

United Nations to Iraq, 29-11-1990

United States to Iraq, 22-02-1991

Iraq had invaded and occupied Kuwait on 2 August 1990. The invasion took place after the government of Kuwait had resisted Iraqi demands that Kuwait hand over billions of dollars to help Iraq balance its bankrupt books after its war against Iran.¹ Most Arab leaders disapproved of Iraqi's actions, but disagreed over an appropriate joint response.² The US, which had remained politically aloof in the days prior to the invasion (even while its armed forces were being put on a higher level of readiness),³ immediately condemned Iraqi's actions, calling for 'the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces.'⁴ This was followed by UNSC Resolution 660 that carried a similar message, and a joint Soviet-US declaration calling for 'an international cut off of all arms supplies to Iraq.'⁵ On 5 August, US President Bush announced that he was forming an international coalition and publicly declared: 'This will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait.'⁶ Soon thereafter the US stationed forces in Operation Desert Shield in Saudi Arabia to protect the kingdom from the Iraqi invasion that it feared.⁷ In September US president Bush and Soviet President Gorbachev met in Helsinki to discuss the Iraqi presence in Kuwait.⁸ The international coalition spearheaded by the US would eventually grow to encompass thirty-nine participating states – including key Arab states such as Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia – and close to 800,000 forces at peak levels.⁹ Iraq's armed forces were estimated to number between 250,000 and 400,000, with about thirty percent of them deployed in Iraq and the other 70% in Kuwait.¹⁰ The UNSC passed multiple resolutions instituting a regime of sanctions on Iraq.¹¹ Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, however, neither budged nor changed course. Instead he tried to rally Arab support by linking the conflict over Kuwait to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In late October and early November Bush decided to send over another 200,000 forces, in addition to presenting Saddam with an ultimatum to leave Kuwait or face military action.¹² In the remainder of November diplomatic support was sought and found for a UN sponsored

¹ Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 44–50, 55–60. Ghāzī 'Abd al-Raḥmān Quṣaybī, *The Gulf Crisis: An Attempt to Understand* (Kegan Paul, 1993), 24–27.

² Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 69–72.

³ Micah L. Sifry, ed., 'The Glaspie Transcript: Saddam Meets the U.S. Ambassador (July 25, 1990)', in *Gulf War Reader* (Random House Value Publishing, 1997), 122–33. Colin L. Powell, *My American Journey* (Random House, 1995), 460–62.

⁴ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 73, 80–81, 80.

⁵ Freedman and Karsh, 73, 80–81, 80.

⁶ Thomas L. Friedman, 'The Iraqi Invasion', *The New York Times*, 6 August 1990, sec. World, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/08/06/world/iraqi-invasion-bush-hinting-force-declares-iraqi-assault-will-not-stand-proxy.html>.

⁷ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 93; Powell, *My American Journey*, 467. Goldberg, 'Saudi Arabia's Desert Storm and Winter Sandstorm', in *The Gulf Crisis and Its Global Aftermath*, ed. Gad Barzilai, Aaron S. Klieman, and Gil Shidlo (Routledge, 1993), 68–69.

⁸ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 163.

⁹ Keesing's, *Keesing's Worldwide, Approval of UN Resolution 678 Authorizing Use of Force*, p. 37870, vol. Volume 36 (LLC - All Rights Reserved Keesing's Record of World Events (formerly Keesing's Contemporary Archives), International, © 1931-2006 Keesing's Worldwide, LLC - All Rights Reserved., 1990); 'Gulf War Fast Facts - CNN.Com', CNN, 26 May 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/15/world/meast/gulf-war-fast-facts/index.html>. Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 409.

¹⁰ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 390.

¹¹ Micah L. Sifry, ed., 'The U.N. Resolutions: The Complete Text', in *Gulf War Reader* (Random House Value Publishing, 1997), 137–56.

¹² Powell, *My American Journey*, 489.

resolution which contained a deadline and a threat in case of non-compliance.¹³ After Soviet objections to including the term force, the UNSC passed resolution 678 on 29 November 1990, which read:

The Security Council [...] Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter:
Demands that Iraq comply fully with resolution 660 (1990) and all subsequent resolutions, and decides, while maintaining all its decisions, to allow Iraq one final opportunity, as a pause of goodwill, to do so;
Authorizes Member-states co-operating with the Government of Kuwait, unless Iraq on or before 15 January 1991 fully implements, as set forth in paragraph 1 above, the foregoing resolutions, to use all necessary means to uphold and implement resolution 660 (1990) and all subsequent relevant resolutions and to restore international peace and security in the area;¹⁴

In the multiple resolutions passed by the UNSC, Iraq had been summoned to cease violent hostilities, leave Kuwait, and release foreign nationals. The following day Iraqi's Revolution Command Council announced its rejection of 'the ultimatum and the threats'.¹⁵ President Bush then declared his willingness to go the 'extra mile' and offered direct peace talks between his Foreign Secretary Baker and Iraqi Foreign Minister Aziz.¹⁶ Saddam Hussein in a conciliatory gesture released a large number of international civilian hostages.¹⁷ After long haggling over the terms of the meeting, Aziz and Baker met on 9 January in Geneva.¹⁸ The Geneva talks yielded nothing: Aziz had not been authorised to compromise on anything. US President Bush condemned Iraqi's stance, calling it a total 'rebuff'.¹⁹ Under considerable pressure from Congress, Bush decided to ask US Congress for an authorisation to go to war, which was granted on 12 January.²⁰ Last minute efforts by amongst others, Egypt, France, Great Britain, Saudi Arabia, the Soviet Union, Syria and UN Secretary-General Puerrez de Cuellar failed to convince Saddam Hussein to withdraw.²¹ The deadline expired midnight on 15 January New York time and on 17 January from 03:00 am Riyadh time onwards the international coalition led by the US launched an air campaign against Iraqi targets. The campaign would last several weeks with fighter jets flying well over 2,000 sorties each day.²² In keeping the international coalition together, the US government managed to persuade its Israeli counterpart not to retaliate when Iraq fired Scud missiles at Israel.²³ But also in the face of heavy and sustained bombardment, Saddam Hussein did not cave. He called the conflict 'the mother of all battles' asserting that 'the deaths on the allied side will be increased with God's help.'²⁴ Receiving reports of a mounting number of Iraqi civilian casualties – with estimates putting these at 2,278 deaths and 5,965 injured – the populations of Arab countries started protesting against their country's participation in the coalition.²⁵ In early February, Soviet leader Gorbachev seized the initiative and attempted to broker

¹³ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 228–34.

¹⁴ Sifry, 'The U.N. Resolutions: The Complete Text', 156.

¹⁵ Keesing's, *Keesing's Worldwide, Approval of UN Resolution 678 Authorizing Use of Force*, p. 37870.

¹⁶ Keesing's.

¹⁷ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 238–40.

¹⁸ Freedman and Karsh, 240–52.

¹⁹ Micah L. Sifry, 'The Geneva Meeting (Remarks of January 9, 1991) James A. Baker 3d, Tariq Aziz, George Bush', in *Gulf War Reader* (Random House Value Publishing, 1997), 177.

²⁰ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 294.

²¹ Freedman and Karsh, 267–74, 295.

²² Freedman and Karsh, 301.

²³ Powell, *My American Journey*, 511–12.

²⁴ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 363.

²⁵ Freedman and Karsh, 324–29.

a deal – with Soviet representatives scuttling between Moscow and Baghdad.²⁶ On 21 February it was reported that Iraq was willing to comply with UNSC resolution 660 and withdraw from Kuwait two days after a cease fire was in place. In return all sanctions were to be lifted, subsequent UNSC resolutions were to be rendered void and all prisoners of war released.²⁷ Gorbachev presented the proposal to Bush. The evening of 21 February Bush consulted with his war cabinet and rather than accepting the proposal it was decided to reclaim the initiative by issuing an ultimatum the next day which was to be discussed first with the governments of France and Great Britain. The US military leadership was in favour of a short time window with a maximum of 24 hours, but both allies were pushing for a deadline of a week. In the early hours, reports emerged that Iraqi forces were setting Kuwaiti oil wells afire, instilling a greater sense of urgency in US decision makers.²⁸ The morning of 22 February at 10.40 am New York time, President Bush declared:

The coalition will give Saddam Hussein until noon Saturday to do what he must do – begin his immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait. We must hear publicly and authoritatively his acceptance of these terms.²⁹

The subsequent publication of these terms declared:

that a ground campaign will not be initiated against Iraqi forces if, prior to noon, Saturday, February 23, New York time, Iraq publicly accepts the following terms and authoritatively communicates that acceptance to the United Nations.³⁰

The terms included the full scale withdrawal of forces from Kuwait City within 48 hours, and from Kuwait and borders with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait within one week; the release of all prisoners of war and civilians within 48 hours; the removal of all explosives and sharing of all operational details concerning Iraqi withdrawal; the halting of all flights over Kuwaiti airspace (except for the repatriation of troops); and the peaceful treatment of Kuwaiti nationals and assets. In return, Iraqi forces were guaranteed a safe retreat. Failure to comply on the other hand would prompt a military response from coalition forces.³¹ Saddam Hussein did not accept these terms and on 24 February at 04:00 am Riyadh time, coalition forces invaded Kuwait starting operation Desert Sabre.³² Three days after the beginning of the ground campaign, after overwhelming military success for the coalition forces, the Iraqi government communicated to the UNSC that it was willing to abide by the terms of the resolutions.³³ On 27 February at 9 p.m. Bush declared that the ground campaign – whose total duration would eventually be one hundred hours – would come to an end later that day, calling it ‘a victory for the United Nations, for all mankind, for the rule of law, and for what is right.’³⁴ The international coalition had achieved practically all its objectives at considerable human cost. Fatalities numbered 240 for the international coalition versus a roughly estimated 35,000 for Iraq – 10,000 of which were claimed during the land war. Of the forty-three Iraqi divisions operational

²⁶ Yitzhak Klein, ‘Soviet Policy during the Gulf Crisis’, in *The Gulf Crisis and Its Global Aftermath*, ed. Gad Barzilai, Aaron S. Klieman, and Gil Shidlo (Routledge, 1993), 201–3.

²⁷ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 382.

²⁸ Freedman and Karsh, 383–84.

²⁹ Micah L. Sifry, ‘The Ultimatum (Statement of February 22, 1991) - George Bush’, in *Gulf War Reader* (Random House Value Publishing, 1997), 350.

³⁰ US Department of State, ‘Ensuring Iraqi Compliance with the UN Mandate’, *US Department of State Dispatch* 2 pt1 (25 February 1991): 125.

³¹ US Department of State.

³² Powell, *My American Journey*, 517.

³³ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 401.

³⁴ Freedman and Karsh, 405–6. Powell, *My American Journey*, 521–24. For the quote, see Micah L. Sifry, ‘Kuwait Is Liberated (Speech of February 27, 1991) - George Bush’, in *Gulf War Reader* (Random House Value Publishing, 1997), 449.

prior to the war, only seven remained.³⁵ The terms of the cease fire proposed by Bush were codified and ratified by the Iraqi government in the Safwan Accords in early March.³⁶ Saddam Hussein had survived and had managed to hold on to the reins of power.³⁷ Saddam's policies were to remain a bone of international contention that would re-appear in the future as a source of discord between Iraq and a coalition of states spearheaded by the US.

³⁵ Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*, 408–9.

³⁶ Freedman and Karsh, 407. Alfred B. Prados, "Iraq: Post-War Challenges and US Responses, 1991-1998," in *CRS Report for Congress. Congressional Research Service*, 1999, 1–2, <http://fas.org/man/crs/98-386.pdf>.

³⁷ Efraim Karsh, 'Survival at All Costs - Saddam Hussein as Crisis Manager', in *The Gulf Crisis and Its Global Aftermath*, ed. Gad Barzilai, Aaron S. Klieman, and Gil Shidlo (Routledge, 1993), 51–66.