Chapter - II

BACK-DROP TO THE ALGIERS ACCORD
Hostility between Iran and Iraq, which is often projected in the wider framework of Arab-Persian rivalry, has a long history. Besides the fact that these are two competing neighbours, linguistic, cultural and sectarian differences even within Islam, like Shii versus Sunni provided enough excuses for the same. Persians and Arabs have their own languages, literary traditions and independent histories. The basic aspect of the Arab-Persian conflict, however, is one of nationalism and civilization. Even when the Persians accepted Islam they adopted the Shii interpretation, with its veneration of Ali and Husayn, its strong religious hierarchy and its obedience to Mujtahids and Ayatollahs. The Arab people are predominantly Sunni, with emphasis on the Quran and the religious law, and the dislike of intermediaries between man and God. The presence of major Shii shrines in the Iraqi cities of Basra, Kufa, Najaf, Karbala and Samarra in Iraq added to this tension. Of the twelve Imams, six are buried in

Iraq. The last one went into occultation in the Iraqi town of Samarra.'

The geographical proximity of the two neighbours also means the spilling over of ethnic and other minorities into each other's territory. This has caused problems between Iran and Iraq. In Iran, ethnic groups of different strengths and political orientations surround the ethnic Iranian core. These include the Kurds, Azeris, Turkoman, Baluch, Arabs etc. Iranian Kurds, while never as resistant to their central regime as their Iraqi counterparts, still fought at times with the regime by the encouragement of Iraqis and the Marxists within Iran. The largest of Iran's ethnic groups, the Azerbaijanis or Azeris have been fairly integrated into Iranian society. However, like the Kurds, they also did host a Soviet-backed autonomous region during and immediately after the Second World War. Other groups capable of resistance to the central regime include the Baluchis on the eastern frontier with Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the Qashqias in the southwest. Though the Iraqis tried to aid the Baluchis in their dissent against the Iranian regime, it did not succeed because of combined Pakistani-Iranian efforts. The Iranian Arabs occupy the Khuzestan province, and,

despite propaganda efforts, did not succumb to Iraqi appeals to oppose the Iranian regime.

In Iraq, the Shiis and the Kurds have remained on the margin of political power. Yet, unrest among both these communities has jeopardized peace and stability in the country since 1920. The two issues were rendered extremely complex by the involvement of the external factor like Iran. In both cases, the regime had resorted to force as its ultimate weapon.

The Religious Factor

On the eve of the 1958 coup d'etat or the Revolution in Iraq, the Shii religious establishment was in a poor state, with its social and economic power at its nadir. For the first time an attempt was made to establish religion as a political movement with the formation of the Islamic Party of Iraq. It was allowed to function openly until 1961, when all political parties were outlawed. The sign of restlessness was the

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'Hiro, n.4, p.23.
emergence of the Fatimiyyah group in 1964,' an anti-government Shii group. It aroused enough apprehensions to cause the government to create a special branch within the Directorate of Public Security - the Second Branch - devoted exclusively to combating underground Shii activities.'

The radical group in the Baath Party, which seized power in mid-1968, imposed strict censorship on religious publications and closed down various Islamic institutions, including a theological college in Najaf. It also began harassing Shii Ulema. For the first time in Iraqi history, the Central government of Iraq allowed the sale of alcohol in Shii holy places. In 1969 Al Da'awa al Islamiya (The Islamic Call) was formed clandestinely, with the blessings of Ayatollah Mushin Hakim, the most respected and senior Shii cleric based in Najaf.' Al-Da'awa gained strength as the Baath government started repression against the Shiis. It began to win increasing support among junior and younger ulema in the holy cities of Najaf, Karbala and Kadhimain, suburbs of Baghdad. Since these cities drew

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'Ibid.

'Hiro, n.2, p.23.
Shiis in hundreds of thousands during several religious ceremonies, Al-Da'awa activists, both clerics and laymen, had ample opportunities to disseminate their message disguised as pious sermons.

The first Shii disturbance occurred in 1969. It was triggered by police harassment of the leading Ayatollah's son, Mahdi Mushin al-Hakim, for his alleged association with America's CIA, and by the curbs imposed on Islamic institutions and religious publications. But the crackdown was basically due to the government's perception of the growing organizational strength of the opposition around the Shii centre. Muhammed Baqer as-Sadr who had become the undisputed leader of the militant Ulema was arrested in 1972. The second disturbance occurred in December 1974, when the Husseini processions turned the commemoration of Ashura into a political protest. Several persons who participated in the demonstration were jailed, and five of the leaders

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'Bengio, n.3, p.2.

were executed." This was the first time in the history of independent Iraq that Shiis had violently confronted the state.

**The Ethnic Factor**

Besides the Shi'i question, the question of Kurdish and other minorities posed domestic and regional problems for Iraq, and led to tensions between Iran and Iraq. Both states have supported the Kurds in each other's territory to put pressure on the adversary and, when occasion demanded, ditched the Kurds and reached bilateral agreements on containing the Kurds in the area.

The origin of Kurds has generated controversy among scholars. Kurds, themselves, trace their origin to the Medes, a tribal group which moved into the Iranian plateau from Central Asia at the end of the second millennium and ruled over the area from 614 B.C. to 550 B.C. The Kurds have their own Indo-European language, related to Persian, and their own customs, literature, historical consciousness, traditional preferences and phobias." Today, the Kurdish population, comprising some

"Ibid.

"Uriel Dann, "The Kurdish National Movement in Iraq", Jerusalem Quarterly, no.9, Fall 1978, p.131."
19 million, forms the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East, after the Persians, Turks and Arabs, and is spread over several states like Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Iran and parts of Central Asia. However, there has never been a self-governing Kurdish political entity exercising exclusive jurisdiction over all the Kurds."

Iraq has been the principal centre of the Kurdish nationalist movement since the end of the First World War. The area in the North and North-East of Iraq, comprising about one-eighth of the state's territory, has an overwhelmingly Kurdish speaking, Sunni Muslim population." Kurds of Iraq have led political agitations, even tribal revolts, since the twenties and were militarily suppressed. In Iraq, the beginning of the Kurdish political renaissance can be traced to the 1958 Revolution which led to the abolition of monarchy by Abdel Karim Qassem. He hailed it as the end of British imperialism. He also handed down a Constitution acknowledging that Iraq was made up of two nations, Arabs and Kurds, partners in the ownership of the country. Iraq's insignia was an intertwined sword and


"Dann, n.12, p.132."
dagger; the dagger symbolizing the Kurds and the sword the Arabs."

The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) was formed and recognized by the Iraqi government. The Kurds, however, sided with the Iraqi communists not only against the Baath group in Iraq but subsequently even against Qassem. Consequently, in September 1961, Qassem mounted an all-out campaign against Kurdish insurgents, after rejecting Barazani’s autonomy plan. Negotiations between the Baghdad regime and Kurdish leaders continued even after the overthrow of Qassem. A twelve-point agreement was signed in June 1966 between Barazani’s Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Iraqi government under President Arif." The pact included the official recognition of the Kurdish language and proportional representation for Kurds in the civil administration. But, in the absence of mutual trust, the agreement failed to resolve the problem. The radical Baath group, after seizing power in 1968, began to implement parts of the twelve-point agreement. However, the KDP considered it as inadequate and started an armed rebellion in March


1969 with an attack on the Kirkuk oil refinery. Fighting went on for an year, costing Baghdad about 30 per cent of its annual budget." The Shah of Iran had reportedly started supporting the Iraqi Kurds to put pressure on the new government in Baghdad which was led by the radical faction of the Baath Party.

After protracted negotiations, between Baath and Kurdish leaders, a memorandum of understanding, called the "Manifesto on the Peaceful Settlement of the Kurdish Issue", 11 March 1970, was proclaimed. "Its major parts included the recognition of Kurdish as the official language in areas where a Kurdish majority was in existence, appointment of a Kurdish Vice-President, self-rule and the creation of national administrative units in Kurdish region, and the constitutional recognition of the equality of the Kurdish nation in bi-national Iraq." As far as the Kurds were concerned, the Baath leadership had attempted to buy time for itself by the March 1970 Manifesto in order to free its hands and also to show progressive image to gain popular support. In 1970, a major achievement in the Kurdish nationalist


"Entessar, n.13, pp.918-919."
campaign occurred when the Talabani and Barazani factions of the KDP, that were till then opponents, merged in a common effort for the Kurdish struggle."

By coincidence, or by design, Iran also began to use Kurds as an instrument against Iraq till the 1975 Algiers Agreement. By 1968-69 relations between Iran and Iraq had deteriorated considerably. This coincided with the indirect Super Power confrontation in the Indian Ocean region due to the competing naval/political rivalry between the USA and the erstwhile USSR. The Iran-Iraq rivalry, and the Kurdish question became a part of the global Cold War rivalry as well.

The Shah of Iran had begun to support the Iraqi Kurds to put pressure on the socialist Iraq, reportedly with US backing. This encouraged the Kurds who not only got political, economic and military support but also safe-bases in Iran. By the autumn of 1972, efforts for Baath-Kurdish amity came under considerable strain. The Iraqi government not only accused the Kurdish leadership for the problem but also advised Kurds to sever their links with Iran. These attempts failed. At the end of the year, the Iraqi Air Force was bombing villages in

the Kurdish region." By October 1973, Barazani had a sophisticated anti-aircraft system in position around his headquarters in Hajj'Umran. The KDP rallied a number of Kurdish deserters from the Iraqi army, as well as host of Kurdish students and intellectuals from both inside and outside Iraq. The institutionalization of the movement led to the emergence of an apparatus with its own security forces, the Peshmerga." It had substantial financial resources at its disposal. The period saw the gradual transformation of the conflict from a guerrilla war into a conventional war supported by states like Iran and the USA.

Faced with protracted war, which it could not win, the Iraqi government on 2 December 1973, offered a new plan for Kurdish autonomy."The first meeting between the representatives of the National Front and the KDP, was held on 16 January 1974. The dialogue continued and the last meeting was due on 2 March 1974. But the KDP did not attend it. However, a decision was adopted by the


"Entessar, n.13, p.920."
National Front that the draft law should be promulgated at the fixed date."

The Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) of Iraq announced on 11 March 1974 the Autonomy Law for the Kurdish region." The autonomy plan stated that Kurdistan was to be an autonomous region, although it formed an integral part of Iraq. Ibril was to be its administrative capital. This region was to be governed by an elected legislative council and an executive council, to be elected by a majority vote of the legislative council. The President of the executive council was to be appointed from among the members of the legislative council by the Iraqi Head of State. The Baghdad government maintained final control through a provision giving the President of the Republic the right to dismiss the Kurdish President and to dissolve the assembly. A number of departments, with authority over local affairs, were to be established, but foreign affairs, oil and defence were left to the central government."


"For the text of Autonomy Law, see Appendix-I."
Meanwhile, three pro-government Kurdish parties were formed. One group, led by Aziz Aqrawi, formed a new KDP. Another, headed by Abd al-Sattar Tahir Sharif, formed the Kurdish Revolutionary Party. The third group led by Abd Allah Ismail Ahmad, constituted the progressive Kurdish Movement. The newly formed pro-Baath Kurdish parties, along with a number of Kurdish independents, were subsequently appointed to the 'Progressive Patriotic and National Front'. Though none of these parties had widespread support among the Kurds, they gave the Baath Government some legitimacy to put its autonomy law into effect. While opening the Legislative Council of the autonomous Kurdistan in Ibril, the Iraqi Vice-President, Taha Muhyeddin Maruof, stated that the Council was a pioneering experiment to settle national questions within the framework of the unity of Iraq.

When the law was announced Barazani's KDP was given fifteen days to join the National Front. It, however, rejected the autonomy law for various reasons. It wanted the inclusion of the oil-rich areas, such as Kirkuk,


"Dann, n.12, p.143.

"Patriot (New Delhi), 8 October 1974."
Sinijar and Khanaqin, in the Kurdish region." Secondly, it demanded a percentage of the country's oil revenues in proportion to the Kurdish population." Thirdly, it demanded that the enforcement of the autonomy law be postponed until a fresh census revealed the exact distribution of Kurds in the northeastern region. Baghdad ignored this demand, and insisted that the 1957 census be employed to demarcate the boundaries of the Kurdish region." Fourthly, it demanded that Kirkuk be designated the administrative centre of the Kurdish autonomous region. But, the government insisted upon Ibril. The government pointed out that the population of Kirkuk comprised of a number of minorities and hence had to be managed by a mixed administration affiliated to the central administration." Perhaps the more serious reason for Barazani's rejection of the Autonomy Law of 1974 was the promise of more aid from the Shah of Iran, USA and Israel." The KDP not only rejected the Autonomy Law but also resumed its armed struggle against the

"Hiro, n.2, p.16.

"Farouck Sluglett and Sluglett, n.21, p.168.

"Hussein, n.24, p.55.

"Farouck-Sluglett and Sluglett, n.21, p.168.

"Entessar, n.13, p.920.
central government when the Baath party ignored its demands.

When the fighting began, Barazani had some 50,000 to 60,000 Peshmerga fighters and another 50,000 irregulars. The Iraqi forces comprised some 90,000 men, 1200 tanks and armoured cars, and 200 aircrafts. As the Turkish border had been closed since the beginning of the fighting in 1974, the Iraqis were able to set up a 20 km. wide buffer zone along the Iran-Iraq border. It was emptied of its population and was patrolled by Iraqi troops. The Iranians however, responded differently. They escalated their aid to the Kurds and deployed their troops along the entire border. Iraq reacted to increased Iranian assistance by sending four aircrafts to bomb the supply centre in Piranshah on 6 September 1974. Meeting heavy anti-aircraft fire, these aircrafts bombed two nearby villages instead. The border clashes reached crisis proportions when Iran used US Hawk surface-to-air missiles (SAM) on 14 and 15 December

"Farouck-Sluglett and Sluglett, n.21, p.168.


"UN Doc. S/11494.

"UN Doc. S/11498.
1974, to shoot down two Iraqi aircrafts within Iraqi airspace." In January 1975, Iran further increased its aid to the Kurds by positioning two regiments of uniformed troops well inside Iraqi border. Iranian combat units armed with 130 mm artillery and Hawk SAM missiles began to provide cover for the Kurdish rebels, a development which subsequently led to direct military engagements between Iranian and Iraqi armed forces.

The Baath government had well-trained troops and sophisticated weapons. Hence, its drive against Kurds was quite successful. By the end of 1974, the army found itself in possession of more Kurdish dominated territory than ever before. As the Turkish border was closed, Kurds were forced to carry their resistance in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan or surrender to Iraqi authorities or to enter Iran as refugees. By the end of 1974, there were at least 110,000 Iraqi Kurdish refugees in makeshift camps in Iran. Most of these refugees were civilians who had fled to escape from the war zone.


"Farouck-Sluglett and Sluglett, n.21, p.168."
The Iraqi armed action against the Kurds encouraged the environment for external intervention. For its part, the Kurdish leadership saw increasing foreign involvement in the conflict as an instrument to force the Iraqi government to give more concessions.

Iran's activation of the Kurdish issue was a reflection of the then prevailing nature of Iranian-Iraqi relations. In other words, the more the relations deteriorated, the more willing Iran became to use Kurds as a vehicle to weaken the Iraqi Government, and to extract some concessions from Baghdad. Iran had more than one reason to involve itself. One was the Shatt al-Arab issue. Another was the struggle for influence in the Gulf area. The third was to check Iraq's radical and revolutionary regional policies and to divert the attention of its leadership towards domestic issues.

Iranian policy towards the Kurds was well-calculated to serve only Iranian ends. The Shah of Iran provided Iraqi Kurds with enough military help to maintain their rebellion, though never quite enough to enable the Iraqi Kurds to win the degree of autonomy that they had demanded. This strategy helped Iran to successfully divert the Iraqi military from other
military activity in the Gulf. Although, Iran set up its support structure for the Kurds as soon as the Iraqi army went on the offensive, Iranian military assistance was always either inadequate or slow in coming. The Shah had no intention of allowing the Kurds to become strong enough to defeat the Iraqi army, since that would give great encouragement to the Iranian Kurds and thus pose a threat to Iranian territorial integrity in future.

America's involvement in the Kurdish insurgency stemmed from several reasons. Iraq was seen by USA as a radical state. Also, its Soviet 'client' status constituted a threat to the pro-Western regimes in the region. Apart from pressures by the Shah, the US decision to back the Kurds was also influenced by Iraq's nationalization of the Iraq Petroleum Company in June 1972. The extent and magnitude of the US involvement in the Kurdish rebellion was documented in the Pike Report of the US Congress. It was based on a series of closed-door hearings conducted by the House Committee on


"Farouck-Sluglett and Sluglett, n.21, p.170."
Intelligence. USA funneled $16m in CIA funds to the Kurds between 1972 and 1975. During the spring of 1974, US Army Team was stationed in Rezayieh, near the Iraqi border, to advise the Kurdish Peshmerga. Furthermore, a CIA station was established in Haj Umran inside Iraqi border and nearer to Barazani's headquarters.

Though USA and Iran, aided the Kurds in their fight against the Iraqi Government, they were opposed to the establishment of an autonomous government for the Kurds in Iraq. According to the Pike Report,

The President, Dr. Kissinger and foreign head of state [the Shah] hoped our clients [the Kurds] would not prevail. They preferred instead that the insurgents simply continue a level of hostilities sufficient to sap the resources of our ally's neighbouring country [Iraq]. They preferred to see a prolongation of the fighting and the continuation of a situation of stalemate.

Israel's interest in supporting the Kurds was due to her close co-operation with Iran and the desire to

"Abdulghani, n.39, p.142.


"Ghareeb, n.16, p.159.

"Ibid., pp.159-60.

"Bill, n.45, p.205."
prevent Iraq from deploying her forces on the eastern front against Israel. Israeli clandestine support for the Kurdish rebellion was shrouded in secrecy until 29 September 1980, when the Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, disclosed officially, for the first time, that Israel had provided Kurdish guerrillas with money, arms and instructors from 1965 to 1975. The Kurdish-Israeli connection was illuminated on 17 September 1972, by Jack Anderson, an American columnist. He revealed that the Israeli Government paid a regular monthly subsidy of $50,000 to Barazani, delivered by an Israeli intelligence officer. Anderson, who based his information on a CIA Report, disclosed that Israel's intelligence chief, General Zamin, had visited Barazani's headquarters in the Kurdish region, at least on one occasion. The objective of Zamin's visit was to discuss the possibility of assisting Iraqi Jews to emigrate and to seek assurances from Barazani of his continued hostility towards Iraq.

The Kurdish episode shows that the convergence of the Iranian, American and Israeli interest in weakening the Iraqi Government led them to use Kurds as a pawn in

*Abdulghani, n.39, p.145.

*Ghareeb, n.16, p.143.

the Iranian-Iraqi dispute. Once they had outlived their usefulness, the Kurds were abandoned and sacrificed by their patrons.

The Baluch Card

In an attempt to retaliate against Iran’s support for the Kurds, the Iraqi Government widened the arena of conflict with Iran by backing the Baluchi dissidents on the Iran-Pakistan border. It needs to be noted that the Baluchis were also in revolt against the Pakistani Government at that time. Iraq hoped that the Baluchi rebellion would spill-over into the Iranian border and create internal troubles for the Shah’s regime. Historically, the Iranian Baluchis have been an unimportant tribal group living in a back-water province far from Teheran. But the province is strategically located. In the South it is contiguous to the Gulf of Oman, which links the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean, while Afghanistan is to its North. At that time the Pakhtoons and the Baluchis in Pakistan were coming closer against the central government. The period had also witnessed the break up of Pakistan in 1971. Thus, not only Pakistan but also Iran was worried about the long-term effects of the Iraqi move.
In 1973, the Pakistani Prime Minister Z.A. Bhutto, prodded by the Shah, dissolved the state cabinet of the Province of Baluchistan. Further, he imposed emergency and imprisoned Baluchi leaders on charges of sedition. Pakistan also sent 70,000 troops to the province to quell the Baluchi insurgency. On 10 February 1973, the Pakistani Government announced that their security forces opened crates of 'diplomatic mail' addressed to the Iraqi embassy in Islamabad and found submachine guns, magazines, ammunition and radios, all of Soviet manufacture and accompanied by Russian-language manuals. Pakistan charged that the weapons were believed to be destined for the Baluchi rebels. Pakistan expelled the Iraqi Ambassador and naturally Iraq retaliated.

To further increase the pressure on Iran, Iraq opened an office for the Baluchistan Liberation Front in Baghdad. Further, Iraq set up three to five radio stations to transmit anti-Shah propaganda and also gave aid to the Iranian Baluchis. For its anti-Shah


"Abdulghani, n.39, p.141."
activities, Iraq spent approximately $50 mn during 1973 and 1974." Saddam Hussein later revealed: "we gave them a radio programme for seven long years, we gave them money and arms, and whatever they needed to fight the Shah."

Regional Dimension of the Iran-Iraq Conflict: Iranian Occupation of Abu Musa and Tunb Islands

Iraq had always tried to give its conflict with Iran not only a regional colour but also the status of an Arab-Iranian conflict in which Iraq was projected as safeguarding the 'Arab' interests against Iranian encroachment. Iranian policy in the Gulf, especially on the question of three disputed islands, provided Iraq with that diplomatic leverage. In the dispute over the status of Abu Musa and Tunb islands, Iran was, respectively, pitted against Sharjah and Ras al-Khaima, two small Sheikhdoms off the Trucial Coast. In the sixties, Iran was developing a naval presence in the Gulf. In fact, it was the strongest regional naval power. The Shah had great ambitions not only in the Gulf but also beyond it. Iran felt that the British colonial

decision in assigning these islands to two of the Sheikdoms should not survive the British departure from the East of Suez. Hence, the Shah of Iran wanted a negotiated settlement on the whole question. Negotiations on the future of these islands were conducted through the three year period, 1968-1971, and a quid pro quo solution was reported to have prevailed when Iran renounced its long-standing claim to Bahrain in the Spring of 1970.

The Iranian quest for the acquisition of these islands was governed basically by the political-strategic factor and the territorial-historical factor. Iran's political arguments, at that time, were based on apprehensions about the strategic situation of these islands and the danger of them falling in the wrong hands:

Their geographical position can make them issues of tremendous military value. Only the other day the South Yemenis issued a communiqué vowing to bring revolution to the whole region of the Persian Gulf."

The Iranian government argued that the three islands were in fact Persian before Britain transferred their sovereignty from the Persian Emperor to the Sheikhs of the Trucial States some eighty years ago. In

a statement to the Associated Press correspondent in Zurich, the Shah said,

These islands are our property, and we have British Admiralty maps and other documents which prove this. We will regain the islands by force, if necessary, because I will not preside over an auction of my own country."

On the other hand, the Trucial States insisted on their complete rights over these islands. Sheikh Khalid b. Muhammad, the ruler of Sharjah, in 1971, prepared a well-documented legal and historical study of the Abu Musa question."

Iran was determined to settle the issue in its favour before Britain's formal withdrawal from the Gulf. It did not want to allow the Union to be launched before the issue was resolved. Because, then, the island's issue would be internationalized and numerous complications might preclude their occupation. Ghulam Reza Tajbakhash, Iran's ambassador in Kuwait, told the Iranian newspaper Kayhan, that the islands lying off the Strait of Hormuz were strategically vital to the security of the Gulf area, and that if the sovereignty of his country over them was not recognized, Iran would not only refuse to recognize the proposed union, but


would also oppose it strongly. He added that Britain should agree to a peaceful and just settlement of the issue."

Britain was endeavouring to hand-over the islands to Iran after securing the consent of the rulers of Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah. In June 1971 Sir William Luce made his fifth tour of the region, during which he met rulers of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah. He said that the British Government wished to advise the two Emirates that they should negotiate with Iran over the islands. He also conveyed to the gathering that Iran was offering, in return for the islands, 'suitable' compensation for their population as well as a share in the oil productions from the islands." Both Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah rejected the Iranian claim as well as Britain's proposal for arriving at a negotiated settlement with Iran.

Iran threatened to use force if peaceful means failed on 27 June 1971, Amir Abbas, the then Premier of Iran said, "Iran was by no means indifferent to the future of the Persian Gulf, because it constituted its vital access route. Iran needed these islands for (its

"Taryam, n.58, p.167.

"Ibid., p.170."
security and prosperity), a goal for the attainment of which Iran would fight with all its might should it fail to settle this problem by peaceful means." The Shah was reported to have said in October 1971, "These islands...are ours. We need them. We shall have them. No power on earth will stop us."

During his visit to Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, in August 1971, Sir William Luce communicated the details of Iran's offer. "Both the Sheikhdoms rejected the offer on 30 October 1971. The ruler of Sharjah was subjected to strong pressures from Britain. Sir William paid constant visits to the Emirate. Moreover Sir William warned him that, should he refuse to negotiate, Iran would occupy Abu Musa and Britain would not give the green light for launching the Union." Eventually, a final agreement was reached by both Iran and Sharjah. The condition of the Abu Musa Accord was announced by the Ruler of Sharjah on 29 November 1971. "Iran was to pay Sharjah one and a half million pounds sterling


"Taryam, n.58, pp.180-81.

"Ibid., p.182.

"Mojtahed-Zadeh, n.57, p.21."
annually, for a period of nine years. This payment was to cease when Sharjah's oil revenues reached three million pounds sterling per annum. On 30 November 1971, one day before the expiration of the British treaties that had given Britain control of the external relations of the Gulf Sheikhdoms, the Shah occupied all three islands."

Iran's motives behind occupying these islands were several. Firstly, it wished to command the Strait of Hormuz, particularly with the increasing significance of the Gulf as a vital maritime route for Iran. Secondly, there were reports of existence of potential oil resources in and around these islands. Iran also felt that if it could occupy these islands then it could demand more of the Gulf for oil exploration by insisting on the median line principle, thereby, pushing the Iranian maritime boundary closer to the Arab shores of the Gulf. Thirdly, Iran was afraid that these islands could fall into the hands of a hostile power and could be used as bases, from which air strikes could be made against cities and oil installations in Iran.

After Iran had occupied these islands, Iraq addressed protest notes to the Security Council, the Arab League and to members of the diplomatic corps in

"Hiro, n.2, p.14."
Iraq. "However, no military action was taken by Iraq or any other Arab country against Iran. On 1 December 1971, Iraq broke off diplomatic relations with Iran as well as with Britain, charging it with conniving with Iran." Iraq described Iran's occupation of the islands as the latest step in a policy of expansion by the government of Iran, and a blatant demonstration of the collusion between Iran and Britain for more than three centuries. The Iraqi Government also accused Britain of not fulfilling her obligations towards the preservation of the Arab character of the islands. "On a more concrete plan, Iraq expelled 40,000 to 50,000 Iranians residing in Iraq. Many of those expelled in 1971-72 were Shii Kurds from the area extending roughly between Khaninqin and Amara." The flow of refugees decreased after an Iranian complaint to the United Nations.

Border Demarcation:

Iran and Iraq have a long border that includes the land as well as the river. Iraq inherited the Ottoman

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"Farouck-Sluglett and Sluglett, n.21, p.158."
boundary after it was created as a League Mandate after the First World War. The Iran-Iraq boundary has been the subject of many treaties; the earliest being in 1639. Britain and Russia tried to bring about a final demarcation of the boundary between the Ottoman Empire and the Persians in the 1847 Treaty of Erzerum. In this treaty, the Ottoman Islands of Khizr was ceded to Persia. The Shatt al-Arab river boundary was determined in 1913 according to the Protocol signed between Turkey and Persia, which clearly gave the Ottomans full sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab apart from small islands and the anchorage opposite the port of Khorramshahr. Later on, by the 1937 treaty, it was agreed that the river opposite Iran's oil port of Abadan was to have a midstream boundary. Iran never fully recognised the 1937 treaty, which had been largely imposed upon her. So long as Iraq was under the Hashemite rule, and Britain the major naval/economic power (oil) in the Gulf region, both Iran and Iraq were content to let the issue remain more or less dormant. But the question assumed new dimensions after the Iraqi Coup d'état of 14 July 1958.

The Shatt al-Arab River Dispute:

Though there is a dispute about the land boundary between Iran and Iraq, the river boundary has drawn more
attention. The *Shatt al-Arab* is a navigable waterway, formed by the confluence of the Tigris, the Euphrates, and the Karun rivers, as they intersect and flow into the Gulf. The total length of the *Shatt al-Arab* from the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates at Qurna upto its discharge into the Gulf is approximately 204 km. The lower part of the river, where it constitutes the Iraqi-Iranian frontier, is approximately 102 km long."

In April 1949, the Iranian Government, through its embassy in Baghdad, demanded that, in accordance with Article 5 of the 1937 Treaty, a Joint Commission be set up for the Joint Administration of the *Shatt al-Arab.* Iraq agreed for the Joint Commission, but only for consultative and not for administrative purposes. Iran revived the same demand in 1955 and Iraq opposed it firmly. Finally, in the meeting of the Ministerial Council of the Baghdad Pact, held in Karachi in 1957, both Iran and Iraq agreed for a Swedish arbitrator to aid the Commission for the frontier delimitation on technical issues." The situation changed drastically in


"al-Izzi, n.72, pp.43-44.
1958 when Colonel Abdel Karim Qassem overthrew the Hashemite monarchy and established a radical regime. The proposal for the appointment of a Swedish arbitrator fell through.

Iran's relations with the new regime deteriorated in 1959, when Iraqi authorities interfered with Iranian ships and ships belonging to the Iranian Pan-American Oil Company. Iraq went further by claiming sovereignty over the entire waterway, including the three-mile stretch of water opposite the port of Abadan that was ceded to Iran in 1937. Iran and Iraq exchanged heated propaganda, alerted their armed forces and fortified their frontiers. The actual dispute subsided by mid-January 1960. The Iranian Government controlled the three mile strip of water opposite Abadan. Iranian grievances regarding Iraq's failure to provide for joint administration of the Shatt al-Arab remained unresolved.

The situation remained the same from 1961 to 1968. Though regular meetings were held between Iran and Iraq, nothing substantial emerged. In 1968, the radical Baath regime came to power in Iraq. Relations between Iran and Iraq deteriorated further. In March 1969, an Iranian delegation visited Baghdad and presented a new draft

"Chubin and Zabih, n.73, p.173."
treaty to replace the 1937 Treaty and the protocol." Iranians were unable to persuade the Iraqis to discuss the new draft. Iran continued to assert its control over the Iranian shipping navigating in the waterway. As a reaction to this move, the Iraqi Government summoned the Iranian Ambassador in Baghdad on 15 April 1969 and pointed out that since the Iraqi Government considered the waterway as Iraqi territory, it would require, in future, that all ships flying the Iranian flag should lower their flags in the waterway, and that all Iranian nationals on board ships transiting Iraqi waters should disembark.”

In response to Iraqi intransigence, Iran, on 19 April 1969, unilaterally abrogated the Frontier Treaty of 1937. Announcing this in the Iranian Majlis, Iran’s Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Amir Khosrau, declared, "On the basis of established international principles, the 1937 Frontier Treaty is considered null and void and worthless by Imperial Government...the Imperial Government does not recognize, along the entire length of Shatt al-Arab, any principle except the established principle of International Law i.e., the

"Khaddhuri, n.18, p.50.

"Chubin and Zabih, n.73, pp.185-86."
median of base line". Iran's show of force commenced on 22 April 1969, when the freighter *Ebn-i-Sina* sailed through the *Shatt al-Arab* into the Persian Gulf. The 1,300 tonne merchant ship, escorted by the Iranian Navy and with an umbrella support of jet fighters, was the first sizeable vessel to pass through the disputed waters, under the Iranian flag, ever since Iraq claimed the river as part of its territory. Again, within three days, on 25 April, the Iranian freighter, *Arya Far* sailed through the *Shatt al-Arab* carrying goods to Kuwait and Abu Dhabi. It was also escorted by Iranian gunboats." It was the superiority of Iran's military might in 1969 which permitted the Shah to unilaterally abrogate the 1937 treaty.

Although the Iraqi Government uttered warlike threats, no military action was taken on that occasion. However, the Iraqi government had one weapon which it had not hesitated to use against Iran; the expulsion of Iranians living in Iraq. Within a few weeks, the Iraqi Government expelled about 20,000 Iranians living in Iraq." Since Iraq felt that its legal case over the 1937

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"Ismael, n.68, p.13.


"Burrell, n.70, p.74."
treaty was strong enough and it could easily win in the International Court of Justice" it refused any compromise or consideration of an alternative way of resolving the controversy. The dispute thereupon entered a period of, more or less, stalemate until the Algiers Agreement was signed.

**Central Border Dispute**

The central border dispute was confined to a 130-mile strip of territory." Ironically, it was the hostility between the Ottoman and the Persian Empires over the whole boundary and other matters that led to the peace treaties of 1639, 1746, 1823 and 1847. But these treaties failed to settle the conflicting border claims. Not even the boundary delimitation commission, created as a result of the 1913 Turko-Persian Constantinople Protocol, completed its work since the First World War intervened. A Frontier Commission was set up as per the 1937 treaty, in which Iraq and Iran agreed that they would accept the results as binding. But the Frontier Commission never completed the task of demarcation in the central portion. The controversial


"Ibid., p.214."
strip is bound by Khanaqin and Qasr e-Shirin on the North, and Badra and Mehran to the South. The disputed portions were only about two miles in many places, about 10 miles in the largest salient, and three to six miles at the North and South extremities, where most of the shooting took place. The dispute over these territories was finally resolved in the Algiers Agreement.

**Border Clashes:**

Though the Iran-Iraq rivalry had taken a threatening turn after 1958, and more so after 1968, especially the *Shatt al-Arab* crisis of April 1969, the first major border incident occurred between 10-13 April 1972. The Kurdish problem was the main reason for the border incident. The Iranians charged that three Iranian policemen were abducted by the Iraqis. Iranian forces, in reprisal, entered Iraqi territory and fired on an Iraqi police vehicle in the Khanaqin area. Following these events, the two sides attacked four border posts in the area. The next series of border incidents occurred from 15 December 1973 to 12 February 1974.

"Ibid., p.215.

"UN Doc. S/10615 and S/10627."
1974," this time at the southern extremity. Iraq accused Iran of illegal road building in the Badra area. Iran countered that Iraq attacked its herdsmen in the Kulak area. An increasing number of border posts exchanged fire. The fighting culminated in a bloody encounter on 10 February over Hill 343 in Zalub and the heights of Riza Abad." It resulted in 81 Iranian and 24 Iraqi casualties, half of which were fatal. Again the fighting broke out in the Northern sector. The border posts of Kanibe, Tangab-Khohne, Tappeh-Kal, Khan-Leili, Mohammad Khedr and Amineh were involved in shelling at one time or another. Finally, a cease-fire was declared on 7 March 1974."

On 12 February 1974, Iraq requested an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council, and complained of an Iranian military build-up on its border and violations of Iraqi airspace." Iraq accused the Iranian forces of seizing 5 km of Iraqi territory which it said reflected Iran's policy of "aggrandizement of territorial

"Khalid al-Izzi, The Iraqi-Iranian Border Dispute (Baghdad, 1980), pp.54-56.

"Ibid., p.62.

"UN Doc. S/11218, S/11230 and S/11231.

"UN Doc. S/11216."
expansionism". The Iranian Government, in turn, charged Iraq of shelling Iranian border posts, inciting Arab people of Ahvaz against the Shah's Government, and training subversive groups opposed to the Shah's regime. Following the complaint by Iraq on 2 February, the Security Council met on 15 and 20 February 1974. The President of the Security Council requested the Secretary General to appoint a Special Representative and to report within three months.

The UN Special Representative, Ambassador Luis Weckmann-Munoz of Mexico, was appointed on 18 March 1974 to investigate the situation. He visited Iran and Iraq between 3 and 25 April, 1974, and submitted a report on his mission to the Secretary-General, who, in turn submitted the report to the Security Council on 20 May 1974. In his report, he stated that the members of the mission held three rounds of consultations with officials of Iran and Iraq and visited the areas of conflict. The report concluded that there was a need to delimit and demarcate clearly the border line between both sides and that they expressed their readiness to

"Ibid.

"al-Izzi, n.85, p.89.

"UN Doc. S/11229.

"UN Doc. S/11291.

"Ibid.
accept the findings of a new Joint Delimitation Commission.

The Security Council on 28 May 1974 passed Resolution 348. It welcomed the agreement of the parties to the observance of the cease-fire of 7 March, simultaneous withdrawal of forces along their borders, and creation of an atmosphere conducive to a comprehensive settlement of all bilateral issues. On 30 May 1974, the Iraqi Government declared its acceptance of Resolution 348. "Whereas, the Iranians, on 6 June 1974, indicated that although the government was not fully satisfied with it, it nevertheless declared its acceptance of it on the understanding that the question was a bilateral one between Iran and Iraq." Responding to the Iranian Government's statement, the Iraqi government proposed an early resumption of conversation with a view to arrive at a comprehensive settlement of all bilateral issues, "without any pre-conditions." The Iranian government, however, held that Resolution 348 did not make any recommendation to the parties concerned and that it merely welcomed an agreement reached between

"UN Doc. S/11306.
"UN Doc. S/11313.
"UN Doc. S/11323."
them and hoped that they would implement it." Resolution 348 remained ineffective due to the unwillingness shown by both the countries to abide by it. In August 1974, series of meetings were held from 12-28 August in Istanbul between Iraqi and Iranian delegations." Nothing emerged out from the meeting to resolve the disputes between them.

Meanwhile, tension flared up in the border region and both parties accused each other. Iraq accused Iran of violating its airspace and attacking the Iraqi border post of al-Qaqa at Khanaqin on 24 August." Iran, on its part, levelled a series of charges against Iraq, accusing the Iraqi Government of shelling Iran's border area and violating its airspace, massing troops on the joint frontiers and committing acts of hostility and provocation against Iran." 

Until the Hashemite monarchy ruled in Iraq, the relationship between Iran and Iraq was neither cordial nor hostile. Both countries showed their willingness to resolve the problem bilaterally. The overthrow of the

"UN Doc. S/11325.
"al-Izzi, n.85, p.119.
"UN Doc. S/11472.
"UN Doc. S/11476 and S/11486.
Iraqi monarchy by a coup d'etat in 1958 under the leadership of Colonel Abdel Karim Qassem drastically changed the nature of their relationship. Iran and Iraq discovered issues on which to provoke each other. No progress was made during the period from 1959 to 1974 to resolve the differences between them over the Shatt al-Arab question, border demarcation, and the rights and responsibilities of the two states towards Iranians residing in Iraq. The announcement of the British withdrawal further strained their relationship. Both the countries tried to increase their influence in the Gulf region. The relationship deteriorated completely when Iran occupied the three islands in the Gulf. Iraq's failure to mobilize the Arab Gulf states against Iran was chiefly due to its revolutionary and radical posture. The involvement of the USA, Iran and Israel in the Kurdish problem, further strained Iranian-Iraqi relations. To counter it, the Iraqi Government provided support to the Iranian Baluchis and anti-Shah supporters. This led to border clashes, though war was avoided till the end. The situation of "no win, no loss" also meant that both Iran and Iraq were spending resources on negative issues. Both were ripe for a mediated settlement. This task was undertaken by President Houri Boumedienne of Algeria. The common bond of OPEC also provided an added incentive. Finally,
rapprochement between Iran and Iraq was achieved following the Algiers Agreement signed on 5 March 1975. The aftermath of the Algiers accord witnessed a period of *detente* until the Iranian revolution of 1979.