soviet Union. Tragically, Ed was stricken with cancer, but he continued to work right up to the end, which came in January 1993.