

# The Justifications for Saddam Invading Kuwait and the World Reaction

## *Justifikasi Saddam Menyerang Kuwait dan Reaksi Dunia*

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**Abstract:** This study examines the justification of Saddam in the Gulf War I. After settling the war with Iran, Saddam continues his action with the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces. These actions got many reactions and responses, especially from Arab states, Iran, the Libyan Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), the United States (US), and United Nations (UN). This paper also tends to analyze the reaction towards the violence afflicted Kuwait, the UN's role to overcome this conflict, as well as the reasons why Saddam invaded Kuwait. The impacts of this war will be highlighted in terms of domestic and global aspects. The highlighted chronology of this war assists the researcher to evaluate and justify the situation of the war as well as the impact on Iraq's economy, rebellions of ethnics, politics in the Middle East, international economics, and the relationship between Iraq and Iran. This research uses the qualitative method of content analysis. Analysis indicated that the factors behind the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait are closely related to the economic problems after the eight-year war with Iran. Therefore, by invading Kuwait, Saddam Hussein hopes to take a shortcut to immediately recover the poor economic situation in Iraq. However, this step taken by Saddam Hussein was a disaster for Iraq. At the same time, the very slow action of United Nations (UN) to put pressure on this war and insisting Iraq to stop the war, have made things become worse.

**Keywords:** invasion, Gulf war, economy, Middle East;

**Abstrak:** Kajian ini mengkaji kewajaran Saddam dalam Perang Teluk I. Selepas menyelesaikan perang dengan Iran, Saddam meneruskan tindakannya dengan pencerobohan tentera Iraq ke Kuwait. Tindakan ini mendapat banyak reaksi dan tindak balas terutama daripada negara Arab, Iran, Majlis Perintah Revolusi Libya (RCC), Amerika Syarikat (AS), dan Pertubuhan Bangsa-Bangsa Bersatu (PBB). Kajian ini turut menganalisis reaksi terhadap keganasan yang menimpa Kuwait, peranan PBB untuk mengatasi konflik ini dan sebab-sebab Saddam menceroob Kuwait. Kesan perang ini akan diketengahkan dari segi domestik dan global. Kronologi perang yang ditonjolkan ini membantu penyelidik menilai dan mewajarkan situasi perang serta kesan terhadap ekonomi Iraq, pemberontakan etnik, politik di Timur Tengah, ekonomi antarabangsa, dan hubungan antara Iraq dan Iran. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif analisis kandungan. Analisis menunjukkan bahawa faktor di sebalik pencerobohan Iraq ke atas Kuwait berkait rapat dengan masalah ekonomi selepas perang lapan tahun dengan Iran. Oleh itu, dengan menceroob Kuwait, Saddam Hussein berharap dapat mengambil jalan pintas untuk segera memulihkan keadaan ekonomi yang lemah di Iraq. Namun, langkah yang diambil oleh Saddam Hussein ini sebenarnya merupakan satu malapetaka bagi Iraq. Manakala, tindakan yang sangat perlahan Pertubuhan Bangsa-Bangsa

Bersatu (PBB) untuk memberi tekanan kepada perang ini dan mendesak Iraq menghentikan semua ini telah memburukkan lagi keadaan.

**Kata kunci:** pencerobohan, Perang Teluk, ekonomi, Timur Tengah;

## Introduction

War is the most difficult experience in life that always brings various kinds of problems in term of individual, social and global. Many people reject war and avoid it. However, a few people accept or like it. The people who have fought on the battlefield already have felt the bitterness of war and they knew very well the bad effect of war to the next generation.

After the Iran-Iraq war ended, apparently Saddam Hussein's ambitions had not been extinguished. He once again invaded the country in West Asia, which is Kuwait. Many westerners believed that Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was largely motivated by its desire to take control over the latter's vast oil reserves. The Iraqi government justified its invasion by claiming that Kuwait was a natural part of Iraq carved off as a result of British imperialism.

According to Belgrave, V. (1995), the Kuwaiti royal family, which ruled a country of around 1 million people in 1990, was thought by Iraqis to control as much as twenty times the amount demanded as loan repayment from Iraq. This argument was supported by Muir, R. (2004) and Karam, J. (2005) that this was especially aggravating because most Iraqis viewed Kuwait as a part of their country that Britain had split off as a separate state to serve British interests. Saddam Hussein attempted to resolve the problem by invading and annexing Kuwait as Iraq's nineteenth province. Most nations, however condemned Iraq's action and demanded immediate withdrawal. The United States, Britain, and other nations assembled an overpowering military force and with virtually total control of the air, carried out devastating attacks, forcing Iraq to withdraw.

According to Neff, D. (1991), the factors behind the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait are closely related to the economic problems after the eight-year war with Iran. Therefore, by invading Kuwait, one of the oil-rich countries, Saddam Hussein hopes to take a shortcut to immediately recover the poor economic status after the Iran-Iraq War. However, this step taken by Saddam Hussein was a disaster for Iraq.

## Methodology

This study is a qualitative and uses a documentation study design. During data gathering, the researcher

utilised document analysis and interviews. Othman Ali, a Professor of the Modern History of Kurds at Salahaddin University in Erbil, Iraq, has been interviewed in order to acquire additional clarification regarding the study subject. The interview data were collected and evaluated utilising a recorder in order to bolster and establish the validity of the secondary research material.

The researcher also conducted direct observation by attending conferences and seminars on Iraq's history and international connections with other nations. The Academic Research Institute in Iraq (TARII), for instance, had a conference in 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. Iraqi, American, other foreign scholars, collaborators, and funders explored the ancient to contemporary research being undertaken in and on Iraq. In October 2021 and 2022, TARII hosted a virtual conference due to health concerns (COVID-19).

In addition to online searches, The Academic Research Institute in Iraq (TARII), and the Sakarya University Middle East Institute were used to obtain secondary resources. This really assisted this study in obtaining printed information regarding Iraq-Kuwait and Iraq's history.

The researcher then conducted a content and theme analysis of the data. The results of the study indicate that by invading Kuwait, Saddam Hussein wants to quickly improve Iraq's economic status.

## The Causes of Invasion the Kuwait

### *Internal Factors*

#### *Economy Difficulties and Debt*

The Iran-Iraq War endangered Iraq's health and educational systems, once among the best in the Middle East. During this conflict, much property shifted from state to private ownership, resulting in the growth of a wealthy minority while the lifestyle of the middle and lower classes deteriorated (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, 2014: 278). According to Tripp & Charles (2002: 252), a central post-war problem was that Iraq owed tens of billions of dollars to non-Arab nations and had received approximately \$40 billion to \$50 billion from Arab countries. This argument was supported by Kamran Mofid which is the estimate amount of the destruction of infrastructure in Iraq since the blazing war until July 5, 1988 reached 67 billion dollars. This amount not included the budget to buy the military

equipment. Therefore, Iraq also asked other oil-producing Arab countries to limit their output in order to drive prices up, allowing Iraq to earn more so that it could pay back loan to those countries on whose technological assistance it depended and rebuild the country. A year after the 1988 Iran-Iraq cease-fire, Iraq's military imports amounted to more than \$5 billion, its civilian imports to about \$12 billion, and debt repayments to \$5 billion. However, its oil income amounted to only about \$12 billion, resulting in an approximately \$9-\$10 billion budget shortfall (Marr & Phebe, 2018: 219).

Based on this situation, Iraq needs around 30-40 years to reconstruct its country that destroyed by war and pay off its foreign debt (Isawati, 2013: 35). Therefore, by invading Kuwait, one of the oil-rich countries, Saddam Hussein hopes to take a shortcut to immediately be able to restore the bad economic situation.

### *External Factors*

#### *1) Kuwait*

Saudi Arabia appeared willing to forgive Iraq's debt, but Kuwait refused (Marr & Phebe, 2004: 220). Iraq tried to negotiate with Kuwait in Saudi Arabia on July 31, 1990, but firmly being rejected by Kuwait. Saddam Hussein requested to write off all debts of Iraq to Kuwait around \$10 to \$15 billion. Iraq also requested to be given the possession of two Kuwaiti controlled islands, Warba and Bubiya. Iraq wanted Kuwait to turn over the islands as well as territory near the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr to allow more land access to the Persian Gulf.

Later, Iraqis claimed that Kuwait was drilling into the southern end of the Rumaila oil field, which extended into Kuwait territory and extracting Iraqi oil. Then, Iraq also accused Kuwait and United Arab Emirates (UAE) of producing oil beyond national quotas set by the Organizations of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) so that Iraq would earn less for its oil (Hiro & Dilip, 2003: 88-90). OPEC nations were supposed to limit production in 1990 to 22 million barrels per day but in fact were marketing 24 million, with Kuwait and the UAE responsible for 75 percent of the excess production (Marr & Phebe, 2018: 221). Oil in January 1990 was about \$21 per barrel but by March was under \$18, falling in the summer to around \$11. According to Hiro & Dilip (2003: 88), Iraqi foreign minister, Tariq Aziz stated that for every dollar less in the price per barrel of oil, Iraq's annual revenue dropped by about \$1 billion. Saddam claimed that economy warfare was being waged against his country.

#### *2) Changes in the International Environment*

According to Gause, F. (1998), as Iraq faced enormous economic problems, revolutions in Eastern Europe replaced communist regimes with less friendly governments. And since the Soviet Union was experiencing its own economic crisis, it could not provide much assistance to Iraq.

Further, other countries undermined Iraq's weapons development plans. Shipments of equipment, apparently related to Iraq's nuclear weapons program, were intercepted. And Iraq experienced a blow to its missile program when Dr. Gerald Bull, a famous Canadian ballistics and missile engineer, was shot and killed entering his Brussels Hotel room on March 22, 1990. Bull had designed a super gun for Iraq that when completed could have launched explosive shells hundreds of miles, and he was helping the Iraqis improve the range of their surface-to-surface missiles. Many believed that Israeli Mossad intelligence agents were responsible for the killing (James DeFronzo, 2010: 101).

### **Reaction to Gulf War I**

#### *1) Reaction of Arab States*

The reaction of Arab countries to the Gulf War I was very different when compared to the reaction in the Iraq-Iran war. If in the Iraq-Iran war, Iraq was supported by a majority of Arab and Western countries, but in the Gulf War I between Iraq and Kuwait, Iraq was most hostile to Arab and Western countries. In the Iraq-Iran war, the fundamentalism Shia Islam by Imam Khomeini was considered as a threat. Therefore, the defeat of Iraq in this war must be prevented as hard as possible. US easily forgive Saddam Hussein when the USS Stark incident occurred during the Iran-Iraq War on May 17, 1987. When an Iraqi jet aircraft fired missiles at the American frigate USS Stark, the missiles were fired from an Iraqi Dassault Mirage F1 by a pilot who thought the U.S. frigate was an Iranian tanker. Thirty-seven United States Navy personnel were killed and 21 were injured in the incident.

According to Ehteshami, A. (1989), in the Iraq-Iran war Iraq was supported by Egypt, Jordan, GCC countries, North Yemen, Morocco, Soviet Union, France, Britain and the United States. While Iran was only supported by Syria, Libya, and South Yemen. In contrast, in the Gulf War I, Iraq had to deal as enemy with the United States including Arab allies in the Iran-Iraq war such as Egypt and the Gulf Cooperation Council, which consisted of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In fact, Saudi Arabia invited thousands of US military as personnel to defend

its territorial sovereignty and protect against attacks by Iraq (Isawati, 2013: 41-42).

## 2) *Iran's reaction*

After Iraq-Iran war, there were three things in common between Iraq and Iran.

a) Kuwait and United Arab Emirates (UAE) producing oil beyond national quotas set by the Organizations of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), so that Iraq and Iran would earn less for its oil. In fact, these two countries are need of income from the oil sector because they need to rebuilding and reconstructing their country due to war.

b) Relations with US. The relations between US and Iran have not improved during the post Iranian Revolution. After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the United States ended its economic and diplomatic ties with Iran, banned Iranian oil imports and froze approximately 11 billion 1980-US dollars of its assets. Iran-US relations cannot be restored as long as Iran's demands fulfilled by the US. Rafsanjani's position is also a dilemma because there is always got resistance from the Mullahs.

c) Even though there is a common interest between Iran and Iraq, it does not mean Iran will support Iraq in the Gulf War I. This is because it is based on several considerations. First, Iran has not been able to forget the trauma and injuries suffered from the war with Iraq, especially the use of chemical weapons by Iraq. Secondly, Iran does not want to fall back into a war that has caused so much damage in all sectors and stifling the country's economic recovery. Third, Iran does not want to be delayed to get out of international isolation after the Iranian Revolution (Ehteshami, A., 1989).

## 3) *Libyan Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) Reaction*

The Libyan Revolutionary Command Council was the twelve-person governing body that ruled the Libyan Arab Republic from 1969 to 1977. Its chairman was Muammar Gaddafi, who had the most influence. In 1977, the Libyan Arab Republic was abolished and Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya was established. As a part of this, the RCC was officially abolished and replaced by the general secretariat of the General People's Congress.

During the Gulf War I, the RCC was faced with a dilemmatic position, which caused the RCC's attitude to appear ambivalent. The Arab League called for a solution to the conflict from within the league and warned against outside intervention. Iraq and Libya were the only two Arab League states that opposed the

resolution for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait; the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) opposed it as well. The Arab states of Yemen and Jordan- a Western ally that bordered Iraq and relied on the country for economic support opposed military intervention from non-Arab states. The Arab state of Sudan aligned itself with Saddam. The RCC have different view with the permanent members of the United Nations (US, UK, France) (Ransone, R., 2019: 396). The UN wants to resolve the Iraq-Kuwait problem by militarily but it is not approved by the RCC.

On the other hand, the RCC does not want to damage the good relations with countries in the Middle East. Therefore, RCC chose to side with the majority of Middle Eastern countries by supporting all UN resolutions, namely the UN condemning the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The RCC condemnation also contains another intention, namely as one of the ways to be accepted again in the international environment after the Tienanmen tragedy.

## 4) *US Reaction*

According to Badie, D. (2010), the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a hard blow to the Bush administration because it represented a serious threat to American interests in the Persian Gulf region, to ensure that oil continued to flow and prevent the emergence of enemy hegemony in the Gulf region. If Saddam manages to gain control of Kuwait, Saddam will control 9% of global oil production. In addition, the placement of Saddam's military power in Kuwait could threaten Saudi Arabia power and could lead it to compulsion to follow the foreign oil prices dictated by Baghdad. In other words, Saddam has the capability to regulate global oil prices.

In order to answer Saddam Hussein's challenge to invade Kuwait, the US even deployed 210,000 troops on August 2, 1990. This is the largest number of troops sent since it was involved in the Vietnam War. President George Bush and US Secretary of State, James Baker even issued a statement that there was no time for Saddam Hussein to withdraw or withdraw his troops without bloodshed. George Bush and James Baker have even been busy visiting Saudi Arabia and European countries to discuss the possibility of being involved in the Gulf War I (Isawati, 2013).

## 5) *International World Reaction*

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was condemned by various parts of the world including the Soviet Union, known as an ally of Iraq, by suspending weapons to Iraq. Meanwhile, US Secretary of State James held a meeting with the Soviet Union's foreign minister and made a

joint statement condemning Iraq and demanding that he resign from Kuwait. In addition to condemning Iraq, America is also willing to use Iraq's anti-military if Iraq invades Saudi Arabia. American action is to deploy several warships to the bay area (Badie, D., 2010).

The UN also condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and demanded the unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait. UN Resolutions signed by 14 countries are called Resolution PBB UN Security Council No. 660. Because all resolutions issued were always rejected and received no response from Iraq, the UN then issued Resolution No. 678, which basically gave multinational authority to use any means if Iraq did not withdraw from Kuwait until January 15, 1991 (United Nations, 1991).

## Conclusion

The war brought very serious damage to Iraq's and Kuwait's infrastructure. For Iraq, the Gulf War I was a disaster because they had lost tens of thousands of troops and thousands of their ground combat vehicles.

According to the Resolution No. 687, the economic sanctions on Iraq will be lifted except selling Iraqi oil. The ban on oil sales will continue until Iraq destroys the weapons of destruction missiles under UN supervision. On April 6, 1991 Iraq accepted the resolution. Nevertheless, Saddam often violates the terms of the agreement. Iraq making airstrikes therefore, UN sanctions continued on Iraq (Gause, F., 1998).

The enactment of the Gulf War I reflect how weak the UN is in dealing with international problems. This is not only evident from the ineffectiveness of economic sanctions and UN Security Council resolutions, but also from the inability of the United Nations to deal with the pressures exerted by major powers, particularly the United States. This means that the enactment of the Gulf War I again prove that the United Nations is in fact serving more large countries like the US rather than paying attention to the fates of weak nations such as solving and fighting for the fate of the Palestinian people (Mehdi, S, 1991).

The Gulf War I had a tremendous impact on Iraq in the economic field. It can be said that Iraq was the most severe country and suffered in the economic sector due to the Gulf War I. Roughly speaking, Iraq's economic loss due to the Gulf War I was estimated at around USD 500 trillion. In addition, Iraq must pay war losses of 14 billion USD. However, Kuwait must also accept the fact that 300 of its 500 oil wells were destroyed by Iraqi forces. The Gulf War I also resulted in Saddam Hussein and Iraq getting cornered and isolated from the world.

International economic sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council supported by the US military blockade and its allies greatly complicate Saddam Hussein's position in the international association. Iraq also had to lose tens of thousands of troops due to this war.

Since inspectors never confirmed that Iraq fully complied, the sanctions lasted for more than a decade, contributing to the deaths from malnutrition and disease of an estimated half-million people. In the latter part of the 1990s, Iraq was allowed to sell increasing amounts of its oil under UN supervision and experienced some limited economic recovery.

As a result, this invasion brought a big problem to Iraq and the Baathist regime would be destroyed. They would be destroyed, not by an internal coup or rebellion, but by US reaction.

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