Chapter - III

Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council
Though a misnomer in the strict sense of the term, the Gulf cooperation Council (GCC) -- consisting of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE -- is the largest, the most comprehensive and relatively the most successful attempt towards multilateral cooperation in the history of the Persian Gulf region.

Yet, the GCC has, so far, not evolved into a regional grouping worth the name, particularly in terms of its objectives laid down in its charter and other blueprints. Nor is it worthy of being equated with other existing major regional organizations such as the NATO and the ASEAN which are known for their achievements, strength and working.

The level of cooperation among the GCC member states has been of medium intensity and the pace a little above slow. Characteristically, it is not a grouping planted by, and formally aligned to, a major global power. Yet, either on its own or due to the interplay of regional and extra regional developments it has heavily banked on the West, particularly the US for support and survival.

i) Cooperation in the Persian Gulf Region: A background

Historically the urge for cooperation, in an institutionalized form, among the Persian Gulf countries has emanated from a "common threat" posed by a country from amongst themselves. Before the advent of Islam it was the Sassanid incursions which were the chief stimulant in driving the then tribal Sheikhdoms to form a common defence system. Otherwise, they were always embroiled in perpetual
and bloody inter-tribal conflicts.

The perennial feuds among royal families coupled with an urge for territorial expansion denied the evolution of regional cooperation for centuries together on the levels of officials cooperation, in the words of Christie John, "Were so slight as to be of little effect and without lasting importance".¹

Under almost 150 years of British domination, there hardly existed a rationale and opportunity for regional cooperation as Britain itself supervised all the larger and wider issues concerning the region as a whole. Infact, it was Britain which laid the foundation stone of intra-Gulf cooperation, but only on the eve of its departure from the region. Britain encouraged the seven trucial Sheikhdoms of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras-al-Khaima, Umm al-Qaiwain and Fujairah to merge into a single state. It orchestrated the 1971 Dubai Agreement, wherein the seven trucial states plus the Sheikhdoms of Qatar and Bahrain agreed to consider the formation of a union or federation.

In 1972, the rulers of these states moved a step ahead and decided to form the United Arab Emirates (UAE). However, it was only after three years that the UAE could become a reality. Bahrain and Qatar opted out of this federal set up. Historical animosity led them to disagree over power sharing in the proposed federation, prompting

both of them to declare themselves as sovereign states.

Thus in the formation of the UAE in 1971 a lack of political unity among the regional states was reflected. The lack of unity was also manifested on the issue of security in the Persian Gulf. In 1976 both Oman and Kuwait separately proposed the establishment of a common defence system but the move did not evoke enough enthusiasm.

In the same year, the Arab Gulf states rejected an Iranian proposal for mutual defence alliance, mooted at the first conference of the Gulf foreign ministers at Muscat. Iraq also did not find any takers of its proposal, which was presented in 1979, for an "Arab Gulf Security force", loosely linked with the Arab League Joint Defence Pact.

However, the Persian Gulf States demonstrated a greater sense of unity as far as oil policy and matters related to oil prices were concerned. They were instrumental in strengthening the OPEC cartel. They backed Libya in challenging the Western oil companies monopoly over pricing and production of oil. They also played a central role in Tehran - Tripoli Agreements (February and April 1971) for an increase in oil prices. They also masterminded the 1973 oil embargo on the US and the Netherlands and the threefold

2. In 1976 foreign ministers of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia met in Muscat to discuss the Omani proposal for adopting a common course of action on regional security. That same year the Kuwaiti ruler discussed the issue of regional security at bilateral level with the heads of states of the region barring Iraq.

price hike taking the new posted price to $11.65 p.b.\textsuperscript{4}.

The Persian Gulf countries also formed a Cartel within OPEC to counterbalance the radical oil producers on the one hand and Iran on the other. In the later half of the 1970s, these states turned price moderates, opposing price hawks, such as Iran, within the OPEC. As a matter of fact, on all issues pertaining to oil the Arabian peninsula countries towed the line of action designed and dictated by Saudi Arabia, then the producer of the bulk of the OPEC and the Persian Gulf oil. Therefore the oil policy of one country looked mirror image of the others.

The oil embargo was the first major concerted effort by the Arab conservatives to assert in the Arab politics on the strength of oil power, neutralizing their American connection and the relative remoteness from the Arab Israeli war zone. Following Egypt's success in escaping from another defeat due to Arab monarchies' action, PLO's subsequent shift from radical states to Gulf monarchies in its bid to come out of former's shadow and its yearning for finance, the Palestinian initiative slipped from the hands of the "old guards" in favour of the new saviours.

In another sense, it was a unique case of regional (political) cooperation. Targeting the US, the Persian Gulf countries later evenly balanced their ties with the former. This, together, with their immensely increased oil prowess, 

changed the region from hitherto a sub-servient system of international politics to one of its sub-systems, capable of extricating itself from extraneous dependence or turning it into interdependence if the circumstances demanded and supported.

Though only for a short while, by imposing the oil embargo on the US, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf de-emphasized their national interests for a larger cause. This was true of both a big country like Saudi Arabia and a small one like Qatar. Doing this, Saudi Arabia also invited the chances of being attacked. Though the probability of such attack was remote due to a number of constrains yet it was communicated to Saudi Arabia by a person no less then Henry Kissinger and a strong group of "attack protagonist" who had gathered around the then US President. In view of this the chances of Saudi Arabia being stripped off the regional policeman status by the US were far less remote than the denial of arms largesse and the scrapping of security commitments which seemed most probable likelihood. More imminent and real was the danger of losing in the US a guarantor of their security which had used its leverage over Iran to restrain it from territorial expansion in the Persian Gulf.

But the regional states failed to maintain the momentum of cooperation. What really robbed them of establishing a regional organization was the lack of a common threat of such a proportion that it could overshadow the factors obstructing cooperation. The US threat to seize the oil
fields in case the Arab governments strangulated oil supply for long was short lived. The political gains of the oil embargo could not be consolidated because of inability of the Gulf states to properly rationalize the gains in the context of regional cooperation. Also, it remained a matter of academic discussion in the US, and the idea did not accompany any US effort or intention to amass troops and forces in the vicinity of the region.

The Camp David accords of 1978-79 "presented the Arab countries with an opportunity to show a glimpse of their solidarity on the Palestinian issue. But a marked difference was evinced in these Arab countries' united resolve in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the oil embargo, and on the Camp David Accords.

First, Oman did not sever diplomatic relations with Egypt. Second, anti Egypt move go embroiled in Pan-Arabism, encompassing a vast land mass, spread over two continents and a score of countries. Thus in view of these states' distinct location, size and geographical proximity with the country concerned and its internal and external political orientation and the economic condition, each pursued an anti Egypt policy varying from the others.

In fact, only Saudi Arabia, given its size, its involvement in intra Arab affairs and its significance as the guardian of the holiest of Islamic sharines; and Iraq,

5. Besides Oman, Sudan and Somalia were the other Muslim countries which did not break off the diplomatic ties with Egypt.
given its newly found urge to seize the opportunity offered by Egypt, played an active role in ensuring Egypt's ouster from the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Smaller countries backed the move but they clearly lacked the enthusiasm.

Even the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which created a sort of security chaos in the region did not activate the Arab Gulf states to coordinate their defence policies by putting up a common defence system, albeit a loose one. Instead, each of them individually started to shore up its defence preparedness.

Saudi Arabia, which was the most vocal against the Soviet invasion and probably the most vulnerable to the USSR's expansionist ambitions in the Persian Gulf, tried to evolve a common voice of the Arab Gulf states in condemning the invasion. But this, at best, was a political and diplomatic move and could have been translated into a demonstration of regional unity had it been preceded or followed by a common stand on security issues at stake.

Iran was the only threat at that time to reckon with but it had happily accepted the role of the "Gulf policeman" jointly with Saudi Arabia and the threats from it had proportionally receded. The Arab Gulf countries did not relish Iran amassing huge quantities of arms and ammunition from the US and its Western allies in exchange for its role in the Gulf but were consoled by the fact that these were at least not directed against them.
Iran too was not a potential threat, although it had not relinquished its claim over Bahrain. But, at the same time, these disputes did not figure high on Iraq's foreign policy agenda due to its entanglements with Khurdish resurgence and pre occupation with the Iranian threat on the eastern border. At that time Iraq also needed to make a radical shift from its typical hostile approach towards these countries to capitalize on the Arab confidence, it had gained after masterminding Egypt's expulsion, for the purpose of filling the post Camp David leadership vacuum in the Arab world. To minimize the Arab suspicion on its Soviet connection, Iraq was bound to demonstrate a greater level of good neighborliness vis-a-vis the regional powers.

ii) Factors Behind the Formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council:

Little and restrained cooperation among the Persian Gulf countries, at least till 1978, did not pave the way for the formation of the GCC. In fact, to locate the genesis of the GCC one tends to analyze the events of the catalyst years -- 1978-1981.

The Camp David Accords, the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war were major developments during 1978-1981 period which led to the formation of the GCC.

a) The Camp David Accords

From the view point of regional cooperation the Camp David Accords were not significant as they did not galvanize
the Persian Gulf states into togetherness. But being the most vocal rejectionists of the accords and instrumental in ex-communicating Egypt from the Arab fold, the Persian Gulf countries shot into prominence once again in the Middle East politics.

This in turn, re-established the Persian Gulf as a distinct geographical and geo-political entity the rationale behind the formation of the GCC despite the presence of the Arab League and close lingual, religious and historical affinity with the rest of the Arab world.

By rejecting the Camp David Accords brokened by the US, its Persian Gulf allies showed a willingness to undermine their association with the US on an issue of regional importance and having major domestic implications. This exemplified the assertion of the Persian Gulf countries into an independent international sub system than a superpowers exclusive area of action.

Protest against the Camp David Accords helped Saudi Aabia to graduate to the role of leadership in the Persian Gulf region. In addition, with none of the issues concerning the Persian Gulf region after 1973, succeeding in uniting the regional countries together, the Palestinian issues after the Camp David Accords at least worked as a binding force before the events like the Islamic revolution and the

Iran Iraq war came to overshadow it as far as the inception of the GCC is concerned.

b) The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan:

On 27 December 1979 the Soviet troops occupied Afghanistan. Taken a back, the Persian Gulf countries interpreted it as a part of a grand Soviet design to encircle the oil rich Gulf. The uncertainties in post-revolution Iran and Baluchistan reinforced their fear. This fear found expression in the Persian Gulf states' criticism of the Soviet invasion. Without exception the Arab countries adopted a united stand against the Soviet invasion. All condemned the USSR in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and the OIC meeting. Yet it is very unlikely that this development would have necessitated an increased cooperation among the regional states.

In fact, within one and a half months of the Soviet occupation, the Arab monarchies voted the Iraq proposal of an Arab National Charter which provided for prohibition of foreign power intervention in the Gulf region. By accepting the Iraqi proposal the Arabian peninsular countries might have put at rest the fear of a combined Iraqi-Soviet invasion. But the disapproval of the same shows that the spectre of the Soviet invasion and that of an increased level of intransigence from the Soviet allies in the region were not grave enough to the regional security.

Around the same time, Saudi foreign minister visited Kuwait and Pakistan and proposed a collective security plan
to them incorporating other regional countries. However, the plan did not seem to have been mooted in the backdrop of the Soviet invasion. Rather, the plan accidentally coincided with it. It envisaged cooperation in internal security matters and not to deter external threats. After initial outrage, the Gulf Arabs toned down their criticism of the Soviet Union. Saudi Arabia offered to establish diplomatic ties with the USSR provided the latter withdrew from Afghanistan. Kuwait publicly declared that the USSR did not pose any threat to the Gulf security despite the fact that the Soviet forces were barely 350 miles away from the Strait of Hormuz and had by then demonstrated their capability to lift troops and equipment on short notice into Afghanistan and over to longer distances in the Gulf. Stephen Page holds, the view that this very security threat had prompted the Gulf Arabs to seek accommodation with the USSR.

Oman was the only exception. It signed an agreement with the US allowing the latter's forces access to the Masirah island airfield and other Omani military facilities. But

7. The plan presented by Saudi interior minister, Nayef, provided for: 1) Collective efforts at internal security 2) Cooperation in response to request of any state threatened by local or imported Sabotage and in halting activities by international terrorists, 3) Strengthening police cooperation and communication systems, 4) Denial of entry or refugee status to all hostile elements and 5) other measures to ensure collective security.


much to the satisfaction of the USSR, other Gulf states disapproved of this deal. Kuwait's foreign minister, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jabar al-Sabah, visited Moscow at the end of April 1981. His visit marked the lack of unanimity in the Arab monarchies opposition to the Soviet move in Afghanistan and a rejection of the then US Secretary of State, Alexander Haig's proposal from anti Soviet "Strategic consensus", including the US and its Arab Gulf allies.

The likelihood of the formation of an anti Soviet regional grouping diminished due to the USSR's assurance to the Gulf countries that it had no intention to step into the region. "The USSR does not need oil and had never sought to dominate the Persian Gulf", said a spokesman of the Soviet Union. The USSR further removed the Gulf states' doubts when Brezhnev, on his official visit to India, proposed an international agreement on December 10, 1980 which stipulated:

1) Not to create foreign military bases in the Arabian Gulf or on adjacent islands; not to deploy nuclear weapons of mass destruction there
2) Not to use force or threaten the use of force against Arab Gulf countries, and not to interfere in their internal affairs.
3) To respect the non-Aligned status of the Arab Gulf states. Not to draw them into military groupings to which the nuclear powers are a party.
4) To respect the sovereign rights of the states of this region to their natural resources and
5) not to create any obstacle or threats to normal trade and the use of sea lanes linking the countries of the region to the outside
world\textsuperscript{10}.

c) The Iranian Revolution:

The overthrow of the Shah in January 1979 and the subsequent seizure of power by the Islamic regime under the leadership of Imam Khomeini beset the Arab Gulf with twin problems concerning their security. First, it exposed them to a kind of double edged threat. It came from a regime (in control of region’s most advanced military machine) that had from day one declared hostility towards the Arab monarchies and called upon its people to export the Islamic revolution across the Persian Gulf. Second, it created a "security vacuum" in the region. This is illustrated as under: The dimension of the threat the Iranian revolution posed can be gauged from the fact that it activated both the radical (anti monarchy) Sunnis, and the Shia minority. Even the expatriates -- the labour force -- identified themselves with the Islamic regime in its struggle against Shah’s exploitation. It is reported that even during the days of the revolution its representatives were trying to proselytize the people of Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. If reports are to be believed then soon after coming to power the Khomeini regime had started supplying arms and giving training to the dissident Shias in the Persian Gulf countries. Both in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia Shias staged demonstrations. They were said to have done so

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., p. 156.
at Khomeini's instigation. In Kuwait and the UAE the signs of resentment among the Shias were also noticed.

These developments, a few and far in between, were successfully crushed though they often erupted at local levels. Their repeated occurrence perturbed the governments of these states to a great extent. They were desperate to find a mechanism for cooperation on internal security. The exchange of intelligence information was stepped up, Iraq's help was acquired to feed intelligence and security data and the regional governments began taking preemptive action against opposition groups and radical activists before they could stir up an agitation.

This experiment was probably the first case of living cooperation among the Persian Gulf states, making them discover the practicability of such a cooperation and the viability of practicing it in an institutionalized manner and at a wider level. The Iran Iraq war did the rest.

The Shah's departure from the Gulf's political scene created a security vacuum. Although unwillingly, he Arab Gulf countries had acquiesced to the Shah's domination of the Gulf. They had reconciled with the Iranian occupation of the three disputed Islands -- Abu Musa and the two Tunbs -- in 1971 as it provided a bulwark against the radical Iraq and its expansionist stance. The Gulf's military and manpower strength being no match to that of Iran further

convinced them to remain friendly with the latter. The revolution in Iran undid what had emerged as a tacit understanding for the security of the Gulf under Iran. This unnerved the Arab Gulf rulers who clamoured for evolving a new security system from among themselves.\(^{12}\)

d) The Iran Iraq War:

The GCC came into existence six months after the outbreak of the Iran Iraq war. This was the time when Iran, after being pushed to the wall for the first six months of the war, began to bounce back. This coincidence raises a pertinent question as to whether the Iran Iraq war or the Iranian recoveries were catalyst in the formation of the GCC.

The war started with a hope that a politically unsettled and militarily disarrayed Iran would soon be overran by Iraq. At least this was the impression the Gulf states gathered from President Saddam Hussain when or visited some of the Arab capitals in the Persian Gulf, reportedly to secure the latter's support and approval of his decision to wage a war against Iran. Though they declared their neutrality in the war and urged the two combatants to end the war, the Gulf states had unofficially assured Saddam to help and support him, to the extent that King Khalid of Saudi Arabia personally wished Iraq success against the

"enemy of the Arab nation."\(^{13}\).

But the Iraqi reverses forced the Gulf states to review their policies. The Iranian retaliation threatened the free flow of oil through the Persian Gulf. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have their major refineries and ports within the striking range of the Iranian air force. But it was the oil shipping which was more endangered than the oil installations. Of the Persian Gulf countries, only Saudi Arabia could divert its oil exports through its pipeline to the Red Sea. The rest of them needed a free passage through the Strait of Hormuz for their oil export. The foreign ministers meeting of Arab Gulf states in Taif in February 1981, in which the decision to form the Gulf cooperation council was taken, was called in the background of this threat only.

Avoiding to indulge in a direct confrontation with Iran, the foreign ministers decided to evolve the GCC not as a regional security grouping, as opined by the Omani representative, but as the Kuwaiti version of the 1980 Saudi plan for military cooperation. This meant the establishment of the GCC as a platform for providing financial help to Iraq and cooperation on internal security amongst themselves. Thus the GCC, which was officially neutral vis-\(\text{a-vis}\) the war, indirectly pro-Iraq and non confrontationalist with Iran, came into existence. Its main

\(^{13}\) Bruce Maddy Weitzman, "The Fragmentation of Arab Politics: Inter Arab Affairs Since the Afghanistan Invasion", *Orbis*, vol. 25, no. 2, Summer 1981, pp.396-97.
purpose, inter alia, was to blunt the rising tide of revolutionary upsurge emanating from Iran as also to prevent the war from spreading to their territories. In a way it can be considered a logical corollary of the Iran Iraq war.

Some experts on the area hold the view that the Iran Iraq war was a catalyze in the formation of the GCC in an altogether different sense, that it was the first ever opportunity to the Arab Gulf states to put Iran and Iraq "out of play as partners in any joint Gulf enterprise".¹⁴ True to a large extent, but an exaggeration of this view tends to down play the importance of security threats emanating from the war in the formation of the GCC. For had the war, not impinged upon the territorial security and internal stability of the Arab Gulf states, these states would not have come to form this organization merely on the ground that they had a chance to isolate both Iran and Iraq.

Looking back at the efforts towards regional cooperation in the 1970s, two distinct trends are visible. First, the setting up of an exclusive regional organization remained elusive most importantly because of the unwillingness on the part of, and division of opinion over the nature and scopes of the cooperation among the conservative Arab Gulf states. Second, few of the pre-GCC efforts at cooperation included Iraq and excluded a few conservative states which now enjoy member state status in the GCC.

Non inclusion of Iraq in the GCC despite the latter’s solidarity with the former in its war against Iran has led some analysts to wrongly conclude that the "Iraqi threat" also loomed large on the minds of the Gulf rulers during the negotiations to set up a regional organization. The experiences with Iraq in the past, its territorial designs in the Persian Gulf and the existing ideological antagonism between them was too much to be overlooked in favour of recently established and largely unsettled alignment, they argue. However, these analysts fail to envision the indispensability of the Iraq Arab rapprochement. The Iranian threat was imminent and grave to such an extent that they could not afford to feel mutually secure.

Right from 1978, when Egypt signed the Camp David Accords, there had begun full scale realignment between Iraq and Arab Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. In subsequent conferences called to reject the Accords and admonish Egypt, they discovered areas to common interests and were led in close cooperation to build up a strong anti Sadaat power bloc. When Khoemini came to power vowing to export the revolution across the border the two decided to work closely to contain Khomeini’s Islamic revolution.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan did not mar the improvement of ties between Iraq and its Persian Gulf neighbours, as one would have expected. Iraq decided to down play the event and Saudi Arabia worked hard to align with Saddam in condemning the invasion. Saudi Arabia, managed to secure Iraqi participation in the OIC foreign
ministers' meeting on January 27 called to condemn the Soviet invasion. The conference adopted Iraqi resolution which, while condemning the Soviet action, flayed the US and Western powers for tampering with Afghanistan situation. This new found love between the Arab Gulf countries and Iraq manifested itself in the tacit approval of Saddam's aggression against Iran. Thus by the time of GCC's formation Iraq had ceased to be a threat to its smaller neighbours in the Gulf, atleast for the time being. What would have indeed persuaded the Gulf rulers to refrain from including Iraq in the GCC was the fear of Iraq's inevitable domination of the GCC, given its military and economic superiority. The war was also in the interest of the Gulf rulers as it would considerably weaker both the region's dominant powers.

iii) Iran Iraq War and the GCC

When Iraq attacked Iran in September 1980, there was a general belief that the Gulf states had incited Iraq and promised support in its war efforts. Iraq's initial claim that it was leading an Arab war against Iran and it as the modern day "Qadisia" lent further credibility to that version.

Clania Wright, a well informed writer on the region, maintains that Iraq had agreed with its allies that only after all efforts to negotiate with Iran had been exhausted, would it strike militarily. Even then, Iraq undertook to limit military action while offering negotiations. Saudi Arabia's position was one of
"benevolent acquiescence", but privately more active support covering a range of requests in the event of the war with Iran.\(^15\)

Despite the temporary respite from the revolutionary fury, the Iran-Iraq war presented the Gulf states with a dilemma. On the one hand, Arab nationalists hoped that Iraq would succeed in dislodging the Islamic regime, they also welcomed the prospect of the so-called liberation of Khuzistan. On the other hand, they were concerned that Iraq might become too powerful. However, the combined effect of fear and Arab nationalism led them to support Iraq. There was a general sense of solidarity with Iraq\(^16\) and even instances of direct military involvement as the first shots were fired. Iraq sent helicopters, troops and aircrafts to Oman and was reported to have sought Omani permission to use its bases for an attack on the islands of Abu Musa and the Tuns islands. It was the concerted American and British diplomacy that dissuaded Qaboos from this course of action\(^17\). Similarly, the Iraqi naval units were reportedly anchored at the UAE ports. Iranian threats to destroy them anywhere in any port had the desired effect on the UAE.

During the first two years of the war, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait provided nearly $30 billion in grants and

loans to Iraq. The Saudis reportedly financed the Iraqi purchase of French weapons. From 1982 onwards, he direct military aid stopped. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, instead, agreed to produce Iraq's quota of 1.2 million barrels of oil per day on its behalf and transfer the proceeds to Baghdad. Saudi Arabia also permitted the 650 kilometer long Iraqi pipeline o the Saudi port of Yarbu free of charge having the initial capacity of 500,000 b/d. 18.

The fact that GCC was mainly directed against it was not lost on Iran. This view further gained credence when in a meeting of defence ministers in November 1982 wherein Iran was identified as a common and primary threat and calling attention to the need of projecting a combined military strength to deter hostile forces and to tackle them in the eventuality of war. 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 reasons of security, but in order to maintain foreign military interests in the area 19. Making it more explicit, the Iranian foreign minister, Ali Akbar Velayeti said, it was "necessary to remind the gentlemen bordering the Persian Gulf that they should not forget that Iran is the greatest and the most powerful country in the region." He warned the GCC against aligning itself with the US and reminded them that Iran considered America s the arch enemy. 20.

18. See Interview with Issam al Chalabi, the Iraqi oil Minister, by Christine Helms, Middle East Insight, vol. 6, no. 5, Spring 1989, pp. 53-54.
Until the Iranian offensive in 1982 the GCC called for an end to the war only in general terms. It was only after the Iranian offensive in July 1982, which saw its forces entrenched 15 km within northern Iraq, that the GCC woke up to the urgency of the situation and took the matter to the OIC and the United Nations. This attack was consistent with Iran's policy of waging a war of attrition, keeping Iraq on a war footing and thereby exerting pressure on the weakening Iraqi economy which might topple the regime of Saddam Husain. Action by Iran prevented Iraq from exporting oil through the Gulf and a pipeline through Syria was cut off. Iraq was able to continue the war with financial aid from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

The GCC summit in Manama in November 1982 criticised Iran for "crossing its international border with Iraq", noted that such developments posed a threat to the safety and security of the Arab nation and the violation of its sovereignty", and asked Iran to respond to the peace process of the OIC, the Non-aligned Movement and the UN21.

During the second half of 1983 when Iraq stepped up its missile and aircrafts raids on Iranian towns and oil installations with the help of Exocet missiles and French built Super Etendard fighter aircrafts threatened to destroy the oil Industry on the Kharg iseland which financed Iranian war efforts, Iran, through its aggressive stance, demonstrated its capability to make the Gulf impassable to all shipping. In retaliation for the sale of super Etendard aircraft to Iraq, Iran severed most of its economic ties 21.

FBIS-MEA, 12 November, 1982.
with France.

The GCC, at its Doha summit in 1983, for the first time proposed a peace plan based on step by step creation of a neutralized zone. First to be taken out of the war would be the Gulf including the Iranian ports and the oil facilities at the Kharg island. The second step would be to neutralize the 300 mile front from the mouth the of the Gulf in the south to peak of Kurdistan in the north. Sheikh Zayed of the UAE floated the idea of a "Marshal Plan" to reconstruct both the countries. In May 1983 the foreign ministers of the UAE and Kuwait attempted mediation between the two combatants in which the idea of a "construction fund" was discussed thereby appearing to meet Iran's principle demand—war reparation.

It is noticeable that the Doha summit marked an evolution in the thinking of GCC on the war. The chances of an outright Iraqi victory had deemed. The Iranian revolutionary fervour had subsided. GCC statements from then onwards reflected its desire to come to terms with Iran without jeopardizing its relations with Iraq.

However, by 1984, the situation had changed again with Iraqi attacks on oil tankers and Iran's ultimatum to block the Strait of Hormuz. Iran also retaliated by attacking Saudi and Kuwaiti tankers. The barely veiled Iraqi tactics of enlarging the conflict and involving the neighbours seemed to be succeeding. Alarmed, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait agreed on joint air cover for their ships. On 5 June

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1984, Saudi jets, guided by AWACS, intercepted and destroyed an Iranian F-4 fighter bomber.

The resumption of Iraqi attacks on shipping in the Gulf in December 1984 had the effect of reducing Iranian oil exports to an estimated 1.1 m. b/d and causing the Tehran Government to suspend imports temporarily. Despite this, the Iranian economy appeared to be capable of sustaining the cost of continuing the war, albeit under severe pressure largely due to oil exports from the Kharg island oil terminal which remained largely intact and by tactical evasion such as the introduction of temporary floating oil terminals, such as that in Sirri island.

The Kuwaiti summit reaffirmed GCC "readiness to mediate in order to put an end to the destructive war in a way to preserve the rights and legitimate interests of the two parties as a step towards normalizing relations among the region's states". It was for the first time that a GCC resolutions call for peace was directed at both the combatants and not directed at Iran alone, thus omitting the assumption behind earlier communiques that Iraq wanted peace whereas Iran was the intransigent party.

Welcoming the GCC's changed posture, Velayati said Iran would respond to the friendly gesture. Rafsanjani, the

then Speaker of the Iranian parliament, said, "we have believed all along that the countries supporting Iraq will change their policies and give up their support when they lose hope in the Baghdad government. He added that the Gulf states trusted Iran because "they know well that Iran has not harmed them although it has been capable of doing so".  

It was under this climate of expectations that Velayaeti went to Riyadh and held talks with King Fahd, though without any results.

Attacks on tankers and other commercial vessels in the Gulf were increased by both sides during 1986, and Iran intensified its practice of intercepting merchant shipping and confiscating goods which it believed to be destined for Iraq. Iraq, meanwhile, was successful in damaging the alternative oil exports facilities which Iran had established at the islands of Sirri and Larak, having bombed Kharg island earlier.

In retaliation, Iran launched a massive operation across the Shatt al-Arab. Some 85,000 troops were used in this operation which occupied the Iraqi port of Fao and about 800 sq. km. of Fao peninsula. It brought Iranian troops within fifty miles of Kuwait city. The proximity of Kuwaiti territory to the hostilities not withstanding Iran promised not to involve Kuwait in the war, provided that it did not

allow Iraq the use of its territory i.e. the island of Bubiyan which is claimed by Iraq for military purposes.

Alarmed at the close proximity of the war, the GCC foreign ministers met in an emergency meeting in Riyadh and discussed the use of the Peninsular Shield Force in case the war envelops any member of the GCC. The communique issued at the end of the meeting, once again, went back to its original position of praising Iraq for its readiness to end the war and declared its resolve to intensify its efforts in the UN and NAM to end the war.28

The Iran-Iraq war entered a potentially new phase in 1987. Once more, the danger of an escalation of the conflict was focused on the shipping lanes of the Persian Gulf. Reflecting its anger at Kuwait's support for Iraq, Iranian attacks were concentrated on Kuwaiti shipping and on neutral vessels and tankers carrying oil or other cargoes to and from Iraq, via Kuwait. Alarmed by the repeated attacks on its merchant ships and general apathy of the outside world to the war, Kuwait sought the protection of the leading powers for its shipping in the Gulf, and by involving them more closely it hoped to persuade them of the urgent need for international cooperation in achieving a peaceful end to the conflict. The USSR and subsequently the USA were asked to re-register Kuwaiti ships under their flags, which they would be then obliged to defend. On March 24, the day after

the USA had made its navy available to escort Kuwaiti tankers Iran threatened to halt the traffic in oil through the Gulf. Iran used high speed launches based on the islands of Minou, Farsi and Abu Musa to attack Gulf shipping. It made it clear that it considered the US naval presence in the Gulf to be provocative, and fears of military confrontation grew. In June 1987, Iran started deploying its sickworm missiles in Fao directly threatening Kuwait.

The escalation of tension in the Gulf resulted in a rare display of unanimity in the UN Security Council which adopted the Resolution 598 urging immediate cease fire. Iran criticised the resolution for failing to identify Iraq as the original aggressor in the war, and claimed that the belligerent US naval presence in the Gulf rendered it null and void.

The GCC summit in December noted with regret "Iran's attempt to procrastinate the implementation of the cease-fire Shiekh Zayed was designated to lead the GCC dialogue with Iran. An offer of $ 50 million was made to Iran as war reparations with a promise that GCC would remain neutral vis-a-vis Iraq and Iran and vis-a-vis the Superpowers once the war came to and end.

The continuation of the war for eight years does not, of course, point to the GCC's inability to find a peaceful solution to it, for the belligerents were adroit in not
ending it\textsuperscript{29}. They did not take a serious note of the GCC’s peace proposals and, for that matter, those from the UN, the NAM and the OIC. Yet this does not shroud the fact that the GCC’s efforts were largely non serious, inactive, and partisan on various accounts.

The seriousness of the GCC to bring an end to the war can be doubted on two accounts. First the GCC’s role as an honest peace broker was diluted by its consistent logistic and financial support to Iraq during the war. This gives credence to the doubt that the main aim of the GCC countries to project themselves as peace broker was, in fact, aimed at offsetting their support to Iraq. Second, they abstained from making any active diplomatic effort to end the war when Iraq had the upper hand in the war. This, if associated with a combination of other factors -- the Gulf states approval of Iraqi attack on Iran and their interest in the defeat of Iran which had, after the revolution, become a major threat to the security of the region -- makes one

\textsuperscript{29} Iran, in particular, rejected the peace moves by the GCC countries for their alleged role in supporting Iraq in the war. Iran criticized the GCC regimes for supporting Baathists who did not believe in religion. It also saw these countries as puppets of the US. Therefore, given its anti-US posture, Iran could not have agreed to accept peace proposals by US allies. Even, despite doling out logistic and financial backing to Iraq, the GCC countries did not have enough clout on it to compel it to agree to establish peace with Iran. Iraq also resented the UAE’s, Qatar and Omani reconciliatory approach towards Iran. Saddam Hussain is reported to have said that if all Arab countries had firmly backed Iraq, Tehran would have laid its arms long ago. For details see A.K. Pasha, "Peace in the Gulf : GCC Perceptions", \textit{Strategic Analysis}, December, 1988, pp. 1025-44.
infer that the GCC countries favoured a war that could result in the defeat of Iran than the peace which would have kept Iran militarily strong and the Islamic government firmly seated in power.

The GCC renewed their stand and began earnest search for peace only when Iran bounced back with its armed forces entering the Iraqi territory, a few hundred miles away from Kuwait. They adopted a conciliatory, approach towards Iran, their support to Iraq cooled down a bit and they came up with solutions that would have led to honourable peace for both the sides.

However, as the tide of the war turned in favour of Iraq, they again went back to their earlier praising Iraq for its quest for cease-fire and resumed their support for Iraq. This was done with a motive to prolong the war as it helped detract the two major regional powers giving Saudi Arabia to establish its leadership in the region\textsuperscript{30}.

iv) Iran GCC and the US

The disruption of the American security structure in the Persian Gulf region in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution led America to rethink and to bring about radical alteration in its involvement in the Gulf. The Iranian revolution escalated the security-related fears of the Gulf states whose political, social and economic conditions were

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, p. 1030-31.
quite similar to those existing in Iran prior to the revolution.

The Khomeini revolution, which was a blend of Iranian nationalism and Islamic puritanical internationalism, appeared poised to seek the establishment of an equally puritanical Islamic order in the Gulf. And Khoemini made abundantly clear its ambitions to adopt measures that would alter the political order in the Gulf. Naturally the peninsular Shiekdoms were not willing to take a passive view of the revolution in Iran.

The staunchly anti-US posture adopted by the Islamic Republic since its very inception, and the possibility that the other states of the Arabian peninsula might also experience Islamic revolutions, provided reasons for the antagonism between the United States and Iran. The hostage crisis added intensity to this antagonism.

The Nixon Doctrine had outlived its usefulness. Even though the Carter Doctrine was a manifestation of the United States' willingness to intervene if the pro-western status quo was further disturbed in the Gulf, Washington was still looking for a major action to emerge as a protector of its strategic interests. In other words, despite the changed political realities in the Gulf in the aftermath of the revolution in Iran and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the US decision makers still wanted to assign

the mantle of leadership to a pro-western actor in the mould of the Shah. At the same time it was also eager to retain its credibility vis-a-vis the peninsular states through the promise of the use of its military might. The creation of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RJTF), which was later expanded into the US Central Command (USCENTCOM), was the most viable military step taken by the US since the Baghdad Pact in 1955 (later renamed CENTO). In order to provide more 'teeth' to the RDJTF, the US also obtained base facilities from Somalia, Kenya and Oman.32.

Under such a situation Saudi Arabia emerged as a major military actor in the region by virtue of its ability to garner the peninsular states under a regional security arrangement whose military capabilities could be developed with the tacit and defacto support of the United States. The Saudis hoped that eventually this would serve as a deterrent for destabilizing maneuvers of the Islamic Republic. The GCC was established for that purpose.

It was the most propitious time for the Saudis, who had been vying for the dominant position in the region to assume the leadership mantle. Until the end of 1970s, the Saudi leadership ambitions were somewhat broadly based. In the Middle East at large, they could not realistically compete against Egypt or Syria for a dominant leadership role.

Even their oil wealth had its limitations, as the re-emergence of a buyers market in the 1980s painfully reminded them. The area which was a more appropriate testing ground for their leadership aspirations was the Persian Gulf.

The one time leading actor, Iran, despite its historical dominant role, its size, population, strategic location, had been castigated as a pariah both regionally as well as internationally because of its Islamic radicalism and anti-US posture which posed a threat both to the Status quo in the region as well as the American interest in the Gulf.

In a major action that was aimed at enhancing regional security Saudi Arabia orchestrated the formation of the Gulf cooperation council (GCC) in May 1981 involving Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain. To protect its own interests as well as to maintain the status quo in the region the US wanted to tie the various Gulf states militarily under USCENTOCOM in a US-centred order. But the raison d'etre of the GCC was not so straight forward. In this arrangement, the GCC states emphasized Islam as the basis of their unity, obviously a measure aimed at pre-empting potential charges from Iran that the GCC was in any way anti Islamic.

Concerning military cooperation with the superpowers there was a deadlock in the GCC because of conflicting positions taken by Kuwait and Oman. While Oman preferred a collective defence agreement between the Gulf countries and the US, Kuwait advocated a balanced relationship with both superpowers. The Saudi leadership wanted to reserve the

right of defining the parameters of cooperation with the United States, allowing the Saudis to define these parameters was not exactly a welcome option for the United States; however, the enormity of strategic interests for the superpower was not matched by the prevalence of policy options. Besides, an over the horizon presence was an alternative that might have also minimized the American human casualties in the wake of a flare up of a limited conflict with Iran. However, the GCC developed a sophisticated position on the issue. According to Secretary General of GCC, Abdullah Bishara, the member states did not want either superpower to gain a foothold in the Gulf area. Instead, they preferred a "Gulfanization" of Gulf security, that is, an arrangement based upon cooperation among the Gulf states on matters of internal security and external threats. The GCC, maintained Bishara, did not envision the use of RDJTF -- as proposed by the US to maintain the free flow of oil for fear of Soviet intervention. At the same time the GCC also rejected the Soviet proposal to neutralize the area while it continued to occupy Afghanistan and maintain its presence in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea using military facilities in South Yemen and Ethiopia.

34. Ibid., p. 20.
The congruity between the real policies of the GCC states and the strategic objectives of the US was manifested in a number of ways. First, both the GCC and the US strongly favored the present political status quo in the Arab Gulf states which was under direct threat from Khomeini's radical Islam. Second, the Gulf states as well as the US envisioned the GCC as a legitimate vehicle for promoting political stability and order in the region. Finally, the GCC member states continued their heavy reliance on Western military equipment and on the use of Western military advisors for building up their military infrastructure.

However, the reliance of cooperation among the member states of GCC for the resolution of international and external threats to the regional security was a deliberate choice. Since the Islamic Republic of Iran so heavily emphasized its predilection for non-alignment with and non-involvement of super powers in the Gulf, the GCC states wanted to use it as a carrot for Iran. This would alleviate whatever fear Iran might have about the Gulf states reliance on the American military might to overthrow the Khomeini regime while reserving the option of using their American backers in case their own regimes were threatened either covertly or overtly by the Khomeini regime.

The Iranian leadership viewed the GCC as an instrument of US policy in the region, ironically much in the same way as radical Arabs had viewed the Shah's regime as a Western
Surrogate\textsuperscript{36}. The revolutionary concept of Vilayat-e-Fagih (Islamic State) and the struggle of the mustazafeen (the exploited) against the mushtakbereen (the exploiters) provided the base on which the Iranian leadership denounced the Arab regimes of the region by questioning their legitimacy.

Accordingly, Iran perceived that if the peninsular states were likely to accept the Khomeini version of the Islamic order then the Islamic Republic has to retain its status as a regional power. In other words, if Iran could serve as the gendarme of the Western interest in the region under the Shah, Iran under Khomeini should be viewed as the defender of the Islamic order.

Thus, the Iranian policy in the Gulf was aimed at alerting the pro-American policy posture of these Sheikhdoms, without necessarily providing diplomatic or military openings for the Soviet Union in the region. In this role of the defender of Islamic order, Iran was bound to come in conflict with the order preferred and supported by the United States as it eroded the American strategic dominance in the region.

The American leadership was most comfortable with the regional order under the Shah who had flexed his muscles on a number of occasions to safeguard both Iran's as well as Western interests. For instance, the Shah, by demonstrating

\textsuperscript{36} FBIS-ME, 29 January, 1982.
his military superiority, seized three Gulf islands—Abu Musa and the two Tumbs near the Strait of Hormuz in 1971, his armed forces dealt a crippling blow to the communist insurgency in the Dhofar province of Oman in 1975, and his military might also enabled him to extract a humiliating agreement from Iraq in 1975.

Moreover, even the peninsular states had welcomed the Shah’s stabilizing presence in the area. This tacit acceptance of the regional dominance of Iran would have continued either in the absence of Iran-Iraq war, which ravaged the Iranian economy and destroyed its military prowess, or if the war had been settled on the terms demanded by the Islamic Republic.

But the sharp polarization of forces in Iran against the political status quo in the region and against the American dominance of the region led to a sharp conflict between the GCC and Iran and the US and Iran. There is yet another variable which significantly aided the Gulf states: the doomed decision of the Reagan administration to sell arms to Iran in exchange for American hostages that were held hostages in Lebanon. The disclosure of this fiasco resulted in three development which were disastrous for the pursuit of strategic objectives of Iran in the Iran Iraq war. First, it brought about an abrupt end to this policy and Iran lost a source for the purchase of quality weapons. Second, in the aftermath of the disclosure, the Reagan administration reinvigorated on a systematic basis, its endeavors to close all international sources of arms sale to
Iran. Third, and the most important, the United States, in an attempt to re-establish its credibility with the Gulf countries, was forced to take such actions as providing satellite intelligence to Iraq on the Iranian troop deployment and encouraging France to sell sophisticated weapons to Iraq\(^{37}\).

Despite this setback, Iran instead of toning down its tirade against the GCC or initiate negotiations to end the war, began attacking targets in Kuwait and increased mining of the Gulf. Iran felt that sustained economic and even limited military support of the members of GCC, such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, for Iraq made them legitimate targets of Iranian fury.

Despite the ant-Iranian stand maintained by the GCC all along the war what has not received enough attention has been Iran's efforts at conciliation with the Gulf states, as well as its attempt to persuade them to adopt a more even handed policy towards the Iran Iraq war. On several occasions Iran did try to separate the issue of war with Iraq from the broader issues of Gulf security, and offered to reach mutually acceptable arrangements. In response, it expected the Gulf Arabs to halt their assistance to Iraq\(^{38}\). The GCC states, on the contrary, wanted to adopt measures that provided them with immediate protection from Iranian


\(^{38}\) Hunter, no. 12, p. 107.
attacks, tilted the balance of war in favour of Iraq in the near future, and brought about an end to war in the not-too-distant future. From this perspective, the cessation of war could be either an outcome of no decisive victory for either combatant, or a military victory for Iraq. This thinking led to an all-out aggressive policy towards the Islamic Republic.

The initiation of this phase was a failure of the "gulfanization" of the Gulf conflict policy of the GCC so grandiosely announced at the formation of this Council. Kuwait invited Washington to re-flag its tankers and approached Moscow to lease Soviet tankers. Even in this decision to confront the Khomeini regime, by seeking the protective shields of superpowers, the GCC members states sustained their quest for a negotiated solution to this war by enticing Iran with offers of economic reconstruction.39

The American presence in the Gulf was not merely symbolic and over the horizon presence, as preferred by the GCC states. The US navy became actively involved in the mine sweeping operations, in escorting the re-flagged Kuwaiti tankers. As an indication that it meant business, the US Navy engaged Iran in a limited military action on 21 September 1987 when it attacked and disabled an Iranian vessel that was allegedly laying mines in the Gulf. The United States even restricted the export of certain high

tech products to China because it had supplied Iran with HY-2 or Silkworm missiles. The United States also launched "Operation Staunch" as an attempt to halt world wide weapons sales to Iran, and it even supplied satellite intelligence to Iraq on Iran's battlefield deployments.

The involvement of the US, particularly in favour of Iraq, became even more clear when on 18 April 1988 its naval warships and planes sank or crippled Iranian naval vessels in a day long series of clashes across the southern Gulf. In another incident the United states as a retaliatory measure, destroyed two Iranian oil platforms when an American ship was damaged due to mines explosion. With this coincided the Iraqi success in regaining the strategic southern Fao peninsula which the Iranians had captured in early 1986. In July 1988 with the downing of an Iranian civil airliner by the US, Vincennes came the Iranian acceptance of the cease-fire though the causes for ending the eight year war are going to be debated for long time. Nevertheless the Kuwaiti decision to invite the two superpowers for protection, in conjunction with the Reagan administrations resolve to restore its credibility in the aftermath of the Iran-Contra fiasco worked to the advantage of the GCC and Iraq and the tightening of noose on Iran.

The United States involvement in the Gulf may be described as a persuasive example of what Dallin and Lapidus

label as its "unilaterist" and "interventionist" orientations. These authors utilize these concepts to describe the US policy towards the USSR; but these orientations are equally applicable to the US policy towards Iran during this confrontation phase. Eventough the US was invited in the Gulf by Kuwait, its behaviour became quite independent of the preferences of the GCC. The US continued to determine unilaterally whether it was going to intervene and to what extent it would use force against Iran to safeguard its strategic interest in the Persian Gulf.

The American naval action in the Persian Gulf constrained the military activities of the navy of the Islamic Republic, while giving the Iraqis the opportunity to launch destructive air raids on Iranian oil facilities. Besides, the American naval activities not only systematically destroyed the Iranian naval power but also kept Iran from focusing on the war as also contributing in the weakening of the Iranian resolve to continue the war, an entirely welcome outcome from the perspectives of the United States and the Arab Gulf states.

41. Ahrari, no. 37, p. 199