CHAPTER III

IRAN - IRAQ WAR:
ERA OF CONFRONTATIONIST POLICY

Introduction

The outbreak of Iran-Iraq war on September 1980 mounted an intriguing and dangerous foreign policy problem to the Carter and the Reagan administrations. Both the belligerents, the pan-Arab pro-Soviet Iraq and pan-Islamic revolutionary Iran were professing an anti American ideology. They were the major military powers in the Persian Gulf region possessing sophisticated conventional weapon systems which was superior to all other Gulf states. Throughout history, both Iran and Iraq were constantly trying to emerge as regional super power, either in association with the superpowers or alone. The Persian Gulf region has also been an area of critical concern for the Western and the United States interests.¹

For the U.S., the war raised yet another challenge stemming from the 1979 Iranian revolution because with the collapse of the Shah there were few regional powers who were willing to entertain close relations with the U.S. Therefore the US strategic interests in maintaining access to the Gulf oil, limiting Soviet influence in the Gulf region and protecting pro-Western Arab states from the threats of Iranian fundamentalism and Iraqi radicalism were in all in jeopardy. The revolutionary regime in Iran had been trying to undermine the pro-US Arab regimes in the region by spreading its revolutionary Islamic ideology throughout the region. The principal U.S. objective during the war was to prevent an Iranian victory. It was based on the assumption that if Iraq were overrun by the Iranians, all the other monarchies of the

Arab world would fall sooner or later. Even if these states would some how survive the immediate shock of Iraq’s defeat, a decisive Iranian victory would bring an economic, political and military disaster in the region and beyond. The task before the US administration was a difficult one. Unable to effect the course of the war and still mired in the hostage crisis the Carter administration was left with few options. One was an alliance with Iraq, choosing it as a replacement for the Shah of Iran. The second was to use the war as a precursor to the hostage release and to a renewed US-Iranian cooperation. The third was an approach to the Soviet Union by invoking its presumed desire to control the Persian Gulf. However, lacking the means or rationale to approach Iraq, frustrated by Iranian hostile attitude and Moscow’s efforts to increase its influence in the region and Iran in particular, the U.S. foreign policy makers were forced to adopt the policy of neutrality. 2

After 1981 Algier’s agreement which brought the hostage crisis to an end, the Reagan administration adopted a confrontationist policy by deliberately projecting itself as an adversary to the Iranian Islamic regime. It favoured Iraq in the war and labelled Iran as an exporter of international terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. It generated an unprecedented American commitment in the Persian Gulf to defend the Arab monarchies and to ensure uninterrupted flow of oil against Iranian threat. It was sought to be done by the establishment of Multi Service Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDF), encouraging the formation and consolidation of defence cooperation within the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC], besides leading international diplomatic and political efforts to curb the arms flow to Iran and Iraq.

An analysis of the US policy towards Iran in the Iran - Iraq war shows that the US never followed it’s self declared policy of neutrality. On the other hand from the very beginning of the hostility, American policy makers were vacillating in its attitudes.

towards the war depending on the changing fortunes of Iran or Iraq in the conflict. The U.S. Strategy was aimed to prevent both Iranian and Iraqi victory so as to weaken them from spreading pan-Islamic and pan-Arabic ideology and check Soviet influence to prevent the erosion of the dominant American position in the region. A perusal of the causes and course of the conflict proves that the US policy towards Iran in the war was one of containment and confrontation.

CAUSES OF THE WAR: DISPUTE OVER THE SHATT - AL - ARAB

The Iran-Iraq conflict is as old as the history of this region itself. Despite their geographical proximity, the differences between Iran and Iraq have always been greater in the ethnic and cultural traits of their people. There has been a long running competition and rivalry between the countries around their boundaries and interference in each others internal affairs by supporting ethnic and sectarian minorities across the common border. As a result major border disputes were erupted in 1847, 1913, 1937, 1960 and also in 1969. Unlike 1980 war, these disputes were settled by the forceful intervention and mediation of European powers, especially Russia and Britain in accordance with their own interest in the region. The bone of contention was the Shatt-al-Arab water way of strategic and economic significance.

Shatt-al-Arab river (Arvand Rud in Persian) is made up of the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers which separates the two countries in the south. It is the


major shipping route of the two countries. It is situated 47 miles north of Basra, stretching over a distance of 136 miles between Al-Qurnah and the Gulf in to which it empties close to the port of Al-Faw. Its width various according to the region, from approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ mile. Waters coming from Hawizah close to Al-Qurnah empty into Shatt-al-Arab. A great number of affluents and 635 waterways irrigate the two banks of the Shatt-al-Arab region and none of these waters ever dry up because the ebb and flow of the tide maintains a permanent irrigation. Aside from its hydraulic potential, this earth is one of the most fertile area in the world. It is rich in its agricultural and maritime resources.\(^6\)

The Iran-Iraq dispute centers on the southern most 69 kilometres of the water way before it enters the Gulf. It is in this section, in an area stretching roughly from the confluence of Iran’s Karun river and the Shatt-al-Arab south to the Faw peninsula, where the Iran-Iraq border follows the course of the river. The Shatt river is both a natural border line for Khuzistan, between Iran and Iraq, and a strategically vital means of access for the cities of both sides. For Iraq, the Shatt al-Arab is the only maritime outlet connecting it to the Gulf and beyond, the oceans, except this narrow passage to the sea, Iraq is virtually a land locked country. This region is vital for Iraq, as it links the south of the country to the north. It is also the only natural waterway allowing vessels to reach the port of Basra. This region is of primary importance to the Iraq’s economy, noticeably with regard to its privileged position in international commercial relations. Therefore any state occupying the bank of Shatt-al-Arab can isolate Iraq by cutting off its natural access to the Gulf from it southern port. For this reason Iran wishes to control the navigation in the region to establish its supremacy.\(^7\)

There were many attempts from both sides, to formulate agreements to the long

\(^6\) Firzli, n. 4, p. 39.

standing territorial disputes. They include the Second Treaty of Erzerum (1847), the Constantinople Protocol of 1913, the July 1937 Treaty and finally the Algiers Agreement of 1975. Unlike the earlier treaties which delimited only a broad frontier zone, from Second Treaty of Erzerum 1847 onwards the Shatt-al-Arab belonged to the Ottoman Empire [Iraq]. It became possible mainly due to the active intervention of Britain and Russia who wanted territorial stability in these border lands. 8 According to the treaty, the boundary between the two states would be administered by a quadruple commission (the Safavid and Ottoman states as well as the Russia and Britain). But the treaty did not work because the interests of the two main contenders were influenced by the interests of the Russia and Britain. Subsequently a new accord emerged in the form of 1913 Protocol of Constantinople. 9 All these treaties upheld the principle of unrestricted navigation on the Shatt by ships of all nations. Iran was not only dissatisfied with status quo and the claim of Iraq as successor of Ottoman Empire but also objected to the treaties for reasons of national pride, and growing economic importance of the ports of Abaden and Khorramshahr. 10 Later involvement of Britain and the Soviet Union led to a new treaty to resolve the river dispute in 1937. The treaty recognized Iraqi control of the river up to the bank on the Iranian side - with exception of an eight kilometer stretch before Abaden where the thalweg principle (Central line of the navigable channel) would apply. Later Reza Shah regretted Iranian acceptance of the treaty because it was a virtual sell off of the Shatt-al-Arab to Iraq. 11


10. King, n. 8, p. 6.

It happened so only because of the direct British intervention in the process of negotiations to protect its major interests in the oil fields and the water way's commercial traffic. The treaty stipulated that a tripartite board consisting of Iran, Iraq, and Great Britain would oversee its implementation.

But the various attempts to enforce the treaty failed because Iraq refused to form the board for its effective implementation. In essence the treaty was the reaffirmation of Iraqi sovereignty over the Shatt-al-Arab.\textsuperscript{12} The relation between the two states deteriorated further with the advent of the pan-Arab revolutionary Iraqi regime led by Brigadier Abed al-Karim in 1958. He began to maintain that Iraq had conceded the 4 miles anchorage in Abaden under pressure and demanded that Iran cede its road steads at KhorramShahr, Abaden and Khuzistan for Iraq.\textsuperscript{13} Thus the Shatt-al-Arab once more became the source of tension. In 1960 Iranian attempts to assert its control over the Shatt by appointing its own river pilots and flying its flag failed, because of Iraqi resistance. But by 1969 the balance of power shifted in favour of Iran with the British withdrawal from the region. Determined to prevent any power vacuum in the Gulf following the completion of the British withdrawal in 1971 the Shah adopted the concept of 'strategic autarky,' which meant that no other regional power could be allowed to surpass or even to equal Iran militarily. It is because a stronger power could degrade the credibility of Iran's deterrence or an equal power could impose serious constraints on its attempts to emerge as a regional force. So Shah accelerated and intensified arms procurement with active US support.\textsuperscript{14}

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\item Roshandel, n. 9, pp. 100-1. Also see King, n. 8, pp. 6-7.
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As a result of Iran's ever growing military power the Shah started to challenge the prevailing status quo with Iraq. On 24 April 1969 Iranian merchant ship, escorted by its navy and air force passed through the Shatt-al-Arab to its ports without paying toll to Iraq as required under the 1937 agreement. This was followed by a series of similar action in the early 1970s. On 30 November 1971 Iranian forces occupied three strategically located Islands near the Strait of Hormuz Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunbs which were at the time under the sovereignty of the Sheikdoms of Sharja and Rasal Khaima. In 1972 Iran extended military assistance to the Sultan of Oman to suppress the Dhofari rebels operating along Oman's Yemeni border with latter's support. Above all there was an attempt to isolate Iraq politically from other Gulf states by forming a regional defence organization comprising Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. All these actions were intended to signal Iraq, the other Gulf states and the superpowers that Iran was the sole guardian of Gulf security. The growing hostility between the two countries erupted as a fierce war in their border in 1973. Subsequent ceasefire in March 1974 did not end the hostilities. On the other hand it merged into the Kurdish war. To weaken Iraq further the Shah started to extend extensive economic and military assistance to the Kurdish separatists in northeren Iraq. Unable to suppress the insurgency, which imposed an intolerable burden on its domestic system, Iraq compelled to sign the agreement brokered by the President of Algieria, Houarin Boumedienne in 6 March 1975.  

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Boundaries and Good Neighborliness, which contained three Protocols and Annexes. The article 2 of the Protocol concerning the delimitation of the river frontier between Iran and Iraq explicitly states that: "The frontier line in the Shatt-al-Arab shall follow the thalweg, i.e., the median line of the main navigable channel at the lowest navigable level." Both the parties accepted and approved the settlement including the US and USSR. The US and its allies wanted to avoid any confrontation between Iran and Iraq which would disrupt the world oil market and also plicate the Arab-Israeli problem. In addition to this in the light of Vietnam experience the US was not willing to commit its force in a foreign land. Soviet Union, also did not want its ally Iraq to engage in a conflict with Iran because it was interested in preserving good relations with the latter. In essence by surrendering its sovereignty over the half of the Shatt-al-Arab Iraq formally accepted Iranian dominance in the region. For the Shah it was a happy ending of all differences. He achieved his long cherished dream - thalweg as the boundary line without making any concessions except the withdrawal of support to the Kurds in northern Iraq, if at all the non-interference in the domestic affair of another sovereign states can be considered as a concession.

The willingness of Iraq to make such a far-reaching territorial concession further illustrated its painful awareness that the effective enforcement of its internal sovereignty depended on the good will of the Shah. It also implied an Iraqi recognition of Iran’s military superiority and its awareness that in no way was it able to compete with Iran for hegemony in the Gulf. Saddam Hussein admitted this in his interview with Al-Kafah Al-Arabi in December 1979. According to him,

"... the signing of the 1975 Accord is the only step I have regretted in all my political life .... This accord was forced on me ... but I had no other choice .... Due to the battle at the northern front (Iraqi Kurds' attack on the central government) our army was in disarray ... I had to sign it."19 Therefore it is clear that only as a matter of expediency and convinience Saddam signed the agreement. He was eagerly waiting for a opportune time to strik back at Iran.

Having achieved its dominance in the region the Shah was determined to maintain it against any possible future challenge. Since then, he initiated a long-term military development plan to double the armed forces by the early 1980s, from around 250,000 to some 500,000 men. The army was to increase from 175,000 to 360,000, the air force from 15,000 to 40,000.20 To accomplish this military goals the Shah spent $ US 9 billion (bn) for arms procurement in the second half of the 1970s. This included the extensive arms agreement with Britain for 1,200 Chieftain MBT, 250 Scorpin light tanks, Fox Scout Cars, tracked and toured Rapier surface-to-air missiles (SAM) and two landing craft. In 1976 the Shah ordered $US 3.4 billion, 160 F-16 fighters, six batteries of improved HAWK SAM, 100 helicopters of various types, and a large number of air to air missiles (AAM), 350 sidewinder, 350 sparrow, 425 Phoenix, TOW and Dragon ATGW. In addition to this in November 1976, $414 million arms deal with the Soviet Union he procured ASU - 85 self propelled anti-tank guns, ZSU - 23 - 4 anti-aircraft guns, BMP infantry combat vehicles, SA–7 and SA– 9 SAM. In contrast to the massive Iranian military expansion there was a marked decline in the Iraqi arms procurement, especially in 1975 - 76 period. Most of the items it acquired during this

period were in the framework of previous agreements. It did not include any major weapon systems except five additional OSA-2 fast patrol boats (FPB), some 300 APC, a number of additional Scud SSM launchers, a few MIG-21 and MIG-23 fighter aircraft. During this period Iraq was focussing to solve the more pressing domestic problems and rebuild its already destabilised domestic economy. But by the 1977 the situation drastically changed and Iraq went for a major arms purchase from Soviet Union. They included 450 T. 27 MBT, dozens of 122 and 152 mm self-propelled (SP) guns, Tu.22 bombers, Mi - 24 helicopters and II-76 transport aircraft. Above all Iraq went for an extensive modernization of its airforce, with purchase of 40 Mirage F-1 fighters and 60 Gazelle anti-tank helicopters from France. However these arms purchases did not upset the Iran-Iraq military balance but rather held it steady, preventing it from tilting further in Iran’s favour. By early 1979 the Iranian airforce had 447 combat aircraft, including 77 F-14 compared with Iran’s 339. Iran’s naval superiority was even more pronounced. Iranian navy had 7 guided-missile ships, 4 gun corvettes, 6 missile - armed fast attack craft (FAC) and 14 hovercraft. But, on the contrary, Iraqi navy was a much more modest force of 12 FAC. The lack of any significant naval development indicate Iraq’s basic geo-strategic inferiority in relation to Iran and its inability to compete with it for Gulf supremacy. While Iran has a Gulf coast line of about 2,000 km with five naval bases, some of them beyond Iraqi operational reach, Iraq is virtually a land-locked country with just 15 km long Gulf coastline, and two naval bases, Basra and Ummer Qasr, which were vulnerable to Iranian artillery attack. In fact the distinct patterns of Iranian and Iraqi military expansion was the result of the logical continuation of trends imposed by its geography.

Nonetheless, the balance of forces on the ground was more even. While the Iranian army was much larger (285,000 against 190,000), the number of combat formations and major weapons systems was almost equal. While ten small Iraqi divisions were organised under three corps head quarters in Soviet style, six, larger Iranian divisions were grouped into three field armies in the US-style. Tank holdings (1,800 Iraqi against 1,735 Iranian) as well as artillery pieces (800 Iraqi, 1000 Iranian) were similar in size and strength. But Iraqi force was relatively strong in all kinds of armoured fighting vehicles (AFV). In the area of threat perception Iran had an advantage. Since the early 1960s Soviet threat were largely discounted, and the Iranian army’s only realistic external mission was the security of its western border. On the other hand, Iraqi army had to defend two critical frontiers - the Iranian and the Syrian border along with Kurdish insurgency.23 Therefore, until the overthrow the Shah, the military balance were clearly in favour of the Shah. Consequently the observance of the 1975 Algiers agreement was satisfactory.

The 1979 Iranian revolution and consequent political turmoil in Iran while providing an opportunity to Iraq to turn the strategic table in its favour, posed threat to the very existence of Iraq, as a nation-state. To exploit this paradoxical situation in its advantage, Saddam Hussein launched a swift military operation against revolutionary Iran.

THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION AND THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

The Iranian revolution ousted the Shah’s regime and disrupted the existing balance of power in the region in two ways. First, powerful Iranian army looked like a revolutionary rabble. Second, conservative, statusquoist and satisfied Iran became a revolutionary power intended to spread its vision of Islamic government all over the world.

Its commitment to export the revolution also found its expression in the Article 154 of the new constitution. This pan-Islamic objective of the revolutionary regime created a serious threat perceptions among Gulf Arab states, particularly in Iraq.

However, Iraq’s initial response to the Shah’s overthrow and the emergence of revolutionary regime was by and large conciliatory and positive. The Ba’ath regime did not take advantage of the civil strife in Iran to revise the Algiers Agreement, but indicated its willingness to continue to observe the status quo. In a memorandum addressed to the head of Iran’s Provisional Government Mehdi Bazargan on 13 February 1979, Iraq categorically stated its policy towards Iran, as follows:

(1) Ba’ath government always pursue friendly relations with neighbours based on principles of respect for sovereignty, non-interference in domestic affairs, and the right of nations to achieve their legitimate national aspirations.

(2) Iraq considers Iran with high regards in view of their Islamic and historic relationships with the Arabs in general, Iraq in particular.

(3) Iraq, which experienced foreign domination and oppression, sympathizes with Iran and hopes that it will achieve its goal of liberty, justice and progress.

(4) Iraq is happy with the recent pronouncements of Ayatollah Khomeini and other Iranian leaders about their good intentions towards the Arabs and their denunciations of Zionism.


(5) Iraq looks forward to cooperate with the new regime in Iran and hopes to deepen its friendly relations, promote mutual interests and maintain stability and peace in the region based on freedom and justice.

Subsequently on 15 April 1979, Iraqi President Ahamad Hasan al-Baker congratulated Khomeini on the occasion of proclamation of the Islamic Republic and invited Primeir Bazargan to visit Iraq in order to improve relations between the two countries. Iraq's show of goodwill was not reciprocated by Iran.27 But, in the revolutionary exuberance, the Iranian leaders displayed least interest in upholding the legacies of the Shah's rule. Although Iran did not formally renounce the 1975 treaty (until 26 October 1980 more than a month after the war had begun) neither did it offer assurance that the treaty would be observed. On the contrary, Tehran made it clear that they were not bound by any of the Shah's agreements. It was because of this treaty Ayatollah Khomeini who lived 13 years of his exile in the holy city of Najaf in Iraq was expelled by the Saddam Hussein in October 1978, in response to Shah's complaints about Khomeini's political activities.28 For Khomeini, it was the clear revelation of the Shah - Saddam nexus. This deep personal anti-pathy also prompted Khomeini to call on the people of Iraq to overthrow Iraqi regime. He even advised the Iraqi army "... not to obey the orders of the foes of the Quran and Islam, but to join the people."29

Iranian President Abol Hasan Bani-Sadr exhorted the Arabs to overthrow their


corrupt regimes and claimed that Khomeini was a religious leader for the Iranians as well as the Iraqis and for the entire Muslims all over the world. The implication of this position was that as Khomeini claiming to be the leader of all Muslims the call to rebellion could not be constructed as an interference in the internal affairs of Iraq. By rejecting Arab nationalism and branding Iraqis and other rulers of Gulf as atheists of pre-Islamic era, Iran was waging an ideological war on the nature and character of entire Arab regimes in the Gulf region, especially Baathist regime in Iraq.\(^\text{30}\) Even though the great majority of the people in both countries are Muslims, these governments stood poles apart in their Islamic religious perceptions. Baath regime in Iraq aspired to establish a new social and political order based on modern doctrines of nationalism, socialism and democracy. It considered Islam only as a component of its national ideology. But for revolutionary Iran Islamic religious values and principles were very foundation of its regime. Therefore Iranian clerical regime constantly claimed that the Islamic republic set up by the Iranian revolution was the ideal form of government and it should be established in other Islamic countries under Iranian leadership.\(^\text{31}\) By confirming it in a speech on February 1980 Khomeini stated that “We will export our revolution throughout the world because it is an Islamic revolution. The struggle will continue until the calls ‘there is no god but God and Muhammed is the messenger of God’ are echoed all over the world. The struggle will continue as long as the oppressors subjugate people in every corner of the world.”\(^\text{32}\)

By using ‘oppressor-oppressed’ model Khomeini was extending the applicability of the Iranian revolution beyond the borders of Iran and the narrow confines of Shi’i-

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32. Quoted in Ressiner, n. 25, p. 61.
Sunni conflict in the region. His appeal had greatest influence among the deprived Shias in Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula who were living in a sunni dominated states. Shi’ism was a potent ideology with a powerful presence in the Gulf region. Except in Iran all other Gulf states were governed by Sunni political elites. Yet 46 million out of the total 61 million Gulf citizens (over 75 percent) were Shi’is; they were the majority in Bahrain, Iraq, as well as in Iran. Besides the citizen Shi’is of the respective states there were an estimated 300,000 non-citizen Iranian Shi’i immigrants residing in Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE and Qatar. These Shi’i communities were largely locked out of the corridors of political power. In fact Shi’i power base rested, not on government position, but on four mutually reinforcing pillars; geography, economy, organization and ideology. Geographically, the Shi’is were concentrated in critical areas around the major oil fields; the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia has a Shi’i population of approximately 450,000 citizens. The world’s largest oil field, the Ghawar field, is situated in Al-Hasa, a district with 55 to 60 percent Shi’i Muslims. The sizable Qatif field is also in an area dominantly Shi’i in composition. They played an important role in the petroleum business in the Eastern Province and was an integral part of the Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO). Economically, they were a dominant and dynamic force controlling traditional markets and bazaars. They were providing a high-level protective umbrella beneath which the majority of Shi’i residents were able to live with some modicum of economic and political security. However the greatest strength of the community was their organization network, such as Shi’i homes, shops, diwaniyyahs (place of assembly), mosques, and mourning centers. These centers provided independence and security for the Shi’is who lived in hostile sunni majority political systems. Since the faith system existed in a private domain it was highly resistant to outside manipulation. The Shi’is in Gulf shared the faith system similar to that of the Iranians.

The shi’i ideology is a potent form of Islamic belief system with a historical mindset of martyrdom. They were deeply committed to their ideas and have revealed a determined willingness to give their lives for these beliefs. Above all they shared all the goals of populist Islam and have faith system similar to that of Iranians and a very large number of them are Persian in origin too. Therefore the Arab ruling elite considered non-Iranian Shi’i as a serious threat to the Arab regimes in Gulf. It created a threat perception among the ruling elites of Iraq and Gulf Arab monarchies about the safety and security of their regimes (see table 8 in appendix). This is felt from within their polities as well as the potential encouragement given to internal factions by the Iranian Islamic revolutionaries. It was due to their weak political structures and lack of legitimacy. There was an important difference in the representative character of the Iranian regime from that of Iraqi or other Gulf states. Iranian regime was the product of a genuine revolution, and its pattern of elite recruitment was much more open than those in Iraq or elsewhere in the Gulf. It was easier for the average Iranian citizen to become a Shia Mullah or a lay member of the Islamic Republican party and move up the political ladder, than to be born a Saudi prince or to be a Takirti member of the Baa’th party. Such an open elite recruitment, helped Khomeini to enjoy the unquestioned support among the masses as the saviour of the nation and Islam. It also helped to withstand the Iraqi assault with confidence. This features of Iranian revolution created an extraordinary threat to Iraq and other Gulf states. Hence, for Iraq, the Shah with all his military power and ambitious designs, was a rational figure. He did not seek to remove the Baa’th regime. His intervention in Iraq’s domestic affairs was limited and purely instrumental, to prevent

Iraq from competing militarily with Iran. The Shah’s aspirations for the Gulf supremacy were recognised through 1975 Algeirs agreement. He lived up to it. On the other hand, the revolutionary regime was irrational, motivated by uncompromising pan-Islamic ideology aimed to over throw the Baa’th in Iraq.36

Meanwhile the statements emanating from Iran strengthened Iraqi fears. Irrespective of their differences, all the leading revolutionaries such as Khomeini, Banisarder, Beshshati, Rajai, Sadiq Ghohtzadh, and Rafsanjani were not only competing with each other in declaring the objective - to over throw the Iraqi regime-but also trying to bring out sufficient evidences that the target was about to be realised.37 Politically Iraqis tried to oppose the export of the Iranian revolution by launching a serious of verbal attacks on Islamic regime. President Saddam Hussein responded with fury by saying that, “Any one who tries to put his hand on Iraq will have his hand cut off without hesitation.”38 He even supported Khurds and Arabs in Khuzistan, an oil rich Iranian region. These counter measures failed to impress the revolutionary regime and their rhetoric and actions became more vitriolic.39 There was a wide range anti-Baa’th violence in Iran involving armed attack on Iraqis. Iran also began to provide moral and material support to Shi’ite under ground movements such as Iraqi Kurds and Da’wa party in Iraq. It was followed by a series of terrorist assassination attempts on prominent Iraqi leaders like Deputy Premier Tariq Aziz at Mustansiriya University on 1 April 1980 and on Latif Nasif Jassim, minister of culture and information on 12 April 1981. The assailants were members of the Al-Daawal party. It culminated into

37. Firzli, n. 4, p. 23.
an official statement issued by Iranian foreign minister Ghotbzadh in Damascus that
President Saddam Hussein had been assassinated during an alleged military coup. He
also confirmed his government’s support to the Iraqi opposition.\textsuperscript{40} Subsequently Iraq
began to abandon its exclusively defensive approach towards Iran and appreciated an
opportunity to erode Iran’s position in the Gulf region. With the removal of Egypt from
the Arab leadership after 1978 Camp David peace agreement with Israel, Iraq became
a natural successor to Egypt with its central geostrategic position in the region.

Iraq has 14 million industrious, literate people, a sophisticated middle class,
annual oil revenues of more than 23 billion which facilitated an allocation of $17.7
billion for development in 1980 and well-equipped armed forces of nearly 250,000
men. Iraq’s leadership was also legitimized by its adherence to Ba’athist ideology,
whose central concern was the creation of one Arab nation. Furthermore in February
1980, Hussein proclaimed an Arab National Charter to future united political action.
The most revealing section of the charter was the call on the Arab nations to use
peaceful methods instead of force to solve their disputes. It marked his departure from
radical policies of early 1970’s. In fact, Iraq’s shift towards moderation was spurred
by the dangers of Iran’s revolutionary zeal to the domestic stability of Iraq and the
other littoral states. By 1979 there was a remarkable rapprochement among these
states to strengthen the bounds of unity among them. In this regard, immediately after
the revolution, Izzat Ibrahim al Douri, the Iraqi interior minister and an important
member of Iraq’s Revolutionary Command Council and of the Regional Command of
the Ba’ath party spent several days in Saudi Arabia discussing “common security
interests.” He and other members of the Iraqi leadership later paid similar visits to
all other Gulf states including North Yemen. These changes did signal Saddam

\textsuperscript{40} Firzli, n. 4, pp. 23-24, 33.
Hussein’s determination to shape the course of Iraq’s domestic and foreign policy in a way which he thought best suited to Iraqi interests. He even stated that, if Iraqi and Pan-Arab interests could be promoted by restoring Iraqi’s relations with the U.S. then Iraq would not hesitate to restore them.41

At the personal level too Saddam wanted to exploit the disturbed balance of power in the area by reversing the effects of the Algiers agreement which discredited his Arabist credentials by the ceding of sovereignty over the eastern half of the Shatt-al-Arab. In December 1979, he remarked that “... at the very moment, I was signing it, I was thinking of a day when I could tear it to pieces and retrieve Arab rights from the marauding Iranians.”42

For Saddam, the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty over the Shatt-al-Arab was a symbol of the Iraqi honour and the new power relations in the area. It was also the convenient minimum war objective as its capture must have appeared relatively straightforward given the relative strength of the two sides.43 It was also because of the exasperation felt by the Iraqi leadership in the face of Iran’s continued efforts to incite the Shi’ite population in Iraq against the Baghdad government. According to Saddam Hussein;

“The ruling clique in Iran persists in using the face of religion to foment sedition and division among the ranks of the Arab nation despite the difficult circumstances through which the Arab nation is passing. The face of religion is only a mask to cover Persian racism and a bruied restment

42. Maleki, n. 19, p. 372.
for the Arabs. The clique in Iran is trying to instigate fanaticism, resentment and division among the people of this area.\textsuperscript{44}

Subsequently, on 17 September 1980 Iraq abrogated the 1975 Algeirs Agreement to confront the Iranian regime militarily and on 22 September Iraq launched a limited war against Iran anticipating swift and decisive victory.

\textbf{LIMITED WAR : FLAWED ASSUMPTIONS AND ASSESSMENT}

For Iraq, a rapid victory would have benefited in three ways: (1) It would have led to considerable elimination of Khomeini’s prestige among the Shi’ite and other Muslim populations of Iraq and the Gulf. (2) It would place Iran’s Arabic-speaking oil rich Khuzistan region in Iraqi hands which would give it a powerful bargaining card in any future negotiations with Tehran. (3) A decisive military victory also would confirm Iraq as the main power in the Persian Gulf and enhance Hussein’s leadership aspirations in the Arab world. But the unexpected stiff Iranian resistance not only upset Iraqi calculations completely but also endangered the regional and domestic position of Ba’ath regime.\textsuperscript{45} The principal reason for the failure of the Iraqi campaign was that the war was based wholly on a number of flawed assumptions and assessments concerning the relative strength and weakness of the revolutionary Iranian regime and the response of the super powers particularly of the United States towards the conflict.

Iraqi leadership believed that the interests of both the states were fundamentally symmetrical and Iran would recognise the undesirability of a prolonged war. The assumption was that a quick limited but decisive blow would help Iran to


\textsuperscript{45} ibid, p. 147.
realize the futility of its attempts to topple the Ba’ath regime.\textsuperscript{46}

In his speech on the abrogation of 1975 agreement Saddam Hussein made it clear that “Iraq has no ambition on Iranian territories.”\textsuperscript{47} Furthermore, it was officially confirmed by Iraqi Defence Minister, General Adnan Khairallah, on 24 September 1980. According to him,

The penetration of our forces inside territory beyond the international borderline, is a reaction against Iran’s closing of the Shatt-al-Arab and its threat to close the strait of Hormuz, which is a strategic passage way not only for Iraq but for all countries in the region.... The war can be stopped if Iran recognizes our rights, otherwise it will continue and we will be forced to strike vital points in Iran till the day they recognize our legitimate rights... We have demanded total sovereignty over the Shatt-al-Arab, but we have no territorial ambitions. In particular, we do not have the intention of seizing the oil reserves of Arabistan because we have enough oil.\textsuperscript{48}

It is clear from the Iraqi statements that the territorial ambitions of Iraq did not go beyond the Shatt-al-Arab and a relatively small portion of Khuzistan. This reasoning was based on the conception that a strategy of limited war would serve Iraq’s interest best and also be accepted by Iran. Therefore Iraq deployed only five out of its twelve divisions of army. Its initial strategy was one of counter force, avoiding targets of civilian and economic value in favour of entirely military targets. By exercising self-restraint, Iraq sought to signal an intent to avoid general war, with the hope that Tehran would reach to a settlement. In pursuit of this goal, Saddam Hussein unilaterally halted the advance of his troops within a week after the onset of

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\item \textsuperscript{46} Karsh, n. 15, p. 94.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Saddam's Speech to National Assembly, BBC/SWB/ME, 19 September 1980 quoted in Johannes Ressiner, n. 25, p. 49.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Firzli, n. 4, pp. 122-3.
\end{itemize}
hostilities and then announced his willingness to negotiate an agreement.\textsuperscript{49} Iraq also wanted to convince the Iranian leaders that in the long running competition between the rulers of the two countries, the Iraqi leadership had an undisputed upper hand. Therefore, any attempt to overthrow the Ba’ath regime would only damage Iran’s own interest and would be resisted by force.\textsuperscript{50} But Saddam’s error quickly became apparent because the limited invasion neither endanger the revolutionary regime in Tehran nor drive Khomeini to moderation or accommodation with Iraq. Instead it capitalized on the Iraqi attack to consolidate their legitimacy and to diminish the power struggle within their own ranks and suppress opposition to their regime.\textsuperscript{51} The war quickly became the principal leverage used by the radical revolutionaries led by Prime Minister Rajai in its efforts to oust the pragmatists. They persistently defeated, President Bani Sadar’s effort to rebuild the Iranian military, because the radicals suspected that Bani Sadar was trying to build an independent power base. The strategies and tactics used to win the war had put benefits to the revolutionary process before military utility. This was reflected in the effort to build up revolutionary fervour by using human wave tactics rather than conventional military assets. The Iranian hardliners who won the factional fighting were opposed to any peace initiative forced Iraq to withdraw to the original borders in most places. Furthermore, they decided to carry the war in to Iraqi territory.\textsuperscript{52} This decision was justified by Foreign Minister Velayati. He argued that the survival of Ba’ath regime in Baghdad would represent the defeat of Islam. The crucial demand to end the war was domestic political change in

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\item \textsuperscript{49} Efraim Karsh, “Military Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War”, \textit{Orbis}, vol. 33, no.2 (Spring 1989), pp. 209-11. A limited war is one which involves a small portion of the countries forces and conducted within definite boundaries directed against military forces rather than civilian value.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Chubin and Tripp, n. 41, p. 55.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Karsh, n. 49, p. 211.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ressiner, n. 25, p. 4.
\end{itemize}
Iraq which would give Iran an opportunity to install an Islamic government in Baghdad. It would help Iran to preserve its dominant role in the region. This Islamic orientation of the revolution was aimed to lend credence to Iran’s insistence that the revolution had no territorial or expansionist claim against Iraq. Thus it became the focal point for the continuation of the war.53

As the war turned in favour of Iran, Iraqis attributed the failure of intermediaries to persuade Iran to the negotiating table. In fact, Iraq’s inability to bring the war to a swift end shows that it entered in to a war with a gross misperception about Iran’s internal affairs. According to Tareq Aziz, Iraqi Deputy Premier;

As for the situation in Iran, it is completely different. Since, the assumption of power by the new group, Iran has been in a serious state of internal disputes and schisms. The existence of trends, groups, and various conflicting attitudes in Iran is a fact, and the disintegration of the political, military, security and information organs of state and their participation in the schisms and the power struggles is also a fact.54

It shows that the Iraqi assessment of the social and political situation in Iran was one of general chaos and disillusion among the people. This led Iraqis to reach the following flawed conclusions;

1. The Iranian military had been substantially weakened after the Islamic revolution. The Imperial Guard was dismembered and the officers above the rank of lieutenant - colonel were subjected to purges. To a large extent, professional military were replaced by militarily untrained Revolutionary Guards known as Pasdaran. There were not sufficiently trained technicians to repair sophisticated weapon systems. They could not even locate or


organize the stockpiled materials.

(2) Iranian leaders were totally divided over the allocation of political authority about the nature and purpose of revolutionary government. So in the event of a war between Iran and Iraq, the former could not counter it effectively.

(3) The Islamic Revolution did not enjoy the wholehearted support of Iranian civilian population. There were certain disillusioned sections among educated elites, military officers, minority population such as Arabs in Khuzistan, Baluchis and moderate leaders like Shariat Mandari who were willing to undermine Khomeini.

(4) Arab Gulf states had little sympathy for Khomeini and Islamic Iran’s hegemonic ambitions.

(5) Finally, Iran would be isolated from large scale super power assistance because of the U.S. hostage crisis in Theran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.55

These assumptions were confirmed by the Iranian exciles led by the former premier in Shah’s provisional government Shapur Ali Bakhtiar who was in close contact with the Iraqi government. He reinforced the reports about the sudden collapse of the revolutionary regime in Tehran.56

Iraq was also encouraged by the reports that, although Iran had spent close to $17 billion on U.S. arms before the Shah’s fall, it had not achieved a fully balanced force structure when the revolution occurred. Many critical systems including its computerized logistic and supply system, radar system, and surface based missile systems were still in the process of development. Many spare parts and munitions deliveries had not occurred, and some $12.2 billion of additional orders were in the pipeline. The U.S. signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Iran on 1 February


1979 - the day before Khomeini returned to Iran which gave the U.S. the authority to cancel these contracts and use the proceeds to pay off Iran’s debts. The U.S. used this authority to cancel many orders. These cancellations included 160 F-16s, seven AWACS, two DD-993 guided missile destroyers, 500 phoenix missiles, 16RF-4Es, 200 Harpoon anti-ship missiles, 500 Gould Mark 46 torpedos, 100 Raytheon Improved Hawk Surface-to-Air missiles, armored personnel carriers and other vehicles. Furthermore, Khomeini cancelled some $9 billion worth of arms deal and arms shipment after the hostage crisis. In the very first year of the revolution, the government cancelled all outstanding orders for arms and existing projects. It also sought a way to sell back its F-14 aircraft to the U.S.

Military preparedness soon became impossible as conscription were reduced. They were vilified and distrusted as royalist and pro-Western. Weapon systems were allowed to deteriorate without adequate servicing. The voices in favour of refurbishment were treated as counter revolutionary and suspects. Garrisons on the Iraqi border were understrengthed despite Iraq’s reinforcement of these areas. Most of Iran’s tanks were deployed away from the frontier, opposite the Kurds in the north and against USSR in the south. It was the declared policy of revolutionary government to de-emphasis and defame the defence centric policies of the Shah. As a result, the Iranian military seemed to be in disarray, with poor morale, little discipline and few prospects.


In addition to it, after the hostage taking Iran faced a virtual embargo on the delivery of US arms and spare parts. Some key weapons already in the Iranian forces, including the fire control systems on the F-14AS and some of the HAW missile and radar units, were sabotaged by anti-Khomeini officers before the revolution took place. Hence, Iraq assumed that in the event of a war, Iran would be forced to find out new sources of supply. Moreover it would get only the much lower quality weapons than it had previously obtained from the U.S. The Iranians were not able to use the stockpiled weapons effectively because of the existing short fall in its inventory and extreme difficulty in getting an adequate supply of U.S spare parts and advanced munitions.\(^{59}\) Iran’s, enstrangement from the US, its leading source of military supplies augured well for Iraq’s war plans. Iraqi leadership also feared the prospect of a resolution of American hostage crisis in October 1980, through a deal known as October Surprise.\(^{60}\) Therefore, reportedly Saddam Hussein met secretly with National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski in Jordan in June 1980. It led Saddam to believe that the U.S. would tolerate an Iraqi invasion of Iran.\(^{61}\)

According to Howard Teicher, a Defence Department Official in Carter administration (who later joined the Reagan administration’s National Security

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61. This is according to Gary Sick. See Kenneth R. Timmerman, *The Death Lobby: How the West Armed Iraq* (Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 1991), Chap. 5 cited in Reza Ra’issi Tousi, “Containment and Animosity : The United States And the War” in Farhang Rajaee, n. 9, p. 50.
Council as staff):

In the months preceding his invasion of Iran, Saddam had received intelligence reports from King Hussein of Jordan and the Saudi leadership which summarised U.S briefings steady decline in the military capabilities of the Iranians. Increasingly fearful that Iranian inspired violence would intensify in the wake of the November 1979 riots in the Grand Mosque in Mecca and with a steady drumbeat of intelligence reports describing Iranian efforts to establish anti-western revolutionary cells throughout the Muslim world, U.S briefers had tried to allay the concerns of conservative Arab regimes over the combat capabilities of revolutionary Iran. Much of Washington’s information which was used to brief the Saudis and Jordanians on the Iranian military was derived from the DOD’s [Department of Defense] expectations that Iran’s advanced military system were not being properly used or maintained. This conclusion led the American government to believe that the Iranian military already racked by numerous purges of the senior officers, would not be capable of sustaining modern combat for more than several days. Although U.S officials did not intentionally provide military intelligence on Iran to the Iraqis, U.S officials were clearly aware that American assessments would reach Baghdad. Given the significance the Arab leaders attached to these briefings, the United states had some responsibility for significantly contributing to Saddam’s calculation that Iraqi power could overwhelm the remnants of the Iranian military.62

Thus, by supplying secret information, which exaggerated Iran’s military weakness, to Saudi Arabia for onward transmission to Baghdad, Washington indirectly encouraged Iraq to attack Iran. Administration officials expected this would lead to the solution of hostage crisis before the Presidential election and also hoped to contain Iranian Islamic radicalism. Other signs which gave credence to such a perception was that the U.S. approval of the controversial sale of five Boeing jets

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to Iraq as well as the sale of eight General Electronic Gas Turbine Engines. The U.S. officials were fully aware that Italian shipbuilders were installing them in Iraqi frigates. This sales took place just a few days before the Iraqi invasion. According to Teicher, "In fact, most of the bureaucracy was certain that Iraq would destroy the remnants of the Iranian Air Force in a matter of days and the war would be over in little more than a month. Saddam had already succeeded in conditioning Washington to link Iraqi interest with American interests." It proves that despite various discords and general mistrust between the two countries, the U.S viewed Iraq as an important ally to contain the Iranian revolutionary threat. In the end, the US impression along with media reports over Iranian situation, strengthened Iraqi belief that Iranian military was incapable to withstand a major military action.

Contrary to the US and Iraqi understanding, about the military situation in Iran the revolutionary leaders were moulding an Islamic defence system through the concept of a 'Peoples War'- a theory stressing the importance of the unity of the masses, the supremacy of the moral and spiritual values over the material in warfare. To achieve this end and to strengthen Iranian revolutionary institutions, they started to purge the traditional military set up. The Americans policy makers and the rest of the world viewed it as the decimation of the Iranian military.

**PURGES IN IRANIAN MILITARY: MYTH AND REALITY**

The main purpose of the purge was to neutralize counter revolutionary potential of the Shah's military. According to the estimates of International Institute for Strategic Studies, 60 percent of the army (about 1,71,000 men) had deserted by July

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63. Tousi, n. 61, p. 50.
64. Teicher and Teicher, n. 62, p. 104.
65. Chubin, n. 58, p. 310.
The most effective means adopted to neutralize the armed forces was the establishment of a separate para-military force loyal to the regime known as Pasdaran [Islamic Revolutionary Guards]. Although they lacked formal military training, they were fanatically loyal both to Ayatollah Khomeini and to the revolution and assumed duties that had been the prerogative of the armed forces. It resulted in the dismissal, arrest, trial, imprisonment or execution of some 10,000 western trained military personnel.

Eventhough, several dozen military officers were executed, the purges in the early months of revolution was limited than was originally reported by western policy makers and media. Action against the military can be classified into two distinct periods. The first, from the establishment of the provisional Islamic government in mid - February to late September. The second purge began with the appointment of Mostafa Chamran, the former deputy Prime Minister for provisional government as the first civilian minister of defence.

During the first period, command of the military was entrusted to a group of former military officers who had established their revolutionary credentials before the revolution. The first two ministers of national defence, Real Admiral Ahmad Madani and General Taqi Riyahi were the major figures in this group. Under their leadership efforts were made to stabilize and reorganize the military along the Islamic lines. The thinking among the revolutionary leaders was that the control of the armed forces should be entrusted with the experienced military men rather than the revolutionaries. Therefore executions were generally limited to most senior personnel in each service and those who had committed specific counter revolutionary acts. The rest of the purge was carried out by forced retirements. Retirements of the cadre were mostly

from the Imperial Guard, which had been charged with protecting the Shah and opposing the revolution. The statistics shows that over 80 percent of the first 200 executions were from the members of the Shah’s security apparatus SAVAK and the national police, both of which had been charged with primary responsibility of internal security, rather than the military. Of the 404 announced executions over the entire period of the first purge, only 21 percent (85) were of military personnel. In contrast 37.9 percent (153) were members of SAVAK and the national police. Out of an estimated population of over 200 general officers in the military, 26 were executed and the rest forcibly retired. It indicated that the revolutionary vengeance against the military was limited than reported by media and policy makers. It was because the revolutionary leadership knew that dismantling of the military would give disproportionate influence to the three major leftist groups, the Tudeh party (Marxist), the Feda’iyine-ekhalq (a Marxist-Leninist) and the Mujahedin-e khalq (an Islamic socialist group) who refused to disarm. Hence, Mehdi Bazargan, Ayatollah Kazam Shariat Mandari etc. spoke out for retaining a strong national military. 68 Khomeini supported it by saying that “the army, police and gendarmerie are now in the service of Islam and the nation. The nation should support them, and do nothing that might discourage them or hurt their feelings... I emphatically warn the Iranian nation that the government must have a strong national army with a mighty morale, so that the government will have the power to safe guard the country.” 69

To ensure the controlled nature of the purge and to rebuild public support for the

68. ibid, pp. 8-10.

69. Speech by Ayatollah Khomeini on February 28, 1979 FBIS, Daily Report, MEA, March 1, 1979, p. R2. Quoted in ibid, p. 10. For other strong statements in support of a national military, see statements by Khomeini in ibid; April 17, 1979, pp. R2-R3; October 9, 1979, p. R 10; and December 31, 1979, p. 6. Other revolutionary leaders who supported Khomeini’s call were Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan ibid., March 2, 1979, p. R 4 and Ayatollah Kazen Shariatmadari ibid., July 24, 1979, p. R7. cited in ibid.
military, Revolutionary Council issued amnesty for members of the armed and security services who were accused of anti-revolutionary activity. Ayatollah Khomeini endorsed this action by stating that; “The three branches of armed forces are being pardoned and I and the noble people forgive them” 70. The strong endorsement by Khomeini and others were influential in limiting the effects of the purge.

The second purge concentrated on lower echelons, whose loyalty was suspected because of their previous association with Americans, training in the United States; relationship with those already purged, or other such factors. Since the warrant officers, military technicians and conscripts were considered to be a major revolutionary force in the final days of the revolution and victims of the Shah’s, military policies, the purge fell mostly on the officer corps and to a lesser extent, on the military cadres. 71

The purge aimed not only to increase the control exercised by the Khomeini but also to reduce the government’s dependence on the military. In order to achieve this aim the revolutionary leadership started to reorganise the military on the basis of revolutionary Islamic principles. The most important among them were the belief in the Islamic revolution and in its leader Ayatollah Khomeini, and obedience to the government to safeguard the revolution and its independence from external influences that was the U.S. In fact this mobilization and consolidation of the Islamic military began with the call of Ayatollah Khomeini for the creation of an “Army of Twenty Million” to combat imperialism. This call to arms to every one who were able to carry a gun resulted in the mobilization of the people and widespread weapons training in schools, factories and on television. Unlike, the Revolutionary Guards who were entrusted to fight internal enemies of the revolution, the Army of Twenty Million was a militia organised to fight invaders only. It was a significant organizational step which
provided a large pool of semi trained personnel to Iranian armed forces. It eliminated
the need to maintain the army at the pre-revolutionary size.\textsuperscript{72} Thus, by the end of the
summer of 1980 the purges had been very successful in the army. While the top
military leadership had been replaced by the purge, their basic command structures
remained intact, a factor that proved significant in the early weeks of the war. However
more important was the relationship that each had developed with the clerical regime
and its paramilitary arm - the Revolutionary Guards. Aside from the revolutionary
reputation each service had maintained this relationship which helped to moderate
some of the anti-military bias of the regime. The airforce and navy possessed military
skills that the Guards could not hope to master.

After the ouster of Bani-Sader, the leadership of clerics and the Revolutionary
Guards, started the Islamisation of the Iranian forces. For this purpose the military was
brought under the tight control of the clergy in their roles as advisers and
representatives of the regime, without corresponding influences from the secular
sources. The military officers chosen to command positions including warrant officers,
technicians, conscripts were ambitious, motivated and dedicated to Islam. For a devout
Muslim, to die while doing battle in the cause of Islam is martyrdom, which assures
immediate entry into heaven. This belief of the Revolutionary Guards and other devout
fighters gave them courage necessary to withstand repeated assaults and nearly
incessant shelling of Iraqi forces. Even though the regime was unpopular among the
disenfranchised upper middle classes, it enjoyed die hard devotion among peasants and
the urban poor. They provided most of the volunteers in the Revolutionary Guards, the
Army of Twenty Million, and other popular forces. This Islamic fervour, along with the
moderate secular - nationalist forces’ desire to defend the Iranian homeland
(nationalism) enabled Iranians to put a tenacious defence against the Iraqi invasion.

\textsuperscript{72} ibid, pp. 11-13.
Amalgamation of these two qualities, Islamic fervor and Iranian nationalism made Iranian military a fierce force. The most significant move in this direction was the announcement of the formation of a joint military command under the regular army and the Revolutionary Guards. The control by the Revolutionary Guards helped to convince the professional military the necessity to address the war in Islamic terms. Thus the changes imposed by the leaders of Iran showed a continuity of purpose not generally ascribed to it. The intent of the purge was to recast the Iranian military as an effective Islamic fighting force. It was contrary to the perceptions of the US analysts and Iraqi political leadership. As a result, after the initial setbacks Iran scored a series of victories in the war which threatened the very existence of Iraq. Iraq in turn was fully compelled to depend on the financial and political support of its oil rich Arab neighbours and the attitude of the U.S. for its success or survival.

THE WAR AND THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION

The war broke out at a time when the whole of the Middle East was going through the impact of Iranian revolution. The holding of American hostages in Iran, the absence of any surrogate power to act on behalf of the U.S. and the vulnerabilities of Arab states to defend itself from external aggression and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan made the political and strategic situation in the region more fluid. These developments not only altered the balance of power in the region but also adversely affected the U.S. position at large. It generated a heated policy discussion among the US foreign policy setup involving the departments of State, Defence, NSC and White House. According to Howard Teicher, a defense department official in Carter administration:

The most troubling strategic development for the United States, however remained the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the potential for further

73. ibid, pp. 18, 20, 30-33.
moves against Iran or Pakistan coupled with the expansion of Soviet influence in and around the periphery of the Arabian Peninsula over the preceding five years, by the middle of 1980, Soviet forces had established a network of air and ground bases in Western Afghanistan near the southeastern Iranian province of Baluchestan va Sistan, providing Moscow with forward staying area only five hundred miles from the strategic strait of Hormuz. Although Soviet forces were engaged with Afghan rebels primarily in the north and east of the country, covert U.S. support for the rebels and overt military assistance for Pakistan raised the stakes and increased the potential for soviet escalation. Having observed Soviet readiness to undertake naked aggression against Afghanistan, including ‘hot pursuit’ into the North - West Frontier Province of Pakistan, U.S. planners could not ignore the possibility of a Soviet campaign designed to seize the strait of Hormuz in order to pressure the West to cease its support for the Afghan resistance (Mujahadden) as well as to provide Moscow with the ability to cut the West’s oil lifeline. With the war and the Iranian revolution draining the military and economic resources of Iran, Moscow might well have calculated that its forces would have not met little opposition despite, the Carter Doctrine. With the United States immobilized by the hostage crisis, an election campaign, a post - Vietnam anti interventionist legacy, and no permanent air ground or naval presence in the region, there was little reason to believe that America or its Western allies possessed the military capabilities or the will to stop a rapid thrust by the Soviets towards their long desired warm water port in the Gulf.74

It is clear from the above statement that the American foreign policy making apparatus was primarily concerned about the possibility of Soviet exploitation of the war to further its influence over the resources of the area. It was done by either directly or indirectly interfering in the internal affairs of Iran or building up new alliances with it. Because Moscow not only had a functioning relations with both belligerents, but also was the principal military supplier of the Iraqis.75 Since the 1958 revolution Iraq

74. Teicher and Teicher, n. 62, pp. 104-5
became an ally of the Soviets and in May 1960 a military aid agreement was concluded between the two countries and later in April 1972, they signed a 15 year treaty of friendship and cooperation.\textsuperscript{76} Moscow also had a working relationship with Tehran. For the USSR, Iran represented a major interest as a neighbouring power that could create strategic problems as well as opportunities for it in Gulf, the Indian Ocean, in South, South West Asia and the Islamic world. Therefore the Carter administration considered that the quick collapse of the Khomeini regime and largescale internal turmoil in Iran could not advance American interests but it would only benefit the USSR.\textsuperscript{77} Until the fall of the Shah, the security of the Gulf had been considered a secondary concern compared with that of the Western Europe and the Far East. The Shah’s Iran, Turkey and Pakistan provided a pro-Western cordon sanitaire between the Soviet Union and the warm waters of the Gulf with Afghanistan as a neutral buffer in the changed strategic situation. The U.S. did not have the military means available to halt Soviet advance to the Gulf. So a reappraisal of the U.S. military position in the region to counter the Soviet threat began immediately after the Iranian revolution.\textsuperscript{78} It triggered a policy dispute among Carter’s advisers about the impact of these two events. The, then Secretary of State Cyrus Vance viewed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a mere attempt to protect Soviet political interests in Afghanistan which was endangered by a spread of Khomeini

\textsuperscript{76} Abdul Quayam, "Regional Conflicts and Super Powers : A Study of Iran - Iraq War" (M.Phil Dissertation, Osmania University, Department of Political Science, Hyderabad, 1990), p. 109.

\textsuperscript{77} Chubin and Tripp, n. 41, pp. 204-5.

fever to other nations along southern border rather than the ultimate Soviet goal to reach the Indian Ocean and the Gulf. He also realised that the global impact might present threats to American interests in the Gulf region. Vance suggested caution, but Carter promoted by long term global considerations, stressed by Secretary of Defence Harold Brown and NSC Adviser Zbignew Brzezinski, announced the Carter Doctrine. In his State of Union address to a joint session of Congress on 23 January 1980, he declared that “Any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the U.S.A. such an assault will be repelled by means necessary, including military force.”

It was intended as a warning to Soviet global pressures and was modeled on the Truman Doctrine enunciated in response to the Soviet threat to Greece. According to Brzezinski, it became necessary because “The collapse of Iran, and the growing vulnerability of Saudi Arabia dictated the need for such a wide strategic response.” But, in fact in September 1980, the US had no forces in the area to mount a conventional military response, the only possible option was nuclear war. Therefore, just before the war when special co-ordination committee met to discuss the intelligence reports of building up of Soviet troops along the Iranian frontier the top policy officials disagreed on their approaches regarding the impact of the Iranian revolution in the region. According to Brzezinski:

80. Khadduri, n. 27, p. 142.
Muski [the then Secretary of State] offered the judgement that the congress would not feel that a nuclear war worth 11 percent of our oil and Brown rather sharply responded by asking what would happen if the Soviets invaded Iran and we did nothing. Did Muski really believe that our losses would be only a percentage of our oil supply? Muski retorted that American people might accept the loss of Europe rather than risk nuclear war. I then joined in by asking Muski if he accepted the proposition that the loss of the Persian Gulf might lead to the loss of Europe and Muski relevantly agreed that might be the case.\(^{83}\)

Even though Muski was correct in asserting that only a small portion of US oil consumption depended on supplies from the Gulf, but for its allies in Western Europe and Japan, Middle East oil was of primary importance. Middle East oil is calculated to represent 58 percent of all the world’s known reserves. A quarter of those Gulf oil lies beneath the territories of Iraq and Iran. Hence any major disruption of oil supply would result in economic slow down in the West. The West had suffered oil shock in 1973 because the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries [OPEC] took over the price setting from the international oil companies. Along with an Arab oil embargo in response to the Arab-Israeli war resulted in the price rise of a barrel of oil from $1.90 to $10.40. It plunged Western economies into economic recession. The second oil shock which began with the disruption of Iranian production due to the Iranian revolution later got exacerbated with Iran-Iraqi war and its threat of a total cut off of Gulf supplies, so that by the autumn of 1980, free market price of a barrel of Gulf crude oil was approaching to $40. Ironically, if it was the Shah’s power and pricing revolution that created the first oil shock, his fall caused the second.\(^{84}\) Even though Iran and Iraq did not account for a very high proportion of OPEC’s export share, they had been playing a very effective role in its decision making. The US feared that for the purpose of prosecuting the war, the waring governments must sell a substantial

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83. ibid, pp. 451-2.
84. Bulloch and Morris, n. 78, p. 4 -5.
quantity of oil at a good price. This necessitated a vigorous participation in OPEC and close dealing with representatives of Arab-States whom Iran viewed as imperialist lackeys. It was because the oil disruption caused by the war was compensated by the increased supply from Saudi Arabia and some other Sheikdoms. It presumed that Iran’s representatives might demand a high production quota and high official prices, even though it sold its oil often in substantial discount.  

For the US foreign policy makers, inability of the U.S. to protect the Gulf from Soviet threat would undermine the entire structure of the post war Western alliance. Any Soviet move into the Gulf might ultimately lead to the lose of Saudi Arabia’s oil reserves, almost twice as great as those of Iran and Iraq combined. Therefore, Secretary of Defence Harold Brown urged “If the industrial democracies are deprived of access to those resources, there would almost certainly be a world wide economic collapse of the kind that hasn’t been seen for almost 50 years, probably worse.” The shutting of oil would create havoc among America’s allies, who could do nothing “in the coming decades that would save them from irreversible catastrophe if it were cut off.” Since the United States was less dependent on oil, he added sarcastically, “We would just face economic disruption international chaos, and looming Soviet Power.” Thus, a major and prolonged reduction of oil exports would be damaging to U.S., and push the world toward economic ruin. The emerging view was that the US should be prepared to act to prevent damage of three sorts, embargoes, disruption of oil production and


export resulting from regional turmoil and military attacks or subversive action against OPEC countries that would seriously interfere with the production and export of oil.88

The American's believed that the threat was real because the CIA had reported, erroneously that the Soviet Union would soon become a net importer of the oil.89 This Soviet threat perception was also reinforced by CIA Director, Admiral Stansfield Turner. According to him, "... the most demanding need for military force in the region would be to oppose a direct thrust by the Soviets into Iran."90 Indeed this contingency under the Carter Doctrine has served as a principal basis for planning of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDF).91 It shows that in the absence of any meaningful US influence over Iran or Iraq the US was deriving its policy towards the war mainly from the Soviet attitudes towards the belligerent powers.92 Therefore to deny opportunity to Soviet Union to interfere in the conflict the Carter administration adopted a policy of neutrality.

Policy of Neutrality

According to Warren Christopher, the then Deputy Secretary of State in the Carter Administration, the main objectives of the US policies in the war:

88. ibid, p. 53.
89. Bulloch and Morris, n. 78, pp. 4-5.
... were to restore peace, to prevent the conflict from spreading and to keep it from endangering the flow of oil; the United States therefore was neutral and would not intervene on either side; it expected the Soviet Union to act with restraint; and the United States would not remain indifferent but would defend its vital interests in the Persian Gulf region, would counteract interference with free transit in the strait of Hormuz and the Gulf, and would respond to requests for assistance from non-belligerent friends in the area who felt threatened by the conflict. Finally, he said, seeking an early end to the war the USA would support the efforts of international institutions to bring about a peaceful settlement.93

Thus the major policy objectives of the U.S. in the conflict could be summed up as follows;

1. To prevent any disruption of Gulf oil shipments which would cause hardships or dislocation of the Western economy.
2. To ensure the conclusions of the Iran-Iraq struggle in a manner - precluding Soviet Union with a dominant position in either country.
3. To check and contain Soviet influence in the whole region, so that it would not emerge as an alternative power in its place.
4. Strengthen U.S. military capability in the region while maintaining a low public profile.
5. And finally to deny a clear victory for either Iran or Iraq in the war.94

The focal point of the US policy was primarily to ensure access by the industrialized world to the vast oil resources of the region. Secondly to prevent the Soviet Union from acquiring political or military control over those resources. Other objectives had been expressed by the Carter and the Reagan administrations from time to time such as preventing any threat to the stability and independence of the Gulf States or containing the threat of Islamic fundamentalism, were derivative concerns.

growing out of the two grand themes of oil and Soviet containment.\textsuperscript{95}

While substantial US interest were involved in the conflict, the administration was virtually powerless to influence the course of the fighting. Hence it adopted a neutral posture, by ruling out direct US military intervention.\textsuperscript{96} Therefore the Department of State categorically stated

The U.S. policy with regard to Iran-Iraq war has been clear and consistent since the out break of the hostilities.... The policy enunciated when Iraqi forces entered Iran remains our policy today. The United States supports the independence and territorial integrity of both Iran and Iraq as well as the other states in the region. In keeping with our policy world wide, we oppose the seizure of territory by force. We see the continuation of the war, as we have repeatedly said as a danger to the peace and security of all nations in the Gulf region and we have therefore consistently supported an immediate ceasefire and negotiated settlement. We have maintained a firm policy not approving the sale or transfer of American military equipment and supplies to either belligerent, and we have welcomed constructive international efforts to bring an end to the war on the basis of each states respect for the territorial integrity of its neighbours and each states freedom from external coercion.\textsuperscript{97}

This policy statement expressed a balanced US concern about Iraqi and Iranian action. While condemning the Iraqi effort to separate the oil producing province of Khuzistan from the rest of Iran, it warned Iran to resist from its effort to export its revolution to Shia population of Iraq. Furthermore, notwithstanding poor US-Iranian relations and the general consensus among the American foreign policy establishment that Iran constituted the greater danger to regional stability, the U.S. declared that it was

\textsuperscript{95} Gary Sick, “The United States and the Persian Gulf”, in Maull and Pick, eds., n. 24, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{96} Azhary, n. 75, p. 609.
strongly opposed to the dismemberment of Iran and an Iranian defeat for strategic reasons. American foreign policy officials believed that Iranian disintegration not only increased the scope for Soviet penetration but also would strengthen Iraq's regional influence. Given America's precarious diplomatic standing towards the belligerents the US wanted to prevent a situation which would give Soviets a chance to interfere in the region. Therefore President Carter urged the USSR to follow a policy of neutrality and non-involvement. 98

On 25 September 1980, the US Secretary of State, Edmund Muski met with his Soviet counterpart Andrei Gromyko and persuaded the Soviets to remain neutral in the conflict. 99 Moscow formally declared neutrality because it had been anxious to ensure that it did not lose its advantage vis-a-vis Washington. It wanted to avoid a situation that would allow the US to improve its ties with the belligerents or its military position in the region. Therefore, the USSR was not keen to take sides with either of the adversaries, or to see an Iranian victory. On the contrary it wanted to ensure that a prolonged stalemate did not strengthen the American presence in the region, or the combatants incentives to lean towards the U.S. by putting an image of restraint and reasonableness, in the region vis-a-vis the U.S. 100

At the same time, Moscow was also disappointed with Baghdad on two counts; first Iraq had violated the spirit of the 1972 Friendship and Co-operation Treaty which implied that Soviet weapons were to be employed only for defence. Second, it had not even shown the courtesy of informing Moscow of its impending action. 101 Therefore Kremlin stopped supplying arms, and spare parts to Baghdad. This was confirmed when Iraqi sources stated that Soviet ships carrying 140 tanks to Basra had returned home

98. Azhary, n. 75, p. 612. Also see King n. 10, p. 52.
100. Chubin and Tripp, n. 41, pp. 204-5.
101. Hiro, n. 60, p. 72.
on Moscow's orders. The Soviet authorities immediately assured Iran that they would remain neutral in the conflict. This allowed Tehran to move troops and equipment from the north to the south. They believed that Iraq had been encouraged by American and its Arab allies to resort to force.

Certain people in the West do not conceal their hopes that the present Iranian-Iraqi conflict will reduce the ability of the Republic of Iran to resist the imperialist pressure which is being exerted on it (to resolve the American hostage crisis), and also hope that the involvement of Iraq in military operations against Iran will enable the West achieve changes in Iraqi policy in the West's favour.102

A week later the Soviet leader Leonid Brzhnev warned that the war might provide Washington with an excuse to move in to Iran militarily and control Gulf oil under the pretext. In order to help Iran preserve its anti-American stand in the face of the combined pressure of war and Western economic boycott, Moscow offered to sell weapons to Tehran. However, the offer was rejected by Tehran because Iran was displeased with Moscow's military intervention in Afghanistan and its commitment to a "Neither East nor West" foreign policy. But the Kremlin gave permission to Syria and Libya to airlift arms and ammunition to Iran. It was because in the Soviet view Iraq had combined its expansionist intent with U.S. interests. This view was similar to the one prevalent in Tehran. It believed that, given the Iraqi weakness in strategic term – possessing only one quarter of Iran's area and about one third of its population – could only have invaded Iran at the behest of the U.S. and its Arab allies.103 This Soviet attitude was determined by the decline in the Soviet - Iraqi relations since the late 1970s. The shift in its policy was also influenced by emergence of pro-Iranian Syria as its main ally among Arab states. However, the Soviets refrained from officially condemning the Iraqi action to preserve the spirit of the Friendship Treaty with Iraq.

102. Quoted in ibid.
103. Ibid, pp. 73-74.
which was still in force. On the other hand Soviet attitudes towards Iran could be inferred from the acts like blocking of sanction against Iran at UN during the hostage crisis, warning the US not to intervene, the refusal to comment on Iranian criticism of the continued occupation of Afghanistan and the encouragement of Tudeh party cooperation with the Islamic regime. But, to Moscow’s chagrin, there was no diminution in Iran’s official hostility to communism, and Soviet policy was implicitly likened to that of its rival super power.

Iran, on its part, sought to make capital out of this Soviet posture of sternness towards Iraq and its flexibility towards Iran. It was even made to appear that the Soviet Union was positively appreciative of the Iranian case because, it was keen to keep its options open vis-a-vis Iran. At the same time Soviets were equally concerned about the consequences of an Iranian success. It feared that a victorious Iran might propagate Islamic fundamentalism which would create problems for Soviets in Afghanistan and Muslim dominated areas within the USSR. Therefore the Soviet emphasis was for bringing the war to a speedy end by calling it a meaningless dispute. Georgy Arbatov, the Soviet strategist, suggested the demilitarization of the entire Gulf area.

The Soviet Union called for the termination of the Iraq-Iran war through negotiations under the auspices of an international conference in which Arab states, the US, USSR and some European powers etc. would participate. This proposal was

104. Rao, n. 93, p. 26. Also see Hiro, n. 60, p. 74.
aimed to reap diplomatic advantages. The fear of the US was that, as in the 1971 war between India and Pakistan the Soviet Union might offer itself as mediator in peace talks between Tehran and Baghdad. Should that happen Moscow might acquire new political influence in the region as a whole. This was what the US sought to prevent. Thus to pre-empt any Soviet move in this direction Edmund Muskie enunciated two key ‘principles’ in a proposal to end the Gulf war. According to Muski,

We believe this conflict can and must be resolved through respect for international law that territory must not be seized by force of arms, that disputes should be resolved by practical means. And let us also affirm another principle that will be essential to a peaceful resolution of this conflict. It is the principle that neither side should seek to interfere in the affairs of the other.\textsuperscript{108}

This policy statement shows the absence of any meaningful US influence over the conflict situation and the Carter administration’s concern over the Soviet moves and motives. It compelled the US to abandon its policy of strict neutrality in favour of Iran. In expressing this concern, Carter stated that the Iraqi forces had exceeded the war goal which was to take control of the Shatt al- Arab water way. He also warned Iraq to withdraw from the Iranian territory because it considered the disintegration of territorial unity of Iran against the US interest. Later the American Secretary of State said that the Iraqi invasion of Iran was threatening the Gulf stability and that territory must not be seized by force.\textsuperscript{109}

Pro-Iranian Compulsions

The Carter administration was anxious of the possibility of a definitive Iraqi victory in 1980. If it happened it feared that it might lead to the dismemberment of


the Iran which would provide opportunities for Soviet aggression as well as for Iran’s Tudeh party to come to power. The U.S. and her regional allies also did not relish the thought of Iraq becoming the dominant military power in the Gulf. The US had virtually no political ability to influence the conflict other than support the UN initiative to end the war and encourage an arms embargo. Victorious Iran would pose a direct military threat to Kuwait and to other Gulf states which backed Iraq. It would also provide Iran with opportunities to spread its revolution and set an example to fundamentalists in other Islamic countries to emulate. However, Iranian victory seemed to be only a distant possibility. Therefore Carter’s advisers like Zbigniew Brzezinski argued that since Iraq was receiving spare parts for her Soviet made equipment, the U.S. should correct the imbalance by supplying the much needed spare parts to Iran to prevent its collapse. They believed the Khomeini regime to be anti-Soviet as well as anti-American. Brzezinski who advocated a military coup to keep the Ayatollahs from coming to power mooted a change in the US policy. He insisted that the U.S. should no longer isolate Iran. According to him, “We need a good strategic relationship with Iran in the long run if we are to have not only stability in the Persian Gulf but access to Central Asia, the countries further north, where there are enormous deposits of energy which will be important in the next two decades.”

Subsequently, the Carter administration suspended the shipment of six gas turbine engines that Iraq had ordered earlier. In mid October in an election speech President Carter even appeared to side with Iran when he described Iraqis as “intruders and their action as aggressive”. Iraq on its part spoke of the existence of an axis between Washington, Israel and Tehran “against Iraq and the entire Arab nation.” Consequently

110. U.S. Senate Staff Report on “War in the Gulf” n. 94, p. 9.
111. Azhary, n. 75, p. 612.
113. Rao, n. 93, p. 25.
the US restrained France from transferring Etendard missiles and aircraft to Iraq. It feared that the use of such crucial weapons might deal severe blow to Iranian oil installations and as a result Iran might spread the war into other areas. This concern also prompted US to limit further Iraqi damage to Iran.114 Another calculation which prompted the Carter administration to take a pro-Iranian stand was the U.S. intelligence report which predicted that Iran as running out of spare parts for its dominantly American arsenals would be desperate to secure them from Pentagon, a situation tailor made for a swap - American spares for hostages.115 Also Carter who was keen to win a second term in presidency learned that a pre-election hostage release would ensure his victory. According to Carter. “If the hostage are released safely we would make delivery of those items which Iran owns—which they have bought and paid for”. The President was referring of an estimated $240 million worth of military equipment already purchased but not received by Iran, and which had been frozen with Iran’s other assets when the hostages were seized. His rationale for arms delivery was that after this the U.S. would maintain its neutrality by refraining from selling ‘additional’ military equipment to Iran.116 But Carter’s hopes dashed when the Reagan’s campaign office secretly struck a deal with the Iranian emmissaries in Washington to withhold the hostage release until the completion of the Presidential election and if elected the Reagan administration would supply Iran with US made weapons and spares.117

Thus contrary to President Carter’s expectations, Iran did not turn to him immediately for spares and ammunition. As a result, the final agreement on hostage release did not even include a specific mention of military spare parts. At this point

114. ibid, p. 27.
117. Hiro, no. 60, p. 78.
the Gulf war had reached a stalemate and Iran appeared to be in less danger than at an earlier stage. In fact spare parts were not a problem for the Iranian army for quite some time after the revolution. It was because of Carter's own Policies towards Iranian provisional government.

The administration promoted ties with the moderate government of Mehdi Bazargan and the armed forces by conducting secret negotiations for the delivery of most of the $5 billion worth of military supplies ordered by the Shah. American military advisers travelled secretly to Iran in the summer of 1979 and test fired two HAWK anti-aircraft missiles for the Iranian air force and offered to repair Iran's Hawk defensive system. It also authorised major U.S. arms manufacturers to continue sales of military equipment to Iran covertly. This in turn encouraged private arms dealers to continue supply to Iran. Even though Carter ordered a blanket freeze on all official cooperation and arms deals after the hostage taking, it had little effect on the world's arms merchants. In the week after Carter announced the boycott, some 300 US and West European companies contacted Tehran with offers to sell munitions and other banned items. For two years a U.S. firm shipped cartons marked 'Tractor Engines' from Boston to Iran. They were actually the replacements for the engines used in the US-built M60 tanks. Many of the sales by the U.S. companies attracted little attention because the equipment was of a type that also had civilian uses and thus could be sold legally under some interpretations of the vague U.S. trade rules. Such equipment included radar, navigational equipment and radio parts.118

In addition to it Iranians developed an easy access to the arms depots of Israel, Vietnam and South and North Koreas who were possessing huge stocks of American spare parts and weapons. Israel violated U.S. arms boycott and followed a strategic

policy of befriending non-Arab Iran by supplying arms to her.\textsuperscript{119}

Israel regarded Iraq as a staunch enemy to be defeated. Therefore it destroyed Iraqi nuclear reactor near Baghdad in June 1981.\textsuperscript{120} Furthermore Israel attempted to keep the hostilities going on by supplying spares to Iran through arms dealers. According to Brzezinski when the Carter administration clandestinely offered to supply spareparts to Iran in return for the hostages freedom, “We learned, much to our dismay that the Israelis had been secretly supplying American spareparts to the Iranians, without much concern for the negative impact this was having on our leverage with the Iranians on the hostage issue.”\textsuperscript{121} Edmund Muski Secretary of State complained to Israel about the arms sales, but the government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin responded that it had sold Iran only $ 300,000 worth of spare tyres for the F-4 fighter planes. But according to U.S. intelligence sources, Israel was also selling tank parts and ammunition to Iran. In 1981 after the release of the hostage, Israel resumed its military sales to Iran without Washington’s approval. The Washington based monthly “Defence and Foreign Affair’s” reported that Israeli technicians were present at Iranian air bases. Israel was backing Iran, especially with spares and parts for McN Donnel Douglus F 4 fighter and with maintenance and cannibalisation of Gorunman’s F-14 air superiority fighter and its Hughes Phonix missile system. It would appear that it was mainly because of Israeli technicians help that Iran could conduct regular combat air patrol with F-14s and fire Phoenix missiles at Iraqi MIGs. In August 1982, Israel reached an agreement with Iran to sell the various arms captured from the PLO in Lebanon. The sales apparently were mostly routed through Furoukh Azzizi and Iranian arms merchant who lived in Athens. In November 1982, Azzizi was reported to have purchased US made TOW missiles from Israel. The

\textsuperscript{119} Hiro, n. 60, p 83.
\textsuperscript{120} ibid, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{121} Brzezinski, n. 82, p. 504.
shipment went to Armsterdam before reaching Tehran.

Iran’s other major supplier of munition, hardware and spares was North Korea. The Koreans had supplied Iran with 150 T. 62 tanks, 400 guns, 1000 mortars, 600 anti-aircraft guns, 1,200 smaller weapons and ammunition of Soviet, Chinese indigenous origin. There was also an accord between the North Koreans and Iran over military personnel assistance. There were 300 Korean instructors in Iran to train the Iranian forces. The North Koreans were reported to have been the source of about 40 percent of Iran’s arms purchases worth about $2 billion in 1982. Besides that, Korea also sold goods worth $1.2 billion in exchange for oil. Iran also acquired from North Korea Chinese built Soviet milcayan fighter aircraft. In addition to this East Germany was training pilots for MIG-19 and China was directly delivering the aircrafts. The Soviet Union had been aiding Iran by supplying Soviet built surface to air missile through its allies Syria and Lybia. US intelligence reports stated that South Koreans also provided spareparts for Iranian F-45. It also indicated that an Iranian company operating under agreement with the U.S. State Department and Fort Worth - based Bell helicopter Textran Inc., supplied Chinok helicopters in violation of U.S. licensing rules. Vietnam, which had huge stocks of left over American spareparts and weapons, too helped Iran with necessary supplies.122

This easy availability of arms and ammunitions from the international arms market through the various countries made the American offer for spares least attractive to Iran. Thus the US overtures to Iran to develop a new relationship through arms deals failed. Iranians firmly believed that the Iraqi attack was inspired and orchestrated by the U.S. In support of this argument, Iranians pointed to the low key US reaction to the attack and its obvious interest to restore damaged power balance in the region. This view was held by all factions of the Iranian revolutionaries; anyone

doubting it run the risk of being considered to be part of the conspiracy. This Iranian conviction about the US role in invasion was deeply rooted in a consequence of a century of Iranian encounters with imperialism especially with US involvement in the 1953 coup.123 Thus all the attempts to befriend Iran failed and Carter left the White House, as a symbol of powerless presidency.

REAGAN AND IRAN: NEW ADMINISTRATION AND OLD POLICY

The Reagan administration followed the policies of the preceding Carter administration without any rethinking and reassessment. He stated "The United States Government has remained from the beginning, and will remain, neutral in the war between Iran and Iraq."124 When Reagan came into office, he did not have any special policy or views towards the developments in Iran. By that time the hostage crisis had come to an end. The next focus of Iranian - American relations was a complex and tedious process of negotiating a resolution for the claims of individual Americans against the government of Iran to which neither government appeared particularly interested. At the same time Iran's relations with the Soviet Union were hardly close because of Iranian antagonism toward the Soviet occupation of Afghan and Afghan refugees, numbering a million in Iran. Eventhough, trade between the two countries was improving, the Soviet efforts to ingratiate themselves with Iran were not successful. The Tudeh party was tolerated, but most government officials viewed it with profound suspicion. There was in short little cause for concern in Washington regarding Soviet inroads in Iran. However, Soviet penetration of the Iranian regime by Soviet controlled agents was suspected. Above all with regard to the region the stalemate in the Iran - Iraq war reduced Iranian threats very substantially. Halting and then reversing the momentum of Iraqi forces was an all consuming task for the Iranian military.

123. Chubin and Tripp. n. 41. p. 206. Also see Cottam, n. 56 pp. 203, 224-5.
Eventhough Iran’s potential for influencing internal political developments within the Arab states was substantial, and the socio-political factors that produced receptivity for Khomeini’s appeal were also present, Iran lacked an institutional base and strategy to spread its version of Islamic revolution. The foreign ministry had been decimated and the recruitment and training of professional replacements was a time taking affair. Revolutionary institutions such as the Revolutionary Guards or the office of Islamic Guidance had not yet developed the capability for carrying out this function. Therefore, the efforts that were made to exploit opportunities in the area tended to be adhoc and focused only on particular individuals who recognised the potential. Thus in the eyes of the Reagan administration, the threat of Iranian Islamic movement to the US interests and also to Arab regimes was moderate. 125

Secretary of the State Alexander Haig stated that the administration’s approach to Iran was “... not going to be dominated by a spirit of revenge and our [US’] basic objective is a friendly, moderate, pro-Western Iran. It’s that long-term strategic objective that we must always keep in mind as we deal with the vicissitudes or inadequacies of the day to day performance of the regime there.” 126 Thus the Reagan administration was sending signals of accommodation towards Iran. It became more emphatic when he rejected the proposal for developing a plan for reversing the situation in Iran in response to the pleas from Iranian exciles who believed that the only way for removing Khomeini was an American sponsored and directed effort. 127

In fact the Reagan administration was facing paradoxical situation in the Iran-Iraq war. Like an Iraqi victory the defeat or disintegration of Iran would bring unpredictable

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consequences, including the possible Soviet intervention or closing of Strait of Hormuz. It would deny its access to the Gulf oil, and thus precipitate a greater crisis. A victorious Iran could also pose such a threat and undermine stability of the US friendly Arab regimes in the Gulf region. This paradoxical assessment led the US to try with the idea of direct intervention to contain the victory of both the belligerents and also befriending Iran. Henry Kissinger in 1982 had highlighted the reason behind such a policy approach. According to him,

The focus of Iranian pressure at this moment is Iraq. There were few governments in the world less deserving of our support and less capable of using it. Had Iraq won the war the fear in the Gulf and the threat to our interests would be scarcely less than it is today, still, given the importance of balance of power in the area, though not at a cost that will preclude an eventual rapprochment with Iran either if a moderate regime replaces Iranian or if the present rulers wake up to geopolitical reality that the historical threat Iran’s independence has always came from the country with which it shares a border of 1,5000 miles, the Soviet Union. A rapprochment with Iran, of course must await at a minimum Iran’s abandonment of hegemonic aspiration in the Gulf.\(^{128}\)

Therefore he argued that Iran should be befriended if possible or must be contained to protect the US interests. So that Reagan administration did not consider any change in the basic policy direction set forth by the Carter Doctrine but only emphasised the need to balance change with consistency.\(^{129}\) The basic policy of the Reagan administration too was first to preserve access to oil supplies and second to prevent Soviet expansion there. Although American dependence on oil imports from the Gulf had declined markedly in the past few years, Western Europe, Japan and Korea remained dependent on Gulf oil. Besides only 60 percent of all the world oil reserves

\(^{128}\) Quoted in Bulloch and Harvey Morris, n. 78, p. 143.

contained in the Middle East, with approximately 25 percent of global total in Saudi Arabia alone. Despite the oil glut and the travails of OPEC the world's reliance upon the Gulf oil was expected to continue for decades to come. But, even if the Gulf had no oil, the US as a superpower ought to prevent Soviet acquisition of such geo-politically important asset. The Gulf could serve as a key ‘land-bridge’ between the Soviet Union, the Middle East, South Asia and East Africa, as well as a window to the Indian Ocean. Adding to this the US believed that Soviet regional goals included denial of Gulf oil to the West or the control of Gulf's oil for Soviet consumption. Therefore, any instability of its being vulnerable to the Soviet Union would have had marked impact on the U.S. interests.

Thus, facing a continuing window of vulnerability with the Soviet Union, a Camp David peace process that was losing momentum and a US credibility problem in the Gulf that had worsened since the abortive attempt to rescue the American hostages the Reagan administration moved to rebuild its credibility by identifying the Soviet Union as the greatest threat by projecting a strong commitment to friendly governments and taking the hard line on terrorism. Hence the thrust of new US policy became known as “Strategic Consensus.” According to the Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, the chief architect of the policy, “In South Asia, the United States is seeking a strategic consensus among our friends directed towards the common Soviet threat. We are attempting to convince them that we are reliable and capable security partner, serious about defending our vital interests in the region in partnership with them.”


The emphasis on the Soviet Union as the “common threat” was directed at the strengthening of the security partnership throughout the Middle East, from Israel and Egypt to the Gulf states. It was assumed that stronger partnership would enable the U.S. to increase its military presence throughout the region. The aim of the policy was to deter Soviet aggression and possibly adventurous acts by Soviet clients through bolstering friendly governments and strengthening their resolve to deal with external opposition, internal subversion and revolution. In Haig’s view ultimate regional security could be maintained through a system of security agreements between the U.S. and the major states of the region (Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia). Such an “arc of strategic consensus” was based on the premise that intimate connections existed between the Middle East, Persian Gulf region and adjacent areas and that, instability in an area would adversely affect the other areas in the region. He identified elements in U.S. strategy in the Gulf region as the following.

a) Improving US military position in and near the region.
b) Strengthening the defense capabilities of US allies.
c) Restoring confidence in the United States as a reliable partner.
d) Pursuing a permanent peace in the region.  

In fact in this direction major policy initiatives were taken by the Carter administration in the fall of 1980 by responding to Saudi request for US military assistance against possible Iranian attack. Subsequently the administration sold four AWACS reconnaissance planes with their ground support systems to Saudi Arabia. By introducing new offensive military systems US demonstrated not only its concern for the security of Saudi Arabia but also it was a clear warning to Iran against meddling in the security affairs of the conservative Arab States.  


In addition, the Carter administration embarked on a cooperative military effort with its western allies to increase their collective naval presence in the Arabian sea and the Indian Ocean. In less than three weeks, the number of allied warships was increased from thirty to sixty including ships from France, Britain and Australia, as well as from the U.S. This action was taken in the belief that, following the dispatch of the AWACS to Saudi Arabia, action on multinational basis was likely to be more politically acceptable to the Gulf states than unilateral American action. At the same time, the U.S. hurriedly launched an effort to strengthen its quick-reaction Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) still in the early stages of its development. According to NSC Adviser Brzezinski, the collapse of Iran, and the growing vulnerability of Saudi Arabia dictated the need for such a wide strategic response. He argued that American security in the broad sense of the term had become inter-dependent in the security of other regions, in particular Western Europe, the Far East, the Middle East, and the Gulf region. It was for this reason that, a regional security framework without a formal alliance became necessary as a means to provide the much needed military support against pressures and possible intervention. He proposed that naval and air base facilities should be extended by some of the Gulf countries to establish an American military presence in the region. Brzezinski’s security framework concept aimed to convert the extended regional facilities eventually as military bases under the American control. He argued that with the collapse of the Shah a wider response by the U.S. became necessary. After the outbreak of the war Carter and Brown supported Brezinski’s idea of cooperative security as an alternative to the American military presence. While Saudi Arabia welcomed the idea of “cooperative security”, it opposed any form of American base on Saudi soil. Apart from Oman no Arab Gulf country was prepared to allow American military forces to be stationed on its territory in peace times,

134. M.S. Azhary, n. 75., p. 610.
135. Brzezinski, n. 82, p. 106.
because the question of the presence of foreign forces on Arab territory was a sensitive issue in Arab domestic politics. Thus by responding to Saudi demands for arms delivery in accordance with the proposed cooperative security arrangement the Carter administration extended the U.S. commitment to internal regional conflicts to ensure a continued flow of oil. It proves beyond doubt that when Regan's Secretary of State adopted a strategic consensus to meet the challenges in the Gulf, it was virtually adopting the Carter policies which regarded the effort to counter the Soviet and regional threats as mutually reinforcing.

The fundamental tenet of the Reagan administrations Middle East policy was that the Gulf countries perceived the Soviet threat as their principal security problem and would therefore cooperate with the US in building a "strategic consensus" to counter it. It shows the Reagan administrations misunderstanding about the political reality in the Gulf. The Arab regimes were much less concerned about the Soviet threat because it had never invaded or occupied Arab land, than they were about Israel, which all Arabs perceived as an invader and oppressor of their Arab brethren in Palestine. In fact, most regimes in the Gulf area believed strongly that their interests could be served by avoiding entanglement in the US-USSR conflict, and they had no desire to become a theater for East-West rivalry. Following the more limited Carter administration initiatives, the Reagan team pushed hard for a more active U.S. military involvement with moderate Arab countries. It stationed diplomats who best knew the area, doubled the policy political appointees in the White House, the Pentagon, and upper levels of the State Department to vigorously pursue its implementation. But these effort had limited success. Moderate Arabs viewed the U.S. as strongly biased with regard to their

137. Azhary, n. 75, p. 610.
number one security concern, Israel, and they were therefore unwilling to cooperate whole heartedly in dealing with Washington’s number one security concern, the USSR. Moderate Arab regimes also had concerns over the effect on their domestic political standing over military cooperation with Israel’s prime supporter. This was a potent consideration in the region because many regimes had been toppled by internal subversion than by external aggression. Finally the Gulf states feared that more overt cooperation with the U.S. would result in an enhanced Soviet military presence in the region with increased risk of big power conflict. Thus after struggling with little success for over three years with obstinate political facts, the Reagan administration policy makers, while not conceding the weakness of their basic assumption had scrapped strategic consensus. ¹³⁹ In the absence of marked enthusiasm of the Gulf states for direct military presence, administration policy makers started to strengthen the RDF to contain the Soviet and Iranian expansion in the region.

NEW US MILITARY ACTIVISM: CENTCOM AND IRAN

Although Carter administration’s strategy for Gulf security was criticized by Reagan’s policy makers in 1981 they endorsed the same policies after assuming power in the White House.¹⁴⁰ Indeed the Reagan administration contemplated an even more ambitious military plan for Gulf security by extending the RDF. It regarded the absence of an American military presence as a tactic invitation to Soviet intervention. The new activist phase of America’s Gulf policy was the logical extension of the policy defined by President Carter in the wake of three fold crisis in South West Asia, such as OPEC


¹⁴⁰. See, for statements about American Policy towards the Gulf, U.S. Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings before the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Joint Economic Committee, 97th Cong. 2nd Session, 10 May 1982 (Washington D.C., 1983) cited in Majid Khadduri, n. 27, p. 144.
-induced oil price spirals that prompted concern over the continued availability of oil to the West at reasonable prices, Iranian revolution, the seizure of U.S. embassy and invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. The declared purpose of the multi service Joint Task Force of infantry, marine, naval called Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) was to deter, and if necessary defeat further Soviet aggression in the region especially against oil-producing states. The RDJTF was a designed military instrument of the Carter Doctrine.141

This shift had several objectives, one of them was display of toughness to the Soviet Union. Second goal was to back up flattening public opinion polls at home. More directly, it signalled an emerging resolve on the part of the U.S. to forsake surrogates to carry out American interests and to “go it alone”. Adoption of such a policy depended on the development of the appropriate military forces for direct American action if intervention be required. It resulted in the birth of the RDF and its

141. Jeffrey Record, “The U.S. Central Command Toward What Purpose”, Strategic Review (Washington D.C.) vol. xiv, no. 2 (Spring 1986), pp. 44-45. On October 22, 1979, reacting to the cumulative impact of several of these destabilizing crisis, the Secretary of Defense directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to establish Joint Task Force which would have operational planning, training, and exercise responsibility for rapid deployment forces with initial focus on South West Asia. Subsequently on 1 November 1979, the JCS established the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) as a separate subordinate element of U.S Readiness Command at Mac Dill AFB, Florida. The new command received a reservoir of forces which had been identified as capable of rapid deployment. For the Marine Corps, these forces could be drawn from any of the three active Marine Amphibious Forces (MAF) of which rapidly deployable. The army, identified, the xviii Airborne Corps and the 24th infantry Division (mechanised). The navy identified carrier battle groups and associated supporting forces, while the Air Force contributed a number of tactical fighter wings. By March 1, 1980, the RDJTF head quarters had been established and was fully operational. See Maxwell Orme Johnson, “Rapid Deployment and the Regional Military Challenge: The Persian Gulf Equation”, in W.M.J. Olson ed., U.S Strategic Interests in the Gulf Region (Boulder, 1987), pp. 136-7.
eventual evolution into the U.S. Central Command.\footnote{142} Thus, the Reagan administration not only continued the broad outlines of the Carter policy but also enhanced RDF capabilities even as a heavy program of arms sales and military cooperation with Saudi Arabia. While Carter had embraced a symmetrical approach to the containment by limiting U.S. response to Soviet invasion of the Gulf, the Reagan administration altered the emphasis in favour of an asymmetrical approach to contain both Soviet and Iran.\footnote{143}

Reagan administration took the threat emanating from USSR and Iran rather more seriously. To contain it the administration revised its conception of a quick strike force and created a permanent military command known as the U.S. Central Command for West Asia (CENTCOM). The RDF was brought under its control.\footnote{144} According to General Maxwell Taylor, former chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff such forces were necessary to deal with threats in the next decade, "... arising from continued Soviet malevolence supported by growing military power, the dependence of the US and allies on Middle East oil and the turbulence of the developing world, where most of the overseas sources of imported raw materials found .... Some political groups may want the Soviet Union’s support while struggling to gain control of their government."\footnote{145} It was clear that RDF was seen as an instrument to contain the regional political unrest or conflict in Iran, which give chance for Soviet infiltration.

The CENTCOM was based at Mac Dill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, with

\begin{footnotes}
143. ibid, p. 477.
\end{footnotes}
earmarked forces totalling some 230,000 military personnel from the four services (see table 9 in appendix). Its basic mission from the very beginning was to assure continued access to Persian Gulf oil and to prevent the Soviets from acquiring political, military control directly or through proxies.\(^1\) It was assigned the responsibility of protecting US interests in 19 countries from Morocco to Pakistan, through the entire Middle East and Persian Gulf region except Israel and Lebanon, which were placed under EUROCOM, the US military command in Europe. The Reagan administration had placed much higher emphasis and reliance on the CENTCOM as a fundamental pillar of the US strategy in the Persian Gulf which was the cockpit of global crisis in the 1980s. The administration intended to increase its personnel strength up to 4,00,000 troops under the command of a wide range of naval, air force, ground and marine entities, augmented with expanding base facilities in the region, the principal being at Diego Garcia. The area which fell under the CENTCOM operation, was now consolidated under a single operational command with a single chain of command. Military to military relationships were established with many of the countries in the region, and coordination and some pre-positioning of material proceeded discretely.\(^2\)

USCENTCOM headquarters was authorised with 900 officers and men. While the basic force list had not been changed significantly, there had been a perceptible shift in the emphasis to allow for logistical realities to become a major factor in strategic planning of South West Asia. Operational plans had been continually refined to better reflect the US capabilities to intervene in either an intra-regional conflict or in a conflict with the Soviets. This was done by formulating appropriate military

\(^1\) Johnson, n. 141, p. 135-6.
contingency plans, conducting combined exercises, administering security assistance training programme, encouraging regional cooperation, and providing political support. Inspite of the US efforts, if a friendly country was threatened by either the Soviet Union or a regional power USCENTCOM was prepared to provide a carefully tailored package of non combatant forces consisting of AWACs, tankers, reconnaissance aircraft, logistical support and advisors, or any combination thereof and was also prepared to deploy combat forces when directed by the National Command Authority.148

Thus, the Reagan administration accepted imperatives of the Carter Doctrine and regarded the security of the South West Asia/Persian Gulf region as vital to US interest which means in military terms a willingness to resort to armed forces if that extreme should be necessary to protect the region. The objective was not only to deter any possible Soviet aggression and reassure regional allies that it would stand beside them but also to prevent internal subversion, or threats from Iran. This recognition had produced greater efforts to devise plans for dealing with more purely local contingencies. In addition there had been continuing efforts to provide military assistance to meet local problems. Support to Saudi Arabia by supplying stinger anti-aircraft missiles and AWACS were an example. The Reagan administration had also invested significant effort in strengthening US diplomatic ties in the region, particularly with Iraq, as a means of dealing with local problems and of enhancing the base for US presence in the region. To implement these efforts the administration had devoted considerable energy to improve the overall readiness of US forces and to enhance strategic lift capabilities that were essential to the projection of US power. Between 1982 and 1985, spending on USCENTCOM went from $871 million to 978 million not including considerable investment in air and sea lift or improvement of strategic

148. ibid, pp. 139-40.
reserves and combat supplies. 149

A major problem that continued to plague US force planning for Southwest Asian contingencies stemmed from the Carter’s decision carried over by the Reagan administration was to rely mainly upon the existing US forces. It imposed upon already overtaxed US military establishment, inordinate new obligations in one of the most operationally demanding and logistically remote regions in the world. No additional US military forces had been created, instead the focus had been placed on a major expansion of sea lift, air lift, maritime prepositioning capabilities, and the strategic mobility of the forces to ensure their timely arrival in Gulf in the event of a conflict. Thus for the most part CENTCOM depended upon a reservoir of existing military forces, most of which were also allocated to other demanding contingencies, such as the reinforcement of Europe and the defense of Korea. Therefore there was strategic shortcomings and risks inherent in CENTCOM’s reliance on forces that were simultaneously allocated to contingencies elsewhere. The risks would be much higher if there were much feared Soviet invasion of Iran, for which CENTCOM remained the ‘worst case’ scenario. In such a case there was the two principal operational obstacles to the effective application of U.S. military power; lack of sufficient strategic mobility and the absence of politically secure military access ashore in peacetime. Even though strategic mobility enhancement programs undertaken by the Carter and the Reagan administration’s had generated significant increase in U.S. airlift, sealift and maritime pre-positioning capabilities, it fell short of required capability. For contingencies requiring rapid deployment of major forces in Southwest Asia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have specified a minimum airlift requirement of 98 millions ton miles per day (MTM/D) but Reagan administration’s target was to further the mobility enhancement to a level of 66 MTM/D by early 1990s. 150

Notwithstanding appeals from the US, the friendly governments in the region was


150. Jeffrey Record, n. 141, pp. 45-46.
reluctant to station a permanent US force presence on their territory. Although some countries including Egypt, Oman, Somalia and Kenya had hosted occasional U.S. military exercises and agreed to provide US forces access to selected facilities in the event of crisis or war, none of them were prepared to risk tainting its political image by accepting the trappings of a military client or "lackey" of the US. It was so especially after the Shah's experience in Iran which played directly into the hands of Iranian Islamic extremist who finally brought him down by charging him as American puppet. At the same time the deployment of US forces ashore would invite a number of risks, including that of terrorist attacks. For example the terrorists attacks on the US marines in Beirut in October 1983. Conservative Arab regimes took note of the abortive US military venture in Lebanon as a clear indication of its military unreliability and lack of consistency or political purpose.\textsuperscript{151}

From the very beginning of the RDJTF the Carter and the Reagan administrations recognised that they would be able to deter or contain a Soviet thrust southward, but in fact it was incapable to deal with the political turmoil and instability in the Gulf region. The real problem for the U.S. interests in the region had always been more political than military.\textsuperscript{152}

The Iran-Iraq war had provided a vivid example of the potential scope of regional violence. Both the countries had used some of the world's most sophisticated weapons, and their full potential. They had also deployed forces far larger than any of their neighbours around the Gulf could. Situations defending the oil rich peninsular sheikhdoms had appeared to be no easy task for US. Nor did CENTCOM appeared to be a particularly useful instrument of deterrence or defense with respect to interstate conflict indigenous to the region that could threaten U.S. security interests. On the contrary, CENTCOM seemed more or less irrelevant to the ongoing war between Iraq

\textsuperscript{151} ibid, pp. 46-47.
\textsuperscript{152} Sick, n. 133, p 131.
and Iran, which began in the same year that the RDJTF was created. It was because the danger of major stoppage of oil exports lied within and among the states, rather than arising from the Soviet Union. The problems experienced by the Arab monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia in coping with the oil riches and modernization were not easily solved. Abiding solutions to these political problems have to be found by its citizens. Foreign government’s interventions can seldom help. Intervention would make a bad situation worse. Moreover, a certain amount of fighting is a necessary prerequisite to a stable outcome. This would leave both sides discontented yet satisfied and would help to recognise that more fighting would be useless. The formidable problem for RDF was that it could not establish political order in foreign lands by using troops, other than taking and holding territory. Even if military intervention succeeded in ensuring oil supplies for a short term, such an action could incur long term loss for the US than its short term gains. Therefore, instead of exerting continuous pressure on friendly Arab regimes to permit a greater and more visible military presence on their territory, Washington started to promote the regional cooperation among Gulf states to develop indigenous military and paramilitary alliances which would help the US to limit its military presence to a minimum required level. Thus it encouraged the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

**US AND GCC:**

**CONTAINMENT THROUGH REGIONAL COOPERATION**

The foundation of the GCC in February 1981 with the membership from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qutar, Oman and UAE reflected a long-standing wish on the part of the

member states to institutionalise the trend of inter-state co-operation that had began to develop in late 1970s. Although the stated aim of the GCC was to integrate the political, economic, social and security concerns of its member states under the contingencies arising from the Gulf war it became pre-dominantly a security arrangement to integrate its members defence system according to U.S. specifications. The US foreign policy establishment believed that the growth in defence capabilities of the GCC states would provide a ready made infrastructure for the CENTCOM in times of need. In fact it was the Iran-Iraq war which prompted the American administrations to encourage the conservative Arab states of the Persian Gulf to establish a regional defence system with military backing from the U.S. However, the apparent exclusion of defence related goals from the text of the charter was aimed as a symbolic expression of their non-alignment with super-powers, especially the U.S. The defence issue, however, posed a number of problems, both internal and external. Quite apart from their obvious inability to influence the chief source of the current regional unrest, they were also faced with the need to reconcile Western and Gulf approaches to Gulf security. On the one hand, a close economic relationship with the U.S. together with established patterns of weapons procurement, infrastructure provision and man power training, were welcomed. On the other, too visible American presence and relationship were not wanted. It was due to the strong anti-American feelings run in the Gulf, for their support to Israel, its interests were widely regarded as hegemonial. Therefore, when the war broke out, the prevailing attitude towards the US and the Carter Doctrine was one of deep ambivalence. At the same time there was no Gulf state which was capable to provide sufficient military

protection to the Gulf region. Thus in order to avoid too much dependence on American assurance and to a credible claim that Gulf security was their own responsibility, the Gulf states developed a joint defence strategy. As a result in January 1982, they decided to establish a collective security system incorporating a joint command and an integrated air defence. However, there was a disagreement over the degree of cooperation that was necessary with the US, Kuwait and Oman positioned themselves at opposite ends of the spectrum. The former had repeatedly come out in favour of a non-aligned approach whereas the latter had been a more persistent advocate of closer cooperation with the US. Oman granted the CENTCOM qualified access to its facilities on a continuing basis.\textsuperscript{157} However the GCC forces were not capable to mount a credible deterrent against external threats because the GCC states lacked the necessary man power and infrastructure (see table 10 in appendix). In view of these shortcomings, Western assistance was regarded as both desirable and necessary in the event of most kinds of external emergency. In such circumstances the US alone had the potential capacity for large scale land, air or sea intervention to cope with externally directed aggression.\textsuperscript{158}

Moreover the paucity of trained local personnel in the GCC states created a situation in which a long term US military assistance and presence became an unavoidable factor. As a Pentagon document on the Saudi AWACS illustrated, the very nature of the early warning planes was so complex that the US contract personnel would be required to maintain key elements of the system for its entire life. The withdrawal of U.S. support for Saudi AWACS would quickly result in the system

\textsuperscript{157} King, n. 8., pp. 35-36.

becoming non-operational.\textsuperscript{159}

The GCC states had also taken giant steps towards modernization and improvement of their establishment. There were serious limitations on the defense capabilities of these states, and even with all their combined forces, they would be no match for a determined assault from either Iraq or Iran. Nevertheless, the enhancement of internal security capabilities proceeded apace and the lion’s share of the militarization effort had gone into air defense capabilities. The efforts resulted in the formation of Rapid Deployment Force of its own which could respond to crises within the boundaries of the GCC. It was aimed at coordinated air defense network based on American supplied AWACS. Saudi Arabia in particular had over stocked equipment supplies and physical assets of “military facilities” leading to the assumption that these would be available for U.S. military use if and when Riyadh should request it. In this way the Saudi’s thought they could minimize the disruptive effects of a foreign military presence while permitting some advantages of a quick U.S. reaction to a sudden threat. While Saudi Arabia’s efforts in this regard were the most extensive, Kuwait, the UAE, and Oman also had placed heavy emphasis on the expansion of air, land, sea forces, purchase of extensive sophisticated arsenals, the recruitment and training of military personnel. The GCC military capabilities could counter threats deriving from matters of internal security as well as some of the regional challenges to it. But the survival of these states against serious opponents like Iran or Iraq in a hostile environment was severely restricted.\textsuperscript{160} Therefore the GCC states did not wish the US to distance itself completely from the region. The Gulf states were also greatly dependent on western technology and the health of their economies for their own wellbeing. The ruler’s predisposition to look to the US, for assistance in an emergency also made the council essentially a pro-US body. From the US perspective

\textsuperscript{159} Entessar, n. 156, p. 1439.
\textsuperscript{160} Peterson, n. 142, p. 487.
this order was valuable to ensure unimpeded access to oil, oil reserves and markets for which the continued existence of the regimes then in power was paramount.\textsuperscript{161}

Hence, consensus grew around the idea of coordinating the defence plans of the members and letting Oman, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to strengthen their individual military and intelligence link with the U.S. In February 1982 the U.S. Defence Secretary obtained Riyadh’s agreement to form a Joint Saudi-American Military Committee, something the Saudi had refused to do in the past. The Iranian threat brought about the change. In this background the Pentagon issued a secret directive in March, which stated that “whatever the circumstances, we should be prepared to introduce American forces into the region should it appear [that our] security of access to the Persian Gulf oil is threatened.” It showed that with or without the regional backing Washington was determined to prevent the Tehran’s professed aim of destroying its influence in the region.\textsuperscript{162}

For the Arab states of the region the fears and opportunities created by the war for their own national interests had determined their attitudes, rather than the appeal of any of the larger ideological claims made by the two belligerents. Once the possibility of an Iraqi victory faded, it was the spectre of an Iraqi defeat at the hands of a revolutionary Iran which dominated regional calculations of advantages and vulnerability of the GCC states. They were clearly alarmed at what this might mean for the region and eventually for their own security.\textsuperscript{163} These fears of Iranian threat gave an impetus to the creation of the GCC by building on a number of bilateral security and other agreements between the member states. It gave the smaller Gulf states an

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\textsuperscript{161} King, n. 8., p. 40. \\
\textsuperscript{162} \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 19 January 1983 quoted in Hiro, n. 60, p. 78. \\
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assurance of security cooperation, which was important both because of lingering concern over Iraq’s ambitions and of the more immediate danger of Iranian retaliation. From this cover of consensual or communal action, the states of the GCC could give greater material support to Iraq and, if necessary involve an element of U.S. security assistance. The diversity among member states allowed it to pursue a double strategy of giving substantial material aid to Iraq on the one hand and of maintaining relations with Iran on the other. It sought to maintain a channel of communication to Iran in the hope that this would reduce the possibility of military retaliation, by mediating an end to the conflict. But Iran persistently rejected the mediation effort. In fact they were not only alarmed at the continuation of the war especially the tanker war, the bombing of Kharg Island and Iranian land offensive in Faw peninsula but also equally disturbed at having to subsidize Iraq at a time of falling revenues. However they had little choice in the matter. Much as they might desire to do so, they could insulate themselves from the conflict. The nature of Iran’s stated war aims were such that it was very much in their interest to help prevent Iran from achieving those aims at almost any cost. 164

Thus, the GCC was not in fact a flexible alignment but it was the organised response of the Gulf monarchies to the inability of Iraq to contain the threat of Khomeini’s ideology and to increase their internal security through collective measures. Therefore they maintained their close relationship with the US and supported Iraq in its war against Iran. 165 The principal Gulf states supported Iraq because they regarded the Iranian revolutionary regime as the principal threat to their security and Iraq as the only state capable of containing it. This naturally antagonized Iran. In addition to the financial burden of subsidizing Iraq’s war effort, they were faced with the expensive prospect of having to strengthen their own civil and military defences

164. ibid, pp. 501-2.
against Iran. In short, their implicit dependence upon an American guarantee rose sharply and with it the possible political cost of this defacto alliance. Individual Gulf states had been pursuing what was essentially a policy of defence by proxy. That is to say, that they had been sustaining Iraq’s war efforts as an indirect means of containing Iran. In practice, this assistance has amounted to ‘loans’ totalling at least $ US 35 billion, the trans-shipment of goods bound for Iraq through their own ports, the sale of 0.3 mbd of oil from the neutral zone on Iraq’s behalf by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and the pumping of Iraqi crude oil by pipe line to the Red sea. In addition to these individual contributions and loans by Gulf states, GCC at its Fez summit set aside further aid worth $ 6.5 billion for Iraq. In Iranian eyes this policy stood condemned as open support for the Ba’athist regime; to prolong the war needlessly to protect American interests as its surrogates.166

Despite these generous material and logistical aid received from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, Iraq was excluded from the GCC. For Iraq its exclusion was humiliating. It meant the negation of all its earlier attempts at putting together a Gulf wide grouping and was seen as a deliberate affront. Saddam repeated his eagerness to join up with the GCC on the plea that he was fighting their war against Iran. “It is not proper that Iraq who fights Iran on your behalf should not be included at the emerging Gulf grouping. It will be obvious to everyone that Iraq has been excluded deliberately, he complained”. GCC turned a deaf ear to the Iraqi representation and despite Saddam’s protests continued to consolidate its structure.167 Its members tried to use the exclusion of Iraq from the GCC to underline their neutrality in the war. But Iran was

not convinced. On the contrary it saw the establishment of the GCC as a step directed against the Islamic revolution.\textsuperscript{168} Inspite of its effort to distance itself from the too obvious American association Iran perceived the GCC as the US creation. Therefore Iran promptly threatened "to take action" if any political or military pact was directed against it and alleged that the GCC was formed not for the reason of security, but inorder to maintain foreign military interests in the area. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayeti even explicitly warned the GCC against aligning itself with the US and reminded them that Iran considered America as the arch enemy.\textsuperscript{169}

Since its very inception GCC, had been trying to find non-military means to end Iran-Iraq war, maintain freedom of navigation in the Gulf, strengthen the security within the GCC, deter a military attack by Iranian forces which could lead to the widening of the war and external intervention. It was heartening to the US to see the GCC states making realistic and responsible plans to contain Iran.\textsuperscript{170} Since the US had been preoccupied with the developments in Central America, and its military and economic resources abroad were stretched thin it had every reason to welcome and encourage the GCC endeavours. It was because these six states together generated nearly half of all OPEC Oil production and contain 40 percent of the world's proven oil resources. It was also important to the American tax payer that these states had invested more extensively in US treasury bills than any other regional group, thereby helping to hold down interest rates and finance the U.S national debt. Thus US

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168. Hiro, n. 60, pp. 78-79.
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provided the GCC meaningful and sustained assistance for local defense efforts to protect its regional strategic, economic and security interests. In the event that local defenses fail to deter Iranian aggression, it provided an option of military intervention by US which would be more popular and acceptable to the Gulf states. In such an event, the principal military organisation responsible for protecting US security interest in the region was USCENTCOM.\textsuperscript{171}

**SHIFTING FORTUNES AND CHANGING US POLICY: PRO-IRAQI TILT**

Eventhough the Reagan administration re-asserted its policy of neutrality in 1982,\textsuperscript{172} the same year, it started to take a pro-Iraqi position in the conflict. This policy change and anti-Iranian attitude was the result of the sudden reversal of the Iranian position in the war. The initial phase of the war favoured Iraq because the invasion caught Iran's political leaders by surprise, at a time when its military forces were badly disorganized and demoralized by the effects of the revolution. Iranians gradually bogged down Iraqi offensive and stiffened their resistance by capitalising on its superiority in raw manpower - 40 million against Iraq's 14 million - Iranian commanders began to devise more effective tactics built around "human wave" attacks which proved extremely successful. Thus, Iranian forces over ran Iraqi positions in a series of battlefield victories in 1982 and rapidly forced the Iraqis back to their borders. As a result of these successful Iranian military campaigns and the subsequent offensives against Iraq, the US policy makers began to fear an outright Iranian victory. When it appeared that the Iraq might collapse, leaving Iran in a commanding position of power through out the Gulf, Washington started to abandon its policy of neutrality and non-involvement in favour of Iraq.\textsuperscript{173}

In fact the process of befriending and cultivating Iraq was started by the Carter

\textsuperscript{171} ibid, pp. 448-9.

\textsuperscript{172} See American Foreign Policy Current Document 1982, n. 97, p. 784.

\textsuperscript{173} Michael Sterner, “The Iran-Iraq War” Foreign Affairs vol. 63, no. 1 (Fall 1984), pp. 129-30.
administration. In the early 1980, Carter's NSC Adviser Brzezinski had secretly met with Saddam Hussein and prompted him to formulate and implement pro-US policies co-terminous with Western interests. Therefore, Brzezinski remarked on April 14, 1980 that "We see no fundamental incompatibility of interests between the U.S and Iraq... We do not feel that American - Iraqi relations need to be frozen in antagonism." The presence of a very large American interest section in the Belgium's Iraqi embassy with 15 Officials and 200 American businessmen in Baghdad provided better US access to Iraqi officials. In 1980 alone the consular staff issued 2000 visas for Iraqi students to study in the USA - thrice the number of three years earlier.

However, from a strategically rational perspective, the continuance of the conflict was good for the US and it was willing to follow the principle of neutrality as long as its stalemate did not give way to a decisive victory by either side and the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to the West was not drastically impeded. The fact both the countries were making war on each other instead of directing their unconstrained military resources elsewhere was helping American interest. Following this, strategy, the US government tried to impair both Iran and Iraq in ways that would lead to destruction of their military machines and depletion of their financial resources. According to Henry Kissinger: "Mutual exhaustion might rid the Middle East of the aggressive regimes of both Ayatullah Khomeini and Saddam Hussein." In fact,

174. Quoted in Dawisha, n. 44, p. 149.
176. Jeffrey Record, n. 141, p. 48. Assistant Secretary of State Murphy told the Congress the U.S. Position was to see neither side emerge as victor. See ‘Developments in the Persian Gulf, June 1984’, Hearings, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe and Middle East, 98th Congress 2nd session, 11 June 1984 (USG PO: 1984) cited in Chubin and Tripp, n. 41, p. 209.
177. Tousi, n. 63, p. 52.
according to one report, “US government had provided false intelligence to both countries in the hope of keeping either one from scoring the victory.” However, the overriding US view was that Iran was stronger and would be a greater threat if it emerged from the war as a dominant power in the region. Therefore, while it publicly remained neutral in the war, behind the scene it tilted sharply towards Iraq, especially with the onset of the Reagan administration. According to Secretary of State Alexander Haig, “Neutrality, however, does not mean that We are indifferent to the outcome. We have friends and interests that are endangered by the continuation of hostilities. We are committed to defending our vital interest in the area. These interests of the world are served by the territorial integrity and political independence of all countries in the Persian Gulf.” It was not only a reasservation of the Reagan administrations commitments to its friends in the area but also a vital warning to Iran to resist its temptations to take the war to Iraqi territory.

The US-Iraqi relations continued to improve despite Israeli bombing on the Iraq’s Osirak reactor in 1981. Washington condemned the Israeli attack and censured Israel in a UN Security Council vote. The text of the resolution was agreed up on by both the US and Iraq and was considered the harshest censure of Israel ever endorsed by the US at the UN. The US also temporarily suspended the delivery of four F16 fighter bombers to Israel. The stage was then set for further progress in relations between the two countries. Within the US government the only debate whether it should work to strike the word “aggression” from UN’s condemnation, the US ambassador Kirk Patrick fought to have the word removed, and it finally was. But, she and other officials recalled that every one in the cabinet and President Reagan himself wanted

178. ibid.
181. Azhary, n. 5, p. 94.
to condemn the “preemptive violence” of the Israeli attack. No one at a senior level thought that Iraq’s potential nuclear capability represented the greater threat to American interests. Infact the later developments in the region proved beyond doubt that the U.S. response to Osirak bombing was the symbolic beginning of a decade of American misjudgment. Its climax was Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. 182

As the Iranians improved their position at the front, the US feared that if Iraq were overrun by the Iranians, it would jeopardies America’s four major policy objectives in the war, such as

1. To prevent any disruption of Gulf oil shipments to Western countries.
2. To ensure the security of pro western oil producing governments, especially of Saudi Arabia in the region, which resisted the expansion of Soviet influence in the area and have followed reasonably responsible oil production and pricing policies.
3. To see an outcome of the war that would not give the Soviet Union a dominant position in either country, and provide an opportunity for the US and its allies to build relations with both countries.
4. To foster and encourage a secure, strong and confident Israel. 183

Thus, the thrust of the policy was that it sought to prevent the Khomeini regime from winning a victory that could undermine the position of pro-Western Gulf governments, give impetus to extremist Islamic movements throughout the Middle East and create new opportunities for an expansion of Soviet influence in the region. 184

Economically, it feared that the Iranians would dictate ever-higher oil price and ever

182. Gigot, n. 179, p.3.
lower oil production to the rest of the world through OPEC. It would also advocate
the linkage of oil prices to the rate of world inflation, or at most raise them to about
presumably $60 to 70 per barrel. Militarily after defeating Iraq, the Iranians would
press on to greater victories in the name of Islam, over running the meager ground
forces of the tiny Sheikdoms such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states
especially after both the countries failed to heed Iranian warnings to stop aiding Iraq. 185
On the other hand if it did not directly attempt to destroy the other Gulf regimes, its
enhanced power and influence would be used to force accommodations from them,
which would be harmful to long term US and Western interests. 186

Politically, it would try to incite the Shiite communities throughout the Persian
Gulf to rise up against the US and Arab monarchies. According to Secretary of State
Shultz “...the export of the kind of revolutionary fervor that can be destabilizing to them
[other Gulf states].” 187 The US feared that given the Iran-Syria axis, in the Middle East,
radicals would threaten the Jordanian monarchy and encourage the pro-Soviet Syrians
to push for even greater hegemony in Lebanon and the rest of the eastern
Mediterranean. And finally it would establish pro-Iranian governments in Iraq, Lebanon
and thus even endanger the Israeli security. 188

A more immediate threat to US and her allies occurred in 1983, when Iraq
intensified its attack on Iranian oil facilities and shipping. Iran in the ensuing bout of
rhetoric, threatened to close the Gulf for “everybody” if the Iraqi attack continued. 189 It

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185. R.K. Ramazani, “Iran: Burying the Hatchet” Foreign Policy, no. 60, (Fall 1985),
pp. 52-54.
State, American Foreign Policy Current Documents 1983 (Washington D.C, 1985),
p. 708.
188. R.K. Ramazani, n. 185, pp. 52-54.
alarmed the US, because according to American strategic assessment Iran had the capability to close the strait unless major powers intervene. Over the years Iran had developed close military ties with both Soviet Union and People's Republic of China. Sometimes the two communist states used their small neighbours as a conduit to supply military materials to Tehran. In 1983, estimates of the arms and ammunition sold by North Korea to Iran varied between $300 to 500 million in exchange for its much needed oil.\textsuperscript{190} In fact Iran under the Shah had already began to diversify its supplies by purchasing arms from the Soviet Union. Otherwise Iranian armed forces could not have sustained the war effort, and turned the tide against the Iraqis, by depending on the international arms market alone. It also seemed that Iran solved its military spareparts problem by discovering the massive amounts of ammunition and spareparts stock piled during the time of the Shah.\textsuperscript{191}

Iran also had an adequate number of World War II vintage contact mines which could be placed in the shipping lines of the Lower Gulf rather than in the strait itself. In addition, Iran could use its aircraft, land based artillery, and hundreds of small explosive laden speed boats to intimidate traffic.\textsuperscript{192} At the same time by the


\textsuperscript{191} The Soviet Union sold the Shah military equipment costing more than $1 billion. The arms bought from Moscow and now supplied by Eastern Europe and other Soviet allies, include Katyasha rocket artillery, surface to air missiles, anti aircraft guns, armoured personnel carriers, small arms and antitank missiles. By 1978, the Shah's government was operating a factory to produce the RPG - 7 antitank missiles, and this factory was functioning even after the revolution. The estimated Iranian airforce storage areas alone contained 20 to 30 million aircraft or helicopter spare parts. These were lost when the pre-revolutionary computer storage system in Iran ceased to funcion. But later the Iranians were succeeded in mapping out the storage areas and putting the spare parts to use. Azhary, n. 75. p. 614. Also see New York Times, 8 March 1982, Washington Post, 8 April 1982.

beginning of the 1982, the revolutionary turmoil had subsided within Iran and a gradual cohesion had began to evolve. Consequently Iran broke the long deadlock in the war and routed the entrenched Iraqi troops from Iranian territory.

However, Iran's revolutionary zeal continued, therefore, conservative Arab regimes especially Saudi Arabia and Jordan put heavy pressure on the Reagan administration to shore up Iraq’s resistance to Iran. Reagan administration had contacted the Islamic mediating states with the aim of preventing Iranian forces from pushing ahead into Iraq. But Iran paid no heed to the advice and invaded Iraq in July 1982 to overthrow Saddam Hussein to establish an Islamic republic in Iraq, and ultimately to the other Gulf States. 193

According to Secretary Shultz, in this circumstances “Our [the US] ability to influence that dispute is quite limited because we don’t have any real relationship with Iran. We do have a relationship with Iraq but it is not deep and strong one so our ability to influence the outcome is quite limited.” 194 It demonstrated the US' own lack of independent leverage with the combatants. Therefore by March 1982, Iranian forces were able to recapture more of their lost territory. Thus according to one State Department official “the days of comfortable equilibrium in the Iraq-Iran war may be over” and he added that: “[If] Iraq collapses and you have an expansionist, aggressive Iran on the rampages that puts a tremendous burden on the US”. As if in response to these development, Egypt and Jordan sent troops as well as arms to Iraq, Kuwait increased its logistical assistance, and the Gulf states granted Baghdad $24 billion. 195

193. Azhary, n. 75, p. 615.
As 1983 progressed American policy makers concluded that an Iraqi triumph was out of the question, and there were two possible outcomes to the conflict. Iranian victory or continued stalemate. In the case of an Iranian triumph they visualized a collapse of the pro-Western monarchies in the Gulf. Though the subsequent Islamic republics in Iraq and elsewhere were not expected to side with Moscow, the overthrow of a group of pro-Western rulers in a region that contained more than half of the world's known oil reserves was perceived as an unprecedented catastrophe. In short an Iraqi defeat was seen as a major blow to US interests. This was the overall conclusion of a study by the US National Security Council in the autumn of 1983. Washington, therefore formulated plans to bolster Iraq morally and materially. According to Teicher "There was a snowballing effect... more and more staff were doing with Iraq." Thus the US in effect became Iraq's silent ally.

As the Iranians improved their position at the front, the US and its allies increased their pressure on Iran to compromise, and the US declared that Iraq's defeat would be "contrary to US interests." Encouraged by this statement Iraq began bombing Iranians with chemical weapons and attacking ships and oil tankers. When Iran threatened to close the strait of Hormuz, President Reagan stated that his country would not tolerate any closing of the strait. It was because according to Reagan administration, Iraq's defeat would threaten the stability of the Persian Gulf states and could potentially prove dangerous to the western interests than the unresolved Israeli conflict. The administration favoured a balance of power position - an avoidance of an all out Iranian or Iraqi victory. Subsequently, the first overt sign of change in

197. Gigot, n. 179, p. 5.
Iraqi-American relations came out in January 1983 when Saddam Hussein published the text of his talks with US congressman Stephen Solarz during the latter's visit to Baghdad five months earlier. In it, the Ba'athist leader declared that Iraq had never been part of the Soviet strategy in the region, and that it was in the interest of Washington to be present in the region when any other big or super power was present. This was not only an open invitation to the US at the cost of Moscow but also a reversal of the previous Iraqi policy of keeping both superpowers out of the Gulf.

Washington reciprocated: US Secretary of State George Shultz met Tariq Aziz in Paris in October 1982 and again in May 1983. The next month, despite the continued inclusion of Iraq in the State Department's list of nations that support international terrorism, Reagan administration authorised the sale of 60 helicopters for 'agricultural use'. These were capable of being converted to military machines. More importantly, it provided credit of $460 million for the sale of 147,000 tonnes of American rice to Baghdad. Such a gesture by the US had wide and favourable international repercussions for Baghdad, in the midst of a severe economic crisis. It reassured many European and Arab governments and banks about the future of the Saddam Hussein regime, and raised its badly bruised credit worthiness. In November 1983 the National Security Adviser issued a secret directive to this effect, outlining the diplomatic and military steps to aid Baghdad. The Pentagon prepared contingency plans to assist Iraq militarily if it had approached to "stabilize the border" by Iraq or one of its Arab allies. In that case, the US would use A-10 warplanes to attack the Iranian tanks inside Iraq, fragmentation bombs to disperse Iranian troop concentrations, and air defence weapons to enable Iraq to retain control of its air space. In mid December a special envoy Donald Rumsfeld, was sent to Baghdad with a letter for Saddam
Hussein from President Reagan. Then a delegation headed by a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence, visited the six Gulf capitals. It informed the rulers that Washington would regard Iraq's defeat as "contrary to US interest." Besides making public its pro-Baghdad tilt to reassure Iraq as well as the Gulf states, such a statement by the US was meant to dissuade Iran from launching its then anticipated offensive against Iraq.\textsuperscript{199}

On the diplomatic level, Iraq made it known that the US asked from time to time to re-establish full diplomatic relations. Yet Saddam Hussein took care to ensure that unofficial relations would indeed be special one. Disclosing in 1981 that "we shall work together with their representatives ... in a political, not just a professional way". It was promised that the US charge d' affaires would be treated like ambassador. American politicians would be welcomed in Baghdad and the American staff there would be allowed to establish a communications system equal to that of proper embassies. Also apparently in return for American readiness to get Iraq off the list of terrorism supporting states, in October 1983 Iraq banished the notorious international terrorist Abu Nidal.\textsuperscript{200}

These changes signalled Saddam Hussein's determination to shape the course of Iraq's domestic and foreign policy in a way which he thought best suited to his own definition of Iraqi state interest. He had stated that if these could be promoted by restoring Iraqi relations with the U.S, then Iraq would not hesitate to restore them by adding a proviso that it would serve not only Iraqi national interests but also the Arab nations Pan-Arab interests. By stating so, he attempted to evade criticisms of this overtures towards the US. The diplomatic relations with the US had been broken off

\textsuperscript{199} Hiro, n. 60, pp. 119-20.
\textsuperscript{200} Baram, n. 175, p. 80.
in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war by the Arif government in Iraq. This regime was overthrown a year later by the Ba’ath by indicting and questioning the Arif government’s dedication to the Pan-Arab cause. 201

The U.S. also consented to increase American economic aid to Iraq and in exchange, in November 1984 diplomatic relations had been resumed, after a lapse of 17 years. Since then, the U.S. embassy in Baghdad began to provide Iraq with military intelligence, it might be inferred that this too was a part of the deal. American credits for food stuffs and agricultural equipments were nearly doubled from $345 million in 1984 to $635 million. 202 According to some sources the U.S. extended $1.6 billion credits in November 1984 alone. In addition, the U.S and Western countries allowed Iraq to delay payment of loans. 203 According to Alexander Haig, Washington noted some shift in Iraqi policy caused in part by a greater sense of concern about the behaviour of Soviet imperialism in the Middle Eastern area. Haig was referring to what the U.S viewed as a pattern of change in Iraqi diplomacy from a radical to moderate stance. The change encompassed close ties with Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Al-Fatah wing of the PLO, and a decline in Soviet-Iraqi relations. It also stopped internal supression of its political opponents and most importantly supported Arab-Israeli peace efforts. 204

In fact over the years, the Iraq had been reorienting its attitude towards the West by wearing away from the Soviet alliance. Iraq’s trade with the Eastern block had declined whereas its trade with the Western Europe and Japan had increased markedly.

201. Chubin and Tripp, n. 41, pp. 189-90.
202. Baram, n. 175, p. 81.
204. Azhary, n. 5, p. 94. Also see Tousi, n. 63, p. 54.
Iraq's imports from Japan in 1979 amounted to 1.6 billion - more than twice as much as its import bill from the entire Eastern bloc. While the European communities exports to Iraq in the same year were more than $32 billion. The USSR had ceased to be Iraq's sole supplier of military equipments. The Soviet share of Iraq's military imports fell from 95 percent in 1972 to 63 percent in 1979. Prior to its attack on Iran it diversified its arms sources by turning to France, Italy, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Brazil and even the U.S for military hardware. French arms sales to Iraq during 1978 and 1979 amounted to $2.2 billion and figures should prove to be even higher in 1980. France sold Iraq 24 Mirage F1 aircraft, Mirage 2000, Crotale air defence system, 100 AMX-30 Medium tanks, scores of light armored cars equipped with SS-11 anti-tank missiles and a large number of helicopters etc.

On the diplomatic level too, Iraqi - Soviet relations were past deteriorating. Iraq had not only joined with other Muslim countries in condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but also criticized the Soviet activities in the Horn of Africa and particularly Moscow's support for Ethiopia against Arab Somalia. In fact long before the Gulf war Iraq abandoned its confrontationist policies towards conservative Arab countries in Arabian Peninsula. There was a growing concurrence of views between Iraq and Saudi Arabia on the question of oil pricing and supplies. Until the military clash with Iran, Iraq was pushing its oil production to about 3.7 million barrels a day and promised to make up for shortages incurred by the Iranian cutbacks in the oil production. In summer 1980, Oil Minister Tayeh Abdul Karim severely attacked Iran for its policy of increasing oil prices as a dangerous precedent.

Furthermore in March 1980, Iraq backed Saudi Arabia's vigorous diplomatic and economic efforts to prevent the government of North Yeman from moving closer to the Soviet Union by promising Sana government $300 million in aid and also to train North Yemen's armed forces. It also announced the formation of a United Front of all groups opposed to the Soviet supported Marxist regime of South Yemen to liberate
it from the communist agents. However, the primary factor induced Iraq’s foreign policy shift was Kremlin’s attitude towards the war. While publicly stating their neutrality, the Soviets in the early days of the war refused to supply arms to Iraq but offered military aid to Tehran. Moreover, Moscow chose Iraq’s moments of maximum danger to enter into a new political and military relationship with Syria which openly supported Iran. As a result, the Ba’ath government started to suppress the Iraqi-communists by executing many of its members, alleging communist infiltration into armed forces. It also aimed to prop up Iraq in to the center stage of the Arab world by championing the Arab cause.

In fact Iraq’s shift towards moderation was spurred by the transnational implications of Iran’s Islamic revolution which challenged domestic stability of Iraq and other littoral Gulf states with which it shared the common security interests. It also increased its prestige as the successor to fill the Shah created vacuum in the Gulf. Iraq presented itself as the protector of the smaller Arab Gulf states against the Iranian threat. As a result Gulf Arab regimes started to impress the U.S underscoring the “changed” behaviour in Saddam. Teicher recalled a meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarrak in April 1982, “Mubarak gave me a fifteen-minute lecture about how Iraq had changed. He said, ‘you have to do every thing you can to make Iraq survive the war. You have to tell President Reagan’. He kept shaking my hand and would not let go.” The combined impact of this effort was that a large portion of America’s policy elite concluded that Saddam really was “Some one we could work with.”

There were a few dissenters in the foreign policy establishment. Teicher and Graham Fuller, a CIA analyst collaborated on a memo in 1985. They argued that Iran remained a strategic prize that should not be ignored and that Saddam’s domestic

205. Dawish, n. 44, pp. 136-8, 144-5.
barbarity meant his "change" might be cosmetic. Their views were debated and rejected and anyone remotely associated with the opening to Iran was forced out of government. Teicher was also purged from the NSC.\textsuperscript{206}

Reagan administration removed Iraq from the list of countries accused of aiding and abetting terrorism thus lifting US restrictions against exports to Iraq. This cleared the way for the U.S State Department to approve export licences for the six civilian versions of 130 Hercules transport planes to Iraq despite strong congressional opposition. U.S trade with Iraq was estimated at $1 billion a year. Although the U.S did not supply arms to Iraq, it had consistently supported France’s policy of supplying military equipment to Iraq which had grown to constitute one third of it’s needs.\textsuperscript{207}

The U.S was also passing a "Spy-in-the-sky" intelligence to Iraq, enabling it to detect approaching Iranian war planes and thus position artillery and armor in the battle field. Warnings of Iranian air attack on ships in the Persian Gulf sea lanes were relayed to Iraq "within minutes" of a pilots take off. These warnings were supplemented by a report every twelve hours on Iranian military activity in the ground. U.S satellites orbiting over the Gulf as well as the U.S. AWACS in Saudi Arabia informed Iraq of the approaching "human waves." Information was also passed on about Iranian aircraft, warships, tanks and rocket launchers. Data on Iranian attack on ground targets were relayed daily and information about strikes launched in the Gulf was delivered "hot."\textsuperscript{208}

These developments encouraged Iraq to launch attack on Iranian tankers to prevent oil export, cities and towns, and oil installations in Khark. Between September 1984 and August 1985, Iraq launched 564 air and missile attacks on Iranian civilian

\textsuperscript{206} Gigot, n. 179, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{207} Azhary, n. 5, pp. 94, 103.
\textsuperscript{208} Tousi, n. 63, pp. 53-54.
areas and even on the capital city of Tehran. Despite the official ban on chemical weapons, Iraq felt licensed to use them in order to discourage Iranian human waves. On a single occasion, when mustard gas was used on Maniyoun Island in February 1984, 40,000 people lost their lives. Later in August 1988, Iraq used chemical weapons against its own people-ethnic kurds. The Reagan administration reacted with restraint. The State Department publicly condemned the attack, but privately sent a message of conciliation to Iraq. As one State official told the New York Times on 8 September 1988: “The approach we want to take was that we want to have a good relationship with you, but that this sort of thing makes it very difficult.”

The mixed message continued as a battle raged in Congress over US sanctions against Iraq. Secretary of State George Shultz privately complained to Iraq’s foreign minister and received a promise that Iraq would not use gas again and would attend an arms control conference the next January. According to Murphy, States Middle East point man at that time “It was enough to persuade US that working on it privately was enough to be productive.” The sanctions would not be productive. After the chemical attacks, the Senate passed tough unilateral sanctions, 87-0. The Reagan administration responded with ferocious lobbying that first watered the sanctions down, then finally killed it. The administration never offered a compromise for even modest sanctions. American business with sales to Iraq - rice millers, chemical companies, and others lobbied furiously against sanctions. In the end House Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Danle Faswll asked that sanctions be stripped from the tax bill to which they had earlier been attached. The lesson Saddam learned about the US resolve was that his actions would be met solely with rhetorical opposition.

209. ibid, p. 54.
210. Quoted in Gigot, n. 179, p. 5.
211. Quoted in ibid, p. 6.
212. ibid.
after he committed a horrendous act - the use of gas.

In March 1984, the President ordered his aids to prepare fresh contingency plans for deploying American air, naval, and ground forces in the region should the Iran-Iraq war boil over. One week later, he sent Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy to the area on a sensitive mission to persuade Arab Sheikdoms to make preparations for preventing a crisis in the oil-rich Gulf by allowing Americans to use their military facilities. Murphy was also instructed to discuss prepositioning ammunition, fuel and other supplies in states such as Oman, Bahrain, and the UAE and to propose secret contingency plans for a rapid deployment of U.S. forces. These plans included a naval blockade of the Khark oil terminal, the mining of Iranian Gulf ports, and commando raids on Iranian military bases. According to Vice-President Bush, these plans would ensure freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf and through the strait of Hormuz. Before taking these steps, the US had co-ordinated with Great Britian, which had agreed to joint contingency plans for escorting tankers and providing air cover in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. The U.S attempted to give their involvement acceptable to the Gulf states by announcing that it must be invited into the region and the states must make available necessary ground facilities for any arrangement that would involve the U.S forces.213

However, Iraq managed to blunt the Iranian offensives and subsequently the war stalemated to Washington’s relief. It suited to the U.S to see the two unlikable regimes were battering each other. Therefore in the early stages, Washington had turned a blind

eye to the shipments of spares originating in the US to Iran by private companies either directly or through third parties. Simultaneously it passed on satellite and high altitude reconnaissance pictures of troop movement to Riyadh, knowing that the latter was transferring these to Baghdad. The military sales were made either by American companies such as Rammco International a New Jersey based aviation parts company or arms dealers based in the U.S, or third countries such as South Korea and Israel. On its part, the Tehran government encouraged exiled Iranian businessmen to establish front companies in the U.S and elsewhere to procure American arms and spares. The office of Munition Control of the State Department was deliberately lax about enforcing the ban on exports of weapons and spares to Iran. “We don’t give a damn as long as the Iran-Iraq carnage does not effect our allies or alter the balance of power” said a State Department official in July 1983. “Why save Iranians from themselves with the U.S. customs resources needed to protect Americans from the drug traffic [in America]?” It prompted the Soviets to accuse the U.S of secretly supplying weapons and spares to Iran to keep the war going on thus extending destabilization in the region and giving itself an excuse to increase its military presence in the Gulf and the Arabian Sea.

CONTAINMENT TO ANIMOSITY:
HARSH MEASURES AGAINST IRAN

While pampering Iraq as a means to contain any possible Iranian victory the U.S had been hardening its position against Iran. The U.S’ official logic was that it was Iran that was refusing to end the war not Iraq, which had accepted UN Security Council Resolution 540 of October 1983. It also argued that while Iraq confined its air attacks on Gulf shipping to a defined war zone, Iran attacked non-belligerents in international

214. Hiro, n. 60, p. 121.
215. ibid, p. 123.
waters. While President Reagan called up on Iran to stop this “terrible blood letting”, the U.S had moved to tighten upon arms transfers to Iran. In first instance, this meant stopping leaks of spareparts from the U.S itself and secondly raising the issue seriously with more complacent allies. The British Ambassador Richard Fairbank was assigned to this job. At the same time Iraq continued to enjoy access to the armouries of the other states, especially the USSR and the France. The Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz said that Iraq had reached an understanding with Secretary of State Shultz to limit the flow of arms to Iran “It affects Iran’s ability to carry on the war. Iran does not produce arms and equipment. It can continue only if others provide the capability. Much of the equipment comes from China and North Korea, over which the U.S has no control. But a flow of arms continues from the West, as well. It is one of our problems.” Subsequently, in 1983 U.S State Department launched ‘Operation Staunch’ a diplomatic effort to impose a world wide embargo on the sale of U.S and other-origin war material to Iran. It discouraged its allies from selling arms to Iran and began to pressure Britain, Israel, Italy, South Korea, Turkey and West Germany among others not to supply weapons to Iran or allow their territory to be used for the purpose. Between January 1984 and January 1987, the State Department sent more than 400 cable to American overseas missions urging compliance with Operation Staunch. Secretary Shultz personally urged member governments to work within the European Community to reduce the flow of arms to Iran. The U.S government increased surveillance of shipments of its equipment and spareparts destined for Iran. It had been successful in part because of the tacit cooperation of the U.S and the Soviet Union. Both have

216. Chubin and Tripp. n. 41, p. 209.
successfully pressured their allies and friends to restrict deliveries of weapon to prevent the tilt of the war in Iran’s favour.

Even the black market had not supplied Iran with items it needed to change the military balance. Black market sales generally were limited to the so called low end of the arms trade - articles that could be easily concealed and disguised as non-military items. Generally, the size of these deliveries limited by what could be conveniently shipped via commercial air freight companies or fit in the cargo of a light plane. What Iran had been able to buy was older less sophisticated ground forces equipment and ammunition, quarter master goods and limited spare parts for which it was forced to pay enormous markup. Even at that price equipment had been difficult to come by. Although the embargo on Iran had not been able to halt the flow of these articles through the black or gray markets, it raised the economic costs of Iran and maintained a lid on the technological sophistication of what Iran could buy.\(^{219}\) As Vernan Walters, U.S ambassador to UN observed. “We may not prevent the sale of all weapons to Iran, but we may stop enough to make a difference.”\(^{220}\)

However, despite America’s arms embargo Iran was getting arms - classified as non lethal from UK, Japan, Germany, Israel which was important to Iran’s war effort.


But U.S was neglecting it by saying that it did not take a position with its allies on non-lethal sales.\textsuperscript{221} The end result was that Iran had not been able to acquire tanks, ships or fighter aircraft or any effective modern air defence military system which would challenge Iraq’s control of the skies.\textsuperscript{222}

Furthermore, on January 20, 1984, the Secretary of State designated Iran as a sponsor of International terrorism. Four days later this decision was followed by the announcement that Iran would be subjected to U.S government’s regulations limiting the export of U.S military equipment to countries that had repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism. The State Department assured congress that “[t]he question of further controls under this rubric is currently under active review at senior levels of administration.”\textsuperscript{223} This action was mainly due to the 23 October 1983 truck-bombing of the barracks of the U.S marines stationed at Beirut airport by Lebanese Shia Militants, which resulted in the death of 251 serviceman, an attack in which Washington claimed to see the hand of Tehran.\textsuperscript{224}

\textsuperscript{221}Milton Viorst, n. 218, pp. 363-4.
\textsuperscript{222}Newman, n.219, p. 1056.
\textsuperscript{223}Developments in the Middle East, June, 1985 : Hearings Before the Sub Committee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Comm. on Foreign Afairs, 99th Congress, 1st session, 22 June 19, 1985 quoted in Report of the Congresional Committees on Iran - Contra Affair, n. 219, p. 160.
\textsuperscript{224}U.S. Marines had been sent to Lebanon in August and September 1982 to supervise the withdrawal of forces of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) from Beirut. The purpose of the U.S. presence in Beirut was to help support the Government of Lebanon in its efforts to restore stability and its authority throughout Lebanon. However, the U.S. troops were perceived in Lebanon as a partisan militia working on behalf of the Maronite - Christian government. The Hizbollah a movement of the Shiite clans of the Bekka valley was the principal opponent of the U.S in Lebanon. They had a close religious and familial ties to Iran and had found inspiration in the rule of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Iran supported Hizbollah (Party of God) and other groups in Lebanon. After 1982, Israeli invasion of Lebanon, these groups used political kidnapping and terrorism against Americans as a retaliation against the U.S. support for the Israeli invasion and occupation of their country. Report of the Congressional Committees on Iran Contra Affair, n. 219, pp. 159-60.
Thus, while directly and indirectly supporting Iraq and following a policy of containment of Iran through the Operation Staunch, the administration officials secretly followed a contradictory policy of arms sales to Iran. It not only questioned the very credibility and integrity of the U.S policy towards Iran but also threatened the very existence of the Reagan administration. It was the beginning of another foreign policy crisis for the U.S known as Iran-Contra affair.