

Forum: Historical Security Council

Question of: The Persian Gulf War (1991)

Student Officer: Anitra Coelho

Position: President

Introduction

The Persian Gulf War from 1990 to 1991, also referred to as the First Gulf War refers to a turning point in Middle Eastern history, catalyzed by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. The crucial aspect of the conflict was to do with concerns of violating sovereignty and a new power dynamic following the Cold War. The invasion sparked collective action that was taken by the United Nations in order to successfully deescalate tensions between the two countries. Following the clash, geopolitics in the Middle Eastern region were forever changed, especially with regards to Western influences on militarist and extremist sentiments.

The role of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was pivotal in the conflict as he pushed Iraqi troops to violate Kuwait's sovereignty while claiming Kuwait originally belonged to Iraq, citing previous border clashes. The conflict finally came to end after Hussein agreed to UN regulations after the initiation of heavy sanctions and diplomatic efforts. This chair report will delve into the history of the conflict and how the stand-off set a precedent for current Middle Eastern affairs.

Definition of Key Terms

Sanctions

Restrictions imposed on a country or many countries by another party/parties in order to either deter or influence their behavior

Coalition forces

Countries/parties that are cooperating with regards to the military to achieve a common goal.

Sovereignty

The authority of a member state/country to govern themselves without any external interference while having other member states acknowledge their own independence.

Invasion

Military involvement to primarily take over another area which violates that region's sovereignty.

Background

In order to understand the full history of the Persian Gulf War, it is crucial to note that it is a multi-faceted issue involving multiple member states. Essentially, the conflict can be boiled down to being a dispute that originated over disputed territory, but erupted into considerably more violent strife.

Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)

The main reason for the dispute between Iran and Iraq was regarding the location of the prized Shatt Al-Arab river, an ideal location for maritime trade and exchange. Simultaneously, the new Iranian revolution led by Ruhollah Khomeini promoted ideologies regarding theological governance based on Shia Muslim principles. The combination of the widely spreading revolution and the threat of losing an important trade facility therefore led to Iraq invading Iran in order to assert dominance relatively quickly.

However, the war ended up spanning eight years, where around 500,000 people died due to the conflict. This was caused due to the employment of chemical weapons, missile strikes, attacks on civilian areas and trench warfare. While Iraq was the nation that began the conflict, other member states- most notably being the United States, the USSR and France supported it as they viewed Iran as being the larger threat given the revolution at the time. Other Arab states like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia gave billions to Iraq to fund their military efforts to fight against Iran, causing the nation to plunge into debt and being the main reason for Iraq inciting the Persian Gulf War.

Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (August 2 1990)

Following the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein was a rising leader in both the war and the invasion of Kuwait later on. Following the large debt Iraq was in, Hussein wrongly presumed the debts would have been forgiven, but upon realizing that they would not be, he was driven to economic desperation. However, Saddam Hussein cited several reasons that allegedly justified trying to annex the territory of Kuwait.

Motivation for invasion

Regarding the geography of the Middle East, Iraq and Kuwait are neighboring countries, where the latter is extremely abundant in oil, and considering the large amount of Iraqi debt owed to several Gulf states, the resource would have come in particularly handy for paying reparations. Iraq also accused Kuwait of overproducing oil by unlawfully drilling and mining in sovereign Iraqi oil space, namely in the Rumaila oil fields.

Additionally, Hussein had an expansionist agenda where he wanted to considerably increase Iraq's land, leading him to cite Kuwait as being under Ottoman rule previously and using this to supposedly justify his invasion. He credited himself with the reason as to why the Iranian ideology did not further spread, and consequently believed Kuwait as a country should be indebted to Iraq. It has been also debated as to whether Saddam Hussein wanted to capitalize on how the international community as a whole responded to aggressive actions as they sided with the invader (Iraq) instead of Iran despite the latter being the one at risk. Hussein may have believed that other member states may have tolerated his actions for their own national or regional gain, and may have leveraged this to his advantage.

When Kuwait was finally invaded, Iraqi forces appointed Colonel Alaa Hussain Ali as head of the state, and shortly after, Hussein officially declared Kuwait as being the 19th Iraqi province.

Features of the invasion

Considering the Iraqi government's motivations for invading, the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait was mainly focused on requisitioning significant amounts of Kuwait's economic assets. This included

"the assets of the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, treasures of Islamic art from the Kuwait National Museum and \$1.6 billion in gold and cash from the Central Bank of Kuwait" (Britannica). From a more humanitarian perspective, Iraqi soldiers imprisoned thousands of Kuwaiti civilians and engaged in wide-spread extrajudicial murders. The beginning of the invasion also displaced a further 350,000 civilians that fled to Saudi Arabia.

United Nations and the international response (August-November 1990)

Following the Iraqi invasion, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) immediately sprung into action in the form of condemning the invasion and imposing Resolution 661 while demanding Iraq immediately cease violating Kuwaiti sovereignty. Between August and November of 1990, three different resolutions were passed, and each aimed to tighten restrictions in order to make Iraq surrender.

Resolution 660

Adopted on 2nd August 1990, Resolution 660 condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and demanded immediate withdrawal of the Iraqi military forces surrounding Kuwait. The resolution also called for negotiations using the League of Arab States as the main method of communication.

Resolution 661

Resolution 661, passed on August 6th 1990 was the first resolution imposed with regards to the Iraqi-Kuwaiti conflict. The resolution firstly banned all trade exports and imports with Iraq, and requested member states to aid with the protection of the assets of the real Kuwait government.

Resolution 678

The final UNSC resolution passed on November 29th 1990 was aimed at finally putting an end to the conflict with its main aim as restoring peace to the Persian Gulf Region. However, it was the first ultimatum delivered by the United Nations towards Iraq as it stated that if Iraqi forces did not withdraw from Kuwait by January 15 1991, the use of force against Iraq would be authorized.

Formation of the Coalition of the Willing

The Coalition of the Willing was a military alliance formed as a response to the ruthless Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the main aim was to liberate Kuwait as well. This coalition was also the alliance that was authorized to administer force as stated in Resolution 671 if Iraq did not comply with the resolution before the specified deadline. Member states that collectively became part of the coalition included more than 30 members, primarily the United States alongside other nations like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and France. The coalition force was notable as it combined Western nations, NATO allies and even Arab nations as well. When Iraq refused to comply with the resolutions, this led to the initiation of Operation Desert Shield and later Operation Desert Storm that finally succeeded in reclaiming Kuwaiti sovereignty and land.

Operation Desert Shield

After Saddam Hussein had seemingly conquered Kuwait with minor complications, the dictator was poised to continue advancing Iraqi territory through invading Saudi Arabia. This was again another strategic location as gaining control over the area would give Iraq access to two extremely holy and religious Islamic sites (Mecca and Medina) along with control over forty percent of the world's oil reserves. The Saudi ruler, King Fahd unconventionally asked for the

support of other nations in order to defend itself against Iraq, and in an unprecedented move, the United States deployed a record-breaking number of armed forces and military assets like navy carriers, fighter jets and even 240,000 troops to help support the Saudi armed forces. Other countries later joined the US in deploying troops and sending weapons to the Saudi region in order to support the attack against Iraq. Following Resolution 671 authorizing the use of force for the first time since 1950, the United States also attempted to encourage peaceful dialogue and negotiations with Hussein for a more peaceful resolution of the issue, but the sentiment was not reciprocated. While no physical military action occurred, Operation Desert Shield was the first phase of military build-up and stockpiling in order to finally succeed in expelling Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

Operation Desert Storm

From January 17th till February 24th, Operation Desert Storm was a mission devised by the United States Central Command as a means of exhausting Iraqi defense forces and then preying on their lethargy to destroy them. Specifically, Operation Desert Storm was centered on being an air offensive campaign. Within 10 days of the operation's commencement, pilots from the Coalition of the Willing had garnered control over air space and Iraq's supply of aircrafts, missiles and other air defense systems were useless. Several aircrafts crashed in combat, many were bombed on the ground and around a hundred were even flown into Iran. Through the efficient and strategic air offensive, around thirty percent of Iraqi forces on the ground were rendered ineffective.

Operation Desert Sabre

In tandem with Operation Desert Storm, Operation Desert Sabre was the ground offensive that set to recapture Kuwaiti territory. The main military tactic was to use a "flanking offensive" that allowed large advances into Iraqi territory- the United States' 1st Armored Division succeeded in a 290km advance in just 66 hours. The advances were launched from northeastern Saudi Arabia, continued into Kuwait and later into South Iraq. Within just a hundred hours of launching the military campaign, the coalition had succeeded in liberating Kuwait City and eliminating a majority of Iraqi forces. It is said that the operation was highly successful with minimal coalition deaths and a significantly larger number of Iraqi casualties. Following the mission's success, the United States' president, George Bush declared a ceasefire on February 28th, 1991 which marked the end of large-scale military operations in the region.

Aftermath of the war

Following the ceasefire agreed to by Iraq through UN resolution 687, there were several terms that the nation was required to comply with. These conditions included officially recognizing Iraqi sovereignty, destroying any weapons of mass destruction they were in possession of, agreeing to UN inspections regarding disarmament and even economic sanctions lasting more than a decade. Saddam Hussein continued to stay in power despite the significant setbacks, but his defeat inspired other sects of Muslims to rebel. When the uprisings were quelled using brute force under Hussein's leadership, the United States did not intervene, raising criticism.

Additionally, Iraqi civilians considerably suffered as a result of the sanctions and considerable damage done as a result of the war- there were severe shortages of medicine, water and food.

Other problems created

The Persian Gulf War was not merely a physical military based conflict, but its aftermath also resulted in several other issues to do with the availability of food and water, the economy and even the environment.

Food and water shortages

During the extreme conflict throughout both the Iraqi invasion and Operation Desert Sabre, many important pieces of infrastructure were destroyed, thus hindering the transportation of food supplies throughout cities. The further damage to irrigation systems also made the agricultural industry stagnate, and UN imposed sanctions further constricted food imports. As a result, malnutrition became widely spread throughout the younger population especially. Similarly, the bombing of water treatment plants and systems caused a lack of potable water, and more communal water sources also had a tendency to become contaminated- thus leading to the spread of water-borne diseases.

Economic stagnation

Iraq's main source of income was through their oil reserves, which were sanctioned by the UN. The currency (Iraqi dinar) also became worth less and less, causing hyperinflation within the country. This, combined with already limited food and water caused poverty rates to dramatically increase. Due to the bombing and hyperinflation, rebuilding damaged infrastructure also became close to impossible, so cities were left in a short-term state of complete chaos.

Environmental impact

During the retreating of Iraqi forces, several Kuwaiti oil wells were set on fire, thus emitting lots of pollutants and toxins into the surrounding atmosphere. Given the large military that was being deployed on basically all sides, oil spills in the Persian Gulf further worsened the condition of marine life and polluted major water bodies as well. However, a major impact was as a result of the bombing that consistently occurred from both sides. The harmful after-effects of both the bombings and the location in which they occurred caused severe chemical pollution, and strained the balance of ecosystems both on land and in the water.

Major Parties Involved

Iraq

Since the nation was involved in both the Iran-Iraq war and essentially catalysed the Persian Gulf War, it was and continues to be a major power in the Middle Eastern and Gulf region. At the time, Iraq had one of the largest armies on paper, with colossal amounts of ammunition. However, they were outmatched by the outpouring of support from troops of other member states, and since they were also poorly trained in comparison, it resulted in the victory of the coalition forces.

Throughout both conflicts, the leader of the nation was Saddam Hussein, who has a legacy of repression and imprisonment, drawing worldwide concern over human rights abuses. There have been instances of Iraq refusing to cooperate with disarmament inspections, most notably in 1998 which led to Operation Desert Fox.

Kuwait

The region of Kuwait was the main area where the conflict occurred in order for the Iraqis to supposedly reclaim land that was historically theirs. This invasion also catalysed the Persian Gulf War. During the time of the Iraqi invasion and occupation, the Kuwaiti government was in exile and temporarily operated from Saudi Arabia. After Hussein officially declared Kuwait as being the 19th Iraqi province, other place names within the country were "Iraqized". Following the success of Operation Desert Storm and Desert Sabre, the global community's rapid and strategic response to the violation of sovereignty was symbolic of the power of the United Nations, and how important ties between nations can be.

United States of America

As the main Western power that was part of the coalition forces, the US unconventionally intervened in a Middle Eastern conflict at the behest of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. When the US deployed troops first to Saudi Arabia during the course of Operation Desert Shield, the total number of soldiers was around 440,000- the largest American deployment of troops since WW2. The United States was a driving force within the coalition, and their significant involvement, especially during Operation Desert Sabre helped in liberating Kuwait City in after around 100 hours of fighting.

Saudi Arabia

Following the initial Iraqi invasion, Saudi Arabia was the next nation that was set to be invaded, leading the monarch King Fahd to request American support. Throughout the early stages of invading Kuwait, Saudi Arabia was also in a vulnerable position as their northern border was being threatened by Iraqi forces. As the conflict ensued, Operation Desert Shield regarding the build-up of military defense primarily occurred in Saudi Arabia, and the nation was the major base for coalition forces. Places like Saudi ports and airports were also used as part of Operation Desert Sabre. In addition to providing a physical location for the coalition, Saudi Arabia further contributed armed forces and monetary wise, thirty billion dollars. Therefore, it was a key player within the Gulf conflict.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

United Nations Security Council Resolutions

Using the UNSC resolutions that were passed, they succeeded in increasing pressure on Iraq to cease violating Kuwait's sovereignty. However, despite the ultimatum delivered in Resolution 678 regarding the authorization of force, Iraq still did not feel threatened enough, leading to the various military operations that had to take place (e.g Operation Desert Shield and Desert Sabre). Along with the main resolutions that significantly increased tensions, there were also other passed resolutions that made smaller yet still important changes to the nature of the conflict- for

example enforcing embargos on air traffic and naval operations, establishing increased sanctions and other forms of support for Kuwait from the international community.

International Negotiations and Arab League Efforts

Following the unprecedented Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Arab League held an emergency meeting in Cairo on August 10th, 1990. However, within the league itself, member states disagreed with each other about the way Iraq was handling matters. Some nations like Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia criticized Iraq for violating Kuwait's sovereignty, but other nations like Sudan and Yemen supported Iraq's reasons for the invasion. As a result, the conflicting stances of nations negated any good of the meeting, and despite the main goal being for peace in the Arab region, no such action was taken. Additionally, other forms of mediation through the Geneva Peace Talks, and negotiations with a third-party mediator failed to pacify Iraq.

Possible Solutions

Easing sanctions and restrictions in a phased approach

Following the Persian Gulf War, sanctions have eased but there still are considerable restrictions placed on Iraq. While these constraints may appear to eliminate or ameliorate the threat of invasions, the main people that suffer are Iraqi civilians. Therefore, it is crucial for member states to consider an alternative approach to safeguarding their own sovereignties, while simultaneously not crippling a country completely. Some ways of still maintaining regional security and being proactive can be to ease sanctions and restrictions in stages through slowly lifting import restrictions for essential supplies like medical goods and agricultural supplies. Additionally, consistently keeping inspections in place for larger issues like regarding the development of weapons of mass destruction can still help in monitoring safety issues to eventually reach a point of mutual trust between member states.

Introduction and initiation of programmes to alleviate shortages

After the Persian Gulf War, there were several environmental, economic and food related issues- mainly to do with stagnation and with no sign of growth either to help life rebound. Similar to the issues created as a result of sanctions, the initiation and introduction of programmes dedicated to alleviating these shortages can significantly help improve the quality and standard of life for Iraqi civilians. Specific humanitarian programmes can aid in addressing the issues of shortages and can even involve non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for maximum efficiency and help given. While it may be easier to blame countries or nations for violating others' sovereignty, it is still

important to remember the end goal of the United Nations- to foster mutual peace and understanding between member states, regardless of what may have ensued in the past.

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