

Records of the Persian Gulf War



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Records of the Persian Gulf War

This collection contains materials related to the diplomatic and military response by the United States (as part of a multi-national force) to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990.

Date Range: 1990-1991

Content: 49,569 images

Source Library: George H.W. Bush Presidential Library

By the time of the end of the Iraq-Iran war in August 1988, Iraq was virtually bankrupt, with most of its debt owed to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Iraq pressured both nations to forgive the debts, but they refused. Kuwait was also accused by Iraq of exceeding its OPEC quotas and driving down the price of oil, thus further hurting the Iraqi economy.

The collapse in oil prices had a catastrophic impact on the Iraqi economy. The Iraqi government described it as a form of economic warfare, which it claimed was aggravated by Kuwait's slant-drilling across the border into Iraq's Rumaila oil field. In addition, Iraq claimed Kuwait had been a part of the Ottoman Empire's province of Basra. Its ruling dynasty, the al-Sabah family, had concluded a protectorate agreement in 1899 that assigned responsibility for its foreign affairs to Britain. Britain drew the border between the two countries, and deliberately tried to limit Iraq's access to the ocean so that any future Iraqi government would be in no position to threaten Britain's domination of the Persian Gulf. Iraq refused to accept the border, and did not recognize the Kuwaiti government until 1963.

In early July 1990, Iraq condemned Kuwait's government for not respecting their oil quota, thus driving down prices, and openly threatened to take military action. On the 23rd, the Central Intelligence Agency reported that Iraq had moved 30,000 troops to the Iraq-Kuwait border, and the U.S. naval fleet in the Persian Gulf was placed on alert. On the 25th, Saddam Hussein met with April Glaspie, American ambassador, in Baghdad. At that meeting, Glaspie allegedly told the Iraqi delegation, "We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts." On the 31st, negotiations between Iraq and Kuwait in Jeddah failed.

On August 2, 1990, Iraq launched an invasion with its warplanes, bombing Kuwait City, the Kuwaiti capital. The main thrust was conducted by commandos deployed by helicopters and boats to attack the city, while other divisions seized the airports and two airbases.

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In spite of Iraqi saber-rattling, Kuwait did not have its forces on alert, and was caught unaware. After two days of intense combat, most of the Kuwaiti armed forces were either overrun by the Iraqi Republican Guard, or had escaped to neighboring Saudi Arabia. After the decisive Iraqi victory, Saddam Hussein installed his cousin, Ali Hassan al-Majid as the governor of Kuwait.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was met with international condemnation, and brought both immediate economic sanctions against Iraq by members of the UN Security Council. President George H. W. Bush deployed American forces to Saudi Arabia and urged other countries to send their own forces to the scene. An array of nations joined the “Coalition of the Gulf War.” The great majority of the military forces in the coalition were from the United States, with Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and Egypt as leading contributors.

The initial conflict to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait began with an aerial bombardment on January 17, 1991 this was followed by a ground assault on February 23. This was a decisive victory for the coalition forces, which liberated Kuwait and advanced into Iraqi territory. The coalition ceased their advance, and declared a cease-fire 100 hours after the ground campaign started. Aerial and ground combat was confined to Iraq, Kuwait, and areas on the border of Saudi Arabia. However, Iraq launched missiles against coalition military targets in Saudi Arabia.

This collection contains materials related to the diplomatic and military response by the United States (as part of a multi-national force) to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The first part of the intervention, Operation Desert Shield, took place between September 1990 and January 1991. During this operation the U.S. and a coalition of other nations committed forces to protect Saudi Arabia from further Iraqi aggression. The military campaign to drive Iraq out of Kuwait, Operation Desert Storm, commenced on January 16, 1991, immediately following the expiration of a UN Security Council Resolution demanding the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces.

Consisting of documents from several White House Office of Records Management (WHORM) Subject File categories and the Staff and Office Files, they document the Bush White House’s response to the political and military crises in the Persian Gulf. White House Office of Records Management (WHORM) Subject File categories contains correspondence, memoranda, news clippings, and brochures from the general public, Congress, and the Bush administration. WHORM Subject File categories CO072 and CO083 contain documents concerning Iraq and Kuwait, respectively Another large segment related to this subject is WHORM Subject File National Defense NDO16 (Persian Gulf War).

The Staff and Office Files contain correspondence, memoranda, and publications maintained by individual staff members and offices. A significant amount of material in this collection consists of files of the National Security Council (NSC). These documents deal with topics such as: the inspection and elimination of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction; diplomatic efforts to create the Gulf Coalition; US policy towards Iraq prior to the conflict; U.S. efforts to assist Kurdish refugees; and military operations in the Persian Gulf Theatre.