



Quick Write

If you had been secretary of State when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, what course of action would you have recommended to the president? Explain your recommendation.



Learn About

- the historical situation of Iraq under the rule of Saddam Hussein
- the historical events associated with the 1991 Persian Gulf War
- events surrounding the 2003 US invasion of Iraq
- US attempts to stabilize Iraq since the 2003 invasion

Imagine yourself as the secretary of State on 2 August 1990. It's 8 o'clock in the morning, and you've just joined the president and others for a meeting of the National Security Council. The president has an important decision to make. Thirteen hours ago, forces of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein marched into Kuwait to take it over.

Now the president is asking for your recommendation—what should the United States do? Should it go to war to liberate Kuwait? Your job is to weigh the options.

Going to war means transferring hundreds of thousands of US troops halfway around the world in a short period. It will be difficult, and you'll have to get foreign governments to agree to host bases for the troops. The American people know little about Kuwait, and might not support a war to put an emir, or king, back on his throne. You hesitate to commit US troops to a war without overwhelming support. You know Iraq has a large, battle-tested army, and fear US casualties could be very high. The rest of the world might not support an invasion, leaving the US isolated. Shouldn't the US limit itself to diplomacy and economic measures? Isn't this just a fight between Arabs the United States should stay out of?

On the other hand, Kuwait is a major oil supplier to the US and its allies. Now a dictator hostile to the United States controls that oil. What if Iraq attacks Saudi Arabia next? The Saudis are an even more important supplier of oil, which the US economy needs to power factories and heat homes. You know that the Saudi armed forces would be no match for the Iraqis. And what if the United States and United Nations do nothing—won't other countries take that as a signal that they can invade their weaker neighbors and seize their natural resources? With Kuwait's oil at his disposal, Saddam Hussein can ignore diplomacy and sanctions.

The president awaits your opinion.