
1991: The Gulf War

By Murray Waas, investigative reporter, *Los Angeles Times*.

From late July 1990 on, the Bush administration spoke with one voice – a consistent one that assured Saddam that the U.S. would look the other way if Iraq attacked Kuwait.

At a July 24 press briefing, State Department spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler said: “We do not have any defense treaties with Kuwait, and there are no special defense or security commitments to Kuwait.” The next day, Saddam was told the same by the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie.

On July 28, CIA Director William Webster informed President Bush that an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was imminent and that the Iraqis were likely to annex only the Rumaila oil fields and two islands. The CIA had satellite photos showing Iraqi troops massed near the Kuwait border. Webster brought along two CIA experts on satellite imaging, in case Bush had detailed questions, but the president showed little interest.

Despite Webster’s personal warning, spokespersons for the Bush administration continued to insist the U.S. would remain neutral.

By July 31, two days before the invasion, CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency analysts reportedly agreed that an Iraqi military action against Kuwait was imminent. Assistant Secretary of State John Kelly, said to a House foreign affairs subcommittee, “Historically, the U.S. has taken no position on border disputes in the area, not on matters pertaining to internal OPEC deliberations.”

The subcommittee chairman, Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), pressed Kelly, saying: “I read a statement ... in the press [in which] Secretary Cheney said the U.S.’ commitment was to come to ... Kuwait’s defense if attacked. Perhaps you could clarify for me just what our commitment is.”

Asserting that he had never heard of Cheney’s statement, Kelly said: “We have no defense treaty relationship with any gulf country. That is clear... We have not historically taken a position on border disputes.”

A week before Iraq invaded Kuwait, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq told Saddam:

“I have a direct instruction from the president to seek better relations with Iraq... We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreements with Kuwait.”

Hamilton pressed Kelly further: “If Iraq ... charged across the border into Kuwait – what would be our position with regard to the use of U.S. forces?... Is it correct to say, however, that we do not have a treaty commitment which would obligate us to engage U.S. forces there?”

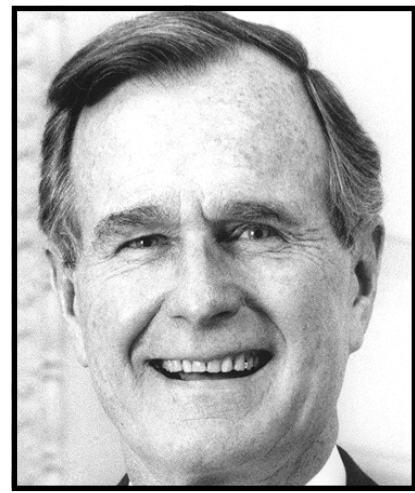
“That is correct,” he responded.

Two days later, Iraqi troops crossed the border into Kuwait.

Saddam’s understanding that the Bush administration had given him a green light to invade could not have been more emphatically reinforced than it was a week before the invasion at a July 25 meeting with U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie.

Saddam left little doubt during the two-hour meeting that he was considering an invasion of Kuwait. He bluntly told Glaspie that he considered Kuwait to be engaging in acts of war against Iraq by not assisting with Iraq’s war debt or agreeing to limit its production of oil. If Iraq attacked, Saddam explained, it would be because Kuwait was already at war with Iraq.

Incredible as it now seems, the U.S. ambassador had no forceful words to discourage Saddam from invading



**President George Bush
(1989-1993)**


Kuwait. Instead, Glaspie expressed sympathy for his attitude toward Kuwait, comparing his plight to that of America’s founding fathers. “I think you know well that we as a people have our own experience with colonialists.”

Glaspie then told Saddam that the Bush administration wanted only closer relations with Iraq, saying that Bush himself “had [directed his] administration to reject the suggestion of implementing trade sanctions.” But Saddam wasn’t in a conciliatory mood. Bush had clamped down recently (too late and in only a limited fashion) on U.S. exports that could be used for military purposes.

Glaspie was apologetic: “I have a direct instruction from the president to seek better relations with Iraq.”

Then, extraordinarily, without having been solicited to do so, she signaled to Saddam that the U.S. would do nothing if Iraq invaded Kuwait. “We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreements with Kuwait,” she said.

Source: Excerpt, “Who lost Kuwait?,” *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, January 30, 1991 <www.sfbg.com/gulfwar/013091.html>



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Incubator Deaths: A Hill & Knowlton Fabrication

By Johan Carlisle, free-lance journalist.

On October 10, 1990, as the Bush administration stepped up war preparations against Iraq, Hill and Knowlton (H&K), the preeminent U.S. public relations firm, presented 15-year-old "Nayirah" before the House Human Rights Caucus. Passed off as an ordinary Kuwaiti with firsthand knowledge of atrocities committed by the Iraqi army, she testified tearfully before Congress:

"I volunteered at the al-Addan hospital... I saw the Iraqi soldiers come into the hospital with guns, and go into the room where 15 babies were in incubators. They took the babies out of the incubators, took the incubators, and left the babies on the cold floor to die."

Supposedly fearing reprisals against her family, she did not reveal her last name. Nor did she mention she was the daughter of Sheikh Saud Nasir al-Sabah, Kuwait's ambassador to the U.S. As Americans were being prepared for war, her story became the centerpiece of a finely-tuned PR campaign orchestrated by H&K and coordinated with the White House for the Kuwait government and its front



"I saw the Iraqi soldiers come into the hospital with guns... They took the babies out of the incubators... and left the babies on the cold floor to die."

Nayirah's tearful lies to Congress - about a totally fabricated incident - convinced Americans to go to war to "free Kuwait."

group, Citizens for a Free Kuwait (CFK). CFK sprang into action on August 2, the day Iraq invaded Kuwait. By August 10, it had hired H&K. CFK reported to the Justice Department receipts of \$17,861 from 78 individuals and \$11.8 million from the Kuwaiti government. With these "donations," H&K waged one of the largest, most effective PR campaigns in history.

John MacArthur explains: "The H&K team, headed by former U.S. Information Agency officer Lauri Fitz-Pegado, organized a Kuwait Information Day on 20 colleges on September 12. On September 23, churches nationwide observed a day of prayer for Kuwait. The next day, 13 state governors declared a national Free Kuwait Day. H&K distributed tens of thousands of Free Kuwait bumper stickers, T-shirts, and media kits extolling the alleged

virtues of Kuwaiti society. They put together media events featuring Kuwaiti 'resistance fighters' and businessmen and arranged meetings with newspaper editorial boards.... The Wirthlin Group was engaged by H&K to study TV audience reaction to statements on the Gulf crisis by President Bush and Kuwaiti officials."

All this PR activity helped "educate" Americans about Kuwait – a totalitarian country with a terrible human rights record and no rights for women. The incubator babies atrocity story inflamed public opinion against Iraq and swung the U.S. Congress in favor of war in the Gulf.

Source: Excerpt, "Public Relations: Hill & Knowlton, Robert Gray and the CIA," *Covert Action Quarterly*, Spring 1993. <mediafilter.org/caq/Hill&Knowlton.html>

Nayirah and other "Eyewitnesses"

By Arthur E. Rowse, former associate editor of *U.S. News & World Report*.

Nayirah's testimony came at a time when Americans were wondering how to respond to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Her story was cited frequently in congressional debate over war authority, which was approved by only five Senate votes. President Bush mentioned it often as a reason for taking firm action.

In addition to helping cast and direct the hearing, H&K sent its camera crew and produced a film which was sent out as a video news release (VNR) to Medialink, a firm serving 700 U.S. TV stations. Portions of the VNR featuring Nayirah's testimony were used on the October 10 NBC Nightly News and eventually reached a total audience of 35 million – winning it fourth place on the top

ten VNR successes in 1990.

H&K scored another coup when it somehow gained access to the U.N. Security Council prior to a November 27 session at which council members expected to debate a resolution on a Palestinian issue. When members entered the council chamber they found the walls hung with pictures of alleged Kuwaiti torture victims. Despite protests, U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering, presiding that day, allowed several self-avowed eyewitnesses to atrocities – rounded up by Citizens for a Free Kuwait (CFK) and H&K – to testify. Two days later, the council set the January 15 deadline for the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

Two weeks later, with Congress still debating whether to approve military action, H&K's U.S. operations chief Robert Gray sent a memo to CFK warning of "the lessening of the U.S.

public's enthusiasm for pursuing a military option" and calling for more atrocity charges from "eyewitnesses," a term he put in quotation marks. (H&K's emphasis on atrocities was based on its \$1 million research study which showed that such emphasis was the most effective way to win support for strong action.)

By January 8, when the House Committee on Foreign Affairs held a hearing, the number of alleged incubator murders being quoted by reporters had reached 312, the figure vouched for by Amnesty International. Four days after the hearing, Congress approved military action, and four days after that the bombing began.

H&K did its job well. The same cannot be said of the U.S. press.

Source: Excerpt, *Columbia Journalism Review*, September/October 1992. <www.cjr.org/year/92/5/war.asp>
