

to challenge the president on the subject of a war which I believe could have been avoided.

Mr. Viorst had found no evidence that Saddam originally intended to destroy Kuwait's sovereignty. There was a minor border dispute over lines drawn by a British diplomat in the 1920s and never accepted by Iraq, and this dispute turned out to affect the ownership of oil-bearing territory. Another dispute involved uninhabited island sandpits in the Gulf that were valueless to Kuwait but useful as protection for a port in Iraq. The Kuwaitis refused to give up the islands. There was a dispute over debts to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait incurred by Iraq during its war with Iran, which the Kuwaitis refused to forgive. And Iraq accused Kuwait of "slant drilling" for oil, sucking it out from under Iraqi territory. Saddam repeatedly warned Kuwait that it was endangering itself, but the Kuwaiti leaders ignored the warnings without preparing for an attack. No doubt they were influenced by General Schwarzkopf, who presumably assured them of American support, Mr. Viorst said. He confessed he had found no evidence of conspiracy by the United States and Kuwait, but the general Arab view was that the Kuwaitis had become very greedy, and that they took strength from promises of US support.

Saddam blundered by occupying all of Kuwait, in Mr. Viorst's analysis. If he had taken only the disputed area, the United States would have handled the question entirely differently. Even after the invasion, Saddam seemed confused about what he was going to do. President Bush also seemed uncertain, but after a meeting with Margaret Thatcher, he adopted a very hard line. The president discouraged, or vetoed, negotiations proposed by Arab nations. He chose a strategy of diplomacy by ultimatum and prepared for war, instead of treating the crisis as President Kennedy handled the Cuban missile crisis, allowing the adversary to save face. President Bush made clear that it was important to him to humiliate Saddam, drive him out of office, destroy his war-making potential and establish the United States as the uncontested power in the Gulf, replacing Britain, completing a process underway since 1971.

For the United States and its allies, Mr. Viorst said, it was an easy war. The only ones who suffered much were the Iraqis and the Kuwaitis. The American press and public went with a winner. Few challenged the president's view of a war that could have been