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The Gulf War and its Consequences

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As long as there have been civilizations, there have been wars. Whether justified or not they are always a menace to public health. Disease runs rampant, money is diverted from useful research, and care for veterans is never ending. On our shores actual war has not been a major territorial problem. Most of our wars have been fought in other locations. Yet we still feel the consequences. Most of our wars have been remote. For example, few people are familiar with the Mexican-American War and the bounty we received at its end. The Vietnam War changed that. With nightly television reports, the American public became aware of the goings on in Asia. That war, however, is not familiar to our students. The war that they are most aware of, thanks to the media, is the Persian Gulf War.

“This is Bernie Shaw. Something is happening outside. . . .” “Peter Arnett, join me here. Let’s describe to our viewers what we’re seeing. . . . The skies over Baghdad have been illuminated. . . . We’re seeing bright flashes going off all over the sky.”¹

America was witnessing live action warfare January 16, 1991. In my paper I will discuss what led to and what happened after the momentous moment that Desert Shield erupted into Desert Storm. Most of our students were old enough to follow the day-to-day developments of this six-week confrontation. This project will enlighten them to the details of the Iraqi-U.N. episode. From Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait to the ceasefire, the intent will be to discuss what transpired and possible options that could have been taken. As an educator, I will present facts and let the students determine whether the U.S. should have become involved in the Persian Gulf War. After weighing information they have gathered and the unit has furnished them, they will take part in a mock trial to determine if the war was necessary. In conjunction with other units related to this topic, the students should be well prepared to put the U.S. on trial for involvement in Desert Shield/Desert Storm. I will use Alan Frishman’s class as a jury.

Included in this unit will be a section on war crimes. I will concentrate on U.S. war crimes. Included will be sections on violence, death, hunger, sickness, environmental ruin, and human rights violations. These are not new topics to war, nor were they just committed by the U.S. and U.N. forces. Iraq did its fair share of atrocities. However, for the purpose of brevity the unit will be confined to the above mentioned topic.

Finally, the unit will attempt to understand the Pentagon-denounced Gulf War Syndrome. Discussed, primarily, will be symptoms reports by Persian Gulf War veterans and the possible reasons for these afflictions. I will then have the students compare diseases and unhealthy consequences of World War I, an early 20th century

war, and the Persian Gulf War, a later 20th century war. The unit will also have the students determine if chemical warfare is a viable means of combat and what if any controls should be placed on belligerent nations.

As stated previously, this unit will present facts. It will be up to the students to determine for themselves what they feel about a war that was immensely popular in 1991. The unit will consist of three parts, and each part will have specific activities associated with it. The first part will be called “What Led To and What Happened During Desert Storm.” There will be three days devoted to a discussion of the historical background of the war, followed by a test on the fourth day.

The second part will be called “Did the United States Act Correctly in Desert Storm?” There will be six days devoted to that topic, followed by a test on the seventh day.

The third part will be called “The Gulf War Syndrome.” There will be three days devoted to a discussion of whether the health problems of some Gulf War veterans were related to the Gulf War or whether they were present before. Following this discussion will be one day of assigning roles for a mock trial and two days of presenting the mock trial. The jury for the mock trial will consist of students from Alan Frishman’s U.S. History class, who will be expected to explain their verdict.

Finally, my class will sit in as a jury for a debate held by students from Mr. Frishman’s class, and will be expected to explain their verdict as well. In all, the unit will consist of twenty school days. There are three primary teaching objectives.

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

Objective Number One:

To familiarize students with the historical background of Desert Storm/Desert Shield

Days 1,2,3: The historical background of Desert Storm/Desert Shield

Iraq is also known as the “cradle of civilization.” It boasts rich history of the Sumerians, Mesopotamia, Assyrians, and Babylonians. The longest dominant group was the Ottoman Turks who ruled from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries. The British occupied Baghdad in 1917. After World War I the Mideast territories were colonized by the British and the French, who, along with the United States, were the major winners of the war. With the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the colonies would eventually gain their independence through the League of Nations. Britain had control of Kuwait. After Iraq’s independence in 1931, the king tried to annex Kuwait but was deterred by the British.

Britain’s colonial rule of Kuwait ended in 1961 when the new country declared its independence. Iraq immediately wanted to attack Kuwait on the grounds that prior to World War I it had belonged to them. However, both Britain and Saudi Arabia helped to defend Kuwait’s border. In addition, to help resolve the border dispute a large payment was given to Iraq. Iraq in turn recognized Kuwait’s independence. This agreement was short-lived, however, as Iraq renewed its claims on Kuwait in 1968. In 1975 Saddam Hussein proposed that Kuwait lease to Iraq half of the Bubiuan Island and surrender Warbah. The Kuwaitis were

outraged and rejected the proposal.

Hussein continued pressure in the 1980's to build a naval base in Bubiyan Island and wanted a lease from Kuwait. Fearing an Iraqi attack, Kuwait fortified itself. In 1988 Iraq attacked Kuwait's military on Bubiyan Island.

We can see that Iraq's claim on Kuwait was not a sudden incident. There had been a history of demands and combat throughout the twentieth century. The culmination of all this was Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. The United Nations immediately issued Resolution 660 demanding an immediate withdrawal from Kuwait. Next came Resolution 661 on August 6, 1990, which called for economic sanctions against Iraq. Also the United Nations issued Resolution 662 which called the invasion illegal.

But Iraq did not withdraw. Iraq had its own agenda. Citing historical precedence for its occupation, the Iraqis were coveting the cash that Kuwait had to offer. Iraq was in economic distress from their years of involvement in the Iran-Iraq War. Kuwait's wealth would offset their economic problems. Iraq was also upset with Kuwait for not forgiving loans that Iraq had not repaid. Finally, Iraq had illusions of becoming the force to be contended with and dominant in the Middle East, especially if they had access to the Gulf.

The United States reacted quickly to the invasion. On August 7, 1990, America began deploying troops. The next day President Bush ordered armed forces to Saudi Arabia. Their purpose was to protect the Saudi Arabians from any Iraqi attack. Iraq responded by declaring that male hostages would be used as human shields at strategic Iraqi sites. This was an attempt to deter any military attacks on these locations. On August 22, 1990, George Bush called up reservists. Iraq then announced that it would withdraw from Kuwait if they were allowed to retain the islands of Bubiyan and Warbah. These two locations would give them free access to the Gulf. ²

On October 26, 1990, the London Financial Times reported that a senior engineer of the Kuwait Oil Company stated that Iraq had prepared 300 of the 1000 oil wells for destruction. ³ The concern of the Bush Administration about Hussein's threats to use Kuwait oil as a weapon caused it to initiate top secret studies on "environmental terrorism of fires/oil spills in the Middle East." The studies concluded that the smoke's impact would have little effect on weapons. Estimates on damage to world climate and the environment varied. The local impact, on the other hand, was properly predicted to be potentially dangerous. ⁴ As predicted, temperatures below the clouds, caused by both Iraqi sabotage and Allied bombing, were below normal during the day; hospitals were packed with patients suffering from respiratory problems; and "black rain" damaged crops and drinking water. ⁵ Global warming due to the increase of carbon monoxide was another concern.

By October 27, 1990, eight Patriot missiles were now operational. Later, reports would show that in actuality it took about four Patriot missiles to down one Scud. After the November elections George Bush ordered additional troops to the Persian Gulf. By November General Schwarzkopf described three centers of gravity:

1. Saddam Hussein
2. the Iraqi nuclear, biological, chemical threat
3. the Republican Guard ⁶

In December troops were vaccinated against chemical warfare. Reporters would also take pills, use gas masks, and take injections during Desert Storm. One reported from the Washington Post noted side effects from the medication upon injection. Some troopers actually sat on syringes and injected themselves by mistake during the confrontation.

The Gulf arena was a new experience for many women. At first many units would not send females to Saudi Arabia for fear of insulting the Islamic culture. As it turned out, there would be more women in combat there than at any other time in United States history. The women had to adjust to rules such as no driving non-military vehicles, keeping their bodies covered, entering public buildings from the back door, and having a male companion to join them in shopping, to do the talking.

The United Nations gave Iraq until January 15, 1991 to pull out of Kuwait. They did not. On that night hotels were hosting parties at sixty dollars a head. Desert Shield became Desert Storm January 16, 1991. President Bush, as some Iraqis called him because bosh means “nothing” in Arabic, began the bombardment with a vengeance. The war of words also began. Bush referred to Saddam Hussein as a Hitler and Hussein began the rhetoric of calling Bush “satan.” Hussein evoked the sympathy of his Muslim countrymen by turning the confrontation into a “jihad” or holy war. He went on to pronounce Kuwait Iraq’s nineteenth province.

It was fortunate for the United States that the war began when it did because prior to that time the United States was not prepared to defend Saudi Arabia let alone attack Iraq. Military equipment was slow in coming and some of it was antiquated. Many soldiers feared death if more troops and supplies did not arrive. The excessive summer heat during the onset of Desert Shield had rendered some soldiers unconscious during their sleep. The morale of the troops was not great in the beginning. The United States was not prepared until the deadline to undertake the enormous task ahead.

It was also necessary to commence the war due to the much debated Amnesty International reports of Iraqi torture and executions of Kuwaitis. Rumors had also surfaced that Iraqis were taking incubators resulting in the deaths of many infants. The Iraqi government manipulated a CNN tour of Kuwait. They had promised the news team access to several hospitals in Kuwait. On the day of the trip they only allowed them to see one hospital for a short time. Before CNN had time to file any report, the Iraqi government announced that the CNN news team found the reports of stolen incubators to be false.

Tensions continued to mount when Baghdad television displayed POWs on the airwaves. Americans became more outraged by this miscalculation on Saddam Hussein’s part. Some say that he felt this tactic would cause Americans to demonstrate against the war as they had during the Vietnam War. He also outraged the American public by attacking Israel with Scud missiles. America quickly tried to get reassurance from Israel that it would not retaliate for fear that such an action would dissolve the Arab alliance against Iraq. America then sent Patriot missiles to Israel.

By January 22, 1991, Iraq began oil tank fires in Kuwait in hopes of camouflaging troop movements. This number would grow dramatically during Desert Storm. On January 25, 1991 Iraq continued what Bush referred to as “environmental terrorism” by releasing barrels of oil into the Persian Gulf. One reason was to foul Saudi Arabia’s desalinization plant. ⁷

One of the most controversial bombings by the United States occurred February 11, 1991. The United States stated that they were bombing a camouflaged military installation. Iraq claimed the site was a bomb shelter filled with hundreds of civilians. ⁸

Scores of Iraqi soldiers were surrendering to Americans and other United Nations forces. Many were tired, scared and angry with Saddam Hussein. By March 5th, 22,308 Iraqi POWs were taken by Marines. ⁹

February 24th began ground attack day. By February 26th Saddam Hussein announced that Iraqi troops were withdrawing from Kuwait. His terminology angered President Bush who felt they were retreating. Two days later another controversial event happened. According to the United States, a section of the Republican Guard was attacked near Basra. The Iraqis countered that they were soldiers that were retreating. Other retreating units or units going to unite with the republican Guards were destroyed along the highway. Casualties were high. As our soldiers put it, it was a turkey shoot. No clear estimates of casualties has been made available.

On March 3rd Iraq agreed to all terms set up by the United Nations and by April 11, 1991, the United Nations Security Council announced that Desert Storm was over.

Day 4: Test on historical background.

Objective Number Two:

To show students that not all Americans were in favor of the Gulf War.

Day 5: The jubilation over the Gulf War.

Most Americans were jubilant about the Gulf War. They supported the troops. They sent parcels, letters, cards, and good wishes to the soldiers. Americans put up yellow ribbons and hung American flags. Bumper stickers adorned many cars supporting the troops. Troops were given parades upon their return. Americans felt they had fought a war for moral reasons to free Kuwait and to establish a new world order with America as the military superpower. Americans felt the war was justified and that any outcomes were part of what war entailed. However, not all Americans were in favor of the war. Despite euphemisms used by the press, politicians, and the military to lessen the actual war terminology, some protested against the war. Several groups tried to get anti-war commercials placed on major networks but were rejected. The mood of the country was predominantly in favor of the war. Kuwaitis had spent millions on publicity and the American government was dominant in information output.

Days 6-10: Did the United States act correctly in Desert Storm?

A group was formed named "The Commission of Inquiry for the International War Crimes Tribunal." Ramsey Clark, former attorney general, was responsible. Their first hearings were held in New York City on May 11, 1991. They charged the United States with a multitude of war crimes during the Gulf crisis. The following is a summary of their complaints as outlined in War Crimes, by Ramsey Clark and others, pages 11-24:

The United States provoked a war in order to take action against Iraq and to dominate the Gulf.

As early as July 1990 General Schwarzkopf ran computerized war games pitting United States troops against the Iraqi military. It also alleged that the United States along with Kuwait baited Iraq into invading Kuwait. The Commission stated that when Iraq threatened Kuwait prior to invasion, the United States did nothing. When George Bush announced that United States troops were to go to Saudi Arabia the Saudis did not feel they were in danger. According to the commission, this deployment prevented any Arab resolution of the matter.

President Bush from August 2, 1990, prevented any interference with his plans to destroy Iraq economically and militarily.

The commission felt that President Bush built up forces in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf with the intention of invading Iraq. It was alleged that President Bush coerced the United Nations into a series of resolutions aimed at Iraq. The commission noted that Bush refused to meet with Iraq to discuss a peaceful solution. In other words, Bush refused to allow Iraq to “save face,” which is a cultural trait of Arab nations.

Bush ordered the destruction of facilities essential to civilian life and economic productivity throughout Iraq.

The systematic bombing of Iraq destroyed electric power; water treatment facilities; telephone and radio exchanges; food processing, storage, and distribution facilities; transportation systems; civilian factories; and historical sites.

Perhaps the most publicized of these incidents was the bombing of an infant milk factory that the United States said was a military factory. Saddam Hussein really publicized this because milk represents something essential to Arabic life. It symbolizes fertility, wealth, and life. Therefore, it was an emotionally-charged message to Iraqis. (Yant, pp. 22-23)

The United States intentionally bombed civilian life/business districts, schools, hospitals, mosques, shelters, etc.

This violated the United Nations Charter. The bombing of Iraq shut down much of Iraq’s daily life. The most publicized of the bombings was the assault on the Amariyah civilian bomb shelter on February 13th.

The United States indiscriminately bombed throughout Iraq.

Bombs were not falling on targets. Although the United States had “smart bombs,” most of the bombs used were referred to as “dumb bombs.” The latter did not have a high percentage accuracy rate.

The United States intentionally bombed and destroyed Iraqi military personnel, used excessive force, killed soldiers seeking to surrender or retreat, and killed Iraqi soldiers after the ceasefire.

One major incident in this category was the post ceasefire combat near Basra by the United States 24th Division forces. The commission asserted they were retreating soldiers. The United States asserted they were armed and hooking up with the Republican Guard. Allegations also arose that the United States bombed tanks with white flags on them. Furthermore, it is alleged that the United States troops buried Iraqi soldiers alive when they covered trenches.

The United States used prohibited weapons.

Some of the examples of the above were fuel air explosives, napalm, cluster bombs, and super bombs.

The United States bombed installations in Iraq containing dangerous substances and forces.

The commission alleged that Iraq did not use any nuclear or chemical weapons. They added that the United States bombed nuclear sites and chemical plants which caused many civilian casualties.

President Bush corrupted United Nations functions in order to secure power to commit crimes against peace and war crimes.

The commission asserted that President Bush caused the United Nations to bypass any peaceful settlement of the conflict in order to get the United Nations Security Council to authorize the use of all means necessary

to remove Iraq from Kuwait.

President Bush usurped Constitutional power of Congress.

The commission stated that Bush ignored Congressional authority and failed to consult with Congress. He individually ordered a blockade of Iraq and sent troops to Saudi Arabia. It is essential to note here that Congress approved the use of military action against Iraq.

The United States waged war on the environment.

Pollution from bombs, oil spills and the destruction of water systems are but a few of the environmental systems destroyed or polluted by U.S. military actions.

President Bush deprived Iraqi people of essential medicines, potable water, food and other essentials.

The above was achieved through embargoes, blockades, freezing of Iraqi funds, misinformation tactics, and bombings.

George Bush controlled and restricted the press to gain support for the military and for his political goals.

According to the commission, Desert Storm was a commercial militarism and individual weapon systems. It is a well know fact that pool reporters were assigned military escorts the censored photos and stories before they were released.

The United States has by force secured a military presence in the Gulf, the control of oil resources, and geopolitical domination in the region.

The above mentioned allegations violate the United Nations Charter, international law, and laws of the United States.

Day 11: Test on whether or not the United States acted correctly in Desert Storm.

Objective Number Three:

To familiarize students with the Gulf War Syndrome.

Days 12-14: Are the health problems of some Gulf War veterans related to the Gulf War, or were they present before?

My students will have the opportunity to read and discuss the radio script used by Mr. Frishman's class. This is a script taken from Morning Edition on National Public Radio, January 19, 1996. It explores both sides of the issue. To quote from Mr. Frishman's annotation of this script, as it appears in his curriculum unit: "A good exercise for students to see the script of something they would only otherwise hear. A study of this script might well lead to other lessons involving scripts, perhaps of TV news, documentary, or even dramatic shows. Helps students see the process behind a familiar product."

Upon returning from the Persian Gulf arena some veterans were complaining of health problems. Were these health problems related to the Gulf War or were they present before? How does one determine this? Were these health problems consistent among veterans at risk? How does one determine the exact locations of these troops during the crisis? Were there enough veterans and personnel with the symptoms to label the

maladies a Gulf War Syndrome? These are some of the questions panels are confronted with when trying to determine whether or not there is a Gulf War Syndrome and if so what caused it?

Tens of thousand of Gulf War personnel are complaining about a variety of symptoms. These include fatigue, headaches, memory loss, sleep apnea, gastroesophageal reflux, hyperthyroidism, chronic sinusitis, post traumatic stress disorder, joint pain, rashes, backaches and depression. These people had been seen by physicians and mental health workers. Studies on these cases have been inconclusive to date. Some veterans are becoming nonfunctioning due to these symptoms.

There are several theories relating to the possible causes of the Gulf War Syndrome. One potential cause pertains to the toxins emitted due to the fires in the region. Oil fires are quite hazardous and could account for some of the symptoms. Another possible cause pertains to chemical weaponry or fallout from Allied bombing. Although many state that Iraq did not use chemical weapons, some tests conducted at the time showed that they were in the air after attacks. Another theory is that the symptoms are a result of the vaccines used on the personnel to deter the effects of chemical weapons and warfare. And, finally, stress factors are a possible are a possible reason for the Gulf War Syndrome. Troops were subjected to the threat of death and chemical warfare, as well as the sight of thousands of Iraqi corpses. Those are but a few of the psychological factors that could have led to the symptoms exhibited by the some Gulf War personnel.

Day 15: Assignment of roles for mock trial. These questions need to be addressed:

- a. What were the motives of the major players?
- b. What did each of these people hope to get out of the war? (Students will play these roles.) George Bush, Arnold Schwarzkopf, Colin Powell, Saddam Hussein, Ted Turner (head of CNN), the heads of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the PLO, Syria, and Israel.
- c. During the trial my students can ask themselves whether the United States government has something to lose if they are responsible for Gulf War Syndrome.

Days 16-17: Mock trial. (with Mr. Frishman's United States history class serving as jury)

Day 18: Explanation of verdict by students in Mr. Frishman's class.

Day 19: Debate by Mr. Frishman's class on the following proposition: "Is Gulf War Syndrome a Significant Health Issue the United States Government Has Tried to Cover Up? (with my class serving as jury).

In preparation for their role as jury in the debate, my students will spend some time with Mr. Frishman, who will explain to them the rules of debate and what their responsibilities will be. In order to make sure that they take their roles seriously, I will make it clear to my class that they will be graded on their participation as jury members during the debate.

Day 20: Explanation of verdict by class.

In conclusion, then, my twenty-day unit on the Gulf War and its consequences will help my students understand the issues and complexities of this war that is most familiar to them personally. They will see that

the issues are not simple to resolve. They will put themselves in the roles of key decision makers during and after the conflict. They will get experience in analyzing information, preparing for and presenting a mock trial, and serving as a jury in a debate.

NOTES

1. Weiner, Robert, *Live from Baghdad* . New York: Doubleday, 1992, p. 259.
2. Hutchinson, Kevin Don, *Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm* . Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995, p. 37.
3. Hutchinson, *op. cit* ., P. 40.
4. Yant, Martin, *Desert Mirage* , Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1991, p. 52.
5. Hutchinson, *op. cit* ., p. 46.
6. Hutchinson, *op. cit* ., p. 84.
7. Hutchinson, *op. cit* ., p. 105
8. Hutchinson, *op. cit* ., p. 139.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Abidi, A.H.H. and K. R. Singh, editors, *The Gulf Crisis* . New Delhi: Lancer Books, 1991.

A compilation of papers presented at a two-day seminar at the School Of International Studies. This book is informative and answered many questions relating to the Gulf War crisis. Also included are documents related to the situation.

2. Bernstein, Dennis, "Gulf War Syndrome Covered Up Chemical and Biological Agents Exposed." *Covert Action Quarterly* , April 3, 1996.

This article is a series of anecdotes about veterans who are certain their illnesses were caused by their service in Desert Storm/Desert Shield.

3. Clark, Ramsey and others, *War Crimes* . Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1992.

Most of the material in this book was presented at the hearings held by the Commission of Inquiry for the International War Crimes Tribunal. The book includes various sections intended to find the United States guilty of war crimes during the Persian Gulf War.

4. Hutchinson, Kevin Don, *Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm* . Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995.

This book contains a chronology of Desert Shield/ Desert Storm. It is a day to day factual account of events that transpired during this time. It is an excellent resource.

5. Moore, Mary, *A Woman at War* . New York: Charled Scribners Sons, 1993.

This book is an enjoyable reading experience. It covers the Washington Post's reporter during

her coverage of the Persian Gulf War including the ground war. It not only includes her experience, the information covered is a result of more than 500 interviews from people involved in this arena.

6. Weiner, Robert, *Live from Baghdad* . New York: Doubleday, 1992.

This book covers the time the executive producer of CNN Baghdad was in Iraq. This is entertaining as well as informative. It gives insight into media coverage and censorship during the war.

7. Yant, Martin, *Desert Mirage* ,
Buffalo: Prometheus Books,
1991.

This book covers Desert Storm/Desert Shield. It especially emphasizes the manipulation of the American people by the government, military and the press.

READING LIST FOR STUDENTS

Barbara Bradley, Joyce David, and Robb Stein, editors, Morning Edition, National Public Radio, January 19, 1996.

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