The Gulf crisis and its global aftermath

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Introduction

The end of the 1980s seemed to suggest a marked decline in the destabilizing role previously played by the Middle East in international affairs. In contrast to dramatic change in the Soviet Union, Central Europe and Germany, the eastern Mediterranean–Gulf sector appeared refreshingly stable. Termination of the Iran–Iraq war in 1988 was one factor; another, the impression that Ayatollah Khomeini's brand of Islamic fundamentalism was not so rampant as previously feared. Similarly, although the Arab–Israeli peace process had produced no breakthrough, nevertheless, the latent conflict did not threaten to escalate into a new war; even the Intifada and turbulence in Lebanon had become fairly routinized. This false sense of stability came to an abrupt end on 2 August 1990 with the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait.

For seven long months the invasion and subsequent annexation of Kuwait dominated the international agenda, reminding one and all of just how unstable and unpredictable the Middle East region can really be even at the best of times.

The crisis in the Gulf affected many more than the regional players alone. Rippling outward, its military, economic and political effects are still being felt throughout the international political system, testing American steadfastness, the effectiveness of the United Nations to confront international aggression, the EC's ability to pose a united front, and the will of 165 states to pursue common security. So, too, the implications for an increasingly interdependent international economic system.

Following the invasion, an international economic embargo was imposed on Iraq. The loss of Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil, plus the threat to Saudi oil facilities, led to a dramatic increase in oil prices affecting both developed and developing economies. Indeed, worldwide concern for oil pricing and market access reinforced strategic and

political anxiety at Iraq's military capabilities and possible pretensions at regional hegemony. So immediate and so grave were these anxieties as to give rise to an unprecedented international coalition which then proceeded to rebuke and even humiliate the Iraqis. But the global alliance fell short of defeating the Saddam regime or denying it any future military option. Thus, towards mid-decade the truly critical economic and political problems of the Middle East region continue unsolved. The crisis aftermath is demonstrating once more the illusiveness of stability in this part of the world.

Yet, at the same time Middle East politics and players have been transformed in a number of important ways by the unsettling Gulf experience. Certainly the three editors of this book have. Prior to August 1990, as colleagues in the political science department at Tel-Aviv University, each of us was preoccupied with our respective areas of teaching and research. Surprised like everyone else at the spreading atmosphere of crisis, in the tense weeks between Saddam's unopposed seizure of Kuwait and the playing out of all the options for avoiding an outright conflict, we were converted into close observers of unfolding events on an expanding chessboard. Once the actual fighting began, but particularly from that unforgettable moment when the first Scud missile without provocation or warning hit Israel, our scholarly pursuits were thrust aside. Finding oneself caught in the middle of a war, with missiles flying overhead, is not exactly conducive to calm reflection, heuristic theory or intellectual breakthroughs. Together with our closest family members, we hunkered down in our improvised, sealed rooms, gas masks at the ready, awaiting each all-clear sound and the next deafening missile alarm siren with equal anxiety.

It was only after the threat had been lifted by Iraq's forced evacuation from Kuwait that we could even begin to seek release from individual suppressed fears and resume our stunted professional activity. In verbalizing these feelings to each other, it became clear that in addition to having experienced first-hand the 'balance of terror' – praxis rather than theoretical abstraction – we were witness to a remarkable international event – quite probably a 'defining moment', and perhaps even system-transforming: one of those rare integrative sequences which bring together personal and impersonal forces; domestic, national, regional and global actors; ideological, social and economic variables as well as technological, political, military and diplomatic ones. From those early post-crisis therapeutic conversations and attempts at putting the whole thing into perspective comes the inspiration for this collaborative effort. That and the twofold conviction that: first, there are abiding insights and lessons to be learned from the Gulf crisis, especially once the dust had settled, rather than instant history or analysis; second, whether for better or worse, the Middle East as a region has every potential for remaining at the epicentre of new world disorder.

Two main issues are at the centre of this collection of original essays. One question is the significance of interactions between domestic politics and the international setting. The second: the wider repercussions of the Gulf crisis. Aharon Klieman's introductory chapter accordingly sets forth a research framework that incorporates the Gulf events into the academic study of world political trends. He stresses that if Gulf-induced renewed interest in strengthening the global community is not to be short-lived, greater effort must go into evaluating how international processes such as realignment and balancing take place over longer periods of time against the backdrop of a changing international order.

Each one of the pieces chosen for this volume was written by an expert in his or her field. We believe this collaboration between historians, regional specialists and political scientists – integrating a variety of research methods in the framework of one book – will be useful to a wide circle of readers. The book itself covers four main areas: the Middle East proper; Israeli domestic and security concerns, Great Power policies and worldwide forces. Opening the first part on 'Middle East Tremors', Bruce Maddy-Weitzman's discussion of the Gulf War centres on enumerating and analysing the elements of both continuity and change in the system of inter-Arab relations in order to provide a more reliable road map for understanding the ever-changing course of Middle East politics. Efraim Karsh explains the latent logic and incentives behind Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait as an aid in understanding his likely future behaviour should he remain in power in Baghdad. Jacob Goldberg, in turn, addresses several lessons about Saudi Arabian domestic and foreign policies; in particular, how and why during the crisis the key word was 'change' while after the war 'restoration' and the 'status quo' became the main theme.

Menachem Klein next analyses the effects of the Gulf War upon the Palestinians. He examines how the PLO entered the war, and with what goals in mind, then contrasts it with the influence the crisis is having upon the organization's internal structure and external policy. In her chapter, Elizabeth Offen deals with the meaning of one of this century's largest and most widespread migrations, whereby more than 5.5 million people from around forty countries were temporarily or permanently displaced by the Persian Gulf.

In the second part of the book, 'Israel in the Post-Gulf Era', Gad

Barzilai's chapter refers to the tendency of democracies to convert to military societies when their national security faces danger. The broad claim is made that such countries become warlike in character with a tendency not merely to react but to initiate military operations. However, his analysis of the Israeli case during the Gulf War produces different conclusions. Efraim Inbar complements this treatment by focusing on the conduct of the Israeli government in responding to Iraqi provocations with almost uncharacteristic restraint. He probes as well into the larger strategic ramifications of the event for Israel and the consequences of the war for national security in this decade.

In the third part of the book devoted to 'Great Power Realignment', Robert Tucker deals with an issue that surfaced during the war in the Gulf – the new world order. In a profound historical analysis he illuminates the fundamentals of the policy engendered by the Bush Administration, identifying elements of both continuity and change in comparison with previous administrations. Abraham Ben-Zvi's chapter then depicts the war in the Gulf as a screen or prism through which the basic components of the dynamic US–Israel relationship are illuminated. He explains why in a variety of situations potential US power and leverage do not always or necessarily translate automatically into actual power, and discusses whether the current state of American–Israeli ties provides the right environment for a more assertive role by Washington in the Arab–Israeli conflict after the US presidential elections.

Yitzhak Klein considers the problem not of ascendancy or hegemony, but of superpower decline in his chapter on Soviet policy in the Gulf crisis. He nicely illustrates the difficulty the former Soviet Union experienced in adjusting Gulf crisis policy to its own internal weaknesses and strained international circumstances. Klein poses the argument that the Soviet Union attempted to play an independent role in the crisis, yet, in the end merely succeeded in dramatizing that its era as a Middle East actor and global superpower was over. The European Community's reaction to the Gulf crisis is the subject of Ilan Greilsammer's essay, in which he seeks to explain the weakness of the EC at a time of major international crisis as deriving from the inability of the twelve member states to act in a collective and uniform manner.

Our final section, devoted to 'Ripples worldwide', deals essentially with three representative systemic-wide issues – Third World arms exports to Iraq; petroleum prices and war; and the media dimension of the Gulf crisis. Gil Shidlo's chapter provides an overview of the defence production capabilities of four developing countries (Argentina, Brazil, China, Egypt) that exported arms to Iraq – before and after the Gulf War. Gil Feiler raises the important question of whether Saddam's power drive to incorporate Kuwait, *de facto*, into Iraq comprised the main reason for his invasion (with financial considerations only secondary) or whether in fact financial objectives and his prospects for dominating the oil market were foremost. In her chapter on the media dimension of the War, Dina Goren punctures the myth of a free, objective mass media in times of crisis and conflict by underscoring various forms of control, including secrecy and censorship.

Concluding the essays, Gad Barzilai and Gideon Doron point us to future prospects, by looking at the possibilities for resolving at least one major source of Middle East turbulence, the Arab–Palestinian–Israeli conflict, in light of the structural changes we are witnessing in the international system in the aftermath of the Gulf War.