

**Forum:** United Nations Historical Security Council (UNHSC)

**Issue:** (201) The Gulf War

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## Introduction

Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, driven by territorial issues and economic resentments, sparking the Gulf War, also known as the Persian Gulf War. Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait set off the conflict, a complicated mixture of global geopolitical interests, economic interdependencies, and regional power dynamics. The initial cause of the Gulf War was Iraq's territorial claim to Kuwait, which was exacerbated by economic tensions from the Iran-Iraq War and disagreements over the supply and price of oil. Iraq claimed historical sovereignty over Kuwait and accused it of economic harm by exceeding oil production quotas, which depressed global oil prices, and alleged slant drilling into Iraq's Rumaila oil field. These issues, in addition to Iraq's financial struggles following the Iran-Iraq War, led to a decision by Saddam Hussein to annex Kuwait and assert dominance in the Gulf region.

Due to Kuwait's role as a dominating oil supplier, this issue drew attention internationally. The conflict had significant adverse effects, including widespread destruction of infrastructure, severe environmental damage, and extensive humanitarian challenges. It also exposed the vulnerability of global energy systems to regional conflicts, prompting an emergent response from the international community.

Addressing the Gulf War's aftermath requires resolving the humanitarian crisis, reconstructing the impacted countries, and putting safeguards against future confrontations of this nature. Protecting regional stability, guaranteeing sustainable development, and promoting international collaboration to handle the war's aftereffects are the reasons why these problems must be resolved quickly.

## Appendices

**Given the committee's timeline, no sources or information after February 28, 1991 should be referenced, written, or debated upon.**

## Definition of Key Terms

### *Operation Desert Shield -*

Operation Desert Shield was the initial phase of the Gulf War, focusing on the defense of Saudi Arabia after Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. The U.S. and a coalition of over 35 nations rapidly deployed troops to the region to deter further Iraqi aggression. The United Nations imposed sanctions on Iraq, demanding its withdrawal from Kuwait, but Saddam Hussein refused to comply. By January 1991, the coalition had assembled over 900,000 troops, preparing for potential military action.

### *Operation Desert Storm -*

Operation Desert Storm was the offensive phase of the Gulf War, launched on January 17, 1991, to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. It began with an extensive air campaign, destroying Iraqi air defenses, command centers, and military targets. On February 24, 1991, the coalition launched a swift ground assault, overwhelming Iraqi forces in just four days. By February 28, Iraq surrendered, Kuwait was liberated, and the war officially ended.

### *Kuwait Oil Fields -*

Kuwait's oil fields were a strategic and environmental tragedy during the Gulf War. Iraqi forces lit over 600 oil wells on fire, creating massive fires and oil lakes. As a result of this act, toxic fumes were released into the atmosphere, causing severe environmental damage and destroying the country's economy.

### *Coalition Forces -*

Coalition forces were an international military alliance led by the United States during the Gulf War. To stop Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, 39 nations, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, France, and the United Kingdom, joined forces. This multifaceted military cooperation played a crucial role in expressing international disapproval of Saddam Hussein's assault.

### *Saddam Hussein -*

Saddam Hussein was the leading cause of the Gulf War and the president of Iraq from 1979 to 2003. Given Iraq and Kuwait's territorial claims and economic disagreements, his government invaded Kuwait in August 1990 with the intention of acquiring that nation's large oil reserves, cancelling a large debt Iraq owed Kuwait, and expanding Iraqi power in the region. Coalition forces intervened militarily because Hussein refused to leave Kuwait and disregarded international resolutions.

### *Highway of Death -*

The Highway of Death refers to the stretch of road between Kuwait and Basra, Iraq, where the United States and its allies launched a massive attack on retreating Iraqi troops during the Gulf War in 1991. The attack resulted in thousands of soldiers and civilians dying, leaving the highway littered with burnt-out vehicles and corpses.

### *Iraqi Republican Guard -*

The Iraqi Republican Guard was Saddam Hussein's elite military force, known for its loyalty and superior training compared to Iraq's regular army. During the Gulf War, they played a key role in defending Iraq-occupied Kuwait, particularly during the coalition's air campaign and ground invasion. However, they were ultimately outmatched by superior coalition firepower, suffering heavy losses during the Battle of Medina Ridge and the retreat from Kuwait. Their defeat significantly weakened Saddam Hussein's hold on Kuwait and Iraq's overall military strength, influencing future conflicts in the Middle East.

### *Kuwait Resistance -*

The Kuwait Resistance was vital in opposing Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, despite facing extreme repression from Iraqi forces. They provided critical intelligence to coalition forces, conducted sabotage operations against Iraqi supply lines, and spread anti-Iraq propaganda to boost morale. Their efforts helped weaken Iraqi control and facilitated the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. The resistance also became a symbol of national pride, strengthening Kuwaiti unity and shaping the country's post-war identity.

### *No-Fly Zones -*

No-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq were enforced by U.S. and allied forces after the Gulf War to protect Kurdish and Shiite civilians from Saddam Hussein's repression. Iraqi forces violated these zones by deploying anti-aircraft weapons, targeting coalition patrols, and occasionally flying aircraft into restricted areas. In response, the U.S. and allies reinforced the zones through airstrikes on Iraqi military installations and by patrolling the airspace with fighter jets. These restrictions remained in place until the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, which removed Saddam Hussein from power.

### *Scud Missile Attacks -*

Scud missile attacks were ballistic missile strikes launched by Iraq against Saudi Arabian and Israeli civilian targets and coalition forces. Many of the strikes were intercepted by Patriot missiles, which were designed to upset the coalition and provoke Israeli retaliation.

## History

Iraq suffered both military and economic devastation during the Iran–Iraq War (1980-1988). Iraq was left in a vulnerable circumstance after the war, which caused significant losses and enormous debt. A large portion of the \$80 billion that Saddam Hussein's administration owed was to Kuwait and other Gulf nations who had aided Iraq during the conflict. Iraq's resentment of its Gulf neighbors, especially Kuwait, was heightened by this financial hardship. Saddam believed Kuwait was aggravating Iraq's post-war economic recovery by maintaining high oil output and beyond OPEC quotas, contributing to the global drop in oil prices. Saddam's growing hostility against Kuwait was further exacerbated by Iraq's crippling economy and mounting debt.

Saddam Hussein focused on Kuwait because Iraq's economy was still fragile. He charged that Kuwait had engaged in "economic warfare" by surpassing OPEC output targets, which caused oil prices to decline and negatively impacted Iraq's already fragile economy. The conflict was further intensified when Iraq claimed that Kuwait was slant drilling into the Rumaila oil field, which Iraq claimed as its own. The relationship between the two countries deteriorated significantly due to this economic dispute. An atmosphere conducive to war was produced by Iraq's growing claims against Kuwait regarding its oil policies and Kuwait's unwillingness to pay Iraq's war debts. The battle over oil resources and Saddam Hussein's rhetoric during this time suggested that Iraq would eventually expand its territory, which paved the way for military action.

Iraq rapidly took over Kuwait after launching a full-scale invasion on August 2, 1990. Saddam Hussein invoked Kuwait's historical membership in Iraq as justification for the invasion. He also charged Kuwait with economic exploitation, especially concerning oil production methods. The invasion shocked the entire community in addition to causing a humanitarian disaster in Kuwait. The United Nations swiftly condemned Iraq's move for violating both international law and regional stability. A coalition led by the United States and backed by UN resolutions was formed as a direct result of the invasion, and it would shortly launch military operations to drive Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. The invasion illustrated the enormous stakes in controlling essential oil resources and the erratic nature of regional politics.

## Key Issues

### *Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) -*

Iraq's decision to invade Kuwait was significantly influenced by the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War (1980 – 1988), one of the most protracted and violent conflicts of the 20th century. Both sides suffered enormous losses in the conflict, which was fought between Iran and Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Estimates of the number of dead

varied from hundreds of thousands to over a million, and Iraq's resources were depleted. Even though neither side won the war by a clear margin, Iraq came out of the conflict significantly damaged militarily and economically.

Iraq had to deal with massive debt after the war, with almost \$80 billion in debt, most of it due to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The administration of Saddam Hussein requested the forgiveness or modification of these loans because it was in alarming need of financial assistance to reconstruct and stabilize Iraq. However, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait declined to offer aid since they were concerned that Iraq may try to annex more territory. Saddam was compelled to take drastic measures as a result of this reluctance, Iraq's escalating domestic economic problems, and the strain of repairing its damaged infrastructure.

Apart from the financial strain, the war had severely damaged Iraq's military infrastructure, and Saddam was committed to regaining Iraq's prominence and authority in the area. Iraq's hostilities toward Kuwait were motivated by a confluence of debt, economic hardships, and a desire for increased regional power. When Saddam Hussein said that Kuwait's wealth would belong to Iraq, it became evident that he saw Kuwait not just as a financial target but also as a chance to establish Iraq as a significant regional force.

### *The Role of Oil -*

In the Gulf War, oil was a significant economic and strategic resource and a trigger for hostilities. Iraq's initiative to dominate Kuwait's oil wealth was a major driving force behind the invasion. With its enormous oil reserves, the Persian Gulf region has long been a critical energy source for the world economy. Saddam Hussein viewed the purchase of Kuwait's oil as securing a leading position in the world oil market while improving Iraq's financial status. Saddam viewed Kuwait's oil production and status as a significant oil exporter as a strategic asset that could aid Iraq in its economic recovery.

In addition, the Gulf War significantly impacted world energy security and oil prices. Oil prices rose due to the fight because of worries about shortages brought on by the instability of the Gulf region and the possible disruption of oil supplies. The international community swiftly stepped in to prevent Iraq's aggressiveness from upsetting the world's oil supply because of the economic volatility that was felt globally. In particular, the US-led coalition was driven by the need to preserve the free flow of Gulf oil, which was essential to the world economy and Kuwait's sovereignty.

### *Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait (1990) -*

Iraq unexpectedly invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, quickly overpowering its armed forces and taking control of the nation. By asserting historical sovereignty over Kuwait and charging its rulers with threatening Iraq's economic stability, Saddam Hussein justified the invasion. The world community widely condemned Iraq's declaration of Kuwait as a province within a few days. The security of the oil supplies in the Gulf was also threatened by the invasion, which sparked concerns that Iraq may target Saudi Arabia and other Gulf

governments. Because it broke international law and raised awareness of Iraq's aggressive intentions, the invasion of Kuwait marked a sea change. The event not only destabilized the Gulf region but also triggered a unified international response, as the United Nations and key global powers began preparing for military intervention to restore Kuwait's sovereignty.

### *Economic Pressures and Iraq's Debt -*

A significant factor in the development of the Gulf War was Iraq's enormous debt, caused mainly by its protracted conflict with Iran. Iraq's economy was in ruins following eight years of war, and Saddam Hussein's regime was under tremendous pressure to bring stability back. Gulf nations, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, owed Iraq a significant portion of its debt since they had given Iraq substantial loans during the Iran-Iraq War. Nevertheless, these countries were hesitant to provide additional economic support or discharge Iraq's debt following the war.

In addition to this, Saddam Hussein also charged Kuwait with taking advantage of Iraq's precarious position by overproducing and flooding the market, which depressed oil prices and hindered Iraq's economic recovery. Iraq believed that Kuwait's actions went against an unofficial pact among the Gulf governments to keep oil production levels stable in a way that aided Iraq's economic recovery. Tensions were further heightened by Iraq's accusation that Kuwait had begun slant drilling into its oil reserves. These economic grievances, combined with Iraq's financial needs, made Kuwait a target for Saddam's aggression.

Iraq's wider economic desperation was one of the economic variables that contributed to the invasion, in addition to oil. Saddam Hussein thought that seizing Kuwait's oil riches would give Iraq the money it needed to settle its debts, finance reconstruction, and regain its economic dominance. Saddam's decision to invade Kuwait was influenced by this economic justification from Iraq's growing debt and the need to regain its standing as a regional force.

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### *Iraq -*

Iraq, led by Saddam Hussein, was the main aggressor during the Gulf War. Saddam officially defended the invasion of Kuwait by asserting historical claims to the territory and blaming Kuwait for economic sabotage due to excessive oil production and slant drilling. Iraq characterized its actions as a reaction to the imperialist exploitation by Kuwait and Western forces. Nonetheless, the invasion was largely seen as a tactical maneuver to seize control of Kuwait's oil reserves and enhance Iraq's economic recovery following the Iran-Iraq War. Iraq faced international

condemnation, but within the country, Saddam leveraged nationalism to garner backing, depicting Iraq as the protector of Arab independence against outside interference.

#### *Kuwait -*

Iraq's aggression harmed Kuwait, violating its sovereignty and territory during the invasion. Kuwait formally utilized international diplomacy and alliances to garner backing for its liberation. Kuwait's governing Al-Sabah family temporarily moved and collaborated closely with the United States and the United Nations to secure international support. Kuwait considered Iraq's claims of economic warfare to be unfounded and argued that its oil production aligns with OPEC regulations. After liberation, Kuwait's position became more rigid towards Iraq, advocating for stringent UN sanctions and reparations to ensure Saddam's regime faced accountability.

#### *The United States of America -*

The United States took a prominent role in the Gulf War, leading a coalition of 35 countries to free Kuwait during Operation Desert Storm. Officially, the U.S. portrayed its engagement as protecting international law, sovereignty, and regional stability, stressing the importance of averting additional aggression in the oil-rich Gulf. American interests were connected to ensuring energy resources and preserving influence in the Middle East.

#### *Saudi Arabia -*

Saudi Arabia played a pivotal role as a regional partner in the coalition opposing Iraq. There was concern that Saddam Hussein's hostility might reach its borders, prompting Saudi Arabia to permit U.S. and coalition forces to utilize its land as a base for military actions. Officially, Saudi Arabia denounced Iraq's invasion as a breach of Arab unity and collaborated with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to organize regional reactions. The kingdom's choice to allow foreign troops was contentious at home, as it drew backlash from Islamist groups that opposed the presence of Western military forces in the sacred land.

#### *Iran -*

Iran adopted a cautious stance during the Gulf War. Officially, it condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as an act of aggression but refrained from fully aligning with the U.S.-led coalition due to lingering hostilities from the Iran-Iraq War. Iran's position was shaped by its strategic interest in weakening Saddam Hussein's regime while avoiding direct involvement in the conflict. Iran also used the war to rebuild relations with Gulf states, presenting itself as a stabilizing force in the region.

#### *Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) -*

The GCC, consisting of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, played a unified role in opposing Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The GCC criticized Iraq's actions and supported international efforts to restore Kuwaiti sovereignty. The council coordinated regional military and economic responses, including hosting coalition

forces and freezing Iraqi assets. The GCC viewed Iraq's aggression as a direct threat to Gulf stability, prompting cooperation with Western powers.

## Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Event
September 22nd, 1980	<b>Start of the Iran-Iraq War</b> - Iraq invades Iran, commencing an eight-year conflict over territorial disputes and ideological disparities.
August 20th, 1988	<b>End of the Iran-Iraq War</b> - A ceasefire is brokered under UN Resolution 598, but Iraq is left with massive debts, including to Kuwait.
July 25th, 1990	<b>Meeting Between Iraq and the U.S.</b> - Saddam Hussein meets U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie, misinterpreting her comments as tacit approval of his claims against Kuwait.
August 2nd, 1990	<b>Iraq Invades Kuwait</b> - Iraqi forces launched a full-scale invasion, capturing Kuwait in just hours and declaring it the 19th province of Iraq.
August 6th, 1990	<b>UNSC Resolution 661</b> - Imposes comprehensive sanctions on Iraq to pressure it to withdraw from Kuwait.
November 29th, 1990	<b>UNSC Resolution 678</b> - Authorizes using all necessary means, including military force, if Iraq does not withdraw by January 15, 1991.
January 17th, 1991	<b>Operation Desert Storm</b> - The U.S.-led coalition begins an extensive bombing campaign against Iraqi forces in Kuwait and Iraq.
February 24th, 1991	<b>Coalition Ground Offense</b> - Coalition forces launch a 100-hour ground campaign that liberates Kuwait.
February 28th, 1991	<b>Ceasefire Declared</b> - Iraq agrees to a ceasefire after the coalition liberates Kuwait, ending active hostilities in the Gulf War.

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

### *UN Security Council Resolution 660 (1990) -*

UN Security Council Resolution 660, adopted on August 2, 1990, marked the United Nations' initial formal reaction to Iraq's incursion into Kuwait. This resolution denounced Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait in the most severe terms, demanding the prompt and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwaiti land. The resolution highlighted Kuwait's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity while stressing the importance



of international peace and security. Even with the resolution's explicit terms, Iraq, under Saddam Hussein's leadership, declined to adhere to the requirements. The Iraqi authorities ignored the demand for withdrawal, signifying a crucial turning point in the crisis. Resolution 660, though notable for its quick rebuke, was deficient in the required enforcement tools to ensure Iraq's exit. This setback underscored a significant issue in the UN structure: the inadequacies of diplomatic solutions lacking a definitive enforcement mechanism. Consequently, Iraq's inaction resulted in increased tensions and harsher steps, leading to more UN Security Council resolutions that permitted military action and enforced strict sanctions. The inadequacy of Resolution 660 created a necessity for more vigorous and thorough reactions from the global community.

### *UN Sanctions and Resolutions 661 and 678 (1990-1991) -*

The UN's response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait extended beyond condemnation to include a series of sanctions and military resolutions aimed at pressuring Iraq to comply with international demands. After the invasion, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 661 on August 6, 1990, which imposed comprehensive economic and trade sanctions on Iraq. These sanctions were designed to isolate Iraq economically and force a withdrawal from Kuwait without the use of force, though they also had devastating effects on the Iraqi civilian population. Iraq's leadership remained defiant despite the sanctions, and diplomacy failed to yield the desired results. In response to Iraq's non-compliance, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 678 on November 29, 1990, which authorized the use of military force to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait if they did not withdraw by January 15, 1991. This resolution marked a critical turning point, as it gave the international coalition a legal mandate to take military action if Iraq continued its occupation of Kuwait. The deadline expired without compliance from Iraq, leading to the commencement of Operation Desert Storm on January 16, 1991. Operation Desert Storm was a successful military campaign that saw the liberation of Kuwait within weeks. The immediate result of this military intervention was the restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty and the defeat of Iraq's military forces. However, the imposition of sanctions had long-lasting consequences for Iraq. While the sanctions were effective in bringing Iraq to the negotiating table, they also contributed to severe economic hardships and civilian suffering. This financial hardship fueled resentment and anger among Iraqis and further destabilized the region.

## **Possible Solutions**

### *Establishing a Conflict Resolution Committee -*

A specialized Conflict Resolution Committee under the UN framework could address disputes related to natural resources and territorial claims in the Gulf region. The committee would operate as a neutral mediator, facilitating dialogue between Iraq and Kuwait to resolve critical points of contention, such as accusations of slant drilling in the Rumaila oil field, border demarcations, and the economic fallout of Kuwait's oil production

exceeding OPEC quotas. The committee could include representatives from affected parties, neighboring Gulf states, and international experts in international law, energy economics, and diplomacy. These experts would analyze historical claims and current grievances to propose mutually agreeable solutions. For example, the committee could explore options like revenue-sharing agreements for disputed oil fields or joint monitoring systems to ensure transparency in resource extraction.

Furthermore, the committee could establish mechanisms to monitor compliance, mediate future disputes, and implement arbitration processes to prevent escalation. Beyond resolving the immediate crisis, the committee could promote regional collaboration by fostering agreements on shared economic and environmental goals. This could include encouraging sustainable resource management practices, diversifying Gulf economies, and mitigating the risks of financial conflicts. The success of such a committee would hinge on support from key stakeholders, including Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, OPEC, and the broader international community, ensuring both political legitimacy and financial sustainability for its operations.

### *Deploying a Peacekeeping Mission -*

A UN-authorized Peacekeeping Force could play a pivotal role in stabilizing Kuwait and its surrounding borders. The force would have a multifaceted mandate, including preventing further aggression from Iraq, protecting Kuwaiti civilians, and ensuring the security of vital infrastructure, such as oil refineries and ports. This peacekeeping mission would involve deploying troops from a diverse coalition of countries to maintain neutrality and gain the trust of all parties involved. The force could establish buffer zones along the Iraq-Kuwait border to deter further conflict and monitor compliance with UN resolutions, such as those calling for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait.

Additionally, the mission could address the humanitarian impact of the conflict. This would include coordinating the safe return of displaced civilians, distributing aid to affected populations, and restoring essential services disrupted during the invasion. Demining operations would also be a critical component of the mission, ensuring that civilian areas and agricultural lands are safe for resettlement and economic use. To sustain peace and stability, the peacekeeping mission could work alongside local authorities to build governance capacity and support reconstruction efforts. This would involve rebuilding critical infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, and transportation networks, fostering a sense of normalcy and stability for Kuwaiti citizens. By maintaining strict adherence to its mandate, the peacekeeping force could demonstrate the UN's commitment to upholding international law and protecting the sovereignty of smaller states in the face of aggression.

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