Chapter-IV

BEGINNING OF DISCORD, 1979-80
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The fall of the Shah of Iran and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran signalled the return of the conflictual relationship between Iran and Iraq. The Islamic Revolution introduced a new ideological factor in their bilateral relations and pitted a new radical, universalist, pan-Islamic regime against a secular, socialist and nationalist Baath regime in Iraq. This period witnessed gradual deterioration of bilateral relationship since February 1979 that culminated in the war of September 1980.

Iraq’s initial response to the Shah’s departure and the emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini as the new leader of Iran was by and large positive. Regarding the Islamic revolution in Iran, Saddam Hussein said, “whatever happened at the choice of the Iranian people has our blessings”. Iraq’s consecutive show of goodwill during the spring and summer of 1979 indicated Baghdad’s interest in preserving the 1975 status quo. For example, the Iraqi government took the opportunity of Iran’s withdrawal from Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) to offer its good services in case Iran should decide to

join the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Also, the Iraqi authorities extended an invitation to the Iranian Premier, Mehdi Bazargan, to visit Iraq in order to improve relations between the two countries.'

The Iraqi government sent a note to the Iranian Provisional Government on 13 February 1979, clarifying the consistent policy of the Republic of Iraq in establishing firm, cordial and co-operative relations with the neighbouring countries on the basis of respect and sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. Further, Saddam Hussein stated, "A regime which does not support the enemy against us and does not intervene in our affairs, and whose world policy corresponds to the interests of the Iranian and Iraqi people will certainly receive our respect and appreciation".'

On the occasion of the proclamation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iraqi President despatched a
telegram congratulating the new regime in Teheran. He hoped that the new republican regime would forge the strongest relations of friendship and good neighbourliness with the Arab states in general, and with Iraq in particular. In a press conference on 20 July 1979, Saddam Hussein said, "We respect you so long as you respect the Arab nation, their right and sovereignty, so long as you respect the rights and sovereignty of Iraq". But the Baath government felt that its attitude of friendly neighbourliness towards the new regime in Teheran was in vain. It contended that, "...Khomeini pushed deliberately the two neighbouring countries on to the path of enmity". The Iraqi government further stated that the reply for its congratulatory message was devoid of any compliment and ran counter to the spirit of good neighbourliness.

Both the regimes' ideology and conception of religion are different. Ideologically, the two regimes are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Iran is run by a theocratic, internationalist (pan-Islamic) regime whose leaders insist on implementing the Sharia and make no attempts to hide their intention of exporting their

"The Iraqi-Iranian Conflict, n.3, p.2.
Hussein, n.1, p.30.
The Iraqi-Iranian Conflict, n.3, p.2."
Islamic ideology to other countries. Iraq is ruled by a secular, nationalist (pan-Arab) party that sees Arab nationalism at the core of its system of belief and views, and hopes to establish a united nation-state but not an Islamic one.'

Iran’s conception of religion as the driving force behind her domestic and foreign policies are diametrically opposed to Iraq’s secular orientation. For Iraq, Islam becomes an element and a manifestation of Arab nationalism. The Baath leaders are vehemently opposed to the politicization of religion. Iraqi leaders believed that the use of Islam by Iranian leaders, their explicit call for jihad to overthrow the ‘evil and atheist’ Iraqi leadership," and their talk of exporting the revolution could not occur except through Iranian interference in the ethno-sectarian structure of Iraqi society.

In response, the Iraqis resorted to using the other major force in Arab politics - Arab nationalism. Saddam, in an interview published in Al-Mustaqbal magazine, on


13 October 1979, said, "We do not hide from you that there is no intention in our mind to adopt and practice the policies that inspire the spirit of Islam from outside the Arab world. Islam is nothing more than plain and pure spirit of the Arabs". Iranians, however, charged that Arab nationalism contained not Islamic but "Zionist, Fascist, and Nazi doctrines".

When Iran attacked Arab nationalism, Saddam said that in order for an Islamic revolution to be genuinely Islamic, it must be a friend of the Arab revolution. Any contradiction between a revolution which calls itself Islamic and Arab revolution means that the revolution is not Islamic." He stressed that any revolution which contradicted the Arab revolution was a spurious one, adding that the Iranian revolution was not genuinely Islamic because it was hostile to the Arab revolution." To emphasize the role of Arabism in history, Saddam Hussein reminded the Iranians that it was the Arabs who had twice liberated Iran: first, when the Arab armies destroyed the Sassanian Persian Empire in 638 A.D. and


"A Review of Imposed War by the Iraqi Regime Upon the Islamic Republic of Iran (Teheran, 1983), p.149.


"Ibid., p.E3."
brought Islam to the Persians and secondly, when the Arabs helped the Iranian underground movement and provided it with the arms and equipment with which to overthrow the Shah's regime."

Gradually, political perceptions in Iraq began to change and relations between Iran and Iraq began to take a turn for the worse. From February 1979, when the revolution was still in its infancy, to July 1979, when the Presidency of Iraq passed from Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr to Saddam Hussein, the question of whether Iraq should take a favourable or non-committal attitude to Iran was often debated in closed meetings of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) and the Baath Regional Command. "Two schools of thought may be said to have developed. One, advocating a confrontational stand, argued in favour of a quick action and the other, hesitating to act counselled a non-entangling attitude." President Bakr is reported to have taken the latter position. Saddam Hussein's assumption of the Presidency in July

"Hussein, n.1, pp.56-57. If this was true, then Iraq had already violated the spirit of the Algiers Agreement of 1975. However, there are no other evidences to support Saddam's rhetoric in this matter.


"Ibid., p.80."
1979 signalled the victory of the advocates of a tough stand against Iran.

Political trends in Iran were not encouraging and the extremist ulema were already on their way up the political ladder. The Islamic Republic of Iran was prepared neither to deal with Iraq on the basis of equality and reciprocity nor even to maintain the minimum normal relationship between the two neighbours. From June 1979 onwards the revolutionary regime began publicly urging the Iraqi population to rise and overthrow the Baath regime. In September 1979, Saddam Hussein presented the Iranian Foreign Minister conditions for normalizing bilateral relations, among which was the return of the Shatt Al-Arab to Iraq's sovereignty. By then both Iran and Iraq had escalated their efforts to interfere in each other's domestic affairs.

**Iranian Support to Underground Shii Movements in Iraq**

Iran escalated its anti-Baath campaign by resuming support for the Iraqi Kurds and by providing moral and

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material support to the underground Shii movements in Iraq." Several factors led Iran to support the Shii underground movements, viz., Khomeini's personal grudge against the Baath regime because of the latter's acquiescence to the Shah's request to expel him from Iraq, the location of holy shrines in Iraqi territory, the delicate ethno-sectarian structure of Iraq, i.e., the Shii accounting for sixty percent of the Arab population etc. Moreover, the revolutionary regime in Iran hoped that the community would rise against the Baath regime.

On 19 October 1979, Ayatollah Hussein Montazeri said, "if Imam Khomeini ordered the Iraqis to rebel against the Baath government the entire nation would arise." Further, he added that the Iranian leadership knew the Iraqi people well, and that three-quarters of them were Shii." According to the Iranian Defence Minister, Mustafa Shamran, Iraq would not dare to attack Iran because the majority in the Iraqi army were Shii." Further, he added that if Iranian army entered Iraq,


"Ibid., p.R5.

"FBIS-SA, 30 April 1980, p.110."
especially the Southern cities of Iraq, the Iraqi nation would welcome the Iranian army and overthrow their own system."

Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, Tariq Aziz, argued that the root cause of Iran's quest to export her revolution to Iraq lay in her misconception of Iraqi society and politics. Aziz contended that Iran's religious leadership overlooked the fact that an "immature revolution (in Iran) cannot be exported to a country that has a mature one (Iraq)". He maintained that Iran's leadership also "ignores the fact that Iraq is not living under an old and decadent royal regime". The Iraqi authorities issued an order in January 1980 exempting men of religion from military service." Evidently this decision was intended to placate them while simultaneously depriving them of the opportunity to exert influence in the army.

"Ibid.


"Ibid.

Following the fall of the Shah and the establishment of new regime in Iran in February 1979, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, a leading Iraqi Shi'i ulema in Najaf, congratulated Ayatollah Khomeini on his success and noted that 'other tyrants' would see in that their day of reckoning." While the Baath leaders viewed the victory of the Iranian revolution with mounting anxiety, Iranian government referred Ayatollah Baqr al-Sadr as the "Khomeini of Iraq"." The new regime in Iran further estranged the relation between the two countries after 11 June 1979 when Iraqi authorities arrested Ayatollah Baqr al-Sadr." The immediate cause for this action seems to have been his alleged responsibility for the riots that broke out in Najaf during a procession arranged to congratulate Ayatollah Khomeini. The arrest led to protest demonstrations in the Shi'i districts of Baghdad and in southern cities of Iraq. The Iranian government intensified its anti-Baath propaganda calling on the faithful to replace 'the gangsters and tyrants of Baghdad' with 'the rule of divine justice'." The Baath


"Hiro, n.28, p.166."
regime also purged Abdal-Hussein al-Mashadi, the Shii Secretary General of the RCC, and upto fifty senior Shii members of Baath party by the end of June."

Saddam Hussein seems to have taken power as President of Iraq, atleast in part, because he felt that Bakr was too weak in dealing with subversive elements. On 28 July 1979, Saddam Hussein announced the discovery of a plot by Ayatollah al-Sadr to exhort Shii leaders to rise up and create a Khomeini-like revolution in Iraq." The arrests following that plot rapidly turned into a purge among the Baath party officials and military officers. It was soon announced that they have been arrested as part of a Shii al-Da'awa conspiracy. On 8 August 1979, Saddam Hussein publicly executed 22 of them." Of these high ranking officials five were members of the RCC, and of these five members, three were Shiis."

"Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, Iran and Iraq at War (Boulder, 1989), p.25.


"Ibid., p.28.

In March 1980, Iraqi authorities executed 97 civilian and military men. Half of them were members of *al-Da'awa*. The capital punishment law against *al-Da'awa* members and supporters was enacted by the RCC at the end of March 1980." Another measure equally detrimental to the continued influence of Ulema was the decision in March 1980 to control Shii corporate revenues." This order enabled the *Baath* regime to regulate the collection, allocation and distribution of income and to supervise the general upkeep of all Shii shrines. This step was designed to undermine the financial power and patronage enjoyed by these clerics.

To avenge the execution of their cadres, *al-Da'awa* activists tried on 1 April 1980, the first anniversary of the founding of Islamic Republic of Iran, to assassinate Tariq Aziz, the Deputy Premier of Iraq, in al-Mustansariya University." Though Tariq Aziz escaped with minor injuries, several students were killed. The


"Bengio, n.27, p.7.

"Ibid., pp.10-11.

"Mallat, n.35, p.728."
Iraqi government charged Sammer Meer Ghulam, an Iraqi of Iranian descent, with the attempted assassination.

The attempt on Tariq Aziz heightened the tension between Iran and Iraq. Saddam ordered the bombing of Qasr e-Shirin, an Iranian border town, and expulsion of thousands of Iranian residents and Iraqi nationals of Iranian descent. By mid-April about 16,000 of them were deported and by summer the figure reached a total of 35,000. The same day, Ayatollah Baqr al-Sadr was arrested. On 8 April 1980, he and his sister, Bint al-Huda, were executed and buried discreetly in Najaf at dawn the following day.

The execution of Ayatollah Baqr al-Sadr worsened Iranian-Iraqi relations. Ayatollah Khomeini declared three days of national mourning throughout Iran. Anti-Iraq demonstrations were also organized by the government in Teheran. The Iranian leaders openly incited Iraqi people to overthrow the Baath party.

"J.M. Abdulghani, Iraq and Iran: The Years of Crisis (London, 1984), p.188.

"Marr, n.30, p.293.

"Mallat, n.35, p.728.

"The Imam and the Ommat as seen through the illustrated Messages and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (Teheran, 1981), p.47.

"Batatu, n.20, p.590."
Iranian Foreign Minister, Qotobzada, declared in Teheran on 16 April 1980, that they have decided to overthrow the Baath government in Iraq." On 17 April 1980, Khomeini called for an uprising by the people and army of Iraq. "The people and army of Iraq must turn their backs on the Baathi regime and overthrow it...because the regime is attacking Iran, attacking Islam and the Quran". "Jamuhari Islamic, a newspaper from Teheran, published Ayatollah Khomeini's statement on 19 April 1980, in which he said, "The Iraqi people should liberate themselves from the claws of the enemy. It should also topple the non-Islamic party in Iraq"." In response to Iran's threats to topple the Baath regime, Saddam Hussein warned Iran that Iraq was prepared to enter into any kind of battle to defend its honour and sovereignty. In April 1980, in a gathering in North Iraq, Saddam, while harshly attacking the Iranian leaders, declared that Iraq was prepared to settle all its difference with Iran by resorting to force." 

On 5 April 1980, Iraqis charged that Iranian teachers and diplomats had thrown bombs from an Iranian 

"Selections from Iraq-Iran Dispute, n.4, p.12. 
"Selections from Iraq-Iran Dispute, n.4, p.12. 
"A Review of Imposed War, n.12, p.5."
school during the funeral procession of those who had died at al-Mustansariya.* This also provided an excuse for the Iraqis to expel Iranian diplomats from the embassy in Baghdad. Iran responded by announcing that it was recalling all its remaining staff at the Iranian embassy in Baghdad.* This amounted to complete breakdown in diplomatic relations. In April 1980, Saddam, in an interview, reported by global news agencies, set three conditions for the cessation of hostilities between Iran and Iraq: Unconditional withdrawal from the three islands, restoration of pre-1975 situation of Shatt Al-Arab and recognition by Iran of Khuzistan as an Arab province."

**Iraqi Support to Minorities in Iran**

In retaliation for Iran's support to the Kurdish rebellion and also the Shii underground movements, Iraq began lending moral and material support to Iran's ethnic minorities. Regional movements in Baluchistan, Azerbaijan and Kurdistan were encouraged, but the greatest emphasis was put on the rights of the Arab people in Khuzistan. The Iranian Government charged Iraq of harbouring irredentist designs on the oil-rich.

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*Abdulghani, n.40, p.189.

*Ibid.

"A Review of Imposed War, n.12, p.5."
Arabic speaking province of Khuzistan. Iran accused the Iraqis of deliberately altering the historical and geographical names of Iranian cities and provinces, such as Khorramshahr to Mohammarah; Ahwaz to Al-Ahwaz and Khuzestan to Arabestan. Iran also charged Iraq with establishing and sponsoring the 'Khuzestan Liberation Front' and of instigating elements of this front to commit subversive acts inside Iran. The Iraqi Government sent agent provocateurs into that province to mount sabotage operations and to rally the indigenous community. Iraq also supplied these Arabs with considerable Soviet-made weapons, including AK-47 automatic rifles and RPG-7 rocket launchers. Large caches of such weapons were discovered on Minou island in the Shatt Al-Arab river between Iran and Iraq. The ultimate aim of the Iraqi leadership was to separate Khuzestan, since it contains most of Iran's oil wealth, thereby turning the latter into a fourth-rate power.

"Ibid., p.xviii, pp.92-94.

"Ibid., p.xvii.


"Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1980, p.30307."
The Kurdish Card

While Iran's Kurds had originally joined Khomeini in calling for the Shah's fall, Khomeini rapidly made it clear that he opposed any form of ethnic separatism or autonomy." Yet, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), led by Abdul Rehman Ghassemolou, began to organize military force and occupied many of the Kurdish areas along the Iraqi border in Northwest Iran. KDPI was even able to occupy the city of Mahabad. By late 1979, the Iranian Army had only two light formations in the area and could not take permanent control of Mahabad. Iraq almost certainly began to provide KDPI with funds and arms."

At that time, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani also sided with the KDPI against Khomeini." Khomeini responded by offering the faction of the KDPI, led by the Barazani, funds and arms to resume their attack on Iraq in return for their support against the KDPI and PUK forces fighting in Iran. Iraq also pursued other policies in its confrontation with Iran. They included support to anti-


"Bruinessen, n.56, p.24."
Khomeini groups, competing for Palestinian support, reviving the question of ownership of three disputed islands in the Gulf, the disputed Iran-Iraq land border etc....

**Iraqi Support to Anti-Khomeini Groups**

Iranians contended that since the collapse of the Shah's regime, Iraq had been providing opponents of the Khomeini regime with weapons and propaganda material with which to overthrow the Islamic government in Iran. Iraq provided asylum to Shahpour Bakhtiar, the last premier under the Shah and, General Gholam Ali Ovaissi, Joint Chief of Staff under the deposed monarch. Bani-Sadr claimed that Iraq was actively sponsoring Bakhtiar and Ovaissi, and had established some twenty training camps with a total of 45,000 men, with another group of 25,000 men in Bahrain and Oman. Bakhtiar and Ovaissi were provided with a radio station in Iraq to conduct anti-Khomeini propaganda among the armed forces and Iranian tribals.

Iraq also supported attempts to create anti-Khomeini coup inside Iran. To subvert the Khomeini


"Hiro, n.28, p.167.
regime, Saddam Hussein aided such monarchist leaders as Shahpour Bakhtiar, the last premier under the Shah. The pro-Shah camp tried to stage a military coup on 24-25 May 1980 which was thwarted by Khomeini loyalists. On 9-10 July 1980, a further attempt, orchestrated and funded by Bakhtiar to topple Teheran regime, also failed. It was called Nojeh coup and led to the arrest of some 500 army and air force personnel. Of these at least 200 were given long jail terms and 50 were executed.

Iran-Iraq Relations and Palestinian Question

The other irritant in the Iran-Iraq relations was the Palestinian question. Despite the fact that both the states adhered to a common anti-Zionist policy, differences erupted between them. While, Iraq tried to project itself as the foremost champion of the Palestinian cause, Iran countered by pledging its support to the PLO, by renouncing its ties with Israel, and by stopping shipment of Iranian oil to Israel. The first and foremost action of the Islamic regime after

"Ibid., p.36.


"Cordesman and Wagner, n.33, p.29."
assuming power in Teheran was closing down of the Israeli Consulate in Teheran and converting it into an office for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat was given a heroic welcome in Teheran during his visit in February 1979. He received a pledge from Ayatollah Khomeini that Iran would offer full support to the Palestinian movement.

On 19 October 1979, Ayatollah Montazeri accused the Iraqis of failing to support the Palestinians and to confront Zionism.

The Gulf Islands

Another source of tension between Iran and Iraq was the refusal of the new regime in Teheran to withdraw from the three islands occupied by the Shah in 1971. On 15 March 1979, Iran's Foreign Ministry issued a statement refusing to withdraw from the islands. The Iraqi Government consistently argued for the return of the islands for ensuring harmonious relation with the Arab States. The Iranian Foreign Minister Qotobzada in


"Ibid.

"Abdulghani, n.40, p.192.

"Ibid., p.199.
T.V. interview said, "Any state or organization which entertains any doubt about the reality of our sovereignty over the three islands or about the Persian character of the Persian Gulf will never be accepted by us." In April 1980, he went on to the extent of saying that historically Arabs could not claim the three islands and remarked that all the Gulf States were historically part of Iran." This sparked a swift and harsh reaction from Iraq. Saddam Hussein said, "we are possessed of the power to take back the three Persian Gulf islands occupied by the Shah".

The Iranian-Iraqi Border Issue

The escalated tension between Iran and Iraq resulted in the periodic military clashes along the borders. The Iraqi Government accused Iran of violating Iraqi borders and airspace and stated that there had been 544 such violations between February 1979 and September 1980." On the other hand, Iran accused Iraq of

"Selections from Iraq-Iran Dispute, n.4, p.30.

"Abdulghani, n.40, p.199.

"A Review of Imposed War, n.12, p.118.

"The Iraqi-Iranian Conflict, n.3, p.16; For Chronology of Iranian Violations of Iraqi territory and airspace, pp.28-49.
violating her airspace 182 times and her borders 637 times, during the period March 1979 to September 1980."

As regards the land boundary dispute, areas such as Zain al-Qaws (122 sq.km), Maimak (110 sq.km), and Saif Sa’d (105 sq.km) were supposed to revert back to Iraqi sovereignty in accordance with the Algiers Agreement." The disputed territories varied in width from 3 to 16 kms., and involved the control of heights in the area where the Iranian plateau drops to Iraq’s river plain. From Iraq’s perspective, control of these heights offered a potential geographic barrier to block any Iranian invasion to Baghdad. The final solution to these disputed land territory had been delayed by the political turmoil in Iran.

On 2 September 1980, clashes erupted between Iraqi and Iranian troops near Qasr e-Shirin and slowly spread to other parts along the border. On 7 September 1980, Iraqis issued a memorandum to the Iranian Charge d'affaires in Baghdad of Iran’s continued occupation of Iraqi territory and requested Iran to evacuate her

"A Review of Imposed War, n.12, p.83; For chronology of Iraqi violations of Iranian border and airspace, pp.179-94.

"Abdulghani, n.40, p.201.
forces from the area." Later, the Iraqi Government announced that it had regained Zain al-Qaws area from the Iranian forces." On 8 September, the Iraqis submitted another memorandum to the Iranian Government confirming the seizure of Zain al-Qaws and warning Iranians to return the remaining territories." On 11 September, Iraqis took over the Saif Sa'd area and by 16 September all Iraqi border posts which were 'illegally' controlled by Iranian authorities were regained." Thereafter, border incidents and military engagements became a daily pattern, in which each side accused the other of inciting hostilities.

**Abrogation of the 1975 Algiers Accord**

The mounting tension between Iran and Iraq was bound to lead to an open confrontation. The Algiers Accord of 1975, which was the symbol of the change in Iran-Iraq relations from conflict to co-operation, thus became a casualty to this deterioration in their bilateral relations. On 17 September 1980, President


"The Iraqi-Iranian Conflict, n.3, p.194.

"ABSP Iraq, n.75, p.180."
Saddam Hussein called an emergency meeting of the National Assembly and announced the renunciation of the 1975 Agreement. The Iraqi Government informed the Iranian Embassy in Baghdad of the unilateral abrogation of the 1975 Algiers Agreement. The same day Saddam Hussein, explaining the reason for that action, declared that as a result of Iran's frequent violations of the accord, Iraq had abrogated it. He also added, "the legal relationship in Shatt al-Arab must return as it had been prior to 6 March 1975. The river must have its Iraqi-Arab identity restored as it was throughout history, in name and in reality, with all the disposal rights emanating from full sovereignty over the river."

Iran immediately rejected Iraq's abrogation of the Algiers Agreement. The Iranian Foreign Minister declared that Iraq's abrogation of the agreement was "devoid of legal validity and is indicative of this government's encroachment upon the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iran." Iranian government argued that the 1975 Treaty on State Borders and Good Neighbourly Relations was based on the Pacta Sunt Servanda, which

"Ibid., p.180.

"A Review of Imposed War, n.12, p.7.

"The Iraqi-Iranian Conflict, n.3, p.212.

"A Review of Imposed War, n.12, pp.11-12."
pertains legally to observe and respect the determined borders. Iran argued that in the context of respect of territorial integrity, international law considers the definitiveness, permanence and inalterability as inherent principles of the constituent elements of border treaties. Also, international law does not allow for unilateral change of border treaties in accordance with the principle of the fundamental change of circumstances, but rejects any unilateral claim on treaties being null and void, or a unilateral denunciation or the suspension of the implementation of its provisions or the termination of such treaties for any reason whatsoever. Article 5 of the Treaty on State Borders and Good Neighbourly Relations emphasizes the recognized international rules on inalterability of borders, reaffirm that terrestrial and river border lines are inalterable, permanent and definitive.

Iraq justified the abrogation of the Algiers Accord by invoking Article 4, which stated that any violation of any of its elements rendered the entire treaty null and void." Iran, which in 1969 had invoked the doctrine rebus sic stantibus to justify its unilateral abrogation of the 1937 Iranian-Iraqi Boundary Treaty, suddenly became an ardent advocate of the principle of pacta sunt

"The Iraqi-Iranian Conflict, n.3, p.4."
servanda." Whatever be the legal framework, Iraq's abrogation of the Algiers Agreement, however, indicated the complete breakdown of relations between the two countries.

**Impact of the Iranian Revolution on the Gulf Region**

The emergence of an Islamic regime in Iran altered the regional politico-military balance of power. Although Iran's decisions to abandon the Shah's role as a policeman of the Gulf, to withdraw from CENTO and to join the Non-Aligned Movement, were welcomed by the conservative Gulf regimes, overthrow of Shah's pro-Western regime, and its replacement by republican regime, challenged the legitimacy of the remaining dynasties in the Gulf. Furthermore, the challenge of the Islamic Republic to the conservative regimes was all the more menacing given its fundamentalist ideology and its vocal commitment to the uprooting of the dynasties throughout the Gulf; since according to the new regime in Teheran, "Islam proclaims monarchy and hereditary succession wrong and invalid."  

"A Review of Imposed War, n.12, p.11.

Iran professed to "export the revolution" after the Shah's regime had collapsed. Iran perhaps, at first, intended to spread the revolutionary movement by peaceful means. Ayatollah Khomeini said,

when we say that our revolution should be exported, it should not be misinterpreted and misunderstood that we are seeking to capture any place. By exporting our revolution we mean to awaken the other nations. We aim to awaken the governments so that they will be able to rid themselves of being under domination and to put an end to plundering their resources by others and to put an end to the poverty of their people."

However, after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini made no secret of his design to spread the Islamic Revolution to other countries by violence. He advocated the export of his brand of Islamic revolution to every corner of the world. "We will export our revolution to four corners of the world because our revolution is Islamic, and the struggle will continue until the cry of 'there's no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah' prevails throughout the world". Iran's policy aroused the concern of its neighbours. Ayatollah Khomeini considered the Iranian revolution a stage and an instrument in an overall Islamic revolution. He

"The Imam and the Ommat, n.43, p.104.

"Quoted in Hiro, n.36, p.32."
declared, "Our movement is for an Islamic goal, not for Iran alone...Iran has been the starting point."

The Islamic regime in Teheran perceived that the regimes presided over by the secular rulers, such as the Baath in Iraq, and the dynastic regimes in the Gulf, had fallen under foreign influence and, therefore, like the Iranian regime under the Shah, were unworthy of survival." Iraq and other Gulf states considered Khomeini's doctrine of export of revolution as a threat to their legitimate regimes, not only to mention the violation of territorial sovereignty and an interference in the domestic affairs of their countries by stirring local Shii population against them." Thus, Iranian revolution had direct and indirect impact upon other Gulf states, besides Iraq, like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

In Kuwait, following the Iranian revolution, the Shii activists did promote a limited Shii popular rebellion. Iran announced the appointment of Hojat al-Islam Abbas al-Mohri, Khomeini's son-in-law, as the Imam

"Khomeini, n.84, pp.34-35.

"Khadduri, n.16, p.67.

"Ibid., p.68."
of the Friday congregationalist prayer in Kuwait. However, his call was met with little popular response.

The seizure of the Great Mosque in Mecca in November 1979 had its impact in Kuwait. Demonstrations took place in support of Iran on the Shii day of Ashura. The Kuwaiti authorities responded quickly by expelling 3,000 Kuwaitis of Persian origin, including Abbas al-Mohri and his family. During the early 1980's Kuwait passed legislations restricting the activities and influence of Shii fundamentalist.

Like in Kuwait, in Saudi Arabia also, the revolution in Iran inspired the Shii population into offering active resistance to the regime. The main cause was the political and economic disenfranchisement of the Shii population of the eastern province. Traditionally the Sunnis considered the Shiiis to be kuffars, those who renounced their religion. There is no evidence to

"Abdulghani, n.40, p.196.


"Morvin Zonis and Daniel Brumberg, Khomeini, The Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Arab World (Cambridge, 1987), p.44.

"Ibid., p.45.

suggest that the Shii community of Saudi Arabia was involved in the seizure of Grand Mosque in Mecca on 20 November 1979. Most of the people involved in that attack were Sunni Saudi Arabians, and Sunnis from Yemen, Egypt, Pakistan and Morocco. Yet, encouraged by the Mecca incident, the 400,000 strong Shii minority, concentrated in the oil-rich province of al-Hasa, broke the long-established ban in the Kingdom on Ashura on 27 November 1979. The first protest broke out and the Ashura processions turned into pro-Khomeini demonstrations in eight important towns in the oil region. Saudi authorities forcefully quelled the disturbances. But sporadic demonstrations by Shii continued for the next two months. Iranian Government began broadcasting statements from the Iranian-backed 'The Islamic Revolution of the Oppressed People of the Arabian Peninsula', urging people to overthrow the Saudi regime.

After an indigenous Shii movement failed to emerge in Saudi Arabia, Iran relied on the Hajj, the annual

"Hiro, n.28, p.335.

"Zonis and Brumberg, n.92, p.51.


"Abdulgghani, n.40, p.198.
pilgrimage to Mecca, to spread its message. Ayatollah Khomeini urged the Iranian pilgrims to use the Hajj as an occasion "to make their revolution proud among the Muslims of the world and export their dear Islamic revolution to the Muslims of the world and other Islamic countries."

During the 1980 Hajj, Iranian pilgrims' demonstrations in favour of Khomeini resulted in violent clashes with Saudi security forces. To avoid this, the Saudis opened negotiations with the Iranians and received a promise that Iranian pilgrims would refrain from open political activities."

The Shi'i activism in Bahrain was also inspired by and followed the success of Islamic revolution in Iran. Bahraini Shi'i groups were inspired and instigated by Hojat al-Islam Muhammad Hadi al-Mudarrissi, a young cleric of Iranian origin exiled to Bahrain during the Shah's days, who was appointed as Khomeini's representative in Bahrain and United Arab Emirates (UAE)." Mudarrissi was assisted by another Iranian,


"Zonis and Brumberg, n.92, p.53.

"Karsh, n.99, pp.30-31."
Ayatollah Sadiq Rouhani, and by a Bahraini Shaikh, Muhammad Ali al-Akri. Ayatollah Sadiq Rouhani declared Bahrain as the fourteenth province of Iran and added that the Iranian Parliament's 1970 decree surrendering its claim was illegal. It sent shockwaves throughout the Gulf. Escalating his campaign Rouhani announced his willingness to lead revolutionary movement in order to topple the ruler of Bahrain, if he refused to conform to the Islamic principles.

In August 1979 public demonstrations took place in support of Khomeini's declaration of Jerusalem Day. Following this al-Akri was arrested. In response to al-Akri's arrest, riots broke out in the Shi'i section of the capital, al-Manamah. These disturbances led Bahraini authorities to expel Mudarrissi and Ruhani. Afterwards, Mudarrissi became the leader of the Islamic Front of the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB) and of the Gulf Affairs Broadcasting section of Radio Teheran, from which he beamed calls for mass political uprisings.


"Abdulghani, n.40, pp.197-98.

"Zonis and Brumberg, n.92, p.48.

"Ibid., p.49."
Hostage Crisis

Another action of the new regime in Iran that had great effect upon the region and also indirectly influenced Iran-Iraq relations, was the anti-American stand which was underlined by the 'hostage crisis'. Three days after the fall of the Shah, the revolutionary forces attacked the US embassy in Teheran. They seized about seventy Americans and demanded that Washington arrange for the return of the Shah for punishment." At that time, on the intervention of Iranian Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Yazdi, US Ambassador William Sullivan and other Americans were freed." However, Carter Administration's permission to allow the Shah to come to the United States on 22 October 1979 for medical treatment triggered a new wave of anti-American demonstrations.

On 1 November 1979, Bazargan and Ibrahim Yazdi met US National Security Adviser Brzezinski in Algiers in order to ease out the differences between the two countries. But within next three days the ordeal of the


hostages began when 500 militant 'students' with Khomeini's blessing ransacked the US embassy in Teheran and captured 60 American diplomats. "Though, Ayatollah Behesti remarked that the Americans would be released within twenty-four hours, it was not so. Instead, within hours, Ahmad Khomeini, son of Ayatollah Khomeini announced his father's support to the take-over."

One of the domestic fallout of the hostage crisis was that the 'liberal' leader like Bazargan resigned on 6 November, and the government affairs went into the hands of hard-line leaders of the Revolutionary Council." When the revolutionary authorities openly supported the takeover of the embassy, the magnitude and intractability of the crisis became fully apparent. The same day, the provisional government was dissolved, and preparations were begun for elections for President and Parliament."
USA reacted violently to the takeover of the US Embassy in Teheran by adopting economic and political measures. President Carter issued a proclamation on 12 November terminating all crude oil imports from Iran to the United States. Another unilateral step by USA, that proved to be a critical element in the strategy of pressure against Iran, was the freezing of official Iranian assets in USA.\textsuperscript{1} The political measures taken by USA were the investigation of Iranian students and restrictions on Iranian diplomatic personnel in USA.\textsuperscript{2}

While the Iranian government did not formally and officially support the US Embassy takeover in Teheran, Ayatollah Khomeini decreed that students took over the American 'spy den' in order to put an end to spying and sabotage activities, to stop American interventions in Iran's domestic affairs, force the extradition of the Shah and the return of funds 'stolen' from the Iranian nation by the Pahlavi family.\textsuperscript{3} America, however, did not heed any of these demands. On the contrary, it enhanced its economic and political pressures on Iran.

\textsuperscript{1}Sick, n.111, p.227.


\textsuperscript{3}Fall of a Centre of Deceit (Teheran, 1988), p.55.
In April 1980, the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Iran. The same month, USA also imposed an embargo on exports to Iran and banned travel there by US citizens. All visas issued to Iranians for future entry to the United States were cancelled. In addition, steps were taken to 'facilitate' payment of claims of American nationals against Iran out of frozen assets in the United States.

When diplomatic efforts failed, a military operation to free the hostages was initiated by USA. The rescue plan called for six giant C-130 transport planes to lift the men, equipment and helicopter fuel from an Egyptian air base to an island airfield off Oman for a refuelling stop. Then the planes were to land in Iran at a disused airfield, designated "Desert One", 265 nautical miles from Teheran. There they were to be joined by eight Sea Stallion helicopters launched from the aircraft Carrier Nimitz, on station in the Arabian Sea. The rescue force would then transfer to "Desert Two", a remote hideaway 50 miles from Teheran. The 120 men to be airlifted from Desert One to Desert Two included 93 Delta men, 2 Iranian generals, who would serve as interpreters, drivers and assistant drivers for


"Ryan, n.107, pp.1-2, 65."
the ride from Desert Two to Teheran and a 13-man Special Forces team to rescue the three American diplomats held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The rescue operation failed. The painstakingly trained and superbly equipped American force was defeated by weather, mechanical failure and human error."

Iran, finally decided to settle the hostage dispute for three reasons. First, the hostages were no longer needed as a means of consolidation of power by the new regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. Second, the US action of freezing $12 bn in Iranian assets as also the varying degrees of economic sanctions by other Western nations exerted significant pressure on Iran. Third, Iran feared an Iraqi invasion.

On 12 September 1980, Khomeini indicated that the hostage crisis was no longer his concern and the government could settle it according to the guidelines that he understood could be the basis for serious negotiations. The same day, in a message to the pilgrims, Khomeini told US about his terms for the release of hostages. "They can be set free if the property of the dead Shah is returned, all claims of America against Iran are annulled, a guarantee of

"Cottam, n.110, p.221."
political and military non-interference in Iran is given by America, and all our capital is released.""

Negotiations began very quickly after Khomeini's speech. Those who negotiated involved Khomeini's relative, Sadeq Tabatabi, and hence apparently had Khomeini's direct sanction." But when Iraq attacked Iran, negotiations were temporarily suspended. In November 1980, once again Iran entered into negotiations with USA, with the Algerians as intermediaries. On 20 January 1981, only two minutes after President Reagan had taken the oath of office, Khomeini released fiftytwo hostages. The Algerians had mediated to negotiate an agreement calling for the hostages to be freed in exchange for the transfer by the US of some $8 bn in escrow accounts to the Bank of England." Of this amount $2.8 bn went directly to Iran. Large amounts were paid to US bank claimants. Another $2 bn was placed in the custody of the Central Bank of Netherlands to await judgement by a claims tribunal at The Hague. However, Iran's taking of hostages had served the real purpose: the humiliation of the United States. It, however, also antagonized USA and was partly responsible for the

"Khomeini, n.84, p.306.

"Cottam, n.110, p.226.

"Ryan, n.107, p.105.
indirect support initially, and subsequently open support, to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war.

Developments that followed the downfall of the Shah swiftly turned the Gulf into a crisis area. It led to a more direct involvement of the USA in the region, especially when these events coincided with the developments in Afghanistan. The Carter Doctrine was proclaimed. The monarchies in the Arabian peninsula came together under the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Above all, the fall of the Shah and establishment of Islamic Republic in Iran disturbed the fragile Iran-Iraq relationship. It brought into conflict the newly created radical and militant regime in Teheran against a secular and nationalist regime in Iraq. Ayatollah Khomeini's commitment for the export of the revolution further complicated the situation and escalated the tension between them. 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 finally resulted in a war. The war had devastating consequences in economic, military and human terms for the two countries. It had wider ramifications. Its prolongation and potential spill-over effects on neighbouring countries not only threatened the stability of the region, but also helped in the further consolidation of
power by non-regional powers, notably the United States, in the region.