



**All the Best Podcast**  
**Episode 39: "This Will Not Stand"**  
*Featuring Special Assistant to President George H. W. Bush,*  
*Dr. Richard Haass*

Richard: It was November, 1990, just months after the dictator of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, had invaded and conquered Kuwait. The President was going over first to Europe to meet with Gorbachev and then he was going on to the Middle East to visit with U.S. Troops there under Operation Desert Shield, to make sure, at a minimum, that Saddam Hussein went no further and to provide a basis in case we had to use force to oust him from Kuwait. I was involved. I was the Chief Middle East Advisor on the National Security Council Staff. The only complication, as Brent Scowcroft told the President, as I had just been married the day before, the President looked at me, horrified, said to me, "Richard, tell me your wife's name." I said, Susan, and he sat down on Air Force One with pencil and paper, literally the Air Force One paper and said, "Dear Susan, Richard was with me in the desert today, honest. Much congratulations, much love George H. W. Bush." The good news is we still have that. The picture of him signing the letter to my wife, hangs on the wall of our apartment in New York. The bad news is I describe it as the most expensive honeymoon I never took.

George: In the first place, I believe that character is a part of being President.

Barbara: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All the Best." The official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All the Best."

George: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, write your mother, serve your country, and he said, tell the truth. And I've tried to do that in public life. All through it.

Barbara: You are a human being first and those human connections with children, with friends are the most important investments you will ever make.

George: We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children. A world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. This is "All the Best." Dr. Richard Haass is a veteran diplomat, a prominent voice on American foreign policy and an established leader of nonprofit institutions. Currently he is in his 18th year as President of the Council on Foreign Relations, an independent nonpartisan membership organization, dedicated to helping people better understand the world and foreign policy. Dr. Haass served as special assistant to my grandfather during his administration, and also acted as director for Near East and South Asian Affairs on the staff of the National Security Council during that time. In 1991, Dr. Haass was awarded the Presidential Citizen's medal for his contributions to the development and articulation of U.S. policy during Operations Desert Storm, and Desert Shield. Dr. Haass is the author or editor of 14 books on American foreign policy and one book on management. His latest book, "The World, a Brief Introduction" was released earlier this year. Doctor, how are you today?

Richard: Under the circumstances I'm doing just great. Thank you.

Sam: Thanks for joining us on All the Best Dr. Haass. Let's start with how you first met my grandfather and found yourself on the National Security Council staff as the Senior Director for Near East and South Asian affairs, starting in 1989. What was your personal path to service?

Richard: There were several connections. I had worked on the Hill, I had worked in the Pentagon in 1979 and '80 in the Reagan administration for the first five years. I worked at the state department and it was during that time that I got to know your grandfather when he was Vice President and spent many times talking with him out at the Vice President's residence up on Massachusetts Avenue. Also, we had another connection. When I was at the Pentagon in '79, the person who hired me there was a guy named Admiral Dan Murphy, who as you may or may not recall for a while, was your grandfather's chief of staff when he was Vice President. My other route to this position was Brent Scowcroft, who was someone who I'd known over the years from various conferences, dealing with arms control, U.S./Soviet relations. And when Brent was asked by your grandfather to become National Security Advisor for the second time, he put together a staff and he decided to ask me to do the Middle East because he thought that on one hand, I had background in that part of the world. I had written my doctorate on the Persian Gulf and all that. On the other

hand, he thought I was flexible. I wasn't so locked into certain positions. So much of this part of the world had gotten almost ritualistic and people were some ways frozen in certain positions that he thought that I would be someone who would come at it with a fresh perspective.

Sam: Doctor you've written some 14 books so I'm going to ask you to look back and assess the geopolitical climate and transformation taken place during the late 1980s into the 1990-'91 time period. What, if any, other period in American or world history compares?

Richard: The period in 1989-90 was an extraordinary period because it marked the end of one geopolitical era. In this case, the Cold War that lasted for four decades and it was their transition to, we didn't know what. The last time that it happened in the United States was after World War II. And at that point we were coming out of one era of international history, the World War and all that proceeded it. And what rose was the post-World War II, Cold War foreign policy of the United States. That was an extraordinarily creative moment. That was the time when all the great institutions of the post-World War II era was born. President Truman's, second secretary of state, Dean Acheson, actually titled his memoir "Present At The Creation" and it was immodest, but accurate. We were a little bit earlier that. We were just at the end of the Cold War.

The Berlin Wall obviously came down in November of '89. So again, we weren't sure what we were going into. Your grandfather was very conscious. Everything he did and how he did it he wanted to set precedence for the world to come. Indeed, that was a big rationale for why we did what we did and how we did it in the Persian Gulf. And he began to talk about a new world order and the rule of law, a greater role for institutions. He was very conscious that we did not want the post-Cold War world to be one defined by violence. He thought it was essential that Saddam Hussein could not get away with attacking and conquering another state, lest that become a precedent that others would emulate. You also thought that while the United States should lead, it should not act unilaterally. To the extent we could, he wanted to act with the United Nations and he put together this extraordinary coalition of dozens of countries. This was the beginning of a new era of history. What's interesting, three decades later, and this era of history still does not have a name. We still call it the post-Cold War world. It still does not have a defined character. What that says to me is there's all these cross currents. The true character of this era has yet to be defined and that's for better or for worse.

Sam: On August 2nd, 1990, Iraq's armed forces invaded and quickly overwhelmed Kuwait's defenses. Within hours, Kuwait's city had fallen. Kuwait's Amir and other government leaders had fled to Saudi Arabia and

Saddam Hussein had established a provincial government effectively annexing Kuwait into Iraq. Doctor, can you describe the early hours of this international crisis and how the world was reacting?

Richard: I can describe it. There had been a buildup for several weeks of Iraqi forces along Kuwait's border, this is basically the second half of July in 1990. And initially we didn't take it all that seriously. We kind of thought this was just a posturing, a kind of coercion to get Kuwait to toe the line on oil prices and oil output. And then in the 24 hours or so before Saddam Hussein invaded, all the warning indicators that the CIA had went off. And suddenly we realized this was not a drill. This looked like the real thing. We had a meeting that day at the state department, as it turned out. I was the lead person from the NSC and the decision was made that I would go back, speak to the President, and we would make one last diplomatic effort to try to head off what looked to be an Iraqi invasion.

So I went to see General Scowcroft first. He said, he agreed. He called your grandfather's assistant. She said to go right over. Now, what she didn't tell us is the President was getting a massage. I think he'd been hitting some golf balls earlier in the day. Hope I'm not telling too much here. He had a sore shoulder. So he was on the table. And I basically, I was briefing him about what was happening, as best we could tell on the ground where the interagency consensus was. Literally, as we were talking, Scowcroft, the President, myself, the telephone rang. It was the state department. I think it was Bob Kimmet on the line and Bob was saying he had just heard from our embassy in Kuwait shots were being fired, that Iraqi tanks were coming into the Capitol. What was so funny is your grandfather and I were talking about whether he should call Saddam Hussein to try to head this off and if so, how would you do it? Because it was about eight hours time difference. This was maybe six or seven o'clock at night. So it was two or three in the morning in Baghdad. And we weren't quite sure who there would have the guts to wake them up. And we were literally talking about the modalities of doing it when this phone call came and we basically said, "Hey, this has been overtaken by events. The phone call is moot. Now we got to decide, how do we mobilize the world to get him out of Kuwait?"

Sam: On Sunday, August 5th, 1990, my grandfather was flying back from Camp David. As these diary recordings suggest, he had a lot on his mind.

George: It is now Sunday afternoon and I'm heading back to Washington, a couple of hours earlier than I expected. I expected to go play golf at 1:30 with Brady, Sam Nun and Scowcroft, but there's too much going on. So I'll get to the White House now at 3:00 and get ready for 5:00 overall review meeting. Spent

probably the most hectic 48 hours since I have been President, and for national security interests, I've been on the phone incessantly and have written down a long collection of names. The bottom line is that the West is together. Japan, Kaifu calling me early Sunday morning, to tell me that his cabinet had acted on four major points. In essence, it boils down to cutting off everything economically with Iraq. Talked to the Prime Minister Mulroney, Canada is with us and the United Nations and in NATO. Mulroney called me Sunday to tell me of a call he had with Özal.

Özal, as I know from a personal call with him, wants collective action under Chapter VII, giving him some cover. He wants the Saudis to cut off the pipeline. He wants the interdiction of the oil by sea, and then he, Özal, will do his part, but he can't do it alone. The Iraqi sent an emissary and Özal feels the man is lying. The Iraqis yesterday sent a word out they were going to withdraw in 24 hours, start withdrawal and so far, there's no sign of withdrawal at all. It's simply a feeling that they're stalling and delaying. And in fact, this morning's intelligence was just the contrary. Center steps of the UAE being threatened, demanded upon by Iraq, a movement of some forces towards the Soviet border, enough to have Bill Webster call Brent early in the morning. The Saudis big rile yesterday because after my talk with the King, he said, well, he was expecting a mission to come over there and they thought it was on the way and he personally would meet. Then Bandar gets in the act. They start talking about a high level mission might not be acceptable. They asked me to hold up on sending a mission, headed by secretary Cheney until we hear back from them. Bandar departs immediately for Saudi Arabia. Bandar has double nailed us with the Turks, trying to talk them into not taking any action. The same time the King is telling me, "I agree. I agree. I agree" with the cracking down on economic front and on everything else. He did stop short of saying that he would close down the Saudi pipeline, however. Today the word comes back, Brad having passed along the new intelligence to Bandar in the King's sitting room. The King will accept the Cheney mission that we've wasted 48 hours here. God knows whether they're going to move or not. There's the Iranian and the Syrians tell Özal they will be supportive and that Iraq must withdraw and there must be no puppet regime. I've been afraid some of them would peel off and support a puppet regime. One of the worst offenders had been my friend King Hussein, who is simply out there apologizing for Saddam Hussein and being almost a spokesman for him. He told me he wanted an Arab solution. So did Mubarak.

Both of them are in the hand wringing stage and neither of them is being a constructive influence for positive action by the West, by the United States or by the Arabs themselves. Bottom line is a lot of these Arab countries are scared to death of Saddam Hussein and they have a meeting of the Arab summit, 7 of

the 21 countries abstain from a resolution. Weak-hearted, pusillanimous. The Soviets have been very good. The Chinese now have said they won't sell weapons, but whether they will endorse the all out sanctions that are necessary, I don't know. As of 2:30 Sunday afternoon, I don't know whether we're going to get Chapter VII legislation out of the UN. I don't know whether the Saudis are going to move across the border, the Iraqis move across the border into Saudi Arabia. If they did, they'd have a free run. Saudi forces are not at the border and of course, Iraq is overwhelming superiority. The Saudis have some air power and the Kuwait airplanes flew to Saudi Arabia. God knows whether they'll even use them, whether they'll stand up.

On Saturday at Camp David, we have a long briefing and we go over the military options. What can be done with augmented air power? What can be done and how long will it take to put proper numbers of ground forces on the ground to repudiate any Iraqi attack? Basher has been supportive, moving ships to the gulf. Kaifu is supportive, Mulroney is supportive. Özal says all the right things although he doesn't feel he can unilaterally shut down the pipeline and he wants NATO in there with him and I don't blame him for that nor do I blame him for the fact that he wants the Saudis to act on the pipeline, nor do I blame him for the fact that he wants to know that the Iraqi and Kuwait oil will be blockaded at sea. In any event he is a staunch little guy, stalwart little man and in my view will prove to be a dependable ally. I called Marlin from the helicopter on Sunday, asking him whether we ought to say something. There's always a danger in these situations, I think talking too much, jabbing out there trying to get on the news or not being visible enough to try to find a proper balance in all of this. Main thing is we're all engaged in tremendous amount of diplomatic work.

And people should know that. They should know that that part is going reasonably well. I tell Marlin I don't have to do it when I get off the helicopter, I can do it later on in conjunction with our five o'clock meeting. This is a terribly serious problem. It's perhaps the most serious problem that I have faced as President, because the downside is so enormous. If indeed the Iraqis went in and got ahold of Saudi Arabia and our objective then was to free Saudi Arabia, we'd really be involved in something that could have the magnitude of a new world war. So many countries involved. Fortunately, the Soviets have been on the right side of all of this.

Sam: Well, doctor, first I have to ask you, have you heard those recordings before from Marine One?

Richard: I have not. This was an amazing experience. Thank you.

Sam: I know it's pretty amazing to hear that. And the whirring of the helicopter in the background. What's going through your mind when you're listening to that clip?

Richard: I have so many reactions. One is people forget how tense it was at the time and your grandfather captures it dead on. Saddam Hussein had gone into Kuwait. It was a knife through butter and the Arabs were kind of dithering. And we were worried that Saddam Hussein might be tempted to keep going. And the big prize was Saudi Arabia. So we're talking to the Saudis about whether they're going to accept this high level American delegation. And just as a 30-second aside, they wanted the delegation to come. And then once it was there, they would make a decision about what they would do. And Brent and I met with Bandar and said, "No, it doesn't work that way, Mr. Ambassador. We are only going to send this delegation if you've agreed in advance to accept American troops. So you have got to decide now." I remember Brent telling Bandar to get on the phone and call his uncle, the King, and make that clear. And it was one of those great moments. Anyhow, it was all worked out. The delegation went, but the reason, again, it was so tense is we didn't know if Saddam would stop where he was in Kuwait. And the whole idea of liberating Kuwait was one thing. Small country. We didn't know how hard that would be, but whatever it was going to be, we knew it wouldn't compare to the task of liberating Saudi Arabia. I thought of all sorts of scenarios. We're also, you know, the Iraqis who are known to have chemical weapons could have used chemical weapons where American troops were going to try to land.

It could have been just a military nightmare for us. So we were just as tense as you could get. And what you heard from your grandfather was also just all the frustration. The day before on Saturday, we had been up at Camp David, all of us. It was the first briefing where we looked at military options. You had Colin Powell, the chairman of the joint chiefs, Norman Schwarzkopf, we were just beginning to wrap our arms around this scenario. And as you heard, the big question was diplomatic. Was there any chance of getting Saddam Hussein to pull back, to pull out of Kuwait? So what I was doing was talking to all the Arab governments, as well as your grandfather. And they were basically saying, "You Americans slow down. We're going to work this out." What he described was an Arab solution. With every hour that went by our confidence in the Arabs being able to solve this was beginning to diminish.

All of us came back from Camp David on Saturday, just a slight moment of frustration, the President was there and you had Chris Everett and Pam Shriver who were probably the two greatest women tennis players in the world. He asked me if I would stay behind because he needed a fourth for doubles. I looked at Scowcroft. He said, "Are you kidding? Get your ass back to

Washington with the rest of us." So I got the helicopter. There went my moment of tennis greatness. Next day, working all day, working entire night, about mid-afternoon I got a call from Brent saying the President's going to land on the South lawn in 15 or 20 minutes. I said, great. He said, I can't be there. You have to greet him. I said, Oh. And he said, the President is going to meet the press. That exchange he had talked about with Marlin Fitzwater had been resolved. Marlon said, you've gotta be ready to talk to the press. There's about a million microphones out there. So Brent said, you've got to meet the President and you've got to prepare him, make sure he's up to speed on the situation.

Sam: What did you tell him when he landed because you were there to meet him. I believe my mother was there as well traveling with him.

Richard: I was so tired. Pardon me for taking a minute to get to the story. So I was in the situation room and I was trying to put together a summary of what happened. King Hussein this, Mubarak that, Özal that, and so forth. Here's what we know about Saddam's troops. And I was so tired after basically not having slept for a few days that I was there in the sit room with Condi Rice. She had the Russian account and she literally said, "Richard, get out of the chair, tell me what you want the President to say to the press. I'll type it for you. I have never seen a slower typist in my life. You're pathetic." So I dictated it to Condi, which is pretty cool when you think about high-priced typist. I had Condi Rice, typing it out. She gave it to me, pointed me in the right direction, got out there with my piece of paper and what it was was simply a summary of everything that was going on.

The President got off the helicopter. You've seen the picture of him looking at the piece of paper and his blood was beginning to boil because every single message was not what he wanted to hear. All the Arabs were saying give them more time. We'll work it out. So the President was way, way ahead of the Arab governments. And to be honest was way ahead of most of his own administration. President asked me a couple of questions about what was going on. I filled him in, but it was him who came up with what might be the most famous words of his presidency. "This aggression against Kuwait will not stand." But that was his formulation. He wanted a signal, his own administration, he wanted to signal Congress, he wanted to signal Saddam Hussein. He wanted to put some steel in the backbones of the Arab leaders. He basically wanted people to know from that moment on, the only question was how and when Iraq was going to leave Kuwait. In his mind, what had been settled was the question of whether Iraq was going to leave Kuwait.

Sam: Doctor, just a few days later, Operation Desert Shield was launched. The U.S. Forces were racing to Saudi Arabia to ensure Saddam Hussein's

unprovoked aggression was kept in check. While war with Saddam's forces was not a foregone conclusion at that point, why was such a massive commitment of U.S. Forces necessary?

Richard: Well, U.S. Forces were sent to the region, not just to liberate Kuwait. Our more immediate concern was making sure that Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region were not overrun. So we had to send a lot of forces to take care of sort of our defensive requirements, as well as begin the process of building up forces to take care of what would become our offensive requirements. We also, based upon a lot of the Intel, thought Saddam Hussein and his forces were pretty good. We overestimated them and when you do military planning, quite honestly, better too much than too little. All the people, yak yak'ing on television were saying how tough it was going to be and how many Americans are gonna lose their lives and so forth. So we were just cautious and basically Colin Powell as chairman and others said, here's what I need to be confident.

And the President, every time your grandfather would say great, anything else? He essentially was not going to be put off by the need to do this big and in Powell's view do it right. What Powell wanted to avoid was a situation where we try to do it cheaply or small and took risks in order to keep down the political commitment on our part. So it was a kind of funny conversation over and over again, between him and the President, where every Powell would ask things, and my guess is, at times, didn't know what the answer would be, and your grandfather always said, yes, call in anything else. He wanted to take away the argument that we were not going to make a 100% commitment. We were hoping for while that maybe this would signal Saddam Hussein that we were serious. It clearly did not. I think Saddam had this view based upon what had happened years before in Lebanon and in Vietnam that Americans at the end of the day, didn't have the stomach for a fight. He obviously read your grandfather as wrong as you can.

Sam: Doctor, you saw the working relationship between my grandfather and his national security advisor, general Brent Scowcroft, up close during some of the most tense and dramatic moments of his presidency. What made their relationship so special?

Richard: What made the relationship special is that Brent had the complete trust of both your grandfather and your grandmother. They knew at the end of the day, Brent Scowcroft was there to do whatever was best for them, which did not mean by the way that he would always say what the President wanted to hear. Now they understood that Brent was going to be intellectually honest, give him the best advice, represent faithfully and accurately what every other senior

member of the team was thinking and saying. But at the end of the day, his agenda was the President's agenda. There was nothing separate. Your grandfather had a degree of trust based upon respect because Brent was strategic, experienced and all that wise, but also his trust on a personal level, put your grandfather's interest first. Your grandfather's closest friend through life was Jim Baker. And that was based upon the chemistry and the experience of coming of age together over half a century, first from the Ford administration and now here, he had a trust and a working closeness with Brent Scowcroft that was quite extraordinary. Those are clearly the two most important relationships in that administration and Brent, better than anybody else figured out what it took to be a successful national security advisor. You had to be a counselor and an advisor to the President second. First though, you had to make the process work. Brent did that as well as, or better actually, than anybody before or since. So what this meant was a high degree of efficiency based on high levels of competence and trust. Very few leaks. This was in some ways the best functioning administration that the United States has had.

Sam: My grandfather, at least with me, and pretty much anybody, never liked to talk about his legacy. And so when I have a chance to talk to people who are up close and personal and got to view it, where does this fall into his legacy, Desert Storm and Desert Shield? Do you think it's a big part, a small part? How do you think it fits in?

I would argue that the Gulf War, Desert Shield, Desert Storm was one of the two biggest parts of your grandfather's legacy. One was obviously the Cold War, how it ended peacefully on terms that even an optimist never could've dreamt up. German unification. Normally the ends of empires, the ends of historical eras are the occasion of friction and conflict. The fact that it didn't happen, I think is all too often taken for granted or underestimated, but really was deft diplomacy. He was very good at reading Gorbachev, went to give way, went to lead. Same thing with the allies, several of whom were reluctant about German unification. That's one. The second was Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was the first great crisis and test of the post-Cold War era. Indeed it never could have happened during the Cold War because the Soviet union never would have let a client state like Iraq, do something like that with all the strategic risk and the openings that would give the United States to establish a presence in the Persian Gulf.

What your grandfather understood was this was going to be a test case. And a lot of history would flow from this, from what the United States did, how we did it. What kind of conclusions, friends and foes alike would draw about the United States about our willingness to act, to lead, our respect for law. So he was determined that this would not stand. He was determined that aggression

would not stand. He was determined to do it multilaterally, to bring others along with us to take the lead though, with Congress, if Congress wanted to come along, great Congress didn't want to come along. So be it. He would have done it without them. He also though, saw this, not just as an end in itself to liberate Kuwait and then established something about the rule of law. But also he wanted this to lead to a larger peace in the middle East.

And people forget in October of '91 in Madrid, he and Gorbachev co-convened the conference. And this was the first time Israel and all of its Arab neighbors met face to face for the purpose of discussing peace. My sense is if your grandfather had had a second term, that was one of the tasks he really wanted to set himself to. I know he and Brent and I talked about it at times, this part of his legacy, he felt wasn't complete that he hadn't really gotten a chance to finish what he had begun here. But again, if you look at the end of the Cold War, which ended one year and then this crisis, which was the start of another, I thought both of them were handled extraordinarily, extraordinarily well.

Sam: Well doctor, thank you for sharing your insights and stories with us today on "All the Best," all the best to you.

Richard: Thank you, Sam. You've got a great legacy there so take care of it.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to "All the Best" on Apple podcasts, Spotify and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate All the Best.

Barbara: Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house. Every house, all over America.

George: Preparedness, strength, decency, and honor. Courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country. America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America. The greatest country on the face of the Earth.

