


```

Forum: International Court of Justice

Topic: Oil Platforms (Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States of America)

President / Chair
```

Introduction

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) case *Oil Platforms (Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States of America)* is a landmark dispute concerning the legality of the use of force, the right to self-defence, and the interpretation of international treaties. The case arose from the military actions taken by the United States against the Iranian oil platforms in the Persian Gulf during the final stages of the Iran-Iraq War. Iran claimed the attacks breached the 1955 Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights, which established and protected commercial, economic, and consular relations between Iran and the United States while promoting friendly relations and mutual rights between their nationals and businesses. However, the United States maintained that its actions were lawful acts of self-defence in reaction to attacks on American-flagged vessels in the Gulf. This case required the ICJ to determine whether the United States' use of force was lawful under international law and whether it had violated its obligations under the 1955 Treaty of Amity.

The dispute is considered a significant international issue because it concerns fundamental concepts in international law, such as the limits on the use of force, the legal conditions for asserting self-defence, and states' responsibilities to comply with treaty obligations. The case also highlights the International Court of Justice's critical role in peacefully resolving state disputes and clarifying the interpretation of international legal principles. Its judgment has had lasting implications for the development of international humanitarian law, maritime security, and the peaceful settlement of international disputes.

The disagreement dates to the "Tanker War" period of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, when both regional and international vessels operating in the Persian Gulf became targets of military attacks. Following the mining of the USS Samuel B. Roberts and other incidents blamed on Iran, the United States carried out military operations, including Operation Praying Mantis in 1988, which led to the destruction of several Iranian oil platforms. Iran later brought the dispute before the ICJ in 1992, claiming that the strikes were illegal and violated the Treaty of Amity.

This case raises significant legal issues, including whether the United States met the conditions for exercising self-defence under international law, whether the Iranian oil installations were lawful military targets, and whether the attacks violated the Treaty of Amity. Understanding

these concerns is critical for determining the appropriate balance between national security, state sovereignty, and international legal duties. The report will look at the conflict's historical context, both parties' positions and arguments, the role of the International Court of Justice, relevant international legal principles, and the decisions' broader implications for international law and future interstate disputes.

Definition of Key Terms

The International Court of Justice (ICJ)

Founded in 1945, it is the main court of the United Nations (UN). It provides advisory views on matters of international law and resolves legal disputes between states.

United Nations Charter

The fundamental charter of the United Nations, drawn up in 1945, setting forth the principles that govern international relations, such as the non-use of force and peaceful settlement of disputes. Article 51 of the Charter recognizes the inherent right of states to resort to self-defence if they suffer from an armed attack.

Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights

Bilateral treaty between Iran and the United States, signed in 1955, intending to foster good relationships, freedom of commerce and navigation, and consular relations. Interpretation of this treaty is used as the legal foundation for this case.

Armed attack

A serious use of force employed by one state against another, which might provide a ground for the right of self-defence of the victim under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

State responsibility

An international law concept under which a state can be held responsible for internationally wrongful acts breaching its international obligations.

Freedom of commerce and navigation

An obligation guaranteed under the Treaty of Amity allowing for free transportation of trade and shipping between Iran and the U.S. without unlawful interference.

General Overview

The case of the Oil Platforms (Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States of America) is one of the most significant international legal cases decided by the ICJ. The main question in this case before the ICJ was whether the destruction by the USA of Iranian oil platforms in the Persian Gulf during the final stages of the Iran-Iraq War was a legal exercise of the right of self-defence or was in breach of the Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations and Consular Rights of 1955.

This conflict took place towards the end of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). Considering that the war lasted longer than any conventional disputes that took place in the twentieth century, several issues could have caused this tension. The reason is that, since both parties were highly reliant on revenues from their oil exports, each tried to damage the economic standing of the other party by attacking oil tankers, merchant ships, and offshore energy facilities. This phase of the war was also known as the "Tanker War". During 1984 and 1988, approximately 400 merchant vessels coming from many different countries were targeted in the Persian Gulf, which is one of the busiest channels of international commerce in the world. Since the U.S. was concerned with the security of international shipping and oil supplies, Operation Earnest Will was undertaken in 1987, involving escorts of the Kuwaiti reflagged oil tankers across the Gulf. More tension followed the attack on the Kuwaiti tanker Sea Isle City in October 1987 and the U.S. warship USS Samuel B. Roberts in April 1988. Since both incidents were linked to Iran, the U.S. launched the operations Nimble Archer and Praying Mantis, which destroyed the Iranian offshore oil platforms.

These military actions further worsened the relationship between the two countries by turning what was a local dispute into an international law dispute. On the 2nd of November 1992, the country of Iran filed a case at the ICJ, claiming that the bombing of the platforms was a violation of Article X(1) of the 1955 Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights, as Iran believed it to be an interference with the freedom of trade and economic relations between Iran and the U.S.

On the other hand, the US claimed that the military activities were an exercise of the inherent right of self-defence pursuant to Article 51 of the UN Charter because Iran attacked American ships and threatened the maritime security of the international community. Moreover, the country based its claim upon Article XX(1)(d) of the Treaty of Amity and lodged a counterclaim against Iran for its violation of the same treaty by its attack on commercial

shipping in the Persian Gulf.

After Iran made its submission in 1992, the dispute was taken up by the ICJ for some time through the process of written submissions, counter-submissions, and oral pleadings by both Iran and the U.S. Throughout this process, both sides produced documents relating to military matters, diplomatic cables, and intelligence reports, and other materials related to the attacks on merchant ships and offshore facilities in the Persian Gulf. This means that the dispute involved more than just a disagreement regarding the attack on oil installations; it required both countries to prove their case legally.

This case resembles this year's AMMUN theme, "Moderating Morality", since it highlights the need to maintain a balance between national security and the rules of international law. Though states have the natural right to defend themselves from armed attacks, they must ensure that their defence is necessary and proportional to the situation, as required by international law. The Oil Platforms case is an example of a case that highlights the way issues about the use of military force, maritime security, and state sovereignty can be solved without the use of military force. As a result, the court was obligated to deliberate on the various legal aspects of the use of force and treaties.

Major Parties Involved

The Islamic Republic of Iran

The applicant party in this case is the Islamic Republic of Iran. On November 2, 1992, the Islamic Republic of Iran brought an action before the ICJ, asserting that the United States of America violated the Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights signed in 1955 in that it bombed Iranian offshore oil platforms in Operations Nimble Archer and Praying Mantis. Iran claims that the Iranian oil platforms were civilian commercial installations protected under the Treaty and the destruction of these platforms constitutes illegal obstruction of freedom of commerce and navigation provided between the two states.

Iran denied the claim made by the U.S. that the attacks on the offshore oil platforms were lawful self-defence in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, in that the U.S. did not present enough evidence to link the attacks on American vessels to Iran. In addition, Iran maintained that the American retaliation was not only unnecessary but also disproportionate to the situation and thus was a violation of international law. Therefore, Iran asked the ICJ to

determine whether the U.S. had violated its treaty obligations.

The United States of America (USA)

The respondent in this case is the United States of America (USA). The USA argues that its strikes on the Iranian oil platforms were justified actions based on its inherent right of self-defence due to Iran's missile attacks on Sea Isle City and mining of the USS Samuel B. Roberts. In addition, the USA states that Operation Nimble Archer and Praying Mantis were justified and were carried out to secure the safety of American ships, prevent further attacks, and provide for international security in the Persian Gulf.

In addition, the USA referred to Article XX(1)(d) of the 1955 Treaty of Amity and claimed that the Treaty allows taking actions which are indispensable to the protection of essential security interests of the state. The USA also brought a counterclaim against Iran for violation of the Treaty of Amity because it attacked commercial vessels and restricted free passage in the Persian Gulf. Therefore, the USA considers that its actions are justified both according to international law and the Treaty of Amity.

Timeline of Events

15 August 1955	The Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights is signed by both the USA and Iran, which holds the purpose of ensuring peace and the freedom of commerce and navigation for both parties.
22 September 1980	The Iran-Iraq war started after the attack made by Iraq on Iran.
1984	The "Tanker War" began after Iran and Iraq started constantly attacking each other's oil tankers, ships, and oil installations in the Persian Gulf.
1987	Operation Earnest Will was started by the USA, after escorting Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf.
16 October 1987	The re-flagged Kuwaiti ship Sea Isle City was attacked by a missile in the vicinity of Kuwait, and the USA blamed the attack on Iran.
19 October 1987	To avenge this incident, the USA launched Operation Nimble Archer, whereby two Iranian offshore oil facilities were targeted and destroyed.
14 April 1988	In the process of this confrontation, the U.S.

	warship Samuel B. Roberts hit an Iranian naval mine in the Persian Gulf, resulting in serious damage to the ship and injuring ten Americans aboard.
18 April 1988	Moreover, the USA started Operation Praying Mantis, whereby attacks were conducted against further Iranian oil facilities as well as Iranian naval ships.
20 August 1988	Ceasefire comes into force between Iran and Iraq on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 598, thus marking the end of military actions in the Iran-Iraq War.
2 November 1992	Iran files a case against the USA in the ICJ in respect of violation of the 1955 Treaty of Amity for destruction of Iranian oil platforms.
12 December 1996	The ICJ decides that it has jurisdiction over the case based on the Treaty of Amity, so the matter proceeds to the merits phase.
17-27 February 2003	Oral proceedings take place in the ICJ, where Iran and the USA make presentations on the matter.
6 November 2003	Final judgment is delivered by the ICJ in the Oil Platforms case.

Attempts to solve the issue

Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights (1955)

The Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations, and Consular Rights, signed in 1955, was the first major attempt to prevent disagreements between Iran and the United States. The pact was intended to develop peaceful relations, encourage trade and investment, and protect the rights of citizens and business in both countries. It also provided a legal framework for resolving disputes peacefully through international law rather than using force.

Following the strikes on Iranian oil platforms in 1987 and 1988, Iran claimed that the United States had breached the Treaty of Amity by interfering with free trade and destroying civilian economic facilities. Although the pact did not prevent the armed conflict, it served as the legal foundation of Iran's subsequent appeal to the ICJ. As a result, while the treaty did not end the conflict, it did establish an important mechanism for settling the issue through judicial proceedings rather than further military escalation.

International Court of Justice judgment (2003)

The ICJ found that the United States had failed to demonstrate that its use of force met the legal conditions for self-defence under international law, as it did not provide sufficient evidence that Iran was responsible for the attacks on U.S. vessels or that the destruction of the oil platforms was necessary and proportionate. However, the court determined that Iran had not proved that the destruction of the oil platforms violated commerce between the two countries at the time of the attacks, as there was insufficient evidence that the attacks significantly affected trade protected under the 1955 Treaty of Amity. As a result, neither state received compensation.

Although neither Iran nor the United States was completely satisfied with the judgment, it ended the legal dispute by peaceful judicial means and highlighted crucial principles concerning the permissible use of force, self-defence, and the interpretation of international treaties. The decision remains an important precedent in international law, influencing similar disputes between governments. While the ruling did not resolve the broader political tension between the two states, it effectively settled the legal issues before the court.

Possible Solutions

Strengthening peaceful dispute resolutions

One possible solution is to develop international mechanisms for preventing the illegal use of force by pushing states to settle conflicts through diplomacy and international legal institutions before resorting to military action. The United Nations may encourage the use of mediation, arbitration, and the ICJ to resolve disputes over maritime security and self-defence claims. Furthermore, states should be encouraged to share evidence with neutral international authorities before engaging in military action; this could be implemented through a UN-led emergency review process, where an independent panel examines the evidence and provides a legal assessment within a short timeframe, allowing the legality of any response to be objectively examined. Although this approach may require greater international collaboration, it would lessen the likelihood of military conflict, increase transparency, and strengthen respect for international law. States can preserve international security by prioritizing peaceful dispute resolution while preserving civilian infrastructure and minimizing unnecessary regional war escalation.

Strengthening international frameworks on the use of force

Another solution is to enhance international treaties governing the use of force and maritime security by setting legal requirements for self-defence and the protection of civilian economic infrastructure. The UN and the ICJ could encourage states to reach updated agreements that clearly define when military force is permissible, what evidence is required to justify self-defence, and how civilian facilities such as oil platforms should be protected during armed conflicts. Clearer legal standards would lessen disputes over the interpretation of international law and help prevent such confrontations in the future. It would also increase accountability among states, encourage compliance with international legal responsibilities, and boost trust in international institutions like the ICJ. In the long run, these steps would help to increase stability, maritime security, and peaceful relations between governments. This could be achieved through negotiations between states under the UN framework, where countries create or amend treaties that establish shared rules for the use of force, evidence requirements for self-defence, and protections for civilian infrastructure during conflicts.

Guiding Questions

1. What was the cause of the oil platforms controversy?
2. What was the “Tanker War”?
3. What was the main reason for Iran taking this matter to the ICJ?
4. What are Iran’s main claims?
5. What are the USA’s main claims?
6. What is the 1955 Treaty of Amity, and why is it important?
7. Was the USA in compliance with its treaty obligations?
8. How can evidence be used to prove the existence of an armed attack?
9. How does the ICJ help in solving disputes involving the use of force?
10. When is it justified to resort to the use of force as a means of self-defence?

Appendix

Historical background and legal facts

https://www.icj-cij.org/case/90

The application submitted by Iran to the ICJ

https://www.icj-cij.org/node/104012

Submissions made by Iran and the USA to the ICJ

https://icj-web.leman.un-icc.cloud/case/90/written-proceedings

The UN Charter, including Article 51

https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter

The Treaty of Amity

https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Treaty-of-Amity-Economic-Relations-and-Consular-Rights-between-the-United-States-of-America-and-Iran-Aug.-15-1955.pdf

Bibliography

International Court of Justice. "Oil Platforms (Islamic Republic of Iran V. United States of America)." *Www.Icj-Cij.Org*, https://www.icj-cij.org/case/90 . Accessed 14 July 2026.

"Application Instituting Proceedings | INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE." *Icj-Cij.Org*, 2 Nov. 1992, https://www.icj-cij.org/node/104012 . Accessed 14 July 2026.

"International Court of Justice." *Un-Icc.Cloud*, 2017, https://icj-web.leman.un-icc.cloud/case/90/written-proceedings. Accessed 14 July 2026.

United Nations. "UN Charter." *United Nations*, 1945, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter. Accessed 14 July 2026.

"Technical Difficulties." *State.Gov*, 2024, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Treaty-of-Amity-Economic-Relations-and-Consular-Rights-between-the-United-States-of-America-and-Iran-Aug.-15-1955.pdf. Accessed 14 July 2026.

"United Nations Treaty Collection." *Un.Org*, United Nations, 2009, https://treaties.un.org/ . Accessed 14 July 2026.

Contact Information

President: Jana Abdo

Email: jana_abdo@abs.edu.jo