



TIMELINE The U.S. and Iraq

August 1990

Iraq invades Kuwait, prompting broad international outrage. President George H.W. Bush vows to respond; within weeks, U.S. troops begin arriving in neighboring Saudi Arabia.

January 16, 1991

Leading a coalition of 32 nations, including Britain, France, Canada, Spain, Egypt, Syria, and Pakistan, the U.S. launches Operation Desert Storm to liberate Kuwait.

February 1991

After defeating Iraqi forces, the U.S. opts not to press on to Baghdad, leaving Saddam Hussein in power. As a condition of surrender, Iraq agrees to destroy all weapons of mass destruction (W.M.D.'s).

1996

Osama bin Laden issues a "declaration of war" against the U.S., citing the presence of "infidel" American troops in Saudi Arabia, the Muslim holy land, as part of the reason.

TIMES PAST

1991

The War

The Persian Gulf War, launched 20 years ago next month, helped shape America's involvement in the Middle East today

BY PATRICIA SMITH



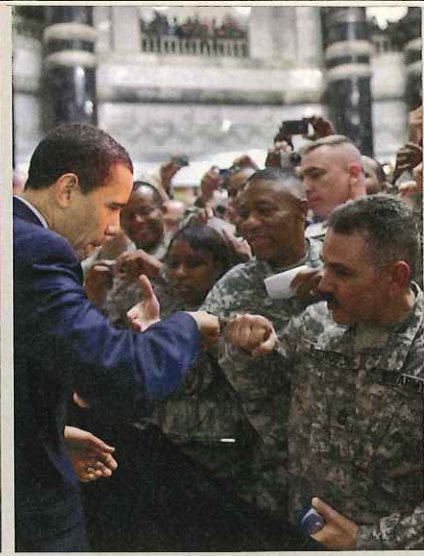
The war that first introduced Americans to Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein—and may have given Osama bin Laden a reason to attack the United States—began on Jan. 17, 1991.

American and coalition forces, responding to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, bombed Iraqi targets and troops for a month. By the time the ground war began on Feb. 24, Saddam Hussein's forces were so decimated that it took just 100 hours to oust them from Kuwait and trounce the remnants of Iraq's once-mighty military.

The Persian Gulf War, fought 20 years ago next month, turned out to be one of the swiftest wars in U.S. history.

But its effects still linger: Because Saddam Hussein remained in power, the Gulf War is now seen as a prelude to the second Iraq War, which began in 2003—and is still winding down more than seven years later.

With reporting by Bernard Gwertzman



1998

Iraq refuses to continue to cooperate with the U.N. inspection teams set up after the Gulf War to ensure that Iraq's W.M.D.'s are destroyed.

2001

The 9/11 attacks on the U.S. by bin Laden's Al Qaeda terrorist group kill almost 3,000 people. In response, the U.S. invades Afghanistan, which had harbored Al Qaeda.

2003

President George W. Bush orders an invasion of Iraq, to oust Saddam Hussein and destroy his W.M.D.'s, which were never found.

2010

President Obama withdraws remaining U.S. combat troops from Iraq, leaving 50,000 troops behind to train Iraqi forces and conduct counterterrorism operations.

Before the War

The Gulf War also set the stage for the current war in Afghanistan and America's broader battle against Islamic terrorism: The presence of "infidel" U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia during the 1990s helped radicalize Osama bin Laden and the other leaders of Al Qaeda, who vowed to target America at home and abroad.

"The Gulf War's aftermath planted the seeds for Al Qaeda, since bin Laden's main grievance grows out of the Gulf War," says Robert Jervis, a political science professor at Columbia University.

'This Will Not Stand'

Most Americans weren't paying much attention when Saddam Hussein maneuvered his way to power in Iraq in 1979. After a bloody eight-year-long war with Iran ended in 1988 without a victory, Hussein set his sights on Kuwait, a small country on Iraq's southern border with huge oil reserves. Claiming Kuwait was actually part of Iraq, Hussein ordered Iraqi forces to

invade on Aug. 1, 1990 (*see timeline*). They quickly occupied the country.

The United Nations immediately condemned the invasion and demanded that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait. Within a few days it imposed sanctions on Iraq to try to force its withdrawal.

The administration of President George H.W. Bush was caught by surprise. The U.S. had no treaty obligations to defend Kuwait. But Saudi Arabia, which suddenly had Iraqi troops on its border, was a long-time key U.S. ally—and the world's largest oil producer.

A few days later, President Bush told reporters: "This will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait." The U.S. calculation was that any threat to Saudi Arabia was too dangerous to contemplate.

At first, the U.S. priority was to send enough troops and air power to defend Saudi Arabia against a possible Iraqi invasion, leaving undecided the issue of whether the U.S. should also seek to liberate Kuwait.

By October 31, the U.S. had enough forces in Saudi Arabia—about 250,000—to defend that country. But at a White House meeting, General Colin Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the President that if he decided to go ahead with the liberation of Kuwait, U.S. forces would need to be doubled. This call for the use of overwhelming force became known as the "Powell doctrine."

Bush decided if sanctions did not work and the Iraqis were still in Kuwait in three months, the U.S. would go to war.

The Bush administration used that time to build broad international support for the plan. Secretary of State James Baker spent weeks traveling in Europe and the Middle East to make the case for war. He secured the support of many countries—allies like Britain, France, and Canada, but also key Arab nations like Egypt and Syria—for forcing Iraq from Kuwait.

"A remarkable job was done assembling basically a coalition of the whole world," says Wade Hinkle of the Institute



U.S. Marines in Kuwait with flaming oil wells in the background; Iraqi forces set Kuwait's oil fields on fire before retreating in February 1991.

for Defense Analyses. "It was a tremendous success for American diplomacy, really having the world act as one united voice."

On November 29, the United Nations Security Council voted 12-2 to authorize "all necessary means" to liberate Kuwait.

On Jan. 9, 1991, Iraq rejected an ultimatum from Bush to leave Kuwait. One week later, the U.S. launched the first round of air strikes on Iraqi targets and troop concentrations in Iraq and Kuwait. The Bush administration dubbed the war effort "Operation Desert Storm."

Live on CNN

On February 24, the ground invasion began. Hussein had promised "the mother of all battles," but by then Iraqi troops were dispirited by the bombing campaign. Instead of the bitter fighting predicted by General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, the war was essentially over in a few days. Kuwait was liberated.

The White House called it "the 100-hour war"—all carried live by CNN, then a fledgling all-news channel. It was the first war with instantaneous news coverage, and many Americans were glued to their TVs, watching the action unfold live.

The U.N. mandate called only for the liberation of Kuwait, and there was no enthusiasm in Washington for pushing on to Baghdad,

with the ensuing carnage sure to be shown in real time to viewers around the globe.

Furthermore, the Bush administration believed its grand international coalition would quickly crumble if the objective were expanded to ousting Saddam Hussein. The White House declared victory and began sending troops home. Realizing he was safe, Hussein retaliated against his opponents, murdering thousands as U.S. troops looked on and did nothing.

But the U.S. did leave about 5,000 troops

in Saudi Arabia. The presence of those troops, even with the support of the Saudi government, became a provocation for radical Muslims.

Five years later, Osama bin Laden issued a declaration of war against the U.S., in which he cited the presence of U.S. troops in the Muslim holy land as his main grievance. On Sept. 11, 2001, bin Laden made good on his threats, launching coordinated attacks in New York and Washington that killed almost 3,000 people and stunned the world.

In response, the U.S. launched the war in Afghanistan, where the 9/11 attacks had been planned and where Al Qaeda was then based.

Unfinished Business

Ten years after the Gulf War, George W. Bush—the son of George H.W. Bush—became President. It wasn't long before the new President Bush began talking about the threat Saddam Hussein still posed to the U.S.

President Bush's decision in 2003 to once again go to war against Iraq to eliminate the threat of its weapons of mass destruction—a threat that was later found to be unfounded—had a lot to do with his father's failure to eliminate Saddam Hussein in 1991.

The administration also spoke of the need for "regime change" in Baghdad and the benefits of establishing a democratic government there. Underlying it all was the feeling that the Gulf War had left the job unfinished.

But the Iraq War—which had much broader objectives than the Gulf War and a much smaller coalition of backers that included no Middle Eastern countries—turned out to be far more complicated. After the initial quick victory, the occupation dragged on and the U.S. soon found itself mired in battling a growing insurgency.

In July, President Obama withdrew the last of U.S. combat troops from Iraq. At the same time, the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, which remains dangerously unstable, was increased.

Thinking back to the Gulf War, Stephen Biddle of the Council on Foreign Relations says, "It was remarkably common conventional wisdom that it was a mistake not to have gone all the way to Baghdad and deposed Saddam."

But after seven years of bloody fighting in Iraq, views have changed. "The reasons the administration didn't do it look prescient today," Biddle adds. "It's remarkable how much the conventional wisdom has turned." ●

Battling Iraq

	Persian Gulf War	Iraq War
Began	1991	2003
Code Name	Operation Desert Storm	Operation Iraqi Freedom
President	George H.W. Bush	George W. Bush
Duration	42 days	7 years
U.S. Troops Killed	293	4,421

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, IRAQ WAR CASUALTY NUMBERS AS OF NOV. 15, 2010.