

REPORT FROM THE SECURITY COUNCIL



The Persian Gulf War

■ On 11 April, the president of the Security Council handed a letter to Iraq's ambassador to the UN officially announcing a ceasefire in the Persian Gulf War. While the letter marked the formal end of hostilities, diplomats with an eye to history, were divided on the issue of the specific date that the conflict came to an end. Some argued that the ceasefire began on 27 February, when US President George Bush ordered his forces to halt their rout of Iraqi troops.

But other diplomats argued that the ceasefire formally took hold 3 April, when the Council adopted Resolution 687, which laid out the conditions for an end to hostilities. Among other things, Resolution 687 called on Iraq to agree to destroy its chemical, biological weapons as well as most of its ballistic missiles. Iraq was also ordered to agree to:

the creation of a demilitarized zone along the 1963 boundary between Iraq and Kuwait; the creation of a fund to compensate those who suffered losses as a result of its 2 August invasion of Kuwait. The fund would be financed by appropriating an annual share of its oil revenues, the precise amount to be determined by the UN Secretary-General; renounce any attempts to acquire or develop weapons of mass destruction whether chemical, biological or nuclear. In return, while not ending sanctions, the Council allowed Iraq to import food and essential materials, a decision that would be reviewed every sixty days.

In a speech to the Council, Iraq's ambassador reacted angrily to the resolution and said his country reserved the right to seek reparations of its own for the destruction wrought by the allies. He accused the allied forces of indiscriminately

bombing military and civilian targets saying that 88,500 tons of explosives had been dropped on Iraq – the equivalent of “seven atomic bombs.”

A majority of the Council supported the adoption of Resolution 687, with Cuba against, and Ecuador and Yemen abstaining. In a speech that reflected the views of many, the Soviet delegate said that the international community had learned a bitter lesson similar to that of the 1930s, when an unchecked aggressor had seized one small nation after another. Resolution 687, he said, was a test of the new system of international relations, and in adopting it, the Council had proved its ability to restore international peace and security.

The adoption of Resolution 687 was preceded by intense diplomatic activity in order to force Iraq to acquiesce to allied and Security Council demands. Even before hostilities ended, the international coalition, as well as Iraq and its allies, had been in competition to secure the upper hand in the propaganda war.

On 13 February, the Council voted to meet privately to hear statements on the Gulf conflict. The procedural vote was a victory for US diplomacy which was concerned that a public discussion of the bombing campaign and a non-aligned proposal to order a ceasefire could embarrass Arab allies in the international coalition.

The minutes of the meeting were released twenty-four hours later. During the meeting, Philippe Kirsch, the acting Canadian ambassador, summarized Canada's position by saying that “the disappointing and painful recourse to force was the result of reaching the limits of diplomacy. The continuing recourse to force is clearly authorized by the legal and moral authority of the Security Council.”

The meeting was also remarkable for the shrill tone of some discussion, as well as for the personal animosities that had developed among Council members

during the months leading up to the conflict. Iraq's representative dismissed the meeting as “a private session for liars, pygmies and hypocrites.” In one of the most vicious personal attacks heard in the Council, he referred to Kuwait's ambassador as “the pygmy who sits to my right.”

The ambassador of Zaire subsequently objected to the use of “pygmy” as a pejorative term. He noted that his country counted a population of 400,000 pygmies and “I should like to say that pygmies are fully-fledged human beings and cannot be treated in a discriminatory fashion because of their size.”

Continuing the diplomatic pressure on Iraq, on 2 March, the Security Council adopted Resolution 686, with Cuba voting against, and China, India and Yemen abstaining. The document demanded that Baghdad implement all of the Council's twelve previous resolutions passed against it. Resolution 686 also demanded that Iraq rescind its annexation of Kuwait; accept liability for losses caused to individuals, corporations or countries as a result of its invasion; release all detainees and return all stolen Kuwaiti property.

On 3 March, just days after hostilities ended, the Council called on the sanctions committee to act promptly on requests for humanitarian assistance stemming from the war. It also dispatched a mission to the area to assess humanitarian needs.

On 20 March, Under-Secretary General Martti Ahtisaari reported that the war had relegated Iraq to a “pre-industrial age” and warned of “cataclysmic” conditions. He called for urgent humanitarian aid. In a separate report on Kuwait, he noted that the government appeared to be making progress in providing for basic needs and restoring essential services.

On 5 April, the Council adopted Resolution 688 demanding that Iraq end its repression of the Kurds

and other civilian groups inside Iraq. Cuba, Yemen and Zimbabwe voted against, while China and India abstained. All five of these countries argued that the resolution amounted to meddling in Iraq's internal affairs and, as such, was a violation of the UN charter. Resolution 688 also called on the Secretary General to “use all the resources at his disposal” to address the needs of the refugees.

On 29 April, the Council issued a “solemn appeal” for assistance to twenty-one countries affected by sanctions against Iraq. While the Council called for a positive response, it did not specify what this should be.

Other Council Business

■ On 22 January, the Council urged the parties to the conflict in Liberia to continue to respect the ceasefire there and to cooperate with the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States to restore peace and security.

In a statement by the president, the Council also appealed for humanitarian aid for Liberia.

■ On 30 January, the Council renewed the mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for six months. The next day it renewed the mandate of the Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIMOG) until 28 February after which it was disbanded.

■ On 27 March, the Council agreed to “deplore” the Israeli expulsion of four Palestinians from the Occupied Territories. It also said it was “gravely concerned” by the deteriorating situation in the territories.

■ On April 29, the Council adopted Resolution 690, which established the UN mission for a referendum in Western Sahara. The operation is another reflection of the UN's reactivated role in peacekeeping. The effort will cost \$200 million and involve close to 3,000 military and civilian personnel. As in most other major peacekeeping operations, a prominent role was reserved for Canada. □

— TREVOR ROWE