## Persian Gulf crisis could become Bush's war

WASHINGTON (AP) — No president wants a war called by his name the way the Vietnam conflict became Lyndon Johnson's war, then Richard Nixon's.

When that happens, it usually is because a conflict has gone on so long, or so badly, that public support is shaken and Americans are divided. Using one man's name is the language of dissent.

The war that could explode in the Persian Gulf any time after midnight tonight would be stamped indelibly as George Bush's policy, even though it carries congressional approval.

The political peril for the president is that it will become his war, in the waging or in a bitter aftermath.

There has been significant home-front dissent about every American war except World War II, and only Pearl Harbor rallied the nation to put aside divisions in 1941.

The five-vote margin in the Senate Saturday, which authorized the use of force to drive Iraq from Kuwait, was the narrowest of modern margins in a war vote — closer than any since the 19-13 Senate vote for a 16-state nation to declare the War of 1812.

In modern times, votes before combat have been the exception. The war in Korea and a decade of conflict in Vietnam were not declared wars, and neither had direct, explicit approval from Congress.

Harry Truman didn't ask before sending U.S. troops to Korea in 1950. By the time that three-year conflict ended it had been dubbed "Truman's War," and a Republican administration had taken over.

Johnson sought and got approval of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in 1964 with only two dissenting votes in all of Congress. His administration later said it was the functional equivalent of a declaration of war. Congressional critics said they had not intended it that way.

Bush had long insisted he didn't need congressional authorization to send American forces into combat. But he also said the use-of-force resolution he requested, won and signed on Monday meant the Democratic-run House and Senate are now "part of all this."

Democratic leaders essentially agreed, saying the margins of approval were unimportant now that majorities have decided to authorize force.

"If conflict occurs, there will be full support for the men and women of our armed forces," said Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell, D-Maine, who voted against the Bush resolution.

"If the firing starts, if the president decides he has to use military force," said Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., "then I think we'll see a very strong rallying behind the president and behind the men and women in the field."

But until the votes, Mitchell and other Democrats had made clear that the war policy wasn't theirs; most of them wanted to delay the use of force and seek to drive Iraq from Kuwait with continued economic sanctions.

Earlier, the Democratic leader had complained that Bush acted alone and put the United States on a course toward offensive action on Nov. 8 when he announced he would double U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf.

"The president did not consult with the Congress about that decision," Mitchell said. "He did not try to build support for it among the American people. He just did it."

The administration also faces an active anti-war movement in advance, something that didn't confront Johnson in the early phases of the Vietnam conflict. That was a war of gradual escalation. The opposition, in the streets and ultimately at the polls, took shape gradually, too.

Now there is a movement against a war that hasn't begun, with demonstrations in Washington and other American cities.

Bush said his message to Americans pleading against war is that "we've got to do what we have to do." His spokesman said Bush doesn't feel alone in facing "a very singular decision" because it is a course approved by Congress and the United Nations.

But it is a lonely, life-and-death decision.





