# THE MERCHANTS OF MESOPOTAMIA AND THE CAUSES OF THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

A Monograph
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**Abstract**

THE MERCHANTS OF MESOPOTAMIA AND THE CAUSES OF THE PERSIAN GULF WAR by MAJ Patrick J. Sharon, USA, 54 pages.

This monograph sets out to prove that Geoffrey Blainey's theory about a disagreement over relative power between nations explains the causes of the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991. Blainey describes the diplomatic crisis leading to war "like a crisis in international payments... The currency of one nation or alliance is out of alignment with that of the others. These currencies are simply estimates which each nation nourishes about its relative bargaining power." Saddam Hussein unfortunately overestimated his nation's currency relative to the United States, resulting in an overwhelming military defeat. As the modern merchant of Mesopotamia, Saddam employed his calculations of his power and his perceptions of the U.S. and coalition power and misread the analysis. Blainey's mercantile analogy harkens back to Carl von Clausewitz, who described battle as the cash payment in war. In the case of the Persian Gulf War, this transaction ultimately favored the United States and its coalition.

This paper begins with a review and analysis of several different theoretical approaches, concluding with an assessment of Geoffrey Blainey's theory in detail. In so doing, this paper establishes the framework for analyzing a case study. Next, this paper turns to a selective discussion of the history of the events leading to the Persian Gulf War with a review of ancient middle eastern history, the influences of the West during the 20th century, the impact of the Iran-Iraq War, and the events immediately preceding the 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. Power emerges during this discussion as central to the region's history, particularly in recent decades. Finally, this paper overlays Blainey's theory on the case study itself, describing the seven influential factors from Blainey as they appear to influence this case study. This analysis clearly demonstrates the apparent comprehensive nature of Blainey's theory and seems to reveal additional insights into the causes of the conflict itself.

Military theory, according to Carl von Clausewitz, exists to help sort through the great mass of phenomena and their relationships. In so doing, the student of history begins to recognize possible explanations for the events and patterns begin to emerge. From a purely academic standpoint, that explanation seems to satisfy. And yet, the pragmatic military officer seeks a means to improve his ability to assist his commander rapidly solve complex problems. In seeking this improved ability, the military officer desires help with solutions, not nebulous explanations about the uncertainty of war. This monograph attempts to embrace both the academic pursuit of the student of military history, seeking an explanation and pattern, and pragmatic pursuit of the military officer, desiring to better serve his profession and nation. In so doing, this monograph attempts to clarify the causes of this recent war and assists the military officer in appreciating an often neglected component of military planning - the causes of conflict.

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

The study of war has given birth to a comprehensive body of theories on war in all its forms. Sun Tzu describes war from a uniquely eastern, oriental perspective. His theories, developed centuries before western thinkers began seriously to study war, provide a pragmatic and functional approach to the conduct of war.[1] Carl von Clausewitz, deified as the modern father of war theory, established an holistic, western view of interstate war, marrying politics to warmaking, and marrying the nation to its military.[2] Clausewitz's alter ego, Baron Henri Jomini, developed a set of principles of war, a formulaic approach that continues to influence modern militaries.[3] In the 20th century, Sir Basil Liddell Hart and JFC Fuller developed perspectives founded in the results of the first great war of the century. Their thoughts on war grew from the apparent indecisiveness of modern wars and their concepts of ways and means to overcome that problem.[4] Late 20th century theories of war include the ideas of historian John Keegan, military intellectual Sir Michael Howard, air power advocate Colonel John Warden and nuclear theorist Bernard Brodie, each adding to the ever growing and maturing intellectual pursuit of an understanding of war, how it works, and how to win it.[5]

Theories of the causes of wars, on the other hand, are both less mature and less comprehensive. A number of theories on the causes of war emphasize the political and social science aspects of war causes, exemplified by Michael Waltz in his 1959 book, *Man, the State and War.* Still others include historically focused studies such as A.J.P. Taylor and his book *How Wars Begin.* Neither of these two approaches seems wholly satisfying to a student of war. The political and social science theories tend to emphasize

the absence of an interantional means of settling disputes as the primary, fundamental cause of war. Historians seem to perceive each war as having unique causes without venturing a theory that identifies a common thread or tendency. Taken in total, these two sides leave room for a unifying theory that ties a thorough analysis of history to a careful evaluation of the conduct of nations and their leaders. Geoffrey Blainey, in his book *The Causes of War*, appears to have developed a theory that unifies these two sides.

In much the same way that theories on war exist in abundance, there exist hundreds, possibly thousands of books, studies, papers and articles on the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War (also referred to as Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm). Generally, these works focus on the conflict itself, its conduct, and the results. Books such as *Lucky War: Third Army in Desert Storm* by Dr. Richard Swain and *The General's War* by Michael Griffith and Bernard Trainor provide not only objective histories of the war but arguably unique and thorough analysis of decisions made, actions taken, and opportunities lost.[6] A number of these use aforementioned theories of war to study the war itself. Again, paralleling the theories on war and the causes of war, there exists significantly fewer studies of the causes of the Persian Gulf War. Those few that exist provide insights into the political, diplomatic, social and economic factors that caused the conflict.[7] There remains a gap. Is there a theory of the causes of war that clarifies and better explains the Persian Gulf War? This monograph argues that just such a theory exists in Geoffrey Blainey's model of war as a disagreement over relative strength. In the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991, Iraq and the U.S. lead coalition disagreed about their relative strength and war resulted.

Military theory, according to Carl von Clausewitz, exists to help sort through the great mass of phenomena and their relationships.[8] In so doing, the student of history begins to recognize possible explanations for the events and patterns begin to emerge. From a purely academic standpoint, that explanation seems to satisfy. And yet, the pragmatic military officer seeks a means to improve his ability to assist his commander rapidly solve complex problems. In seeking this improved ability, the military officer desires help with solutions, not nebulous explanations about the uncertainty of war. This monograph attempts to embrace both the academic pursuit of the student of military history, seeking an explanation and pattern, and pragmatic pursuit of the military officer, desiring to better serve his profession and nation. In so doing, this monograph attempts to clarify the causes of this recent war and assists the military officer in appreciating an often neglected component of military planning - the causes of conflict.

Geoffrey Blainey, originally writing in the 1970s, theorizes that wars are caused by a dispute about the measurement of power.[9] Wars usually begin when two nations disagree on their relative strength. Wars usually end when these same feuding sides come to agreement about their relative strengths.[10] Blainey continues that any factor which increases this disagreement or impression of relative power increases the chance of war. Alternately, any factor which decreases this disagreement decreases the chance of war.[11] While this dispute over power does not always escalate to war, Blainey observes that war serves as the most conclusive, accurate and objective measurement of actual power versus the perceived power of the conflicting nations.[12] He observes that most theories about war and its causes are inadequate, incomplete and contradictory.[13] Importantly, he argues that the relationship between war and peace is integral to

understanding the causes of war because those factors which lead to war also lead away from peace and, often, those factors which conclude a war begin a peace.[14] He concludes that there exist a number of influencing factors that national leaders consider when making a decision to go to war.[15] Blainey's theory, then, attempts to provide a comprehensive explanation of the interrelationship of peace and war and the factors that influence nations to disagree about power.

This monograph's structure and methodology work together to provide this explanation. Structurally, this monograph consists of five chapters. Chapter one, the introduction, sets the stage for the thesis and briefly summarizes the paper. Chapter two reviews and analyzes the theories on war and its causes and details Geoffrey Blainey's concepts. Chapter three surveys the events leading up to the Persian Gulf War from a number of perspectives but chiefly from the viewpoints of the United States and Iraq, the chief protagonists. Chapter four synthesizes Blainey's theory with the events described in chapter three, establishing the explanation for the conflict. Finally, chapter five summarizes the paper and draws some conclusions and implications for military planners and leaders. This structure facilitates this paper's method of analysis by providing the reader a theoretical foundation, then an historical understanding of events, and finally an application of theory to these events in an attempt to "give the mind insight into the great mass of phenomena and of their relationships, then leave it free to rise into the higher realms of action."[16]

This method relies heavily on both primary source information, embodied in the theoretical works analyzed in chapter two, and secondary source information from the manifold analytical writings about the Persian Gulf War itself. Geoffrey Blainey's theory

consists of "a framework of causes" that serve as this paper's evaluative criteria.[17] This framework includes: the influence of diplomatic breakdown; the opposing leaders' perceptions of their ability to impose their will on their opponent; the seven factors influencing leaders' decisions; the expectations about the duration and outcome of war; and the impact of decisive war on lasting peace. These criteria emerge as a result of the evaluation of theory in chapter two. They then are applied in chapter four to evaluate Blainey's theory in light of the events leading to Persian Gulf War. Simply, application of these criteria to the events reveals that this war is generally consistent with Blainey's theoretical framework.

In summary, then, this monograph sets out to prove that Geoffrey Blainey's theory about a disagreement over relative power between nations explains the causes of the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991. Geoffrey Blainey observes that, in peacetime, diplomacy acts like commerce.

> *The difficulty...is to find an acceptable price for the transaction. Just as the price of merchandise such as copper roughly represents the point where the supply of copper balances the demand for it, the price of a transaction in diplomacy roughly marks the point at which one nation's willingness to pay matches the price demanded by the other...In diplomacy each nation has the rough equivalent of a selling price...and the equivalent of a buying price. Sometimes these prices are so far apart that a transaction vital to both nations cannot be completed peacefully; they cannot agree on the price of the transaction.*[18]

This mercantile analogy clearly describes the interactive nature of the causes of war. Wars are caused by a disagreement that requires at least two sides in the transaction. In the case of the Persian Gulf War, the diplomatic merchants of Mesopotamia and Washington were unable to agree on the price to settle their disagreement peacefully. War, according to Blainey, results from a diplomatic crisis which cannot be solved

peacefully because both sides continue to disagree on "the price."[19] What lead to this diplomatic crisis between Iraq and the United States is central to understanding this war. In studying this conflict framed by Geoffrey Blainey's theory, this paper advances the importance of understanding not just war itself but the patterns of international behavior which may lead to armed conflict.

## Chapter 2 - Blainey's Theory Laid Bare

### Introduction

As described previously, this chapter will review and analyze the framework of war in three components - war itself, what wars cause, and the causes of war. Since this paper desires to clarify the causes of the Persian Gulf War, this chapter will concentrate on the dominant theories on the causes of war. However, these theories require at least a rudimentary understanding and acknowledgement of what war is, and what war results in. Taken in total, this chapter should lay the foundations for a more unified understanding of war - before, during and after its conduct. The first few pages of this chapter survey the dominant theories on war, then briefly highlight what wars cause, as embodied in Bruce Porter's book *War and the Rise of the State*.[20] Following a survey and analysis of a number of theories on the causes of war, this chapter concludes with a critical review of Geoffrey Blainey's theory with an eye towards defining its primary components and establishing the criteria for evaluating the Persian Gulf War and its causes.

## What is War?

> *We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.*[21]

Carl von Clausewitz's famous observation, often quoted and often interpreted, begins a brief journey along a path marked by varying and divergent opinions on the subject of war itself. Clausewitz defines war in terms that acknowledge the conflict between nations, an escalation of political goals using organized violence as its means to achieve a nation's ends. Observing Napoleon and 19th century conflict, Clausewitz provides an intellectual approach that acknowledges the emotional, unpredictable nature of war as well as its more cerebral and rational aspects. Alternately, John Keegan, the modern British military historian, argues that Clausewitz's theory comes up short in explaining war. "War is not the continuation of policy by other means,"[22] but is something much more according to Keegan. Keegan observes that Clausewitz was influenced by philosophical, political and military tumult of his times, limiting his ability to see war completely for its true nature.[23] While Clausewitz focused on the present and future, he lost sight of the important events of the past.[24] Keegan theorizes that "war embraces much more than politics: that it is always an expression of culture, often a determinant of cultural forms, in some societies the culture itself."[25] These two theories, then, approach war from decidedly different directions.

Sun-tzu, the ancient Chinese military theorist, furthers our understanding of war. *The Art of War* provides a glimpse into the nature of war in the ancient Orient. This work is both pragmatic and theoretical, providing ancient and modern readers with a concise guide to war and strategy. As with Clausewitz, Sun-tzu looks at war as an

interstate conflict, a clash between armies, a political instrument.[26] Notably, Sun-tzu observes that "the highest realization in warfare is to attack the enemy's plans,"[27] defeating an opponent without battle. Nearly two millennia later, Basil H. Liddell Hart expanded this simple concept. Liddell Hart's focus on strategy embraces the political role of war and the military but attacks the method for using this instrument. Reflecting Sun-tzu, Liddell Hart argues that "the perfection of strategy would be, therefore, to produce a decision without serious fighting."[28] Clausewitz and others talk of the concentration of forces at the point of decision to destroy enemy forces, a direct method of applying the means of policy.[29] Liddell Hart advocates that the true aim of strategy is dislocation of the enemy - psychologically, physically or in combination.[30] By indirectly attacking the enemy, an army deprives the enemy of its freedom of action while preserving or expanding its own freedom of action.[31] Thus, Liddell Hart adds depth and complexity to Sun-tzu's timeless ideas. While many other theories on war exist, these few serve as interesting examples of the often conflicting, complex but arguably mature thought on the subject. Each serves to better help us answer the question - What is war?

## What Do Wars Cause?

Theories on the conduct of war exist in abundance and in depth. In contrast, theories about the results of war - what wars cause - are few and limited in scope. To conduct a comprehensive review of the three components of war theory, an understanding of theories about the results of war is necessary. Bruce Porter's *War and the Rise of the State* illustrates this second of three facets of war theory. In addition, Porter derives his theoretical method from the ideas of Kenneth Waltz, whose theory on the causes of war will be detailed in the next section of this chapter. Porter's ideas, then,

not only exemplify the topic but provide a link to the third component of war theory - the causes of war.

Porter desires to demonstrate that war has played "a fundamental role in the origin and development of modern European states, that the institutions of contemporary Western politics reflect the pervasive influence of organized violence in modern history."[32] While Porter focuses on modern history and western states, he does not limit war to interstate actions. He recognizes the importance of civil war in the development of nations.[33] Yet he carefully acknowledges that war is one of many forces of change, albeit profound in its effects and results.[34] Having established his basic thesis, Porter proceeds to analyze war since the middle ages and develops his theory accordingly.

Porter focuses his analysis on three "mirror images."[35] These images derive from Kenneth Waltz's images of war,[36] primarily from Waltz's second image of the causes of war and the internal structure of states. Porter, focused on the rise of nations, attempts to answer the question "How does war effect the internal structure of the states?"[37] He derives three mirror images as: war and state formation; war and the development of states; and, war and the power of states.[38] More simply, Porter observes that wars cause states to form, develop, and gain internal power. He finds within this framework a number of effects of war, generally categorized as formative and organizing effects, disintegrative effects, and reformative effects.[39] Formative and organizing effects "advance state formation and increase the power, authority, size, capabilities, or jurisdiction of the state."[40] Disintegrative effects "diminish, limit, or dilute the power, size, authority or capacity of a state."[41] Finally, reformative effects facilitate "reform through the destruction or weakening of entrenched social strata and institutions...as well

as through creating or energizing new political constituencies."[42] In all, then, war dramatically effects a nation's political and social organization.

Whatever war results in, Porter observes that the price paid is often high.

> *The primacy of armed conflict in the evolution of the Western world is the essential tragedy of modern history. On the one hand, war has helped to create the oases of stability known as states; on the other hand, it has made of the state a potential Frankenstein monster, an instrument of unconstrained coercive force. The mirror image of war, like war itself, reveals both the best and worst of human nature. But regardless of whether war is just or unjust, positive or negative in its long-term effects, its ultimate price is always human life - and therein lies its inescapable tragedy.*[43]

## What Causes War?

Having briefly discussed two of the three facets of war theory - theories on war itself and theories on the effects of war - this chapter now turns to its principle topic, the theories describing the causes of war. This review of theories provides the reader a perspective on the causes of war with which to better understand Geoffrey Blainey's concepts. Therefore, this section provides a sampling or representative cross section of causes of war theories, not a complete or comprehensive review of the topic. Additionally, each particular theory receives only superficial analysis, sufficient to define the key themes of its author and to allow the reader a cursory ability to appreciate distinctions and similarities among the theories described here. This section, then, aids in establishing the principle themes of other theories on war causes, and sets the stage for an objective, comparative analysis of the merits of Blainey's ideas.

A.J.P. Taylor, author of *How Wars Begin*, approaches the causes of war from an historian's viewpoint. In analyzing the seven wars since the French Revolution, Taylor theorizes that "wars in fact have sprung more from apprehension than from a lust for war

or for conquest."[44] He uses the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, the Crimean War, the Italian War of Liberation, Bismarck's Wars, World Wars One and Two, and the Cold War as his historical case studies of his thesis. In each, he attempts to make the case that a nation, apprehensive over an imbalance of power or a perceived threat, acts to diminish that perception and apprehension. For example, Taylor argues that Austria precipitated World War One by declaring war on Serbia because of their suspicions of the Russian and Serbian threat to Austria. The mobilization of Austrian forces set in motion an irreversible series of events, ending with war itself.[45] Taylor's simple theory rests primarily on the belief that war is frequently a mistake, a mishap resulting from suspicion and deceit between nations. Taylor, while willing to speculate about the causes of particular wars, avoids drawing conclusions about common causes among the wars he studies. He is careful not to attempt a theory that unifies these conflicts.

A.J.P. Taylor evaluated historical examples as proof of his theory on the causes of war. Colonel J.F.C. Fuller, early 20th century military writer, theorist and historian, chose to theorize on the causes of war with less acknowledgement of historical case studies. Fuller groups the causes for war into biological and national causes.[46] Fuller argues there exist three fundamental causes within each of these major groupings. Biological causes include security of life, maintenance of life, and continuity of race.[47] Similarly, national causes include ethical, economic and military.[48] Fuller states "in its most condensed form the cause of war is discontent with the existing conditions of peace,"[49] a remarkably simple observation complementing Liddell Hart's premise that "the object of war is a better state of peace - even if only from your own point of view."[50] Fuller's seeming paucity of historical analysis in support of his theory, while not

excluding it from consideration, tends to leave the reader guardedly skeptic about the objectivity and academic rigor behind the ideas.

L.L. Bernard, writing in 1944 following the Second World War, claims war is a human institution and that economic causes, culminating in imperialism, are the chief and fundamental causes of war.[51] His book, *War and Its Causes*, serves as a thorough analysis of the social aspects of war and its causes. Important among his many areas of discussion are the concepts of fundamental and immediate causes of war.[52] These concepts recur in many of the theories of war causes, particularly those founded in behavioral and social sciences. Fundamental causes of war are those causes deeply rooted in the society and its organization. Immediate causes, on the other hand, are incidental and obstensible causes, often attributed as the causes of war but rarely the truly or fundamentally causing war. Under this rubric, Bernard identifies two categories of fundamental causes - population pressures and economic causes. Bernard acknowledges population pressures as the only significant biological cause of war.[53] His principle effort, however, focuses on economic causes, particularly imperialism as the "final and culminating form of the operation of these (economic) causes."[54] Clearly attempting to explain the two world wars of his generation, Bernard describes imperialism as the most destructive of war's causes.[55] Political, economic and ecclesiastical imperialism expand to include predatory, dynastic, commercial and several more sub-forms of this fundamental cause.[56] While Bernard approaches his topic from a sociology viewpoint, his fairly comprehensive analysis of war causes provides an early example of a non-military thinker attempting to reconcile war and peace in society.

Several theories on the causes of war, predominantly developed by political scientists and international relations academics, focus on the actions of states and the lack of an international body to control and reconcile international disputes. Kenneth Waltz, in his book *Man, the State and War*, argues that there exist three images of estimates of the causes of war - within man, within the structure of separate states, and within the state system itself. These images, in combination, cause wars. He theorizes that "force is a means of achieving the external ends of state because there exists no consistent, reliable process for reconciling the conflicts of interest that inevitably arise among similar units in a condition of anarchy."[57] In essence, international anarchy causes war. In Waltz's first image, causes of war within man, the behavior of man individually and collectively causes wars. Stupidity, aggressiveness, selfishness and passion all describe the behaviors within man that cause war.[58] Within the state structure, Waltz's second image, internal organization can cause war.[59] While certain internal political systems may be bad or good, evil or just, wars often result from a nation or state desiring to impose its state structure on another state.[60] The third image of war caused by the international system itself lies at the heart of Waltz's theory. He believes that each image interacts with the other but emphasizes the importance of this particular aspect.

Waltz applies the philosophies of Spinoza, Kant and Rousseau as the embodiment of his three images. Spinoza believed in the inherent defectiveness and passion of man as a cause of war, consistent with Waltz's first image.[61] Kant argued that, while the state provides some restraint to the passionate nature of its citizens, it is never perfectly good and act in international relations often as man acts in social relations.[62] Rousseau contends that the anarchy of international relations results from the nature of social

relations. While a nation perceives its goals as internally rational and consistent, those same goals are irrational and inconsistent to another nation because of its nature.[63] Waltz observes that his first two images are often immediate causes of war, those events unique to each war.[64] The third image, the fundamental cause of war, will continue to cause wars until the international community develops a means of resolving this international anarchy.[65] Waltz's themes of international anarchy and the immediate and fundamental causes of war emerge in the theories of L.L. Bernard and Seyom Brown as well.

In 1969, Dean Pruitt, a psychologist, and Richard Snyder, a political scientist, edited a volume attempting to describe the current empirical research on the causes of war.[66] While their work is more a survey of other ideas than an attempt to fashion a new approach, they forward a theory that war is caused by motivational and perceptual forces that, through a pattern of change, result in actions moving toward war. Their theory, consisting of three primary components, emerges as a synthesis of other theories, including Waltz and Bernard. This theory appreciates the complexity of war causes and recognizes that little empirical research had been conducted on the topic up until 1969.

The first component of their theory, the influence of motivational and perceptual forces, consists of a combination of goals, perceptions, and emotions. The goals that can be advanced by war generally fall into two categories - success-oriented goals and conflict-oriented goals.[67] Success goals, typically associated with the results of success in war, include economic, political, ideological, and power desires, consistent with theorists like Bernard. Conflict-oriented goals rely on the struggle itself, focused on the groups that benefit from the conduct of war such as the military and arms manufacturers.[68] As a second motivational or perceptual force, perceptions of threats

include a belief by a nation that another nation acts as an obstacle to attaining goals or as a threat to continuing achievement of an already realized goal. Perceptions, consistent with Geoffrey Blainey's theory, become motivating forces, particularly when these perceptions differ between the two nations. The editors, in discussing perceptions, assert a theme consistent with other theorists of this topic - the idea that no international mechanism exists to accommodate peacefully this conflict of perceptions between nations.[69] The third principle factor, hostility towards other states, follows the argument of behaviorists that states or nations assume emotional characteristics of individuals. In so doing, a nation acts more through emotional than rational considerations, warring not for some desire to expand power or achieve political ends but more to release emotions based on perceived wrongs or frustrations.[70] Pruitt and Snyder maintain that each of these three motivating and perceptual factors plays a role in establishing the conditions for nations to war, but none singularly explains the causes of war.[71]

Having established the underlying forces that lead to war, Pruitt and Snyder then develop the patterns of change necessary to bring war, citing increasing tension as the primary pattern. Tension, within the editors' framework, broadly includes the increasing incompatibility of goals, perceptions and emotions.[72] In other words, as the conflicting states grow further apart in agreement over their mutual goals, perceptions and emotions, tension results. Nations express that tension through a number of actions, including military build-up and diplomatic antagonism.[73] Often those actions reduce the alternatives available to both sides, resulting in a crisis. War results, then, as "a culmination of events that often involves the intensification of many factors" (collectively defined as tension) "and a reduction in the number of available alternatives,

frequently as a result of time pressure and psychological rigidities associated with a crisis situation."[74] Pruitt and Snyder reinforce several previously addressed themes about war causes, primarily those contained in Kenneth Waltz's theory. Additionally, some of Geoffrey Blainey's concepts about misperceptions begin to emerge from this theory.

Michael Howard, the famous British military historian and intellectual, briefly addresses his theory of war causes in his essay "The Causes of War." It this essay, he argues against the behaviorists and psychologists that believe wars result from passionate, irrational decisions over emotional disagreements. Howard believes that nations deliberate rationally and analytically in deciding to go to war.[75] He argues that "states may fight...in order to acquire, to enhance or to preserve their capacity to function as independent actors in the international system."[76] This decision to war is based on a perceived threat to a nation's power and the belief in the necessity of action while action can stop or change that power shift.[77] Howard, citing the Greek historian Thucydides, theorizes that war is made inevitable by the growth in power of one state and the fear of that growth in power by its adversary - an international struggle over power, real and perceived.[78] In Howard, then, we find an historian that brings together a number of themes. Waltz's belief in international anarchy supports Howard's ideas. A.J.P. Taylor's ideas about perceived threats and shifting power also surface. Howard, acknowledging Geoffrey Blainey, concludes that wars result from a nation's calculation that more can be achieved through war that by remaining at peace.[79] Power, and its preservation and/or expansion, continues to emerge as a common thread among these theories.

Complementing Kenneth Waltz's approach, Seyom Brown applies the principles of social and behavioral science to his approach to the causes of war. This most

contemporary analysis contains many of the elements of each of the theories already discussed here, including some of Geoffrey Blainey's concepts. Brown, like Bernard and Waltz decades earlier, looks at conflict beginning with the individual, then within a community or nation, and finally between nations. He sees three principle and interrelated categories for the causes of war - structural factors, prevailing culture for war and peace, and the psychological traits of decision makers themselves.[80] While his cultural determinants and psychological determinants are important, his discussion of structural factors reveals the fundamental thesis of his work. Here, Brown establishes that rivalries among nations go unchecked because of the anarchy of international relations (he uses "anarchic" in his argument).[81] Consistent with Kenneth Waltz, he identifies five primary structural factors that cause war: the international distribution of power, the internal structure of states, the balance of military power, the normative culture, and the quality of diplomacy.[82] These structural factors further reinforce the themes of the other theories on war causes - the struggle for power and the apparent anarchy of international relations.

Brown, writing in 1994, discusses the Persian Gulf War among his case studies of the role of diplomacy. In his view, American diplomacy, characterized as Realpolitik, failed to clearly define to Saddam Hussein the potential reaction to his aggression. According to Brown, U.S. diplomatic efforts to diffuse the crisis through accommodation mislead Hussein into underestimating ("an enormous miscalculation"[83]) U.S. resolve to defend its interests. Throughout this analysis, Brown cites failed diplomacy as a principle cause of the Persian Gulf War.[84] Brown's analysis provides one of very few attempts to derive the causes of the Persian Gulf War. While hinting at the power

struggle occurring in the region, Brown appears to identify what Bernard might describe as an immediate cause of war, not a fundamental cause.

In summary, then, this survey of theories exposes several common themes. The theories rooted in political science, social behavior and psychology seem to emphasize the vacuum within international relations as a principle cause of war. This anarchy results from an absence of mechanisms to diffuse conflicts. Additionally, the struggle for power rises up consistently as a theme. Finally, the idea that nations and leaders calculate, deliberate and analyze carefully any decision to go to war seems to emerge in most of theories. No matter how deliberate and analytical these leaders are, their personalities and abilities influence their decisions. Competency of leaders plays a role in many of these theories.

This review also reveals some common shortcomings or flaws in these theories. With few exceptions, these theories seem to lack a comprehensive, objective historical analysis to support their assertions. Several are careful to cite specific historical examples.[85] Still others draw conclusions with no apparent acknowledgement of historical events as sources.[86] Taylor's review of seven modern wars serves as the lone exception. Unfortunately, his conclusions focus on the causes of each of these wars without attempting to derive a comprehensive theory that embraces all the studied conflicts. Possibly only L.L. Bernard's thorough work strikes the balance between theoretical continuity and rigorous historical analysis that might be considered comprehensive.

More importantly, those theories that focus on the anarchy of international relations as the cause of war seem to focus less on the cause of the conflict and more on

the means to prevent war. Here the application of some of the concepts found in Pruitt and Snyder's work may help clarify this confusion. First, a nation sets a goal. It recognizes or perceives that some other nation may prevent achievement of that goal. That nation, analyzing the importance of the goal versus the possibility of war, chooses to pursue that goal. In so doing, it challenges the nation preventing goal achievement. If the challenged nation and the challenging nation cannot reach agreement over the desired goal, war often results. In this scenario, the fundamental cause of war is the existence of one nation's goal and the belief that the other nation desires to prevent that goal. A means to prevent war might be some form of international set of rules to solve this goal-oriented dispute without war. Here we see that the cause of war differs from the means to prevent war. This anarchy often described as the cause of war appears to be a condition which leads to war, allowing the cause of war to go unchecked. Fundamentally, the argument for international anarchy might better be categorized as a theory on how to prevent wars, not on the causes of war.

## Geoffrey Blainey and the Abacus of Power

As summarized in Chapter One, Geoffrey Blainey's theory on the causes of war focuses on the relationship between conflicting nations. This section expands Blainey's theory, highlighting the most important concepts and establishing a set of criteria for assessing the causes of the Persian Gulf War. Blainey states his theory simply, "Wars usually begin when two nations disagree on their relative strength, and wars usually cease when the fighting nations agree on their relative strength."[87] Before exploring Blainey's ideas in detail, this section reviews Blainey's analysis of the flaws in other theories.

Blainey attacks any number of "popular" theories on war. He discounts theories that blame individuals or groups with specific interests as explaining rivalry and tension rather that war.[88] While acknowledging that a nation's aims or ambitions contribute to war, he disputes any theory that ignores the means available to achieve those goals.[89] In citing historical examples, he refutes the argument that an uneven balance of power promotes war. Instead, he argues that this uneven balance promotes peace.[90] He challenges the "scapegoat" theory of war that claims a nation starts a war in hopes of restoring domestic stability.[91] He disagrees with the theory that a nation busy with its own affairs, particularly economic expansion, will not become involved in a war. Described as the delinquency theory, this idea suggests that a busy nation is a peaceful nation.[92] He opposes any theory that claims that human nature causes wars.[93] He is unconvinced that greater understanding between nations through contact and sharing prevents wars, citing specifically the events leading to World War Two.[94] This argument indirectly refutes the idea that international anarchy causes wars, since he cites instances where an international attempt to prevent war failed. He believes that no war occurs by accident, although the circumstances of the war are frequently misjudged.[95]

Having eliminated a large field of possible explanations for war, Blainey defines his theory under very specific conditions. Power is central to his theory. It is not power by itself but the relative power between nations. This power relationship characterizes international relations in much the same way that trade between merchants exists. Power serves as the medium of exchange, diplomacy as the method of barter. Without revisiting Blainey's complete analogy, as quoted in Chapter One, an understanding of this interactive relationship demonstrates that a nation's sense of its own power in relation to

its opponent's power determines the decision to go to war or maintain peace. Actual power is meaningless. The perception of power relative to the opponent is key. As described by Blainey, "a government may be unyielding in negotiations because it predicts that its adversary does not want war. It may be unyielding because it has an inflated idea of its own military power. Or it may be unyielding because to yield to an enemy may weaken its standing and grip within its own land."[96] Each of these possibilities appreciates the importance of perceived power, not actual power. Whatever perceptions exist about relative power, "war itself provides the most reliable and most objective test of which nation or alliance is the most powerful."[97]

Geoffrey Blainey describes the key aspects of his theory as a framework of causes.[98] Within this framework, five primary considerations emerge. Blainey discusses the influence of diplomatic breakdown, arguing that a breakdown in diplomacy is caused by a continuing disagreement about relative power. In other words, diplomatic breakdown, though not a cause of war, seems consistently to precede immediately a war.[99] Another central consideration, the national leader's assessment of his ability to impose his will on his opponent, focuses on both the rational decision making and emotional perspective of the leaders involved.[100] Blainey continues that national expectations about the duration and outcome of a war strongly influence a decision to war. He observes that, as with the disagreement over relative strength, nations disagree about the duration and expected outcome of the war. Typically, both sides expect to win and win quickly. When these expectations cease to contradict, the war normally ends. In other words, when the losing nation recognizes that it will not win, the war ceases.[101] But this realization may take some time. In the case of Germany and Japan in World War

Two, there seemed to be little agreement within these nations as to when to cause was lost. In addition, Blainey reverses the widely held belief that a balance of power ensures lasting peace. In his view, "a clear preponderance of power tended to promote peace."[102] Here Blainey observes that war that ended decisively, demonstrating clearly which nation actually held the power, resulted in agreement about relative power. Indecisive war, such as World War One, failed to resolve fully the disagreement over relative strength, resulting in a less enduring peace.[103]

The most significant aspect of Blainey's framework focuses on a set of seven factors which influence a nation's assessment of its relative strength. These factors are:

> *military strength and the ability to apply that strength efficiently in the chosen zone of war; predictions of how outside nations would behave in the event of war; perceptions of internal unity and of the unity or discord of the enemy; memory or forgetfulness of the realities and sufferings of war; perceptions of prosperity and of ability to sustain, economically, the kind of war envisaged; nationalism and ideology; and the personality and mental qualities of the leaders who weighed the evidence and decided for peace or war.*[104]

These seven factors require little if any additional clarification. Blainey recognizes that no single factor dominates this set. In combination, however, these factors serve as the analytical criteria, either consciously or unconsciously applied by a nation and its decision makers. Using Blainey's own analogy then, these seven factors serve as the beads in the abacus of power which, when added and subtracted in this complex calculation, help determine in their total a nation's assessment of its relative power.[105]

While this summary of Geoffrey Blainey's theory hints at its advantages compared to other theories, a more explicit discussion seems necessary to clarify its selection over other theories for analyzing the Persian Gulf War. First, Blainey approaches the problem from an historian's perspective, searching through history in an

attempt to recognize patterns and tendencies. As an historian, he tends to remain aware of the many and varied influences on war and its causes. The political scientists and sociologists discussed here tend to emphasize the causes that "fit" into their concept of war as a political science phenomenon or a condition of society. In other words, while Blainey looks at history and attempts to see connections, the other theorists look at their thesis and attempt to fit history to it. Some, as already discussed, barely consider history in their ideas at all. So Blainey's theory seems to rise above the others as an example of Clausewitz's assertion that theory assists in recognizing patterns in the jumble of historical events.[106]

More pragmatically, Blainey provides a clearly defined set of criteria with which to assess other historical examples. A number of the other theories covered here have attempted to define a set of conditions that cause war. For example, L.L. Bernard details a number of very specific conditions that cause war. Bernard, however, defines so many conditions as to make these criteria almost useless in applying to case studies. Kenneth Waltz's three images of war, while clearly defined in Waltz's theory, seem insufficient in explaining or clarifying the events of history.

Finally, this chapter has already discussed the shortcomings of most of these theories on the causes of war, principally in criticism of the argument that international anarchy causes wars. Blainey appears unconvinced of that argument and, as has already been asserted here, these theorists seem to confuse the means to prevent wars with the causes of war. As Blainey explains it, a breakdown in diplomacy "is a description masquerading as an explanation. In fact that main influence which led to the breakdown of diplomacy - a contradictory sense of bargaining power - also prompted the nations to

fight."[107] Successful diplomacy might prevent war but the need to employ crisis diplomacy indicates that something caused the conflict to begin.

This chapter, having reviewed war in its three component parts, has provided the necessary background with which to study an historic example. Geoffrey Blainey has provided the criteria with which to conduct an analysis. His seven factors that influence a nation's war decision will assist in evaluating history. What remains is the history itself - in this case the story of the events that led to the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991. The next chapter will provide that story.

## Chapter 3 - The Origins of the Persian Gulf War

### Introduction

This monograph has focused on the theoretical aspects war and its causes up to this point. Having determined that Geoffrey Blainey's model of the causes of war provides an adequate thesis to validate, this paper now sets out to establish the historical events leading to the Persian Gulf War, providing the necessary case study with which to test Blainey's theory. This chapter, then, will set out the history leading to this conflict. In so doing, this chapter makes no attempt to provide a comprehensive, exhaustive review of history. Instead, four major historical periods will be summarized and analyzed with the hopes of identifying the key aspects of each of these periods. In order, then, this chapter will describe: the ancient history of Iraq and its region; the modern influences of western imperialism and expansion; the importance of the Iran-Iraq War; and the conditions leading to the conflict itself. While Iraq and the middle eastern region dominate this discussion, the interactions of western powers, including the United States,

play an important role in the modern history of the region and will receive a thorough review here. In the end, national strength and power will emerge as the critical and common thread throughout this historical review.

## The Fertile Crescent and Babylon

While the continent of Africa is credited with being the birthplace of mankind, the area around the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys retains the label of the cradle of civilization. The combination of climate, fertile soil, native flora and fauna, and available waters create a region that favored the establishment of organized society.[108] In their earliest forms, civilizations emerged as the Sumerians, the Semites and the Elamites, each struggling for dominance in the area until united by Hammurabi 1700 years before Christ.[109] Great ancient empires, including Assyria, Persia and Macedonia, swept through the region, finding both a crossroads from Asia to Europe and a rich source of material and goods. The spread of Christianity during the first few centuries after Christ acted as an organizing influence in the region, reshaping society again. Finally, the Arabs, expanding from Arabia with the message of Mohammed in the seventh century A.D., moved to Mesopotamia as the emerging center of the Middle East. Here religion, commerce, agriculture and geography combined to create a powerful force in the region.[110] Baghdad rose as the center of this power, wealthy from trade and agriculture. Under these conditions, society advanced as the influences of trade east and west combined with the continuing impact of Muslim on the people.[111] The rise of Turkish power in the 11th century, followed by the Crusades and the conquests of the Mongols, all led to the destruction of this early power center.[112]

The Ottoman Empire dominated the Middle East and modern Iraq from the 16th century until World War I. The importance of Iraq as a trade center and crossroads, coupled with the continuing influence of Muslim, ensured the continuing interest in the area by its conquerors and by those desiring its resources. Baghdad remained the power center in the region, serving the Ottomans as the provincial capital. Late in the 19th century, the Ottomans reorganized the province into three areas, Mosul, Basra and Baghdad. The British Empire, having emerged as the principle European colonial power in the middle east, began to extend its interests into the Basra province, recognizing and supporting Kuwait as separate and independent of the Basra province. The Ottomans, with their regional power waning, were unable to prevent this arrangement. Ultimately, the British agreed to protect Kuwait from Turkish and the Arab sheiks to the south. This arrangement survived the results of World War I, allowing British and French colonial expansion in the region.[113]

## Western Nationalism and 20th Century Power

World War I served as the defining historical event in 20th century middle eastern affairs. The Allies, working secretly, agreed to divide the Ottoman Empire among Great Britain, France, Italy and Russia.[114] Great Britain, having supported Arab resistance in Syria, eventually gained "friendship treaties" with the countries of Kuwait and Iraq, providing supervision of their emergence as nations. More importantly, the British recognized the potential for oil resources in the region.[115] The determination of boundaries among the new Middle East nations (including Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey) came more from the economic interests of France and Britain than from any attempt to delineate social, cultural, or political groupings.[116] In so doing, France and

Britain created in Iraq a land locked state with two major rivers running through its length but no seaports or access to the Persian Gulf. These boundaries continue as a source of conflict in the region.

In the years following, Great Britain carefully managed the slow independence of Iraq. Initially an occupying force, the British supervised elections, established a monarch (supportive of their interests), and developed agreements with the Iraqi government to protect Iraq from war with occupying military forces.[117] In 1932, having been led carefully toward independence, Iraq received membership in the League of Nations, officially marking its independence. Its government, in the image of Britain's parliamentary democratic form, struggled to manage the nation. Even this early in its history, Iraq found itself ruled by a minority religious group (the Sunni) while the majority Shiites stood outside the power of government.[118] The riches of Iraq's oil resources remained important to the west and a source of periodic conflict with its neighboring nations.[119] Unfortunately, the strategic importance of Iraq to the west could not ensure a stable political environment as Iraq cycled through numerous governments, culminating in revolution in 1958.[120]

The only political position that remained consistent throughout the turmoil of Iraq governments was the Iraqi position that Kuwait remained a part of the province of Basra from the Ottoman Empire and before.[121] This claim, disputed by both Kuwait and Great Britain, flared up in 1961 when Kuwait declared independence from Great Britain, and remained a primary area of disagreement between the two nations. When the Baathist Party wrested power in 1963, the Iraqi government acknowledge Kuwait as a state but continued to disagree with the borders drawn by the Allies after World War I.[122]

Saddam Hussein emerged as a powerful force in the Baathist government in the 1970s. Rising to dictator in 1979, he ruthlessly applied physical force to consolidate his gains, purging the government and military of potential adversaries.[123] In international affairs, Hussein demonstrated much greater restraint, applying pragmatic diplomacy throughout the region in attempts to carefully expand Iraqi power in the region with "the lowest risk and greatest economy possible."[124] This apparent moderacy attracted France, Great Britain and the United States, each seeking a foil for radical Muslim fundamentalism and communist expansionism, and, most importantly, a market for trade in oil and goods.[125] The Western powers, willing to forgive internal suppression as common among dictators in the region, hoped to encourage Saddam toward an increasingly moderate leadership role both domestically and within the region. All three powers established diplomatic and economic ties with Iraq, including agricultural credits and arms sales.[126] There remained dissatisfaction with Saddam's domestic policies, specifically his treatment of the Kurds and his development of chemical and biological weapons[127]. This discomfort, however, did not prevent continuing to cultivate Saddam as the moderate, secular leader of the Middle Eastern nations. The result of this effort by the west may have been a confusing message of support for Iraq.

## What the Iran-Iraq War Caused

As described above, Saddam saw himself as the new regional leader of a more secular Muslim region. He desired to emulate Egypt's Nasser from the 1960's and hoped to unite the Middle East, particularly the Muslim nations, as a regional force.[128] Unfortunately for Saddam, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 precipitated the rapid growth of the more fundamentalist arm of the Muslim faith, causing many fundamentalist

Muslims in a number of Middle East countries to rise up against their more moderate, secular governments. Iraq and Saddam experienced that turmoil shortly after his assuming power. His initial solution was to repress Iraq's Shiite supporters of Iran's revolution with violence and intimidation.[129] However, Saddam saw this as an opportunity to expand his power in the region, particularly because he believed that the fall of the Shah of Iran had weakened the Iranian military. Additionally, defeat of Iran or even gaining some land might open Iraq's access to the Persian Gulf.[130] In September 1980, Iraq attacked Iran.[131]

After eight years and hundreds of thousands of lives, neither side appeared victorious, although Saddam claimed victory.[132] The results of this war for Iraq directly influenced their invasion of Kuwait two years later. These results are threefold. First, the Western powers, particularly France and the United States, slowly became supporters of Iraq during the war. Their support grew more from a desire to maintain regional stability than from any ideological issue. Specifically, the emergence of Iran as an Islamic fundamentalist power threatened many of the Western interests, including oil. Saddam, while recognized as a dictator, was the sole leader capable of countering that emerging power.[133] The second result of the Iran-Iraq War was an Iraqi military machine of enormous size and power. Having fought a war for eight years, Saddam's army was large and experienced in combat. Saddam faced the difficult proposition of reducing this force versus maintaining it.[134] Finally, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had backed Saddam financially during the last few years of the war in an effort to maintain the regional status quo and prevent the expansion of the more radical Iranian power. The Iraqi economy,

largely propped up by its military industries and the support of other OPEC countries, began to crumble under the weight of the debts owed to Kuwait and others.[135]

After the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam seemed to have three tools to manipulate in order to maintain his grip on Iraq - Western support, a powerful military, and a weakening economy heavily reliant on oil for income.

## How War Comes to Kuwait

Most scholars seem to agree that Iraq's economic woes were central to its invasion of Kuwait. Specifically, Kuwait, leading the more moderate nations in OPEC, preferred to sell oil in large volumes at reduced prices. Kuwait was able to depress the price of Persian Gulf oil while still making large profits. Other OPEC states, with Iraq at the forefront, preferred higher oil prices by reducing output to purchasers. These two differing opinions - generally described as the haves versus the have nots - became one of the central divisive issues among the Gulf nations. Additionally, Iraq accused Kuwait of overproducing oil from the Rumalia oil fields, an area rich with oil reserves that lies along the Iraq-Kuwait border. This dispute highlighted the age old disagreement about the actual borders between Iraq and Kuwait. Iraq remained without access to the Persian Gulf, an issue related to this border dispute. Finally, Iraq's outstanding debt to Kuwait resulting from the Iran-Iraq War remained an issue of frustration for Saddam. Having defended Kuwait's and Saudi Arabia's interests against Iran, Saddam felt strongly that Kuwait should forgive this debt.[136]

On 28 May 1990, Saddam hosted an emergency summit of the Arab League under the guise of a concern for expanding Israeli power in the region. In the two years since the Iran-Iraq War ended, Saddam had been under constant international attack for

his increasingly repressive conduct. Specifically, his attacks on the Kurds with chemical weapons and his expanding military purchases concerned both regional powers, such as Egypt and Israel, as well as the West. Also during this period, waning Soviet support to Iraq had undermined some of Saddam's influence as a regional power. At this summit, Saddam attempted to consolidate support for his role as the regional leader. In addition, he attacked Kuwait and his other wartime supporters over the economic issues described above. By July, Iraq had become increasingly virulent in its statements about Kuwait, while Kuwait appeared far less serious about these issues.[137] By late July, Iraq was applying its considerable military power, coupled with its diplomatic pressure, to Kuwait.

The Western powers, including the United States, watched carefully this increasingly emotional exchange. The United States, cautious not to engage Iraq directly, expressed mixed signals concerning the crisis. For example, Ambassador April Glaspie, meeting with Saddam in July, expressed the U.S. policy as taking no position in regional conflicts. Just days prior, however, the U.S. dispatched military forces to the United Arab Emirates and warned Iraq about its military build up north of Kuwait.[138] Saddam, apparently sensing that his dispute with Kuwait would remain outside Western influence, invaded Kuwait on August 4th, 1990.

## Conclusions - Powerful Miscalculations

Power dominated Saddam's calculations since his emergence in the Baathist party in the 1960's. The legacy of Baghdad as a power center since the time of Hammurabi contributed to the Iraqi sense of importance in the region. The influence of the West, beginning with Great Britain after World War I, then with France and the United States, appears to have reinforced that sense of regional importance in Iraq. The economic

power of oil clearly played a role and continues to do so today. The Iran-Iraq War, resulting in both a weak economy and a strong army, established conditions that, left unresolved, would possibly destabilize Iraq. Saddam, ever concerned with maintaining and enhancing his grip over his own nation, seemed to employ a combination of internal repression and external moderacy to consolidated his power and maintain stability.

It appears Saddam miscalculated, whether through incompetence or rational thought, in his analysis of Western involvement in his war. His past support from France and the United States resulted as much from a Western desire to prevent Soviet expansion and maintain regional stability as from any reliance on oil. Once the threat of Soviet hegemony decayed in the late 1980's, Western interests shifted more towards a balance of economic interests and regional stability.[139] While this shift seems apparent in retrospect, U.S. diplomatic efforts during the crisis were arguably vague and confusing. Here, then, the United States seems to have miscalculated as well by not asserting a clear policy towards the region until after Saddam's invasion.

This brief historical survey provides the appropriate backdrop for the application of Geoffrey Blainey's theory in the next chapter. As argued here, power and the relationships of the Persian Gulf nations is at the core of the Gulf War. Ancient history and the legacy of Mesopotamia, 20th century Western influences, the emergence of Saddam Hussein and his brand of dictatorship, and the results of the Iran-Iraq War all combined to create conditions where Iraq perceived itself as a regional power and felt compelled to attack Kuwait to both consolidate and expand its power. In the next chapter, this study will apply the key aspects of Blainey's theory on the causes of war to this conflict in an attempt to better frame the Persian Gulf War and clarify its causes.

## Chapter 4 - Blainey's Theory Applied

### Introduction

Having developed and analyzed a theoretical framework for the causes of war and the origins of the Persian Gulf War, there remains the task of applying Geoffrey Blainey's model for the causes of war to this historical case study. This chapter, then, synthesizes military theory with history in order to clarify the causes of the Persian Gulf War. As argued earlier in this paper, the value of theory lies in its ability to help explain events by describing patterns or common threads. In so doing, the theory leads the student to a better understanding of history and improves his ability to recognize these common threads in the future. While not a predictive tool, theory can lead to an improved ability to see similarities and differences in future events.

As a refresher from earlier in this paper, Geoffrey Blainey describes war as "a dispute about the measurement of power."[140] War is then caused by this dispute, when nations disagree about their power relative to each other. As Blainey describes it, this power measurement is based on each nation's perception of their power relative to the other nation. As earlier emphasized, this perception drives the conflict. The actual distribution of power is less vital than the way the nations' leaders believe that the power is distributed.[141] Blainey sets up seven factors which influence a nation's decision to go to war: military strength and a nation's ability to employ its military; assessment of how other interested nations might behave; the perceived internal unity or disunity of the opposing nations; the nations' memories of the reality of war; the ideology and nationalism of each nation; each nation's economic conditions and its ability to pay for

war; and each nation's decision makers.[142] This chapter will take each of these factors in turn and analyze Iraq and the United States based on the history presented in Chapter Three to demonstrate that this war was "a dispute about the measurement of power."[143] Before beginning that analysis, this chapter will present several current scholars' theories on the causes of the Persian Gulf War, providing some additional ideas for comparison with Geoffrey Blainey's approach.

## Perspectives from Other Theories

This brief discussion highlights three distinct perspectives on the Persian Gulf War. The first perspective relies heavily on the actions and emotions of leaders themselves. John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, in their book *Saddam's War*, argue that, while both the Western powers and Iraq's neighbors may have failed to recognize the threat from Iraq, Saddam Hussein's desire for greater and greater power caused this war. His almost insane struggle for power, both inside his country and regionally, resulted in this war.[144] Their thesis argues against the interaction of two sides, blaming war solely on Saddam Hussein the individual. Roger Hilsman titled his book *George Bush vs. Saddam Hussein*, an obvious indication of his belief in the power of personalities.[145]

The second set of theories relies heavily on the economic and diplomatic causes of the war. Ibrahim Ibrahim argues that the absence of an effective regional or international mechanism for resolving disputes caused the Persian Gulf War.[146] Writing in that same volume, Abbas Alnasrawi believes that the dispute over oil, as described earlier in Chapter Three, caused this conflict. He postulates that the combination of Kuwaiti manipulation of oil prices and the Rumalia oil field dispute led Saddam to react violently.[147] Both these theories represent one narrow aspect of the conflict. Both

resonate the theories of Kenneth Waltz and L.L. Bernard, emphasizing the political science and social factors that cause war.

The final grouping of theories supports Blainey's theory, describing the struggle for power and the confusion of diplomacy as causes of war. For example, Lawrence Freedman and Efriam Karsh, writing in 1993, acknowledge that Saddam's insecurity and economic problems contributed to the crisis and that the West and the regional powers failed to both recognize the threat and warn Saddam away from war.[148] Saddam perceived his own power to be increasing in relation to his neighbors as a result of the apparent Western lack of interest in his actions. In *Unholy Babylon*, Adel Darwish and Gregory Alexander argue more directly that the United States and others failed to define clearly their intentions, allowing Saddam to perceive his own power as greater in this struggle.[149] While this theory relies somewhat too heavily on Saddam's opponents for blame, the confused and muddled diplomatic efforts of the Kuwaitis and the Americans certainly seems to have given Saddam some opportunity for miscalculation.

## The Seven Factors Analyzed

Geoffrey Blainey's first influencing factor in national leaders' decision is the nation's military strength and the ability to apply that military efficiently to the war.[150] Iraq at the time of the conflict had one of the largest, most modern armies in the world, experienced in war and powerful inside Iraq. Saddam perceived his military machine as dominant in the region. Conversely, Saddam perceived that the United States would not become militarily engaged in the region. He commented to Ambassador Glaspie that the U.S. would be unable to accept large amounts of casualties in a fight for Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.[151] However, by 1990 the U.S. military, having emerged from the Cold

War a sophisticated and powerful force, was a convincing instrument of national power available to President Bush. In the period from the Vietnam War until the end of the Cold War, the American military forces had undergone a transformation. That transformation provided the President with the confidence to use military forces in this conflict. Saddam, as the war proved, miscalculated his own military strength in relation to the United States and its allies.

Saddam may have miscalculated the influence of outside nations as well. Particularly in the case of Israel and the former Soviet Union, he appeared to have expected their involvement in the conflict. With Israel, he attempted to precipitate their involvement with Scud missile attacks on Tel Aviv during the conflict.[152] As for the Russians, Saddam apparently misunderstood the impact of the collapse of European communism in the years leading up to the Persian Gulf War. It seems that he expected Russian continuing regional interest to minimize American involvement.[153] Again, the United States leadership seems to have had a better understanding of how other nations might become involved. In fact, the United States aggressively sought a coalition of both regional states and Western powers in order to ensure that outside nations were acting in concert with U.S. interests.[154]

Blainey argues that a national leader's sense of both his nation's and his opponent's internal unity influences a war decision. In the case of Iraq, the dictatorial nature of that country probably minimized Saddam's assessment of his internal unity. His obsession with his own security and the oppressive nature of his government probably ensured his perception of Iraqi unity. Saddam did, however, demonstrate his assessment of American internal unity when he speculated about U.S. ability to suffer

casualties as described above. It seems apparent that his initial perceptions were founded in a belief that the United States people would not support American military intervention. In contrast, President Bush carefully crafted both an international coalition and the domestic support necessary to use American military power. The Congressional vote to allow the President to go to war with Iraq exemplifies this national unity.[155]

Harry Summers' book, *On Strategy II: A Critical Analysis of the Gulf War*, embodies the American perception of the perils and sufferings of the last war, Blainey's fourth influencing factor. Summers describes the national resurrection following the Vietnam War, particularly within the military itself.[156] Not only had the United States built itself a new military, it had accepted emotionally and ideologically that the next war would not be like Vietnam. The United States may have forgotten some of the sufferings of a war in the nearly twenty years since Vietnam. Iraq, only two years since its long war with Iran, probably had not forgotten that war. Unfortunately, Saddam's dominance over decision in his nation seems to have overridden any misgivings other Iraqis had about the sufferings of war. Saddam apparently saw his army as an extension of his power without regard to the lives involved in applying his military to his ends.

Nationalism and ideology, in continuing Blainey's argument, played a significant role, particularly from the United States' perspective. As has already been addressed, Saddam's iron fisted rule virtually eliminated his considering the nationalism or ideology of his own people. Iraq's ideology, then, was Saddam's ideology. Religion played little part in Saddam's dictatorship up until this conflict. His highly secular regime had repressed the more religious Shiite majority in the past.[157] The only apparent nationalism in Iraq was the nationalism of Saddam. As the conflict drew near, Saddam became

increasingly nationalistic, claiming Iraq as the model of the Arab state and citing ancient Babylon as its bloodline to power.[158] The United States, on the other hand, had always relied on a strong sense of both nationalism and ideology, as expressed by President Bush throughout the early days of the crisis. Bush compared Saddam to Hitler and characterized Saddam's invasion as a challenge to freedom throughout the world.[159] In appealing to democratic ideals and demonizing his adversary, President Bush appealed to the natural tendencies of his citizens.

Saddam's decision to invade Kuwait clearly had economic reasons, as described in Chapter Three. Saddam recognized the need to expand his economic base and to attempt to reduce his debts. His decision to pursue a highly militarized economy following the Iran-Iraq War would seem to have prepared him economically for any future conflict. Blainey observes that most wars have come during economic well being but asserts that other factors can drive a nation to war even when economically distressed.[160] Iraq seems to fit that observation - a nation in economic distress that starts war all the same. Had Saddam been able to study the United States economic state in relation to his own, he might not have been so eager to invade Kuwait. Relative to Iraq, the U.S. had economic prosperity and was very able to afford the war it chose. Arguably, success in this war by the United States could increase their prosperity by maintaining, even enhancing, the free flow of oil from the region.

Finally, Blainey believes that the personalities of the opposing leaders and decision makers plays an important role in a nation's decision to war. As already noted, Roger Hilsman would argue it played the central role in causing this conflict. While that assertion may be overstated, certainly Saddam Hussein's dominance of his own nation's

decision making body weighed heavily in causing the Persian Gulf War. Saddam's repressive, dictatorial, manipulative and heavy-handed domestic style contrasted sharply with his more pragmatic, deliberate and moderate international approach.[161] President Bush played a less dramatic role in influencing the United States decision to go to war. He expressed many of the emotions felt by the American people, while Saddam likely expressed only the emotions he felt in contrast to Iraqis at large. While both leaders were dominant during the crisis, Saddam's personality played a much larger role in moving his nation to crisis.

## Counting the Factors on Blainey's Abacus

The previous discussion clearly demonstrates that Blainey's theory for the causes of war clarifies much of the Persian Gulf War causes. In varying ways, each of the seven factors that influence a nation's decision to go to war are present in this situation. Particularly with regards to Iraq, all the factors described except the economic ability of Iraq to fight a war apply to Saddam's decision making. The United States, while not as overwhelmingly influenced by Blainey's factors, still appeared influenced by a number of these factors, particularly internal unity, nationalism and ideology, and military strength. Geoffrey Blainey warns that "not one of these influences worked persistently for war" and that each "can promote either peace or war. It is their combination which determines the chances for peace and war."[162] If taken in total, then, one can add up the seven factors weighed by Saddam and see his decision to go to war. One can also see the influences add up on the United State side, also driving towards a decision to go to war.

Ultimately, however, war is a dispute over relative power. In this case, Saddam mispercieved his power. Blainey observes with uncanny accuracy that "a nation with an

increasing deficit in international power may not even recognise its weaknesses. A nation may so mistake its bargaining power that it may make the ultimate appeal to war, then learn through defeat in warfare to accept a humbler assessment of its bargaining power."[163] In Iraq's case, it still remains to be seen whether Saddam has a humbler perception of his power.

## Chapter 5 - Summary and Conclusions

This monograph clarifies and better explains the causes of the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991 by applying Geoffrey Blainey's theory about the causes of war. Blainey describes the diplomatic crisis leading to war "like a crisis in international payments... The currency of one nation or alliance is out of alignment with that of the others. These currencies are simply estimates which each nation nourishes about its relative bargaining power."[164] Saddam Hussein unfortunately overestimated his nation's currency relative to the United States, resulting in an overwhelming military defeat. As the modern merchant of Mesopotamia, Saddam employed his calculations of his power and his perceptions of the U.S. and coalition power and misread the analysis. Blainey's mercantile analogy harkens back to Carl von Clausewitz, who described battle as the cash payment in war. In the case of the Persian Gulf War, this transaction ultimately favored the United States and its coalition.

In an attempt to clarify better the many theories on war and its causes, this paper began with a review and analysis of several different theoretical approaches, concluding with an assessment of Geoffrey Blainey's theory in detail. In so doing, this paper established the framework for analyzing a case study. Next, this paper turned to a

selective discussion of the history of the events leading to the Persian Gulf War with a review of ancient middle eastern history, the influences of the West during the 20th century, the impact of the Iran-Iraq War, and the events immediately preceding the 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. Power emerges during this discussion as central to the region's history, particularly in recent decades. Finally, this paper overlays Blainey's theory on the case study itself, describing the seven influential factors from Blainey as they appear to influence this case study. This analysis clearly demonstrates the apparent comprehensive nature of Blainey's theory and seems to reveal additional insights into the causes of the conflict itself.

This monograph has repeatedly argued that the value of any military theory lies in its ability to help better our understanding the war, its causes and its results. As asserted in this monograph's introduction, the military officer and planner desires more than the intellectual satisfaction of understanding a conflict. These more pragmatic students of history and theory seek to improve their insight through study to better prepare themselves for recognizing similar patterns leading to future conflicts. In so doing, they apply their academic skills to the dangerous business of better solving the complex problems faced by military commanders and units.

In applying Blainey's theory to current events, a staff planner might be able to identify some patterns or trends, particularly when framed by the seven factors that influence a national decision to go to war. For example, the seemingly unpredictable nature of recent events on the Korean peninsula may find some order or method when analyzed in light of Blainey's concepts. Certainly Geoffrey Blainey's ideas do not answer all the questions arising from the complexities of international affairs and human nature.

His theory, when considered as a tool among many tools, can forward the planner's assessment of a region, a nation, or a conflict in its infancy. This monograph, then, seeks to balance the academic and intellectual pursuit of theory with the pragmatic, arguably more important, pursuit of a solution to the problems of international conflict.

## Endnotes

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[7] for example, John Bulloch's *Saddam's War* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1991) and Ibrahim Ibrahim's *The Gulf Crisis: Background and Consequences* (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1992) provide unique perspectives on the war.

[8] von Clausewitz, 698.

[9] Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3rd ed., (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 114.

[10] ibid., 122.

[11] ibid., 104.

[12] ibid., 113.

[13] ibid., ix.

[14] ibid., x-xi.

[15] ibid., 293.

[16] von Clausewitz, 698.

[17] Blainey, 292-294.

[18] ibid., 115.

[19] ibid., 114.

[20] Bruce D. Porter, *War and the Rise of the State: The Military Foundations of Modern Politics*, (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

[21] von Clausewitz, 99.

[22] John Keegan, 3.

[23] ibid., 12.

[24] ibid.

[25] ibid.

[26] Sun-tzu, 167.

[27] Sun-tzu, 177.

[28] Liddell Hart, 324.

[29] Clausewitz and Jomini.

[30] Liddell Hart, 325.

[31] ibid., 330.

[32] Porter, 2.

[33] ibid.

[34] ibid., 3.

[35] ibid., 4.

[36] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

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[38] ibid., 4-8.

[39] ibid., 11.

[40] ibid., 11.

[41] ibid., 15.

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[43] ibid., 21-22.

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[45] ibid., 100-122.

[46] Fuller, 66.

[47] ibid.

[48] ibid.

[49] ibid., 69.

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[52] ibid., 250.

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[54] ibid., 353.

[55] ibid., 353.

[56] ibid., 357-367.

[57] Waltz, 238.

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[59] ibid., 81.

[60] ibid., 111.

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[62] ibid., 163-165.

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[64] ibid., 232.

[65] ibid., 234.

[66] Dean G. Pruitt and Richard C. Snyder, *Theory and Research on the Causes of War*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1969), 1.

[67] ibid., 16.

[68] ibid., 17.

[69] ibid., 21.

[70] ibid., 26-27.

[71] ibid., 31.

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[73] ibid., 52-53.

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[76] ibid., 13-14.

[77] ibid., 16.

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[79] ibid., 22.

[80] Seyom Brown, *The Causes and Prevention of War*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 3.

[81] ibid., 65.

[82] ibid., 67.

[83] ibid., 132.

[84] ibid., 130-135.

[85] Brown and Waltz, for example.

[86] Pruitt and Snyder, as well as Michael Howard.

[87] Blainey, 293.

[88] ibid., 291.

[89] ibid., 148.

[90] ibid., 291.

[91] ibid., 68-86.

[92] ibid., 9-11.

[93] ibid., 291.

[94] ibid., 27-28.

[95] ibid., 144-145.

[96] ibid., 117.

[97] ibid., 118.

[98] ibid., 292.

[99] ibid., 114.

[100] ibid., 293.

[101] ibid., 294.

[102] ibid., 113.

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[104] ibid., 123.

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