



# Addressing the involvement of the United States in the Persian Gulf War

Committee: HSC

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**Issue:** Addressing the involvement of the United States of America in the Persian Gulf War

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## Introduction

The Persian Gulf War, also known as the First Gulf War, began on the 2nd of August 1990, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait under Saddam Hussein. A day earlier, the Iraq-Kuwait dialogue regarding the Kuwaiti exceeding of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quotas broke down leading to the subsequent invasion. Over the course of the coming days, the greatly outnumbered Kuwaiti forces were unable to prevent the taking of Kuwait City. Thus began the Iraqi occupation of the country, with many refugees escaping to Saudi Arabia. Emir Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah escaped with his cabinet ministers and went to Saudi Arabia to secure international Kuwaiti assets. The excuse given by Iraq was that the invasion came at the request of Kuwaiti citizens, and formed a puppet government within Kuwait.

Iraqi forces began committing atrocities on a great scale, such as but not limited to; murder, torture, and rape. Four days following the invasion, on the 6th of August, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) imposed heavy economic sanctions on Iraq, banning international trade, and attempting to further secure the assets and interests of the Kuwaiti government. Furthermore, the Arab League passed a resolution affirming the one from the UNSC, supported by 12 out of 21 members. Iraq apologists included Jordan, Yemen, Sudan, Tunisia, and Algeria amongst others. Those who sided with Kuwait included Egypt and Syria, along with the Arab Gulf states. The UN demanded that Iraqi forces withdraw by the following January, a demand that was ignored by Saddam Hussein.

The result was that on the 8th of August, an enormous military build-up began, with US forces amassing in Saudi Arabia, in Operation Desert Shield. In late November, the UNSC endorsed the use of force against Iraq if they did not meet the withdrawal deadline previously set. The NATO-led coalition by the withdrawal date included some 540,000 US personnel, out of the approximately 750,000 present. US-led Operation Desert Storm began on January 17th, in a massive air offensive, including smart missiles, fighter jets, and cruise missiles. These attacks proved highly effective in crippling many of the Iraqi forces and military targets located in Kuwait and Southern Iraq. The offensive lasted 42 days, however, it took a mere 100 hours of boots-on-the-ground warfare for

Kuwait to be liberated by coalition forces. On February 28th, Saddam Hussein accepted a ceasefire, marking an end to the First Gulf War.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Invasion

The military incursion inflicted by one nation upon another, with the intent to occupy or otherwise. Invasions are typically considered illegal under international war, as a direct violation of peace. The greater international community will very likely find the aggressor at fault, and will proceed accordingly.

### Occupation

The potentially illegal and typically military control of a nation or territory outside the sovereign jurisdiction of a particular nation. Following an invasion, the aggressor may choose to remain in power within the state that they have invaded. They will then institute a rule of law and systems within the country they are occupying.

### Puppet government

A government that claims independence, however, is de facto under the direct or otherwise control of an outside entity. Essentially, on paper there will be a certain façade of power lying within the administration of a supposedly sovereign nation, although the true wielders of influence within said country are different. This is commonly through the form of establishing a regime in which the head of state is either under duress or stands to benefit from following instructions from a separate entity, state or otherwise.

### (Military) withdraw(al)

The removal of military forces from a particular location, typically synonymous with a retreat. Military withdrawals typically follow or lead up to the conclusion of an armed conflict. It may be for the purpose of transitioning from a state of aggression to a state of defense, or following a ceasefire.

### Liberation

The release of a nation from an oppressive force, in this case, a foreign invader. Typically an occupied nation will be liberated by a third party, that will overthrow a country that initially took

control over the nation, by means of an armed conflict. In this case, the coalition forces attacked Iraq-occupied Kuwait, that led to the liberation of Kuwait, freeing them from Iraq.

### Ceasefire

A military truce or an agreement to stop fighting for a period, potentially indefinitely. Ceasefires are different to other peace agreements such as armistices, in the manner that a ceasefire may not be permanent whilst an armistice is the mutual agreement of parties in an armed conflict to entirely refrain from hostilities permanently. Both may be binding.

### Foreign (military) intervention

The intervening in a conflict by a nation not necessarily directly connected to the conflict. The connotation to foreign military intervention, is that the third party intervening typically has a sizeable interest in the result of a conflict being in the favour of a particular side. In this case the US military along with various other coalition members had a lot to gain from ensuring a resounding Iraqi loss.

## General Overview

### US interests

The deterioration of relations in the Persian Gulf were of great concern to Western powers. The West had a great interest in the maintenance of stability and peace in the region, as they benefited from the exporting of oil. Saddam Hussein's Iraq had made accusations regarding the oil fields along the Iraq-Kuwait border, and potentially illegal activities on the part of Kuwaiti oil extraction. Other nations in the area were alarmed by the escalation in tensions, and a dialogue was opened in an attempt to prevent any further degeneration in relations in the region. Ultimately these attempts failed, and the following invasion put foreign interests, both in the other Gulf nations, and those further afield in great jeopardy.

The US had several principal interests that were threatened by the Iraqi aggression and destabilisation of the region. These interests included but were not limited to, the grand strategic benefit of maintaining power in the Gulf, vast socioeconomic and financial implications with regards

to oil imports, alongside the American desire to be seen internationally as the upholder of world order, and the guardians of peace and democracy. The invasion was a threat to their growing hegemony, and US interests could not be seen to be endangered by aggressors in a foreign country that most Americans cannot point to on a map.

Firstly, the Gulf is a very strategically important area, in multiple ways. Primarily, with respect to its vast oil reserves. The region produces one third of the world's oil supply and is of critical importance from a security perspective as well as an economic one. In order for the US military to function there must be an enormous amount of readily available oil, much of said oil is imported from the Gulf. It was therefore of vital importance to prevent this from falling into the hands of a despot nation such as Iraq.

In addition to its military, the US proper is dependent on oil imports to remain functional. A staggering 3,162,510,000 litres of petroleum were used daily in 2021, according to the Energy Information Administration. In the same year, almost 20% of all oil imports came from Persian Gulf and OPEC nations. This displays the grand economic incentive to retain such import levels, however, it is also of importance to the government to be seen to be looking out for the public interest. Securing US assets is also needed to maintain public approval.

In addition to this, the US had a reputation and of course its world order. It could not be seen at the mercy of a Middle Eastern dictatorship. To retain global power, it needed to crush the incursion in the region. The Bush administration, in particular Dick Cheney, however, also saw the destabilisation in the Gulf as an opportunity. In the following decades, Halliburton Co., which had extremely close ties to Cheney himself, who was Secretary of Defence during the First Gulf War, would make approximately \$40bn profiteering off the wars in Iraq.

### **US military involvement**

A memorandum from President George Bush Sr. on January the 15th 1991, the withdrawal deadline, outlined four goals of the US war effort that was to come in Iraq. These included the unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait, the restoration of Kuwait's government, promotion of peace and stability in the Gulf, and protecting the lives of American citizens abroad. 6 weeks later, Iraq was at its knees, after one of the most incredible demonstrations of modern weaponry and tactics by the US-led coalition. As aforementioned, an enormous bulk of this military

personnel came from the US. It was a huge success, and many involved were celebrated for the operation's results. Of the 697,000 US troops involved in the war, only 299 lost their lives.

Needless to say, the military involvement of the US in the Gulf war was extensive. The reasoning was that Iraqi forces had to be absolutely dominated, in as short a time as possible. This indeed was the case, and the justification of their intervention makes sense. However, critics will discuss whether or not it was a war for the US to fight, with their right to take whatever military action they please being called into question. The fact remains, that to a large extent the US military as a whole does not necessarily answer to anyone, since they are essentially the West's great protector against aggressors in other parts of the world, and that from a numbers standpoint, it is farcical to suggest NATO would be remotely close to its might without the backing of the US.

As part of the US global hegemony, establishing military bases across the world in over 70 countries was key. One of these countries was Saudi Arabia, which had only recently become allied with the US following an oil embargo. The US promised security, and they accepted. Thus, a vast US military presence in Saudi Arabia began, in particular, air bases. These were then utilised to a great extent during Operation Desert Storm.

### Criticisms

As with any military operation, the war effort was not without criticism, despite not being anywhere near outside the realm of public favour compared to the Vietnam war. These criticisms include the idea that the war was simply a massacre by the US demonstrating their modern combat capabilities against a far inferior threat. There is also no shortage of war crime allegations, and several incidents shocked the public, including what has now become known as "the highway of death."

### War crimes

The allegations of war crimes are by no means baseless, as the US air assault attacked civilian socio-economic facilities, such as water and power supplies. At the end of the war, 70,000 Iraqi civilians were killed, 100,000 soldiers, and 300,000 wounded. In the coming years, it is estimated up to 500,000 more civilians died after a devastating 96% of the power supply was destroyed by the assault. This prevented proper sanitation, access to drinking water, and the function of hospitals.

Essentially for 6 weeks, the US military had the freedom to annihilate an entire nation, as permitted by the UNSC.

Perhaps the most infamous incident from the First Gulf War, is that which took place days before the end of the war. Highway 80 runs from Kuwait City to Basra, across the Iraq-Kuwait border. A retreating column of Iraqi ground forces, alongside civilians, were travelling back to Iraq via the 6-lane highway, when coalition planes began to attack the convoy. The photos of the aftermath are some of the most gruesome of modern warfare. Charred remains of people trying to escape their burning vehicles, amongst see of over 2,000 burnt-out vehicles across the road. Whilst controversial, it has been argued that due to the lack of surrender, and the fact that the retreat could supposedly have been the reallocation of Iraqi forces to bolster those inside Iraq itself. However, many consider it a war crime, at the very least a needless slaughter, regardless.

## Timeline of Key Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
18 <sup>th</sup> July 1990	Saddam Hussein accuses exceeding OPEC quotas by Kuwait
1 <sup>st</sup> of August 1990	Dialogue in Jeddah breaks down between Iraq and Kuwait
2 <sup>nd</sup> of August 1990	Iraq invades Kuwait
August 1990	Operation Desert Shield: US military build up in Saudi Arabia
29 <sup>th</sup> of November 1990	UNSC permits use of force in Kuwait after January 15th
12 <sup>th</sup> of January 1991	US Congress authorises US military action against Iraq
17 <sup>th</sup> January 1991	Operation Desert Storm begins, with US-led air offensive
24 <sup>th</sup> of February 1991	Operation Desert Sabre (coalition ground offensive) begins
26 <sup>th</sup> of February 1991	Saddam Hussein announces withdrawal of Iraqi forces
26 <sup>th</sup> of February 1991	Retreating Iraqi convoy is wiped out by coalition air force
27 <sup>th</sup> of February 1991	Kuwait City liberated
28 <sup>th</sup> of February 1991	Iraq accepts UN resolutions
3 <sup>rd</sup> of March 1991	Ceasefire

## Major Parties Involved

## United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

The UNSC is one of the principal UN organs, tasked with maintaining global peace and stability. It contains the permanent five (P5) nations, alongside 10 other rotating seats. The involvement of the UNSC was at the centre-stage of much of the Gulf War build-up. The resolutions that it passed ensured that the international community and other global superpowers were on the Kuwaiti side of the war. This ensured that other large powers had no conflicts of interest and did not try to subvert or interfere with US-led coalition war efforts. However, there have been many criticisms made of the US abusing the power it held in the council during the conflict. The resolutions that it passed were extremely one-sided, and although the UN was indeed strongly against the invasion of Kuwait, many of the measures outlined in the various resolutions have been deemed excessive by many. The US essentially used the UNSC as a way of being able to get away with a war that would end up killing up to a million in the coming decade.

## Iraq

Iraq was under the rule of the tyrannical dictator Saddam Hussein at the time of the war. Whilst it is important not to conflate Iraq and Hussein, it is equally important to note that his rule was highly oppressive and that he was responsible to a great extent for all Iraqi military action. He is likewise responsible for the escalations that occurred in 1990, which resulted in his subsequent invasion of Kuwait.

## Kuwait

Kuwait is an oil-rich country that remained a British protectorate until its independence from Britain in the summer of 1961. It adopted Western values and became a very prosperous nation primarily because of its fortunate location on top of vast oil fields. These were naturally of great interest to protect and exploit by nations such as the US.

## United States of America (US)

The US as aforementioned had a great many interests in maintaining security in the Persian Gulf. It was a source of great economic importance and needed to be protected. Despite having supported Iraq's war effort against post-revolution Iran, as with Afghanistan, this alliance did not transcend business, as the US went on to lead a coalition of forces into Iraq and Kuwait to oust them from the occupation and cripple the country doing so.

## Possible Solutions

The date set for this Historical Security Council (HSC) is December 24th, 1991. That means that the war has already concluded, and the question of US involvement is retrospective, not current. Therefore, in order to discuss solutions, it is important to understand the knock-on effects of what the US military intervention caused. These effects have been discussed briefly in the paragraphs above, however, the full scope is perhaps much greater than it may seem. You may not use the information from after December the 24<sup>th</sup>. However, all the actual repercussions are potential consequences that you may discuss, and write clauses to mitigate their likelihood.

The US air offensive was incredibly successful in terms of a military victory standpoint. However, it was not such a case from a humanitarian perspective. Much of the country was left without power after a tremendous proportion of their generation was destroyed by the coalition. This resulted in severe and widespread consequences. Those most affected by the outages were the very young and very old, both of whom, from a traditional moral standpoint, are the least deserving and least involved in any violence that was occurring. It is important to realise that power generation is at the heart of any system in any nation. Without it, living with basic amenities becomes a struggle for many and an impossibility for some. Although it is very difficult to quantify accurately, estimates generally agree that up to a million, potentially more, Iraqi civilians would die in the coming decades, which can be attributed either directly or indirectly as a result of Operation Desert Storm.

Additionally, as aforementioned, there is a question of possible war crimes. Many are quick to accuse the US of attacking civilian infrastructure, and that this caused the massive power outages, and subsequently resulted in hundreds of thousands of unnecessary civilian fatalities. However, it is not so simple as to brand an attack on a civilian enterprise as a war crime. There are certain criteria to determine whether there are legal grounds to strike infrastructure used by civilians, and likewise criteria that determine if such an attack is a war crime. According to the Geneva convention, attacks on infrastructure indispensable to the sustenance of civilian life is a war crime. However, this definition can become foggy at times, especially in cases where the military and surrounding civilians are entangled, such as in the case of a power supply. A power supply may be vital for providing power to civilians, but at the same time could equally be considered a valid military target. However, as the committee is the security council and not the ICJ, it would be better to avoid discussing whether military actions were or were not war crimes and to instead focus on the UNSC targets of

peace and stability. Of course, it is important to understand the events that transpired, however avoiding a legal debate would be much more productive for the cause.

The final pieces of context include memoranda throughout the 1990s, culminating in the war that would follow more than a decade later. Several publications were key in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In 1994, the “Clean Break Memo” was written by a study group for the Israeli government, outlining a radically new, and concerningly neoconservative approach to “peace and stability” in the region. Several of the writers would move on to hold key places in the US government and were a part of preparing the invasion of Iraq. Additionally, the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) were highly influential in its calling for the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, provided that a “catastrophic and catalysing event” were to happen, such as “a new Pearl Harbour.” This event came in the form of the events of 9/11. Following this, certain individuals in the US administration, with strong ties to their Middle-Eastern ally Israel, fabricated information and spread lies about the infamous “weapons of mass destruction” being developed in Iraq, to garner approval for an invasion. The subsequent war, from 2003 to 2011, had a devastating toll, in many respects. Its occurrence would potentially not have happened had the first Gulf War not transpired over a decade prior. As the date for our HSC is a long time before these events, it could be possible to attempt to make things turn out with fewer needless deaths than.

With the above context set, there are certainly alternative solutions that could prove effective at addressing the issue at hand. As there are a great number of issues that came as a result of the US involvement in the Gulf War that severely affected the civilian population at the time, these should be a focus. It is important to remember that Iraq is under some of the heaviest sanctions ever imposed and that these are preventing the restoration of civilian infrastructure. Therefore, one such proposition could be to provide direct aid and a UN mission in Iraq, that would assist in the restoration of these enterprises vital for the survival and living standards of the civilian population. The sanctions would remain, however, the country would have a chance to rebuild, likely saving countless lives in the long term. This solution would potentially gain traction, as it continues to punish Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait, but simultaneously helps the civilians have a chance to recover.

As the country is dealt with in the issue has veto power, it will be a lot more productive to reach compromises and refrain from holding them accountable, in order to pass clauses. As well as this, the solution should not be too burdensome for the US, as they should not be expected to entertain motions that they typically wouldn't. The solutions should be methods of reconciliation and rebuilding, rather than condemning the wartime action by the US.

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