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WHEN POLICY FAILS: How the Buck Was Passed When Kuwait Was Invaded

By Bernard Roshco

Discussion Paper D-15
December 1992

The Joan Shorenstein Barone Center

PRESS · POLITICS

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Harvard University
John F. Kennedy School of Government

INTRODUCTION

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Bernard Roshco is a journalist, a scholar, a former government official and once a fellow at the Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. He came here in January, 1992, his mind filled with questions about the Bush Administration's policy towards Iraq prior to the invasion of Kuwait in August, 1990. We all remembered Ambassador April Glaspie's crucial meeting with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein days before he ordered his troops into Kuwait, but why did the meeting have to be so crucial? Why didn't her superiors in the State Department and the White House give her clearer instructions? Why did President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker misread Hussein's motivations so badly? What was their responsibility? What role did the press play in covering the cover-up, which followed? Roshco is not one to rush to conclusions. He was Phi Beta Kappa at the City College of New York and a gifted sociologist at Columbia University, where he got his M.S. and Ph.D. For a time he worked for *The National Observer* before becoming editor of *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Since 1987, he's been a member of the board of directors of the Roper Public Opinion Center at the University of Connecticut, and from 1979–91, he was director of the Office of Opinion Analysis and Plans in the Bureau of Public Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. He's written many scholarly articles in addition to "Newsmaking," his clear analysis published by the University of Chicago Press in 1975. After reviewing the evidence—the same evidence that was available to any reporter—Roshco tried to answer the questions that were in his mind about U.S. policy towards Iraq. He succeeded masterfully. "When Policy Fails: How the Buck Was Passed When Kuwait Was Invaded" is an insightful analysis not only of scapegoating at the highest levels of the Bush Administration but also of the reporters covering the story. The scapegoating could not have worked if the reporting had been sharp, inquisitive, directed. Roshco's analysis cuts to the heart of the importance of an aggressive press in protecting the people from governmental malfeasance. With each passing day, we know more about the story. The new Clinton Administration will undoubtedly be faced with the need to make decisions relating to its predecessor's mistakes; it will also be faced with similar challenges of diplomacy and policy. How will it respond? Officials of the new administration would be wise to read this report.

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WHEN POLICY FAILS: HOW THE BUCK WAS PASSED WHEN KUWAIT WAS INVADED

Saddam Hussein Gives Two Reporters A Lesson in Diplomacy

As Iraqi tanks rumbled over the Kuwaiti border during the pre-dawn hours of August 2, 1990, April C. Glaspie, then U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, had the bad luck to be away from her embassy. In London, on her way to the United States, she heard the news.

The Ambassador became the personification of failure. At a one-on-one meeting with Saddam, her critics alleged, just one week before Kuwait was blitzkrieged, she was soft when she should have been tough. Instead of confronting Saddam, she placated him, and he took her message as a green light to invade. Her performance was criticized by members of Congress, members of the press, and anonymous sources in the State Department.

Eight months after the invasion, Ambassador Glaspie finally offered her version of what she said to Saddam. Testifying first before members of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and, the next day, before members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, she recounted how, despite her forceful representations that the U.S. would "defend its vital interests," a "stupid" Saddam was not persuaded that invading Kuwait would have dire consequences for him.

Congressmen who questioned her were not aware of the extent or diversity of the U.S. government's economic and military relationships with Iraq before Kuwait was invaded. Most of the reporters covering the Glaspie story were unaware of U.S. policy toward Iraq during the 1980's. The complex details, buried in classified documents, did not begin to seep out until almost a year after Ambassador Glaspie testified.

Even without this knowledge, Congress and the press should have raised questions that placed Ambassador Glaspie's role in perspective: Who was responsible for the policy toward Iraq that finally led to one meeting being so seemingly critical? Why did the ambassador's superiors not provide her with instructions that made her message more persuasive? More to the point, why had not the President, or the Secretary of State, played a larger role in dissuading Saddam from invading Kuwait?

Addressing State Department personnel in August 1992, as he made ready to direct Mr. Bush's 1992 Presidential campaign, Mr. Baker described Saddam Hussein as "a ruthless madman with weapons of mass destruction." President Bush and Secretary Baker had all of the 1980's to become familiar with Saddam's regime and ambitions. Why did it require the invasion of Kuwait to make the Bush Administration conclude that Saddam was a "ruthless madman?"

A long-term, artfully contrived, stubbornly pursued, and secretive U.S. policy collapsed when Kuwait was invaded. Congressional investigators have pried enough information out of classified files to reveal how President George Bush, Secretary of State James Baker, and their key aides were responsible for shaping a policy toward Iraq that, intending to co-opt Saddam Hussein by rewarding him for good behavior, succeeded principally in bolstering Iraq's military capability and inspiring Saddam to use it.

When Kuwait was invaded, President Bush, Secretary of State Baker, and their top aides reversed course, covered up, made excuses, and created a scapegoat. The Persian Gulf War was President Bush's response to his own miscalculations. He accepted credit for the lightning victory while he and his principal foreign-policy collaborators concealed the extent to which they had misread Saddam Hussein.

Responsibility for the failure of Iraq policy was never accepted by any policy-maker who could pass the buck. Wherever possible, it was passed down, the most publicized instance being Ambassador Glaspie. Reporters — including members of the State Department press corps — contributed to this evasion by ignoring, or not understanding, who makes policy. Such ignorance is illustrated by two journalists who interviewed Saddam Hussein:

On October 29, 1990, almost three months after Iraqi troops occupied Kuwait, the Cable News Network (CNN) broadcast an interview from Baghdad with Saddam Hussein. Two CNN correspondents, Bernard Shaw and Richard Blystone, did the questioning.

They probed an issue that preoccupied the American press: what words passed between the President of Iraq and the U.S. Ambassador when the two met a week before Kuwait was invaded? How firmly had the Ambassador warned the President of Iraq not to use his military forces to attack the neighbor he had been attacking verbally for months?

Blystone: Let me ask, Mr. President — on the twenty-sixth of July, you had a meeting

with the American Ambassador, April Glaspie, who apparently did not understand what you were trying to tell her. If she had reacted differently to what you had to say, would you have acted differently? And, a secondary question to that, were you surprised at what happened after your invasion of Kuwait?

Blystone crammed his query with assumptions — that Saddam revealed his intention to invade Kuwait, that Ambassador Glaspie didn't comprehend the import of what she was allegedly told and therefore didn't respond with an adequate warning. Saddam asked Blystone to be more specific about what the Ambassador allegedly misunderstood:

Saddam Hussein: . . . Why don't we have a straight question put to me without beating about the bush? Ask me quickly, ask me directly, what you want to know with regard to that particular issue, and then I will answer it.
Blystone: Well, briefly put, do you think April Glaspie understood what you were saying?
Saddam Hussein: . . . I was very clear in that meeting and expressed myself in lucid and clear Arabic, and I had an interpreter who did his best to convey my ideas in as clear English as was possible. What I dealt with was not — was no secret. All I talked about was the way we saw things and our own assessment of the behavior and the conduct of the United States towards Iraq in particular and towards the Arab nation in general.
Blystone: But if she had said something like, "If you set one foot into Kuwait, we will be there with 200,000 troops and thousands of tanks," that would have been a slightly different answer.

Blystone postulated a Glaspie counter-threat to a presumed Saddam threat to invade Kuwait. Saddam Hussein disabused him.

Saddam Hussein: I didn't say to her in that meeting that we were going into Kuwait for her to respond by saying that if we did, or if we had, then the United States would be prepared to bring the forces — or 200,000 soldiers and the tanks and so on. . .

Saddam explained to an American reporter why an American ambassador was not in a position to threaten him.

Saddam Hussein: . . . suppose for argument's sake, that I were to tell her of any plans which we have contemplated . . . *do you expect that an ambassador of the United States will be in a position to give such a reply? Unless of course the United States was itself prepared and preparing for such a situation and had equipped the ambassador with such a reply to give.* (Emphasis added.)

Instead of pursuing this lead, CNN's second interviewer, Bernard Shaw, broke in with a question that changed the subject.

The military buildup that Blystone's question took for granted in October was still wildly implausible to most observers in the first weeks after the invasion. On August 11, an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* dismissed "an anonymous Defense Department source" who was reported as saying there were contingency plans for placing a military force of "200,000 to 250,000" into the area of the Persian Gulf.

"That won't happen," the paper editorialized, "because (1) Congress would refuse to approve such a commitment; (2) the American people wouldn't support it; (3) the Saudis would not invite or tolerate it; (4) probably no senior military official would propose it; and finally (5) President Bush, if for no other reason than that he faces re-election in 1992, would not request it."

Saddam Hussein knew that ambassadors do not make policy, which was more than most of the reporters covering the Glaspie story seemed to know. The place of U.S. ambassadors in this country's foreign-policy hierarchy was described a few years ago by former ambassador David D. Newsom. He served as ambassador to three countries and rose to the Department's third-highest post, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, a position that gave him ample opportunity to observe foreign policy being made and conveyed to foreign governments.

In his 1988 book, *Diplomacy and the American Democracy*, Newsom described how diplomacy is increasingly conducted from Washington: "Rapid communications meant also that the diplomat was on a shorter leash. Except in those rare instances when a diplomat was beyond the reach of rapid communications, negotiations were often managed by telephone from the foreign office and augmented by flying visits from home-based officials."

If any phrase captures the diminished role of the contemporary ambassador, it is "shuttle

diplomacy." When the problem is deemed sufficiently significant, the Secretary of State gets on a plane. Not infrequently, even the Secretary of State is shunted aside by *his* superior, the President. Nothing better illustrates the pace and style of contemporary, top-level diplomacy than President George Bush telephoning other chiefs of state on several continents to line up support against Saddam Hussein. When a real crunch comes, telephone diplomacy makes even shuttle diplomacy obsolete.

Although the ambassador's role in dealing with major issues has been curtailed, the constraints of classic diplomatic practice and behavior have not eased. The professional diplomat is still bound, in Newsom's words, by diplomacy's "secretiveness, the meticulous attention to words, and the often ostentatious concern over the sensitivities of protocol."

Being "meticulous" in one's choice of words is not synonymous with being specific or detailed. The more delicate the problem, the more likely an ambassador will repeat a melange of vague phrases, without variation or embellishment.

Mostly, the ambassador serves up the mixture as before, mindful that a new phrase might be taken to imply a new policy. In such situations, an ambassador employs "language" (to use State Department parlance) that has been carefully composed to dampen disputes and paper over differences.

When Ambassador Glaspie testified before Congressional committees after the Gulf War, she put the best possible face on her performance. At the same time, she made a point that was ignored: It was up to the *President*, she emphasized, to decide how Saddam Hussein should be handled.

Three days after the Glaspie-Saddam meeting, President Bush sent his own placating message to Saddam. The State Department instructed Glaspie to deliver it "as an oral response from President Bush to Saddam Hussein." In part, it said: "The United States and Iraq both have a strong interest in preserving the peace and stability of the Middle East. For this reason, we believe that differences are best resolved by peaceful means and not by threats involving military force or conflict." The fact that Bush had sent a message to Saddam after the Glaspie meeting was not revealed until June 1992, and the message's full text was not published until October 1992.

Reporters kept asking what Ambassador Glaspie said to Saddam Hussein. They failed to ask a more important question, which would have shifted public attention from the Ambassador to her superiors, the Secretary of State and the President of the United States: Given a long-time U.S. policy of aiding and accommodating Iraq that was ardently promoted by Bush, forcefully abetted by Baker, vigorously supported by their top aides, and never reversed until Kuwait was invaded, what could Ambassador Glaspie plausibly have said to deter Saddam?

In the great game of nations, words require deeds. A statement of policy is made credible by a record of actions. Mild words might have conveyed credible threats if past threats were backed by actions. In order to make informed assumptions about how the Ambassador's words would be interpreted on July 25, 1990, we need to know how American deeds matched American words starting from July 17, 1979, when Saddam Hussein became President of Iraq, commander-in-chief of its armed forces, and secretary-general of the Ba'ath Party, the political apparatus that was Saddam's springboard to power.

All through the 1970's, U.S. policy favored Iran and its Shah rather than Iraq. In December 1979, the Department of State placed Iraq on its newly inaugurated list of countries that fostered terrorism, a list mandated by Congress. In February 1980, Saddam declared, "So long as the United States is occupying our land through the Zionist entity (i.e., as long as the United States supports Israel) we will continue to look upon it (i.e., the U.S.) as an enemy of the Arabs."

The U.S. began to turn toward Iraq (the in-phrase was "tilted") and away from Iran when the forces supporting the Ayatollah Khomeini ousted the Shah in 1979, seized the American Embassy, and took its staff hostage. Almost from the beginning of that "tilt," the U.S was sending contradictory "signals" to Iraq. All through this period, the usual American response to Saddam's provocations and atrocities was to speak loudly and turn a blind eye. These contradictions, accumulating for more than a decade, finally culminated in the failure to deter Saddam from invading Kuwait.

The pattern began under President Jimmy Carter. In April 1980, Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, announced, "we see no fundamental incompatibility of interests between the United States and Iraq."

Meanwhile, the Ayatollah Khomeini had pronounced his intention to bring Islamic fundamentalism to Iraq and remake it in the image of revolutionary Iran. The prospect frightened most of the Arab countries, particularly

Iraq's oil-producing neighbors along the Persian Gulf — Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates — who saw themselves as the next victims if Iraq fell.

In September 1980, Saddam attacked Iran, beginning an eight-year war. International reaction was the reverse of what it would be when Iraq invaded Kuwait. Iran was then the outlaw state. Responding to the Iraqi invasion, the United States said only that it "could not condone" the Iraqi seizure of an Iranian province. The United Nations Security Council, after discussing the matter for a week, passed a resolution urging both sides "to refrain from any further use of force."

Washington, concerned about the threat to the Gulf oil producers, was inclining toward Baghdad. But, Baghdad had turned its back on Washington some thirteen years earlier. Iraq severed diplomatic relations with the U.S. when the six-day war between Israel and the Arab states broke out in June, 1967. In April 1981, early in the Reagan Administration and about a half-year into the Iran-Iraq war, the State Department sent an envoy to Iraq to look into the possibility of resuming diplomatic relations. Saddam rebuffed the overture. But, when Iran proved a ferocious and obstinate foe, Saddam made friendlier gestures toward the U.S.

Early in 1982, the Reagan Administration took Iraq off the blacklist of terrorism-supporting countries despite objections from counterterrorism officials in the Pentagon and the State Department and despite a critical resolution passed by the House Foreign Affairs Committee. The Reagan Administration then undertook a top-level, behind-the-scenes effort to bolster the Iraqi economy. The objective was to enable Saddam to wage war against Iran more effectively.

The top-level officials who instituted Iraq policy during the Reagan Administration managed it during the Bush Administration. The command over Iraq policy exercised by a handful of White House and State Department officials for most of the 1980's is illustrated by the steps they took to get financial credits for Iraq from two U.S. government agencies, the Export-Import Bank and the Commodity Credit Corporation.

The two agencies have a similar function, to promote the sale of American products by guaranteeing payment to American sellers, even if the buyer goes bankrupt. The two programs also have a singular advantage when high-ranking officials in the executive branch wish to avoid Congressional scrutiny and second-guessing. They can make money available without prior Congressional approval.

One of the earliest moves to cement the pro-Iraq tilt was made by Lawrence S. Eagleburger, Deputy Secretary of State under James Baker (the Department's second-highest post). Eagleburger had served George Shultz, the previous Secretary of State, as Under Secretary for Political Affairs (the third-highest post) and, when Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State, had been one of his top aides.

Late in December 1983, a letter signed by Eagleburger and classified "secret" went to William Draper III, Chairman of the Export-Import Bank. Eagleburger urged that the Bank open a line of credit for Iraq. Undoubtedly, he acted with Shultz's knowledge; no top-ranking official would initiate a major policy without the Secretary's prior approval.

To help make the case for the loan, Eagleburger wrote: "Recently, the President of Iraq announced the termination of all assistance to the principal terrorist group of concern, among others. Iraq then expelled its leader. The terrorism issue, therefore, should no longer be an impediment to Ex-Im financing for U.S. sales to Iraq."

He made this argument despite the fact that, within months of taking Iraq off the terrorism blacklist, the Department protested to Iraq because it was still sheltering the terrorist leader in question, Abu Nidal. Not until September 1, 1990, when the Bush Administration was building support for confronting Iraq, did Eagleburger acknowledge that "Iraq is a country which has repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism." Eagleburger offered the Bank a rationale to mollify any who might protest underwriting the Saddam regime. Holding out Bank credits "could provide some incentive for Iraq to comply with our urgings that it show restraint in the war."

Ex-Im officials were not persuaded. Iraq was not deemed credit-worthy, and the Bank declined to extend the credits. But, State was not deterred. It promoted the idea of an Iraqi pipeline running west, across the Saudi Arabian desert, to the Jordanian port of Aqaba. That would allow Iraqi oil to be shipped through the Red Sea, out of reach of Iranian air attacks, rather than through the Persian Gulf. The pipeline would be financed with loans guaranteed by Ex-Im.

To get the Bank's financial assistance, State asked Vice President George Bush for help. Six months after Eagleburger's failed effort, in June 1984, Bush telephoned Draper. The memo that

State prepared for Bush suggested he tell Draper that Iran was "the intransigent party" and "we must therefore seek means to bolster Iraq's ability and resolve to withstand Iranian attacks."

Ex-Im agreed to provide a loan guarantee of $484 million for the pipeline project. Now, another problem intervened. The pipeline would run close to Jordan's border with Israel, and Saddam wanted a guarantee that the U.S. would not allow Israel to attack the pipeline. He finally vetoed the project, claiming American assurances were not adequate. (Recall that, in 1981, the Israelis bombed out the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak.)

In July, 1984, again urged by Vice President Bush as well as others, the Ex-Im reluctantly granted Iraq a short-term line of credit for $200 million, requiring repayment within a year. Within months, Iraq was $35 million behind in repayments, and the Bank suspended further credits.

These efforts were made even before diplomatic relations with Iraq resumed and after Saddam spurned a direct U.S. effort at reconciliation. Congress might disapprove and raise obstacles, but Vice President Bush and his close associates in the making of foreign policy never stopped courting Saddam Hussein. The ardor with which Saddam was wooed makes it easier to understand why he apparently expected to have extraordinary latitude in his future behavior.

Formal diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iraq were restored in November 1984, and the two countries exchanged ambassadors. The fact that Iraq sponsored and sheltered terrorists was an issue that kept resurfacing, but the Reagan Administration did its best to sidetrack the problem. In 1985, the Palestinian terrorist Abu Abbas hijacked the cruise ship *Achille Lauro*, murdered an American citizen confined to a wheelchair, then took refuge in Baghdad. The U.S. protested, Iraq ignored the protest, the U.S. dropped the issue.

The Reagan Administration set out to arm Iraq despite an arms embargo that Congress enacted in response to Iraq's terrorism and human-rights violations. The embargo was in effect throughout the Iraq-Iran War. So, too, was the Arms Export Control Act, which makes it illegal to sell arms to one country for the purpose of transferring them to another country prohibited from receiving them directly. To sidestep these restrictions, the Reagan Administration enlisted Egypt, Jordan, and Kuwait, all interested in seeing Iran held at bay, to "buy" arms from the U.S. and trans-ship them to Iraq.

The Iran-Contra imbroglio of 1986, wherein the U.S. helped Iran acquire missiles, came after the Reagan Administration was deeply engaged in promoting arms shipments to Iraq and actively trying to prevent other countries from selling arms to Iran. The U.S. government was thus providing arms to both sides in the conflict and simultaneously violating U.S. laws against providing arms to either side. Iran-Contra undermined U.S. credibility with both sides.

In February 1987, Vice President Bush, still seeking Ex-Im credits for Iraq, weighed in with a phone call to the Bank's new Chairman. But Ex-Im financial analysts took a dim view of Iraq's financial condition. They estimated that, at the end of 1986, Iraq owed $50 billion to banks and that, in the words of one memorandum, "Iraq will be unable to service scheduled debt repayments over the next five years." Nevertheless, the Bank acceded to the extent of renewing its short-term loan guarantees to a maximum of $200 million, covering itself by requiring part of the loans to be repaid before additional funds became available.

Ex-Im's analysts were dubious about Iraq's financial prospects. One memorandum, undated but written in 1987-88 in anticipation of the war's end, noted that Iraq would remain a post-war credit risk because it "will not drastically cut military spending." Also, "Iraq has an attitude problem regarding foreign debt. Iraq only repays creditors who offer large new loans. If creditors don't offer new loans, Iraq simply fails to pay." The analysts saw a bankrupt spendthrift recklessly bent on acquiring more military power; the policy-makers saw a beleaguered debtor who could be subsidized into becoming a "moderate."

Even after the Iran-Iraq war ended in August, 1988, State continued to push for bigger and longer loan guarantees, and Ex-Im continued to resist. In the spring of 1989, Ex-Im analysts prepared another grim assessment of Iraqi finances and, more important, its *postwar military intentions:* "Iraqi leaders, in the wake of their technology-driven 'victory' over Iran, believe that advanced military technology — bombers and missiles, chemical and bacteriological weapons and nuclear capability — are the key to military power." In a burst of prescience, an Ex-Im report predicted in April, 1989, that Iraq might go to war with . . "Saudi Arabia or Kuwait over simmering territorial claims."

When Iraq invaded Kuwait and halted payment on its obligations, Ex-Im was caught with a relatively "small" unpaid balance, an estimated

$80 million. Elsewhere, the mid-level bureaucrats protested, but the top-level policy-makers overruled. Most notably, this happened in the Commodity Credit Corporation, an agency of the Department of Agriculture that guarantees loans to promote foreign sales of U.S. farm products. When Iraq repudiated its debts, the CCC was holding a bag containing between $1.9 and $2 billion of Saddam's IOU's. Some of the money is being recovered from Iraqi assets, but the American taxpayer is stuck with much of the bill.

A new U.S. ambassador to Iraq, April C. Glaspie, took up her post in July 1988. She arrived in time to witness two events that, coming in swift succession, should have roused senior policy-makers in Washington to reconsider the U.S. tilt:

(1) On August 20, 1988, Saddam abruptly ended the war with Iran, declaring a unilateral cease-fire.
(2) Five days after Saddam terminated the war with Iran, his air force gassed Kurdish villages in northern Iraq. He did so again in early September.

Having ignored both Iraqi and Iranian gas attacks on soldiers and civilians during their eight-year war, the U.S. now spoke up. Secretary of State George P. Shultz pronounced Iraq's gassing of its own people to be "unjustified and abhorrent." His press spokesman, Charles E. Redman, speaking to television cameras from the State Department briefing room, told the world's press that Iraq's actions were "unacceptable to the civilized world."

As instructed, Ambassador Glaspie lodged a protest against the gassing. Baghdad's response was dead silence, and the issue died.

One function of ambassadors is to serve as pawns in symbolic gestures, such as withdrawing an ambassador from a country to express acute displeasure with an action taken by the host government. At about the time the Iraqi Kurds were gassed, the U.S. expressed its displeasure with Bulgaria's treatment of its ethnic Turks by withdrawing the U.S. ambassador to Bulgaria.

In that instance, Bulgaria was a Soviet satellite, and Turkey was a U.S. ally. In Iraq, however, the U.S. ambassador was kept at her post. Not until after the invasion of Kuwait, when she was home on leave, did she find herself "withdrawn" from Baghdad. But, she was not kept in Washington as a gesture of protest. She was a pawn in a different game.

For Ambassador April Catherine Glaspie, the first woman designated by the State Department to serve as an ambassador to an Arab country, the road to Baghdad was strewn with career obstructions. Not only did she contend with a bias against women in the Foreign Service, she also confronted the unwritten dictum that a woman could not be an effective "Arabist."

Born in Vancouver, Canada, in 1942, she came by her interest in the Middle East from her British-born mother's side of the family. Relatives in the military served in Palestine when the territory that became Jordan and Israel was a British mandate.

She was graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Mills College in California, where she majored in history and government, then took a master's degree at Johns Hopkins's School for Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C., a way station for would-be career diplomats. She passed the demanding written and oral examinations required for admittance to the Foreign Service and became a Foreign Service Officer in 1966.

The first step to area specialization is language training, and Glaspie induced the State Department's personnel system to assign her to Arab-language training despite the Department's profound reluctance to assign women FSOs to embassies in Arab countries. Over the course of her career, she gained sufficient fluency in Arabic to serve as Director of the State Department's Arabic language school in Tunisia.

Iraq was Glaspie's seventh assignment in an Arab country. During her twenty-two-year career preceding her posting to Baghdad, she served in Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as Tunisia. In the 1970's, her widowed mother came out to visit her; from then on, they moved together to each new post. Unmarried and making her way successfully in a demanding profession, April Glaspie's work appeared to be the focus of her life.

In Syria, she served as Deputy Chief of Mission, which made her second in rank to the ambassador. While in Damascus, in 1985, she persuaded the Syrians to take a hand in freeing the 104 Americans held as hostages aboard a grounded TWA plane. For that effort, Secretary of State Shultz, an ex-Marine, described her as "a genuine heroine."

Rotated back to Washington, she served as director of the office of Lebanon, Jordan and Syrian affairs. Maintaining her reputation as a workaholic, she was known to weed the garden of her townhouse by flashlight, since she came home too late to do the job by daylight.

Glaspie's name was submitted to Congress as

the next ambassador to Iraq in September 1987. When the President nominates an ambassador, he expects his policies will be faithfully supported and carried out. At her confirmation hearings, Glaspie echoed the policy line that the Reagan Administration had advanced since the beginning of the Iraq-Iran war.

Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, who has made many an ambassadorial nominee's road to confirmation a blistering journey, either because he differed with their reputed policy sympathies or because the hearing provided an opportunity to promote his own foreign-policy agenda, subjected Glaspie to some probing questioning.

One question was, "Does Iraq pose any threat to Saudi Arabia or Kuwait?" Glaspie replied, "Not at present." She recalled the confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iraq in the early 1970's over Iraqi claims to two Kuwaiti islands in the Persian Gulf, but noted that, subsequently, the Saudis and Kuwaitis became the principal sources of financial aid to Iraq in its war with Iran.

Acknowledging that military power gave Iraq a major role in Gulf affairs, Glaspie said, "We presume this poses some concern for Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in the long run, but at present Iraq poses no threat to those countries."

The "long run" proved far shorter than Ambassador Glaspie — or her superiors — anticipated. A year after her arrival in Baghdad, danger signs surfaced in an unexpected place — Atlanta, Georgia.

On August 4, 1989, several dozen FBI agents and Federal Reserve bank examiners raided the Atlanta offices of the Banco Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL), a bank owned by the Italian government. The Federal agents were acting on tips from BNL employees in Atlanta, who passed the word that BNL loans to Iraq were far above the limits set in Rome or reported to U.S. regulators.

For more than an hour, at closing time on a Friday afternoon, the Federal agents emptied file cabinets, stripped desks of their papers, and stuffed the contents into cartons they carted away. None of the BNL staff was allowed to make a phone call or leave for home until the office was emptied.

The Atlanta branch of a bank headquartered in Rome served as the principal conduit for U.S. loans to Iraq. BNL Atlanta was also Iraq's principal source of CCC-guaranteed loans. Over a period of about five years, until the summer day in 1989 when BNL was raided, it provided Iraq with an estimated $5 billion in loans guaranteed by the Commodity Credit Corporation. Iraq has defaulted on about about 40 percent of these loans.

The CCC, which is part of the Department of Agriculture and therefore directed by the Secretary of Agriculture, a member of the President's cabinet, was much more malleable than the Ex-Im in extending credit to Iraq. Iraq became a beneficiary of the CCC lending program in 1982, soon after removal from the terrorism blacklist. It shortly became the number-one buyer of U.S. rice and the number-eight buyer of U.S. wheat.

By the end of the war with Iran, Iraq owed foreign banks about $80 billion and, as the Export-Import Bank correctly foretold, was refusing to repay creditors who would not renew loans. The problem was extensively reported in cables the U.S. embassy in Baghdad sent to Foggy Bottom.

Iraq was, after Mexico, the largest holder of commodity credit guarantees. When Iraq reneged on its loans and U.S. banks began to file claims against the CCC, the extent to which U.S. taxpayers would be paying Iraq's debts began to be revealed. A subcommittee of the House Agriculture Committee, chaired by Representative Charlie Rose of North Carolina, prepared a chronology that showed how the borrowing burgeoned. In 1983, the State Department took the lead in enabling Iraq to buy approximately $365 million of U.S. agricultural products with CCC guarantees. By 1988, CCC credits to subsidize Iraq's agricultural purchases were up to $1 billion annually.

A news item in the *Wall Street Journal*, reporting that one Atlanta bank provided billions in government-guaranteed loans to Iraq, came to the attention of Representative Henry B. Gonzalez of Texas, chairman of the House Banking Committee. He wanted to know more about what was going on.

The Justice Department was extremely reluctant to enlighten him. Gonzalez, using his powers as Committee chairman, began to extract documents from foot-dragging Executive departments and read them into the *Congressional Record*, an expedient that enabled the press to report their contents.

Gonzalez was strangely reminiscent of Jimmy Stewart in "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington." This is how his performance was covered in a front-page story in the *Washington Post* on March 22, 1992:

> Almost every Monday for the past couple of months, Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez

(D.Tex.), the feisty chairman of the House Banking Committee, has been setting the Bush Administration's teeth on edge with fiery exposes about its courtship of Iraq before the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. So far, hardly anyone has been listening. Gonzalez's 'special orders'—as such uninterrupted speeches are called—are delivered to a virtually empty House floor. But they are full of excruciating detail—much of it classified "secret" and "confidential"—that could haunt the White House before this election year is over.

Gonzalez's basic charge was simple and direct: Senior Bush administration officials went to great lengths to continue supporting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his unreliable regime long after it was prudent to do so.

For three consecutive days starting on Sunday, February 23, 1992, the *Los Angeles Times* published page-one stories on the labyrinthine maneuvers that comprised U.S. policy toward Iraq. It was the first newspaper to play the story so extensively. The stories were co-authored by Murray Waas, a veteran free-lance writer, who brought the story to the *Times* and has continued to cover it for the paper.

More than a year earlier, in December 1990, Waas had published an extensive report of how the U.S. fueled the Iraqi war machine in the weekly *Village Voice*. Waas' transition from magazine to newspaper reporting represents one of the idiosyncrasies of Iraq-policy coverage. Wide-ranging reportage appeared in books and magazines before the story was picked up by the daily press and the news weeklies. Gradually, the facts that Congressional investigators uncovered began appearing in the daily press. By May, 1992, various publications were covering new revelations almost as a regular news beat.

The bank records seized in Atlanta and memoranda extracted from executive departments and agencies — including Agriculture, Commerce, State, and the Customs Service — revealed the scope of Iraq's buying spree. The documents not only showed how Iraq acquired military materiel and militarily useful technology but, also, the extent to which top officials permitted these purchases even after the Iran-Iraq war was over and Saddam's continuing military build-up was widely recognized.

The Iraqis applied for BNL loans to cover purchase agreements made with grain dealers and shippers. The alleged buying prices were above the market rate. The Iraqis actually paid less than the loan amounts and pocketed the difference. They also picked up extra money by refusing to deal with suppliers who would not give them kickbacks.

BNL bank officers who were in on the scam did not worry about the safety of the loans. Repayment was ultimately guaranteed by the U.S. Treasury through the CCC's loan-guarantee program. Only the taxpayer could lose.

The CCC program helped to fund Iraq's military efforts in two ways: 1) Iraq's own funds did not have to be spent on foodstuffs and could be spent on military-related purchases. 2) The "profits" from the kited loans provided additional funds for military-related projects.

The documents surrendered to Congressional oversight committees verify that the Bush Administration understood the nature of Saddam's regime. It knew he continued his unremitting military build-up, purchasing components for nuclear and chemical capabilities all over western Europe and the United States, despite the fact Iraq was strangling in debt.

His record on human rights was likewise well known. Ignored in the interest of stopping Iranian expansion, it became an issue when the war with Iran ended. It was brushed aside, again, over the opposition of the State Department's own Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.

What the Secretary of State Knew

In the early spring of 1989, barely more than two months after taking over at State, Baker met with Iraq's deputy foreign minister, Nizar Hamdoon. The Briefing Memorandum he received from the Middle East bureau in advance of the meeting noted that "Iraq retains its heavy-handed approach to foreign affairs — it has revived a border dispute with Kuwait and is meddling in Lebanon — and is working hard at chemical and biological weapons and new missiles."

The memorandum also pointed out that "commercial relations are good, but further growth is constrained by Iraq's debt crunch. Iraq is now our number two trading partner in the Arab world . . . Iraq imports over $1 billion per year in U.S. agricultural products, financed with USDA CCC credit insurance . . ."

By the fall of 1989, the Secretary of State was being warned of allegations that Agriculture Department loan credits had been extensively

misused. A memo written within the Federal Reserve, which opposed further credits, reported that State was wrestling with the issue: "The State Department is trying to determine whether the actions of Iraq in the BNL case were those of renegade Iraqis or reflected official Iraqi government policy. The latter case appears to be true."

In mid-October 1989, a State Department memo describing the loan abuses went to Baker. The story behind the memo was detailed in the *New York Times* on July 13, 1992. A 35-year-old Foreign Service economic officer, Frank Lemay, prepared a memorandum in October 1989, after a meeting with officials at the Agriculture Department. He warned that Iraq's request for another billion dollars in loan guarantees should be handled warily because there was evidence the farm-loan program had been used to buy equipment for nuclear development. He noted the federal investigation of the role played by BNL's Atlanta branch. Writing far more bluntly than is usual in self-protective memoranda "drafted" at State, Lemay warned: "If smoke indicates fire, we may be facing a four-alarm blaze in the near future."

Lemay's superior, Richard T. McCormack, then Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, who had asked Lemay to look into the program, took the warning to Baker, and there all traces of the memorandum disappeared — until Congressman Gonzalez disclosed its contents, and inevitably its author, in a speech on the House floor on March 30, 1992. *New York Times* columnist William Safire, long interested in how Saddam's build-up was financed, devoted his column to the memo on June 22 and 25, 1992, shortly before Lemay was due to testify before a Congressional committee. Safire wrote that his source in the State Department told him that when McCormack revealed the contents of Lemay's memo, responsibility for keeping track of such economic issues was transferred to one of Baker's handful of trusted aides, Robert Zoellick.

Every memorandum intended for the Secretary of State is first logged and processed for distribution to other top Department officials. Lemay's memo, however, received the unusual designation, "Not for the System," meaning it was not to be formally recorded and distributed. When Lemay looked for the official copy of his memorandum prior to testifying in June, the file that should have contained it could not be found.

After Lemay testified in July 1992, the Department put out its side of the story, reported in the same *New York Times* account:

> State Department officials close to Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d play down the significance of Mr. Lemay's memo. They point out that the allegations he highlighted — that a United States loan program may have paid for Iraqi arms — are still only allegations.
>
> "The issue was brought to the attention of all the big boys and Baker was aware of all the assertions through the huge paper trail," said one official. "We knew Saddam Hussein wasn't a saint and there was this bank thing in Atlanta, but we couldn't cut off a policy based on hunches and assertions. Frank Lemay didn't report anything differently from other people. His problem was that he put it in more bombastic language."

With that explanation, "senior" State Department officials acknowledged having information that, two months earlier, they denied having. On May 21, the *Boston Globe* reported this comment by a "senior administration official" (a standard attribution for a highly placed source who will speak for quotation only if not identified): "I was not aware at any point that Baker was told we thought they were diverting the credits to buy weapons . . . I never saw anything about buying arms."

Whatever Secretary Baker had already heard by the time Lemay's memo was sent to him, there was good reason for his not wanting to hear about the possibility of a "four-alarm blaze." He was already putting out a fire as a result of the raid on BNL. At an interagency meeting earlier in the month, on October 4, 1989, Agriculture's recommendation that Iraqi food credits be cut was approved. A proposed billion-dollar credit was reduced to $400 million. Even the lesser amount was opposed by the Treasury Department, the Federal Reserve, and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). State fought for the full amount.

The reduction from the previous year's $1.1 billion incensed the Iraqis. They protested that such a reduction would be "widely viewed as a U.S. vote of no confidence in Iraqi debt policy." Two days later, on October 6, Baker met with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz and promised he would "look into the matter immediately."

Late in October 1989, Baker met with Aziz and asked for assurances the Iraqi government was not involved with BNL. The cable, classified "secret," that went from State to the U.S. embassy in Baghdad reported the highlights of

the Baker-Aziz exchange, including: "The secretary asked if GOI [cablese for Government of Iraq] is cooperating with the Fed investigation . . . Aziz said that Iraqi central bank governor and the minister of finance had been in Washington, met with U.S. officials, and were told the GOI was not involved."

Baker had the Iraqi foreign minister's word. On the other side of the ledger, he had Lemay's memorandum and other Department cables and reports. A cable from Rome dated October 19 reported that BNL's chairman and its director-general had called on the U.S. Ambassador to Italy, Peter F. Secchia, offering to cooperate with U.S. authorities "while at the same time making it fairly clear they want to achieve some kind of damage control." The cable added that the bank officials "suggested that the matter should be raised to a political level."

Baker received another internal report, dated October 26, 1989, informing him that the BNL fraud case "may also involve several high Iraqi officials." The writer of this memorandum kept better step with policy than Frank Lemay by pointing out that "Iraq is now our ninth largest customer for agricultural commodities." He offered a rationale for catering to Iraq: "Our ability to influence Iraqi policies in areas important to us, from Lebanon to the Middle East peace process, will be heavily influenced by the outcome of the CCC negotiations."

Other agencies wrote critical reports based on the seized BNL documents. The Customs Service was concerned about violations of export controls. Reports dated September 21 and October 20, 1989, stated that BNL was suspected of financing illicit shipments to Iraq of militarily useful technology and controlled chemicals and making loans "to various U.S. firms for the illegal export to Iraq of missile-related technology."

Top-level Administration officials received a secret CIA assessment of Iraq's nuclear program. Dated September 3, 1989, it reported that Iraq was working on a nuclear capability and that Iraqi front companies were secretly engaged in extensive efforts to acquire the necessary technology in Europe. Baker's inquiry to Aziz, however, was limited to the Iraqi government's possible involvement with BNL.

Those who wrote the memoranda of October 1989 were unaware they were fighting a losing, rear-guard action. As the jargon goes at State, they were "O-B-E'd", "overtaken by events." The train left the station on October 2, when President Bush signed National Security Directive 26, a document classified "secret" and titled, "U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf."

An implicit, but powerful, order lies behind a policy Directive. Once it is signed by the President, opposing the policy is no longer a matter of bureaucratic in-fighting, but willful opposition to the President. Not only do top policy-makers get their marching orders, Directives also provide a powerful tool for exerting leverage on opponents of an enunciated policy.

"National Security Directives" embody a neat contradiction. Classified "secret," only insiders are supposed to be conversant with their actual texts. But, the glamorous aura of restricted distribution assures widespread attention, while the classification makes it illegal to publish the text.

The "Cover Sheet for NSD 26" lists 12 "addressees:" The Vice President; The Secretary of State; The Secretary of the Treasury; The Secretary of Defense; The Attorney General; The Secretary of Energy; The Director of the Office of Management and Budget; The Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs; The Director of Central Intelligence; The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; The Director, United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; The Director, United States Information Agency.

The White House finally made a "redacted" (i.e. censored) text available to the members of the House Banking Committee on May 29, 1992. More than half the original text, which ran to less than three pages, was blacked out.

While the most policy-sensitive parts are presumably missing from the redacted version, the meaning and tone of the President's instructions are clear: The U.S. will not allow the Soviet Union and Iran to go adventuring in the Gulf area; the U.S. promises to seek disciplinary measures against Iraq if it violates the norms of peaceable behavior; the U.S. pledges to work toward a mutually advantageous relationship with Iraq. Finally, and most significantly, the President instructs the U.S. government to promote U.S.-Iraqi economic ties.

This is the censored text, as released:

U.S. Policy Toward the Persian Gulf

Access to Persian Gulf oil and the security of key friendly states in the area are vital to U.S. national security. The United States remains committed to defend its vital interests in the region, if necessary and appropriate through the use of U.S. military forces, against the Soviet Union or any other regional power with interests inimical to our own. The United States also

remains committed to support the individual and collective self-defense of friendly countries in the area to enable them to play a more active role in their own defense and thereby reduce the necessity for unilateral U.S. military intervention. The United States also will encourage the effective support and participation of our western allies and Japan to promote our mutual interests in the Persian Gulf region. (Remainder of first page blacked out.)

(Top one-third of second page blacked out.)

Iraq

Normal relations between the United States and Iraq would serve our longer-term interests and promote stability in both the Gulf and the Middle East. The United States Government should propose economic and political incentives for Iraq to moderate its behavior and to increase our influence with Iraq. At the same time, the Iraqi leadership must understand that any illegal use of chemical and/or biological weapons will lead to economic and political sanctions, for which we would seek the broadest possible support from our allies and friends. Any breach by Iraq of IAEA safeguards in its nuclear program will result in a similar response. Human rights considerations should continue to be an important element in our policy toward Iraq. In addition, Iraq should be urged to cease its meddling in external affairs, such as in Lebanon, and be encouraged to play a constructive role in negotiating a settlement with Iran and cooperating in the Middle East peace process.

We should pursue, and seek to facilitate, opportunities for U.S. firms to participate in the reconstruction of the Iraqi economy, particularly in the energy area, where they do not conflict with our non-proliferation and other significant objectives. Also, as a means of developing access to and influence with the Iraqi defense establishment, the United States should consider sales of non-lethal forms of military assistance, e.g., training courses and medical exchanges, on a case by case basis. (End of second page.)

The third page, about one-half page of text, is blacked out, except for:

/s/
George Bush

NSD 26 was issued nine months after the Bush Administration took office and ten months before Kuwait was invaded. Ostensibly the product of an extensive, high-level policy review, it ignored recent events in Eastern Europe. It defined the Soviet Union as the major threat to U.S. interests in the Middle East, even though the Soviet Union had begun to withdraw from Eastern Europe and Afghanistan, the Soviet economy was staggering, and the Soviet military was faltering.

The cold-war perspective from which NSD 26 viewed the Middle East has been explained by the fact it was prepared and approved in the spring of 1989. The so-called "deputies committee" (number-two officials in their respective agencies) reportedly met on April 12, 1988 and approved its content. Passing on the Directive were officials from the Departments of Commerce, Defense, and State. The meeting was chaired by Robert M. Gates, then deputy national security adviser and subsequently named Director of the CIA. It was sent to the White House where, for months, it was ignored.

On the other hand, the foreign affairs columnist of the *Washington Post*, Jim Hoagland, reported in October 1992 that the signing of NSD 26 was not at all an after-thought. Shortly before NSD 26 was signed, President Bush, Secretary Baker, and National Security Adviser heard out a long, negative assessment of the likelihood Saddam Hussein's behavior could be moderated. It was presented by a top intelligence official, CIA deputy director Richard Kerr. Baker and Scowcroft opted, nevertheless, for trying to induce Saddam to come around, and Bush agreed "it's worth a try."

In any event, NSD 26 was signed by the President and forcefully promoted by the Secretary of State. It committed the U.S. to strengthening Iraq as a pro-Western bulwark in the Middle East, despite acknowledging that Iraqi behavior was not all the U.S. would wish, despite taking issue with Iraqi development of chemical and biological weapons, despite expressing concern over Iraq's nuclear program and human-rights record, despite disapproving of Iraq's territorial ambitions.

Besides proffering carrots to Iraq, NSD 26 brandished sticks. It threatened that "U.S. military force" might be used against the Soviet Union and, by inference, Iran. Its direst threat against Iraq was "sanctions."

Who Was in Charge?

Despite the fact that NSD 26 made the Gulf region a high-priority concern, no top-level official in the State Department was put in charge of developing and evaluating Gulf policy. Nominally, Middle East policy belonged in the portfolio of Dennis B. Ross, director of the Policy Planning Staff. Ross was a member of the inner circle that has been called "Baker's Half Dozen." The Secretary's cadre of trusted associates, they concentrated on Baker's immediate concerns. In the Middle East, that meant trying to thread one's way through the labyrinth of Arab-Israel relations to find a way to a peace settlement, referred to in NSD 26 as the "peace process."

Ross was also in charge of Soviet policy, which entailed assessing and coming to terms with Gorbachev, and *perestroika*, and coping with the reshaping of central Europe as the two Germanies set out to unite. The dual responsibility was the policy-making equivalent of playing nine innings of baseball and four quarters of football — at the same time.

Consequently, the direction of Middle East policy was relegated, for the most part, to the Assistant Secretary for Middle East Affairs, John H. Kelly. It was Kelly's job to manage day-by-day events.

Baker's inner circle had offices on the seventh floor of the State Department building. Kelly's office was on the sixth floor. The sixth floor has long been the locale for the offices of Assistant Secretaries, most of whom are responsible for continental areas — Africa, Europe, East Asia, Latin America, the Middle East. But, in Baker's State Department, being situated below the seventh floor approximated being in Siberia. One Assistant Secretary was on the Seventh Floor, the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs and Department Spokesman, Margaret Tutwiler. She occupied an office next door to the Secretary, and her primary responsibility was to protect and burnish his image.

When lower-ranking officers in the Department tried to express their concerns about the course of events in the Persian Gulf area, they hit up against the sixth-floor ceiling. That bureaucratic barrier, which partitioned the seventh floor from the rest of the building, eventually afforded Secretary Baker the excuse that he had not concerned himself with the issue of Iraq.

The excuse became manifest in a full-page article on the *Washington Post*'s "Federal Page" (which usually deals with the bureaucratic concerns of Federal employees). Written by the *Post* reporter who covers the State Department beat, John M. Goshko, it was headlined, "Before the Gulf War, Iraq Was a 'Sixth-Floor Problem'."

Goshko wrote, "Some critics now contend that the directive [i.e., NSD 26] was the springboard for the greatest foreign policy failure of Bush's presidency. But the record suggests that Bush, Secretary of State James Baker III and other senior foreign policy advisers were not paying much attention to Iraq and its truculent president, Saddam Hussein, in the period between the conception of NSDD 26 [note: in the Reagan Administration, NSD's were known as NSDD's, National Security Decision Directives] and Iraq's August 1990 drive into Kuwait."

Once issued, NSD 26 became sacred writ. Non-believers and doubters either professed the true policy or were driven into the bureaucratic wilderness. As journalist-historian Theodore Draper commented, "once the United States adopted a policy vis-a-vis Iraq, it never let reality interfere."

Part of that reality was manifested in Moscow the same month NSD 26 was issued. A conference with the title, "*Perestroika* and the Third World," drew a sizeable contingent of Arabs who depended on Soviet support. The import and aftermath of the conference was described by the well-placed Egyptian journalist-commentator, Mohamed Heikal, in his aptly named book, *Illusions of Triumph*. It offers a non-Western perspective on the events leading up to the Gulf War:

> Arab delegates returned to the Middle East shocked by the changes they had seen. Another hint of Moscow's abandonment of its former role came in a meeting with President Hafez Assad of Syria, who was seeking strategic parity with Israel. Gorbachev told him: "Your problems are not going to be solved through any such strategic points — and anyway, we're no longer in that game." Assad went home devastated, and immediately set about mending fences with Washington.

Nine months later, when George Bush belatedly set about reining in Saddam Hussein, both the Soviet Union and Syria cooperated with the United States.

The essential point about NSD 26 is that it codified the Reagan Administration's Iraq policy. Paying lip service to concerns about violations of human rights and the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, it emphasized

strengthening the bond with Iraq. NSD 26 thus formalized the pro-Iraqi tilt at its most acute inclination.

Following up the President's Directive, Secretary Baker and key aides turned their attention to getting the billion dollars in commodity credits restored to Iraq. In the wake of the Atlanta BNL revelations, Agriculture decided to cut back its CCC credits to Iraq for the 1990 fiscal year (the Federal fiscal year begins in October) to $400 million.

To get the cut restored, Baker telephoned Secretary of Agriculture Clayton K. Yeutter. Under Secretary for Political Affairs Robert M. Kimmitt had prepared "talking points" for Baker. Kimmitt suggested that Baker say the CCC program was "crucially important to our bilateral relationship with Iraq" and that he (Baker) supported extending the credit "on foreign policy grounds." The talking points included an assurance that "obviously, we should not go forward with the program if we have substantial evidence of a pattern of serious violations of U.S. laws by high-ranking Iraqi officials."

After the telephone conversation, Baker made a marginal note of Yeutter's response: "I think we're seeing it the way you guys are. I'll get back into it." Within a few days, Agriculture agreed to go ahead with the billion-dollar credit. But, there were still objections from Treasury, the Federal Reserve, and the Office of Management and Budget.

Deputy Secretary of State Eagleburger, who made the initial call to the Export-Import Bank almost six years earlier, had the task of persuading Treasury and OMB. Eagleburger telephoned a top Treasury official, John Robson, to ask for Treasury's support. Robson asked Eagleburger to put his request in writing. Eagleburger complied, writing that State sought the credits on "foreign policy grounds."

State was sufficiently persuasive to carry the day on November 8, 1989, when the National Advisory Council on International Monetary and Financial Policies, an interagency body comprised of officials from the Departments of Commerce, State, and Treasury, approved a billion-dollar credit for fiscal 1990, with one condition. Kimmitt suggested the condition in his Baker-to-Yeutter talking points. The credits would be made available in two installments of $500 million. The first installment would be available shortly, the second in six months.

The next day, Kimmitt (who went on to become ambassador to Germany) patted his boss on the back in a classified memo: "Your call to Yeutter and our subsequent efforts with OMB and Treasury paid off." Kimmitt suggested that Baker "break the good news" to Tariq Aziz, Iraq's Foreign Minister. Two days later, Ambassador Glaspie received a cable in Baghdad, conveying a message to Aziz from Baker: "This decision by the Administration reflects the importance we attach to our relationship with Iraq."

The Bush Administration continued the Reagan Administration policy of facilitating weapons sales to Iraq by other countries. In November 1990, the U.S. embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia, informed Washington that it planned to convey its objections to Indonesia's planned sale to Iraq of helicopters that could carry French Exocet missiles, one of the most effective weapons of their type.

Eagleburger waved off the U.S. ambassador by cabling: "Department does not — repeat not — clear on proposed talking point for use during the ambassador's meeting. Although the US severely limits the sale of our own munitions list items to Iraq, we have not had a policy of discouraging other countries' arms sales to Iraq."

Eagleburger's cable clearly indicated the U.S. did not object if other countries sold weapons to Iraq. But, after the Gulf War, another close Baker aide took a different tack. The *New York Times* reported in June, 1992: "At a Congressional hearing last year, Robert M. Kimmitt, then the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, asserted that American weapons had never been sold to Mr. Hussein. 'If other countries had followed the same policy, Iraq perhaps would not have become the force for instability that it became in the region,' he testified."

In December 1989, Iraq successfully launched a long-range missile. In January 1990, seven months before Kuwait was invaded, President Bush told the Export-Import Bank to go ahead with loan credits for Iraq. That was the high-water mark of Bush Administration policy to build up Iraq.

Saddam's financial position was becoming desperate. His oil income plummeted and his debts mounted as the price of oil went from $20 a barrel in January 1990 to $14 a barrel in June. For every dollar per barrel of decline, Iraq lost a billion dollars in annual revenue.

In February, Saddam went on the verbal attack against the United States. The State Department behaved as if it heard nothing. If there was one thing the United States never received from Saddam Hussein, it was a diplomatic thank-you, in any form. Saddam Hussein acted as if he was

getting his due for serving U.S. interests by confronting Iran. Besides, the Iran-Contra affair, written off in the United States as an aberration, was interpreted in Iraq as indicating U.S. duplicity.

On February 19, at a meeting of Arab leaders in Cairo, Saddam denounced the presence of U.S. naval forces in the Gulf, even though the U.S. fleet had operated in the Gulf for more than 40 years. The contingent had been reinforced when the U.S. undertook to escort "reflagged" Kuwaiti tankers (Kuwaiti tankers flying the U.S. flag to prevent them from being attacked by Iran) during the Iran-Iraq war.

A handful of U.S. warships was still in the Gulf, down from a peak of about fifty during the Iran-Iraq War. Saddam demanded that the U.S. Navy leave the Gulf, altogether. The State Department did not respond.

A few days after the leave-the-Gulf speech, Ambassador Glaspie was summoned to the foreign ministry to receive a protest from deputy foreign minister Nizar Hamdoon, who previously served as ambassador in Washington. He informed her that Saddam objected to an editorial broadcast by the Voice of America on February 15, 1990.

Nobody at State paid attention when the Voice, a largely ignored entity under the nominal supervision of the State Department, broadcast an editorial titled, "No More Secret Police." It celebrated the ouster of Eastern Europe's communist dictatorships and called for eliminating police states "in countries like China, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Cuba, and Albania."

From Saddam's perspective, criticism by a U.S. government agency must have been sanctioned, indeed instigated, by the U.S. government. That would have been the case not only in Iraq, but throughout the Arab Middle East.

Glaspie reported to the State Department that Hamdoon protested the "flagrant violation of the internal affairs of Iraq and the direct official instigation against the official authority . . ." Furthermore, Glaspie explained, Saddam saw the editorial as an official statement of policy, in her words, as "mudslinging with the intent to incite revolution."

State cabled Glaspie the text of an apology. Despite the concern about "human rights" expressed in NSD 26, she was told to write: "It is absolutely not United States policy to question the legitimacy of the Government of Iraq nor to interfere in any way in the domestic concerns of the Iraqi people and Government. My Government regrets that the wording of the editorial left it open to incorrect interpretation." What State could not say was that the Department's annual human rights report was an exercise demanded by Congress, not to be mistaken for actual policy in regard to Iraq.

From then on, all proposed VOA editorials dealing with Iraq were cleared by State. Glaspie later told associates she considered the editorial a "disgrace, an incitement by a wholly owned government organ to populations of a number of countries to revolt." Glaspie's distress may have resulted from considering the editorial inappropriate, coming from a government agency. In any event, she saw how far the Administration would bend to placate Saddam.

Five days after demanding that U.S. naval vessels leave the Gulf, Saddam amplified his denunciation in another speech, delivered in Amman, Jordan. With King Hussein of Jordan and President Mubarak of Egypt in the audience, he emphasized that waning Soviet power left the U.S. the reigning superpower in the Middle East. He spelled out a warning: "This means that if the Gulf people, along with all Arabs, are not careful, the Arab Gulf region will be governed by the wishes of the United States . . ." He warned further that Israel, encouraged by the U.S., would embark on "new stupidities."

In March, 1990, the Iraqis put on trial an Iranian-born journalist working in Iraq for the London *Observer*. Farzad Bazoft was arrested while looking into a massive explosion at an Iraqi military complex that reportedly took hundreds of lives. He was said to have taken photographs and collected soil samples.

Bazoft spent six months in solitary confinement before appearing on Iraqi television and confessing he had spied for Israel. Despite a British request for clemency, he was brought to trial on March 9 and hanged on March 15. Given what is now known about Iraq's nuclear-weapons program, the swift elimination of Bazoft and his samples no longer seems paranoid brutality, but a calculated cover-up.

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher denounced the hanging as "an act of barbarism" and recalled the British ambassador from Iraq. The United States said as little as possible, illustrated by this exchange between State Department Spokesman Margaret Tutwiler and a reporter during the Department's press briefing of March 19:

> **Reporter:** Margaret . . . you all found it prudent and wise not to say anything when Iraq sentenced a British-based journalist to death. Now that he's been executed, does

the United States find it timely to say anything?

Tutwiler: We deplore Iraq's decision to ignore the many international appeals for clemency and the undue haste with which the sentence was carried out. Where human life is involved, there should always be time for additional consideration of such a sentence.

Reporter: Are you going to do anything about it?

Tutwiler: What do you mean, are we going to do something about it?

Reporter: Well, the British have recalled their ambassador, for instance. Are you going to protest? Are you going to —

Tutwiler: I don't know. Let me check on that. I know that we have deplored this. We have made a very strong statement. I did not think to ask, are we going to protest it or withdraw our ambassador, et cetera. I'll be glad to ask.

There was no further response from the State Department, and the Department was comparably mute during the rest of the month, as Iraq was caught in a series of attempts to acquire nuclear-related technology. Late in March, British and U.S. customs agents intercepted an Iraq-bound shipment of "krytons," electronic devices that can trigger nuclear weapons. They were bought in the U.S. and shipped to London, where an Iraqi plane was supposed to fly them to Baghdad.

Following the interception, Saddam went on Iraqi television. He displayed several krytons and declared, "We don't need to smuggle them, and they are not for any nuclear purpose. They are solely for civilian use."

Within days of stopping the airborne shipment of krytons, the British also intercepted a seaborne shipment of eight enormous steel tubes, each more than a yard in diameter. Reportedly, more than 40 such tubes had already reached Iraq. The British claimed they were to be part of a "supergun." Other parts of the device, including 75 tons of forged steel for the gun assembly, were intercepted in Naples, Athens, and Istanbul.

With a barrel intended to be more than 180 feet long, the gun's range would reportedly allow intelligence-gathering satellites to be fired into space or shells loaded with chemicals to be lobbed into almost any part of the Middle East. The bills of lading for the tubes listed them as petroleum pipe, and the Iraqis claimed the tubes were for an oil pipeline. The British noted that pipelines were not built of extra-thick, gun-quality steel. The State Department let the matter pass with minimum public comment.

Also in March, U.S. intelligence discovered that Saddam had installed six launchers for long-range Scud missiles within range of Israel. The fact was not made public.

On April 2, Saddam finally roused the State Department to speak up by threatening to use chemical weapons against Israel. Saddam warned that Israel would "face grave consequences if it conducted any attack against Iraq under any pretext. Israel is threatening us with a strike, and they are even hinting at a nuclear strike. By God, if they did that, we are going to use what we have, and I take this chance to say that we have got weapons that can face them and they can be effective enough to create a war which would eat half of Israel if they dared to attack Iraq with nuclear weapons." Then, Saddam added this comment: "We do not own a nuclear weapon, and we do not need one, and we do not aspire to have one."

At the daily State Department press briefing of April 2 (Washington time is eight hours behind Baghdad time), Department Spokesman Tutwiler was asked for comment and replied: "We have seen these reports, and if they are true, what we have seen is inflammatory, irresponsible, and outrageous."

At the next day's briefing, she was asked: "Margaret, have there been any representations by . . representatives of the United States government to the Iraqis over this?"

Tutwiler: "Well, we made a very public representation yesterday. What do you mean?"

Reporter: "Well, have you talked to any of their people face-to-face about this?

Tutwiler: ". . . I always just assume that our ambassador and our embassy personnel there, of course, have raised this with their counterparts in Iraq."

The U.S. had moved with far more alacrity in February to apologize than it did in April to condemn. After the VOA editorial was broadcast, the text of a U.S. apology was drafted in Washington and cabled for personal delivery to the Iraqi foreign minister. But, when the United States was "outraged" by an "irresponsible" threat to use chemical weapons, it settled for responding to a question at a press briefing and "assuming" the U.S. ambassador — without

instructions from Washington — would raise the issue with an appropriate bureaucrat in Baghdad.

At the time, President Bush seemed more confused than concerned. In a June 27, 1992 reassessment of the policy and events that led to the Gulf War, *New York Times* reporter Elaine Sciolino wrote:

> Mr. Bush noticed the ominous developments, but according to his aides, he was puzzled, not alarmed. Although the Administration publicly and privately criticized Mr. Hussein's words and actions, it did nothing to alter its policy.
>
> "Bush was going around and asking, 'What gives with this guy?' recalled one senior adviser. "He was saying, 'Gee, we are trying to be reasonable, yet this guy says and does these crazy things.'"

The President appeared to believe he could deal with Saddam Hussein on the basis of an unspoken but mutually understood quid pro quo. He seems to have had no understanding of the psychological context and political agenda propelling Saddam Hussein or, for that matter, the Emir of Kuwait.

In April, 1990, U.S. policy was still to protest, placate, and postpone, as illustrated when five U.S. Senators, shepherded by Ambassador Glaspie and members of the embassy staff, met on April 12 with Saddam. Taking advantage of the appointment, scheduled only the previous day, Secretary Baker cabled a message that Glaspie was told to deliver to Saddam.

Baker mentioned U.S. concerns about Iraq's weapons programs, but concentrated on reassuring Saddam that the U.S. would hold Israel in check. "Concerned as we are about Iraq's chemical, nuclear and missile programs," Baker cabled, "we are not in any sense preparing the way for a preemptive, military, unilateral effort to eliminate these programs." The message emphasized, "We are telling Israel so. There is no green light."

There certainly was no "green light" for Israel to deal with Iraq, as it did in 1981, when it bombed the Osirak nuclear reactor. More significantly, no "red light" signaled Iraq to halt its military buildup.

The Senators' visit to Iraq was a last-minute improvisation. Headed by the Senate Minority Leader, Republican Robert Dole of Kansas, the delegation was meeting in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak when it expressed concern about the Iraqi arms build-up. Mubarak suggested they raise the subject personally with Saddam and offered to arrange a meeting. Dole called President Bush from the U.S. embassy. When the President approved, the Senators faxed him a copy of the letter they proposed to hand Saddam and that, too, was approved.

The President of Egypt then telephoned the President of Iraq, who was on holiday in the mountain resort of Sarsank, in the Kurdish area of northern Iraq, near Turkey. Saddam agreed to see them, and on April 11 the Senators flew to Iraq. Besides Dole, the group included three other Republicans — James McClure of Idaho, Frank Murkowski of Alaska, Alan Simpson of Wyoming — and a Democrat, Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio.

Accompanied by Ambassador Glaspie, they met with Saddam on April 12, in a hotel on the Tigris river in the city of Mosul. Before the meeting began, they were asked to surrender their cameras and tape recorders. Unknown to them, the Iraqis tape-recorded the meeting. Subsequently, they released the transcript in Washington. The Senators have not challenged the essential accuracy of the transcript, except to claim it was heavily condensed.

The letter they presented was "standard language," as the State Department would say, deploring the effort to develop nuclear, biological, and chemical capabilities as well as the speech threatening Israel with chemical weapons. It hoped that Saddam would discontinue his weapons programs and desist from provocative statements. It expressed appreciation for being received and looked forward to improved relations.

It was the transcript of what was said spontaneously, particularly by Dole and Simpson, that attracted public attention. According to the transcript, Saddam still had the Voice of America editorial on his mind, and he complained, "Daily the Arabs hear scorn directed at them from the West, daily they bear insults. Why? Has the Zionist mentality taken control of you to the point that it has deprived you of your humanity?"

Senator Dole responded: "... I don't know what you mean when you say 'the West'. I don't know whether or not you mean the government. There is a person who did not have the authority to say anything about [your] government. He was a commentator for the VOA and this person was removed from it."

Senator Dole was wrong. VOA was muzzled on the subject of Iraq, but nobody was fired. Senator Simpson got on the subject of the press:

"I believe that your problems lie with the Western media and not with the U.S. government. As long as you are isolated from the

media, the press — and it is a haughty and pampered press. They all consider themselves political geniuses, that is, the journalists do. They are very cynical. What I advise is that you invite them to come here and see for themselves." Acknowledging the remarks, Senator Simpson later claimed that the transcript reported fifteen minutes of a three-hour meeting and left out the Senators' remonstrances regarding Iraqi behavior.

The events of the previous dozen weeks not only induced five Senators to remonstrate with Saddam in Mosul, they also inspired Washington's first, high-level reconsideration of Iraq policy. April 16 was the date of a regularly scheduled interagency "deputies" meeting at the White House. State finally wanted to take some punitive actions. Under Secretary Kimmitt proposed ending Ex-Im credits, denying further CCC credits, and other measures to make it difficult for Iraq to import military materiel. By now, however, the Agriculture and Commerce Departments had constituencies that wanted to continue selling agricultural and other products to Iraq. Although the credits were held up, the meeting ended with a call for further study.

Many members of Congress, outraged by Saddam's most recent statements, wanted to vote sanctions against Iraq. They were opposed by those members whose constituents had developed significant trade interests with Iraq.

State's strategy was to defend the policy's intentions and dissuade Congress from voting sanctions, opposing them on the grounds that Congressional management of foreign policy denied the Department the flexibility it needed to shape policy to changing circumstances. Testifying before the House Foreign Affairs Committee late in April, Assistant Secretary for Middle East Affairs John Kelly described Iraq as "an important and difficult country which poses a challenge to American foreign policy." The U.S., Kelly insisted, had to provide Iraq with an opening "to demonstrate that it does, indeed, wish to reverse this deterioration in relations."

On May 29, 1990, the deputies committee met again, after which the Department of Agriculture closed off Iraq's second $500 million in CCC credits. What U.S. policy-makers failed to recognize was that the policy of punishments and rewards promulgated under NSD 26 had become irrelevant. The punishments were trivial, and the monetary rewards were past tempting Saddam. He was bent on acquiring far larger sums from Kuwait.

Saddam's shift of focus to Kuwait was signaled at almost the same time U.S. credits were cut off. On that same day, May 29, an Arab summit meeting was under way in Baghdad. The next day, Saddam delivered another anti-U.S. speech, accusing Washington *and Kuwait* of waging "economic warfare" against Iraq.

Until then, Saddam had linked Britain and Israel with the U.S., accusing them of conspiring to encircle Iraq militarily and economically. Now, he named Kuwait as a co-conspirator in seeking the economic ruination of Iraq by driving down the price of oil. The new tack was overlooked by the press and the State Department, where U.S. policy-makers were involved with the imminent arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev for a four-day meeting with President Bush.

The issue that inflamed Saddam at the Arab summit meeting of May 1990 was Kuwait's unabashed violation of OPEC oil quotas. Iraq blamed Kuwait for the loss of billions in annual revenue. Kuwait's overproduction, along with that of the United Arab Emirates, was driving down the price of a barrel of oil. Saddam wanted OPEC to push the price of oil up to $25 a barrel at a time when it was well below $20. (Later, at an OPEC meeting in July 1990, it was announced the price would be maintained at $18 a barrel. After the meeting, the price fell to $14 a barrel.)

Both Iraq and Kuwait emerged from the Iraq-Iran war badly in need of money. Both were profligate in using their oil income — Iraq for military spending, Kuwait for covering the cost of an internal stock-market scandal that, proportionately, far exceeded the cost to the U.S. of the savings-and-loan scandal.

Even though oil income was vital to both for survival, they made money from oil in opposite ways, a distinction noted by Mohamed Heikal: "Kuwait had invested heavily in Western refining and marketing facilities, and its income came more from selling petrol and other products than from crude oil. As Kuwait's overseas companies were the initial buyers of Kuwaiti oil, anything gained initially from higher oil prices would be lost in lower profitability of the companies. What mattered to Kuwait was not the oil price so much as the volume sold. Its priorities were diametrically opposed to those of Iraq, which depended almost entirely on selling crude oil and needed the highest price that would not cause a collapse of demand."

Iraq and Kuwait not only had comparable financial needs and conflicting economic interests, each also had a very different view of what it was owed by the other. Iraq considered Kuwait in its debt because it saved Kuwait from being

swallowed by Iran. Kuwait considered Iraq in its debt because of Kuwait's massive financial contribution to the Iraqi victory. Iraq wanted sizeable loans and its debts forgiven. Kuwait was prepared to offer a small loan and forgive the debts — if Iraq recognized its borders.

Kuwait had reopened the border question shortly before the supergun revelations and other news stories critical of Iraq appeared in the Western press. Saddam began to suspect that Kuwait was in league with his enemies, most notably the United States.

Iraq's territorial dispute with Kuwait was an issue with a long history. The Iraqis never accepted the frontier between Iraq and Kuwait drawn by Britain in 1923. It later opposed Kuwait's admission to the United Nations and delayed it for two years. Because Kuwait was part of the Iraqi province of Basra when both were ruled by the Turks of the Ottoman Empire, Iraq considered Kuwait an integral part of its territory. (The President of Turkey subsequently dismissed the Iraqi claim by telling a group of journalists that, on that basis, Turkey had a claim to Iraq.)

Iraq's territorial disputes with Kuwait went beyond their shared border, which Iraq would have placed just outside of Kuwait City. Iraq had limited and difficult access to the Persian Gulf, while Kuwait had a long Gulf coastline. Iraq wanted access to the Gulf at the expense of Kuwait. Also, a major oil field in Iraq lapped over into Kuwait. The Kuwaitis were accused, apparently justly, of drilling aslant and tapping more oil than they were entitled to. For this, Iraq wanted substantial monetary recompense.

After the Arab summit in May, Saddam stepped up his dunning of Kuwait for $10 billion in financial aid. Kuwait, not expecting to be repaid, ignored him.

During the course of July 1990, Saddam intensified his war of nerves with Kuwait. Western and Arab countries saw the threats as Saddam's way of getting Kuwait to cut back its oil production and make territorial concessions giving him easier access to the Persian Gulf. Both demands were tacitly supported by most of the Arab countries.

On July 17, Saddam addressed a political rally celebrating his Ba'ath Party's 1968 seizure of power. He threatened to use force against "some" Arab oil producers if over-production did not stop: "What we are facing now is a loss of $14 billion a year in oil prices . . . this is an American policy and there are Arabs who are mobilized in the service of that policy."

On July 18, at a meeting of Arab League foreign ministers in Tunis, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz accused Kuwait of stealing territory and oil in the Rumaila oil field, which straddled the Iraq-Kuwait border, and of conspiring to push down oil prices.

On July 20, a military attache from a non-Arab country was driving along the six-lane highway from Kuwait City to Baghdad. He saw hundreds of Iraqi military vehicles filled with troops and weapons moving toward the Kuwaiti border. Several hours later, U.S. satellites were observing the area, and analysts estimated that 30,000 Iraqi troops had taken up positions near Kuwait.

On July 21, Saddam Hussein assured the Saudi ambassador to Iraq that Iraqi troops were not moving toward Kuwait but toward the Fao Peninsula, a contested area between Iraqi and Iranian forces. Saddam also agreed to a meeting between high-level Iraqi and Kuwaiti representatives on August 1.

On July 24, a meeting in Baghdad between President Mubarak of Egypt and Saddam Hussein eerily anticipated the next day's meeting between Ambassador Glaspie and Saddam Hussein. In his book, Heikal described the meeting between the Presidents:

> Mubarak and Saddam Hussein held a private meeting in a closed room in Baghdad, leaving their assistants outside. Mubarak understood Saddam Hussein to say that he was only trying to scare Kuwait and would not use force. Baghdad's version was that Saddam Hussein said there would be no use of force before Iraq and Kuwait held their high-level meeting. If the meeting produced an agreement, there would be no problem; if not, Iraq would defend its interests. Mubarak came away convinced that there was no danger, while Saddam Hussein thought he had given a clear warning. As no note-takers were present it is impossible to tell how the confusion arose.

On his flight home after leaving Saddam, President Mubarak brought what he thought was good news to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, touching down in Kuwait City and Riyadh to make personal visits. He telephoned the same positive impression to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain and President Bush.

What is one to make of Mubarak's message? If

Saddam wanted to intimidate the Kuwaitis in order to soften them up for the August 1 meeting, he should have been threatening. Perhaps he was, and Mubarak misunderstood him. Or did Saddam want to lull the Kuwaitis, and the rest of the world, to make his invasion easier?

Perhaps he was marking time with Mubarak, waiting for a better sense of what the Americans might do. In that case, a threat against Kuwait delivered to the American ambassador would have been a way to learn how the Americans might respond to an invasion.

Both Mubarak and Glaspie operated on the basis of one of the Arab world's key assumptions: It was unthinkable that Saddam would breach a basic tenet of pan-Arabism and invade an Arab country. (Iranians, being descendants of the hated Persians, were another matter.) Both Mubarak and Glaspie anticipated a hard haggle between the Iraqis and Kuwaitis, with the Kuwaitis getting supplementary arm-twisting from the Saudis, Egyptians, and Jordanians.

Both apparently made the mistake of assuming the Kuwaitis would eventually bow to pressure and make concessions. But the Kuwaitis had already proved unexpectedly stubborn in the blatant way they defied OPEC. Presumably, they also were convinced that an Iraqi invasion was an unthinkable violation of pan-Arabism.

Most likely, the Americans would not have objected if the Kuwaitis caved in to Saddam; he might thereby become less obstreperous. Furthermore, the Bush Administration, with its Texas oil perspective, was not likely to consider higher oil prices objectionable. The U.S. oil industry could piggy-back on the price hike. And, if Saddam's income rose, he could spend it on U.S. grains and other commodities.

Saddam's meeting with Ambassador Glaspie the day after he met with the President of Egypt raises the same questions as the Mubarak meeting. What did Saddam want to convey and why did he want to convey it? Did he dissemble or was he misunderstood? Could war have been averted if either Mubarak or Glaspie had inferred it was a strong possibility and reacted differently?

If both were mistaken, they were not equally at fault. As a President, Mubarak made policy; as an ambassador, Glaspie conveyed the policy made in Washington. To know what she could possibly say as a deterrent one has to know what she was *given* to say. The answer can be found in the texts of State Department press briefings and cables prior to the Saddam-Glaspie meeting.

Pack Journalism at the State Department

The State Department holds a daily press briefing shortly after 12 noon. During the period covered here, the briefings were conducted by Spokesman Margaret Tutwiler or by her deputy, Richard Boucher, a career Foreign Service Officer. On July 20, the day the Iraqi motorized armada was spotted moving toward the Kuwait border, Margaret Tutwiler opened the press briefing by announcing that the Secretary of State would visit Mongolia from August 2 through August 5. When Kuwait was invaded, Baker was with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Edward Shevardnadze, in the Siberian city of Irkutsk.

On July 24, the day Mubarak met with Saddam and the day before Glaspie's meeting with Saddam, the following exchanges occurred at the State Department press briefing:

> **Reporter:** Margaret, what does the State Department know about some military buildup by Iraq on the Kuwaiti border?
> **Tutwiler:** Yes, there is a buildup near the Kuwaiti-Iraq border, on both sides.
> **Reporter:** Does that have any impact on the United States? Are you worried at all about it?
> **Tutwiler:** The United States is watching the situation closely and this is a source and a situation that is of concern to us. Iraq and others know that there is no place for coercion and intimidation in a civilized world. All disputes should be handled through peaceful means. We would also like to take note of the efforts in the Arab world to solve this situation peacefully.
> **Reporter:** Does that mean you're blaming Iraq for starting it, since you're suggesting that they know that there's no place for coercion?
> **Tutwiler:** That's your interpretation. I've said clearly that Iraq and others — that there is no place in a civilized world for coercion and intimidation.

That exchange is a quintessential expression of the State Department's policy statements regarding Iraq — even-handed and mealy-mouthed. The questioning continued:

> **Reporter:** "Has the United States sent any formal diplomatic messages to the Iraqis about putting 25,000 to 30,000 troops on the border with Kuwait? Has there been any protest by the United States at the ambassadorial or any other level that you know of?

Tutwiler: I'm unaware of a protest. I am aware, as I've said, Mr. Kelly has had more than one meeting on this subject. Our ambassadors in the region are actively discussing this situation with their counterparts, but I'm unaware of a formal protest, in the diplomatic jargon.
Reporter: Do you happen to know if the United States has any commitment to Kuwait to defend Kuwait or to assist it against aggression?
Tutwiler: We do not have any defense treaties with Kuwait, and there are no special defense or security commitments to Kuwait.
Reporter: Is there not some sort of a special relationship — if that's the phrase — because, when they had an oil problem, the U.S. rushed in . . . if anything more overt is done to hurt Kuwait, would the United States help them?
Tutwiler: I will restate for you, as we restated on July 18, our policy in the Gulf region: We remain determined to defend the principle of freedom of navigation and to ensure the free flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz. We also remain strongly committed to supporting the individual and collective self-defense of our friends in the Gulf, with whom we have deep and long-standing ties.

Ms. Tutwiler appeared to be warning Iran not to bomb reflagged tankers in the Persian Gulf, but carefully refrained from any comment specific to Iraqi military moves. She did say the U.S. would "support" its Gulf "friends," and a persistent reporter subsequently drew out an affirmation that Kuwait is a "friend." But the nature of the "support" Kuwait might get was never described:

Reporter: Margaret, you said that you're committed to the self-defense of your friends in the Gulf. Does that mean that, literally, if Kuwait was in trouble, that the United States would go to bat for it?
Tutwiler: That's a hypothetical and a contingency, and you know that we never discuss those types of things.
Reporter: Is Kuwait one of our friends in the Gulf?
Tutwiler: Yes.
Reporter: Is any rethinking underway of U.S. policy toward Iraq in light of Iraq's threatening statements toward Kuwait and the U.A.E.? (United Arab Emirates)
Tutwiler: We have said here before on the podium that our relationship with Iraq is a complicated relationship, and we have said that it is at times a difficult relationship. We've been on the record on that before. As far as an overall review of the United States' relationship with Iraq, no.
Reporter: President Mubarak is also on a mission to try to bring about peace. Are we simply supporting his mission, or do we have an independent, free-standing mission of our own going on there to try to bring about peace in the region?
Tutwiler: If you want to call our United States ambassadors in each of these countries in the region, who are actively talking to their counterparts, if you want to characterize that as an independent, stand-alone United States activity, then call it that. . . . it's not just President Mubarak. We've said there are a number of Arabs — I did not happen to bring a detailed list — are working for peace in this region.
Reporter: Can you share with us any analyses from this Department about the why of the build-up?
Tutwiler: No, we do not have any analysis for you.

On July 24, 1990, the day Saddam and Mubarak met, the United States announced a joint air exercise with the United Arab Emirates. In addition, American naval vessels on duty in the Persian Gulf were moved closer to Kuwait and the U.A.E.

The refueling exercise involved air-to-air refueling by U.S. tanker planes. The ruler of the U.A.E., Sheik Zaid Ibn Sultan, had asked the Pentagon to conduct the joint maneuver following Saddam's inflammatory July 17 speech. Along with Kuwait, the U.A.E. was a major violator of OPEC production quotas.

The State Department was uneasy about the military gesture. Under Secretary of State Kimmitt insisted on inquiring if the U.A.E. was serious and if the Saudis wanted to participate. The Saudis wanted no part of the token show of force, and the U.A.E became upset when the exercise, to which the U.S. contributed two aerial tankers and a cargo transport, was reported in the American press.

On July 25, 1990, Ambassador Glaspie had her unexpected meeting with Saddam Hussein. Testifying before members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in March 1991, a month after the Gulf War ended, she referred to the refueling

exercise with the U.A.E. in recounting the sequence of events that led up to the meeting:

> Over the advice of our friends in the area, and at the request of the government of the United Arab Emirates, the only government in the area which took our approach, we announced on the 24th a joint military operation in the Gulf.

The Ambassador made the refueling seem an initiative the State Department favored and promoted when State had, in fact, opposed it. She thereby demonstrated that she knew how to put a favorable "spin" on a story.

> At midnight that night I was convoked and protests were made. I was asked if it was also true that our fleet had redeployed. I hope I looked suitably enigmatic because I didn't know whether it had redeployed or not, but I thought it wouldn't do any harm if the Iraqis thought it had. And later in the morning, when the Foreign Ministry officially opened, I went back with Ms. Tutwiler's statement typed and handed it to the Deputy Minister and asked that if it hadn't already arrived at the Presidency that it be taken there immediately. About an hour later, of course, I was called to see the President. I was there for two hours, but I think he was on the phone to President Mubarak for certainly half an hour of that. So I suppose I was with him for about an hour and a half.

Press accounts have provided supplementary details about the circumstances leading up to the meeting. In addition to Tutwiler's statement, Glaspie took with her the announcement that the U.S. was engaging in the refueling exercise with the U.A.E. She brought the documents to the office of Deputy Foreign Minister Nizar Hamdoon and asked that they be brought to Saddam's personal attention.

The pairing of documents is interesting. The only useful purpose served by giving Saddam excerpts from Tutwiler's briefing would be to mollify him. Tutwiler had spent her time on the podium distancing the Administration from any intimation of military action. Bringing her statements to Saddam's attention would counter the report of the refueling exercise, which was bound to irritate Saddam. Such an approach was in keeping with the fact that all the Arab countries that were close to the United States wanted to pour oil, so to speak, on the troubled waters.

Having delivered the documents, Glaspie went back to the U.S. embassy and was almost immediately recalled to the Foreign Ministry. Hamdoon was waiting for her in a parked car outside the Ministry building. She joined him, and they drove to what Heikal, in his account of the meeting, describes as a "guest house." Glaspie soon found herself alone in an office with Saddam Hussein.

Glaspie was not accompanied by an embassy officer to take notes of the conversation. Having a note-taker along is preferred procedure; it is considered inappropriate for an ambassador to take notes during an exchange of views.

In their own distinctive way, the Iraqis made up for the omission. In mid-September, more than six weeks after the invasion, they released a transcript of the tape-recorded conversation. It was the same gambit employed after Saddam's meeting with five Senators. As with the Senators, a dispute arose over how much was edited out by the Iraqis.

The following March, the war over, Glaspie testified on successive days before subcommittees of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee. She sought to put the best possible face on the prewar circumstances of the previous July, but history was not on her side. She maintained that the transcript made her look diffident and apologetic because the exchanges in which she was firm and persistent were omitted. After months of press coverage in which her performance was derided or supported half-heartedly by an Administration that distanced itself from her, she had a difficult case to make.

She made it insistently. There was no diffidence in her testimony before the committee. Hemmed in by the Iraq transcript, she firmly maintained that Saddam had no choice but to read a muscular meaning into the cryptic phrase "defend our interests." Glaspie's version of how she warned Saddam is concisely recounted in her testimony of March 21, 1991, before the Europe and Middle East subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Her key points come out in exchanges with the subcommittee's chairman, Representative Lee H. Hamilton (Dem. Indiana):

> **Rep. Hamilton:** Do you believe that Saddam Hussein clearly understood, without any shadow of a doubt, that if he went into Kuwait the United States was going to oppose him vigorously and strongly with all its military power?

Amb. Glaspie: With all its military power, no. I certainly wouldn't suggest that he thought we were going to nuke Baghdad, Mr. Chairman, but I am absolutely sure that he knew that we would fight. I think it dawned on him as a possibility on the 25th, or the 24th when he heard that announcement [of the refueling exercise].

. . .

Rep. Hamilton: Did you ever tell Saddam Hussein, "Mr. President, if you go across that line into Kuwait, we're going to fight?"
Amb. Glaspie: No, I did not.
Rep. Hamilton: And yet you think he believed that?
Amb. Glaspie: I certainly do. I told him we would defend our vital interests. He complained to me for one hour about fleet movements and American neoimperialism and militarism. He knew perfectly well what we were talking about, and *it would have been absolutely wrong for me, without consulting with the President, to inform anybody of a change in our policy.* (Italics added) Our policy was that we would defend our vital interests. It's up to the President to decide how we would do it. Saddam Hussein, who is a man who lives by the sword, believed that we were going to do it by the sword, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Glaspie fell back on NSD 26, without citing it. ("The United States remains committed to defend its vital interests in the region, if necessary and appropriate through the use of U.S. military forces, against the Soviet Union or any other regional power with interests inimical to our own.")

A former boss of Glaspie's, retired from the State Department, was one of the few who defended her openly. Richard W. Murphy, the Assistant Secretary of State for Middle East Affairs during most of the Reagan Administration, was quoted as saying, "April inherited an effort of years' standing to try to help mold a more sensible Iraq. She didn't invent the policy." If anybody can be deemed at least a co-inventor, and surely a sponsor, of that policy, it was Murphy. He then sold it to his superiors, notably Under Secretary Eagleburger.

Much was made of the phrase "defend our interests." But the U.S. never gave Saddam any reason to believe the U.S. would consider its interests violated if he took over Kuwait. In the end, as Glaspie pointed out in self-defense, it was up to the President (or his surrogate, the Secretary of State) to decide how U.S. interests would be defended. When she testified, it was not public knowledge that President Bush sent a placating message to Saddam on July 28, three days after Glaspie met with him.

Glaspie did not reveal she had conveyed Bush's message, and the full text was not made public until October 21, 1992, when it was published by the *Washington Post*. It makes clear the limits of what she could say in an effort to deter Saddam. The cable reads:

> Please deliver the following as an oral response from President Bush to Saddam Hussein's message in reftel B [Glaspie's cable describing her July 25 meeting].
>
> Begin Text.
>
> I was pleased to learn of the agreement between Iraq and Kuwait to begin negotiations in Jeddah to find a peaceful solution to the current tensions between you. The United States and Iraq both have a strong interest in preserving the peace and stability of the Middle East. For this reason we believe that differences are best resolved by peaceful means and not by threats involving military force or conflict.
>
> I also welcome your statement that Iraq desires friendship, rather than confrontation, with the United States. Let me reassure you, as my ambassador, Senator Dole, and others have done, that my administration continues to desire better relations with Iraq. We will also continue to support our other friends in the region with whom we have had long-standing ties. We see no necessary inconsistency between these two objectives.
>
> As you know, we still have fundamental concerns about certain Iraqi policies and activities. And we will continue to raise these concerns with you, in a spirit of friendship and candor, as we have in the past both to gain a better understanding of your interests and intentions and to ensure that you understand our concerns. I completely agree that both our governments must maintain open channels of communication to avoid misunderstandings and in order to build a more durable foundation for improving our relations.
>
> End Text.
>
> Ambassador should indicate this is in the nature of an interim reply, and that she hopes to be able to respond more fully to the concerns raised by Saddam on return to Baghdad.

Baker had departed for Soviet Asia, and the cable was sent over the name of the acting Secretary of State, Lawrence S. Eagleburger.

Leaning over backward not to ruffle Saddam, Mr. Bush did not mention the Iraqi troops and tanks massed on the Kuwaiti border. Four days after the *Post* revealed this text, on October 25, 1992, the *New York Times* ran a story describing the Pentagon's effort to persuade the State Department to send Baghdad a sterner message. The Pentagon was unsuccessful; the problem was left to the Arabs because the Arabs wanted it that way.

Now that we know about President Bush's message to Saddam four days before he invaded Kuwait, it seems reasonable to conjecture. If Glaspie, on her own initiative, threatened Saddam with military retaliation, might she not have been denounced for inciting him to violence and dragging the U.S. into war? *Newsweek* commented after her March testimony, "With a different outcome in the Persian Gulf War, April Glaspie could have been the mother of all scapegoats."

All the players had preconceptions and deep commitments to prior policies. The result was inappropriate responses to rapidly unfolding events. The outcome surprised everyone, an unmistakable sign of failed policies.

The day after the Saddam-Glaspie meeting, the State Department press corps began asking what had happened. As events unfolded, the reporters were caught up in minutiae. They asked exactly what Ambassador Glaspie said to Saddam Hussein, where she was and what she was doing since her return to the United States, whether she would return to Iraq and why not, whether the transcript the Iraqis released was accurate and how much it was edited, whether Glaspie could be interviewed, why she was not giving interviews. In short, they made Glaspie, not her superiors, the focus of their questions and their stories.

None of the reporters who routinely attend Department briefings asked why the whole weight of dealing with Saddam apparently had been placed on the Ambassador's shoulders. Nor did they ask if anybody other than Ambassador Glaspie communicated with Saddam prior to the invasion. The fact that President Bush had sent his own soothing message to Saddam shortly after the notorious Saddam-Glaspie meeting was not revealed until Elaine Sciolino broke the story in the *New York Times* on June 27, 1992.

The reporters on the State Department beat focused their questions on the tactics of diplomacy, thereby obscuring the strategic issue: Who was responsible for policy? Here are examples of how the questioning progressed, beginning July 26,1990:

> **Reporter:** Can you tell us about the discussions that the Ambassador to Baghdad has had with the Iraqi government?
> **Boucher:** President Hussein met with Ambassador Glaspie yesterday. During the meeting, President Hussein stated his desire for a peaceful resolution of the Gulf situation, and informed the Ambassador of his plans for discussions with Kuwait. Ambassador Glaspie took the opportunity to reaffirm the United States commitment to peace and stability in the Gulf region, and to urge that all sides seek to settle their disputes by peaceful means. The Ambassador also noted that Iraq's decision to hold a dialogue with Kuwait was a step in the right direction.

A week after the invasion, Ambassador Glaspie was becoming a non-person, as shown in this exchange on August 10:

> **Reporter:** Ambassador Glaspie, where is she?
> **Boucher:** I don't have an update on Ambassador Glaspie. I'll have to check on that.

August 14:

> **Reporter:** I want to ask you again about Ambassador Glaspie. One thing I'm wondering about is whether she has been involved in any of the meetings that took place here . . .
> **Tutwiler:** I think that I might have misspoken yesterday when I said that she was in Washington. I didn't check again this morning. I know she is on leave, and I believe that she is just in the United States, and we are not saying specifically where.

August 23:

> **Reporter:** Can you tell us anything further today about the elusive and mysterious Ms. Glaspie?
> **Boucher:** Every day I think yesterday was the last time I get asked about April Glaspie. I'll check on it and get something for you.

September 13:

> **Reporter:** Have you seen this mysterious Iraqi document purporting to be a report of a conversation between Ambassador

Glaspie and Saddam Hussein some time ago?

Boucher: I haven't seen a whole document, I've seen several different press reports about it. And let me just say that our position on threats and intimidation that was being carried out by Iraq at the time against its neighbors was clear in the days leading up to the invasion and Iraq's occupation of Kuwait.

Iraq could not have misunderstood our resolve to stand by our friends in the Gulf. We think that most people will see this ruse for what it is, and that's an attempt by Iraq to divert attention from its naked aggression in Kuwait, and that remains the issue here.

Whatever the Iraqis intended to achieve by releasing the transcript, the State Department made good use of it as a diversion. For months, the exact words that April Glaspie used in addressing Saddam Hussein was the focus of reportorial curiosity. On the first day of Glaspie's Congressional testimony, when she claimed the transcript was distorted by editing, the accuracy of the transcript became the central issue. At that point, the Department re-positioned itself. The *New York Times's* State Department reporter, Thomas Friedman, wrote: "The Bush Administration moved today to counter the impression that it callously left April C. Glaspie, the American ambassador to Iraq, as a scapegoat for failing to prevent Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait."

At the Department briefing of March 21, 1991, reporters questioned Deputy Spokesman Richard Boucher about the Department's motives in not defending the Ambassador:

Reporter: April Glaspie has testified yesterday that that transcript was a fabrication. Had anyone during the last seven months from this podium, or any other government official, simply said, "That transcript is a fabrication," there would have been no story here. Why did no one say that?

Boucher: I'm not sure I can agree with you that there would have been no story here. During the period in question, forming the coalition, prosecuting the war, we said repeatedly we weren't interested in starting a sideshow, starting a side debate, on who took better notes of the meeting.

Reporter: I suppose people in the public service have to take a certain amount of trashing for the good of the country or something, but how about the good of the policy? Why didn't you — not you, but why didn't Mr. Baker on one of his many television appearances say something about the doctoring of what she had told Saddam Hussein?

Boucher: If you're dealing with the issue of whether Saddam had been warned or not, again we had repeated many times the statements that we made in the two weeks leading up to August 2. We had very clearly, in the briefings here and in other public statements and testimony, said that we had interests and friends in the region that we would stand by. . . .

And we said, as we say today, that issue was not really the two weeks before August 2. The issue was Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2. We were dealing with that — the results of that. We were forming a coalition, and we were prosecuting a war. That was the focus for us, and that remained the focus for us.

The Department had every reason to focus on August 2, the day of the invasion. But, even the reporters' efforts to extend the period under review to the "two weeks before August 2" was a diversion from the larger issue, the policy followed for at least the two years since the Iraq-Iran war ended in August 1988.

Outside the briefing room that day, the Department was putting an additional "spin" on the story. The next day, the *New York Times's* front-page story included not only Boucher's rationale that "we considered the Iraqi transcript to be a sideshow," but also an unattributed comment:

Privately, however, a senior Administration official sympathetic to Mr. Baker said: "If you read her cable you would not say that the entire Iraqi transcript was phoney baloney. Since her cable was not 250 degrees different from the Iraqi transcript, no one felt entirely comfortable in going out and saying it was all false."

The State Department put still another spin on the saga of Ambassador Glaspie. On June 7, 1991, Ambassador Glaspie was one of seven members of the staff of the Baghdad embassy to receive the Department's Senior Honor Award. In bestowing it upon her, Deputy Secretary Eagleburger declared that she had "for two years tenaciously represented U.S. foreign policy in Iraq under trying and hostile circumstances . . ."

The "Smoking Gun" Syndrome:
The Press and the Reporting of Policy

On September 23, 1990, about seven weeks after the invasion, the Secretary of State appeared on *Meet the Press*. Responding to questions from R.W. ("Johnny") Apple of the *New York Times*, James Baker demonstrated that, for him, the buck stopped as far away as he could push it.

> **Apple:** April Glaspie . . made it quite clear in quite explicit language — as I said, authorized by you — that the United States took no position as between Kuwait and Iraq in this border dispute . . . Why was she told to say that?
> **Baker:** Johnny, I think what you see here has best been characterized, if I might say so, by a very good article that Ed Yoder wrote yesterday that was published in the *Washington Post*, and what he called all of this was "retrospective scapegoating," and he characterized it as shameful. . . Let me tell you what the signals were that were sent to Saddam Hussein before this happened.
> Signal No. 1 was to slap foreign policy export controls on exports to Iraq. Signal No. 2 was to cancel or suspend the Commodity Credit Corporation program with Iraq. Signal No. 3 was to prohibit the export of a number of items that we and some of our allies thought might be useful in terms of missile or nuclear proliferation.
> So now we've got some 20/20 hindsighting going on that's been highly critical, frankly, of some very fine career public servants of the United States.
> **Apple:** Nobody's trying to criticize April Glaspie. They're trying to criticize you.
> **Baker:** What you want me to do is say that those instructions were sent specifically by me on my specific orders. I'm not going to deny, Johnny, what the policy was, but I'm going to say to you that there are probably 312,000 or so cables that go out under my name as Secretary of State.
> **Apple:** Why was the policy, as Ms. Glaspie said, as Mr. Kelly said on Capitol Hill, not to take any sides between the Kuwaitis, whom we thought to be completely pacific, and Saddam Hussein, who we knew to be an extreme dictator?
> **Baker:** That had to do with taking sides on a border dispute — not taking sides on the question of unprovoked aggression. But some have translated it to mean taking sides with respect to unprovoked aggression.
> **Apple:** Well, why was it our policy not to take a position on the border dispute? Did we think that one was as right as the other?
> **Baker:** There are border disputes going on all over the world, Johnny, and we take positions on some, and we don't take positions on others. But let me say one more thing. The suggestion that somehow the United States contributed to Saddam Hussein's unprovoked aggression against this small country is ludicrous, absolutely ludicrous.

A likely reason the United States took no position on the Kuwaiti border dispute is that the Kuwaitis' Arab compatriots were pressing them to give up some territory to Iraq. Saudi Arabia played a key role in setting up the first of a series of meetings during which the territorial concession was to be worked out. At the initial meeting, the Iraqis were brutally impolite and the Kuwaitis unexpectedly stubborn. The follow-up meeting in Baghdad never took place.

The last, prewar confrontation between Iraqi and Kuwaiti representatives was on August 1, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, Heikal described the situation prior to the meeting:

> As the Jeddah encounter approached, Kuwait came under stronger pressure from Saudi Arabia and others to be more accommodating towards Iraq. Riyadh shared Baghdad's annoyance with Kuwait and the U.A.E. over the oil quotas issue, and also felt the Iraqi wish for an outlet to the Gulf was reasonable. It proposed that Kuwait should consider leasing the islands of Warba and Bubiyan to Iraq for a long period, an idea supported by the Egyptians.

At the time of Baker's *Meet the Press* interview on September 23, *Times* reporter Johnny Apple could not have known such details, but his questioning of Baker might have been more pointed if he had recalled a comment that Glaspie made less than two weeks earlier. On September 12, the *Times* published what is probably the only post-invasion interview Glaspie granted. She told reporter Elaine Sciolino: "Obviously, I didn't think — and nobody else did — that the Iraqis were going to take *all* of Kuwait."

Sciolino later wrote that when the two top U.S. embassy officials in Kuwait received a copy of Glaspie's cable reporting her meeting with

Saddam, they sent Washington a cable laying out what they thought would happen. "They predicted that the Iraqis would move troops across the border, but even they did not foresee a total invasion."

After the invasion, the State Department was no more forthcoming about these details than it was about the history of U.S. support for Iraq during the preceding decade. A sense of how the Secretary of State tried to present the events immediately preceding the invasion of Kuwait emerges in his interview with CBS newscaster Connie Chung. The two spoke in Mr. Baker's office, where he was recorded and filmed for the February 11, 1991, broadcast of *Face to Face with Connie Chung*. At that point, the bombardment of Iraq had been going on for weeks.

The following excerpts include exchanges that were not aired, but were reported in the State Department's in-house transcript of the interview:

> **Chung:** What was the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, telling you regarding the troop movement . . . ?
> **Baker:** Well, our intelligence was beginning, as I say, around the 25th — 24th to 25th — began to indicate that there was — maybe it was 26th or 27th — don't hold me to the exact date — but the intelligence began to indicate movements. . . .
> **Chung:** What was she telling you about Saddam Hussein's intentions prior to that meeting?
> **Baker:** Well, I'd have to go back and look at those cables, because I was in the Pacific, and I would have to see — you know, take a look at each of the reporting cables before I was able to get into that with you.
> **Chung:** You haven't gone back to look at it since then?
> **Baker:** Well, we've looked at them here in the Department — yes — but we had not — we've been unwilling to make diplomatic communications public.
> . . .
> **Baker:** But let me say this: Regardless of what those reporting cables might reflect, the intelligence which we believed indicated to us that there was a good likelihood or possibility on or around the 26th — 25th, 26th, 27th of July time frame, that he was massing his troops. So we were worried about it from then on.

Recall that Tutwiler responded on July 24 to reporters' questions about the Iraqi military buildup on the Kuwait border. Tutwiler's soothing response was the message that Glaspie brought to Saddam. Wouldn't that make Tutwiler as culpable as Glaspie?

> **Chung:** Did you feel it was necessary to protest to Saddam Hussein or warn him — any forthright warning to Saddam Hussein not to proceed?
> **Baker:** We did a number of things, and I think that there were specific warnings, if I'm not mistaken. But I know that we had cut off a lot of programs that involved Iraq. We had slapped foreign policy controls on Iraq beginning around that time frame, beginning in the July 25th time frame — something that we hadn't done before. So there were a number of steps that we took.
> **Chung:** Then why would the U.S. ambassador say in her meeting with Saddam Hussein, "What we hold no opinion about are inter-Arab disputes, such as your border disagreement with Kuwait." She's basically telling him that the United States has no problem with his border dispute with Kuwait and has no opinion.
> **Baker:** Well, but she's really not — that's really not what she's telling him. What I think she's stating was what was the formal policy of the United States at that time, in the sense that we did not have a security guarantee or a formal security arrangement with Kuwait.
> **Chung:** Well, that doesn't make sense, sir. Forgive me. . . you're saying that the policy was that the United States had no opinion about Saddam Hussein . . . as to Kuwait, and yet you were worried about the troop movements and gave him some sort of warning.
> **Baker:** What I'm saying is that I think what she's stating there is the policy, which was that there were no security guarantees. That's the way I would interpret that.
> **Chung:** What do you mean "security guarantees"?
> **Baker:** That there would be any formal security arrangements or security guarantees, that we would intervene militarily.
> **Chung:** But in fact we have.
> **Baker:** But we've done so not as a consequence of formal security arrangements and guarantees. We've done so because he marched in and brutalized a small neighbor.
> **Chung:** This seems very simple, and I can't tell you why I don't understand what you're saying. But this seems very simple — that the Ambassador is telling Saddam Hussein

that the United States holds no opinion about his border dispute with Kuwait.
Baker: Uh-huh.
Chung: Does that lead you to believe that she was basically giving him the green light?
Baker: No. I don't think she was giving him the green light. I mean, that is not — I'm confident that she was not intending to give him the green light. And what I'm saying is I would interpret that to mean she was expressing the fact that were no formal security guarantees. But beyond that I can't answer you.
Chung: Was she specifically conveying a policy that you directed her to express?
Baker: No.
Chung: She was not?
Baker: No.
Chung: She was speaking on her own?
Baker: There were no instructions, contrary to all the reporting that's taken place on this subject. There were no specific instructions.

Mr. Baker makes a fine distinction. Chung's question about a "green light" allowed Baker to slip through the mesh of her questions. The crucial point is that the U.S. never signaled a red light intended to halt Saddam at the Kuwait border.

A week before Ambassador Glaspie's meeting with Saddam, she was instructed to seek clarification of what his bellicose statements portended, and she had called on the Foreign Ministry daily. Also, Washington quickly learned about the Iraqi troop movements that began July 20. Kuwait placed its armed forces on alert on July 20, and the U.A.E. asked for the joint military exercise on July 21.

The day before Glaspie met with Saddam, the State Department cabled U.S. embassies in Europe to brief them on the policy line regarding Iraq. Instead of updating policy to reflect the events of the past few days, it reiterated the statement issued on July 18, before Iraqi troops massed on the Kuwaiti border. On July 24, the following cable went out from Washington:

> TO: EC Collective Immediate
> Subject: U.S. Reaction to Iraqi Threats in the Gulf
>
> Action addressee posts should take opportunity of briefing host-country governments at appropriate level on U.S. views and actions following recent Iraqi statements and threats against its Gulf neighbors. In doing so, they should provide the text of the following Department statement of July 18:
>
> "We remain determined to ensure the free flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz and to defend the principle of freedom of navigation. We also remain strongly committed to supporting the individual and collective self-defense of our friends in the gulf with whom we have deep and long-standing ties."
>
> You should also draw on the following points:
>
> •The U.S. is concerned about the hostile implications of recent Iraqi statements directed against Iraq's neighbors, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. While we take no position on the border delineation issue raised by Iraq with respect to Kuwait, or on other bilateral disputes, Iraqi statements suggest an intention to resolve outstanding disagreements by the use of force, an approach which is contrary to U.N. charter principles. The implications of having oil production and pricing policy in the gulf determined and enforced by Iraqi guns are disturbing.
>
> •We stated some of these views clearly on July 18. We have reinforced them in discussions with the Iraqi ambassador in Washington and with the GOI [government of Iraq] through our ambassador in Baghdad. Our embassies in Arab League capitals have been instructed to make our policies known to host country officials.
>
> Please report reactions as appropriate.
> (signed) Baker

The cable was published in the *Washington Post* on October 21, 1992. The rest of the exchange between Chung and Baker can now be read in the context of the July 24 reiteration of the July 18 statement, which constituted Glaspie's instructions for her meeting with Saddam:

> **Chung:** How could there be no specific instructions? If you were receiving important information from U.S. intelligence that these troop movements — the fourth largest army in the world — and you didn't give her any instructions on this important meeting that she was having with Saddam Hussein on July 25th?
> **Baker:** Well, I'm not sure we were receiving intelligence before she had that meeting, to be very honest with you. I said we were

getting intelligence around the 25th, 26th 27th time frame. So I can't answer that for you.
Chung: I thought you said that you were receiving intelligence around that period of time.
Baker: Around that period of time. That's correct. But I don't know whether it was before that meeting or not. But the point is, as best I know — again, I was in the Pacific, but I've checked into this — there were no specific instructions that were sent to her from this Department with respect to that meeting.
Chung: Then would you say that Ambassador Glaspie sent some mixed signals and may have made a mistake?
Baker: No, I wouldn't. And there's a lot of 20/20 hindsighting of Ambassador Glaspie, who is a very fine public servant, and I really think that that's unfortunate. And I think, as I've said many, many times, that it is ludicrous to suggest that somehow Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait because we led him to invade Kuwait. He invaded Kuwait for his own self-aggrandizement. . . .
Chung: If we can figure out how this invasion occurred of Kuwait, if Saddam Hussein had been sufficiently warned, repeatedly warned, in some way or another by the United States, by the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, might this have prevented —
Baker: Maybe. Yes. Absolutely. And as the President has said, as I have said, with 20/20 hindsight, there might be some things we would have done differently. You know, we might very well have with 20/20 hindsight.

Baker's denial of "specific instructions" for the unanticipated meeting of July 25 left the impression that Glaspie acted on her own, without any instructions at all. He also seems to be saying, if we knew we were heading off a cliff, we would have stopped sooner. But, he is defending the policy that brought the U.S. to the cliff's edge.

An even more sweeping dismissal of the Iraq experience was offered by President Bush. At a White House news conference on February 5, 1991, a week before the Baker-Chung interview, he was asked:

Reporter: Mr. President, you've made the point many times that the world needs to stop Saddam now, unlike in the 1930s when it failed to stop Hitler. In retrospect, do you ever think that this war might have been avoided if the U.S. had been tougher with Saddam long before he invaded Kuwait.
President Bush: Yes, yes.
Reporter: Is there any lesson to be learned from that?
President Bush: Well, we tried the peaceful route. We tried working with him and changing through contact. I don't know what the lesson is. The lesson is clear in this case that that didn't work. But whether there's a lesson in the future that you reach out to regimes — I think it was proper that we have reached out to the Soviet Union, when you look at the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe, you look at the changes in the unification of Germany, you look at the withdrawal of Soviet forces from a lot of Eastern Europe. I mean, at times you want to try to go forward with regimes. I think Nixon's going to China was a very appropriate and courageous diplomatic move that has made the world a little better, in spite of setbacks. That's the way I approach it.

President Bush excused himself on the basis of his good intentions. Mr. Baker's complaints about opposition "hindsighting" are equally beside the point. Of course, the vision of hindsight is clarified by experience. That is why experience should be examined rather than concealed or denied.

Policy-makers are supposed to have foresight. When their vision fails, they should explain what blurred it. What made President Bush think Saddam Hussein could be coaxed into gentlemanly behavior?

The history of U.S. policy toward Iraq during the past decade is emerging slowly, impeded by the reluctance of the Bush Administration to let the story be known. Apologists for the policy have protested the alleged inclination of a Democratic Congress to "criminalize" honest mistakes.

There is much room for debate and disagreement in reassessing the choices available to policy-makers during the Iran-Iraq imbroglio. To tilt or not to tilt? Towards whom, and how much, and for how long?

The crux of the issue is accountability — acknowledging what was done and explaining why it was done. "The buck stops here" proclaims the acceptance of responsibility by those in authority. In the case of foreign policy, the ultimate source of authority is the President,

complemented by his chief foreign-policy aide or aides. In the Bush Administration, the chief aide was Secretary of State James A. Baker III.

Suppressing the past for the sake of political expediency mortgages the future. Concealment leads to corroded trust, breeds suspicion, and generates incessant, partisan demands for investigations of alleged cover-ups. The suspicion of cover-up inspires cynicism and shreds the political fabric.

Despite the efforts at obfuscation and concealment, the story of U.S policy toward Iraq is slowly being revealed. What also becomes increasingly apparent is the difficulty of instituting public discussion and debate when a policy fails.

After Kuwait was invaded, Glaspie's superiors cast her in a role that she tacitly agreed to play. Had she rejected this "assignment," she would have had to resign as a Foreign Service Officer. The fact that she allowed her superiors to shape the story of her last days in Iraq, rather than resign and go public with her story, illustrates the extent to which news coverage of policy differences depends on whether the issue can be personalized.

When an appropriate individual makes an issue of a policy decision, reporters have a source to whom they can attribute the conflict. Put another way, policy has to be politicized before the press can convert it into news.

Had Ambassador Glaspie gone public with the instructions she had when she went into her meeting with Saddam, even revealing that the President had articulated the same policy only days later, the story would have begun as a conflict between an ambassador and the top policy-makers of the U.S. government. There would still have been formidable obstacles to transforming a seeming personality dispute into a policy debate.

Glaspie could not argue effectively for a different policy in retrospect, since she had not opposed the policy she had followed. Furthermore, she had no assurance of public support if she had gone public. Quite likely, the Administration would have accused her of trying to excuse her own mistaken judgment. Having erred as badly as her superiors, she could not wrap herself in the mantle of a scorned prophetess. She might well have been characterized as a whiner as well as a blunderer.

The difficulty Glaspie would have faced if she confronted her superiors can be discerned from the performance of the committee members before whom she testified after the war ended. Even when she pointed out that responsibility for policy rested with the President, nobody picked up on the point. Congressional Democrats, hobbled by their hesitancy and disapproval during the debate leading up to the commitment of U.S. forces in the Gulf, were not spoiling for a fight with a President riding an unprecedented wave of public approval. The politically appropriate moment for engaging in a policy dispute had not arrived.

The pitfalls that lay before the Ambassador if she had picked a fight with the Administration are further illustrated by the lonely, stubborn crusade of Congressman Gonzalez. It was months before the press, let alone his Party, took much notice of him. And Gonzalez's emphasis was not on abstractions of policy, but on specifics of embezzlement and cover-up involving hundreds of millions in taxpayers' dollars.

The extent to which the issue of Iraq policy has been defined in terms of a huge cost to taxpayers further illustrates the difficulty of opening and conducting a policy debate. Embezzled money is an attention-getting news peg. The issue of Iraq policy has become "Iraqgate," complete with "smoking gun" in the form of high-order theft coupled with efforts at concealment and attempts to obstruct justice. Before that, the whole matter was being dismissed by those under attack as a mean-minded effort to make a crime of a mistake in judgment, as politically inspired "hindsighting."

Mistaken policy assumptions are not the stuff of front-page stories until somebody with the power to affect future policy makes an issue of the matter in a public forum. When that happens, it is still difficult to sustain new coverage beyond charge and counter-charge. Even a "smoking gun" is not sufficient to sustain news coverage, unless the gun is fired repeatedly in the form of new revelations.

Conceiving, conducting, and criticizing policy are crucial aspects of governance. The role of the press in these processes is significant, but also ambiguous and limited. One of the most relevant comments on the role the press can play in policy debates was made by Walter Lippmann in his still-contemporary 1922 book, *Public Opinion*:

> The press is no substitute for institutions. It is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision. Men cannot do the work of the world by this light alone. They cannot govern society by episodes, incidents, and

> eruptions. It is only when they work by a steady light of their own, that the press, when it is turned upon them, reveals a situation intelligible enough for a popular decision. The trouble lies deeper than the press, and so does the remedy.

Enforcing accountability requires politicians who utilize their powers of inquiry to demand and secure an accounting as well as a press that seeks and reports the findings. The story of Iraq policy provides an exceptionally useful case history in the obstacles to institutional accountability, an issue located where the press, politics, and public policy intersect.