

NINE YEARS AGO TODAY

By John Duke Anthony

TODAY marks the anniversary of an event from which Kuwait, its fellow GCC members, many another developing country, and the U.S. and other Allied Coalition members, in different ways, even now, nearly a decade later, have yet to fully recover.

The most comprehensive and rigorously applied international and political sanctions against any country in this century remain a source of ongoing controversy amidst their continuing applicability and enforcement.

Prompt, adequate, and effective compensation for the war's victims continues to be elusive. The fate of Kuwait's and other countries' missing citizens -- swept up and carted off to Iraq in the war's waning hours -- remains nearly as unknown as before.

Although the numbers of those missing -- more than 600 -- may seem small to some, they are more than 600 too many if viewed from the perspective of the victims themselves and their loved ones who await and pray for their return.

What's so often missing is context. It's this: the number of Kuwaitis and others who are missing is equivalent to 270,000 Americans missing and unaccounted for in Canada or Mexico.

It is the same as if a million Frenchmen or British citizens had been taken prisoner by an invading army, spirited away, and were being held hostage -- as a bargaining chip in some future negotiations -- by the government in a neighboring country.

Most of the Kuwaitis of my acquaintance know at least four of those who are missing. Most also know at least forty of those who long for their friends and relatives' repatriation.

The cost in human life, in dreams that were trampled by the invader, in material well-being, jobs, and standards of living among the invaded and the citizenry in the land of the invader lost as a consequence of the invasion, will probably never be known. Even conservative estimates, ones that range in the hundreds of billions of dollars, look like typographical errors. Would that they were.

Against any measurement of the tragedy and devastation visited upon the human victims that ensued from Iraq's invasion on August 2, 1990, one is perhaps still too close to the act itself to venture another kind of calculation.

But, to the extent a rational, objective, detached assessment will one day be possible, the following might constitute some of the components that flowed from the exceptionally close and multifaceted GCC-U.S. geo-political, defense, and related relationships as the crisis unfolded and the national sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity of a small and defenseless country was upheld.

The GCC-U.S. relationship:

- o was the cornerstone of the Allied effort that reversed Iraq's aggression against Kuwait;
- o helped prevent Iraq from significantly expanding its invasion to the other GCC countries;
- o liberated Kuwait;
- o re-instated Kuwait's internationally recognized legitimate government;
- o restored freedom and security to the Kuwaiti people;
- o enforced, for the first time since the Korean War, the UN Charter preamble dictum regarding the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force;
- o succeeded in persuading the world's highest political body, the UN Security Council, to do what neither it nor any other institution had ever done before: guarantee the border between two countries, i.e., Kuwait and Iraq; and
- o helped to crystallize international consensus on the need to strengthen The Hague and Geneva Conventions regarding the laws of war, with a view to providing more effective mechanisms to prevent a recurrence of what, during the Kuwait crisis of 1990-91, were some of the most egregious acts imaginable committed by one country against another country's people, its entire society, and its environment and natural resources.

Notwithstanding ongoing debate about other aspects of the crisis and conflict, these and other achievements are of no small moment. They are of unparalleled significance in the annals of U.S.-GCC and U.S.-other Arab strategic, economic, political, and related ties, and in the history of Allied cooperation in defense of a region of overriding importance to not just its inhabitants but to all of humankind.

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