



The George H.W. Bush Administration

Election of 1988



Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush

Reagan's vice president, George Herbert Walker Bush, easily won the Republican nomination in 1988. The November general election pitted Bush, and running mate Senator Dan Quayle, against Democratic nominee Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. Bush won the election, but by a much narrower margin than Reagan had enjoyed over the Democrats. Democrats emerged from the election with control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The Bush Administration

President Bush initially scored well in approval polls, after naming a drug czar to help combat the nation's drug problems, calling for a constitutional amendment outlawing flag burning, and agreeing to an increase in the minimum wage. But soon Bush ran into troubles both domestically and abroad.

“Read My Lips”

Domestically, the economy began a downward turn and forced Bush to renege on his campaign promise of “Read my lips: no new taxes.” Although many members of Congress, including some Republicans, had urged Bush to agree to new taxes to help address the massive federal deficit, the move angered conservative Republicans, provided easy fodder for the Democrats to use in the next election, and ultimately contributed to Bush's defeat in 1992. Listen to Bush's “Read My Lips” speech.

The First Gulf War



F-14 Tomcats in Iraq

Norman Schwarzkopf

In August 1990, Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces attacked and annexed the tiny, oil-rich nation of Kuwait. The forces then gathered at the border of Saudi Arabia. The United Nations quickly responded with trade sanctions, and American forces—along with troops from Syria, Egypt, Great Britain, Italy, and France—deployed to Saudi Arabia. The U.N. warned Saddam that it would use force if he did not withdraw from Kuwait. Saddam refused to withdraw. Led by General Norman Schwarzkopf, American forces began a month-long air assault on Iraq. In February 1991, President Bush warned Saddam that if he did not pull out of Kuwait, U.N. forces would invade. Operation Desert Storm began on February 24, quickly retaking Kuwait. Saddam then agreed to U.N. terms—

including allowing inspectors to investigate if Iraq was developing biological and atomic weapons—and Bush stopped the attack.

Most people believed that the Iraqi people would overthrow Saddam, but he crushed attempts at rebellion and then failed to honor his promises to the U.N. Immediately after the Desert Storm operation, President Bush enjoyed extremely high approval ratings. But once it became clear that Saddam was not living up to the bargain, critics asserted that Bush should have taken the war further by completely destroying Saddam's forces and capturing Baghdad.



General Schwarzkopf and President Bush in Iraq