

The Bush dynasty is coming to an end

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Less than two months after George Bush's brutal victory over Iraq, the self-satisfaction and jingoistic euphoria surrounding Operation Desert Storm are fading, leaving in their wake a growing dissatisfaction about the condition of the country, and intensifying suspicions about the wisdom of its leaders. The President, having made himself so emphatically the fulcrum of the Gulf war policy, is becoming the main target of this disillusionment.

Although Operation Desert Storm succeeded temporarily in diverting attention from the country's woes, especially the economy, the effect is proving short-lived. Suddenly, people are beginning to wake up to the fact that slaughtering hundreds of thousands of Iraqis has not only failed to bring democracy to Kuwait or stability to the Middle East, as Bush promised, but has also, obviously, not translated into a better quality of life at home. This realization has resulted in nagging doubts about the viability of Bush's policies.

The President's heart ailment, which struck on May 3 when he suffered an irregular heartbeat during jogging at Camp David, has only served to crystallize those doubts, as reflected in the renewed debate over Vice President Dan Quayle's lack of qualifications to run the country. The debate intensified during Bush's two-day stay in Bethesda Naval Hospital, especially when it appeared that Bush might be briefly put under anesthesia for a medical procedure to restore regularity to his heartbeat.

With Bush's illness, "a damaging and indelible question mark has been embossed on the exposed flesh of this presidency," commented Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche, in a May 5 campaign statement. "The world is so reminded, and will not soon forget, that aging Presidents are as mortal as some among them are also fallible. In such a fashion did the May 4 incident change the tempo and direction of current history over a period of no less than

the next 18 months or so to come. The Bush presidency continues. But as of the evening of May 4, the Bush dynasty has ended."

Greasing the skids

It's not just at the grassroots level that Bush is experiencing a falling-out of favor; certain sections of the policymaking elite, angered by Bush's persistent "lone ranger" tendencies, have decided to fire some warning shots across the President's bow.

Over the past few weeks, Bush has been hit with a series of scandals ranging from new questions about his handling of the Iraq-Kuwait crisis, to attacks on the probity of his chief of staff, John Sununu, as well as a renewal of the charge that he was personally involved in persuading the Iranians back in 1980 not to release U.S. hostages in Teheran until after Ronald Reagan had defeated Jimmy Carter for the presidency—the so-called "October Surprise."

The scandals have rocked Bush and his administration and probably contributed to the first major defection from the dynasty. Days after Bush went into the hospital, Director of Central Intelligence William Webster abruptly announced that he would be resigning by the end of May. At a joint press conference May 8, Bush said that Webster's decision had taken him by surprise.

That is likely to be only the beginning of a string of nasty surprises in store for the President. Since one of the key reasons the Reagan-Bush administration had named Webster as top spook in the first place, was to continue the coverup of the Iran-Contra fiasco starting in 1986, the resignation has fueled speculation that damaging information about Bush's involvement in it may soon be made known. "Unlike Ronald Reagan's mistakes," observed *New York Times* pundit James Reston in one of his infrequent editorial page opinion col-

umns May 6, "Mr. Bush's catch up with him."

Indeed, in the days leading up to Webster's announcement, there were important new developments on the Iran-Contra front, with Bush the number-one target. In the wake of a renewed focus on the charges that Bush helped delay the release of the U.S. hostages back in 1980, triggered by a new book by Carter administration Mideast expert Gary Sick, the House congressional Democratic leadership moved in the direction of opening an investigation into Bush's role in the affair. Adding fuel to the fire, the former President of Iran, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, embarked on a speaking tour of the United States to plug his book, which also asserts that Bush was deeply involved in the October Surprise (article, p. 65).

Desert Storm fallout

Although possibly the "sexiest" scandal, Iran-Contra is hardly the only area in which Bush is vulnerable. The President is also coming under attack for the complete mess he has made of the Mideast. Ironically, instead of fulfilling Bush's dream of being elevated to the pantheon of great world conquerors, the war against Iraq may prove to be a crucial part of his undoing.

The latest assault on Operation Desert Storm comes from the pen of the *Washington Post's* Bob Woodward, who, in his new book, *The Commanders*, paints a frightening portrait of the commander-in-chief as an impulsive, hot-headed, vicious, back-stabbing bully, who consistently ignored the advice of his military advisers in the planning and execution of Operation Desert Storm. The book's main message is that if the war with Iraq failed to achieve its goals, and instead created a bigger mess in the Mideast than existed before, it is Bush personally who is to blame.

Woodward asserts that Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. Colin Powell opposed going to war against Iraq—although he never argued for that position with the President—as did a number of other members of the military brass, including his immediate predecessor, retired Adm. William Crowe.

Woodward also knocks down the image Bush carefully cultivated of himself as wanting to avoid war if at all possible; instead, Bush was committed to the military option from the outset.

Bush's obsession with military power predated Iraq, according to Woodward. He writes that Bush was so embarrassed over his failure to oust Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega, that he began searching in 1989 for any provocation to use military force to drive him from power.

The Commanders has been serialized in a number of newspapers and magazines, including the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, and *Newsweek*, and has provided fertile soil for the anti-Bush campaign—in the very same establishment media that virtually elevated Bush to Mount Rushmore during the Desert Shield-Desert Storm performance. The *New York Times*, for instance, made it the subject of its lead

editorial May 5, which, under the headline, "Lunging for War," writes that Woodward's book "gives weight to the view that the President only affected a posture of due deliberation" on the use of force in the Gulf.

Bully boy bites back

In case Bush is having trouble getting the message about what these erupting scandals could mean to his political future, ABC News chief correspondent in Britain John K. Cooley spelled it out in an interview with BBC May 3. "All these things add up to trouble, very big trouble perhaps, for the Bush administration," he said. "The Bush presidency could be damaged" if a full-scale inquiry were to be opened into the October Surprise story, said Cooley, especially given the growing ferment in the United States about the revelations that Bush was determined to use force in the Gulf, no matter what.

Bush is clearly beginning to see the handwriting on the wall. Over the past few weeks, he has begun to show signs of extreme stress, not the least of which was his "atrial fibrillations." Much to his dismay, he can't seem to travel anywhere publicly without encountering hostility toward his policies, or probing questions about his involvement in Iran-Contra, or the chaos and mass death his splendid little war in the Gulf has brought.

Pressed on the October Surprise question at several recent public appearances, Bush has snapped at reporters and lost whatever coherence his speech had previously had. At his May 8 press conference with William Webster, Bush sputtered in reply to a question about whether an investigation was warranted into the allegations that the 1980 Reagan-Bush campaign struck a deal with Iran to hold off the U.S. hostages release: "I can only say categorically that the allegations about me are grossly untrue, factually incorrect, bald-faced lies. And I have my schedule out there. I think it was put in the days in question—was in detail in the paper. And those critics, those who continue to pass this little word-of-mouth ugly rumor ought to have the decency and the honor to say, this takes care of this question. I'm talking about myself."

Is this a balanced mind at work?

In response to the stress, Bush turns into the nasty little bully. In his commencement address to the University of Michigan May 4, where he was greeted with hostile demonstrations, Bush lashed out at what he called "political extremists" who, he claimed, "roam the land, abusing the privilege [sic] of free speech."

With the 1992 presidential election finally coming alive, free speech is the stuff of nightmares for Bush. Paul Tsongas, the former Massachusetts senator, joined Lyndon LaRouche as a formally declared Democratic candidate; Virginia Gov. Douglas Wilder geared up his national speaking tour; New York Gov. Mario Cuomo abruptly stopped saying he isn't interested in running; and Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.), who hitherto had steered clear of presidential politics, announced that he is considering a run for the White House.