

in place as Iraqi leader. In 2003 his son, President George W. Bush, ordered U.S. forces into Iraq in a successful effort to oust Hussein.

*What distinction does Schlesinger make between vital and peripheral interests? What lessons does Schlesinger discern from the actions and words of previous presidents? Do you think his arguments apply to the debate over George W. Bush's decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003?*

President [George H.W.] Bush's gamble in the Gulf may yet pay off. Let us pray that it does—that the combination of international economic sanctions, political pressure, and military buildup will force Saddam Hussein to repent and retreat. Let us pray that the tough talk from Washington is designed primarily as psychological warfare—and that it will work.

But tough talk creates its own momentum and may seize control of policy. If the gamble fails, the president will be hard put to avoid war. Is this a war Americans really want to fight? Senator Robert Dole said the other day that Americans are not yet committed to this war, and he is surely right. And is it a war Americans are wrong in not wanting to fight?

Among our stated objectives are the defense of Saudi Arabia, the liberation of Kuwait and restoration of the royal family, and the establishment, in the president's phrase, of a "stable and secure Gulf." Presumably these generous-hearted goals should win the cooperation, respect, and gratitude of the locals. Indications are, to the contrary, that our involvement is increasing Arab contempt for the U.S.

#### WHITE SLAVES FROM AMERICA

In *The Wall Street Journal* a few days ago Geraldine Brooks and Tony Horwitz described the reluctance of the Arabs to fight in their own defense. The Gulf states have a population almost as large as Iraq's but no serious armies and limited inclination to raise them. Why should they? The *Journal* quotes a senior Gulf official: "You think I want to send my teen-aged son to die for Kuwait?" He chuckles and adds, "We have our white slaves from America to do that."

At the recent meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab states congratulated themselves on their verbal condemnation of Iraqi aggression but spoke not one word of thanks to the American troops who had crossed half the world to fight for them. A Yemeni diplomat explained this curious omission to Judith Miller of *The New York Times*: "A lot of the Gulf rulers simply do not feel that they have to thank the people they've hired to do their fighting for them."

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "White Slaves in the Persian Gulf," *Wall Street Journal*, January 7, 1991.

James LeMoine reported in *The New York Times* last October [1990] in a dispatch from Saudi Arabia, "There is no mass mobilization for war in the markets and streets. The scenes of cheerful American families saying goodbye to their sons and daughters are being repeated in few Saudi homes." Mr. LeMoine continued, "Some Saudis' attitude toward the American troops verges on treating them as a sort of contracted superpower enforcer. . . ." He quoted a Saudi teacher: "The American soldiers are a new kind of foreign worker here. We have Pakistanis driving taxis and now we have Americans defending us."

I know that the object of foreign policy is not to win gratitude. It is to produce real effects in the real world. It is conceivable that we should simply swallow the Arab insults and soldier on as their "white slaves" because vital interests of our own are involved. But, as Mr. Dole implied, the case that U.S. vital interests are at stake has simply not been made to the satisfaction of Congress and the American people.

Of course we have interests in the Gulf. But it is essential to distinguish between peripheral interests and vital interests. Vital interests exist when our national security is truly at risk. Vital interests are those you kill and die for. I write as one who has no problem about the use of force to defend our vital interests and who had no doubt that vital interests were involved in preventing the domination of Europe by [Adolf] Hitler and later by [Joseph] Stalin.

#### PRETEXTS FOR WAR

In defining our vital interests in the Gulf, the administration's trumpet gives an awfully uncertain sound. It has offered a rolling series of peripheral justifications—oil, jobs, regional stability, the menace of a nuclear Iraq, the creation of a new world order. These pretexts for war grow increasingly thin.

If oil is the issue, nothing will more certainly increase oil prices than war, with long-term interruption of supply and widespread destruction of oil fields. Every whisper of peace has brought oil prices down. And the idea of spending American lives in order to save American jobs is despicable—quite unworthy of our intelligent secretary of state.

As for the stabilization of the Middle East, this is a goal that has never been attained for long in history. Stability is not a likely prospect for a region characterized from time immemorial by artificial frontiers, tribal antagonism, religious fanaticisms and desperate inequalities. I doubt that the U.S. has the capacity or the desire to replace the Ottoman empire, and our efforts thus far have won us not the respect of the Arab rulers but their contempt.

What about nuclear weapons? The preventive-war argument is no more valid against Iraq than it was

when nuts proposed it against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In any case, Secretary of State [James] Baker has in effect offered a no-invasion pledge if Iraq withdraws from Kuwait—a pledge that would leave Saddam Hussein in power and his nuclear facilities intact.

As for the new world order, the United Nations will be far stronger if it succeeds through resolute application of economic sanctions than if it only provides a multilateral façade for a unilateral U.S. war. Nor would we strengthen the U.N. by wreaking mass destruction that will appall the world and discredit collective security for years to come.

No one likes the loathsome Saddam Hussein. Other countries would rejoice in his overthrow—and are fully prepared to fight to the last American to bring it about. But, since the threat he poses to the U.S. is far less than the threat to the Gulf states, why are we Americans the fall guys, expected to do ninety percent of the fighting and to take ninety percent of the casualties? Only Britain, loyal as usual, has made any serious military contribution to the impending war—10,000 more troops than Egypt. If we go to war, let not the posse fade away, as befell the unfortunate marshal in *High Noon*. . . .

No one ever supposed that an economic embargo would bring Iraq to its knees in a short five months. Why not give sanctions time to work? The Central Intelligence Agency already reports shortages in Iraq's military spare parts. If we must fight, why not fight a weaker rather than a stronger Iraq? What is the big rush? There is a phrase of President [Dwight] Eisenhower's that comes to mind: "the courage of patience."

I also recall words of President [John F.] Kennedy that seem relevant during these dark days: "Don't push your opponent against a locked door." What is so terribly wrong with a negotiated settlement? Iraq must absolutely withdraw from Kuwait, but the grievances that explain, though not excuse, the invasion might well be adjudicated. As for the nuclear threat, that can be taken care of by a combination of arms embargo, international inspection throughout the Middle East and great-power deterrence. Such measures would do far more than war to strengthen collective security and build a new world order.

#### WAR'S NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

One has the abiding fear that the administration has not thought out the consequences of war. Fighting Iraq will not be like fighting Grenada or Panama. The war will most likely be bloody and protracted. Victory might well entangle us in Middle Eastern chaos for years—all for interests that, so far as the U.S. is concerned, are at best peripheral.

#### War Against Iraq Is Unnecessary (1991)

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. (b. 1917)

INTRODUCTION Arthur Schlesinger Jr. is a prominent historian and liberal intellectual. His books include *A Thousand Days*, based on his experiences as Special Assistant to President John F. Kennedy, *Cycles of American History* and *War and the American Presidency*. The following viewpoint is taken from an article published in January 1991 when the United States was confronting Iraq over that country's invasion of neighboring Kuwait. President George H.W. Bush had created an international coalition to exert economic sanctions and diplomatic pressures on Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. Schlesinger argues that Hussein must be dealt with, but urges caution in resorting to military action, arguing that it is not necessary to secure the vital interests of the United States and may bring about harmful consequences to the region. War in Iraq may also detract attention from pressing problems in Europe and within the United States itself.

Despite the concerns of Schlesinger and others, the United States since 1991 has twice made the decision to invade Iraq. President George H.W. Bush used military force to liberate Kuwait in 1991, but left Hussein

---

*War against Iraq will be the most unnecessary war in American history.*

---

Worst of all, the Iraq sideshow is enfeebling us in areas where vital interests are truly at stake. While we concentrate energies and resources in the Middle East, Eastern Europe is in travail and the Soviet Union is falling apart. We cannot single-handedly rescue democracy in the ex-Communist states, but at least we ought to be thinking hard about ways we could help on the margin. Europe is far more essential to our national security than the Middle East.

And we confront urgent problems here at home—deepening recession, decaying infrastructure, deteriorating race relations, a shaky banking system, crime-ridden cities on the edge of bankruptcy, states in financial crisis, increasing public and private debt, low productivity, diminishing competitiveness in world markets. The crisis of our national community demands major attention and resources too. While we fiddle away in the Middle East, the American economy will continue to decline, and Japan and Germany will seize the world's commanding economic heights.

War against Iraq will be the most unnecessary war in American history, and it well may cause the gravest damage to the vital interests of the republic.

#### FOR FURTHER READING

Leslie H. Brune, *America and the Iraqi Crisis, 1990–1992: Origins and Aftermath*. Claremont, CA: Regina, 1993.

Majid Khadduri, *War in the Gulf, 1990–1991*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf, eds., *The Gulf War Reader*. New York: Times Books, 1991.

Martin Yant, *Desert Mirage: The True Story of the Gulf War*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1991.

Steven A. Yetiv, *Explaining Foreign Policy: U.S. Decision-Making and the Persian Gulf War*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.

#### *America Must Wage War Against Terrorists (2001)*

George W. Bush (b. 1946)

INTRODUCTION *The United States entered a new era in its history, many believe, when on September 11, 2001, it found itself under attack from terrorists. Four hijacked planes crashed into the World Trade Center skyscrapers in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and the Pennsylvania countryside. Three days later, Congress authorized the president to use military force to find and retaliate against those responsible for the attack.*