

# Middle East playing costly waiting game

**By STACI COX**  
State and National Editor

Current U.S. involvement in the Middle East is becoming a defensive standoff with Iraq, plunging each side into a waiting game for compromise or war.

"I don't think it will end up in war," said Herbert Bodman, UNC professor of history. "We will have a long period

of standoff. I think we must prepare to think of a year."

The Gulf crisis began July 17, when Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein claimed Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates were exceeding OPEC oil quotas, glutting the market and lowering prices. Hussein threatened military action against any OPEC nation he perceived to be ignoring quotas. His threats

prompted U.S. President George Bush to send refueling tanker planes and fighting ships to the Persian Gulf.

Iraqi and Kuwaiti negotiators met on July 31 to attempt to reach an agreement on oil production, while more than 100,000 Iraqi troops massed on the Kuwaiti border. Iraqi forces poured over the Kuwaiti border in the early morning hours of Aug. 2, taking complete control of the nation. Hussein claimed his soldiers had been invited by Kuwaiti revolutionaries to free them from a corrupt government, and he quickly installed a puppet government.

Bush quickly froze all Iraqi and Kuwaiti assets in the United States, began lobbying allies for a massive trade embargo and prepared the military for movements to Saudi Arabia. By Aug. 28, tens of thousands of U.S. troops were stationed along the Saudi-Iraqi border, along with trillions of dollars in military hardware. Several naval battle groups are also patrolling the Persian Gulf and the Arabian, Red and Mediterranean seas, with unprecedented U.N. approval to use military power to enforce the current embargo.

U.S. action has garnered wide support from most of the world in maintaining the embargo, as well as some naval support from Europe and land support from several Arab nations.

The greatest attention now focuses on thousands of foreign nationals, including hundreds of Americans, now held hostage in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. Hussein has made several television appearances with the hostages, describing them alternately as guests or "human shields" to be held at strategic Iraqi military bases. Hussein has made additional threats that the hostages, including women, children and diplomats stripped of their immu-



nity, will suffer from the embargo.

"It will take a long time for sanctions to be effective," Bodman said. "And Hussein has an advantage on us with foreign citizens. It will be a difficult and delicate waiting game."

While Bush has made it clear that safety of the hostages is a priority, the overall goals of the United States in the standoff are uncertain, said Tim McKeown, UNC associate professor of political science.

"The administration's proposed course of action is very unclear," he said. "We're not engaged in a shooting war but are willing to use force or coercion to cut off Iraqi supplies."

With military on both sides of the border dug into defensive positions, the embargo has become the key to the struggle between Iraq and the rest of the world, said George Friedman, professor of political science at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania.

"The embargo is very strong now, with only a few leaks, mainly through Jordan. But Iran is the weak link. They may decide it is in their best interest to keep Iraq just barely going. Hussein may look better than U.S. control of Saudi, Kuwaiti and Iraqi oil supplies."

But so far the extent of U.N. and world cooperation in the sanctions has been phenomenal, said Glenn Snyder, UNC professor of political science.

"It's a combination of both U.S. influence and genuine support," Snyder said. "There are the obvious interests of keeping the oil market stabilized and high prices down. And, honestly, many nations also want to stay on the good side of the United States."

But, if the current crisis comes to military action, it is not at all certain that Arabs will continue to support U.S. forces against fellow Arabs, especially if the United States is seen to be occupying the Holy Land, Bodman said. And even if the embargo is successful, there is little agreement on what terms the United States is seeking.

"We've got to back Hussein into a corner," Bodman said. "There can be no face-saving compromise. He must pull completely out of Kuwait."

If the sanctions create a level of shortages that Hussein cannot politically withstand, he will be willing to give in, Bodman said. A similar case was brought on by the current crisis, when Hussein returned territory won from Iran in a bloody eight-year war.

"It was extraordinary," Bodman said. "He gave up all gains from the Iran-Iraqi war, basically saying he made a mistake. All because he was pressured by U.S. forces and needed troops."

But Hussein was never in danger of losing power during the war with Iran and might be strong enough to resist full concessions, Friedman said.

"We want the Iraqis to back down; Bush is looking for nothing less than the fall of Hussein," he said. "What we've built up to is a defensive force, and it would be a quantum leap to a viable offensive threat on our part. It's a big bluff, and now the hard, behind-the-scenes negotiations begin."

While most of the world is rallying behind the embargo, and at least accepting U.S. military action, many nations, including Japan, West Germany and the Soviet Union, will not want to accept U.S. control of the region's oil supply, Friedman said. A possible acceptable solution might include the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Saudi Arabia and Iraqi forces from Kuwait, leaving an inter-Arab force in control of Kuwait.

"But would Syria or Egypt be included on the force and could they cooperate in the long term would be major questions, as would the fate of the Kuwaiti ruling family," Friedman said.

To make the embargo successful, Hussein might need some help in backing down, Snyder said. If the U.S. forces could be replaced by a U.N. umbrella operation, then negotiations might be eased into a position where Hussein could be offered territorial or political concessions.

"I think the public would accept a compromise that does not entail the U.S. turning tail," Snyder said. "But there will be public disenchantment with U.S. involvement over time and a solution will have to be reached before the president's position is eroded."

Possible compromises might include more Iraqi territory on the coast of the Persian Gulf or not returning the Kuwaiti royal family to power, Friedman said.

While it is impossible to gauge what the American public will accept as a victory in the Middle East, negotiations to return the Kuwaiti government to power might be enough, McKeown said.

"If there is no war, this is already an exercise of the power of the post-Cold War U.N.," McKeown said. "What the effectiveness of world sanctions or the command structure within the United Nations forces will be still is not clear."

The greatest danger now may be the threat of an inadvertent war, as tense and information-starved soldiers face each other across the Saudi-Iraqi border.



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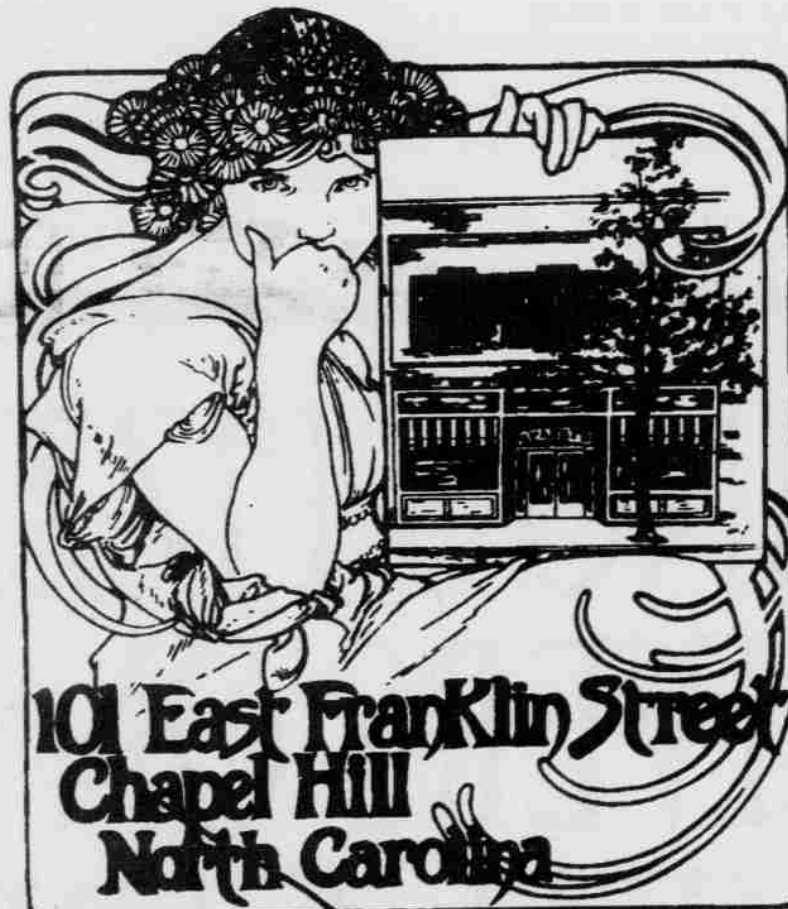
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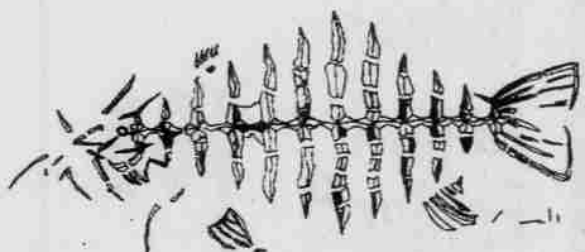
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