

Faculty of Letters and Languages – M’sila

Department of English

Level: Master One

Course: American Civilization

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Lecture One: The Gulf War

INTRODUCTION

“In war, history is seldom generous to the vanquished, nor is it always kind to the victor”

(Kingseed, 131)

The Gulf war of 1991 was one of the most defining moments of the last century. It changed dramatically the political dynamic, of not just the Middle East, but also the world. With a one-million-man army, the fourth largest in the world, Iraq represented a major conventional power at the beginning of the Arabian Gulf conflict. In 1988, during the last major battle of the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein's troops killed 65,000 Iranians. Favored in that war by the U.S. government as the "**lesser of two evils**," the Iraqi President was shipped extraordinary amounts of sophisticated military equipment--supplied mostly by the USSR, Great Britain, and France--which comprised the arsenal targeted at Coalition forces in the Gulf War.

The First Seeds of war

The event leading to the Gulf War came in February 1990 when Hussein told members of the Arab Cooperation Council (The Arab league currently) he expected \$30 billion to cover the Gulf States' share of costs from the Iran-Iraq war. After a July 1990 meeting with Hussein, U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie reported Iraq would not use force against Kuwait. Despite assurances from Hussein, Iraqi troops invaded and occupied Kuwait on **August 2**. President George Bush declared the invasion as an act of aggression and deployed extra warships to the Gulf.

The World's reaction and Desert Shield

The United Nations condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and demanded its immediate withdrawal. In a test of its post-cold-war strength, the UN sought to build an international coalition to liberate Kuwait and to regain its leadership role against an aggressor nation. Coalition members crossed all geographic and political boundaries, even gaining the support of the Arab League to send Arab troops to Saudi Arabia. In August 1990, General Norman Schwarzkopf was named commander of Operation Desert Shield, the code name for the defensive phase of the Gulf War. Days later, a naval blockade of Iraq was mounted and all shipments of Iraqi oil were halted. In reaction, the Iraqi government announced that citizens of aggressor countries would be sent to vital military installation to be used as human shields. President Bush arranged for Secretary of State **James Baker** and Iraqi Foreign Minister **Tariq Aziz** to meet in Geneva six days before the January 15 U.N. deadline. The meeting ended in stalemate, prompting the U.S. Congress to grant President Bush the authority to wage war to enforce U.N. resolutions against Iraq.

Desert Storm and the End of the War

Operation Desert Storm officially began at 3 a.m. Baghdad time on January 17 with air strikes at early-warning radar control stations throughout Iraq. The goal of the strategic bombing campaign was to bring chaos to Iraq's ability to wage war. **The first twenty-four hours of precision air bombing saw more targets obliterated than those targeted in the 1942-43 bombing offensive in Europe, and by war's end, more bomb tonnage had been dropped on Iraq than had been dropped by U.S. forces during all of World War II.** At the height of battle, some 500,000 American troops had been deployed to the Gulf. After six weeks of bombing, half of Iraq's frontline army had deserted. The coalition ground assault met little

resistance, and on February 27, 1991, Kuwait was liberated. But the decision to end the war was controversial. Military strategists had to weigh the consequences of realizing their objectives of the war mission against the possibility that Americans would turn against the conflict if prolonged. The U.S. decision to accept the terms of cease-fire is still being debated today.

Conclusion

The Gulf War was hardly the end of United States involvement in the Middle East. Rather, it signaled that at the end of the twentieth century, the foreign policy of the United States was becoming ever-more entangled in the politics of the Middle East. Even though recent events have signaled a pullback of the US from this region, but the legacy that this war had created cannot be forgotten anytime soon.

Exercises: In a short essay discuss one of the following topics:

- 1- Do you think that Saddam Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait was justified, especially after the Arab world support for him in the Iraq-Iran war?

- 2- What was behind the US quick response to liberate Kuwait and attack Iraq, even though they supported the latter in its war with Iran just a few years earlier?

REFERENCES

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulfguide/gwbackground.html>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/modern-us/1990s-america/a/the-gulf-war>

Chronology (Britannica.com)

For a more detailed chronology consult: “CRUSADE: THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE PERSIAN GULF WAR” by Rick Atkinson

- **August 2, 1990**

Iraq invades and annexes Kuwait. The UN Security Council passes Resolution 660, condemning the invasion and demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces.

- **August 5, 1990**

U.S. President George H.W. Bush gives a speech in which he declares “this will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait.”

- **August 1990**

Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and General Norman Schwarzkopf, the commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East, initiate planning for operations to defend Saudi Arabia from a possible assault by Iraq. Troops and equipment for U.S. air and ground forces begin to arrive in Saudi Arabia.

- **October 1990**

U.S. military planners begin to plan an offensive to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

- **November 29, 1990**

The UN Security Council issues Resolution 678, calling for the use of “all necessary means” to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait if it has not done so by January 15, 1991.

- **January 9, 1991**

James Baker, the U.S. Secretary of State, meets with Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, in Geneva in a fruitless effort to resolve the crisis peacefully.

- **January 12, 1991**

With the military buildup in Saudi Arabia well under way and the January 15 deadline for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait approaching, the U.S. Congress passes a resolution authorizing the use of military force.

- **January 15, 1991**

UN Security Council deadline passes.

- **January 17, 1991**

In the early morning of January 17. The U.S. and its coalition of allies launch a campaign of air and missile attacks on targets in Iraq and Kuwait. The campaign continues for several weeks, damaging or destroying Iraq's air defenses, communications, military infrastructure, oil infrastructure, and transportation infrastructure.

- **January 18, 1991**

Iraq retaliates by firing missiles at Israel and Saudi Arabia. There are no deaths and only a few wounded. Mindful of the need to preserve the international coalition—which includes numerous Arab countries—Israel was told to refrain from retaliating.

- **Early February 1991**

U.S. and allied forces increasingly focus their attacks on Iraq's ground forces in preparation for a ground assault. Special Operations soldiers begin to infiltrate into Kuwait and Iraq.

- **February 24, 1991**

U.S. and allies begin ground offensive, crossing into Iraq and Kuwait around 4:00 AM.

- **February 25, 1991**

A Scud missile fired from Iraq destroys a barracks used by U.S. troops in Khobar, Saudi Arabia. Twenty-eight Americans are killed and about 100 are wounded.

- **February 26, 1991**

Iraqi president Saddam Hussein announces that Iraq will withdraw from Kuwait immediately but does not renounce Iraq's claim to Kuwait. U.S. and allied forces bomb a convoy of retreating Iraqi troops, killing hundreds.

- **February 27, 1991**

U.S. and allied forces enter Kuwait City. U.S. President George Bush declares the suspension of offensive combat operations against Iraq.

- **February 28, 1991**

Iraq announces that it will accept all UN resolutions regarding the conflict.

- **March 3, 1991**

Iraq accepts the terms of a cease-fire agreement presented by General Schwarzkopf.