

Compare and contrast the 1990 gulf war to the 2003 iraq invasion essay sample

[War](#)



The Gulf War in 1990 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 both had a profound impact not just on the countries directly involved – primarily Iraq and the United States (US) – but also on the geo-politics of the world. Arguably, the War ended in a stalemate because the Iraqi regime that had started the War by invading Kuwait remained in power. Perhaps inevitably then, in March 2003 the US and its allies invaded Iraq with the stated aim of overthrowing the regime of Saddam Hussein and destroying that regime's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Some similarities between both Wars are immediately obvious: for example, the same country, the US, led both wars against the same country, Iraq.

There are, however, significant differences between the Wars. Accordingly, this essay compares and contrasts some key aspects of the wars: their military aspects, the use and abuse of intelligence services, causes and outcomes, differences in media coverage, and the changing views of different Arab regimes. It argues that the military outcomes were very much the same and that western intelligence essentially continued to offer wrong advice and analyses; in contrast, the roles of the media diverged significantly between both wars as did the political outcomes and the views of Arab regimes. Overall, comparing and contrasting both Wars highlights their major impact on world politics and power, with their consequences playing a significant role in shaping today's contemporary world.

MILITARY

Militarily, the Gulf War and the Iraq War have much in common. Both wars were fought by predominantly the same nations, with similar outcomes

achieved. What distinguished these wars at was the acute asymmetry in fatalities with many thousands slaughter edon the Iraqi side, as opposed to minor death toll on the side of the coalition. The Persian Gulf War was undoubtedly one of the most swift and successful military operations in history. Coalition troops effortlessly crushed Saddam Hussein's armed forces. In the Gulf Conflict, " Iraqi troops numbered approximately 545, 000 to 600, 000." While this figure closely approximated the number of US military personnel, many of the Iraqi troops were young, under-resourced, and poorly trained conscripts.

The one-sided nature of the conflict is best summarised in estimates of casualties: US Department of Defence reported that " U. S. forces suffered 148 battle-related deaths. Some estimate that Iraq sustained between 20, 000 and 35, 000 fatalities." In addition, " civilian fatalities were estimated at about 3, 500 from bombings and some 100, 000 from other effects of the war." Casualty figures on the US side in the Iraq war were very similar to those of the Gulf war: according to CNN, the US government reported " that 139 American military personnel were killed."

For the US, the Iraq War was equally as effective as the first war in achieving its military objective. The US-led Coalition forces toppled the Hussein government and captured the key cities of a large nation in only 21 days. There is little doubt in terms of military successes the Gulf and Iraq Wars were both triumphs of American preparation and execution. This success extended into the political arena. As Reilly noted the fact that " the United

States could reconfigure the Persian Gulf's balance of power underscored its evolution since World War II into the area's de facto arbiter."

INTELLIGENCE

While the Gulf conflicts were a military success for the Americans and their allies, the very need for a second war - at least as perceived by the US - points to some major failings in the outcome of the first war. Arguably, political decisions based on faulty intelligence led to an unacceptable outcome in the Gulf War. Further, intelligence, particularly around the issue of weapons of mass destruction, was equally faulty in the Iraq War.

In the months prior to the First Persian Gulf War, intelligence operations and pre-emptive preparation was justifiably extensive. Analysts working for the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported on the probability of Iraqi hostility in the foreseeable future. According to this now-infamous study, Saddam had "so overextended his capital in the war with Iran that he was not in a position to undertake any significant hostile action for, at the very least, three years". The CIA grossly underestimated Saddam's penchant for military expansionism. Critics of the quality of US intelligence abound.

Freedman and Efrain have concluded that "Operation Desert Storm was a low point for Marine Corps intelligence. It revealed an antiquated architecture that was unresponsive to the needs of the United States Army" while Seliktar writes of an "unprepared organization" and of "considerable in-theatre limitations and restrictions." Arguably, the military success

camouflaged these intelligence failings. Surprisingly, these intelligence failures during the Gulf War were carried over into the Iraq War.

Detractors of the war argued that the US intelligence services provided misleading and inaccurate information about WMD. US intelligence services had miscalculated Iraqi WMD development in the 1980s and it was widely argued that they over compensated in the other direction in the 21st century. One potential explanation for such a mistake was that the CIA tended to rely on technological information rather than gather human intelligence - 'humint' - from 'assets' situated in Iraq and the Middle East. Regardless of this argument, the CIA clearly failed to provide reliable information on decisions made within Saddam Hussein's inner circle and, most notably, on Iraqi capabilities for producing and delivering WMD.

In short, the CIA got it wrong in the 1980s, in the 1990s and again in the early 2000s. One analyst has claimed that this is because the "cia suffers from a ponderous bureaucratic structure that makes it sluggish in response to events, impedes intellectual and analytic initiative, and diverts resources from nurturing and keeping analytic talent." Such failures did not detract from the operation of the war but bad intelligence, or at least a wrong interpretation of this intelligence, was a crucial political element in events in Iraq post-2003.

POSITIONS OF ARAB REGIMES

While the military outcomes of both conflicts were exceedingly similar the political positions and postures adopted in the Arab world were starkly

dissimilar. The Gulf War was a war waged by a U. N.-authorized coalition force from thirty-four nations led by the US. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was met with international condemnation, and brought immediate economic sanctions against Iraq by members of the UN Security Council. A series of UN Security Council resolutions and Arab League resolutions were passed regarding the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein's Iraq, including one authorizing the use of force if Iraq failed to comply. Many Arab nations supported this resolution because of their fear of Saddam, particularly his violation of Kuwaiti territorial integrity - a matter of some importance in the Middle East. As Cerf and Sifry note " Iraq itself was an artificial state, having been carved out of the Ottoman Empire, after World War one in an ad hoc manner."

Several authors, predominantly of Arabic origin, suggested that Iraq had some justifiable territorial claims to Kuwait. Regardless of such analyses, many Arab nations joined the coalition because they were persuaded by Iraq's belligerence towards other Arab states, a decision sweetened by offers of economic aid or debt forgiveness. Overall, the international community and the Arab world were supportive of the American action to liberate Kuwait and to drive Hussein back to his own borders. The subsequent establishment of American bases in the region and the negotiations with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for concessions for oil and other resources dissipated this goodwill. By 2003, the invasion of Iraq was widely castigated in the region, particularly by Islamic radicals.

CAUSES AND OUTCOMES OF THE WARS

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The immediate cause of the Gulf War was principally economic. By the time the armistice with Iran was negotiated Iraq was practically bankrupt, owing massive amounts of currency to various countries, in particular Saudi Arabia and more poignantly Kuwait. Iraq pressured both states to absolve the debts, but these diplomatic overtures were repudiated. Iraq also accused Kuwait of exceeding its OPEC quotas and driving down the price of oil, thus further hurting the Iraqi economy. The dramatic fall in oil prices had a ruinous effect on the Iraqi's slowly recovering economy. The Iraqi Government decried it as a form of economic warfare to which it had to respond with military warfare.

In contrast, the Iraq War was not based on Iraqi aggression nor historical claims. "The rationale for the Iraq War has been a contentious issue since the Bush administration began actively pressing for military intervention in Iraq in late 2001." The US stated intention was to remove "a regime that developed and used weapons of mass destruction, which harboured and supported terrorists, committed outrageous human rights abuses, and defied the just demands of the United Nations and the world".

For the invasion of Iraq the rationale was "the United States relied on the authority of UN Security Council Resolutions 678 and 687 to use all necessary means to compel Iraq to comply with its international obligations." Those who opposed the war in Iraq did not regard Iraq's violation of UN resolutions to be a valid cause for war, since no single nation has the authority, under the UN Charter, to judge Iraq's compliance to UN resolutions and to enforce them. Furthermore, critics argued that the US was applying

double standards of justice, noting that other nations such as Israel are also in breach of UN resolutions and possess nuclear weapons.

Further differences appear between the Gulf and Iraq wars when examining the aftermath of each respective campaign. In 1991, Saddam was left in power, an intelligence mistake based on American assumptions that he would be toppled by internal opponents. This led to on-going sanctions which had a horrific effect on Iraq. Between 1991 and 2003, the effects of government policy and sanctions regime led to hyperinflation, widespread poverty and malnutrition. According to UN estimates, between 500, 000 and 1. 2 million children died during the years of the sanctions. The outcome was radically different in 2003: coupled with Saddam's removal, political violence erupted between two religious, warring factions, the Shias and the Sunnis. Furthermore, after the invasion, al-Qaeda firmly established itself in the region. Essentially, Saddam's removal resulted in a civil war coupled with a humanitarian crisis the US was obviously unprepared to handle, and with which it continues to struggle up to the present day.

MEDIA

The Gulf War was covered in great detail by the western media. This situation has been called the " CNN effect" and introduced a different approach to the analysis of modern International Relations. Few journalists examined the effects of the War on the largely Arabian populace. Nobody seemingly cared for the displaced Iraqi refugees. In contrast, during the Iraqi War a much more diverse media, including the internet, played a

fundamental role. Most notably, the presence of an Arab media, offering an Arab perspective on the crisis, was a marked change.

CNN and other major Western media outlets were now joined by the Arabian Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. " Al-Jazeera was to some extent the ' Arabian CNN', its role has been extremely relevant because it was present everywhere, even in closed areas, prohibited to Occidental media." The rise of the Arab media changed the presentation of the War, a presentation no longer seen solely from the western, CNN perspective. There was now an entirely different, arguably more even, portrayal of the Iraq War, with repercussions not just for the Western world, but for the displaced Iraqis and the Arab world as a whole.

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that the Gulf War and the Iraq War share many striking similarities. Both wars were conducted primarily by the US against the Baathist Iraqi state under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Militarily, there is little doubt that in both wars the outcomes were the same: the preparation and execution of American military operations successfully crushed the rather irresolute Iraqi defence forces. Coupled with military successes, however, were massive failures of intelligence. Arguably, political decisions based on faulty intelligence led to an unacceptable outcome in the First Gulf War as Saddam Hussein was not, as the US had expected, toppled from power. Such failures did not detract from the operation of the war but bad intelligence, or at least a wrong interpretation of intelligence, was a

crucial political element in events in Iraq post-2003. Perhaps the key difference between the two conflicts was the position of Saddam's regimes.

In the Gulf War, his army and nation were the clear aggressors, invading Kuwait. In the Iraq War, the US with little support and devoid of UN-sanctioned legitimacy, invaded Iraq under the belief that Iraq possessed WMD and was a haven for terrorists. The world's perception of this Iraqi War was significantly influenced by advent of an Arab media, offering viewers different insights into a volatile region of the world. Ultimately, the effects of the Gulf and Iraq war can still be seen to this day, with fighting still prevalent across much of the nation. It seems neither the Gulf nor Iraq Wars could solve the Iraqi conundrum indefinitely, failing to institute stability and peace in a seemingly perpetually turbulent Middle East.

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