

Winners and Losers, Ten Years After The Gulf War

Carl Max KORTEPETER

New York University

Summary

In this paper, I shall study the problem of winners and losers in the Gulf War in four parts: 1- The Balance of Powers in the Middle East and their Resources

1-prior to the war;

2-Coalition Formation and the Execution of the War;

3-Immediate and Developing Problems after the War;

4-Projected Longer Term Outcomes of the War.

Initially I shall look into the ambiguous relationships of Iraq, Iran and other M.E. players with the United States and the former colonial powers since World War II. From this baseline, I shall attempt to clarify the coalitions and the devastation of the War. In the third phase, I wish to throw some light on the problems Iraq now faces, and the problems the entire region must deal with as a result of the sanctions against Iraq. Finally I shall make some observations about what might happen in the region as other Great Power players assume important roles in the region.

Power Bases in The Middle East in 1990

In the central Middle Eastern lands in the year 1990, there were six countries possessing what we might term "Middle Range Power," based on such factors as a strong army, close relations with the U.S., or financial stability because of oil wealth. These countries included Israel, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Egypt. Israel, Turkey and Egypt, basically surrogates of the U.S., depended heavily on U.S. subsidies, military equipment and special trade agreements. Iran, after the Khomeini revolution in 1979, had attempted to inflame the Middle East against the "Great Satan," the United States, and hence was on the U.S. list of outlaw nations. For this reason, when the Iran and Iraq War broke out in 1981, the U.S. sided with Iraq and supplied Saddam Husain with chemical, biological and military weapons and also fed Iraq strategic information on the Iranian military. This led to Iran's suing for peace in 1988 even though it was basically a stronger and more populous state. It is also ironic to observe that both Iraq and Iran were oil-rich states, and both states greatly decreased oil production during the war.

American oil companies were pleased because their decreased production meant that U.S. companies would receive higher prices for their inefficient wells.

II. The Occupation of Kuwait and The Shift in Alliances

Whether or not, in hindsight, the United States was simply lax in recognizing an Iraqi threat to Kuwait or indeed conspired to suck Iraq into a trap, one cannot ascertain at this time. Nevertheless, however strong Iraq's legal claim was to Kuwaiti territory⁽¹⁾ or however much the Kuwaitis had stolen oil from the border oilfields or otherwise

provoked Iraq, the Iraqi leadership should have known that the U.S. and Britain would not accept a violent realignment of borders in the the oil-sensitive Gulf region. Britain, in particular, had worked over a half century to legitimize its grabbing of Kuwaiti territory from the Ottoman Turks in 1898, and thereafter, had, in the Treaty of Uqair of 1922, forced Iraq to accept the re-drawn borders of Kuwait which greatly limited the Iraqi access to the Gulf. It is clear also that the U.S. would react quickly to any threat to its surrogate, Saudi Arabia, from which it was drawing so much of its current oil needs. Thus, when the Iraqis occupied Kuwait on August 2, 1990, the U.S. and Britain began working assiduously to build a coalition of states which would stand with them to crush Iraq. ⁽²⁾ Contrary to what was initially imagined about the difficulty of forming a coalition, in the absence of a countervailing Great Power like the Soviet Union, the U.S. had little trouble in gaining new support from old enemies.

At the suggestion of the Saudis, who felt very threatened because the U.S. had few troops or naval vessels in the Gulf region, the U. S. began a massive troop buildup without reporting much in the press. During this build-up the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff, General Michael Dugan, got himself fired on September 17, 1990 by Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, for saying that the Iraqi army would be a pushover, but that the Air Force must play the key role in destroying Iraq's infrastructure and will to fight. Actually Dugan's remarks were prophetic about the war's outcome. ⁽³⁾ After the U.N. sanctions against Iraq were declared in August of 1990, discussions continued among the heads of the U.S. government to decide which method, economic sanctions or outright attack and war, would remove Iraq from Kuwait. General Powell, Head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, meanwhile had built up the U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia by December to 230,000 troops and supporting units.

It was decided, sometime in early December, that force would be the method of choice of President Bush, thus rendering the so-called inegotiations on January 9, 1991, of Secretary of State, James Baker, and Tariq Aziz, Iraqi Foreign Minister, basically useless and insincere on

the part of the United States. Rather, it was an occasion for the U.S. to present its ultimatum..The U.N. Security Council, with the support of Foreign Minister Shevardnadze of Russia and abstention of China, passed its fateful resolution to use "All Necessary Means" to remove Iraq from Kuwait after January 15, 1991. Interesting, in the light of future developments, Admiral Crowe, former head of the Joint Chiefs, opposed, to the end, the use of force declaring that the policy would, in future years, backfire on the Americans in their relations with the Arab World because the Arabs would not forget the killing of their fellow Muslims. Admiral Crowe made a number of enemies by his honest stance because Congress only narrowly supported going to war and many European and Asian nations that had sent token troops and given their support to Washington were under great pressure in their homelands not to go to war.(4)

It remains to note how the United States was able to cajole the "Middle Range" Middle Eastern countries into joining the alliance against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. In the case of Iran, the only position desired from the Ayatullahs was that they remain neutral. They complied because the country had suffered greatly from the war with Iraq, and Saddam's government continued to suppress its majority Shi'ites, the co-religionists of Iranians.

In spite of the fact that Egypt, since Sadat's peace with Israel in 1979, was receiving massive food subsidies and generally keeping itself out of Arab conflicts, President Mubarek had a tough time bringing Egypt into the alliance because of a strong anti-American religious faction. To overcome the reluctance of Egypt, the U.S. agreed to eliminate some 8 billion dollars of Egypt's debt to the United States. Hence, Egypt, who also had a close relationship with Saudi Arabia, including many professionals working in the government, sided with the building U.S. coalition. Also, because of the close cooperation of Morocco with the U.S., Morocco was asked to join the coalition. The Saudis themselves felt uneasy fighting fellow Muslims without the support of other Arab countries. Moreover, a number of the Saudi Ulema were strongly opposed to the build-up of U.S. troops on Saudi soil.

President Asad of Syria saw a golden chance to improve his relations with the United States by joining the U.N. coalition; hence, he sent 20,000 troops, a major effort. Later, the excellent journalist, Judith Miller, made a detailed analysis of why Asad joined. He had seen the approaching collapse of the Soviet Union before 1989 which had supported him for many years against Israel and the United States. Moreover, Syria had received regular subsidies from the Saudi royal family since the 1970s for its anti-Israel stance. After the Gulf War, in

which no Syrian troops were committed, Asad received a handsome reward from the Saudis, one billion dollars.(5)

Many basic financial interests of Turkey were deeply disturbed by the Gulf War. At the time, Iraq was paying subsidies to Turkey for the regular piping of Iraqi petroleum to the Mediterranean. Also, Turks reputedly conducted some one billion dollars worth of trade in manufacturing, chemicals and agriculture with Iraq. Moreover, the Islamic faction in Turkey had grown to major proportions and had, to a great extent, supported the anti-US and anti-Israeli stance of Iraq and certain other Muslim countries. The Turks, however, were, building huge hydro-electric facilities on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers which cut the flow of water to the agricultural lands of both Iraq and Syria. Also the Kurdish question in Turkey was festering, supported intermittently by factions in Syria and Iraq. These larger political and economic matters caused many Turks in high places to seek, by any means available, to weaken Iraq.

Finally, there was another very important gamble. The Ataturk government in Turkey, as far back as 1925, had lost its bid to retain control of some of the oil rich regions of northern Iraq after a League of Nations negotiation. Hence, the Turks always continued to seek ways of gaining back some of this lost territory. (6) As we shall note, this ambition has never ceased.

The state of Israel is the last of the "Middle Range Powers" to play a role in the Gulf War. In his most perceptive study of U.S.- Israeli relations, The United States and Israel, The Limits of the Special Relationship, Abraham Ben Zvi discusses in great depth the "pattern of interaction between the special relationship and national interest paradigms."(7) In other words, Ben Zvi discusses those times when the U.S. government had little leverage over Israel because of the Jewish lobby and other considerations which used the "special relationship" argument. At other times, because of circumstances beyond Israel's control, the U.S. government had a wider choice of options to deal with the complex Middle Eastern issues. At such times, the U.S. Government could pursue courses of action deemed more in the "national U.S. interest" rather than "in the interest of Israel," narrowly conceived. At the time of the Gulf crisis, the U.S. went to considerable trouble to bring Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and especially Syria, into an anti-Iraq coalition. Thus, U.S. strategists in Washington did not want Israel to play any overt role in the war, even after Saddam Husain provoked Israel by sending some SCUD missiles into Israeli territory. It was perceived, rightly or wrongly, that the coalition would collapse if Israel intervened. To ward off such a decision the U.S. made every effort to wipe out the SCUD

launching vehicles, and also provided Israel with its latest ground-to-air missile defense system.

At about the same time, in 1989-90, within Israel and among Jewish supporters abroad, a changing atmosphere was coalescing around the idea that Prime Minister Shamir's Likud Party approach to the Palestinian Intifada, of simply suppressing the Arabs, was ineffectual and losing world support for Israel. Now popular support in the U.S. and Israel shifted to the idea that for the sake of peace, Israel should be willing to give up some of the territory it had seized from the Palestinian. And of course this position corresponded to the position of the Labor Party and eventually accounts for it once again taking control of the government. Naturally, this internal searching in Israel strengthened the U.S. government, after the Gulf crisis, in its desire to bring Israel into direct negotiations with the Palestinians, Jordan, Lebanon and especially Syria.(8)

Winners and Losers, Ten Years After The Gulf War

When one considers that the population of Iraq in 1990 was one of the most-advanced and best-educated in the Middle East, but today it is possibly the most-undernourished of lands of the Middle East, unable to provide proper health care or clean water to its citizenry, one must try to understand Why. After all, Iraq reputedly possesses the second largest oil reserve in the world. And, is there not presently a world oil shortage because OPEC is refusing to pump all the oil we would like to use? By 1947, the Western Powers and NATO virtually forgave Germany for its support of Hitler and the destruction of Europe and began to pour billions in aid money into Europe under the Marshall Plan. Underneath the surface was the discovery of one of Europe's basic economic facts: if one destroys a major player in the international economy, then one cannot expect the recovery of a vital society like Western Europe. This calculation has not yet seeped into the policy-makers in Washington with regard to Iraq. Without Iraq, to which we might add Iran, the U.S. and Britain, and their other supporters, risk a long-term stagnation in the economy of the Middle East.

Yet today the U.S. persists pell-mell in supporting an almost complete economic blockade of Iraq and Iran. Unfortunately, the U.N. has become a surrogate of the United States in its policies toward Iraq. The so-called 661 Sanctions Committee, under the control of the Security Council, gives each member of the 15 member council a veto on any shipments to Iraq. "The U.S., not surprising, is the most active in blocking contracts, followed well-behind by Britain." (9) Some of the items recently denied were as follows:

foot-and-mouth disease vaccine for cattle, telecommunications equipment, refrigerator trucks to transport medicine and perishable foods in 120 degree heat, new printing presses, many kinds of medicine, especially chemo-therapy drugs, (10) chemicals such as chlorine and aluminum sulfate for use in water purification plants, motors for ordinary industrial use, and so forth. The excuse always is that such materials can be used to make weapons of mass destruction in spite of the fact that many U.N. inspectors have resigned and spoken out that Iraq has no weapons capability.

If one looks at the so-called "Middle Range Powers" of the Middle East today, it is very easy to conclude that NO POWER, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES, is better off. In fact, one can easily make a case that the Middle East is in worse shape today than for many years. Iran is deadlocked between two politico-religious forces, the forces of reform and the reactionary clerical powers of the Ayatollahs. The Russians, under President Putin, will not long tolerate the open attempt of U.S. oil companies to syphon off the oil riches of Azarbaijan and Kazakhstan. It is only a matter of time before the Russian imperial instincts re-assert themselves. Steven Cohen of New York University, foremost student of modern Russian politics, holds firmly to this position.

The Syrian army has too long dissipated its prowess, involved in the black markets of Lebanon, to remain a formidable military force. Moreover the neglect of modern technology under Asad has weakened the competitive edge of a once thriving merchant society.

The Israeli army, always touted as the greatest, has greatly weakened its moral position and the international position of Israel by shooting hundreds of unarmed Palestinians. Also, the ultra-right religious parties have helped split Israel socially to a point where thousands of Israelis wish to emigrate.

With the critical state of King Fahd's health, one must begin to consider the future policies of the crown prince, Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, whose family belong to the old Shammar tribal federation with clansman stretching clear to Baghdad. Clearly the United States and Britain, by continuing the sanctions against Iraq ad infinitum, have destroyed their moral position in the Middle East with most Muslims.

The Turkish military suppressed the Islamic-leaning Welfare Party, while at the same time destroying thousands of Kurdish villages in order to weaken an insipiate national Kurdish movement for national recognition. This animosity towards the Kurds has given Turkey also an excuse to perpetrate cross-border raids into Iraqi Kurdish territory, but Middle East

watchers have not forgotten Turkey's interest in regaining control of the Kirkuk oil fields. U.S. silence about these cross-border raids will bring much grief to the U.S. in the years to come.

Egypt under President Mubarak has done what it always has to do: face up to a population growth that eats up any surplus in national resources. At the same time, with the greater pollution and salination of the Nile, both from Sudan's Saudi-sponsored irrigation projects and its own need to claim agricultural land for housing spells disaster for an exploding population. The U.S. also is not helping its image in Egypt for continuing the incarceration of the elderly and ailing Sheikh Abdurrahman for his complicity in the plot to blow up the World Trade Center.

The U.S., rather than take the Trade Center threat as a clarion call for a radical change in its foreign policies in the Middle East, has used that as an excuse to attack such targets as Ben Laden in Afghanistan and a Sudanese pharmaceutical plant stressing that "radical Islam" presents a challenge to the U.S. comparable to the threat of the Soviet Union in previous decades. The outside observer might well conclude that this rattling of the sword is only meant to serve U.S. domestic needs so that the C.I.A., the F.B.I. and the U.S. Defense Department will be able to increase their yearly budgets. The problem with this rationale, however, is that no people or religious movement likes to be scapegoated when it is clear to the trained observer that the U.S., by continuing such atrocities as the sanctions against Iraq or the funding of Israel's settlement policy against the Palestinians, or the indiscriminate bombing of other countries, brings its own form of mayhem to the World. And the World can retaliate as we recently observed in the bombing of the U.S. Destroyer Cole in Aden harbor. In a devastating attack on the U.S.

Iraq Policy, the well-known M.I.T. professor, Noam Chomsky, points out clearly that the peoples of the world, who have their meager natural resources to sell to the Northern Countries including the U.S., want naturally to have a say in the price such resources command in the world market. Professor Chomsky puts forth the proposition that some governments may find it easier to "thin out" the population of a country whose resources are deemed "vital" so that said resources may be exploited with little or no opposition.

"What we say, goes" was George Bush's definition of the New World Order in 1991 while bombs rained down on Iraq. Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State rather echoed the same policy when she stated on national television in 1996, when asked about the sanctions killing 500,000 Iraqi children. Her reply, as quoted by many writers, "We think the price is worth it." (11) Unfortunately, this writer sees only losers after the terribly one-sided, so-called

Gulf War of 1991. Yes, remove Saddam Husain, but let the people live, all over the Middle East. In passing, any serious student of the Gulf War should also read Seymour Hersh's devastating attack on General McCaffrey who "heroically" led his brigade against the retreating Iraqis after they had lay down their arms and reversed their tank guns on the road to Basra. (12) One wonders what international standards the U.S. military was following by not punishing the officer responsible. The World is not waiting for this New World Order.

Notes

1. This writer believes that the Iraqis, based on Ottoman Empire antecedents, has a good historical claim. See Michael Bishku, "Iraq's Claim to Kuwait: An Historical View," *Amercian-Arab Affairs*, No. 37(Summer, 1991), 77-88.
2. Already in April of 1990, the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. Prince Bandar bin Sultan had been sent by King Fahad of Saudi Arabia to Baghdad to understand what Saddam Husain meant by his recent inflammatory speech against Israel. Bandar had earlier arrange a cease-fire in 1988 of the Iran-Iraq War. Saddam, who still felt humiliated by Israel's destruction of his nuclear research reactor in Osirak in 1981, simply stated that the U.S. should not once again provide cover for an Israeli attack because Iraq would respond directly against Israel. This message was conveyed directly to President Bush. See Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*(NY, 1991), pp. 199-204.
3. See Woodward, 290-296.
4. Again consult Woodward, 35-42, 331-335 and 353-362, who has presented one of the most succinct behind-the-scenes account of events leading up to the Gulf War. The U.S. Senate voted 52 to 47 for war and the House, 250-183.
5. Judith Miller, *God Has Ninety-Nine Names*(NY 1996), 310-311.
6. This matter is only touched upon by Daniel Yergin in his study, *The Prize*(NY 1991), 198-203, but the reader may wish to refresh his/her memory about how the "Red-Line Agreement"came about to settle originally the case of the Turkish Petroleum Company claims. On the disruption of oil markets during the Gulf War, see Yergin, 770-777.
7. (NY 1993), see especially the chapter : "The Gulf War and Its Aftermath", pp.191-208.
8. Ben Zvi, 182-185. This trend within Israel was of course disrupted when Arafat and many of his Palestinian supporters sided with Saddam Husain during the few days of warfare. Such a stance guaranteed that the thousands of Palestinians who held good positions in the Gulf States would lose their jobs and be forced to emigrate elsewhere.
9. The sanctions committee was set up on August 6, 1990. For detailed information about the effect of sanctions on Iraqi society, one may consult "A Dim Light For Iraqis at the End of a Long Tunnel," in the authoritative Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs XIX(Oct.-Nov. 2000), 34-35 and the excellent study of

the hundreds of thousands of deaths of Iraqis by sanctions and war, Ramsay Clark, ed., *Challenge to Genocide* (NY 1998), *passim*.

10. It is well known that thousands of Iraqis are suffering from cancer induced by the spent Uranium in the artillery shells used by Americans in the War.

11. For Chomsky's and Aruri's articles, see Anthony Arnove, ed., *Iraq Under Siege, The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*, South End Press, Cambridge, MA. 1998, 7-56. The other articles are also important.

12. See Seymour M. Hersh, in the June or July issue of *The New Yorker*, 2000. The writer apologizes for not giving a full reference before sending off this article.