

ELEVEN YEARS AGO TODAY

***By
Dr. John Duke Anthony***

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Today marks an important anniversary, a date with tragedy. From an event that occurred eleven years ago this week, Kuwait, its fellow GCC states, numerous other developing countries, Allied Coalition members, and Iraq, have yet to fully recover.

The most comprehensive and rigorously applied international economic and military sanctions against any country in the past century are still in place. They are unlikely to be lifted anytime soon. There are numerous reasons why this is so.

To cite but one, prompt, adequate, and effective compensation for the war's victims continues to be elusive. To note another, 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 and, hence, unresolved, as before.

Kuwait's MIAs

That more than 600 are missing may seem a small number to some. But they are more than 600 too many if viewed from the perspective of the victims and their loved ones who await and pray for their return.

What's so often missing when people trot out numbers to prove a point is context. In this case, 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 50,000 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 armed forces of a neighboring country.

Most 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. It is next to impossible to go about one's business in Kuwait without confronting daily one or another reminder of this long-festering wound to a people's psyche and soul.

As a consequence of the invasion, the cost in human life, in material well-being, in dreams trampled by the invader, 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.

Calculating the Costs

Against any measurement of the devastation visited upon the victims of Iraq's invasion on August 2, 1990, many are still too close to the act itself, and the maelstrom of controversy surrounding its ongoing international consequences, to venture another kind of calculation.

But this writer believes a more rational, clinical, and detached assessment will one day be forthcoming. When it does, the following might constitute at least a partial tally of other results that are far less frequently mentioned.

These, from one perspective, flowed from the multifaceted and exceptionally close GCC-U.S. geo-political, defense, and economic relationships as the crisis unfolded. These ties, and the combination of their resolve and respective assets, were powerful. They stiffened the defenders and liberators' refusal to bow or bend to Baghdad's belligerence. They upheld the national sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity of one of the world's smallest and most defenseless countries. The internationally recognized legitimate government of Kuwait was reinstated.

The GCC-U.S. relationship was the cornerstone of the combined efforts that restored safety and security to the Kuwaiti people. It helped prevent Iraq from expanding its invasion to the other GCC countries.

The alliance enforced, for the first time since the Korean War, the UN Charter preamble dictum regarding the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. The partnership, in concert with their respective allies, succeeded in persuading the world's highest political body, the UN Security Council, to do what it had never done before, or since -- it guaranteed the border between two countries, i.e., Kuwait and Iraq. Not least, it enforced the 1907 Hague and 1949 Geneva Conventions regarding the obligations and prohibitions of an occupying power.

The relationship achieved all this with a view to providing more effective mechanisms to prevent the recurrence of an aggression against not only another country's land and people, but its entire society, economy, institutions, environment, and natural resources.

No specialist is unmindful of what was unique in the liberation of Kuwait. Nothing comparable has subsequently occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda-Burundi, Kosovo, Palestine, and Syria. Even so, in the case of Kuwait, important precedents relating to each of these other conflicts were established, and reinforced, even if, at the end of the day, they have not been implemented elsewhere. If nothing else, they show what the United States can do to right a wrong -- when there is the requisite will.

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LAST LINES

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