Chapter - V

THE CRISIS: IRAN-IRAQ WAR
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Among the conflicts in the Third World, Iran-Iraq war was unusual in several aspects. It was one of the longest and bloodiest wars of the twentieth century. The most commonly cited facts about it are its costs in human and economic terms. The war also involved a wide range of regional and extra-regional states. All the Persian Gulf states had to become deeply involved in the politics of the war and they had to restructure their armed forces. The Western states and the Soviet Union were indirectly involved in the Iran-Iraq war from its start. They supplied large amounts of arms to the two belligerents and later became directly involved in the war, by escorting the ships through the Gulf waters.

The ambitions of Iraq, as the emerging regional power and as a self-proclaimed custodian of the Arab interests, and Iran's relative weakness tempted President Saddam Hussein to eliminate Iran as a power-contender in the Persian Gulf.' The situation was ripe for an Iraqi attack on Iran when Saddam Hussein moved Iraqi troops into Iran in September 1980. The growing

chaos in Iran and disarrayed Iranian military seemed to have shifted the balance of power in Iraq's favour.' On 22 September 1980 Iraq invaded Iran. Between then and 20 August 1988 the war passed through six phases. It can be broadly divided into two parts: first one covering the period when it was conducted on Iranian soil and the second one when it was fought either along the border or inside Iraq.

Phase One: Iraq invades Iran, 1980-81
Phase Two: Iran regains its territory, 1981-82
Phase Three: Iran invades Iraq, 1982-84
Phase Four: The War of Attrition, 1984-86
Phase Five: Iran's renewed offensives, 1986-87
Phase Six: Western intervention and ceasefire, 1987-88

Phase One: Iraq Invades Iran, 1980-81

One of the objectives of the Iraqi government to initiate the war was to protect the regime and the Iraqi state from the effects of the Iranian Revolution. The potential threat was to the cohesion of the state. This threat rested on Iraq's demographic structure and a population mixture of ethnic and sectarian groups. The

other objective was to secure reversal of the 1975 Algiers Agreement on the Shatt al-Arab boundary. Iraq's obsession with the total control of the Shatt al-Arab was governed by its own limited access to the Gulf. Finally, Iraq hoped of liberating Khuzistan Province containing vast oil resources and with a majority of ethnic Arabs. Saddam Hussein termed Iraqi invasion of Iran as, "a battle in defence of honour, sovereignty, constant historical rights and legitimate vital interests of our country...has been a decisive battle for the Arabism of the Gulf, for deterring the expansionist, Persian ambitions'.

Iraq invaded Iran on 22 September 1980 with its war planes striking Iranian military bases and airports, and after the Iraqi armed forces crossed Iranian territory in two axis, the central and the southern sector. The Iraqi armed forces moved in the central sector in the direction of Qasr e-shirin, Serbil, Zilah, Ghailan, Sumar and Mehran. In the southern sector the thrust was in the direction of Muhammara, Ahwaz and Dezful. The surprised and disorganized Iranian defenders, consisting


mainly of Gendarmerie, border police, local volunteers and some regular artillery units, were not at first able to put up any serious resistance."

Iran could do little to resist Iraq's regular forces during the period from 22 September to 28 September 1980. At the same time, Iraq failed to exploit its initial success in the land fighting and halted for nearly five days following its initial penetration into Iran. It expected either a quick collapse of the regime or a willingness to sue for peace. In his speech on 28 September 1980, President Saddam Hussein expressed Iraq's sincere and serious desire to stop fighting and reach a just and honourable peaceful settlement for the dispute on the basis of Iran's recognition of Iraq's legitimate rights on land and water, respect in relations of good neighbourliness and sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs and renunciation of expansionist policies and ambitions. However, Iraq's pause in the military offensive gave Iran time to call up and deploy its regular and revolutionary forces in


'ABSP Iraq, n.4, p.214.
the forward area in order to establish defensive lines and to dig in.'

Iran perceived Iraq's invasion as an attempt to destroy the Iranian Revolution. Iranian President Bani-Sadr accused Iraq of co-ordinating its action with the US and asserted that its objective "was the overthrow of the revolutionary regime in Iran. They want to replace us with American puppets." The then Iranian Prime Minster Ali Rajai told the UN Security Council on 17 October 1980 that the "the true aim of the Iraqi regime and its masters was not to gain a few kilometres of territory. What they tried to do was to mutilate the revolutionary movement of the Islamic Iranian people. They wish to destroy the Islamic Republic."

To compensate for its weakness on the ground, Iran rapidly escalated conflict by extending it to Iraqi cities and targets of value. The Iranian air force struck at a variety of strategic targets within Iraq, including, oil facilities in Mosul and Kirkuk, dams on the Zab river, petrochemical plants near Basra and

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'UN Doc. S/PV.2251.
Zubair and the nuclear reactor near Baghdad. Only low level damage was caused by these raids, Iraq retaliated with a series of strikes against Iranian targets, such as the oil complex on Kharg island, but this did not deter Iran. Other forms of combat damage to the oil facilities on each side proved to be far more serious. Iran started a blockade on the Shatt al-Arab and Basra on the first day of the war and used artillery fire to damage the Iraqi oil-loading facility at Fao peninsula. Some 62 ships and tankers were rapidly trapped or sunk in the Shatt al-Arab and Basra on the first day of the war, and the waterway was extensively mined.

**Phase Two: Iran regains its territory, 1981-82:**

From January to August 1981 there was little military action. Though both the sides tried to overcome the other in their operations, they did not make any real progress in the battle front. A stalemate persisted between them. It was only in September 1981 through May 1982 that Iran conducted three major military offensives that forced Iraq to withdraw to the original borders in most of the places.


"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.92."
On 2 September 1981, Iran launched its offensive called *Thamil ul’Aimma.* Iran, in this operation, relieved Abadan and fully secured its road network from Ahwaz to Abadan. Iraq continued to hold a part of Khorramshahr. But the city had lost most of its strategic value because Iran rapidly consolidated its position and Iraq could not counterattack without suffering massive casualties. "The offensive was halted during October. Fighting was resumed in late November with Iran launching Operation *Tariq al-Quds.*"

The next major Iranian offensive was launched near Qasr e-Shirin on 12 December 1981. It was known as Operation *al-Fajr.* The result was that Iran was able to regain about 100 square miles of land around Qasr e-Shirin. "Apart from these two operations, the battlefront was generally quiet during December 1981.

Iraq launched a series of attacks from January to March 1982. All these attacks failed. As a retaliatory measure Iran resumed its offensive from March 1982. It managed to recover major part of its territory occupied

"Ibid., p.123.

"Ibid., p.124.


"O’Ballance, n.5, pp.68-69.
by Iraq. On 22 March 1982, Iran launched a major offensive called Operation Fath ul-Mobin." The objective of the offensive was to prepare the way for a final push to recapture the rest of Khuzestan. Both sides suffered heavy casualties in the battle. Iran lost around 5,000 dead and 7,000 wounded. Total Iraqi casualties and POWs ranged between 14,000 to 15,000." In the end, Iran regained about 850 square miles of its territory."

Another offensive was launched by Iran on 30 April 1982. It was known as Operation Quds. The main objective was to recapture Khorramshahr." By 23 May Iranians took back Khorramshahr. Iran’s recapture of Khorramshahr effectively brought an end to the second phase of the war during which Iran had concentrated on recapturing its lost territory. Between 22 March-24 May, Iraq lost around 3,350 square miles of captured territory, suffered as many as 30,000 to 50,000 casualties, and lost upto 25,000 prisoners."

"O’Ballance, n.5, p.79.
"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.133.
"O’Ballance, n.5, p.79.
"Ibid., p.82.
"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.140.
Phase Three: Iran Invades Iraq, 1982-84:

Following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon on 6 June 1982, Saddam Hussein declared a unilateral ceasefire. Indeed, the Iraqi Government used Israeli invasion of Lebanon as a pretext for its ceasefire." But the real reason for it was that the successive Iranian victories in the spring of 1982. Iranian Government put forward its condition for a ceasefire. On 9 July 1982 Rafsanjani listed the following conditions for a ceasefire: Retaining the 1975 Algiers Treaty, repatriation of over 100,000 Iraqi citizens expelled by the government, placing a war guilt on Iraq and payment of $100 bn to Iran for war damages. He added that if these demands were not met then Iran would carry the war into Iraq."

Immediately following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, Iran announced that its forces were going to liberate Jerusalem, passing through Karbala in Iraq." Shortly thereafter, Iran launched the first of a series of massive offensives intended to


breakthrough the Iraqi defences and bring down the regime of Saddam Hussein.

The first major Iranian attempt to conquer Iraq was called Operation Ramadan al-Mubarak. It was launched on 13 July 1982. The major objective of this operation was to breakthrough the Iraqi defences in the southern sector. It hoped for a Shii uprising against the Baath regime. The operation lasted until 3 August 1982 in which five large 'human wave' attacks by Iran were held or counter-attacked by Iraq. The hope for significant popular support from Iraqi Shii population did not materialize. The heavy loss forced Iran to halt the major attack for the rest of the summer. However, during Operation Ramadan Iranians had set foot on and held on to some of the Iraqi territory for the first time since the beginning of the war.

On 1 October 1982, Iran launched Operation Muslim Ibn Aqil, in the Mandali sector, 70 miles from Baghdad. The objective was to strengthen its position near the border approaches to Baghdad. Iran took heavy casualties and scored only token gains. Iran’s next offensive

"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.150.

"O’Ballance, n.5, p.93.

"Ibid., p.98.
against Iraq was Operation Muharram al Harram. "It was launched on 1 November near Basra. It attempted to recapture the Iranian territory near the border. In the end Iran captured 350 square miles of which 190 square miles were in Iraqi territory and also took 3,500 POWs."

On 6 February 1983 Iran launched Operation Wal Fajr in the Musian area. Rafsanjani declared the offensive as the final move towards ending the war and said that it should determine the final destiny of the region. "The fighting ended within four days and Iran could gain only a few kilometres along the border area. On 14 February, though bitterly disappointed, Rafsanjani declared that Operation Wal Fajr would continue." This proved to be the case, as a series of Wal Fajr operations were subsequently launched, with limited aims, in various sectors of the front.

Iran launched Operation Wal Fajr-2 on 22 July 1983." This was against the pro-Iraqi and anti-Khomeini Kurdish forces (KDPI) led by Abdul Ghassemlo. Iran

"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, pp.154-55.  
"Zabih, n.15, p.181.  
"Ibid., p.116.  
"Ibid., p.138."
drove KDPI forces out of their positions near Bagqez, Bukhan and Mahabad. The territory that Iran took was not of great significance, but Operation Wal Fajr-2 marked the end of much of the anti-Khomeini Kurdish resistance in Iran.

While Operation Wal Fajr-2 was in progress in the Kurdish Haj Umran area, Iranians launched Operation Wal Fajr-3 on 30 July 1983 in the Mehran area. The fighting lasted until 10 August. While Iran did not score a major victory, it pushed forward to about 8-10 km. The battle produced heavy casualties ranging between 10,000 to 17,000. This offensive had another major strategic effect on the war. Iraq's leaders decided to expand the war by attacking the shipping and tanker traffic moving to and from Iran.

On 1 July 1983, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz stated that attacks on economic targets would be stepped up. When it became known that France was going to supply Iraq with five Super Etendard aircraft, he explained that they would be used to threaten Iranian economic and petroleum interests in the Gulf. The 'Tanker War' began

"Ibid., p.119.

"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.168.

"O'Ballance, n.5, p.127."
formally from 12 August 1983 when Iraq declared a formal 'exclusion zone' in the northern part of the Gulf. It also warned foreign shipping to stay clear of all Iranian waters in the Upper Gulf, including waters around Kharg island. The French delivered Super Étendard fighter-bombers, equipped with Exocet missiles, in September 1983. Their primary target was Kharg Island, Iran's principal oil-exporting facility in the Persian Gulf. In attacking this complex and Iranian tankers in the northern Gulf, the Iraqis aim was to reduce the Iranian oil revenues.

Iran quickly demonstrated that it had no intention to halt its land offensives in response to the tanker war. On 19 October 1983, it launched Operation Wal Fajr-4 in the northern Penjwin sector. This offensive occurred in the Iranian part of Kurdistan. Iran once again adopted 'human wave' assaults to advance steadily up the Penjwin valley. Finally, Iran had pushed forward 20-25 km. into Iraqi mountains and conquered about 130-200 square kilometres of Iraqi territory.

*Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.171.


"O'Ballance, n.5, p.139.

*Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.177.
offensive reduced the ability of KDPI to conduct military operation in the Kurdish parts of Iran. During the Operation Wal Fajr series in 1983, Iranians alleged that Iraqis were using chemical weapons.

While Wal Fajr-5 & 6 and Operation Kheiber created a near-stalemate on the land, they did nothing to halt the escalation of the aerial combat and tanker war. Iraq struck heavily at civilian and economic targets during the Iranian offensive in February 1984. The Iraqi air and missile attack on civilian areas left 4,700 Iranian dead and 22,000 injured. "Iraq tried to initiate a ceasefire on civilian targets that was to go into effect on 18 February 1984, but Iran rejected the offer."

Iran did not formally halt its offensives in March 1984, but the cost of its battles was so high that Iran did not launch another all-out offensive against Iraq until the Fao campaign of 1986. During the next two years, Iran conducted a war of attrition, punctuated by a few major offensives. Iraq, in return, escalated its tanker war and attempted to weaken Iran by attacking its major source of income.

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"Hiro, n.23, p.234.

"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.191."
PHASE FOUR: THE WAR OF ATTRITION, 1984 TO 1986

Iran's land strategy during the rest of 1984 shifted from frontal assault to one of war of attrition. The reasons for its shift was the heavy casualties incurred in the early 1984 offensive. Iraq did launch a few counter attacks during the rest of 1984 and it hardly had any real impact on Iran.

In 1985 fighting on land did not become serious until March and came only after a long series of artillery exchange during late February and early March, which were directed against civilian and oil targets. On 11 March 1985, Iran launched a major offensive called Operation Badr. "It was designed to seize Basra or cut it off from the rest of Iraq. Both sides suffered very heavy casualties before Iran was driven back. Iran did not score any major gains in land fighting in 1985. However, it gained about 155 to 226 square kilometres in the central and northern sectors by the time when most of the land fighting were halted in November 1985."

Both sides continued tanker war during 1985. But, they followed very different patterns. Iran was not yet ready to attack third-country shipping in the Gulf. It

"O'Ballance, n.5, p.160.

"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.208."
concentrated largely on searching ships moving through the straits and harassing vessels moving to and from Iraq's main allies to the Gulf. Iraq, in contrast, concentrated on inflicting physical damage to shipping in Iranian waters. By the end of 1985, Iraq's use of Exocet helped it to raise the number of ships hit, damaged or attacked, to nearly 200 since the first major air attack on ships in the Gulf began in May 1981."

**Phase Five: Iran's Renewed Offensives, 1986-1987**

By early 1986, Iran was ready to launch its new series of offensives. The main strategic goals had been to seize and retain the Fao peninsula and block Iraqi access to the Gulf; to carry out a follow on attack to seize Basra from the North; to disrupt oil production in southern Iraq; to disrupt Iraqi access to Kuwait; and to support a Shi'i uprising or anti-government operation in southern Iraq."

On 10 February 1986, Iran launched Operation *Wal Fajr*-8, an amphibious attack against the Fao peninsula."

By 14 February, the fighting had reached the point where

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"Ibid., p.213.

"Zabih, n.15, p.191.

"O'Ballance, n.5, p.173."
Iran had lost some 8,000 to 10,000 casualties, and Iraq had lost 3,000 to 5,000. For the first time, the possible defeat of Iraqi regime looked realistic. In the end, Iran took about 200 square kilometres of the Fao peninsula.

Iraq did launch major counter attacks against Iran in 1986. The Iraqi forces attacked Mehran on 14 May 1986. Within three days, it took Mehran. Iran counter-attacked in June 1986 and took back Mehran on 3 July. It was called Operation Karbala-1. It was at this point that Karbala offensive began to replace the Wal Fajr offensives. Iran launched Karbala-2 and 3 in August and September 1986 respectively. It could not get substantial gain by these operations. After the Karbala-3, no major land fighting occurred till December 1986.

During January and February 1987 it looked as though long promised "final offensive" jihad had come. The first attack, codenamed Karbala-4, was launched a few days before the end of 1986. It was intended to

"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.221.

"Ibid., p.227.

"Ibid.,p.228.

capture the island of Umm al-Rasas, but it failed. Iran's reversals in Karbala-4 did not stop its efforts to defeat Iraq with new offensives. Within few weeks Iran launched its Karbala-5 and Karbala-6, directed against Basra and the area north of Baghdad. These Iranian assaults ultimately failed to exert any major pressure on Iraq. Iran halted its operations for the rest of February and March, except for the fighting near Basra.

The struggle for Basra also led Iraq to revive the war of the cities. During January and February 1987, the Iraqi air force attacked a number of Iranian cities, making it clear that it was targeting not simply Iranian economic resources but also important population centres. This strategy was publicly justified by the Iraqi leadership as an appropriate response to Iran's prolonged and indiscriminate artillery bombardment of Basra that accompanied military operations along the front. By the end of January 1987, Iran claimed that over 3,000 civilians had been killed during the Iraqi attack on their cities.

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"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.247.

"Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, Iran and Iraq at War (Boulder, 1989), p.62.

"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.255."
While fighting around Basra was shaping the future of the land war, developments in the Gulf were leading to a new phase of the war. It was Iran and not Iraq that was making the most important change in the tanker war. Iraq’s attacks on the shipping in Iranian waters finally led Iran to go beyond harassing the shipping moving to and from such pro-Iraqi states as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and Iran shifted to attack on its own.

Iranian strategy aimed at attacking Kuwait’s oil shipping to pressurize it to stop its co-operation with Iraq. This prompted Kuwait to request Soviet and US to extend protective umbrella over its shipping in the Gulf. On 7 March 1987, while the US administration agreed to offer US flags and thus to protect 11 Kuwaiti vessels, “Soviet Union chartered three of its tankers to Kuwait.” The first convoy sailed on 22 July 1987. The US sent in four combat ships, including a guided missile cruiser, to escort these Kuwaiti ships. The reflagged


ships included super tanker Bridgeton and the gas tanker Gas Prince. On 24 July a mine damaged the Bridgeton."
The US took time to respond. During July and August 1987, the war continued to lead to the steady escalation of tension between Iran and the West.

The major turning point came on 10 August 1987 when US-operated tanker Texaco Carribean was hit by a mine in the Gulf of Oman. Within a few months, several West European governments despatched minesweepers to join the US forces in the region. By the fall of 1987, the US had deployed 24 warships and approximately 1500 men in the Persian Gulf. By February 1988, it had increased to 29 vessels with approximately 20,000 men."

Direct involvement of USA in the war occurred on 10 August 1987 when the US fired on an Iranian F-4 aircraft and missed it." This was the first shot fired by US in

"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.298.


"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.304.


A turning point in the escalation of hostilities was reached on 16 October 1987, when the US reflagged Kuwaiti tanker, *Sea Isle City* was hit by an Iranian Silkworm missile. US retaliated on 19 October when its naval helicopters shelled and set ablaze an oil platform. Iran, on its part, retaliated on 22 October 1987. It fired a missile into Kuwait *Sea Island Terminal*. The US did not respond militarily to the Iranian attack. During the rest of October, Iran was careful to avoid direct provocation of the US.

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"UN Doc. S/19161.

"Ramazani, n.61, p.86.

"UN Doc. S/19924.

"Ramazani, n.54, p.173."
By the end of October 1987, a pattern had been established where the war involved three parallel struggles. The first struggle was the escalating confrontation between Iran and the West. The second was a continuing political battle over UN peace initiative, with the US increasingly pressing for an arms embargo. The third was the continuing series of exchanges and low-level border conflicts between Iran and Iraq.

The course of the war was to change radically in the early 1988 and to result in a series of Iraqi victories that ended by forcing Iran to accept the UN Security Council's ceasefire resolution (598) in August 1988. The land and air-war remained relatively quiet during the first months of 1988. Iran did launch a more serious offensive code-named Bait al-Mugdas on 15 January 1988. However, this was a failure. The most dramatic escalation in the air war, however, began in late February. Iraq carried out a major attack on the oil refinery in Teheran on 27 February 1988. Iran retaliated by resuming the war of cities and fired Scud missiles at Baghdad. During the fifty days of the war of

"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.362."
cities in 1988, Iran fired 77 Scud missiles at Baghdad and Iraq fired 180 missiles into Teheran."

In April 1988 Iraq went on to the land offensive. Well-planned and coordinated attacks by Iraqis led to the recapture of all the territories it had lost to the Iranians. Iraq’s series of military victories began with the recapture of the Fao Peninsula on 18 April 1988. A month later, Iraq drove Iranian forces out of Basra, recaptured oil rich Majnoon islands in June, and in July it recaptured the Zubeidat area in the North East."

The string of Iraqi military victories, along with other factors, hastened Iranian leaders to get Khomeini’s approval for the acceptance of a ceasefire. Further, the destruction of an Iranian civilian Airbus by US in early July 1988 provided a convenient occasion for the announcement of the acceptance of ceasefire.

**Direct Military Involvement of Extra-regional Powers in the Gulf**

Despite its neutrality in the Gulf war, USA passed intelligence information to Iraq about Iranian military

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"Ibid., p.367.

"Baktiari, n.59, p.80.

"Ibid., p.81.

"Sunday Observer (London), 24 July 1988."
activities. Initially it came from the four AWACS aircraft supplied by the USA to Saudi Arabia in September 1980. These AWACS carried out round-the-clock surveillance of the Gulf and reportedly passed the information to the Iraqis. As Saddam Hussein was to reveal later, "We in Iraq have benefitted from the AWACS." The deployment of AWACS in Saudi Arabia later became the nucleus of all US air surveillance capability in the region during the entire length of the war. After the restoration of US-Iraqi diplomatic relations in 1984, information from American satellites were also passed on to Iraq. However, when the Iraqi forces failed to deal effectively with the Iranian offensive, as in early 1986 and 1987, Iraq blamed the USA for 'misleading' Iraqis for its own nefarious ends."

The Iranian strategy which became clear in the summer and autumn of 1986, aimed at attacking Kuwaiti oil shipping and inspiring terrorist attacks in Kuwait as a pressure on it to stop its co-operation with Iraq. This prompted Kuwait to request US to reflag its oil tankers, thereby placing them under US protection. On 10 December 1986, the Kuwaiti Oil Tanker Company requested

"Cordesman and Wagner, n.8, p.103.

"Hiro, n.23, p.236.

the US Coast Guard for information on the technical requirements for placing US flags on their tankers."

Further the Kuwaiti government enquired with US on 13 January 1987, as to whether reflagged Kuwait-owned vessels would receive US Naval protection." Initially, the US was not willing to reflag and to protect the Kuwaiti vessels. Basically it meant direct involvement of the US in the war.

In February 1987 Reagan Administration learned that the Soviets had agreed to reflag and protect Kuwaiti tankers. US officials reacted vigorously and urged Kuwait to give Soviets a much smaller role on Kuwait’s behalf, in return for which the US would reflag and protect Kuwait vessels. On 7 March 1987, US Government agreed to protect Kuwaiti tankers. "If the US does not act", said National Security Adviser Frank Carlucci, "our allies will be faced with either giving in to Iranian intimidation or accepting Soviet offers of protection, and not just for shipping." US Secretary of

"McNaugher, n.55, p.173.


"Ramazani, n.54, p.170.

"Rubin, n.62, p.79.
Defense, Caspar Weinberger believed that an American refusal to honour the Kuwaiti request "would have created a vacuum in the gulf into which Soviet power would shortly have been projected". Thus, despite the emerging detente, US policy was still dominated by Cold War perceptions.

In the final Kuwaiti-Soviet agreement, the Soviet role was reduced to chartering three of its small tankers to Kuwait. "Regarding the deal, All Union Sovkomflot (Soviet Merchant Fleet) Foreign Trade Association stated that the deal with Kuwait was one common commercial operation among many." In fact, on 15 February 1987, Kuwaiti banks were to grant $150 mn credit to Vneshtergbank in Moscow. This was the price Moscow had demanded and received for its readiness to lease three tankers for three years and to have the Soviet Navy escort them "if necessary." However, Kuwait's apparent strategy was to play off the Super

"Ramazani, n.61, p.63.


Powers against each other, avoiding dependence on either one while trying to align both of them against Iran.

In committing itself to protect the Kuwaiti oil tankers by military means, Iran perceived that the US was clearly siding with Iraq against Iran in the war. Its naval escorts protected the oil tankers of Kuwait, Iraq's close ally. The US involvement threatened Iran against using its major means of retaliation against Iraqi attacks – on its oil tankers. Further, the American naval escorts were also seen as one-sided in their overriding objective to stop Iran from winning the war. Hence, Iran called for the withdrawal of all foreign warships from the Gulf region."

On 17 May 1987, an Iraqi warplane launched Exocet missiles and 'accidentally' hit the US frigate, USS Stark, in the Persian Gulf, killing 37 American sailors." Iraq apologized for the accident to Washington. The attack sharply refocussed national attention on US interests in the region and led to a major restructuring of US military forces in the Gulf. Till early 1987, US forces in the region were organized

"Ramazani, n.61, p.64.

under the Middle East Force. While the Commander of the Middle East Forces (COMIDEASTFOR) had a traditional presence of a flagship and three combatant vessels, by September 1987 US Naval forces under COMIDEASTFOR had been quickly beefed up to a total of eighteen combatant vessels."

The Middle East Force lacked the staff and communications resources necessary to command and control this expanded force. The Joint Task Force Middle East (JTFME) was established by combining the Middle East Force with the existing carrier battle group staff and its sophisticated communication resources in the northern Arabian Sea. The mission of the task force was to perform escort duties for the eleven reflagged Kuwaiti oil tankers and to protect them against increasingly hostile Iranian forces. By the time the first convoy of reflagged Kuwaiti tankers began the two-day journey up the Gulf on 17 July 1987, the US fleet in or near the Gulf had grown to roughly 33 vessels."

Between September 1987 and July 1988, the Commander of JTFME conducted over 100 convoys and operated between 28

"Ibid.

and 33 navy combatant vessels serving as escorts in or near the Gulf."

The reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers by US and the protection it offered against the Iranian attacks in July 1987 signalled the beginning of the internationalization of the Gulf war. According to the State Department report on the US policy in the Persian Gulf of July 1987, "aircraft of either country flying in a pattern which indicates hostile intent will be fired on unless they provide adequate notification of their intentions." Further, the US Government warned, "international law recognizes an inherent right to employ proportionate force as necessary in self-defence. This right will be exercised in the face of attack or hostile intent indicating imminent attack."

The news of Soviet naval presence in the region came in the wake of the seizure of Soviet freighter in September 1986 by the Iranian navy. The Soviet freighter was released only after a high level discussion between the two countries. On 16 May 1987,

"Johnson, n.84, pp.131-32.

"Ibid.

"Ibid.

"The Hindu (Madras), 6 October 1986."
Soviet tanker *Marshal Cheykov* was damaged by a floating mine, some 35 miles off the Kuwaiti coast. The vessel was one of the three Soviet tankers chartered by Kuwait. Thereupon, Soviets increased their presence in the region by adding three *Natya* class minesweepers, armed with anti-aircraft missiles, but they operated just outside the Gulf.

The naval escort and minesweeping operations in the Gulf during 1987-88 were a remarkable example of allied political if not military co-operation. Also, the escort operations helped to tilt the balance of forces in the Gulf war decisively in favour of Iraq and the moderate Arab world and against Iran. At the same time, it allowed Iraq to continue its attacks against Iranian oil exports with impunity while strategically protecting its Arab allies from Iranian reprisals. US policy was largely responsible for it.

On 10 August 1987, a US F-14 fired on an Iranian F-4 and missed. This was the first shot fired by US in the Persian Gulf. And on 24 August 1988, US destroyer *Kidd* fired machine-gun burst across the bows of two


"*Current Digest of Soviet Press*, n.60, p.12."
unidentified sailing vessels, which turned away." On 21 September 1987 US helicopters sighted the Iran Ajr, an amphibious landing ship, dropping mines in the Gulf fifty miles north east of Bahrain in international waters." The US Navy helicopter attacked and seized the ship. Three Iranian crewmen were killed and two others were lost at sea. The twenty-six survivors were returned to Iran and the ship was destroyed by American forces." US claimed that the vessel was photographed while mining in the Gulf. However, subsequently, it was claimed that the photographs could not be developed." Armed skirmishes escalated between US and Iran. The other clash took place on 8 October 1987, when US helicopters sank three Iranian gunboats after they allegedly fired at them fifteen miles southwest of Iran's Farsi island." Thereafter, Iran refrained from attacking US directly but resorted to various forms of harassment, including laying mines, hit and run attacks by small patrol boats, and periodic stop-and-search actions on tanker traffic.

"Ramazani, n.61, p.86.
"UN Doc. S/19149.
"Rubin, n.62, p.84.
"UN Doc. S/19161.
"Rubin, n.62, p.84.
A turning point in the escalation of hostilities was reached on 16 October 1987 when the US reflagged Kuwaiti tanker, Sea Isle City was hit by an Iranian Silkworm missile. Eighteen crew members were wounded and the captain of the ship was blinded. In contrast to the Bridgeton incident, this ship was in Kuwaiti waters instead of the high seas. According to the orders governing the convoy, US protection did not apply within Kuwaiti waters. Nevertheless, the USA retaliated on 19 October when its destroyers shelled and set ablaze an oil platform in the Resalat field, and the US Navy's Sea, Air and Land (SEAL) commandos blew up a second one, Reshaelat. The US Administration said that this was in response not only to the missile attack but also the general provocation from Iran in a series of recent incidents. President Reagan claimed that this was a lawful use of force under Article 51 of the UN Charter, and as such was notified to Security Council. He said that the platform was being used for radar and was an operation base for Iranian attacks on shipping. He stressed the restrained nature of action, its precision.

"Ramazani, n.61, p.86.

"UN Doc. S/19224.

"UN Doc. S/19219."
and the fact that it was proportionate to the Iranian attack by the Silkworm missile."

Predictably, Iran retaliated on 22 October 1987 when it fired a missile into Kuwait's Sea Island Terminal". But its action was more restrained than its rhetoric. The damage was reportedly not severe, but the target was vital to Kuwait's economy and security. Sea Island Terminal was the main installation for handling super tankers, which could carry about one-third of Kuwait's total oil output.

Several days later mines appeared again in the Persian Gulf, one of which struck the USS Samuel B. Roberts and set off a new round of clashes with US forces. Initial US reaction to the damaging of the USS Roberts was that the mine that had hit had been laid much earlier. After confirming that the mines were newly placed rather than old mines that had finally broken free and risen to the surface, the US found itself with no choice but to retaliate. On 18 April 1988 US warships destroyed Iranian platforms at Sirri and Sassan, which the Pentagon claimed as "command and control radar


"Ramazani, n.54, p.173."
systems, for the Iranian military." From the Iranian perspective, the strike on these platforms represented the emergence of US-Iraqi axis, a perception no doubt reinforced by the fact that Iraqi forces recaptured Fao on the very same day.

The attack on the Iranian platform was followed by intense skirmishes, as the Iranians sent two of their frigates out of port at Bandar Abbas in counter-retaliation. According to American journalist on board USS Jack Williams, "when the Iranian frigate Sahand was detected sailing out of Bandar Abbas, an order went forth to get it." US warplane dropped a laser-guided bomb on the Iranian frigate, Sabalan, after it had allegedly fired at the plane, and immobilised it. US warships damaged or sank both frigates, after gaining permission from President Reagan. Two weeks after the Sirri strike, President Reagan gave US ship captains permission to come to the aid of friendly non-belligerent commercial vessels asking for help.


"Ibid., p.60.

"McNaugher, n.55, p.189.

"McNaugher, n.86, pp.117-118."
Finally, the US altered its rules of engagement to permit US Navy ships to protect any neutral merchant ships that came under attack.

On 3 July 1988, the *USS Vincennes*, firing at Iranian gunboats, mistook an Iran Airbus A-300 airliner for an attacking Iranian fighter plane and shot it down, killing all 290 people aboard. "Indeed, the tragic downing of Iran's Airbus was incidental to the US Navy's protection not of a US flagged vessel, but rather a Danish one. The facts were that the *USS Vincennes* reversed course to come to the aid of the Danish supertanker *Karama Maersk*. In the aftermath of that action, Iranian forces in speed boats fired on US helicopters over the Gulf. The *USS Vincennes* moved to meet that attack, and partly as a result of the stress of doing so, its crew misidentified the airbus as a military aircraft and fired two anti-aircraft missiles at it." In a letter to UN Secretary-General, the Iranian Foreign Minister said, "This undoubtedly premeditated act of aggression by the US against civilian airliner of Iran is in clear violation of all international laws and principles." President Reagan

"UN Doc. S/19979.


""UN Doc. S/19979."
expressed his complete satisfaction with the policy and reiterated his belief that the action of the USS Vincennes on 3 July in the case of Iranian airliner were justifiable defensive actions."

The downing of the Iranian Airbus seems to have been one of the main factors which persuaded Iran to accept the UN ceasefire resolution a fortnight later. On 18 July 1988 Iran accepted the Security Council Resolution 598. In his letter of acceptance to UN Secretary-General, Iranian President Ali Khaemeni referred especially to the Airbus tragedy, asserting that the war had "now gained unprecedented dimensions, bringing other countries into the war and even engulfing innocent civilians"." Despite the enormity of the mistake, Iran was unable to muster sufficient support at the UN to condemn the US action. Its isolation and shortcomings were never more apparent.

**Impact of the Iran-Iraq War and Responses**

It is evident from the various phases of the Iran-Iraq War that regional and extra-regional powers played an important role in both furthering the war as well as

""UN Doc. S/20005.

""*Times*, 19 July 1988."
forcing the war to an end. Never before had the regional and extra-regional powers been so deeply involved in the regional conflict in the Gulf. This paradox can be clearly seen when one makes a study of the roles of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Arab States, USA, USSR, Great Britain, France, Germany and also, Japan and China. Such an involvement was seen during the Kuwaiti crisis that had assumed the character of an international conflict from the very beginning.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

The Iraqi invasion of Iran in part reflected the response of Iraq government to the perceived threat of revolutionary Iran. But other Gulf states chose to contain the Iranian-inspired Islamic revolution and the spread of Iran-Iraq war through a mixture of diplomatic conciliation, military deterrence and regional cooperation among them. This led to the formation of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981. The focus at first was on economic, social and information co-operation. Later on, with the intensification of the Iran-Iraq war, the focus shifted to security matters. Militarily the GCC states were neither willing to nor did commit troops to the war. They, however, gave logistical and financial aid to Iraq.
The first summit meeting of GCC was held in May 1981 in Abu Dhabi. It called for an end to the war, indicating that the war not only threatened the region's security but also increased the possibility of foreign intervention in the region. This position was reiterated after the GCC's Second Summit, held in Riyadh in November 1981. Furthermore, the GCC expressed the hope that the efforts stemming from the Islamic Conference and the efforts of the Non-Aligned and the United Nations would be successful.

Successful Iranian offensives between March and June 1982 prompted emergency meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the GCC states. In March 1982, the GCC declared that an attack on any one member state would be considered as an attack on all, and condemned Iran's attempts at regional destabilization. The Second Emergency Meeting of GCC Ministerial Council was held in Riyadh on 20 April 1982. The Council declared its support for all efforts being made to end the war between Iran and Iraq, especially to stop the "shedding of Islamic blood and protect the region's security and


"International Herald Tribune, 27-28 March 1982."
stability". The tenor of the war changed dramatically when Iran recaptured Khorramshahr in May 1982 and went on the offensive, apparently with considerable success. The Third Emergency Meeting of GCC’s Foreign Ministers was held in Riyadh on 30 May 1982. The final communique reiterated the Council’s position on ending the war between two Muslim states. However, departing from the past policy, the Council issued a specific call to the Islamic Republic of Iran to respond positively to Iraq’s peace initiatives. For the first time since the outbreak of hostilities, the GCC identified Iran as the intransigent party rejecting any mediation efforts.

In July 1982, GCC appreciated Iraq’s posture in withdrawing its forces from Iranian territory to international borders and its readiness to settle the conflict through diplomatic negotiations so as to ensure the rights of both sides. By November 1982, when Heads of States of the GCC met in Bahrain, Council’s attention was clearly focused on Iran’s persistent intransigence. Immediately after the summit, GCC Defence Ministers,


"FBIS-MEA, 14 July 1982, pp: C1-C2."
Chiefs of Staffs and Interior Ministers gathered to coordinate their efforts for containing the Gulf War and to preclude its spill-over into their territories." The Gulf states declared that the Iranian invasion of Iraq was dangerous and affirmed support for Iraq’s effort to end the war peacefully. They also criticized Iran for "crossing into its international border with Iraq" and noted how these developments posed a threat "to the safety and security of the Arab nation and violation of its sovereignty".

After two years of war new lines were drawn. The Gulf states had moved away from their 'false neutrality' to obvious alignment with Iraq. GCC statements openly condemned Iran for continuing the war and destabilizing the region, while individual states disbursed interest-free aid to Iraq totalling some $20 bn by 1982." A Saudi radio commentary stated, "there is no way to thwart [Iran] plans and foil them except by supporting Iraq financially and militarily in order to destroy the Iranian war machine."^w


"Ibid.

"Ibid.

The Gulf states' substantial aid had been a decisive factor in enabling the Iraqi regime to withstand the war. Although the amount of the financial loans cannot be definitely known, estimates range between $35 bn to $55 bn during the war. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had supplemented this financial help with the opening up of their ports for the transhipment of goods bound for Iraq, sale of oil from the neutral zone on Iraq's behalf from 1983, and the pumping of Iraq's crude oil by pipeline to the Red Sea.

The GCC Heads of States endorsed the UN Security Council Resolution 540 in their fourth summit meeting held in Qatar. A major turning point in 1984 was the Iranian attack on Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian tankers. It dramatically increased the regional stakes in the war. On 14 May 1984, two Kuwaiti tankers came under attack. It was followed by an attack on the Saudi tanker Yanbu on 17 May 1984. The same day, GCC Foreign Ministers, in an emergency session, "decided to raise the question of Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti and Saudi oil tankers at

"Chubin and Tripp, n.52, p.154.

"Ralph King, "The Iran-Iraq War: The 'Political Implications'", Adelphi Papers, no.219, 1987, p.33.


"Ibid."
an emergency meeting of the Arab League, in order to take a unified Arab stand on the attacks." On 5 June 1984, Saudi fighter jets shot down an Iranian F-4 aircraft." The Saudi action was in response to the perceived Iranian encroachment on its territorial waters. However, this military action removed all doubts as to where the GCC states stood. Thus, despite the official stand of the GCC, the member states had become party to the war.

The first meeting of the GCC Defence and Foreign Ministers was held on 18-19 September 1984 in the wake of a flare-up in the Gulf tanker war. With no end to the conflict in sight, the GCC countries decided to boost their self-defence capabilities to safeguard their interests. However, to avoid retaliation from Iran, the GCC states reiterated to Iranian officials that the GCC defence plan was not intended to form a military bloc directed at any one country."
At the conclusion of their fifth summit meeting in November 1984 the GCC Heads of States reiterated their call for a peaceful resolution of the war and stressed the need for a dialogue and negotiation. It called upon Iran to participate in the efforts which aimed at finding a solution based on attaining the rights of both parties."

The GCC states' Foreign Ministers Meeting, held on March 1985, expressed "sorrow and pain for the sufferings of innocent civilians and for the destruction caused by this war to the peoples of the two neighbouring countries". It called upon Iran "to respond to the international efforts" aimed at ending the war and affirmed their "full solidarity with Iraq in preserving the sovereignty, safety and integrity of its territory". They also demanded that Iran should not cross into Iraqi territory and should respect the international borders between the two countries.""

 GCC Foreign Ministers, in their meeting on 9 July 1985 in Saudi Arabia, expressed the Council's resolve to promote efforts to bring about a peaceful solution to


"FBIS-MEA, 19 March 1985, p. C_1."
the conflict between Iran and Iraq. The next session of the Ministerial Council was also held in Saudi Arabia on 2-3 September 1985. Once again the members reiterated their position to encourage all efforts to find a peaceful solution to the war. The Council also regretted Iran’s continued refusal to respond to the efforts made to end this war through negotiation and reconciliation.

Though since 1981 GCC states had singled out Iran as the intransigent party in their official statements, they opted for a more conciliatory posture in 1985. The Muscat summit communique, on 6 November 1985, conspicuously failed to cite Iran as the procrastinating party in the war. The summit statement only stated that the GCC had studied the Iran-Iraq war and that its recent escalation would bring further threats to the region.

As the land war intensified during 1986, so did the tanker war and Iraq’s attacks on Iran’s oil facilities. At first, GCC Ministerial statements tended to focus on


"IDSA News Review on West Asia, September 1985, p.408.

'regret' that Iran was not willing to be responsive to the good offices of various parties and to relinquish the use of force." But, from mid-summer 1986, the GCC's concern for the security of shipping increased both by the tanker war and by Iran's intensified interdiction of shipping. In August, the Council noted with regret the escalation of Iranian threats directed at the security and sovereignty of member states and expressed its concern over Iran's interdictions." Nothing was said about Iraq's attacks on Iran's oil facilities and tankers, nor the GCC members' continued assistance to Iraq in the pursuance of the war, nor, indeed about the fact that Iraq had initiated the war. For all these reasons, Iran considered such declarations by the GCC as invalid and lacking even moral force.

The final statement of the GCC Foreign Ministers meeting, held in Riyadh on 18 February 1987, called for a peaceful settlement of the Iran-Iraq war, stressing the council's adherence to the UN Security Council Resolution 582 and 588 of 1986. The Council also expressed its hope that Iran would respond to the

"Chubin and Tripp, n. 52, p. 172.

"Ibid.
international will and appreciate Iraq's response to put an end to the war by peaceful means."

At the end of 1987 in Summit Meeting held in Riyadh, the GCC Heads of States repeated their calls to the international community to take decisive measures to end the Gulf war. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had urged that the Council adopt a strong anti-Iranian resolution, whereas Oman and the UAE counselled for a continued dialogue with Teheran. In the end, "the Council noted with great regret Iran's procrastination regarding accepting the Resolution 598". Despite considerable diplomatic efforts, Gulf states could not seek an end to the conflict. Finally, Iran accepted Resolution 598 in July 1988 and the ceasefire came into effect in August 1988. Thus, the GCC states' stand vis-a-vis Iran-Iraq war underwent a change from initial neutrality to covert support and finally to overt support of Iraq against Iran. This also reflected the overall Western position on that question.

Responses of Individual Arab States

Iran-Iraq war had seriously divided the Arab countries. While Egypt, Jordan and the Arab Gulf


"FBIS-NES, 30 December 1987, p.I2."
countries sided with Iraq, Syria and Libya backed Iran. Jordan and Egypt, for their own reasons, came to Iraq's aid with political and other means of support. Jordan supported Iraq in a number of ways. It provided crucial trans-shipment rights through the port of Aqaba for war material and other goods destined for Iraq, and granted facilities for the dispersal of Iraqi aircrafts in Jordanian airfields at the outset of the war."

King Hussein of Jordan, who was close to Iraq even before the war, immediately declared his support and urged others to follow suit." King Hussein said that Jordan's stand in support of Iraq was an expression of its national commitment. He added, "Jordan will support Iraq because the neighbouring country is a strategic extension of Jordan and the danger that Iraq faces is a danger to Jordan as well". In the UN General Assembly, Jordan argued it by saying that it was abiding by the Charter of the League of Arab States and its joint defence agreement under which any aggression against any

"Chubin and Tripp, n.52, p.144.

"Times, 16 September 1980.

Arab state constituted an aggression against all Arab states."

As in the case of Jordan, Egypt too gained substantial political and economic benefits from its support to the Iraqi war efforts. By supporting Iraq in the name of pan-Arab solidarity, the Egyptian Government was able to serve Egypt's national interests and to break, to some extent, the isolation of the country following its peace treaty with Israel in 1979.

In 1980, when the Iran-Iraq war broke out, Egypt was still on the fringes of Arab politics. Initial Egyptian reactions were to declare neutrality and to condemn both parties." As Iraq's fortunes declined, Egypt saw in it an opportunity to re-establish its Arab credentials. Egyptian government turned the situation in its favour and began to aid Iraq. Egypt provided spare parts for Soviet equipment and over a million workers to supplant Iraqis engaged at the war front."

In 1983, President Hosni Mubarak said that Egypt would not send troops. But, Egypt supplied large

"UN Doc.A/37/PV.41.

"King, n.125, p.42.

quantities of arms and spares. A deal worth $1bn was mooted for 1982, and a deal worth $2 bn was reported in 1985." In May 1984, shortly after Egypt's Foreign Minister had given an assurance that his country stood by Iraq and would furnish such aid as was requested, Saddam called for Egypt to be readmitted to the Arab League." On the anniversary of the Baath revolution, Saddam Hussein declared, "Arab solidarity cannot be strong and effective without Egypt... Egypt is part of the Arab nation...[we must] not let an important Arab power like Egypt fail to participate with the group.""

This objective of Saddam Hussein was achieved at the Arab Summit in Amman in 1987. Although the Heads of State assembled there did not take the decision to re-admit Egypt to the Arab League, they did accede to the request that relations with Egypt should be reconsidered. This led to the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Cairo by a majority of Arab states, with Iraq itself in the forefront, thereby officially ending the isolation imposed on Egypt at the Baghdad Summit of 1979."

"International Herald Tribune, 23 May 1983.
"King, n.125, p.43.
"Chubin and Tripp, n.52, p.147.
"Ibid.
From the outset, Iran had cultivated ties with Arab states like Syria and Libya in order to frustrate the United Arab Front against Iran. The value of Syrian alliance was more than just military. It lent weight to the notion that Iran was fighting for an Islamic cause and helped to undermine the Iraqi propaganda of the war as an Arab-Persian confrontation.

Syria had no hesitation in condemning Iraq for having started the war and went on to accuse Saddam Hussein of having done so as part of a greater betrayal of Arab nation, by collaborating with US and Israel. Syria's reaction was basically determined by its poor relations with the rival Baath faction in Baghdad. Furthermore, Syria regarded the removal of the Shah as a positive step, and the Iraqi invasion of Iran as an unwelcome diversion from the issue of Palestine. Soon, Damascus became the base of the activities of the Iraqi opposition groups who pledged to overthrow Saddam Hussein.

For Iran, the Syrian connection had been important from the military point of view also. Iran was able to

"Ibid., p.148.

buy arms from the Eastern bloc through Syria without having any direct relationship with the suppliers. This was particularly valuable in the early stages of the war and in 1982, when the shipments were extensive. Though Soviet approval for arms transfer to Iran was not forthcoming till 1985, Soviet missiles found their way to Iran, but, by then, the pattern of co-operation had already been set.

Syria's most important contribution to Iran's war efforts was the closure of the Iraqi pipeline to Banias in April 1982. This move had serious economic repercussions for Iraq. The immediate pay off for Syria's closure of the Iraqi pipeline was the Iranian offer of $1 bn, of which $600 mn was in grants. This stemmed from an agreement whereby Iran was to provide one million tons of oil per annum free and supply some 5-7 million tons of crude oil at a discount of one-third of the posted prices, paid for half in foreign exchange and half in Syrian goods.

By 1986, this arrangement had encountered difficulties stemming from Syria's inability to repay

"Chubin, n.123, p.17.

"King, n.125, p.42.

"International Herald Tribune, 30 December 1983."
part of its $2bn oil debt to Iran. Iran reportedly suspended oil shipments pending a new agreement. However, differences were quickly resolved after a high-level meeting between Syrian and Iranian officials. Iran decided to sell 2.5 million tons of oil between October 1986 and March 1987. It confirmed that the Syrian position remained unchanged, and that Iran highly valued the relationship. The Syrian antagonism to Saddam Hussein's regime was also seen during the Kuwaiti crisis when it had no hesitation in supporting the US-led coalition against Iraq.

**Great Power Policy: USA**

The US policy was in pursuance of its overall strategy towards the Gulf in view of its immense strategic and geopolitical importance. It sought to ensure the free flow of oil from the region to its allies, and to treat oil not just as a source of energy but as a raw material of strategic importance. Thus, US attempted to carry out its role as the unchallenged custodian of Western interests in the Persian Gulf and at the same time to deny Soviet Union any political benefit from the region. The period of the Iran-Iraq war was also important from another angle. It reflected

"Chubin, n.123, p.19.

"King, n.125, p.42."
changes in the policy of USA and its allies as well as of the USSR in the context of the height of the neo-Cold War in 1980 on the one hand and ending with the Super Power detente in 1988 on the other. Thus 1988 was a good backdrop to understand the emergence of USA as the dominant foreign power in the Gulf as was proved during the Kuwaiti crisis subsequently.

Another factor that needs to be noted is that when the war started Iraq-US relations were characterized by a long history of negative relationship both in the context of the Cold War affiliations as well as the potential threat posed by Iraq not only to Israel but also to pro-US regional powers in the Gulf. Iranian revolution meant that not only Iraqi regime of President Saddam Hussein but also the new Iranian regime led by Ayatollah Khomeini were seen as hostile to the US interests. The long-drawn war signified the gradually growing interest and partnership between Iraq and USA. But Iraq was never considered a friend or an ally of USA as was seen during the Kuwaiti crisis.

USA, in reacting to the war, found itself shaping and moulding its policies to meet the changing conditions of the war and the changing fortunes of combatants in the war itself. In the early phase of the war when Iraqi forces, were occupying Iranian
territories, US policy was characterized in public as one of neutrality." The US representative in the Security Council said, "we are deeply concerned that this conflict be resolved with respect for the cardinal principles of international law that the territory must not be seized by force and the disputes should be settled peacefully and not by armed invasion." He added, "[US] believes that the cohesion and stability of Iran are in the interest of the stability and prosperity of the region as a whole. The national integrity of Iran is today threatened by the Iraqi invasion.""

Though the US called for a withdrawal of Iraqi forces, this position was never pressed at the UN Security Council. Also, the United States aided both countries by not enforcing its trade embargo on Iran, thus allowing for arms and spare parts to be shipped there without serious interdiction, and by reportedly allowing the Saudis to provide Iraq with high-altitude reconnaissance photographs of Iranian troop movements." However, the USA denied it vehemently and said that at


"UN Doc. S/PV 2252.

"Ibid.

"Ibid., n.23, pp.324-25.
no time had the USA passed information to either party regarding the military actions of the other." Thus, after having supported both sides, by permitting arms transactions to Iran and by supplying Iraq with intelligence data, the US tilted its policy in favour of Iraq after Iran crossed into Iraqi territories in July 1982.

As Iran went on the offensive, and when it appeared that Iraq might be defeated, US attitude changed. The removal of Iraq from the list of states that supported terrorism, sale of helicopters, extension of credit for the purchase of rice, and the drawing up of plans to assist Iraq militarily reflected the change in the US policy. Iraq's possible defeat came to be regarded as contrary to US interests." These changes culminated in the resumption of diplomatic relations in 1984, which had been broken off in 1967." 

USA however, did not totally break off with Iran, especially after the release of the American hostages. Strong Iranian connections continued to influence US

"UN Doc. S/PV.2251.

"Abbas Alnaswari, "US Foreign Policy in the Middle East", Arab Studies Quarterly (Belmont), vol.11, no.2, Winter 1989, p.79.

"Sick, n.24, p.239."
policy. In 1984 US inaugurated Operation Staunch to curtail the flow of arms to Iran. This was, however, conveniently shelved by the Reagan administration when it traded arms for the release of US hostages in Lebanon. It led to the Iran-Contra scandal of 1986."

US policy towards the Gulf was influenced by the likely response of USSR in the context of the Cold War. That constraint was removed to some extent by 1987-1988. Consequently, one witnessed a significant and visible change in the US policy in the Gulf region. It led to its direct military involvement in the Gulf against Iran. In 1987, USA decided to provide naval escorts to Kuwaiti oil tankers. The reflagging of these tankers provided the pretext for an extensive US naval presence in the Gulf." Mining of the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz provided another excuse. Finally, USA engaged the Iranian forces directly in military confrontation, thereby overtly opposing Iran in the war. That was one factor that contributed to Iran's acceptance of the UN ceasefire resolution.

The UN ceasefire resolution was passed on 20 July 1987. In the Security Council, US Secretary of State

"McNaugher, n.86, p.112.

"Alnaswari, n.162, p.76."
George Shultz said, "we hope and trust that today's decision will be honoured. At the same time we also support the decisive application of enforcement measures should either or both parties reject the call of this body". As Iran rejected Resolution 598, US put pressure for an arms embargo on Iran. It was, however, opposed by the Soviets.

Finally, Iran succumbed to the pressures by accepting the ceasefire Resolution 598. The various factors that led to it have been dealt with in next chapter. Though USA welcomed Iran's acceptance of the UN Resolution 598, State Department spokesman proclaimed: "We certainly intend to remain strong player in the Gulf. Our policy has not changed". US Secretary of State announced, "the US has no immediate plans to reduce the number of its warships in the Persian Gulf or its approaches". Though USA's direct military intervention shortened the war's duration, it legitimized US military presence in the Gulf.

**West European Countries**

For West European countries, the Iran-Iraq war presented politico-military implications. Initial fears

"UN Doc.S/PV.2750.

that the conflict might not be contained in the region itself, posed potential economic challenges to West European countries, especially in the context of their dependence on Gulf oil. Their interests in the Gulf were largely commercial when the war broke out. However, they had no capability to protect their interests, except with active US co-operation. Furthermore, their strategic interests differed qualitatively from that of the Super Powers. Each state had its own perception of its interests in the war. While they pursued arms sales policies to both the belligerents, which reflected their business interests, they decided to deploy their warships to protect shipping when there was a threat to their merchant shipping in the area.

Since the outbreak of hostilities in September 1980 until October 1985 the British government classified it as Iran-Iraq war and proclaimed its neutrality in that war. But, from October 1985 onwards there was a change in the term used and the British government began to speak of "the conflict between Iran and Iraq" and to describe the British position as one of "impartiality". A declaratory policy of neutrality in the war was in part the realization by the British that

they were not in a position to play a balancing role in the region either diplomatically or militarily. The British government was respected by both the belligerents, but had little or no influence on the course or outcome of the war."

The British Navy's presence, called the Armilla Patrol, had operated in the Strait of Hormuz and in the southern part of the Gulf since the outbreak of the war. The British government described its function as "to offer reassurance and help British ships in an emergency"." The British government stated that it had sent the Armilla Patrol to the Gulf because of the threat to the free passage of merchant shipping, but added that British naval assistance was offered only to ships under the British flag and not to ships owned in Britain, insured in Britain, carrying British cargoes, with British officers or partly British crews." This policy became more important after 1984 when attacks on shipping intensified.


"Gray, n.168, p.423.

"James Cable, "Outside Navies in the Gulf", International Relations (Mala Strana), vol.9, no.3, May 1988, p.234.
As the first US protected convoy prepared to sail in July 1987, the British discussed a similar request by Kuwaiti to place other Kuwaiti vessels under the British flag. British involvement in the area was further increased by the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers under the British flag in August 1987. The British government, however, maintained that the reflagging was a purely commercial and administrative matter.

At first the British government refused to participate in the US operation to remove the mines from the Gulf. But, when its tanker Gentle Breeze was attacked and mines were found off Fujairah outside the Strait of Hormuz, the British government reversed its decision. It decided to send minesweepers to assist the Gulf patrols. On 28 September 1987 the first batch of British minesweepers entered the Gulf. The zone of patrol of Armilla Patrol was also extended up to Bahrain in the north.

In November 1987 the British Secretary of State spoke of the differences between British and US foreign policy in the Gulf. He said:

"Caron, n.76, p.157.

"Gray, n.168, p.424.

"Ibid., pp.423-24."
they share a determination to uphold the freedom of navigation in the Gulf and that they each have naval forces in the Gulf for this purpose. But their tasks and methods of operation are fundamentally different. The Armilla Patrol exists to provide reassurance to British ships and to accompany their passage to the best of its limited resources. It provides no guarantee of protection and does not convoy or escort. It does not normally operate beyond the Strait of Hormuz and southern Gulf."

The British naval force was apparently instructed to respond with armed force only when there was an attack on a British ship.

As far as the supply of arms to Iran and Iraq was concerned, Britain maintained the same position as it had adopted at the beginning of the war on the requirements of neutrality/impartiality. Although a British embargo on arms sales to Iran and Iraq has been in force since 1980, it banned only the sale of lethal equipment which could "prolong or exacerbate the war"." Following the Iranian attack on the British tanker, Gentle Breeze, the British government closed down the Iranian Military Procurement Office in London which was

"Ibid., p.425.

responsible for about 80 per cent of Iran's total military purchases."

France, since the outset of Iran-Iraq war, had backed Iraq. The Franco-Iraqi relationship goes back to the mid-1970s, reflecting the French policy of securing preferential treatment from certain Middle Eastern oil suppliers. The French interests in the Gulf were largely commercial when the war broke out. It furnished Iraq with large quantities of weapons and technology. By May 1981, Iraq owed France some fifteen billion Francs." Like all large creditors in similar circumstances France was, therefore, forced to continue its assistance to Iraq or risk losing all.

France found itself underwriting Iraqi defence efforts because of the latter's financial difficulties from 1982 onwards. The quantum of debt which Iraq had incurred in purchasing French arms was such that, apart from other considerations of regional interest, France had a strong commercial incentive to ensure that an Iraqi military collapse should not occur." As a result, it became too eager to provide Iraq with the means of


"Chipman, n.169, p.217.

"Chubin and Tripp, n.52, p.193."
preventing that grim scenario. At the same time, it was Iraq's limitations which forced Baghdad to increase its barter deals with France, providing Paris with petroleum in exchange for advanced weapons."

In 1983, in order to further Iraq's war efforts France leased five Super Etendards to Iraq and sold Exocet anti-ship missiles to go with them." The French government said that their decisions to lease to Iraq Super Etendard jets was an attempt to force Iran to sit down at the negotiating table and bring war to an end." Though that might have been the French intention at that time, the supply of Mirage F-1 aircraft and Exocet missiles in the subsequent period clearly marked the tilt in favour of Iraq in the war.

As Iraq's income and reserves declined, its ability to meet debt repayments fell further. French credits became increasingly important for the survival of the Baath regime. Figures cited for 1986 suggested that some $5bn were owed." France counted on the favourable treatment promised by Iraq to its allies, but it was

"Kechichian, n.128, p.92.

"King, n.125, pp.55-56.


"King, n.125, p.56."
difficult to imagine that this degree of financial exposure was viewed with equanimity. Whatever the mix of strategic and commercial reasons, which initially prompted French involvement, France was left with few options but to continue to supply Iraq.

France and Iran had strained relations right from the outbreak of war, and there were many reasons for that. France, the one time refuge of Ayatollah Khomeini, had extended its hospitality to his opponents too. Further, relations with Iran had been complicated by the French aid to Iraq, in particular its arms sales to that country. Relations deteriorated further when the French found out that Iran was behind the terrorist attack in September 1986.*

As the relations strained further, France broke diplomatic relations with Iran on 17 July 1987. However, within a year, the French government lifted its embargo on oil purchases from Iran and later, in mid-June 1988, pledged to renew diplomatic relations.** But care was taken to keep the pace of economic rapprochement slow so as not to harm the existing oil trade with Iraq and


**Chipman, n.169, p.218.
upset a partner whose goodwill France had carefully cultivated for over a decade and a half.

West Germany and Italy maintained very low diplomatic profiles over the war, since their interests were largely commercial in nature. Both countries declared their neutrality. During the war, Italian and West German diplomacy were largely successful in maintaining strict neutrality as was reflected in the commercial practices of both their governments. The threat of mines in the Gulf waters caused great concern to these European states. This resulted in unprecedented participation of many European NATO states in an 'out of area' operation. Several French warships operating in the Indian Ocean or based in Djibouti registered their presence in the Gulf. Moreover, after the threat of mines increased, minesweepers were dispatched by five European states: France, Britain, Italy, Belgium and Holland, with indirect assistance from West Germany. Even though West Germany's constitution prevented deployment of military power beyond the NATO area, it sent four ships to the Mediterranean to compensate for the draw down of other NATO ships from the West Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{11} West European warships joined the US forces in the region, taking part in a 70-ship

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p.225.
constellation of allied power." It needs to be noted that these ships were operating under independent commands. Hence, the total number does not signify a coalition of Western states in the Gulf, like during the Kuwaiti crisis.

Japanese Policy

The Japanese position vis-a-vis the Iran-Iraq war also reflected a neutral stand and the desire to prevent the war from spreading. Excessive dependence upon oil from the Gulf region had always been a critical element of Japan's economic vulnerabilities. The intensification of attacks on tankers and commercial vessels in 1984 was a source of grave concern to Japan. It called upon Iran and Iraq "to exercise maximum restraint so that hostilities will not spread to other parts of the Gulf region"."

The Japanese Foreign Minister, Shintaro Abe, visited Teheran and Baghdad between 6-11 August 1984. His efforts were described as, "not intended to mediate in the Gulf war but to generate an environment that would prevent the expansion of the war, leading to an

"The Telegraph (Calcutta), 5 October 1987.

"UN Doc. S/PV.2543."
early end to the conflict". However, his appeals for an early political settlement were in vain. Japan had its own limitations. It had little diplomatic leverage since it had no desire to sell arms to the belligerents. Probably the only means by which it could exercise influence was by its economic power with incentives for a ceasefire. Japan provided very little development aid to both belligerents. But it should be noted that while Japan provided virtually none to Iran between 1979 and 1987, its aid to Iraq amounted to $14.7 mn in 1985, $15.2 mn in 1986, and then jumped to $70.2 mn in 1987. Tokyo justified this by stating that credits to Iraq, whose external debts were rapidly increasing, might influence to moderate its policies.

In May 1987, after an Iraqi missile hit the US frigate *USS Stark* in the Gulf, the US called for an international naval patrol to operate in the Gulf. It requested Japan also to send minesweepers and to pay $14 bn to help cover the costs of US naval operations in the Gulf. Japan refused to send naval vessels since Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution prohibits its army, navy


"Ibid., p.177."
or air force to be deployed beyond the country's borders." Finally, Japan provided financial aid for the establishment of an electronic navigational aid system along the Gulf coast."

**Soviet Union**

The Soviet position was influenced by several factors like, its traditional friendship with Iraq, its desire to winover Iran after the revolution, and the desire to offset its involvement in Afghanistan. Hence, the initial Soviet reaction to the conflict was an official declaration of neutrality. Soviet Union's initial stance on the Iran-Iraq war was set forth by its leader, Leonoid Brezhnev. He stated, "We are not going to interfere in the conflict between Iran and Iraq. We stand for the earliest possible political settlement through the efforts of both countries"."

Soviet actions during 1980-81 reflected not only disapproval of Saddam's war, but also a strategic assessment that the USSR's stand should tacitly support


"Nishihara, n.189, p.176.

the Teheran regime lest the Iraqi military offensive decisively undermines it. Though Soviet-Iraqi relations were close, Moscow did not enjoy predominant influence in Iraq, as evidenced by the Baath Party’s crackdown on the Iraqi Communist Party and Iraqi criticism of Soviet military intervention in the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan. Because of the dependence of Iraq’s armed forces on Soviet material, the decision to curtail new shipments and to halt direct arms supplies to Iraq was, in effect, a blow to Iraq. A substantial change in the Soviet attitude towards Iraqi war efforts came in 1982, when it became clear that Iraq had lost the initiative and that its very survival was at stake.

On the other hand, Iran had not only been warned of the impending attack, but was offered arms soon after the war began, an offer which was declined. This willingness to cooperate with Iran was the reflection of a new policy. Soviet attitudes towards Iran could be inferred from the blocking of sanctions against Iran at the UN during the hostage crisis, the refusal to comment on Iranian criticism of the continued occupation of

"Litwak, n.37, p.204.

"King, n.125, p.48.

Afghanistan, and the encouragement of Tudeh Party's co-operation with the Islamic regime."

By July 1982, the Iranian military, which had been on the defensive since September 1980, expelled the Iraqi forces from Iranian territory and crossed the international border into Iraq. Moscow was greatly concerned about the possibility of an Iranian victory, which would not only upset the regional balance but also greatly enhance the appeal of Islamic fundamentalism, with internal implications for the Soviet Union."m

The Soviets consequently resumed direct military assistance to Iraq in 1982. The resumption of large-scale Soviet arms shipments to Iraq strained Soviet-Iranian relations. The Tudeh Party, which had made the mistake of identifying itself too closely with Soviet interests, felt Khomeini's displeasure. Party activists were purged from government positions and arrested, while the Tudeh newspaper was banned. The denouncement of this episode came in February 1983 when the top leaders of the Tudeh Party, including its General Secretary, Nuraddin Kianuri, were arrested on charges of


"Litwak, n.37, p.205.
spying for the Soviet Union." In May 1983, the Tudeh party was banned." Also the Iranian government expelled eighteen Soviet embassy officials. Soviets sharply criticized these continuing anti-Communist activities, including the public trial of 'secret' Tudeh activists in the army."

By 1984, Soviet Union had adopted a more pro-Iraqi stance. It considerably expanded military, economic and political ties with Iraq. In March 1984, a Soviet delegation, including arms export officials, visited Baghdad and the following month an agreement was concluded granting $2 bn in long-term loan for economic projects."

Iraqi Prime Minister highlighted the changed Soviet posture by saying that Moscow had come around from its 'inexact view point' and was now living upto the spirit of 1972 Friendship Treaty."

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"Ibid., p.206.

"King, n.125, p.49.

"Ibid.


Despite these developments, Soviet Union could not ignore the need to be on the right side of Iran. Hence, despite the overt tilt towards Iraq in 1984 Soviet Union adopted a more balanced approach towards the two antagonists after 1985. Despite continuing political differences on a variety of bilateral issues, the 1985-86 period witnessed a significant expansion of Soviet-Iranian economic contacts. In December 1986, a general economic agreement was concluded whose provisions included the resumption of natural gas exports to the USSR via the IGAT-I pipeline."

In January 1987 the Soviets issued an official statement on the Iran-Iraq war and proposed equitable means to settle it. The statement stated that settlement should be based on generally recognized norms of international law and order, above all the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in each others internal affairs, and reaffirmation of the boundaries between Iran and Iraq that existed before the conflict began."

After Gorbachev had come to power, the USSR was keen to improve its relations with the oil-rich GCC states in the Gulf. In March 1987, the Soviet Union

"Litwak, n.37, p.207.

responded positively to the Kuwaiti request for the protection of its oil tankers. Clearly, this move did not endear the Soviets to the Teheran government. In early May Iranian gunboats in the Persian Gulf fired upon the Soviet freighter Ivan Koroteev. Soon after, one of the three Soviet tankers leased to Kuwait, the Marshal Chuykov, hit an Iranian mine and sustained considerable damage.\" Soviets responded by despatching three additional minesweepers to the Gulf.\"

However, in June 1987 Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Yuli Vorontov announced that the USSR had no intention of increasing the size of its naval force in the Persian Gulf. Later that month, Vorontov visited Teheran and Baghdad, and reportedly conveyed a Soviet offer to sponsor bilateral peace talks in Moscow. During his visit to Teheran in August 1987, Vorontov strongly criticized the US military presence in the Gulf.\" The visit resulted in additional bilateral economic agreements. Soviets agreed to build a pipeline to carry

\"Moltz and Ross, n.203, p.138.

\"Litwak, n.37, p.209.

\"Ibid., p.209."
Iranian oil to the Black Sea and a railway system was also planned."

In the UN, Soviet Union voted in July 1987 in favour of Resolution 598, which called for an immediate ceasefire and peace negotiations. Iran refused to adhere to the resolution. US then proposed a Security Council Resolution for an arms embargo against Iran until it accepted the ceasefire. Soviet Union, however, refused to vote in favour of an arms embargo." As a move to counter the US diplomatic initiative, Soviet Union called for the creation of an UN flotilla to replace the large Western naval presence." Iran thanked the Soviets for its firm position in the Security Council as regards to the Council's attitude towards Iran. This approach continued till July 1988, when Iran finally accepted the ceasefire. It is interesting to note that despite the detente, and the new direction to the foreign policy under Gorbachev, USSR still preferred to have an independent policy vis-a-vis Iran and did not fully support the US stand.


"Ibid.

China

The Peoples Republic of China had relatively little direct interest or presence in the region. However, strategic consideration relating to the Soviet armed intervention in Afghanistan had drawn Chinese attention to the area. When the Iran-Iraq war broke out, China adopted a policy of neutrality. It called upon both the parties to end the conflict peacefully. Premier Zhao pointed out:

Iran and Iraq belong to the Third World and both are friendly countries of China...We are very much concerned about the recent armed conflicts between them. We hope that they will settle their disputes peacefully through negotiations, guard against super power interference and prevent the situation from worsening. This was not only in the interests of the people of Iran and Iraq but also conducive to peace and stability in the Gulf area."

The Chinese Government reiterated that resorting to arms could in no way help Third World countries and would provide opportunities for the Super Powers to step in and interfere in the affairs of the region."


""UN Doc. A/37/PV.39."
However, the search for arms in the Gulf region, coupled with the Chinese need for foreign currency, led to Beijing's emergence as a major supplier of increasingly sophisticated weapon systems to the area. Added on to this factor was the expanding strategic and political ambitions of the Chinese. China sold billions of dollars worth of arms to both Iran and Iraq during the Gulf war. China was one of the major supplier of arms to Iran although Chinese government vehemently denied it. Technically the Chinese may be right because the bulk of Chinese weapons were channelled through North Korea. The military relationship between Beijing and Teheran expanded significantly after the visit of Rafsanjani to China in 1985. The focus had been on the transfer of Silkworm anti-ship missiles to Iran which had allowed them to expand the war into the Gulf.

Following the 'tanker war' the Chinese government expressed the desire that the parties concerned would exercise restraint instead of further aggravating the situation. Reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers and the


""China hopes end to Iraq-Iran War", Beijing Review, vol.26, no.52, 26 December 1983, p.8."
escort by the Super Powers were seen by the Chinese as a pretext to intervene in the region. The Chinese firmly opposed any military intervention in the Gulf by other countries, especially the Super Powers. In August 1987, Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Qi Huaiyuan visited Iran as a Special Envoy of the Chinese government and exchanged views with Iranian leaders on reducing Gulf tensions and ending the Iran-Iraq war.

Despite protests from the US and an American-led initiative in the UN to impose a global arms embargo on Iran, China continued its arms transfers to Iran. On 29 September 1987, Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xuqian, in a television interview stressed that if Iran "refuses Resolution 598, then the Chinese government will take part in the follow-up actions to implement the resolution. If a majority of the Security Council member countries decided on an arms embargo, China will also support it." Only after high-level protests from the US and its curb on high technology exports to Beijing, did China express its intention to prevent the diversion


"""The Iran-Iraq Agreement on UN Resolution Elusive", *Beijing Review*, vol.30, no.43, 26 October-1 November 1987, p.13.
of Chinese equipment to Iran." The Chinese government asserted that it had never sold weapons directly to Iran but had rather taken strict measures to prevent the flow of Chinese weapons into Iran from international markets."

It is interesting to note that Iran and Iraq never formally declared 'war' during the eight years of their armed conflict. Nor did they withdraw their diplomatic legations from the other country. Their embassies remained open and operative throughout the war. The Iran-Iraq war lasted unabated for eight years. The major reason for this had been Khomeini's complete unwillingness to agree to any compromise that could make peace possible. Indeed, he had adamantly insisted that the war be pursued until Iraq was defeated and Saddam Hussein's regime removed. The battlefield setbacks, depleting economy, Western intervention, and loss of morale in the armed forces, forced Iran to accept the ceasefire. Khomeini rationalized the acceptance of a ceasefire on the ground that it was in the interest of the revolution. Basically, his ultimate concern was to


"Gargi Dutt and V.P. Dutt, China After Mao (Delhi, 1991), p.263."
preserve the Islamic Revolution. The continuation of the war eroded the popular support for the revolution.

The Gulf war had a profound effect not only on the belligerents, but also on the entire Persian Gulf region and on the wider Arab world. The GCC states themselves had been ambivalent about the war. Both Iran and Iraq, in the past had used military force and intimidation to expand their influence. Between 1981 and 1988, the Iran-Iraq war remained the top agenda item for GCC states. They called on both belligerents to accept a ceasefire. But their limited influence on Iran and Iraq did not produce contemplated results.

When the war broke out, the US had no diplomatic relations with both the belligerents. But steadily it turned against Iran and in favour of Iraq. As the war dragged on, the US attitude towards the war was that neither Iraq nor Iran be allowed to achieve a clear military victory. The reflagging of a Kuwaiti tanker and escort operations resulted in direct US military involvement in the war. Later, this led to a number of direct US-Iranian clashes. Finally, the war also legitimized the presence of US forces in the region.

The interest of industrialized nations of Europe in the Gulf were largely commercial. When the war broke out, each defined the interest slightly differently.
However, when there was an equal threat to their merchant shipping in the area, they despatched their warships and minesweepers to the region.

Initially, the Soviet Union called on both the parties to end the conflict amicably between them. From mid-1982 through early 1985 the Soviet Union tilted towards Iraq. This policy shift did little to enhance Soviet influence in Iraq. This situation, however, changed after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. From 1985 through 1988, Gorbachev managed the very difficult balancing act of retaining Soviet influence in Iraq while also improving Soviet relations with both GCC states and Iran. Also, Soviet protection of Kuwaiti oil export secured it for the first time ever an active role in defending the GCC states.

It is important to note that all through the Iran-Iraq war, there was no basic change in the political or economic system in Iran or Iraq. The same set that had provoked the war remained when the ceasefire was accepted and fighting stopped. Of course, there was unprecedented loss of life and property on both the sides. While the character of the main combatants had not changed, the war period witnessed a great change in the global environment with the emergence of detente, and also the new power of the oil-rich members of the
GCC and their overt linkage with the West. These developments influenced the events in the Gulf in the next decade, and almost marginalized the Iran-Iraq conflict.