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BREAKING RANKS

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What turned Brent Scowcroft against the Bush Administration?

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At eight o'clock on the morning of August 2, 1990, President George H. W. Bush assembled his National Security Council in the Cabinet Room of the White House. Thirteen hours earlier, Saddam Hussein had sent his Army into Kuwait, and the Administration was searching for a response. Brent Scowcroft, the President's national-security adviser, has an unhappy memory of that first meeting. The tone, he says, was defeatist: "Much of the conversation in those early moments concerned the stability of the oil market. There was an air of resignation about the invasion."

Shortly before the National Security Council meeting began, General Colin Powell, who was then the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told General Norman Schwarzkopf, "I think we'd go to war over Saudi Arabia, but I doubt we'd go to war over Kuwait." For the moment, at least, Powell's assessment reflected the President's mood. Minutes before the meeting, Bush had told reporters that he was not contemplating an armed response. Scowcroft had been listening to the President as he spoke to the press, and the comment immediately struck him as unwise. "Right at the beginning, I believed that it"—the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait—"was intolerable to the interests of the U.S.," he told me recently.

At the time, Scowcroft, a retired Air Force general, was notably hawkish on the Iraq question, more so than the Secretary of State, James A. Baker III, and perhaps even more so than Dick Cheney, who was Bush's Secretary of Defense. Scowcroft believed that if Saddam's aggression was left unanswered it would undermine the international rule of law; it would also, he thought, compromise America's standing in the world at a moment—the end of the Cold War—that was otherwise filled with promise.

Scowcroft is a protégé of Henry Kissinger—he was his deputy when Kissinger was Richard Nixon's national-security adviser. Like Kissinger, he is a purveyor of a "realist" approach to foreign policy: the idea that America should be guided by strategic self-interest, and that moral considerations are secondary at best. But Bush and Scowcroft also spoke expansively about the possibilities for America the Cold War world, about a New World Order built on benign but resolute American leadership and multilateral cooperation. The United States, Bush said in "A World Transformed," a book that he later co-wrote with Scowcroft, had a "disproportionate responsibility" to use its power "in pursuit of a common good." Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was a direct challenge to Bush's understanding of America's role in the world.

There were initial doubts among some of Bush's advisers. Colin Powell, like many military men shaped by the experience of the Vietnam War, was disinclined to send American troops into battle, and he cautioned the National Security Council against imprudent action. "My first questions had to do with defending Saudi Arabia, and the importance of having a clear political understanding first of what we were doing," Powell told me recently. "Brent immediately saw that the invasion had to be reversed. He was a little further forward on the need to do something."

Scowcroft argued unyieldingly for intervention, and his view prevailed. Within days, Bush announced "This will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait"—a burst of fortitude that commentators later attributed to a comment from Margaret Thatcher ("Don't go all wobbly on us, George," she reportedly

told him). Scowcroft, whose modesty may be pronounced to the point of ostentation, loyally insists that the President arrived at his decision alone, but several of Scowcroft's former colleagues said that it was Scowcroft's firmness, along with Thatcher's prodding, that strengthened Bush's resolve to confront Saddam. Scowcroft is "not a blowhard," the senior Bush told me in a recent e-mail. "He has a great propensity for friendship. By that I mean someone I can depend on to tell me what I need to know and not just what I want to hear, and at the same time he is someone on whom I know I always can rely and trust implicitly."

In the six months leading to the war, Scowcroft became indispensable to Bush, subjecting war planners to sharp questioning, and debating those opposed to intervention. It is easy to forget, given the war's stunning speed and its low casualty count on the U.S. side (a hundred and forty-eight American soldiers lost their lives in the fighting), that there was a great deal of domestic opposition to Bush's plan, particularly among congressional Democrats.

The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sam Nunn, of Georgia, led the opposition. He conducted hearings in which many of the country's most widely respected military and foreign-policy experts prophesied cataclysm: American casualties would be in the thousands, they said, in a war that was unnecessary. Sanctions, it was argued, would be sufficient to drive Saddam out of Kuwait. Some of Bush's aides came to refer to Nunn as "Neville."

Bush did not let domestic opposition, or the views of Mikhail Gorbachev, who sought a negotiated solution, stand in the way of what he came to see as a moral cause of surpassing importance. On December 31, 1990, he wrote a letter to his five children: "How many lives might have been saved if appeasement had given way to force earlier in the late 30s or earliest 40s?" it read. "How many Jews might have been spared the gas chambers, or how many Polish patriots might be alive today? I look at today's crisis as 'good' vs. 'evil'—yes, it is that clear." Scowcroft never engaged in this sort of rhetoric. A line had been crossed, and Iraq needed to be punished; he did not invoke the spectre of Hitler to make his point.

The war began on January 16, 1991. An air campaign that lasted five weeks greatly weakened Iraq's military capabilities. On February 24th, General Schwarzkopf, the commander of American and allied forces, unleashed a ground attack that quickly turned into a rout; the Iraqi Army collapsed, and its soldiers fled Kuwait on foot. The road to Baghdad was clear, but, on Bush's instruction, the Americans did not take it. Although Bush had publicly compared Saddam to Hitler, the goal was never to liberate Iraq from his rule. "Our military didn't want any part of occupying that big Arab country, and the only way to get Saddam was to go all the way to Baghdad," James Baker told me recently.

Afterward, Bush was criticized for the decision to end the ground war at its hundredth hour. Even some officials of the Administration were unhappy at what they saw as a premature end to the fighting. In "Rise of the Vulcans," James Mann recounts that Paul Wolfowitz and I. Lewis Libby, who were then aides to Cheney, believed that a coup d'état might have occurred had the Bush Administration waited to announce that the war was over.

At the time, though, no one close to Bush expressed doubts about the ending of the war, much less about its strategic goal. "For a bunch of years, a lot of people who should know better have said that we had an alternative," Powell told me. "We didn't. The simple reason is we were operating under a U.N. mandate that did not provide for any such thing. We put together a strong coalition of Gulf states, and Egypt and Syria, and they signed up for a very specific issue—expelling Iraq from Kuwait. Nor did President Bush ever consider it."

A principal reason that the Bush Administration gave no thought to unseating Saddam was that Brent Scowcroft gave no thought to it. An American occupation of Iraq would be politically and militarily untenable, Scowcroft told Bush. And though the President had employed the rhetoric of

moral necessity to make the case for war, Scowcroft said, he would not let his feelings about good and evil dictate the advice he gave the President.

It would have been no problem for America's military to reach Baghdad, he said. The problems would have arisen when the Army entered the Iraqi capital. "At the minimum, we'd be an occupier in a hostile land," he said. "Our forces would be sniped at by guerrillas, and, once we were there, how would we get out? What would be the rationale for leaving? I don't like the term 'exit strategy'—but what do you do with Iraq once you own it?"

Scowcroft stopped for a moment. We were sitting in the offices of the Scowcroft Group, a consulting firm he heads, in downtown Washington. He appeared to be weighing the consequences of speaking his mind. His speech is generally calibrated not to give offense, especially to the senior Bush and the Bush family. He is eighty and, by most accounts, has been content to cede visibility to the larger personalities with whom he has worked. James Baker told me that he and Scowcroft got along well in part because Scowcroft let Baker speak for the Administration. I learned from people who know Scowcroft that he finds it painful to be seen as critical of his best friend's son, but in the course of several interviews prudence several times gave way to impatience. "This is exactly where we are now," he said of Iraq, with no apparent satisfaction. "We own it. And we can't let go. We're getting sniped at. Now, will we win? I think there's a fair chance we'll win. But look at the cost."

The first Gulf War was a success, Scowcroft said, because the President knew better than to set unachievable goals. "I'm not a pacifist," he said. "I believe in the use of force. But there has to be a good reason for using force. And you have to know when to stop using force."

Scowcroft does not believe that the promotion of American-style democracy abroad is a sufficiently good reason to use force. "I thought we ought to make it our duty to help make the world friendlier for the growth of liberal regimes," he said. "You encourage democracy over time, with assistance, and aid, the traditional way. Not how the neocons do it."

The neoconservatives—the Republicans who argued most fervently for the second Gulf war—believe in the export of democracy, by violence if that is required, Scowcroft said. "How do the neocons bring democracy to Iraq? You invade, you threaten and pressure, you evangelize." And now, Scowcroft said, America is suffering from the consequences of that brand of revolutionary utopianism. "This was said to be part of the war on terror, but Iraq feeds terrorism," he said.

Scowcroft was Richard Nixon's military assistant in the last years of the Vietnam War, and he says, "Vietnam was visceral in the American people. That was a really bitter period, and it turned us against foreign-policy adventures deeply, and it was not until the Gulf War that we were able to come out of that. This is not that deep." But, he said, "we're moving in that direction."

Like nearly everyone else in Washington, Scowcroft believed that Saddam maintained stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, but he wrote that a strong inspections program would have kept him at bay. "There may have come a time when we would have needed to take Saddam out," he told me. "But he wasn't really a threat. His Army was weak, and the country hadn't recovered from sanctions."

Scowcroft's colleagues told me that he would have preferred to deliver his analysis privately to the White House. But Scowcroft, the apotheosis of a Washington insider, was by then definitively on the outside, and there was no one in the White House who would listen to him. On the face of it, this is remarkable: Scowcroft's best friend's son is the President; his friend Dick Cheney is the Vice-President; Condoleezza Rice, who was the national-security adviser, and is now the Secretary of State, was once a Scowcroft protégée; and the current national-security adviser, Stephen Hadley, is another protégé and a former principal at the Scowcroft Group.

According to friends, Scowcroft was consulted more frequently by the Clinton White House than he has been by George W. Bush's. Clinton's national-security adviser, Samuel Berger, told me that he valued Scowcroft's opinions: "He knows a great deal, and I always found it useful to speak to him." Arnold Kanter, a former Under-Secretary of State in the first Bush Administration and now a principal in the Scowcroft Group, was the one who suggested that Scowcroft set down his thoughts on Iraq. "If Brent had an ongoing dialogue and ready access and felt his views were being heard, he might not have written the op-ed," Kanter told me. "I hadn't heard anyone put Iraq in the strategic perspective that included the Middle East peace process and terrorism, and I thought it was important to hear."

By publicly critiquing the Administration's strategic priorities, Scowcroft knew that he risked offending the White House, but clearly he was offended by its posture before the war. "All the neocons were saying, 'Finish the job,' " he said. "In fact, the President said that. He said it before he launched the war." Scowcroft fell silent. I asked him if he was bothered by those statements. He stayed silent, but he nodded.

Scowcroft suggested that the White House was taking the wrong advice, and listening to a severely limited circle. He singled out the Princeton Middle East scholar Bernard Lewis, who was consulted by Vice-President Cheney and others after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. Lewis, Scowcroft said, fed a feeling in the White House that the United States must assert itself. "It's that idea that we've got to hit somebody hard," Scowcroft said. "And Bernard Lewis says, 'I believe that one of the things you've got to do to Arabs is hit them between the eyes with a big stick. They respect power.' " Cheney, in particular, Scowcroft thinks, accepted Lewis's view of Middle East politics. "The real anomaly in the Administration is Cheney," Scowcroft said. "I consider Cheney a good friend—I've known him for thirty years. But Dick Cheney I don't know anymore."

He went on, "I don't think Dick Cheney is a neocon, but allied to the core of neocons is that bunch who thought we made a mistake in the first Gulf War, that we should have finished the job. There was another bunch who were traumatized by 9/11, and who thought, 'The world's going to hell and we've got to show we're not going to take this, and we've got to respond, and Afghanistan is O.K., but it's not sufficient.' " Scowcroft supported the invasion of Afghanistan as a "direct response" to terrorism.

Colin Powell told me that he was not offended by Scowcroft's public doubts. "The concern is cost—what are we getting ourselves into? That is not an unprincipled concern." But the White House—in particular Rice—saw Scowcroft's op-ed as a betrayal, and as a political problem: Scowcroft has a commanding voice on national-security matters. But there was another, more personal dimension. "What makes it even more awkward is the suspicion that he's speaking not just for himself" but for the elder Bush as well, Robert Gates, who was Scowcroft's deputy at the National Security Council, said.

The distancing of Brent Scowcroft dates nearly to the beginning of the second Bush Administration. Scowcroft was appointed chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board in the first term, but he was not consulted on plans for Iraq. "He's not the only person to be frozen out," one colleague of Scowcroft's from the first Bush Administration told me—a clear reference to James Baker and a number of other officials. "The only thing that is unusual is that Scowcroft was treated like everyone else." His appointment to the advisory board was not renewed at the end of 2004.

A common criticism of the Administration of George W. Bush is that it ignores ideas that conflict with its aims. "We always made sure the President was hearing all the possibilities," John Sununu, who served as chief of staff to George H. W. Bush, said. "That's one of the differences

between the first Bush Administration and this Bush Administration.” I asked Colin Powell if he thought, in retrospect, that the Administration should have paid attention to Scowcroft’s arguments about Iraq. Powell, who is widely believed to have been far less influential in policymaking than either Cheney or the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, said, pointedly, “I always listen to him. He’s a very analytic and thoughtful individual, he’s powerful in argument, and I’ve never worked with a better friend and colleague.” When, in an e-mail, I asked George H. W. Bush about Scowcroft’s most useful qualities as a national-security adviser, he replied that Scowcroft “was very good about making sure that we did not simply consider the ‘best case,’ but instead considered what it would mean if things went our way, and also if they did not.”

One reason that Scowcroft was so effective as national-security adviser was that the entire Cabinet knew that hearing from him was akin to hearing from the President. David Rothkopf, the author of “Running the World,” a history of the National Security Council, said that Scowcroft mastered the bureaucracy while maintaining his position as perhaps the President’s closest adviser. He was “a true partner of the President,” Rothkopf said. “They knew each other extremely well, and were able to communicate at the level of equals, even if the President’s primacy was never in doubt.”

Even today, Scowcroft, who lives in Bethesda, Maryland, spends many weekends at a condominium he keeps in Kennebunkport, near the Bush family compound. According to friends of the elder Bush, the estrangement of his son and his best friend has been an abiding source of unhappiness, not only for Bush but for Barbara Bush as well. George Bush, the forty-first President, has tried several times to arrange meetings between his son, “Forty-three,” and his former national-security adviser—to no avail, according to people with knowledge of these intertwined relationships. “There have been occasions when Forty-one has engineered meetings in which Forty-three and Scowcroft are in the same place at the same time, but they were social settings that weren’t conducive to talking about substantive issues,” a Scowcroft confidant said.

Scowcroft would not talk to me about the father’s attempts at reconciliation, but he said that he hoped for a better relationship with the son. “Am I happy at not being closer to the White House? No. I would prefer to be closer. I like George Bush personally, and he is the son of a man I’m just crazy about.”

When I asked Scowcroft if the son was different from the father, he said, “I don’t want to go there,” but his dissatisfaction with the son’s agenda could not have been clearer. When I asked him to name issues on which he agrees with the younger Bush, he said, “Afghanistan.” He paused for twelve seconds. Finally, he said, “I think we’re doing well on Europe,” and left it at that.

The disintegrating relationship between Scowcroft and Condoleezza Rice has not escaped the notice of their colleagues from the first Bush Administration. She was a political-science professor at Stanford when, in 1989, Scowcroft hired her to serve as a Soviet expert on the National Security Council. Scowcroft found her bright—“brighter than I was”—and personable, and he brought her all the way inside, to the Bush family circle. When Scowcroft published his *Wall Street Journal* article, Rice telephoned him, according to several people with knowledge of the call. “She said, ‘How could you do this to us?’ ” a Scowcroft friend recalled. “What bothered Brent more than Condi yelling at him was the fact that here she is, the national-security adviser, and she’s not interested in hearing what a former national-security adviser had to say.”

The two worked closely in the first Bush Administration, although Rice tended to take a tougher line than Scowcroft on Soviet issues. Robert Gates, then Scowcroft’s deputy and Rice’s boss, recalled how he and Rice would argue with Scowcroft in 1990 and 1991, during the period when Boris Yeltsin, as the elected leader of the Russian republic, became a rival to the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. “Condi and I felt very strongly about reaching beyond Gorbachev,” he said.

“Brent and Baker believed you could only deal with one President of the Soviet Union at a time.”

Rice’s conversion to the world view of George W. Bush is still a mystery, however. Privately, many of her ex-colleagues from the first President Bush’s National Security Council say that it is rooted in her Christian faith, which leads her to see the world in moralistic terms, much as the President does. Although she was tutored by a national-security adviser, Scowcroft, who thought it intemperate of Ronald Reagan to call the Soviet Union an “evil empire,” she now works comfortably for a President who speaks in terms of “evildoers” and the “axis of evil.”

Rice’s split with her former National Security Council colleagues was made evident at a dinner in early September of 2002, at 1789, a Georgetown restaurant. Scowcroft, Rice, and several people from the first Bush Administration were there. The conversation, turning to the current Administration’s impending plans for Iraq, became heated. Finally, Rice said, irritably, “The world is a messy place, and someone has to clean it up.” The remark stunned the other guests. Scowcroft, as he later told friends, was flummoxed by Rice’s “evangelical tone.”

Scowcroft told me that he still has a high regard for Rice. He did note, however, that her “expertise is in the former Soviet Union and Europe. Less on the Middle East.” Rice, through a spokesman, said, “Sure, we’ve had some differences, and that’s understandable. But he’s a good friend and is going to stay a good friend.”

Yet the two do not see each other much anymore. According to friends of Scowcroft, Rice has asked him to call her to set up a dinner, but he has not, apparently, pursued the invitation. The last time the two had dinner, nearly two years ago, it ended unhappily, Scowcroft acknowledged. “We were having dinner just when Sharon said he was going to pull out of Gaza,” at the end of 2003. “She said, ‘At least there’s some good news,’ and I said, ‘That’s terrible news.’ She said, ‘What do you mean?’ And I said that for Sharon this is not the first move, this is the last move. He’s getting out of Gaza because he can’t sustain eight thousand settlers with half his Army protecting them. Then, when he’s out, he will have an Israel that he can control and a Palestinian state atomized enough that it can’t be a problem.” Scowcroft added, “We had a terrible fight on that.”

They also argued about Iraq. “She says we’re going to democratize Iraq, and I said, ‘Condi, you’re not going to democratize Iraq,’ and she said, ‘You know, you’re just stuck in the old days,’ and she comes back to this thing that we’ve tolerated an autocratic Middle East for fifty years and so on and so forth,” he said. Then a barely perceptible note of satisfaction entered his voice, and he said, “But we’ve had fifty years of peace.”

For most of the past hundred years, American foreign policy has oscillated between two opposing impulses: to make the world more like America, or to deal with it as it is. Those who object to what they call “interference” in the affairs of others—today’s realists—often cite the words of John Quincy Adams, who in 1821 said that America stands with those who seek freedom and independence, “but she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy.” By contrast, Woodrow Wilson, the unbounded moralist, said, in seeking a declaration of war against Germany in 1917, that “the world must be made safe for democracy.” Wilson told Congress, “We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.”

At different times, the isolationist impulse, which would have America withdraw entirely from the affairs of the world, has been felt strongly in Washington—for instance, in the America First movement before the Second World War. Today, few in the Republican Party, or even among liberal Democrats, believe that America has no military role to play in any hemisphere other than its own.

The desire to undermine or overthrow brutal regimes—to transform them into democracies—is irresistible for many Americans. The realists argue that these global Wilsonians have an unacceptably high tolerance for the kind of instability that the export of democracy can bring. “The United States . . . must temper its missionary spirit with a concept of the national interest and rely on its head as well as its heart in defining its duty to the world,” Henry Kissinger wrote in the third volume of his memoirs. By contrast, the current President, in his second inaugural address, set for America a breathtakingly large mission. “It is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world,” Bush said.

For Brent Scowcroft, the rhetoric is not matched by reality. “I believe that you cannot with one sweep of the hand or the mind cast off thousands of years of history,” he says. “This notion that inside every human being is the burning desire for freedom and liberty, much less democracy, is probably not the case. I don’t think anyone knows what burns inside others. Food, shelter, security, stability. Have you read Erich Fromm, ‘Escape from Freedom’? I don’t agree with him, but some people don’t really want to be free.”

Scowcroft is unmoved by the stirrings of democracy movements in the Middle East. He does not believe, for instance, that the signs of a democratic awakening in Lebanon are related to the Iraq war. He sees the recent evacuation of the Syrian Army from Lebanon not as a victory for self-government but as a foreshadowing of civil war. “I think it’s something we have to worry about—the sectarian emotions that were there when the Syrians went in aren’t gone.”

Scowcroft and those who share his views believe that the reality of life in Iraq at the moment is undermining the neoconservative agenda. Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, who served as Colin Powell’s chief policy planner during the first Bush Administration (and who was Scowcroft’s Middle East expert on the National Security Council during the first Gulf War) said that the days of armed idealism are over. “We’ve seen the ideological high-water mark,” he said. “I mean wars of choice, and unilateralism, and by that I mean an emphasis, almost to the point of exclusion of everything else, on regime change as opposed to diplomacy aimed at policy change.”

William Kristol, the editor of *The Weekly Standard*, has been a determined advocate of the Iraq war and an equally persistent critic of foreign-policy realism. “I think it’s a pseudo-springtime for realism,” Kristol said. “When things go bad, realists look good, until things look really bad. Have the mistakes of the last century been ones of too much intervention or not enough? Was it good that we waited to be attacked on December 7, 1941? I would say the same about the Balkans and about terrorism.” When I mentioned Scowcroft’s assertion that Middle East stability brought America fifty years of peace, Kristol laughed, and asked, “Are we really going to go into the twenty-first century trying to prop up the House of Saud? Is that the goal of American foreign policy? Is that reasonable or realistic?” Kristol noted that fifteen of the nineteen hijackers of September 11, 2001, were citizens of Saudi Arabia, whose government is autocratic and pro-American; the leader of the hijacking cell, Mohamed Atta, was an Egyptian, whose government each year receives roughly two billion dollars in American aid.

The President’s foreign policy, which the political scientist John Mearsheimer calls “Wilsonianism with teeth,” is a rejection of his father’s approach. It is certainly a rejection of Scowcroft’s sentiment-free pragmatism. “I’ve been accused of tolerating autocracies in the Middle East, and there’s some validity in that,” Scowcroft said. “It’s easy in the name of stability to be comfortable with the status quo.”

The status quo, Scowcroft said, is not necessarily a good thing, but it might be better than what follows. “My kind of realism would look at what are the most likely consequences of pushing out

a government. What will replace it?" What will replace autocratic but stable governments, neoconservative thinkers say, is whatever the people of the Middle East decide will replace them. Robert Kagan, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and a Kristol ally, has written critically of the Bush Administration's incomplete adherence to its own anti-tyranny doctrine. Referring to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Kagan wrote, "Perhaps there is concern that too much pressure on Mubarak might produce a victory by the Muslim Brotherhood, the most popular Egyptian opposition party, which has been outlawed by the government. That's a risk, of course, but if the Bush Administration isn't willing to let Islamists, even radical Islamists, win votes in a fair election, then Bush officials should stop talking so much about democracy and go back to supporting the old dictatorships."

Scowcroft believes that the Administration has already gone too far in Kagan's direction. "Let's suppose Mubarak disappears and we have an election," he said. "The good guys are not going to win that election. The bad guys are going to win that election. The bad guys are always better organized. Always. The most ruthless, the tough ones, are the ones who are going to rise to the top in a chaotic society. That's my fear."

The Bush Administration does not, as a rule, concede that democratization in the Middle East could lead to a series of Islamist states. One day, I mentioned to Scowcroft an interview I had had with Paul Wolfowitz, when he was Donald Rumsfeld's deputy. Wolfowitz was the leading neoconservative thinker in the senior ranks of the current Bush Administration. (He is now the president of the World Bank.) I asked him what he would think if previously autocratic Arab countries held free elections and then proceeded to vote Islamists into power. Wolfowitz answered, "Look, fifty per cent of the Arab world are women. Most of those women do not want to live in a theocratic state. The other fifty per cent are men. I know a lot of them. I don't think they want to live in a theocratic state."

Scowcroft said of Wolfowitz, "He's got a utopia out there. We're going to transform the Middle East, and then there won't be war anymore. He can make them democratic. He is a tough-minded idealist, but where he is truly an idealist is that he brushes away questions, says, 'It won't happen,' whereas I would say, 'It's likely to happen and therefore you can't take the chance.' Paul's idealism sweeps away doubts." Wolfowitz, for his part, said to me, "It's absurdly unrealistic, demonstrably unrealistic, to ignore how strong the desire for freedom is."

Scowcroft said that he is equally concerned about Wolfowitz's unwillingness to contemplate bad outcomes and Kagan's willingness to embrace them on principle. "What the realist fears is the consequences of idealism," he said. "The reason I part with the neocons is that I don't think in any reasonable time frame the objective of democratizing the Middle East can be successful. If you can do it, fine, but I don't you think you can, and in the process of trying to do it you can make the Middle East a lot worse." He added, "I'm a realist in the sense that I'm a cynic about human nature."

Scowcroft's path to realism began, in a sense, with a life-threatening accident. It had been his dream, he said, from the age of twelve, to attend West Point. As a child in Ogden, Utah, where he was reared in a Mormon family, he had read a book called "West Point Today" and, he said, "it just captured me." He was still a cadet when the Second World War ended. "I assumed when I went in that I would fight," he said. "I remember when the war ended and we were on cadet maneuvers in upstate New York, and I was manning a mortar, thinking, What the hell am I doing here? The war is over. There aren't going to be any more wars."

He graduated from West Point in 1947, in the top quarter of his class, and joined the Army Air Corps, because "all my friends were joining." The accident that altered the course of his life occurred during a dogfighting exercise over northern New England: "I had just taken off, and one of my companions jumped on me and sort of attacked me right off. So I advanced my power to

go after him, and the engine governor malfunctioned and the propeller overspun. I didn't know it, but it had broken a piston rod and I was losing my coolant. My power was steadily going down. I was at about fifteen hundred feet, still strapped in. This was New Hampshire, forested, and I looked around—there was a little clearing. The last thing I remember was looking under my wing at the tips of the last trees just under me.”

Scowcroft's back was broken in the crash, and he spent two years in Army hospitals. When he came out, doctors told him that he wouldn't fly again. He was asked by West Point to teach.

In 1959, he was posted to Belgrade, to serve as the assistant U.S. Air Force attaché at the embassy there. In Belgrade, Scowcroft learned something about the power of nationalism. “I don't remember ever hearing people call themselves Yugoslavs,” he said. “They always called themselves Serbs, Croats, Slovenians.” Realists, he noted, tend to believe in the abiding relevance of national feeling, especially when compared with such abstractions as Communist ideology.

Scowcroft returned from Belgrade to take a teaching post at the Air Force Academy. The Air Force, which was separated from the Army in 1947, was trying to cultivate its own strategic thinkers, and it sent some of its best young officers to graduate school. Scowcroft attended Columbia, where he received a Ph.D. He went on to a series of strategic-planning posts in the Pentagon. Scowcroft rose steadily in the Air Force, and, soon after he earned his first general's star, he was appointed Nixon's senior military assistant. He was put in charge of many quotidian but indispensable things, including the White House's limousines. This was when he came to the attention of Henry Kissinger. Kissinger was watching one day as H. R. Haldeman, the White House chief of staff, dressed down Scowcroft for some minor sin of administration. “We were flying on Air Force One,” Kissinger told me. “I saw Scowcroft disagreeing with Haldeman, and Haldeman very imperiously tried to insist on his point of view, but Scowcroft disagreed with him, and he was a terrier who had got hold of someone's leg and wouldn't let it go. In his polite and mild manner, he insisted on his view, which was correct. It was some procedural matter, but he was challenging Haldeman at the height of Haldeman's power.”

At the time, Kissinger was searching for a deputy national-security adviser. “I was looking for someone with character,” he said. “I knew a lot of people with intelligence. But I needed a strong person as my deputy, who would be willing to stand up to me if necessary—not every day—but to stand up for what he thought was right.” Scowcroft remembered his selection differently. “I heard he wanted me because I was a Mormon,” he said. “Mormons were supposed to be loyal and faithful.”

In the nineteen-seventies, as now, the role of morality in the conduct of foreign policy was the subject of considerable debate. During the Nixon and Ford years, the late Washington senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson, a Democrat (many of the leading neoconservatives, such as Wolfowitz, were once Democrats), and one of the fathers of neoconservatism, was battling Kissinger, the advocate of détente, over his approach to the Soviet Union. Jackson, among others, wanted to punish the Soviet Union for its Jewish-emigration policy, and for its persecution of dissidents like Andrei Sakharov; his criticism intensified when Ford and Kissinger, worried about antagonizing the Soviets, snubbed Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Ronald Reagan took on these causes when he won the Presidency in 1980, and many dissidents, including Natan Sharansky, who went on to become an Israeli politician, were grateful for his condemnation of the Soviet Union as an “evil empire.” Kissinger believed that such confrontations were dangerous to the smooth management of America's relationship with the Soviets.

Scowcroft, who served as President Ford's national-security adviser when Kissinger was Secretary of State, recalled the 1976 primary fight between Reagan and Ford: “It got so bad in the campaign that Ford said he wouldn't use the word ‘détente’ anymore. The Reagan people excoriated Kissinger—they cast the Soviet Union into outer darkness. Now, I was not fond of the

Soviet Union, but I didn't think that calling the Soviet Union the 'evil empire' got anybody anywhere."

This Reagan-era fight was in some ways a dress rehearsal for the fight today between neoconservatives and realists: only the enemy has changed.

In the case of Iraq, Scowcroft was incensed by Saddam's violation of an international border; he did not believe that Saddam's treatment of his own citizens merited military intervention. A month into the war, Bush, in public comments, encouraged Iraq's defeated military, and also its civilian population, to "take matters into [their] own hands" and to rise up against Saddam. "Here's where we fell down," Robert Gates said recently. "It was our hope that the magnitude of the defeat would lead the Iraqi generals to throw Saddam out, but we didn't anticipate those uprisings. When the Kurds and the Shiites rose up, Saddam won back his generals. We speculated that Saddam 'warned' his generals that, without him, they could not control the uprising, and the country would disintegrate." Gates, who went on to serve as director of the C.I.A. from 1991 to 1993, argued that the President never intended to provoke a popular rebellion. "When the President talked about the Iraqis solving the problem, he was absolutely not urging the Kurds and the Shiites to do it. He was talking about the generals taking him out." In the book that Scowcroft wrote with the elder Bush, a passage about the uprising said, "It is true that we hoped Saddam would be toppled. But we never thought that could be done by anyone outside the military and never tried to incite the general population. It is stretching the point to imagine that a routine speech in Washington would have gotten to the Iraqi malcontents and have been the motivation for the subsequent actions of the Shiites and Kurds." In Wolfowitz's view, Scowcroft, "by overestimating the risk of supporting the rebellions that the U.S. had encouraged, bequeathed to George W. Bush a much more complicated situation ten years later."

The treatment of dissidents was at the root of Scowcroft's most controversial moment as national-security adviser, during a trip to Beijing six months after the massacre of Chinese students near Tiananmen Square. Like much of the world, the Bush Administration was angered by the Chinese government's actions, but it also cautioned prudence. Bush dispatched Scowcroft to carry a message. "After Tiananmen, we were the first ones to crack down, we cracked down hard on anything to do with the military," Scowcroft said, referring to a suspension of weapons sales announced within days of the massacre.

Scowcroft communicated Bush's concerns to the Chinese leadership: "I knew Deng, and I had a wonderful, frank discussion with him, and he said, 'What happened in Tiananmen Square is none of your business—it's a domestic issue, and we do whatever we want,' and I said, 'You're right. It is none of our business. But the consequences of what you did in the world and to our relations are our business. And that's what I'm here to talk about.'"

The trip attracted more notice when Scowcroft was filmed at a banquet toasting the Chinese. "We're having the dinner, and the standard part of every formal Chinese dinner is you have a toast at the end," he said. "Just before the toast, in comes the camera crew. So I've got a choice. Do I turn my back on them and walk out and destroy the purpose of the visit, or do I look like a fool, toasting with the Chinese? And I chose that. I knew how it would look. Our interests and the reason I was there were more important than how it made me look." In 1992, Bill Clinton made the Bush Administration's China policy a campaign issue; by 1994, Clinton had put trade, not human rights, at the center of his China policy—a triumph for realism.

In August of 1991, when the Baltic states were about to break free from Moscow's control and the Soviet Union itself seemed close to dissolution, Bush visited Ukraine. He used the occasion, however, to warn his Kiev audience about the dangers of "suicidal nationalism." He was ridiculed for this speech—it was labelled the "Chicken Kiev" speech—and it did nothing to slow the Soviet republics' momentum toward independence.

Natan Sharansky is now allied with the neoconservative camp, and he cites the Chicken Kiev speech as a typical instance of realist policymaking. A book that he wrote last year, "The Case for Democracy," came to national attention when George W. Bush told the *Washington Times*, "If you want a glimpse of how I think about foreign policy, read Natan Sharansky's book 'The Case for Democracy.' . . . It's a great book."

Sharansky argues that the United States would best serve its own interests by choosing as allies only countries that grant their citizens broad freedoms, because only democracies are capable of living peacefully in the world. In Kiev, "America had missed a golden opportunity," Sharansky wrote in a chapter criticizing the President's father. George H. W. Bush's Administration, he said, "was not the first nor will it be the last to try to stifle democracy for the sake of 'stability.' Stability is perhaps the most important word in the diplomat's dictionary. In its name, autocrats are embraced, dictators are coddled and tyrants are courted."

In September, Sharansky was in Washington at the invitation of Condoleezza Rice; he gave the closing speech at a State Department conference on democratization. "Can you believe it?" he said to me just before the session. "Rice gave the opening speech and I give the closing?" Of his complicated relations with the Bush family, he said, "A few days after my book comes out, I get a call from the White House. 'The President wants to see you.' So I go to the White House and I see my book on his desk. It is open to page 210. He is really reading it. And we talk about democracy. This President is very great on democracy. At the end of the conversation, I say, 'Say hello to your mother and father.' And he said, 'My father?' He looked very surprised I would say this." Sharansky went on, "So I say to the President, 'I like your father. He is very good to my wife when I am in prison.' And President Bush says, 'But what about Chicken Kiev?' " Sharansky smiled as he recounted this story. "The President looked around the room and said, 'Who is responsible for that Chicken Kiev speech? Find out who wrote it. Who is responsible?' Everyone laughed." Sharansky paused, and looked at me intently. He had a broad grin. "I know who wrote Chicken Kiev speech," he said. "It was Scowcroft!"

Scowcroft may have had a hand in the speech, but when I asked George H. W. Bush about it he answered as if it had been his own idea. "I got hammered on the Kiev speech by the right wing and some in the press, but in retrospect I think the Baltic countries understood that we were being cautious vis-à-vis the Soviet Union," Bush said. "And their freedoms were established without a shot being fired."

One day, I asked Scowcroft if he placed too much value on inaction. I had in mind the first Bush Administration's record on Bosnia. Toward the end of Bush's term, Yugoslavia was beginning to disintegrate. The Bush team was hesitant to intervene, or even to lift the arms embargo on the Bosnian Muslims, who were being murdered by Serbs. Lawrence Eagleburger, the acting Secretary of State, said at the time, "This tragedy is not something that can be settled from the outside, and it's about damn well time that everybody understood that. Until the Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats decide to stop killing each other, there is nothing the outside world can do about it."

Scowcroft addressed the question with more delicacy than Eagleburger, but he didn't disagree: there was only so much that the United States could do, he said. "I didn't think it would break up," he went on. "I didn't think the hatred was so deep; I didn't want to stir it up. I would have proposed that we go to the Yugoslavs and say, 'It makes no sense for you to break up. Economically, you're small as it is, but, if you're going to break up, here are the rules. Here are the rules, and we're going to insist on those rules.'" The Bush Administration, in an echo of Chicken Kiev, was hoping, Scowcroft said, for Yugoslavia to stay together.

Richard Holbrooke, who negotiated the Bosnian peace accords on behalf of President Clinton, saw the Administration's reluctance to take effective action in Yugoslavia as a failure of realism. "When the Cold War ended, the Bush people concluded that our strategic interests were not involved," Holbrooke said. "And they turned their back on Yugoslavia just as it fell to its death. They said they determined that it had no strategic value, but, as it turns out, the Balkans still had strategic value and an overpowering humanitarian case as well." A good foreign policy, Holbrooke believes, ought to "marry idealism and realism, effective American leadership and, if necessary, the use of force."

The first Bush Administration did engage in one act of humanitarian interventionism, in Somalia, when it sent American troops to help feed starving civilians in Mogadishu. When I mentioned Somalia to Scowcroft as an example of idealism over national self-interest, he demurred, as if it were an accusation: a true realist does not employ the military for selfless humanitarian operations. The action in Somalia, Scowcroft said—at least in his view—was in America's self-interest. "About four months before we went in, the President and I had a meeting with the U.N. Secretary-General, and he was saying that most of the world believes that the U.N. has become the instrument of Western powers. Here's a chance to set that record straight. Here's an underdeveloped state, a Muslim state, a black state, and here's a chance to show the world that we are not acting in our self-interest." In other words, the United States acted selflessly out of self-interest.

For Scowcroft, the principle is clear: by pragmatic standards, a humanitarian intervention without a strategic rationale is a mistake. And the experience in Somalia was a reminder that an intervention—even with the noblest motives—may end in humiliating failure. In part because of what happened in Somalia, the Clinton Administration did not intervene in Rwanda during a genocide in which an estimated eight hundred thousand people died. "A terrible situation—just tragic," Scowcroft said of Rwanda. "But, before you intervene, you have to ask yourself, 'If I go in, how do I get out?' And you have to ask questions about the national interest." Interventions have consequences, he argues, and Iraq is a case in point. "There are a lot of places in the world where injustice is taking place, and we can't run around and fix all of them."

Democrats like Holbrooke take issue with Republican realists. "Support for American values is part of our national-security interests, and it is realistic to support humanitarian and human-rights interventions," Holbrooke said. Such Democrats differ from the Bush-style interventionists as well, particularly on the value of treaties and the importance of multilateral cooperation, although Holbrooke and Paul Wolfowitz have sounded very much alike at times; Wolfowitz, for instance, strongly supported a military option in Bosnia. "It's important to realize how much can go wrong by doing nothing," he said.

The experience in Iraq seems to have tempered the Administration's impatience with coalition-building. There is more cooperation with America's traditional allies and more willingness to work with other nations—with Europe in countering the nuclear ambitions of Iran, and with China in countering those of North Korea. The Administration, though, remains committed to the export of democracy, and is publicly optimistic about the future in Iraq. Wolfowitz, a leading proponent of the Iraq war, recently said, "Wilson thought you could take a map of Europe and say, 'This is the way things are going to be.' That was unrealistic, but the world has changed a lot in a hundred years. The fact is that people can look around and see the overwhelming success of representative government."

For Scowcroft, the second Gulf war is a reminder of the unwelcome consequences of radical intervention, especially when it is attempted without sufficient understanding of America's limitations or of the history of a region. "I believe in the fallibility of human nature," Scowcroft told me. "We continually step on our best aspirations. We're humans. Given a chance to screw

up, we will.” †