

Iraqi invasion of Kuwait-International Response

Iraq invaded and overran Kuwait on Aug. 2 and by the end of August had completely absorbed Kuwait into its administrative structure, despite the international condemnation of the invasion. Shortly after the invasion United States troops, backed up by forces from various European, Arab and Asian countries, were quickly dispatched to Saudi Arabia in an attempt to shield the kingdom from Iraqi assault and to impress upon President Saddam Hussein of Iraq that he should withdraw his troops from Kuwait.

The invasion, and the subsequent entry of US forces into Saudi Arabia, had a massive impact on Arab regional politics, causing alliances and antagonisms to shift and crumble. The Iraqi move was the culmination of several months of incident in the Middle East which appeared to be aimed at building up Saddam Hussein's anti- Western and anti-Israeli credentials whilst at the same time confirming Iraq's regional ascendancy [see pp. 37332; 37390; 37471]. For many Arabs the invasion of Kuwait confirmed Saddam as the foremost pan- Arab nationalist leader and the first Arab ruler since Egypt's Abdel Gamal Nasser who was fully prepared to stand up to the USA.

Tension between Iraq and OPEC over-producers

Tension between Iraq and Kuwait came to the world's attention in mid-July when Saddam Hussein launched a fierce attack on the policy of those Gulf states, principally Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), whose over-production of oil he blamed for a corresponding slump in world oil prices.

The 13-member Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) had made little headway in curbing over-production during 1990. The problem had been high on the agenda of an OPEC ministerial meeting held in Vienna in mid-March [see p. 37335], but both Kuwait and the UAE had refused to agree to production cuts. In early May OPEC oil ministers met in emergency session in Geneva [see p. 37475] and an agreement was reached on cutting production, but the Paris-based International Energy Agency, in its June 5 report, said that OPEC output actually fell only by 400,000 barrels a day (bpd) in May, a figure which was wholly attributable to cuts in Saudi Arabian production and which was far short of the 1,450,000 bpd reduction pledged at the OPEC emergency meeting. As other reports confirmed OPEC's failure to implement the production cuts, oil prices fell. The "marker" price of Brent crude, the most widely traded North Sea crude, was US\$15.60 per barrel as of June 5, compared with \$17.50 on April 24 and \$19.60 on Feb. 20.

In late June the OPEC president, Saddek Boussena, embarked on a tour of some member states in an attempt to encourage cuts in production ahead of the next OPEC ministerial meeting scheduled to take place in Geneva in late July. Boussena's tour coincided with a series of visits by Sa'adoun Hammadi, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, to Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, during which he pressed vigorously for cuts in production to be implemented. Breaking with normal protocol he was openly critical of Gulf over-producers, claiming that every \$1.00 fall in the price of oil lost Iraq \$1,000 million a year. A report in the *Middle East Economic Digest* of July 13 stated that if prices held at the July 3 level (\$16.03 per barrel of Brent and \$13.75 per barrel of Dubai crude) then Iraq's current-account deficit for 1990 would be US\$3,500 million; however, if the OPEC reference price of \$18 a barrel, introduced in 1987, was achieved then the 1990 deficit would be halved.

The oil ministers of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE met in the Saudi city of Jeddah on July 10-11 and an agreement was reached on curbing over-production. Kuwait and the UAE agreed to reduce their output to 1,500,000 bpd each until the reference price was restored. This represented a cut in actual output for Kuwait of some 300,000 bpd and for the UAE of 400,000 bpd.

Less than a week after the Jeddah agreement on over-production had been reached, Iraq launched a concerted, public attack on the policies of Kuwait and the UAE. The offensive was begun on July 17 by Saddam Hussein during a speech to mark the 22nd anniversary of the "July 17-30 Revolution". Saddam threatened that "if words fail to protect Iraqis, something effective must be done to return things to their natural course and return usurped rights to their owners". He accused some (unnamed) Arab states of undermining Arab interests and security on behalf of the USA and warned that Iraq "will not forget the saying that cutting necks is better than cutting the means of living". On the following day Iraq radio broadcast details of a memorandum, dated July 15, which had been sent by the Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz to the Arab League Secretary-General Chedli Klibi. This memorandum elaborated on a number of points raised by Saddam in his Revolution Day speech.

In his memorandum Aziz accused Kuwait of having deliberately pursued policies aimed at weakening Iraq during the latter's eight-year war with Iran. During the war, Aziz claimed, Kuwait had advanced into Iraqi territory and had set up military establishments and oil installations. Since the outbreak of the Gulf war in 1980, he stated, Kuwait had stolen vast amounts of oil from the southern section of the Rumalla oilfield. Based on prices between 1980 and 1990, Aziz estimated that Kuwait had stolen oil worth US\$2,400 million and he claimed that Iraq had every right to "retrieve" these funds.

Aziz characterized the Gulf war as a "pan- Arab battle in which Iraq had assumed the responsibility of defending pan- Arab security as well as the Gulf region in particular". During the war the Gulf states had provided Iraq with interest-free loans which, Aziz pointed out, were still recorded by Kuwait and the UAE as debts. After the 1988 ceasefire agreement Iraq had attempted, unsuccessfully, to have these debts cancelled. During the war Iraq's oil production had fallen dramatically, and to meet the shortage production had been increased elsewhere in the Gulf. Therefore, he reasoned, "a simple calculation will show that the UAE and Kuwaiti loans to Iraq were not entirely from their treasuries but from the increases in their oil revenues as a result of the drop in Iraqi oil exports over the war years". Had there been a genuine sense of Arabism during the post-war period, Aziz went on, then the Gulf States would not only have cancelled Iraq's debts, but would also have organized a comprehensive Iraqi reconstruction plan.

On the issue of over-production, Aziz accused Kuwait and the UAE of recently implementing an "international scheme to glut the oil market" by exceeding their quotas. As a result of this policy the Arab states as a whole had lost about US\$25,000 million since 1987 through falling oil prices. For Iraq, the effect had been particularly severe, occurring at a time when the country was suffering a financial crisis as a result of having fought a war against Iran on behalf of all Arabs.

Escalation of dispute

Saddam's speech and Aziz's memorandum were greeted with alarm in Kuwait. On July 18 the Kuwaiti Army was placed on a state of alert and the recently elected National Council [see p. 37549] held an emergency session in camera to study the Iraqi charges. Shortly afterwards the Council issued a statement denouncing the Iraqi memorandum.

A memorandum drawn up by the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry on July 18, and sent to the Arab League the next day, stated that the Iraqi charges had "no factual basis". Allegations that Kuwait had moved into Iraqi territory were "a falsification of reality and a resumé of inverted truths" because it was Iraq which had a "full history of violations of Kuwaiti territories". The memorandum called for the formation of an Arab League committee to arbitrate on any disputed sections of the Iraq-Kuwait border. On July 18 the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, Shaikh Sabah al Ahmed al Jabir as Sabah, set out on an emergency tour of Kuwait's five Gulf Co- operation Council (GCC) partners (Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE). Other Kuwaiti ministers were sent to the remaining Arab League countries, with the exception of Iraq. Meanwhile, the events of July 17–18 motivated a number of Arab leaders to launch mediation efforts. On July 18 King Fahd ibn Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia and President Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen both contacted Saddam and the Amir of Kuwait, Shaikh Jabir al Ahmad al Jabir as Sabah.

Chedli Klibi visited Kuwait on July 20–21 for talks aimed at calming the rapidly escalating situation. After meeting with Klibi on July 21 Shaikh Sabah appeared optimistic of a peaceful settlement, stating that "what is between the brothers in Iraq and Kuwait is merely a summer cloud which will go away". On July 22 Tariq Aziz travelled to Cairo for talks with the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and the following day the two held a further round of talks in Alexandria with King Hussein of Jordan. At a press conference after the meeting Mubarak expressed his confidence that Kuwait and Iraq would "arrive at a comfortable and calm, quiet solution". Meanwhile, Kuna, the official Kuwaiti news agency, had reported on July 22 that the Egyptians had put forward a four-point plan to settle the dispute, which would ultimately involve a conference of the major Arab states.

In Iraq, government-controlled newspapers intensified their attacks on Kuwait on July 23. In the first personalized attack of the Iraqi media campaign *Al-Thawra*, the newspaper of the ruling *Baath* Party, accused Shaikh Sabah of working as a US agent.

President Mubarak visited Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia on July 24, and on his return to Egypt the following day he announced that Iraqi and Kuwaiti delegations would meet in Jeddah in late July. Mubarak also announced that Saddam had assured him that Iraq had no intention of attacking Kuwait or of moving forces towards the Kuwaiti border.

This assurance had been given in the light of US reports on July 24 claiming that Iraq had advanced two armoured divisions totalling about 30,000 soldiers towards the Kuwaiti border. On the same day US forces in the Gulf had started hastily arranged joint exercises with the UAE Navy. In general, the US response to

the dispute had been very muted, reflecting the prevailing view in the West that the Iraqi campaign against Kuwait was primarily a scare tactic timed for the start of the OPEC conference in Geneva.

OPEC meeting Agreement to raise reference price

Oil ministers from the OPEC countries met in Geneva on July 26–27 where they quickly reached an agreement on oil production and pricing. The ministers agreed to raise the minimum reference price of crude by \$3 to \$21 a barrel for the period to the end of 1990. At the same time it was agreed to limit total output to 22,491,000 bpd, a modest increase on the previous ceiling of 22,086,000 bpd. The only country to have its individual quota raised was the UAE (from 1,095,000 bpd to Kuwait's level of 1,500,000 bpd, set at the November 1989 OPEC meeting–37053). Analysts expressed the opinion that, unlike previous agreements, the Geneva accord was credible, largely because Iraq had shown itself willing to adopt the role of an OPEC "enforcer" to curb over-production.

During the conference Iraq, supported by Libya, had argued for a minimum reference price of \$25 a barrel, Venezuela had been the most outspoken critic of the Iraqi position, arguing to maintain the existing price of \$18 a barrel. The Saudi Arabians, who had been expected to support Venezuela, adopted a low key approach, leading most commentators to suggest that they had been intimidated by Iraq's belligerence. Iran, meanwhile, had argued for a compromise price of \$23 a barrel.

Talks between Iraq and Kuwait which had originally been due to take place in Jeddah on July 28–29 were delayed until July 31. Meanwhile, tension in the Gulf continued to rise despite frantic mediation efforts by King Hussein, the Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al Faisal, and the PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat. Iraqi media reports prior to the meeting were uncompromising and blunt; the daily *al-Jumhuriya* reported on July 30 that Iraq was attending the Jeddah talks to "retain its rights and not to hear new talks about 'fraternity and solidarity' which yield nothing". On the day on which the talks eventually opened the *Washington Post* reported that six Iraqi divisions totalling 100,000 soldiers were concentrated along the border with Kuwait.

The Iraqi delegation at the Jeddah talks was led by Izzat Ibrahim, Vice-Chair of the powerful Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). The Kuwaiti delegation was headed by Prime Minister and Crown Prince Shaikh Saad al Abdullah as Salim as Sabah. The two sides held one two-hour session late on July 31, after which the talks were suspended. The Iraqi delegation left abruptly for Baghdad the next day, and Sa'adoun Hammadi announced that the talks had collapsed because the Kuwaitis had not shown any serious willingness to tackle the "major damage inflicted on Iraq". However, a Kuwaiti official told reporters that the talks had collapsed "because Kuwait did not give in to Iraqi demands to write off debts and to relinquish some of its territory". According to a report in the *International Herald Tribune* of Aug. 1, it was likely that Iraq's "maximum demands" at Jeddah had included up to US\$10,000 million in aid; \$2,400 million in compensation for "stolen" oil; the cancellation of \$10,000 million in debts; the renunciation of Kuwaiti claims to the southern section of the Rumalla oil field; and a long-term lease on the islands of Bubiyan and Warba, both of which lay off Iraq's short Gulf coast. Bubiyan and Warba were of great strategic importance since Basra, Iraq's main port, remained inoperative because of a lack of agreement with Iran over the Shatt al- Arab waterway linking Basra with the Gulf.

Kuwait had been wary of Iraqi territorial ambitions ever since it gained independence from the UK in 1961. Less than a week after achieving full independence on June 19 [see p. 18159], Kuwait was threatened by a claim to sovereignty over the whole of its territory by the Iraqi leader, Gen. Abdul Karim Kassem. Gen. Kassem asserted that Kuwait had been an integral component of the southern Iraqi province of Basra under Ottoman rule and that Iraq had succeeded to Turkish territorial sovereignty over Basra with the dissolution of the Ottoman empire after the First World War. Kassem failed to win international support for his claim and was deterred from pursuing it militarily by the swift dispatch of British and Arab League forces to Kuwait [see pp. 18187-90; 18355; 18934], he was toppled in a bloody *Baath*- Nationalist coup in 1963, after which the new Iraqi government recognized Kuwaiti sovereignty [see p. 19668]. Kuwait was thought to have made a major financial grant to the new Iraqi regime as an incentive to improve relations, which, whilst remaining peaceful during the 1960s, were nevertheless marred by a dispute centring on Iraq's interest in Bubiyan and Warba. Iraqi possession of the islands would afford it greatly increased access to the Gulf. In 1973 Iraqi forces occupied Kuwaiti territory near the islands, but quickly withdrew in the face of widespread Arab disapproval. Iraq's expansion of the port of Umm Qasr and the development of the Rumalla oil field during the 1970s meant that a settlement of the dispute became a prime Iraqi objective. During negotiations Iraq proposed that it would recognize all of Kuwait's land borders in return for full rights to Warba island and the lease of half of Bubiyan. But, despite a series of negotiations, demarcation was never accomplished. The rise to power of Saddam Hussein and the subsequent outbreak of the Gulf

war in 1980 led to a revival of the Iraqi claim to the islands. However, while the eight-year war was under way Iraq was receiving substantial financial assistance from Kuwait and hence never fully pressed the claim.

Iraq launched its invasion of Kuwait on Aug. 2 at 2.00 a.m. (local time), when of the 100,000 Iraqi troops massed on Kuwait's northern border an estimated 30,000 soldiers, including elite Republican Guards, crossed in the first assault. Despite the increased tension between Kuwait and Iraq during late July, Iraq's invasion appeared to take the small Kuwaiti Armed Forces by surprise. Iraqi troops advanced swiftly across the desert, encountering only minor artillery resistance, and entered the capital, Kuwait City, at around 7.00 a.m. The advancing ground troops were provided with substantial air support, with fighter bombers attacking key installations in and around the city, including the airport. In Kuwait City itself the Iraqi forces met some opposition from elite troops guarding the Amir's palace and from troops stationed in Army and Air Force barracks situated on the city's outskirts. The Amir and the Crown Prince had both been transported by helicopter to Saudi Arabia at an early stage of the invasion.

By mid-afternoon Iraqi troops had taken control of most of Kuwait City centre, although fierce fighting continued well into the evening at Shuwaikh, the main Army barracks north of the capital. Iraqi forces also landed on Bubiyan and Warba islands. Early reports suggested that between 100 and 200 people were killed during the invasion, including the Amir's half-brother, Shaikh Fahd al-Ahmad al Sabah. However, later reports indicated that the casualty toll might have been much higher. The *Independent* of Aug. 7, for instance, claimed that fighting between Iraqi forces and the Kuwait Maghaweer brigade at Al Jahra barracks on Aug. 2 had resulted in over 1,000 deaths.

Iraq claimed that its troops had been invited into Kuwait by internal "revolutionaries" who had launched a coup against the Amir, a claim which was internationally repudiated. A pro-Iraqi "Provisional Free Kuwaiti Government" (PFKG) began broadcasting soon after the invasion. In its first communiqués the PFKG announced that it had replaced the "defunct and corrupt" al Sabah regime and had closed Kuwait's borders and imposed an indefinite curfew.

Iraqi radio broadcasts on Aug. 2 warned against foreign intervention in Iraq and Kuwait; in one report the RCC threatened to "turn Kuwait into a graveyard" if any country was "moved by the lust of invasion". At the same time Iraq closed its land borders and air space and ordered 15 infantry and armoured divisions, disbanded after the 1988 ceasefire agreement with Iran, to be re-formed. Saddam also called for the creation of 11 new divisions, and on Aug. 4, for the expansion of the Popular Army militia to serve in both Iraq and Kuwait. The Iraqi newspaper *Al-Iraq* reported on Aug. 23 that the number of volunteers for the Popular Army had reached almost 5,000,000.

In Iraq itself mass demonstrations were held on Aug. 2 to celebrate the invasion. However, some reports suggested that there had been opposition to Saddam's decision to invade. The Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* of Aug. 3 reported that 120 Iraqi officers had been executed for refusing to support the invasion, a claim confirmed by Arab diplomats arriving in Syria from Kuwait in late August. Some Western reports claimed that Iraqi troops had been told that they were invading Israel and were deeply distressed when they found themselves in another Arab state. However, there were hardly any reports of mass defections, one exception being an account by Western diplomats of 12 Iraqi soldiers crossing into Saudi Arabia in mid-August. On Aug. 16 the Egyptian news agency MENA reported that an abortive coup attempt had been launched in Baghdad on the previous day and that "large scale arrests" had taken place. Meanwhile, on Aug. 25 Western intelligence reports indicated that the Iraqis had started to move northwards units of the Republican Guard Corp forces which had led the initial invasion. The US NBC television network claimed that the redeployments were linked to internal divisions in Baghdad.

Kuwaiti response and resistance to invasion

The civilian population in Kuwait appeared to be stunned by the invasion, and although some immediately tried to escape into Saudi Arabia most simply remained in their homes. Some reports suggested that the invasion was supported by large numbers of the estimated 400,000 Palestinian workers in Kuwait, all of whom had previously been denied Kuwaiti citizenship despite constituting the backbone of the country's middle-management structure. Over 1,000,000 other expatriates lived in Kuwait, more than half of whom were south or south-east Asian.

The deposed Kuwaiti government established its base in the Saudi mountain resort of Taif, although the Amir and his ministers spent much of their time travelling the world to bolster opposition to the invasion. Resistance within Kuwait was initially sporadic but became increasingly organized during August. However, the resistance or *al Muquwama* posed little threat to the Iraqis, consisting in the main of poorly

armed civilian-led neighbourhood committees. A resistance radio station, *Huna Kuwait* ("This Is Kuwait"), broadcast intermittently in Kuwait.

Actions of Iraqi forces in Kuwait-Alleged build-up of troops on Saudi border

Reports on the conduct of the Iraqi troops in Kuwait varied. Some highlighted the brutality of the Iraqis, focusing on allegations of mass rape of expatriate women. Other reports claimed that the Iraqi forces were generally well behaved, and that many soldiers had apologized to the civilian population for the invasion. According to some sources the situation had deteriorated when Popular Army units entered Iraq soon after the invasion. Looting was certainly widespread, but a major part of it appeared to be organized by the Iraqi government. The *New York Times* of Aug. 14 reported that Iraq had transferred between US\$3,000 million and \$5,000 million in gold, foreign currency and goods from Kuwait and that this had significantly increased Iraq's financial reserves which had stood at an estimated US\$6,500 million before the invasion. However, in a warning to looters Iraqi television broadcast on Aug. 16 pictures of an executed Iraqi officer hanging above his looted booty in Kuwait City.

The invading Iraqi forces had been accompanied by *mukhabarat* (military intelligence) officers who immediately began rounding up Iraqi opposition exiles in Kuwait City. The roundup was centred on the predominantly Shia Moslem Bnaid al-Gar district and communist and fundamentalist Shia opposition figures were particularly targeted.

In a broadcast on Aug. 3 the RCC stated that plans had been drawn up to begin a withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait on Aug. 5. However, at the time of the broadcast Iraqi forces were still working to secure complete control of Kuwait City, as well as of the country's ports and oil terminals.

Meanwhile, the world's attention was focused on Saudi Arabia. US State Department reports on Aug. 3 had alleged that Iraqi forces had been spotted by reconnaissance aircraft massing on the Saudi border in preparation for a possible invasion. Iraq categorically denied such reports, but they persisted in the West and one US news agency reported later in the day that Iraqi troops had actually crossed into the Kuwaiti-Saudi Neutral Zone. Saudi forces were placed on red alert and the USA issued statements warning Iraq not to launch an attack on Saudi Arabia.

Formation of PFKG-Iraqi "withdrawal" claims

Details of the membership of the new "Provisional Free Kuwait Government" (PFKG) were released for the first time on Aug. 4. Kuwaiti officials in exile claimed that the new junta was composed entirely of Iraqis and that the new Prime Minister, Col. Alaa Hussain Ali, was in fact Saddam Hussein's son-in-law. A number of prominent Kuwait opposition figures were reportedly arrested by the Iraqi forces after refusing to participate in the new government.

Iraq announced on Aug. 5 that it had started to withdraw its forces from Kuwait, a claim which prompted US President George Bush publicly to denounce Saddam Hussein as a liar. The Kuwait embassy in Jordan described the withdrawal as little more than a manoeuvre to disguise the theft of Kuwaiti military equipment. On the same day the PFKG partially lifted the curfew imposed on Aug. 2 and urged key workers to return to their jobs. The curfew was reduced even further on Aug. 17.