Chapter - VII

CONCLUSION
A study of bilateral relations, especially among close neighbours in a given region, has to take into account multiple variables: domestic, regional and even global. If the period under study is of a longer duration then one has also to analyze the changes in these three variables at all given points of special interest to understand not only the impact of those changes upon bilateral relations under study but also the possible impact of the given bilateral relations upon the domestic, regional, and even global politics, all through that period.

Another factor that needs to be emphasized is that the study of bilateral relations need to take note of the cooperative as well as conflictual aspects of this relationship. It is rare that bilateral relations are wholly positive or totally negative. One often witnesses a combination of these two trends. Hence, it is important to trace these two trends, which in fact represents the two sides of the coin, in any conceptual graph of bilateral relations over a given period of time. This graph would, therefore, distinctly indicate the lines of co-operation as well as conflictual
relationship. Only then, can one understand the nature of bilateral relations in its fullest sense.

When one studies relations between Iran-Iraq, one finds that while systemic changes in these states might have affected their mutual threat perception, one does not witness that nature of their relationship had any profound effect upon the evolution or change in the nature of the regime in power. In other words, the threat perception was not responsible for the regime changes either in Iran or in Iraq. Changes did occur, but they were more due to domestic factors rather than due to the ups or downs of bilateral relations. Neither the Iraqi Revolution of 1958, when the monarchy was overthrown, or the overthrow of Abdel Karim Qassem's regime in 1963 by the Baath leaders, nor the subsequent intra-Baath coups were the result of Iran-Iraq relations. Similarly, in Iran, the overthrow of the monarchy was not because of Iran-Iraq relations. Thus, while regime changes might have resulted in the reassessment of bilateral relations, they were not the effect of bilateral relations.

The emerging pattern of bilateral relations, however, had serious impact upon regional and even international environment. When these relations were dominated by cooperative trends, they contributed to
regional harmony. On the contrary, conflictual trends added to regional insecurity and prepared the ground for extra-regional powers' intervention. The Saadabad Pact of 1937 between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, and even the Baghdad Pact of 1955, helped to reduce intra-regional tensions. On the other hand Iran-Iraq rivalry since 1958 provided a fertile ground not only for great power involvement in the region but also led to a sense of insecurity among other regional powers, like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Iran-Iraq relations can be broadly divided into the following phases: pre-1958-68, 1969-74, 1975-79, 1980-88 and the post-1990 period. The pre-1958 period is important because it had all the seeds for a conflict, though the over-whelming British presence in the region on its own till 1952, when it was eroded in Iran following the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil company by Mossadeq, and under the American umbrella till the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy on 14 July 1958, had put a lid on the process of conflict escalation. Thus, though Iran-Iraq relations had all the seeds of bilateral conflict viz., the unresolved boundary dispute both on the land and the river, the minority question of Kurds, Arabs in Iran, Persians in Iraq, the Shii question etc..., on the surface, their bilateral relations were dominated by a spirit of co-operation.
Iran-Iraq relations from 1920’s to 1950’s cannot be termed as totally cordial. However, both the states showed some inclination to resolve the issues bilaterally. Though Iran and Iraq were ruled by conservative, pro-West, monarchical regimes, their political orientations did not preclude the eruption of multiple crises over the issues. However, the perception of common domestic and external threats invariably served as a catalyst, for some time, in order to focus their attention on more pressing domestic and external threats. This was evident when both Iran and Iraq acceded to Saadabad Pact in 1937 and the Baghdad Pact in 1955.

The overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy by a coup d’etat in 1958 under the leadership of colonel Abdel Karim Qassem drastically changed the environment that governed Iraq’s relationship with Iran. The emergence of a revolutionary regime in Baghdad, and Iraq’s subsequent withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact, had adverse effects on Iran-Iraq relations. All the conflictual issues, that had been suppressed till 1958, came into the forefront. Despite some half-hearted attempts at conflict resolution, no progress was made during the regime of Abdel Karim Qassem to resolve the differences between them over the issues like Shatt al-Arab navigation,
border demarcation and the rights and responsibilities of the two states towards Iranians residing in Iraq. The emergence of the Iraqi Communist Party into the forefront of Iraqi politics, and its close links with the Kurdish Democratic Party along with the growing polarization of Iran and Iraq in the context of the Cold War were some of the factors responsible for the continuing confrontation.

The overthrow of Qassem regime by the Baathi group in 1963 helped to reduce the tension to some extent but no progress was made towards resolving the outstanding issues. The emergence of radical Baath regime in 1968 escalated the tension between Iran and Iraq. The injection of an ideological factor of regional nature in Iraq's foreign policy, i.e., Pan-Arabism, and Iraq's championing of the 'Arab Cause' in the Persian/Arab Gulf, had the effect of polarization of Arab nationalism versus Persian nationalism in the Gulf. This accelerated mutual antagonism and led to profound mistrust in their relations till 1975. Both, Iran and Iraq, pursued a deliberate policy so as to enhance the tension. Thus, questions like hegemony over the Persian/Arab Gulf, the Shatt al-Arab question, the Kurdish question, the status of people of Persian origin in Iraq etc... assumed added significance. This period also witnessed a growing arms race between Iran and Iraq besides growing Super Power
involvement in the context of global Cold War politics. The energy crisis added a new dimension to the Gulf region.

Involvement of USA and Israel in the Kurdish problem was a major cause which deteriorated Iran-Iraq relations during that period. To counter it, the Iraqi government provided support to the Baluchis in Iran and widened the arena of Iranian-Iraqi conflict. This led to border clashes, though war was avoided till the end. With the mediation of Algerian President Houri Boumedinne, rapprochement between Iran and Iraq was achieved. Algiers Agreement was signed on 5 March 1975. The aftermath of Algiers Accord witnessed a period of detente until the Iranian revolution of 1979. The Algiers Agreement was important because a successful, though short-lived, attempt was made to resolve issues that had led to long-drawn bilateral conflicts, in contrast to the efforts to sweep them under the carpet or to let them simmer on the back burner, as was the earlier practice. The spirit of bilateral co-operation between 1975 till 1979 when Shah’s regime was overthrown was, therefore, qualitatively different from the Iran-Iraq co-operation till 1958.

This period of detente witnessed a steady improvement in the political and economic relations
between Iran and Iraq. The commonality of interest was manifested in their perceptions of developments in the Horn of Africa, co-ordination of their policies within OPEC, and in their agreement to eliminate extra-regional bases and influences in the Gulf. There was also divergence of interests between them, as was evident in their disagreement on the concept of the Gulf security system or the manning of the Gulf, Arab or Persian. Despite the difference on that issue, the detente between Iran and Iraq created an environment of regional stability that was unique in the contemporary history of the Gulf.

Iran-Iraq detente collapsed with the fall of the Shah and the accession to power of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. The systemic change in Iran signalled a return to tension and confrontation in Iran-Iraq relations. The establishment of Islamic Republic in Iran introduced a new dimension in the region, pitting a radical, universalist regime against a secular, nationalist regime in Iraq. Moreover, Iranian provocative threats against Gulf rulers, in general, and Iraq in particular heightened the tension between them.

Under the impact of the new regional Cold War, both Iran and Iraq, began lending moral and material support to various ethnic, dissident and religious groups in
their attempt to destabilize each other. The growing tension between them culminated in the war. The war had a devastating effect on the economy and society of both the countries. It had wider ramifications too. It's prolongation and spill-over effects on the neighbours not only threatened the stability of the region, but also led to further consolidation of power by extra-regional powers, especially the US.

Both were exhausted by the war. Iran was feeling increasingly isolated. Hence, Iran finally agreed to a ceasefire. The ceasefire, however, did not mean a return to detente. Tension prevailed. Though United Nations played a major role in implementing ceasefire between Iran and Iraq it was powerless to initiate the peace process. The peace progress was painfully slow. Peace talks, which began in Geneva under the UN auspices soon after the ceasefire, made no progress and were soon abandoned. Even the release and repatriation of sick POWs by both sides had been sporadic, uncoordinated and protracted. Besides the UN, other organizations such as OIC and NAM attempted to bring about a ceasefire between Iran and Iraq without any success. None of the basic issues of conflict were resolved in the framework of the peace process till 1990.
The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 drastically changed the nature of Iran-Iraq relations. Iraq, confronted by coalition challenge in Kuwait, withdrew its troops to international borders and agreed to abide by the 1975 Algiers Agreement. Iraqi gestures were not the result either of a change of heart, change of the regime or of a negotiated bilateral agreement. It was a unilateral gesture reflecting Iraq's new concern after its occupation of Kuwait and the unexpectedly hostile international reactions. Consequently, Iran did not feel obliged to reciprocate Iraqi gestures, and it did not. In fact, Iran lost no opportunity to make things difficult for Iraq both during and after the Kuwaiti crisis. Iran has not finally settled its problems with Iraq. Unless Iran and Iraq reach a final and durable solution to their differences, the conflict will exist between them. There is no indication of the revival of the spirit of the Algiers Agreement of 1975 as yet. Thus, the Iran-Iraq rivalry is dormant and not resolved, despite the long experience of conflictual relationship.

In the light of the analysis of the ups and downs of the Iran-Iraq bilateral relations and of the study of its positive and negative character, one can attempt to plot these relations on a graph using an adhoc 10-Point Scale. It is possible that different scholars
IRAN-IRAQ RELATIONS: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE DIMENSIONS
might have some differences due to their subjective assessment of the cooperative/positive and conflictual/negative nature of the relationship. But a pattern of Iran-Iraq relationship will be approximate to that given in the graph here. Since bilateral relationship is the sum-total of positive and negative factors, it is reflected in the 10-Point Scale. In fact, the graph shows that the positive and the negative dimensions are a mirror image. The plotting of both the lines, however, gives a complete picture of the totality of bilateral relations that is not clear from the graph of only the positive or the negative dimensions of the relationship.

Variables involved in plotting the graph includes domestic factors, regional factors and global factors. Various permutations and combinations can be arrived at when studying the bilateral relations between Iran and Iraq. The graph is plotted on a 10-Point Scale on the Y-axis and periods are indicated on the X-axis. Cursory look at the cut off periods taken indicate significant events that took place between Iran and Iraq. The cut off periods taken for the graph has been arrived at after a careful study of events that shaped Iran-Iraq relations. From a high of 8-units index of co-operation in 1958, the graph dropped to a low of 2 units, rising again to 8-units in 1975-1978 period. The reasons for
these ups and downs in the graph over the long period and how the points were arrived at, on the 10-Point Scale are discussed briefly in the subsequent paragraphs.

The pattern of relationship shows a high degree of co-operation despite the causes of bilateral tension. There were several reasons. Iran and Iraq shared similar political system during this period. Monarchical type of governance, capitalist model of economy and their pro-Western policies were important factors. Moreover, they were part of a regional security arrangement, Baghdad Pact, and hence, there was no arms race between them. Religion (Islam) did not find a role in the governance and the politics of both the states could be termed as secular in character.

However, in spite of the similarities in governance, security perceptions and policies, there remained areas of disagreement. The problem of the minorities viz. Kurdish problem, Shi' question, Persians in Iraq and Arabs in Iran posed a challenge to the continuance of co-operation. Both governments engaged themselves in suppressing the activities of minorities. The boundary dispute over land, river and sea, remained a dormant issue in bilateral relations.
1958-1963: From Qassem’s Coup to Baath Coup

Iraq underwent a systemic change in 1958. Abdel Karim Qassem captured power through a military coup and proclaimed Iraq as a Republic. The change of regime in Iraq enhanced Iran’s threat perception. The new regime in Iraq also sought to fan the fire of conflict but was constrained due to several reasons. The domestic rivalry in Iraq between supporters of Qassem, Communists, Baath and Kurds absorbed the attention of Iraqi government and left it with little scope for fanning Iran-Iraq rivalry. Despite the change in regime, Iraq remained a secular country like Iran.

This period also witnessed the emergence of struggle by minorities in Iraq. The Kurds and the Shii slowly intensified their struggle against the Iraqi government. Yet the Kurdish problem in Iraq remained a domestic one and did not become as yet part of Iran-Iraq rivalry. Likewise, the boundary question acquired the shape of vocal bilateral dispute though both the countries refrained from escalating it into a crisis. The systemic change in Iraq resulted in foreign policy reorientations which resulted in Iraq’s pro-USSR stand and support to NAM at global level. Despite growing differences and even loud protests, bilateral relations
between Iran and Iraq did not deteriorate to a great extent. That is reflected in the graph.

1963-1968: Consolidation of Power by the Baath Party

The Baath party's hegemony and consolidation of power in Iraq resulted in growing overt antagonism between Iran and Iraq, in spite of secular credentials of both the governments. Iraq started to champion 'Pan-Arabism'. This was a new factor added to Iraq's foreign policy of Non-Alignment and to its pro-Soviet stand. In contrast, Iran followed pro-Western policies. This period saw the beginning of the deterioration in Iran-Iraq relations. It also led to the beginning of an arms race between both the countries, with Soviets aiding Iraq and US-led Western powers arming Iran.

Kurds in Iraq were overtly supported by Iran with the active connivance of the US and Israel. The dissident groups in Iran were encouraged by Iraq as a countermove to out-manoeuvre Iran. The Shii question slowly emerged into prominence. Outstanding border disputes made a major impact on bilateral relations. Iran wanted to revert back to the position agreed to in the 1937 Treaty on Shatt al-Arab waterways. Also, Iran started to assert its role in the Gulf region, which was of strategic importance to it. These conditions resulted in a downward slide in relations between Iran and Iraq.
1968-1975: Height of Tension

The emergence of radical Baath party to power accelerated the process of tension between the two nations. One of its indication was Iran's unilateral abrogation of 1937 Treaty in 1969. It began escorting its oil tankers in the Shatt al-Arab as a show of strength, and to deter Iraq, from following an adventurous policy vis-a-vis Iran. Iran also openly started supporting the Kurds and other minorities in Iraq. As a countermove, Iraq expelled people of Iranian origin living in Iraq. The underground movement by Shi'i gave an opportunity to Iraq to get rid of them since they were emerging as a domestic constraint. Iraq's Friendship Treaty with Soviet Union in 1972 vitiated the atmosphere. This gave a further impetus to the arms race between the two states. Mediatory attempts by regional powers were spared by both the states. However, the significant silverlining during this period of tension was the co-operation between both the countries in OPEC/Oil pricing policies, and it was this co-operation that paved way for their reconciliation in Algiers.

1975-1978: The Algiers Agreement and the Detente

This period witnessed the emergence of new cooperative attitude between Iran and Iraq. The Algiers
Treaty of 1975 marked a turning point in Iran-Iraq relations. Both the countries affirmed their faith in peaceful means of settling the outstanding issues, including the minorities question in both the countries, and the boundary dispute. As a follow-up measure to the 1975 Algiers Agreement the hospitality extended to Ayatollah Khomeini was withdrawn. Yet, despite this new cooperative attitude, systemic differences forced both the states to adopt a conflictual foreign policy. There was no unanimity of action over the Gulf security, a vital area of interest. The Cold War also made its impact in the Gulf region which affected Iran-Iraq relations. Yet, one can say that the Iran-Iraq relations had reached the level of co-operation comparable to that of pre-1958 coup.

1979: The Islamic Revolution

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 resulted in a setback to Iran-Iraq relations. Iran's conception of religion as the driving force behind its domestic and foreign policy was diametrically opposed to Iraq's secular orientation. For Iraq, Islam becomes an element and a manifestation of Arab Nationalism. Ideologically the regimes were at opposite poles. Iran was run by a theocratic, internationalist (pan-Islamic) regime. On the other hand Iraq was ruled by a secular, nationalist (pan-Arab) party. Ideological differences led to great
friction between the two states. The mutual trust and friendliness of the Algiers Agreement of 1975 was replaced by suspicion and hate. However, this vicious atmosphere did not immediately reach the flash point. Iran's pre-occupation with its domestic problems and anti-US activities avoided a conflict situation. But relations continued to deteriorate leading to the war in September 1980.

1980-1988: The War

The polarization process which started in 1979 was by now complete. A bloody war breaks out between Iran and Iraq. The long simmering differences were brought to the forefront. Iraq was supported overtly and covertly, by Western and Arab countries. The Soviet Union was careful not to antagonize both the countries. A war of attrition was waged by the belligerents by employing missiles and chemical weapons with no care for civilian targets. Initial efforts for a ceasefire by NAM, OIC and UN was not accepted by Iran. However, when the pressure became too much Iran was left with no other option but to accept the UN resolution. There is no doubt that the bilateral relations had hit the bottom-line in cooperation. Yet, in spite of the war there was a positive aspect in bilateralism amongst Iran and Iraq. Both the
countries not only maintained diplomatic relations but also worked towards a concerted oil policy in the OPEC.

1988-1990: Ceasefire and Aftermath

Despite the ceasefire, relation between Iran and Iraq failed to mark any improvement. Implementation of UN Resolution 598 encountered strong opposition from both the sides. Disputes over the Shatt al-Arab, border demarcation and exchange of POWs continued to mar Iran-Iraq relations. However, the Kuwaiti crisis of 1990 brought about a rapid change of Iraq’s approach towards its relations with Iraq. It was forced to accommodate Iran on various issues. Iraq agreed to adhere to the 1975 Algiers Agreement. It also withdrew its troops from Iranian front so as to redeploy them on other sectors against the coalition forces.

A study of Iran-Iraq relation over the long period of 1958-1978 reveals the ups and downs of bilateral relations. It shows that though either conflict or cooperation might emerge as the major theme in their bilateral relations at a given time, it need not essentially dominate the totality of their bilateral relations. The two facets of bilateral relations—the cooperative and conflictual relations—continue to remain as a mirror image on the graph and neither of them can be ignored by scholars. The study of these
relations also revealed that while the seemingly cooperative environment like the pre-1958 period glossed over the deeper causes of conflict, the solution for their conflict emerged out of the conflictual environment as in 1975.

The impact of bilateral relations does not remain confined to the two countries directly involved, but influences the regional as well as extra-regional policies. Iran-Iraq relations influenced the perceptions of security of regional powers like members of the GCC, Syria, Israel, Jordan etc... A prolonged conflict not only encouraged extra-regional intervention but even legitimized the presence of extra-regional powers.

It is important to note that over the long period under study, regional and global environment underwent major changes. Till 1958, the West dominated the Gulf. Between 1958-1988 the Cold War at the global level, and its ramifications at the regional level, influenced and in turn were influenced by the changing pattern of Iran-Iraq relations. The energy crisis, the Islamic revolution and the Afghan war had different impacts upon the attitude of Super Powers and regional powers towards Iran-Iraq relations. Finally, the new Super Power detente since 1987 and finally the withdrawal of USSR from its earlier policy of
confrontation with the West and pro-Western regional powers, had a decisive impact not only upon Iran-Iraq relations, but also upon the future politics of the Gulf, as was subsequently reflected in the Kuwaiti crisis.

Iran-Iraq relations in future will continue to be influenced by various variables that have dominated the positive and negative parameter of mutual perceptions of the ruling elites of these states; viz., nature of the regime, ideology, religion, ethnicity resources, foreign policy linkages etc. Yet, while the study of the past did provide an insight into the unfolding of events, developments in future have to be studied keeping in view. The new factors that are likely to influence the positive and negative perceptions of the ruling elite of both the states at the given time. Some of the new factors that will influence these perceptions are the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Central Asia as a new independent geopolitical entity, future of the new World order dominated by the industrialized North, downward trend in the power of the OPEC and simultaneously the growing importance of the Gulf oil, ongoing Arab-Israeli peace process, the domestic socio-economic and political dimensions of the so-called Islamic fundamentalism and its impact upon the region as well as upon the interests
of the North in the region, recurrent ethnic crisis etc. It remains to be seen what impact these old and new variables will have upon Iran-Iraq relations in future.