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LETTER GRADE LEVEL OF EFFORT	

REDUCTIONS

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9<sup>th</sup> Grade World History

S. Rosenberg

Lesson 142 – Handout 276

## Opposing Views – The Persian Gulf War

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**DIRECTIONS:** Read these two articles carefully, taking notes to the side as you do to help with your understanding and your discussion later in the lesson. Answer the three questions following the reading as per the instruction.

### Reading #1: Why The Gulf War Was Not in the National Interest

*Christopher Layne*  
*“Why the Gulf War Was Not in the National Interest”*  
*Atlantic Monthly, July 1991, 55, 65-8.*

The fundamental question of statecraft has always been, What are a nation's vital interests-those for which the nation will go to war? What considerations of national interest prompted the Bush Administration to believe the United States had to wage war in the Persian Gulf? As U.S. policy evolved during the pre-war crisis, three national-interest justifications emerged as bases for it: the need to guarantee an uninterrupted flow of Middle East oil (which entailed defending Saudi Arabia); the need to counter the threat to the Middle East posed by Iraq's military arsenal, especially its chemical, biological, and prospective nuclear weapons; and the need to ensure peace and stability in the Middle East....

Admittedly, oil is important-but not important enough to justify the Gulf War. Several points need to be made about the oil argument. First, given the centrality of the Arabian Peninsula's oil reserves, a case can be made that no hostile power should be allowed to dominate the region. The need to prevent an Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia was, therefore, a key consideration for Washington, and the Saudis would not have asked for U.S. assistance unless they had reason to believe that an attack was imminent. However, this threat could have been-and was-counteracted without war, through deterrence, containment, and the economic embargo of Iraq.... Moreover, such a strategy could have been implemented with far fewer than the 200,000 U.S. soldiers initially deployed in Operation Desert Shield. A limited and temporary U.S. air, naval, and ground presence would have sufficed to dissuade the Iraqis from further aggression and to buy time for Saudi Arabia and its regional allies to organize an all-Arab defense of the desert kingdom....

Iraq, even after overrunning Kuwait, controlled a mere 7 percent of current world oil production-far too small a share to have enabled Baghdad to impose a stranglehold on the world economy. Moreover ... like other (oil) producing nations, Iraq also had every reason to avoid driving up oil prices to a point where consumers would have had an incentive to switch to alternate energy sources. . . .

A second national-interest justification for U.S. policy was the threat posed by the prospect of an Iraq armed with nuclear (and biological and chemical) weapons....The notion that Iraq was a near-

term nuclear threat was perhaps contrived to undercut those who wanted to give economic sanctions an additional twelve to eighteen months to work before war was considered. Before the war the expert consensus was that Iraq was five to ten years away from acquiring an operational nuclear force. . . . Even the prospect that an egregious government may acquire nuclear weapons does not automatically justify a strike against its nuclear facilities. . . .

Nuclear weapons incline their possessors to risk-averse rather than risk-taking behavior. For example, in the 1960s many feared what would happen when China became a nuclear power.... Once China actually became a nuclear power....its declaratory and strategic politics conformed to the more cautious practices of the nuclear club's other members....

The third national-interest justification for going to war was the need to ensure peace and stability in the Middle East. Notwithstanding America's brilliant military victory, the final verdict on the Gulf War has yet to be rendered. As President [George H. W.] Bush has stated, that verdict will turn on the war's impact on the region's politics. The prospects for a favorable political and diplomatic outcome are not good.

First there is the matter of Iraq. Who will govern if Saddam Hussein is overthrown? Traditionally, Iraq's political culture has been marked by violence and instability, and a happy democratic outcome is not likely....

As a recent Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff report said, "Unless the United States is prepared to abandon the Iraqi people, it will be involved in the Iraqi quagmire for a long time to come." But the Administration cannot be absolved of responsibility for the horrific Iraqi civil war. If the United States had followed a realistic policy from the beginning-by avoiding war-these tragic events almost certainly would not have occurred....

The Administration compounded its complicity by actively trying to galvanize the Iraqi people into overthrowing Saddam Hussein....[O]n February 15 [1991], the President of the United States himself explicitly encouraged Iraqis to revolt. When the policy chickens finally came home to roost in Iraq, the Administration engaged in the morally appalling spectacle of wringing its hands over the Kurds and Shiites while simultaneously washing its hands of any responsibility for their fate....

. . . The United States has seldom done well trying to stage-manage the process of political change in other countries. It is the people in those countries who pay the price when American experiments in "nation-building" go awry....

Clearly, bringing peace and stability to the region is a goal that is not and never was within Washington's reach. Other than the dubious satisfaction of liberating Kuwait and restoring its government-a corrupt, repressive, and undemocratic regime that, to paraphrase Bismarck's comment about the Balkans, was not worth the bones of a single American soldier - it is hard to see what lasting gains the United States has secured from the Gulf War. ...

The United States fought and won the Gulf War, but it must break its habit of fighting wars where its national interests are not involved. Such wars may be just-and the war against the brutal Saddam Hussein met the criteria for a just war-but by definition they are not necessary. And unnecessary wars are seldom wise ones....

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## **Reading #2: Why the Gulf War Served the National Interest**

*Joseph S. Nye Jr.*

*"Why the Gulf War Served the National Interest"*

*Atlantic Monthly, July 1991, 64-65.*

Let's start with a puzzle. Why did a majority of the people living in the central part of North America think it was in their interest to send half a million soldiers 6,000 miles away to the Persian Gulf? The simplest answer is one word: oil. To quote one of the better placards at a peace march, "If Kuwait exported broccoli, we wouldn't be there now."

Like most slogans, however, that one oversimplifies the truth. Persian Gulf oil accounts for less than 5 percent of America's energy consumption. Japan, which is highly dependent on Gulf oil, did not send troops, while Britain, which exports oil, did send troops. So oil is not the whole answer. Other possible aspects of the answer include "a new world order," collective security, interdependence, prevention of regional hegemony, and reversal of American decline. But big words sometimes substitute for clear thought. Let us unpack the abstractions and see what they're made up of as we search for the national interest in the Persian Gulf. . . .

What can Americans agree on? Most want a sense of security—the absence of threats at home or abroad. Economic well-being is also high on the list.... But Americans don't define themselves by bread alone. They also care about their identity, self-image, and moral values....

Some analysts, myself included, say that the American people share an interest in world order. But order is instrumental, valuable only insofar as it serves the more basic shared interests in security, economic well-being, and identity. So why should Americans care about order in distant parts of the globe? The simple answer is that even distant disorder can have effects that hurt, influence, or disturb the majority of people living within the United States. The various ways in which these effects are transmitted are lumped together under the abstraction "rising interdependence." They add up to a world in which it is ever more difficult for us to isolate what happens inside the United States from what happens outside....

Another trend that increases interdependence is the spread of the technology of destruction.... Not only is there the prospect that hostile countries may try to use such weapons on the United States, but also, given the weak command-and-control capabilities of poor countries, there's the chance that such weapons will fall into the hands of terrorist groups. Ballistic-missile defenses built with American technology will be unable to stop the aircraft, ships, and smuggling that are the likely forms of delivery by weak states or terrorist groups.

Along with economic and military interdependence, social and ecological interdependence have increased as well. A growing number of the issues in international politics are transnational in the sense that they have roots in many societies and their effects cross international borders (T)hreats to the ozone layer or to the global climate are rooted in the domestic practices of many countries. . . .

Even if interdependence is rising and the United States has a national interest in some degree of world order in general, what were the widely shared American interests in the specific case of the Persian Gulf? The three most serious reasons for involvement were oil, order, and weapons proliferation.

Oil is the most tangible interest, though not necessarily the most important. Oil provides about 40 percent of American energy, and about 45 percent of this oil is imported. Roughly a quarter of the imports come from the Persian Gulf—so America's direct energy dependence on the Gulf is less than 5 percent....

The direct physical effects of losing Gulf oil appear small, but it is a mistake to look only at the direct effects.... Oil is a fungible commodity: it flows to the highest bidder. As long as the world market depends on the Gulf for a third of its oil, shortfalls there will jack up world prices and everyone, including the United States, will pay more for oil. . . .

Higher oil prices have two kinds of effects on the U.S. economy: a larger import bill (economists call this a change in the terms of trade), and shocks to the economy that interrupt growth (economists call these macro-economic effects). . . . If Saddam Hussein had gained control of Gulf oil and chosen a long-term sustainable price rise, the effects on the U.S. economy (through the terms of trade) would have been modest. If he had tried to extort money more quickly with a more dramatic price rise, the damage to the U.S. (and world) economy would have been considerably greater. . . .

Was a conflict with Saddam Hussein inevitable? The simple answer is no. . . . Though not inevitable, however, higher levels of conflict looked likely. But would the United States have been drawn in? Probably so, given America's de facto alliance with Israel. . . .

Moreover, given Iraqi threats against friendly Arab governments, the dangerous precedents set by the use of weapons of mass destruction, and the risk that such weapons would fall into the hands of subnational groups, the U.S. interest in stemming weapons proliferation in Iraq went beyond the question of threats to Israel.

The most intangible of the American interests was the "new world order," a phrase that President [George H. W.] Bush had begun using by February of last year [1990] to describe the end of the Cold War. . . .

Even if the United States has a national interest in world order...why not let the United Nations shoulder the burden? ... The answer is that the United States should not be the world's policeman, at least not alone. Working through the United Nations and getting others to share the burden of maintaining order is part of foreign-policy wisdom. But to assume that the UN is a separate entity capable of imposing order by itself is a case of misplaced specificity. The UN is the sum of its member nations, and the United States is by far the largest contributor among those members....

One does not have to believe that Saddam Hussein is another Hitler (the latter was a far cleverer evil genius) to believe that the failure of the United States to support the UN collective-security system in the first major post-Cold War crisis would have come back to haunt us in the future. At the same time, using the UN rather than acting unilaterally set an important precedent that may help to limit any temptation for the United States to become overextended as a global policeman.

***DIRECTIONS:*** Answer these three questions on a SEPARATE sheet of lined paper. Write out the question first and highlight or underline it for clarity. Then answer with a good, descriptive paragraph or two. Skip a line between questions. Your answers need to be stapled to the back of these two sheets.

1. Identify the main arguments set forth in the first article.
2. What were the key points established in the second article?
3. Who, in your opinion, makes a stronger case? Why?