Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and the resultant war in the Persian Gulf is considered to be a high watermark in the contemporary history of international relations in general and that of the United Nations in particular. The challenge posed to international order by the Iraqi invasion prompted unprecedented, quick and clear response. Surprisingly, the United Nations, generally known as a dormant body to respond timely to armed conflicts quickly rose up to appraise the development. Within no time a diplomatic and military coalition comprised of 33 nations was created - a phenomenon of unity, organization and military - political cohesiveness had no parallel in post second world war international affairs. The United Nations response to Iraq-Kuwait conflict was novel and unprecedented because no other conflict in the world arena since the inception of the United Nations caused such an active and vigorous resort to the charter framework for the collective enforcement of international peace and security. It was a unique kind of UN’s collective security action in which the United States of America and not United Nations, played the central role.

The review of the role of the United Nations during Gulf crisis by various scholars has indicated that it has not acted impartially. And its role was manipulated by the powerful members to serve their own interests. It is also misleading to describe Operation Desert Storm
as the quintessential example of traditional collective security intervention. It, in fact, inaugurated a new model for the use of military force in the post-Cold War era. The allied resistance against Iraqi aggression represented a unique and novel form of unilateralism which was pretended to be a collective security action. The precedents set by the United Nations' involvement in the Gulf War and its aftermath have had wide implications for the future use of force, the UN's credibility and a multilateral world order.

The Cold War antagonisms between the two superpowers severely damaged the ideal of collective security. The United Nations' accomplishments, during the Cold War, were modest and only occasionally - when the Soviet Union was absent from the Security Council. Apart from Korean crisis, the only enforcement actions under chapter-VIII of the UN charter adopted by the Security Council were a mandatory embargo of the white breakaway regime of Rhodesia (passed in 1969 and extended in 1968 and 1976) and a mandatory arms embargo declared against South Africa in 1977.

But with the end of the Cold War and subsequent demise of the Soviet Union, the potentialities of the Security Council was rediscovered. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was not only the most blatant case to come before the Security Council, but also the first serious test case after the change in the Soviet policy. Without the protection of the Soviet Veto, Iraq was exposed to an international
consensus of unusual strength. The result was the most extensive use ever of the Council’s powers. Mandatory sanctions of unprecedented scope were adopted with near universal support and were implemented with the most effective enforcement ever put in place. Following this, a large and diverse coalition of countries contributed a multilateral fighting force that was able to bring in overwhelming superiority over Iraq.

It is against this backdrop the Gulf War and the United Nations response become important to analyse. Various other aspects of the United Nations and its role in the Gulf War and its aftermath need to be examined. Was the UN Charter invoked for its genuine objectives or it was manipulated by the United States? Were the sanctions given enough time before resorting to use of force? Were the provisions under chapter VII of the Charter distorted and used selectively? Can the UN be used as an instrument of any member-state’s policy? What were the actual aims of the US? Was it just the liberation of Kuwait or the destruction of Iraq as the war finally showed? What is the rationale of continuation of sanctions against Iraq after liberation of Kuwait? Whether sanctions have achieved their desired goals or have missed the target? What is the justification of frequent bombing of the Iraqi targets by the US? Did the handling of the crisis indicate that the two cardinal principles of the UN Charter - “to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and “to maintain international peace and security” are contradictory? And finally, has
the UN lost credibility or vindicated its status as the organ of the international community with primary responsibility for international peace and security?

This work is an endeavour to make a detail study of the above raised questions and to find the answers. This study has been divided into six chapters. The first chapter provides a historical overview of Iraq's claim over Kuwait and prelude to August 2, invasion. Chapter II deals with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War. Chapter III deals with the UN role in the Gulf crisis and examines the controversy over legality of the UN actions. Chapter IV provides an overview of global response to the Gulf crisis. Chapter V and VI deal with economic sanctions and arms inspection imbroglio. A summary of all discussions and some suggestions to improve collective security system of the UN have been presented in the conclusion. And also a new Iraq policy has been suggested.