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## Interview: Dr. Herbert Abrams

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# Hyperthyroidism often impairs mental ability

*Dr. Abrams is a professor of radiology at Stanford University, a member in residence at the International Center for Security and Arms Control, and was a co-founder of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. He was interviewed on May 30, by Kathleen Klenetsky.*

**EIR:** You were quoted in the *Washington Times* saying that Bush's thyroid problem may have caused him to ignore more temperate counsel when it came to the question of the Persian Gulf war. Could you elaborate on that?

**Abrams:** I did not suggest that hyperthyroidism led Mr. Bush to ignore that counsel. What I said was that it was conjectural, but that there are some things that we know about hyperthyroidism that are important, and that is that these are patients who are irritable, restless, overactive, and emotionally labile. Characteristically, they are described as lacking in concentration, and they have symptoms of anxiety, etc.

**EIR:** Do they exhibit obsessive behavior?

**Abrams:** Their impulsive behavior is something that has been described, and if you really go into the literature on it, cognitive impairment has been observed, and this really relates to concentration, memory—things of that sort. If you take it a step further, there are a bunch of psychiatric disorders that are associated with hyperthyroidism. . . .

What the [*Washington Times*] reporter asked me about was whether there was any possibility that hyperthyroidism in George Bush might be associated with a decision-making process of a particular kind. My response to that was that all elements of the metabolic state of the individual, at a particular time, that all of them can have an effect, particularly when there are cognitive changes.

All I said to him was that eight out of nine secretaries of defense, three Joint Chiefs of Staff chairmen, namely, Adm. William Crowe, Gen. David Jones, and Gen. Colin Powell, and Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paul Nitze, et al., had counseled that a non-military approach to the [Iraq-Kuwait] crisis had not been given an adequate chance, and that it needed more time. The congressional hearings [on the crisis last winter] had substantive evidence that the sanctions were

amazingly effective in terms of both exports and imports. So what I said was, these were counsels of a moderate course, and that they were a very influential and well-informed group, and that Bush made a decision which was in direct opposition to their counsel. But there is a time course here, which we don't know too much about. We don't know exactly when the onset of his hyperthyroidism was.

**EIR:** You mentioned that there are a number of psychiatric disorders linked to hyperthyroidism. What are they?

**Abrams:** There's a literature on patients who are hyperthyroid who actually develop schizophrenia. . . .

**EIR:** Should Bush consider stepping down if the treatment does not work, or if he becomes so underactive he can't carry out the functions of the presidency?

**Abrams:** Do you mean in terms of the 25th Amendment, or are you talking about 1992?

**EIR:** I'm talking about the 25th Amendment.

**Abrams:** I think the answer is no. He will probably respond. The judgment there, at least initially, would be with George Bush in concert with Burt Lee, his physician, and in particular, with Larry Mohr, the Executive physician to the White House. The question really as to whether or not it's interfering with Bush's capacity to handle the power and responsibilities of the presidency, is something that is a delicate question, and one that they would have to judge. My guess is, that at a time like this, where they are relatively optimistic about his response to the treatment, that that would not be an important consideration now.

**EIR:** How about in 1992?

**Abrams:** That would depend on what happens with the treatment. For example, the patient with hyperthyroidism who is treated, in the aftermath [of treatment] has intellectual impairment, but it is of a very modest degree. Sixty percent of patients exhibit some kind of intellectual impairment.

What you bring up is the real dilemma of the 25th Amendment, which happens to be a passion of mine. And that dilemma is: What is the definition of inability? In fact, I just sent in the copy-edited manuscript of a book on the Reagan assassination attempt, which deals with the 25th in particular. W.W. Norton will publish that in early November.

**EIR:** In terms of the time of onset of Bush's hyperthyroidism, the White House estimates it to have been some time in February. Given his symptoms, is it possible that he got the disease much earlier?

**Abrams:** It's possible. One thing which is of importance, is the question of whether stress has anything to do with the onset of the disease. It's an autoimmune disorder, and one could raise the question as to whether or not one's resistance might be lowered. . . . You know, someone has raised the



Stuart Lewis

*President Bush landing at the White House on Aug. 14, 1990, during the phase of the Gulf crisis when the decision was taken to go to war.*

question very seriously whether Bush's choice of Dan Quayle as Vice President was not an impulsive act. I myself think it was a precipitate action.

The other thing about this is that George Bush may have been born to make the decisions that he did; his personality is of a particular type. We had a meeting at George Washington University in December on the care and treatment of the VIP, and a lot of it dealt with disability in leadership. One session was devoted to the media, and Jack Nelson [of the *Los Angeles Times*] took pains to point out that a quarter of a million miles of travel in two years is an extraordinary amount of time away from Washington, of change in time zones, activity, if you will, and maybe that's just George Bush. And maybe it isn't.

So I think the interesting thing will be, when he becomes euthyroid—that is to say, when the radioiodine has ablated those cells that are overproducing the thyroxin—what is his personality going to be like? What is his activity level going to be like? Is he going to be keeping those guys jogging along every single day, or not? You know, that's a question we'll all be fascinated to follow.

**EIR:** Can hyperthyroidism be triggered by purely psychosomatic circumstances?

**Abrams:** There are other factors that can be involved: the presence of an infection, certain drugs, and an increase in the consumption of iodine-containing foods. Most of the time, one never knows what is the precipitating factor.

**EIR:** Is it a credible theory that the water supply at the Vice President's residence may have been tainted, and that Bush and his wife got it from that?

**Abrams:** I think it's very doubtful. I think they're going to find that the water is pretty good. I think it is very interesting to speculate that a man, his wife, and their dog all in one locale have an autoimmune disorder, but it doesn't lead you any closer to getting at what the cause is.

**EIR:** I take it you were opposed to the war on Iraq?

**Abrams:** I felt very strongly that a non-military approach to that kind of conflict was the rational one to follow, and that I would have hoped that the country would have followed it.