CHAPTER I

CONFLICTS IN THE PERSIAN GULF: AN OVERVIEW

As regards the regional conflicts, the Persian Gulf is distinct from other regions of the world, less in terms of their seemingly endless number and more due to their varying patterns and intensity-level.

History, coupled with the topography of the region, has given birth to a number of territorial disputes. As the cradle of world’s two conflicting civilizations Arab and Persian each confined to separate territorial boundaries, the region is the center stage of the conflict between the two oriental ideologies. While some countries still stick to centuries old Islamic conservatism, the grassroots of their socio-political system, while a few other have embraced 19-20th centuries’ Socialism, of course with added Arab-Islamic characteristics. This has given birth to inter-state radicalism vs. Islamic conservatism in the region. With the emergence, or re-emergence of Islamic radicalism during the last one and a half decades, the region is afflicted with Islamic conservatism versus Islamic radicalism rivalry. The Arab peninsular countries representing Islamic conservatism are embroiled in ideological rivalry with both the radical right (Islam), represented by Iran, and the radical left, represented by Iraq. No less antagonistic are the radical right and the radical left, although this conflict has been overshadowed by territorial, Arab-Persian and Shia-Sunni rivalries between Iran and Iraq, the countries representing, respectively, the abovementioned radical streams.

It is in this perspective that this study endeavors to a detailed and analytical account of regional conflicts in the Persian Gulf(1).

TERRITORIAL DISPUTES

A) BOUNDARY DISPUTES:

1) THE SHATT-AL-ARAB DISPUTE:

This dispute is between Iran and Iraq. It is over the an 80km of the estuary of the river Shatt-Al-Arab, which divides the land boundaries of the two countries (2). A tributary of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris, the Shatt-Al-Arab, 205 km long with an avg. breadth of 548 meter, has historically been under Arab control, except those few occasions when the Persian empire was in control of the same and the land adjacent to it(3).

The demarcation of boundaries being an unknown practice during ancient and medieval times, the possession of the Shatt shifted alternately between Arab rule and Persian empire with the migration of people and or due to the shifting loyalties of the people, inhabiting the delta
of the river, from one power to the other one. Therefore, there are little on record about the dates of the “shifts” in, and the duration of control over, the Shatt. Given the practice of non relinquishment of claim from the Shatt by one of the disputants even when it happened to lose it, the authenticity of the historical accounts and official records, except those of relatively modern period, can not be considered authentic.

However, there is a fundamental difference between the nature of conflict over the Shatt during the medieval days and that of present times. Earlier the Shatt was the part of dispute over the entire landmass east of it, while in the 20th century, rather the 2nd half of this century to be more precise, the Shatt alone is the major source of conflict.

This change has taken place due to growing strategic importance of the river after the discovery of oil in Iraq coupled with the expansion of trade between Iraq and the countries linked to it by sea routes. The river’s eastern side is Iraq’s chief oil export outlet to the Persian Gulf waters. Laying overland pipelines through Syria and Turkey and constructing commercial port at Umm-e-Qasr, Iraq reduced its dependence on the Shatt route by half. Yet, the oil shipped through the Shatt estuary constitutes the mainstay of Iraqi economy(4). Besides, to Iraq the Shatt is a permanent route for the supply of oil, while the pipelines carry the threat of closure by the countries these pass through. Interestingly, both Turkey and Syria closed down the Iraqi pipelines passing through their territories.

To Iran, the Shatt waterways facilitate direct access to the ports of Khorremshaher and the industrial complex around Ahwaz. However, for Iran the commercial and economic importance of the Shatt reduced when the port Bandar Abbas and Kharag island were developed as the chief sources of its oil’s outlet(5). The river is important to Iran for denying Iraq the control over it given the latter’s dependence on it. It also enables Iran to supervise the Iraqi navigation through it.

Iraq claims that not only has the Shatt been historically the part of Arab rule but since the time of the beginning of the practice of boundary demarcation between Ottoman and Persian empires, its sovereignty over it (the Shatt) has always been acknowledged by Persia in exchange for Arab recognition to its control over the adjacent landmass.

Iran rejects Iraqi claim on two counts. First, Iraq is not the successor state of the Ottoman empire. Therefore it is not entitled to extend any claim over the former Ottoman territories. Second, the old treaties, which recognised the Ottoman’s empire’s control over the Shatt, now stand illegal for not being in accordance with the existing international law.

The successive Iranian governments swear by the international legal principles of the midline of the river channel constituting the natural boundary of two states separated by a river. The Iranian side further claims that after signing in 1975 the Algiers agreement to this effect, Iraq is under the international obligation to abide by the ‘Thalweg’ principle.

As against this, Iraq’s position has been that since according to international law obligations under a treaty are not unilateral, therefore it was justified in abrogating the Algiers treaty in
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1980 when Iran indulged in the violation of those clauses of the treaty which provided for the return of three border villages in Khurramshahar regions to Iraq by Iran.

Amid claims and counterclaims, occasionally escalating into border conflagrations(6), the Shatt-Al-Arab dispute has quite a good number of times been negotiated over. These negotiations culminated at least into four major treaties(7).

THE PEACE TREATY OF 1639: This treaty was signed, following the Turkish conquest of Basra, in 1639 between the representatives of the Ottoman and the Persian empires. Under this treaty, Persia accepted the Turkish suzerainty over the Shatt and some areas peopled by the Arabs on its eastern side. The Persian empire retained the freedom of navigation and right of economic exploitation of the river(8).

THE SECOND EURUZERUM TREATY: This treaty was concluded under the good offices of Great Britain and Russia on May 31, 1947 in the Turkish city of Erzerum. Under this treaty; a) the Turkish empire ceded to Persia the city and harbor anchorage of Muhammadah and the island of Khizr (now Abadan) and Persia ceded some territories in the province of Sulaimaneyah and Zubabeb; and, b) the Ottoman empire was allowed to retain control over the Shatt’s width up to the deep water marker of the eastern shore, sans the territories of Muhammadah and the island of Khizr.

The treaty was, however, later rejected by the both the parties. The Ottoman empire held that the treaty did not extend the Arab sphere of control to the eastern shores of the river. Following the refusal, Britain and Russia recognized Ottomanian sovereignty over the whole of the river in an ‘explanatory note’ (9). Taking strong exception to the ‘explanatory note’, Persia retrogressively annulled its assent to the treaty. With this the boundary commission, set up under the treaty to fix the boundaries, was also dismantled.

THE CASTANTINOPLE PROTOCOL 1913: The Constantinople Protocol was signed among Russia, Great Britain, Persian and Turkish empire (10). This treaty re-established Turkish control over the entire width of the Shatt and around the waters of Muhammadah and Khizr. The middle of the river channel was fixed as the boundary.

THE TREATY OF 1937: The heralding of Pahalvi rule under Reza Shah in 1921 put the 1913 treaty and the earlier ones in jeopardy as the Shah refused to abide by any one of them. He did not recognize the Basra port Directorate, established by Iraq to supervise negotiations on the Shatt according to the 1913 treaty. The rejection of the treaty resulted in border skirmishes between Iran and Iraq (11). The Shah also refused to give recognition to Iraq in resentment against ‘Iraq’s control over the Shatt (12).

The matter was brought to the notice of the League of Nations on Nov. 29, 1934. The League appointed a rapporteur, an Italian diplomat, to mediate between the two parties to find a negotiated settlement to the dispute. In part due to the efforts of the rapporteur and in part as a result of the Middle East pact, initiated in 1935 by Britain and Russia to resolve the boundary disputes, an Iran-Iraq border treaty was signed on July 4, 1937 in Tehran. The treaty
Iraqi jurisdiction over the east of the Shatt and save the areas around the Iranian port of Muhammara and Abadan the border ran along the Thalweg. In addition to this, Iran was granted four miles anchorage zone of Abadan. Principle of freedom of navigation was established. The transit fee was to be used for the maintenance and expansion of shipping lanes and a provision was made for the conclusion of a convention for joint administration of the Shatt shipping and related activities within two years of the signing of the agreement.

DISPUTE IN THE 1960S: The following two decades after the signing of the 1937 treaty marked a relative calm on the Shatt front. The two countries turned friends by joining the CENTO in 1955. In 1959, the Shah, however, reiterated Iranian claim over the eastern side of the Shatt, accusing Iraq of not adhering to the Thalweg principle. In response, the then ruler of Iraq, Gen. Qasim, renewed his claim over Abadan, Muhammara and other Arab territories under Iranian control as per the 1937 treaty. In 1959, the Shah unilaterally abrogated the treaty of 1937 (13). Frequent outbursts of border clashes during the late 1950s and early 1960s were reported. Iran continued accusing Iraq of backtracking from setting up the convention of the joint administration of the Shatt as agreed upon under the 1937 treaty, misappropriating the transit fee and using it in the construction of hotels and airport and not paying the dues (14).

Iraq putforward the Iranian attempt to forcibly impose its jurisdiction over the Shatt as the main reason behind not setting up the boundary commission by it (15).

It would be too far-fetched to conclude that Iran began abetting Kurdish rebellion in the first half of the 70s to bargain a favorable settlement on the Shatt. For to keep Iraq pre-occupied with its internal affairs might have stemmed as well from the Iranian strategy to neutralize Iraqi threat on its own borders, to weaken Iraq internally and to intimidate the Arab powers from forming an anti-Iranian strategic consensus in collusion with Baghdad.

However, this did help Iran in reinforcing a link between the Kurdish problem and the Shatt issue as Iraq offered to cede the estuary to Iran in return of Iranian assurance to stop supporting the Kurdish rebels. Following a green signal from Iraq, the Algerian president who was hosting OPEC's annual summit being attended by the Shah and the then Iraqi vice-president Saddam Hussien mediated between the two. The, Algerian efforts led to the signing of the Algiers Agreement. The treaty provided for the establishment of the boundaries along the Thalweg and the Iranian side was called upon to keep its hand off from the Kurdish rebellion (16).

The Algiers treaty had a major drawback. It was a political agreement instead of a border settlement in the true sense of the term. Hence, its sanctity and durability were doubted that too in view of the fact that it was signed by Iraq under compulsion and by Iran from the position of strength.

Thus on Sept. 19, 1980, Iraq unilaterally abrogated the treaty with its President Saddam Hussein torn the text of the treaty apart in Algeria. Both the venue, the same place where Iraq
was subjected to sign the humiliating treaty, and the time—by then, it is said, the decision to
attack Iran on the 22nd of the same month was already taken—confirm that the tearing of the
treaty was an exhibition of Iraqi decision to settle the issue on battleground beside meeting other
objectives(17).

THE IRAQ-KUWAIT DISPUTE:

Next to the Shatt, the most outstanding dispute in the region is the one between Iraq and
Kuwait over the two islands of Bubiyan and Warbah. The whole of Kuwait in itself is disputed
due to Iraq’s claim that this country has historically been the part of Basra region under Ottoman
rule. Iraq did not forego its claim over Kuwait in exchange for massive Kuwaiti financial support
during the Iran-Iraq War. Nor has it done so until now despite being battered in the Persian Gulf
War. The official map of Iraq shows Kuwait as its 17th province and there have been repeated
Iraqi incursions in the Kuwaiti territory in scant disregard to the latest demarcation of Iraqi-
Kuwait boundaries by the UN Boundary demarcation Commission.

Barely a week after the independence of Kuwait, Iraq began contemplating the takeover
of the whole country through the use of force. It had also begun amassing troops on the
international borders(18). However, the British and Saudi threats to resort to force to protect
the independence of Kuwait prevailed upon Iraq to drop the idea.

Before invading Kuwait on Aug. 2, 1990, Iraq might have made little efforts to regain
Kuwait, but it continued to eye Bubiyan and Warbah. On times, it proposed to relinquish its
claim on the whole of Kuwait if the latter returned the two Islands, even on lease.

Bubiyan and Warbah are close to the junction of Kuwait and Iraq. Bubiyan lies within
one mile of Kuwait shore and within five miles of Iraq’s. Warbah is approximately two miles
from the Kuwaiti shore and less than a mile away from Iraq. The two islands are strategically
vital to the disputants. They command a narrow strip of water which the Iraqi ships must pass
through to arrive at the port of Umm-i-Qasr. They contain huge deposits of oil. And Iraq’s
control over them would extend its Maritime boundaries to a far larger area of the Gulf sea-bed
underneath which lies oil in abundance.

Iraq has stuck to coercive diplomacy on the islands issue. It occupied the island twice
in 1970-71 and built a road through the Kuwaiti dessert territory of the Persian Gulf in 1972
and made limited military forays in 1977. Kuwaiti sovereignty over the two island is recognized
under a bilateral agreement with Ottoman empire in 1932, whereby Iraq accepted Kuwait’s
suzerainty over them.

Amid military hiatus in early 70s, there also came a phase when the two countries tried
to settle the issue amicably. In the mid-70s, Saudi Arabia mediated to work out a mutually
agreeable solution. The settlement of this crisis came in sight when the Arab states exerted
pressure on Kuwait to lease half of the Bubiyan to Iraq and withdraw its claim over Warbah.
However, Kuwaiti government’s opposition to this plan eluded the solution. Kuwait was agreed
to lease both of the islands to Iraq for ninety nine years(19).

THE OMAN-UAE DISPUTE:
The dispute between Oman and the UAE is on a 10 mile long coastal strip along the borders. The border between the UAE and Oman in the Al-Khaki region are still undemarcated and, therefore, contain the seeds of the eruption of a dispute in future.

Oman dates its sovereignty over the coastal strip back to mid 19th century saying that it has traditionally been used by one of its tribes as grazing land. The dispute over the area in question erupted when the oil was discovered there. The UAE started oil exploration in the area in 1974 which which Oman opposed by claiming the region as its territory. In 1977, oil was for the first time extracted off shore in the area. Kuwait ignited the dispute further by helping Ras-al-Khaima establish an oil refinery in the disputed area. Oman demands a land corridor connection between its mainland and Musandam Peninsula through Al Fujairah and Sharjah.

DISPUTES AMONG THE UAE SHEIKHDOMS:

Disputes within the UAE, which is a single political unit, bear all the characteristics of the ones between two or more states. The seven Sheikhdoms which constitute the UAE are tied up in a lose confederation with each of them maintaining a sort of sovereignty over its boundaries. There lacks a central authority to decide about the boundary disputes and demarcate the boundaries among themselves. The member-Sheikhdoms have entered into boundary demarcation treaties with other states of the region in sovereign capacity.

The dispute between Sharjah and Dubai is over a portion of land situated five km inside the latter's territory where Sharjah has constructed a large shopping and business center there. This conflict reached alarming proportions in the late 70s, and an armed conflict looked, even the breakup of the confederation, inevitable. This crisis was averted due to President Sheikh Ziyad's intervention who managed to persuade the disputants to refer the case to a panel of European lawyers.

The Musandan peninsula is another disputed territory, involving Ummal Qaiwain and Fujairah as well as the UAE as a whole and Oman, the most peculiar of existing border conflicts in the world. A valley dividing Ras-Al-Khaima and Saharjah is also under dispute between them. The disputed territory is reported to have huge deposits of phosphate. Sharjah and Fujairah have also fought over the boundary demarcation issue. In one of such battles in 1972 about two dozen soldiers from both the sides were killed.

THE SAUDI-IRAQ DISPUTE:

Though far from being finally settled, the Saudi-Iraq boundary dispute has remained subsided due to an agreement reached between the two countries to consider the disputed land as neutral zone. This agreement was signed by the two governments on July 2, 1975. However, the dispute is vulnerable to being exploited as a pretext to launch military aggression by one of them against the other. In other words, the state of political relations between Iraq and Saudi Arabia shall determine the intensity of this dispute.

DISPUTE OVER THE BURAIMI OASIS:
The dispute over the Buraimi Oasis is between the UAE and Saudi Arabia on one hand, and Abu Dhabi and the UAE on the other. The Oasis, divided between Oman and the UAE, is a few hundred kms inside the southern corner of the Persian Gulf. It consists of nine villages inhabited by a population of mixed tribal origin. The dispute has arisen due to the absence of the practice of boundary demarcation in the past and the changing loyalties of the inhabitants between the contenders.(26)

The dispute has been a bone of contention following its increasing strategic importance in the wake of changing political and economic scenario in the region after the First World War. The Buraimi oasis, via Wadi-Al-Jazzi, controls access to the coast of Dhahran and Interim Oman. the oasis is also the primary water resource for Abu Dhabi and contains a substantial deposit of oil. This conflict came to the fore for the first time in 1933 when the Saudi government awarded oil concession to ARAMCO in the region lying between the eastern and the western extents of Abu Dhabi.

Britain which was then representing Oman's and sheikhdoms' interests challenged the Saudi authority to grant concession, on the basis ofAnglo-Ottoman convention in 1913 and Anglo Turkish convention in 1914, which described the territory as the part of Oman and the Sheikhdoms.

This dispute was almost settled in 1936 as the parties to the dispute acceded to a proposal by Britain to demarcate the oasis among themselves. However, the outbreak of the Second World War prevented a formal agreement to this effect.

The issue was raked up again by the Saudi government in 1949 in a note to Britain in which “the sovereignty over the greater part of the territory lying between the base of the Qatar peninsula and the South eastern corner of the Persian Gulf” was claimed(27). The Buraimi constituted a major portion of the territories claimed by the Saudi government.

The oasis was occupied by Saudi Arabia in 1952. The British Protectorate also recognized the Saudi occupation so long an agreement could not be reached at between the disputants. The negotiations between Oman and Saudi Arabia over the Buraimi issue began in 1954. They agreed to hold negotiations in the presence of a third party in Geneva. These talks took place in in 1955 but nothing tangible could copme out of it also. The failure of Geneva talks was followed by the expulsion of Saudi forces, stationed since 1952, from Buraimi in the same year. An attempt by the UN in 1953 to resolve the dispute by sending a fact-finding mission under Herbert de Pibbibng also failed(28).

It was not before the beginning of the 70s did the possibility of settlement arise. In the first quarter of the 70s the disputants showed the willingness to resolve it through negotiations. As a result, Saudi Arabia and the UAE signed a border agreement on July 29, 1974. Under this agreement:

1) Saudi Arabia renunciated its claim over Buraimi in exchange for a corridor to the Gulf in Khor-Al-Udaid and also a triangular strip of land on Abu Dhabi's eastern border near Qatar.
2) Rich Zararah (Sabah) oil field was divided between the UAE and Saudi Arabia.
3) Oman was given three and Abu Dhabi six of Buraimi villages (29).

(B) OFFSHORE DISPUTES:

IRAN'S CLAIM OVER BAHRAIN:

Iran's claim over Bahrain, a group of 33 islands situated between Qatar and Saudi Arabian coast, (30) dates back to the 19th century. Though the islands did not constitute the part of the Persian empire for most of the times, it never recognized Bahrain as a country nor its protectorate, the Great Britain (31). However, this conflict too, as did the other ones, accentuated following the discovery of oil in Bahrain in the 1920s (32).

Iran stakes claim over Bahrain on the basis of the latter having been the part of the Persian empire from a period preceding the advent of Islam in Arabia til the Portuguese occupation of the island in 1507(33). Bahrain was a Portuguese colony far about a period of hundred years before returning to Persia's sovereignty from 1602 to 1782.

Since 1702, Bahrain has been ruled by Arabs and from 1862 by the British power. However, the Iranian side claims that Britain never established its sovereignty over Bahrain and in principle recognized Persia as the legitimate sovereign(34).

The Iranian claim is disputed. The treaties signed between Britain and the ruler of Bahrain refer Bahrain to as an “independent country” with British jurisdiction on its foreign affairs.

Iran raised the issue following the Britain's decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf in 1968. It opposed negotiations among nine trucial Sheikhdoms, which included Bahrain, for a confederation. It, instead, demanded the return of the island to Iran.

Interestingly, after the British withdrawal the crisis made a headway towards the solution against all expectations. During 1968-69, Saudi Arabia used it good offices to convince Bahrain and Iran to settle the issue peacefully. The Shah's visit to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait broke the ice, paving the way for an announcement by the Shah on Jan. 4, 1969 that “Iran would forgo its claim over Bahrain if the people of Bahrain do not want to join my country”.

The two countries also decided to refer the issue to the UN. The then General Secretary, U Thant, appointed Vittorio Winas Peare Guicciardi, the then Director General of the UN office in Geneva, as his personal representative to head a fact-finding mission. The mission visited Bahrain between March 30 and April 18, 1970. In its report the mission maintained that people of Bahrain wished for an independent state. Subsequently, the UN passed a resolution on May 11 1970 declaring Bahrain as an independent country. The resolution was accepted by the Shah.
THE IRAN-UAE DISPUTE:

The dispute between Iran and the UAE is over Abu Musa and two Tunb islands, lying midway between the two countries. This dispute is the result of the overlapping of the territorial claims (35). Abu Musa is situated at 43 miles from Iran and 35 miles from the coast of Shrajah.

The greater and lesser Tunbs are situated about 20 miles from the Iranian island of Qeshm(36).

The area became a source of potential crisis after the discovery of oil in the Persian Gulf region. However, until the British withdrawal (by then these islands had become strategically significant too) the dispute was limited to staking of the claims and counter claims. The dispute virtually started in 1969 when Iran objected to the granting of oil concession to Occidental Petroleum’ in Abu Musa and an area three miles under the its territorial sea limits by Umm-Al Qaiwain on Nov. 16, 1969. Sharjah followed the suit by granting concession on Dec. 20, 1969 to ‘Butte Gas and Oil’ in the island and on its territorial waters. Sharjah also extended its sovereignty over Abu Musa by a royal decree, dated Sept. 19, 1969.

The islands are vital for Iran and the UAE for different reasons. These are important to the UAE as they contain vast deposits of oil. For Iran the islands are important from political and security point of views than the economic. Iran possesses enough oil reservoirs to be allured by the oil underneath the islands. But a physical control over them can immensely reinforce Iran’s position in the Strait of Hurmuz. Though the importance of the islands to Iran has not receded as such with the passage of time, it was certainly greater on the eve of the British pullout, which provided Iran an opportunity to indulge in a muscle-flexing exercise by virtue of its geographical, military and demographic preponderance over the Arab Sheikhdoms awaiting independence.

Iran occupied the islands on Nov. 30 1971, a day before the British withdrawal. Encouraged in part by Britain’s reluctance to restore the islands to their rightful owner and in part by the UAE’s helplessness, the Shah was able to negotiate a favorable agreement with the latter. According to this agreement, the UAE recognised Iran’s military control over the islands(37).

However, the agreement, which is still relevant, is not the final settlement as both Iran and the UAE regard it a temporary measure and each of the two, as a matter of principle, considers them an integral part of their territories. A Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two countries two days after the Iranian occupation read “neither Iran nor Sharjah will give up its claim to Abu Musa nor recognize the other party’s claim”(38).

The Islamic regime did not abandon the Shah’s occupation of the islands, instead decided to retain it which was a manifestation, as an observer views, of continuing with the Shah’s national security policy in connection to the islands (39).

THE OMAN-IRAN DISPUTE:

This dispute now stands settled. The area under question was a narrow strip of water, 21 nautical miles wide between Iranian islands of Jazirat Larak and the Omani islet of great Qiōin(40). Of 21 nautical miles of this waterway, a 6 nautical mile stretch falls under the
territorial jurisdiction of both the countries.

Iran and Oman signed a treaty on July 25, 1974 which divided the common boundaries into respective territorial waters on the Thalweg principle. However, even then some points of demarcation do not strictly conform to this principle. For instance, the 21st demarcation point is 4.40 nautical miles closer to Oman than Iran.

The full-fledged demarcation of the offshore boundaries between these countries is also subjected to the delimitation of the offshore boundaries between Oman and Ras-Al Khaymah as well as between Oman and Sharjah.

The absence of delimitation of boundaries between Oman and the two UAE Sheikhdoms carries a threat that any concession by the former to the latter two in delineating their offshore boundaries shall tamper with the Oman-Iran agreement of 1974.

THE DISPUTE BETWEEN KUWAIT AND SAUDI ARABIA:

The dispute between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait is regarding the neutral zone which consists of small islands of Umma-Al Maradim and Qaru in the upper part of the Persian Gulf. These islands ARE SITUATED 16 and 25 miles off the costs of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait respectively.

The dispute over the two islands started over the granting of the oil rights when the oil was discovered in the region. However, a settlement, though temporary, prevented the escalation of the dispute. The two countries under the treaty of Uqair of 1922 decided to consider the islands as 'neutral zone'. Since then the dispute is limited to the difference of interpretations over the terms and conditions of the 'would be final settlement'.

Kuwait wants to regain its sovereignty over the islands while Saudi Arabia has proposed for co-sovereignty, meaning the partition of the neutral zone by half between them.

Although a permanent solution remains elusive since 1922, the issue has never escalated into a serious political or military crisis(41).

THE BAHRAIN-QATAR DISPUTE:

The dispute between Bahrain and Qatar is over the Hower islands. Sixteen in number, Hower being the largest of them, these islands are barren. Located over the village of Zubarah of Qatar in the Bay of Salwa in the south-east corner of the Persian Gulf, Hower islands are scantily one mile off from the Qatar peninsula from where it can be reached by foot at low tide. Bahrain's claim over the islands is based on it being the traditional home to the ruling family.

In the wake of the dwindling oil resources in Bahrain and Qatar, the Hower islands are increasingly becoming vital for the two countries because of vast reservoir of oil these possess(42).

However, the dispute has so far not turned into a major political, diplomatic or military...
hiatus between the two countries. It is, rather, confined to occasional reiteration of claim over the islands by each party, and accusing the other of conducting military maneuvers (43).

THE SAUDI ARABIA-IRAN DISPUTE:

The Saudi Arabia-Iran dispute was over Al-Arbiyah and Al Farsiyeh islands and the area between the two islands. The two countries resolved the issue in 1968. Under an agreement, the boundaries were divided into three main segments. The median line between the opposite coasts constituted the boundaries in the southern segment. Saudi Arabia retained rights over Al-Arbiyah and Iran over Al Farsiyeh (44). The median line principle is also applied in the demarcation of boundaries in the northern segment with the island of Kharag placed under Iranian jurisdiction on the condition that the non-oil deposits will be shared by Iran with Saudi Arabia (45).

THE IRAN-KUWAIT DISPUTE:

The dispute between Iran and Kuwait pertains to the delimitation of boundary in the upper part of the Persian Gulf waters. They have failed to resolve it through negotiations. Instead, by granting oil concessions and carrying out other activities in the region in question both Iran and Kuwait have maintained a semblance of control over the upper Gulf.

Also, Kuwait has refused to recognize Iran’s sovereignty over the Kharag island, 209 miles off the Kuwaiti mainland. Iran dismisses Kuwaiti sovereignty over the Faylakh island, 15 miles from the Iranian mainland.

THE IRAN-QATAR DISPUTE:

According to a bilateral agreement signed on Sept. 20, 1969, Iran and Qatar have demarcated their offshore boundaries “in accordance with international Law and the Law of sovereignty”. The two countries, however, have yet not decided about the status of a number of islands lying on the either side of the boundary delimitation mark. Beside this, the northern terminal point is still undemarcated, pending the delimitation of Qatar-Bubiyan offshore boundaries.

SAUDI ARAB-OMAN:

Saudi Arab and Oman extend conflicting claims over the water whole of the Umm Zammul and the surrounding territory in the undemarcated border area covering the northwest riches of the Rub-Al Khali region.

IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICTS

The Persian Gulf region is the hotbed of a variety of ideological conflicts. These range from the geo-cultural ones, such as Persianism vs. Arabism, to the one between an indigenous and the alien ideologies, such as Left Radicalism vs. Arab Conservatism, to intra ideological ones, such as Sheism vs. Sunnism or Radical Islam vs. Conservative, or Puritanical, Islam.

PERSIANISM VERSUS ARABISM:

Separated by the Persian Gulf waters, Iran and the Arab countries represent Persian and
Arab ideologies respectively. Each of the two ideologies denotes to a distinct language, culture and ethnicity.

Even Islam, the common religion of the peoples on both sides, has failed to blur the differences and animosity between these two ideologies. In fact, Persia was the only defeated power which did not give up its pre-Islamic cultural ethos and the traditional language for the ones represented by the conquering Islamic forces from the Arab region. This happened despite the fact that the people of Persia embraced Islam in overwhelming number, and a large majority of them willingly.

Newly converted Muslims of Persia saw to it that they retained their language and culture by reducing the sphere of Arabic language and Islam to religious aspects of their lives only (46). The Arab Muslims and their Iranian counterparts are since then culturally and ethnically apart (47).

As against the case of Iran, Islamic conquests in Iraq and Syria and Egypt led to the replacement of the latter’s traditional Aramaic and Coptic languages respectively by Arabic. Even Arabic became one of the principle languages beside Greek and Latin, Roman and Byzantine empires following the Islamic conquests there (48).

The Arab rule in Persia did not, however, last long enough to have been able to replace an ancient nationalism with Arabism. After regaining the control from Arabs, The Persian rulers revived Persian nationalism and thrived on its animosity to Arabism over successive centuries in order not to let the Islamic concept of transnationalism, based on the unity of ‘Ummah’ (the Muslim community the world over), under ‘Khilafat’ rule influence people of Persia.

The geo-political factors have played a significant role in abating the Arab-Persian rivalry. Each national ideologies grew in different geographical settings, segregated by a fairly large body of sea water, with well defined political boundaries.

However, the post World War II, rivalry between Iran and Arab countries are more territorial than cultural in nature. The Arabism of Nasserite variety in the 60s espoused the concept Arab as ‘One Nation’ stretching from Atlantic to the Persian Gulf. The Saddamite variety espouses revival of the 7th century Arab empire which included today’s Iran conquered in 638 A.D. in the battle of Qadisiya. Saddam described the Iran-Iraq war as the replica of the battle of Qadisiya and portrayed his country as the defender of Arab nationalism against the “Persian racism” (49).

The Shah of Iran in the 70s re-claimed the UAE, Bahrain and parts of Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia on the basis of the erstwhile Persian rule of these regions. If the Shah attempted to establish physical control over Arab territory, the Islamic government, which replaced the Shah, is said to have tried to expand the boundaries indirectly, by aspiring for Iran-like revolutionary changes in the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and subsequently subordinating the new governments to its central authority on the principle of “Islam knows no boundaries” (50).
During the 70s, both Saddam Hussein and the Shah projected themselves as the mirror-image of Arab and Persian heroes, respectively. Saddam portrayed himself as Nebuchadnezzar and the Shah as Cyrus, the founder of the Persian empire.

However, ideological rivalry between Iran and the Arab countries is not real but has been evoked to give substance to the typical 20th century inter-state aspirations for domination, influence or national defense. That is why when these interests are served in maintaining peaceful relations, these ideologically antagonistic countries become friendly. For instance, the Shah mend ties with the Arab monarchies and Iraq (with the latter since 1975 by signing Algiers Agreement) in the 70s.

In other words, the ideological rivalry has been evoked when the relations between the two sides have deteriorated. This has not initiated the deterioration of relations as the case would have been.

During the 50s, 60s and much of the 70s, factors other than the Arab-Persian rivalry dominated the relations between Iran and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf. In the 50s, Iraq and Iran enjoyed very friendly relations by virtue of being the members of CENTO. So were the relations between Iran and the Arab countries in the 70s, except for a couple of years in the beginning of that decade, strengthened further by their common orientation towards the US. Iran rescinded its claim over Bahrain in 1972. It helped Oman to quell Dohfar resurgence. Saudi Arabia agreed to take up the responsibility of “policing” the Gulf along with Iran even though it largely mistrusted and envied the latter. Despite being apprehensive of the Shah’s hegemonic designs, the smaller states looked to it as their protector against the threats from the Soviet Union and radical Iraq, a co-Arab viewed with a lot more skepticism than Iran. Iran was amused by the imposition of 1973 oil embargo against the US and other allies of Israel and led the Arab countries from the front in the subsequent quadrupling of the oil prices.

Thus the Soviet threat, common affinity with the US, threats from radical powers of the region and the oil took much of the sting out of the ideological rivalry between Arab countries and Iran in that decade.

In the 80s, the advent of Islamic government to power in Iran and its bid to export Islamic revolution to the Arab countries were interpreted by the latter as a manifestation of Persianism, linking the Iranian designs to Tehran’s historical claims over the Arab World.

However, in reality the Persian-Arab ideological rivalry had by and large diminished after the Shah’s departure. Imam Khomeini’s rhetorical pronouncements on export of revolution did not smack of territorial expansion. Nor did they accompany the threat of an armed attack to overthrow monarchical governments.

The Islamic Iran’s policy towards its Arab neighbors during the Iran-Iraq War can not be dubbed as a militant expression of Persianism. If Iraq tried its best to color the war as a rivalry between Arab and Persian ideologies, Iran saw to it that Iraq did not succeed in its effort. Iran described the war as ‘Jihad’, the term which also applies to the the defeat of Persia at the hands
of Arabs in 638 A.D. The portraying of the war in terms of Arab-Persian rivalry was not in the interests of Iran as one of its war objectives was to win over the Arab masses in the name of Islamic brotherhood so that they could rise in revolt against their own governments in an expression of religious solidarity with Persian people.

The Arab states’ support to Iraq stemmed from realpolitik than ideological considerations, such as the espousal of Arab cause by Baghdad. In such a scenario, the ideologically driven non-belligerent Arab states would have sought total humiliation of Iran. On the contrary, once the chances of the spreading of the war to their territories receded, they preferred a stalemate between Iran and Iraq or the end of the war in a draw with both the belligerents returning exhausted and militarily weak. The Arab states also wanted that from the war Iraq emerged as a docile and humble power, obliged for their financial assistance to it, and not as a military giant turning to settle its territorial scores with them. The glorification of Arabism did not certainly call for such a policy.

The Arab states outside the Persian Gulf region did not define their positions in the war on the basis of Arab-Persian rivalry. This is illustrated by the fact that barring Egypt and Jordan, most of the non-Persian Gulf Arab countries, from PDRY to Algeria, supported the Non-Arab Iran.

That the Iran-Iraq war was the very epitome of an ideological rivalry is further invalidated by the fact that a considerable section of the Arab population of Iran supported the country they were the citizens of and thousands of Iranians residing in Arab countries did not sympathise with Iran’s war. Given a large scale settlements of Arab people in Iran and the Iranians’ in Arab lands, the ethnicity and ideology based support of these peoples to the belligerents must have cut across the national and regional boundaries.

At present, The Arab-Persian rivalry is not all that overt in nature. However, It has not entirely disappeared. The Islamic government has not abandoned Iran’s historical claims over Arab territories, as borne out by the raking up of the Abu Musa and Tunbs issue by it with the UAE in mid-1992. On quite a few occasions, the Iranian clerics have claimed to be the spiritual leader of the people of Bahrain and the UAE as well as the people of Iranian origin live in these countries. This can hasten one to conclude that the Persianism in the guise of Islam or the vice-versa continues to be an important foreign policy agenda of Iran.

The controversy over the name of the region is the most vivid example of Arab-Persian rivalry in the 1990s. The Islamic government of Iran is not even ready to name it as ‘Islamic Gulf’ a proposal that is acceptable to the Arab states. Whereas, the Arab governments have since the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war ceaselessly called it as ‘Arab Gulf’ in total disregard to the fact that it has been referred to as ‘Persian Gulf’ in historical and official Arabic language records. The Iranian media refer to the GCC as (P)GCC. It is surprising that the GCC member states have not responded by putting the prefix ‘Arab’ before the word ‘GCC’.

The fact that the Arab countries and Iran are predominantly peopled by Sunnis and Shias respectively has created an impression that the Arab-Persian animosity has sectarian connota-
tions. This prognosis is a largely untested logic. Going by this logic, the Arab Shias should have identified themselves with the Persianism practiced by the people of the same sect in Iran. So have done the Iranian Sunnis vis-a-vis the Arabism. In other words, the Arab-Persian rivalry can acquire a sectarian dimension only by repudiating its very basis.

Also, Sheism is not an anti-Arab creed since it was the official creed of the Persian empire and later of Iran and the largest concentration of its followers is in Iran. As a matter of fact, Sheism took birth in the Arab land as a result of differences over the succession after the death Prophet Mohammed, an Arab. Needless to say, Hazrat Ali, whom the Shias, the word Shia literally meaning his ‘sympathizers’, claim as the true successor of the Prophet and who is held in the highest esteem among the revered Islamic figures by them, was also an Arab.

IRAN’S ISLAMIC RADICALISM VS. IRAQ’S BAATHIST RADICALISM:

This ideological conflict has a definite geographical character being confined to Iran and Iraq only. Iran is the only proponent of the radical Islam in the Persian Gulf and none other than Iraq practices Baathism in that region.

As Iran has acquired the reputation of an Islamic state and Iraq as the only follower of Baathism, roughly the Arab replica of Socialism if not exactly the Marxism Leninism, this rivalry is principally the one between a religious ideology and a secular one. Yet, when the Baathism confronts the Iranian Islamism, it too takes recourse in Islam. The Arab ethnicity of the prophet, the revelation of the Holy Quran in Arabic, a recognition to this language’s superiority over the non-Arab languages, and the introduction of Islam in the Arab region so that the brave, adventurous and enlightened Arabs could spread it all thorough the world are used by Iraq as Arab challenge to Iran’s self-proclaimed role of the champion of Islamic cause in the 20th century.

The very secular nature of Baathist doctrine comes in the handy for Iran to dub Iraq’s ruling regime as “infidel”. Iran is doubly compelled to launch religious propaganda against Iraq as it conforms to its broader strategy of instigating the Sunnis, beside the the Shia population, of Iraq against Saddam regime.

It is not possible to dissociate this stream of ideological rivalry from the Iran-Iraq War and the historical antagonism between the two states. Had there been no war between them, they would have cshed in on their rivalry in their quest for regional dominance, in interfering in each other’s internal affairs particularly in the context of Kurdish rebellion, which has been spearheaded by both the secular and the Islamic groups in Iraq as well as in Iran, and in legitimizing their respective stands on the boundary disputes.

This ideological rivalry has not always been incompatible. This is borne out by the fact that the Baathist government of Iraq granted fifteen years asylum to Imam Khomeini, more so it extended support to his struggle against the Shah and offered him to use Shie religious centers, Najaf and Karbala, in Iraq as the base for the same. However, it can not be denied that the Baathist support to Imam Khomeini’s Islamic struggle stemmed from “enemy’s enemy is friend” logic than from any ideological solidarity.
But, the Baathist support to Islamic struggle in the pre-revolution days points to the fact that the Baathist-Islamic radicalism rivalry can at times be subordinated to the existing patterns of inter-state relations and internal (both in Iran and Iraq) and external environment.

This is further reinforced by the fact notwithstanding the conflicting nature of two doctrines, Iran avoided demeaning the Baathism as a whole so as not to displease the war ally, Syria, the other Baathist state in the Arab world. Interestingly, in its defamation campaign against Iraq, Iran has targeted the ruling regime of Iraq more than the Baathism.

**ISLAMIC RADICALISM VS. ISLAMIC CONSERVATISM:**

This conflict is of immense academic interests as it centers around the issues concerning Islamic state and government, political rights of people under Islam, mode of political change, and the Islamic economy.

Iran's Islamic radicalism quotes from the Holy Quran and other Islamic sources to dub the Arab monarchies as "un-Islamic" and prove that Islam provides for a government by a religious personality "able to rule" and "supported by the people" (52).

The Persian Gulf monarchies maintain that the Holy Quran's concept of state calls for the establishment of a "welfare state" and not a particular form of government or state.

Islamic radicalism of Iran exhorts people to uproot an unpopular government as this is their Islamic duty while the Arab conservatism quotes Quranic verses, asking the people to remain faithful to their country and government.

Islamic radicalism of Iran highlights people's right under Islam to participate in the public affairs while the Arab conservatism considers people rights are confined to being properly looked after by their government and provided basic necessities of life.

Similarly, the Iran's Islamic radicalism is for equal distribution of state's resources and income among people and describes the government as custodian of these resources while the Islamic conservatism of the Arab countries interprets that the state's total control over the means of economic production is the logical extension of the government's right to act as the custodian.

Taking a leaf from Islamic principles, the Iranian government describes the conservative regimes as 'un-Islamic' because of these being unpopular and ruled by non-religious personalities, deriving the source of their power from the tribal setup than from the people as single unit of the political system.

As against this, the Arab regimes accuse the Iranian government of being sectarian and racial, aiming at creating a wedge within the Islamic community of the world, creating instability in neighboring Muslim countries, and involved in a large-scale oppression of people of Islamic
subsects other than the Shia and Non-Muslim minorities inside the country.

Interestingly, the two ideologies bear a few similarities too. For instance, both the ideologies do not support Westminster model of democracy. Nor do they maintain that the Quranic concept of an able and popular government necessitates periodical elections (53), the party system and a constitutionally recognized opposition.

On the question of rights of women, non-Muslims and aliens, the two camps practice the policy of "denial" in violation of the Islamic principles in this regard.

This ideological conflict veers around political and to a limited extent social and economic issues. The Shia-Sunni differences over 'Fiqh' (Islamic jurisprudence), such as the interpretation of the Quran and the Sunnah or the performing and the timing of prayers, have not cropped up.

This conflict is a ideological conflict in the true sense of the term and not an inter-state rivalry in the guise of an ideological conflict: Although it is widely held in the case of Iran that behind the veneer of "export of ideology", there lies inherent its territorial ambitions in the region.

This perception can be discounted on the ground that Iran’s high profile campaign for "export of ideology", aiming at overthrowing the un-Islamic governments, is not matched by its little role in fomenting, sponsoring and sustaining the rebel forces, many of whom are also inspired by the Islamic revolution, in the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf. Undergoing a process of political chaos and instability soon after coming to the power and later entangled in a war with Iraq, the Iranian government was hardly in a position to and capable of doing so. Thus, it deliberately limited its campaign to a great deal to rhetorics only in the hope that the Arab people on their own would succeed in toppling the monarchical governments. Only in a few cases, such as in 1980 coup attempt in Bahrain and strikes in Shia-dominated areas of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the aftermath of the success of the Islamic revolution, could the Iranian involvement, that too latent, be established.

A full-blooded Iranian involvement would have resulted into the eruption of a large scale rebellion spreaded all through the region, instead of the stray cases of politically motivated violence confined to a few countries and few places in the each of them.

Throughout the war, Iran relentlessly propagated for the export of revolution through press, broadcasts, and speeches of clerics and other leaders (54). But on the other hand it refrained from expanding the war to the non-belligerent Persian Gulf countries even when provoked by Iraq to do so. Iran even decided not to retaliate against the shooting down of its four aircrafts by Saudi Arabia in 1984. Its attack on the ships of Arab countries in 1987 was more symbolic than real. This proves that Iran’s rhetorics about the export of revolution was not matched by an aggeressive stand against the Arab allies of Iraq in the region.

After the end of the Iran-Iraq War, particularly in the 1990s, the relations between Iran and its conservative neighbors have improved with Iran having almost abandoned its export of
Principal, Iran still regards the conservative socio-political system of the Arab Gulf states as un-Islamic but does not give vent to its feeling through radio broadcasts or in policy pronouncements. In this decade the most contentious aspect of the ideological rivalry between Iran and the Persian Gulf monarchies is the issue of the status of Mecca and Madina, where the two holiest of Islamic shrines are situated.

Considering the twin cities as belonging to the Muslim the World over, Iran refuses to recognize Saudi sovereignty over them. It has urged the Saudi government to hand the administration of the shrines to a confederation of all the Muslim states. Iran also has the desire to keep the ideological conflict alive, not with a view to antagonise the Arab neighbors but public consumption and to retain its claim as the only Islamic state in the world.

ARAB RADICALISM VS. ARAB CONSERVATISM:

Iraq and South Yemen represent the Arab radicalism and the monarchical Arab governments of the Saudi peninsula the Arab conservativism. Form South Yemen’s side, this dispute reflected in its opposition to the independence of trucial states after the British withdrawal and their membership to the Arab League. It also got manifested in South Yamen’s military and financial support to the Dohfar rebellion in Oman.

South Yemen pursued its boundary disputes with Oman and Saudi Arabia in the cloak of ideological rivalry instead of adopting military postures or indulging in direct confrontation. This is why it never asked for Soviet Union’s help, available in the form the latter’s military presence on its ports, with a view to establish its control over the disputed regions.

Beside giving unflinching support to the Dohfar rebellion, spearheaded by the ‘Popular Front for Liberation of Oman (PFLO), later named as the ‘Popular Front for the Liberation of Occupied Gulf(PFLOG), the National Front government of South Yemen described the Dohfar movement as the extension of its revolutionary struggle in the Persian Gulf.

However, following the suppression of the Dohfar movement in 1975, South Yemen deviated from its radicalism in favor of entering into formal relations with the monarchical governments. Saudi Arabia-South Yemen diplomatic relations were established in 1976. In the late 70s, South Yemen established diplomatic relations with Qatar and Bahrain and in 1982 with Oman too. With Kuwait and the UAE, which had diplomatic ties with South Yemen since late 60s and the early 70s respectively, South Yamen closed ranks on political and economic fronts (55). These two countries became Aden’s largest trading patterns and principal aid givers in the Persian Gulf region.

In fact, Before 1975, the Arab-Israeli War and the oil embargo had paved the way for rapprochement between South Yemen and the Gulf kingdoms. But this was overshadowed by Yemen’s total support to the Dohfar movement. The defeat of the movement let pragmatism take
precedence over ideology. South Yemen found the conservative regimes as a source of economic aid and diplomatic entree in the Persian Gulf politics.

The radical threat to the Arab neighbors from the Baathist Iraq always persisted in some form or other but remained subsided in the two decades preceding the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Both the rivals used to verbally criticize each other's ideology but neither did Iraq resort to helping radical forces within the monarchical states nor did the monarchical governments utilize their financial clout to help the Kurdish rebellion inside Iraq.

In fact, the conservative states were more concerned at the dangers of Iraqi expansionism, basically a Pre-Baathist characteristic, than at an covert or overt attempt on Iraq’s part to create internal instability (56). The incidences of Iraq’s direct military actions against neighbor Arabs are far more than those of supporting leftist movements or rebellion in these countries.

This proves that Iraqi military invasions or threats were based on the objectives other than the ideological ones. These objectives can be summarized as the control over oil resources and the expansion of national frontiers by Iraq. Otherwise, had the occupation of Kuwait had an ideological connotation only, Saddam Hussein would have pulled his forces out of it after installing a pro-Iraq democratic government instead of annexing it.

The Geo-strategic dimension, bereft of any ideological flavor, of Iraqi confrontation with the Arab states is further highlighted by the contrast in Iraqi objectives of attacking Iran in 1980 and Kuwait ten years later. The nature of Iraqi attack against Iran, particularly the deployment of force and the limited number of battalions used in initial days, show that Iraq’s main aim was not to occupy Iran but to create political chaos, leading to the removal of the Islamic government.

Even Iraq did not officially announce the annexing of the Iranian territories it conquered during the war, although liberation of the Khuzestan, peopled by Arabs and claimed to be the part of Iraq under Turkish rule, was one of Baghdad’s official war objectives.

On a number of occasions the relations between the Iraq and its Arab neighbors were de-ideologised. The relations in the 70s can be described as friendly and in the 80s as very close. There were irritants and constraints but none amounted to the deterioration in the relations.

Commonalty of interests, including the realisation fact that they belong to the same ideological camp in Arabi-Iran rivalry, overcame the ideological constraints in the bilateral relations. Iraq was courted by the conservative states to contain the Shah in the same way as the latter was used to checkmate the Baathist threat.

On the Arab-Israeli issue and that of the oil embargo, Iraq joined hands with the conservative regimes and after the Egypt’s ouster from the Arab fold, Iraq tired to win over these regimes to prop it up as the new leader of the Arab world.

The Islamic revolution and the outbreaking of the Iran-Iraq War followed in quick succession. The threat these events posed to Iraq as well its Arab neighbors brought them
closer, with the conservative states providing financial support to Iraq to the tune of $50 billion and
Baghdad claiming to have fought the war on behalf of all the Arab countries of the region.

The relations between Iraq and the conservative Arab states since the former’s invasion of Kuwait remain severed and soured. As a result, the ideological rivalry has again cropped up, but in a changed form if not the substance.

Saddam Hussein’s tirade against monarchical governments is now more on Islamic lines than the Baathist. However, it would be too early to presume that Saddam Huseein has finally
shunned the Baathism at least in the sphere of his relations with the neighbor Arabs. But what can be said with a measure of authority that at present the ideological rivalry is a reminiscent of the 1980s’ Islamic conservatism vs. Islamic radicalism between Arab states and Iran and not a reflection of the Iraqi radicalism vs. Arab conservatism.

**DYNASTIC RIVALRY**

The Persian Gulf is the arena of another form of conflict also, that is among the rulers of Arabian peninsula. This conflict lacks the “personality cult” as is found in the one between Hafiz-Al-Assad and Saddam Hussein. Rather it is a continuation of age-old dynastic rivalries.

The conflict over the Buraimi Oasis between Saudi Arabia and Oman is inter-linked with the dynastic rivalry between the rulers of the two countries. For King Fahad the oasis is the matter of ancestral pride. For Sheikh Ziyad it is the symbol of pride too as it has been his ancestral home and the place where he spent his formative years.

In the case of Sheikh Ziyad of Abu Dhabi and Sheikh Rasheed of Dubai, the dynastic conflict between them revolves around the issue of the respective claims to the post of the head of the state of the UAE. Ziyad extended his claim for and secured the top slot on the ground the Rashid’s family occupied second position in the tribal hierarchy before it moved out from Abu Dhabi for Dubai and settled there in the early 19th century. Sheikh Saqar bridles at being contended with a lower niche in comparison to the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Both Qatar and Bahrain opted out from the negotiations on the proposed federation of nine trucial states at the eve of the British withdrawal mainly because Al-Khalifa of Bahrain and al Thani of Qatar were not prepared for a position lower in rank to that of the other one’s in the power arrangement.

**CAUSES OF CONFLICTS IN THE PERSIAN GULF**

The causes of the various conflicts in the Persian Gulf are rooted in the history, politics and geo-strategy of the region.

**HISTORY:**

History, both distant and the recent, is described as the major source of the outbreak and continuance of both ideological and territorial conflicts in the region.

The boundaries of present states have always been in a state of flux in the past, hence overlapping claims over a particular portion of land and islands by two countries and in some cases more than that. The Ottoman empire stretched, in the Persian Gulf region, over today’s Kuwait, parts of Iraq and Iran. The Persian empire, which Iran represents, included the UAE, Bahrain and a number of islands presently under Kuwait’s and Saudi Arabia’s control. As a result, Iraq extends its claims over both Kuwait and the areas adjacent to the Shatt’s estuary.
Iran, on the other hand, justifies its claim over the UAE and Bahrain.

The territorial disputes in the region are the continuation of those existing since long. The Shatt dispute, fought over by the Ottoman and Persian empires over hundreds of years, is the most notable among these.

Changing loyalties of the people of the disputed area from one disputant state to another and the human occupation in an area shifting from the people of one ethnicity in a particular period to the people of some other ethnicity in the other periods have given birth to contentious claims.

Came the European powers and they divided the region in "spheres of influence" in total disregard to the historical, ethnic and geographic realities(57). These "spheres of influence" emerged as sovereign states after the British withdrawal. But the withdrawal also led the mother countries to revive their claims on these newly independent states as these happened to be the part of their historical boundaries.

TERRITORIAL NATIONALISM:
One of the negative effects of the Arabs’ contact with the European powers has been the inculcation of a strong sense of territorial nationalism among the former. In the pre-colonial days, this practice was limited to Ottoman and Persian empires. The Saudi peninsula was by and large ignorant of territorial nationalism of the western kind. But the growing consciousness of statehood has interlocked the peninsular states into rivalries which did not exist in the past; for example, disputes on sovereignty over the continental shelf bed and territorial water. The national consciousness prevented the small Sheikhdoms from coalescing into a single political unit and even ensued conflicts among various constituents of a state, for instance, the UAE.

POLITICAL SYSTEM:
Since most of the regional countries are not democracies, people, the media, interest groups and armed forces do not keep a check on their government’s territorial designs(58). It is not to deny that the boundary disputes do not exist between two democracies, but the possibility of the flaring up of these disputes into full-fledged conflicts is remote in the case of two democracies.

In fact, the non-democratic countries have glorified wars to establish political legitimacy. In some cases the ruling regimes have deliberately stayed away from finding a peaceful solution to their disputes out of the fear that granting some concessions to the opponent power during the peace process may lead to a public revolt. This was one of the underlying reasons behind Iraq’s refusal to pull out of Kuwait when the war with allies and the likely defeat had become inevitable. A meek surrender than a valiant defeat at the hands of a far stronger military power ran a greater risk.

GEOGRAPHY:
The intricate geo-structure of the Persian Gulf region is alone the cause of many a
conflict. Iraq would have had hardly any objection to demarcate its boundaries with Iran along
the Shatt through the Thalweg method had the access of this oil exporting country to the sea-
lanes not passed through the neighbor's side of the Thalweg.

Most of the islands in Persian Gulf waters fall within the 12 nautical territorial water
limits of more than one state. Persian Gulf is shallow with its average depth being 40 meters.
Because of these reasons all of the seabed is the continental shelf is subjected, according to the
contemporary international law, to economic exploitation by almost all the countries of the
region. The width of the Persian Gulf is far less than the prescribed limit of 200 nautical miles.
The result: overlapping of rights over resources underneath the waters.

The western side of the Persian Gulf is more shallow. This results into the formation of
a large number of islands that lie within the territorial jurisdiction of the majority of the coastal
states on the western side and are, therefore, subject to multilateral disputes.

It is relatively deeper on the Iranian side. Therefore, there are fewer islands on this side.
This compells Iran to eye on all those islands on the western side coast which fall well within
Tehran's territorial limits. The problem is further compounded due to the fact that an island
constitutes the part of land territory of a country, extending, thereby, its territorial water limits
farther.

The Thalweg method od the settlement of a particular dispute does not suit to the Persian
Gulf's typical geo-physical conditions. The employing of this method implies physically
dividing a number of islands. Added to this is the problem that from where the medianline be
measured, the coastline of the main territory of a country or the coastline of the islands that that
county possesses.

The oil factor further complicates the issue. The parties to a territorial dispute are not
prepared to relinquish their claims over islands falling under their sovereign jurisdiction as these
islands and the seabed over 12 nautical miles all around it contain a large oil reservoirs (Bubiyan,
Warbah and Huwar, Abu Musa and Tunbs) (59).

Accords pertaining to island disputes do not qualify as ideal and permanent settlements.
There lies inherent the possibility of violation, annulment and varying interpretation of these
accords by either of or both the states. Both Iran and the UAE describe Abu Musa and Tunbs
as the integral part of their territories although they have already signed an agreement according
to which the former enjoys military control of them and the later the economic and the
administrative control.

The signing of treaties on the Shatt and their abrogations have followed one after the
other since the 17th century. A number of agreements on boundary disputes are half-baked.
They at best have frozen a dispute for the time being instead of providing a permanent solution
(Saudi Arab-Kuwait agreement on Neutral Zone).
Yawning asymmetries in size and military strength between the disputants is one of the main causes behind the boundary disputes assuming the form of military conflagrations.

Interestingly, the large-sized states’ mindset is that they are not prepared to recognize their tiny neighbors as a state of equal status in the international community. The military prowess of these countries induces them to undo what they consider an injustice done to them by the British powers. This approach underlines Iraq’s behavior towards Kuwait and that of Iran towards the UAE or Bahrain.

The stronger powers’ urge for regional supremacy is the by-product of the above-mentioned asymmetries. The Shah occupied the UAE’s islands knowing that the UAE did not have the capability to withstand the Iranian assault. The same force worked behind Iraqi designs in Kuwait. The annexation Kuwait would project Iraq as a formidable land-sea power vis-a-vis other Arab states of the region and Iran was an important part of Saddam Hussein’s over all strategy behind invading Kuwait.

The regional motives, however, have been the source of conflict between the two symmetrical powers also. Saudi Arabia and Iran under the Shah, despite maintaining friendly relations, were reluctant in co-sharing the role of the regional policeman. Saudi Arabia thoroughly opposed Iranian intervention in Oman to suppress the Dohfars’ movement though it in itself was threatened considerably by the likelihood of Dohfars’ victory. Saudi Arabia also expressed reservations to the American decision to bestow the responsibility of policing the Persian Gulf on the Shah.

A replica of Iran-Saudi Arabia relations was those between Iraq and Saudi Arabia during the Iran-Iraq War. Saudi Arabia never liked the prospects of an outright victory of Iraq. And one of its objectives to help Iraq financially was to neutralize Iraqi claim of defending the Arab world all alone.

Among enemies, Iran and Iraq have competed for this status by containing each other’s influence among the Arab peninsular countries, through entering an arms race and trying to outmaneuver each other on regional issues.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PERSIAN GULF CONFLICTS

AN OUTGROWTH OF HISTORICAL CONFLICTS:
This prognosis, although true to a large extent, needs to be re-examined as history may not be the both a factor in all the conflicts and not a factor at all in some specific conflicts.

In most of the cases of territorial disputes in the region the causes of their origin is found in the history. This approach is wittingly or unwittingly influenced by the historical rights the disputant states advance to the territory in question. For example, the reasons behind these disputes are generally stated to be the absence of the practice of boundary demarcation, shifting tribal loyalties and human migration from and to a disputed area. But these very factors at a same
time deny the historicity of a dispute due to following reasons.

First, since the boundary demarcations were not common in the past and those carried out by the imperialist powers were arbitrary, the modern nation-states in the Persian gulf are not the legal and typical case of successor states. Second, if the human migration was a continuous phenomenon in the past, a portion of land which a state claims on the basis that it was the part of the territory of its mother state during a particular period might have been the part of the mother state of the other state during some other period(s).

Also, in the past the disputes in the region were tribal not the territorial. The wars in those days were fought not for the extension of boundaries but for conquering tribe or tribes by another tribe. The possession of land the defeated tribe inhabited was, therefore, the result not the factor behind the outbreak of those wars. The territorial jurisdiction of a state were determined by the loyalty it received from tribes. Thus, the territorial boundaries of a state were not necessarily contiguous as is the case with modern nation states. Thus, the intra-tribal wars of the old days are not a precursor of present territorial disputes in the Persian Gulf. The only dispute which fits into the description of a historical dispute is that over the Shatt between Iran and Iraq.

Most of the territorial disputes in the region are the outcome of the geo-strategic factors. These have erupted after the discovery of oil or as a result of eco-strategic requirements of a 20th century nation-state (60), while a dispute of historical magnitude generally happens to be an ever persisting phenomenon. But in the case of the disputes in the Persian Gulf region it seems that their historical antecedents have been re-discovered by the disputants to give sustenance to their claims. This is further substantiated by the fact that the territories which are strategically and economically not important have not been the bone of contention between the two states. Although in a region undemarcated in the past, each portion of land can be a subject of dispute.

As matter of fact, the boundary disputes in the region are the product of a recent history, the unnatural demarcation of the states and carving out of a web of small states on the western shore of the Persian Gulf by the colonial powers. With tribal loyalties being the main determinant of the territorial boundaries of Arab peninsular states during the pre-colonial days, some tribes have not reconciled to the fact that a tribe dominated by it in the past is now the part of another state following the arbitrary demarcation of the region in the 18th, 19th and the early 20th centuries. The coming up of small states on the western shore of the narrow body of Gulf waters has created the disputes over the demarcation of the territorial water and right over the continental shelf among themselves and with Iran on the other side.

**THE SUPERPOWERS RIVALRY:**

Of the Third World conflicts those in the Persian gulf region were hardly an extension of superpowers rivalry. All the disputes preceded superpowers rivalry in general and their rivalry in the Persian Gulf, which started after the British withdrawal except in Iran's case, in particular.
These are local in nature and they had not involved the superpowers on the opposite sides. All the conflicts in the Arab Peninsula are between the countries which belong to the US bloc. Thus the US practiced neutrality and either of the disputant sides did not generally seek Soviet support, leaving, therefore, a little room for the superpowers’ involvement.

The dispute between Iraq and Kuwait, the one involving the countries of opposite global power blocs was a low-profile dispute when the cold war was in its hey day. Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait took place when the Soviet Union had almost retired from global politics. Although the war between Iraq and Iran was fought when the New cold war was in full swing, but partly due to Iran’s antagonism vis-a-vis the superpowers and partly due to the fact that the threat of Iran emerging, if it happened to win the war, into a regional power independent of superpowers domination, the two superpowers sided with Iraq.

The US has not shown any interests in resolving the boundary disputes among its allies. It did not consider these disputes detrimental to its policy of containment of the Soviet Union as the chances of either of the parties to the dispute turning to the Soviet Union for support were almost unlikely.

The role of the superpowers in the conflict prevention has been negligible. They did not make any endeavor jointly or separately to resolve any of these imbroglios, except once while cooperating to assure the adopting of the Security Council Resolution 598 which turned out to be the basis of the end of the Iran-Iraq War. But, the acceptance of the resolution 598 by Iran was an independent decision and not a result of any external pressure. In the termination of the Iran-Iraq war, therefore, the role of the superpowers was confined to facilitating the adopting of the resolution 598.

The superpowers did play the role of the conflict-manager directly as well as indirectly. Common bond with the US restrain the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf from escalating their boundary disputes. Both the superpowers perceived the regional conflicts as issues of local significance, therefore refrained from using these in their global confrontation. This way they prevented the internationalization of these conflicts (61).

LARGELY NON-VIOLENT:
Majority of the conflicts in the Persian Gulf have been non-violent. Only four of them viz., the Iranian occupation of Abu Musa and Tunbs, the Iran-Iraq dispute over the Shatt in the 70s, the Iran-Iraq War, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent Persian Gulf War fall in the category of violent disputes.

The territorial dispute, in particular, has strictly been a diplomatic duel, with a few of them occasionally escalating into border skirmishes such as the one between Oman and Saudi Arabia in 1955, Iran and Iraq during the 70s over the Shatt and Saudi Arabia and Qatar in September 1992.

The Iran-Iraq War and the Iraqi aggression of Kuwait look on the face of it a war over boundary disputes but actually the issues behind the outbreak of these crises were other than
what normally do not constitute the part of a territorial dispute. As regards the Iran-Iraq war, it started immediately a day after Iraq abrogated the 1975 Algiers agreement, while the side which started the war was Iraq not Iran. The issues which prompted military action were Iraq’s aim to topple the Islamic Revolution, to pre-empt an internal resurgence by the Shie population and to emerge as the leader of the Arab World by defeating its traditional enemy Iran, which after the revolution had begun to look dangerous to the internal stability of each of the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was not an outburst of the brewing up of the tension over contentious Bubiyan and Warbah islands, an issue which, otherwise, did not rake up throughout the Iran-Iraq War and two years after its end. A boundary dispute with a potential to culminate into an invasion or a war must have hardly been a subsided one in the preceding decade.

That the conflicts in the Persian Gulf have not turned volatile is explained in the very nature of these conflicts. The territorial conflicts are more technical than political which entail a negotiated settlement than a military solution. Some of the conflicts are under the process of settlement and, therefore, by and large subsided. As far as the conflicts over the exploitation of natural resources and extension of territorial jurisdiction are concerned, the parties know that the use of force to realize their objectives would not give legitimacy to their claim.

The settlements of these conflicts through the use of force is harmful in cost-benefit calculations also. As far as the Arabian peninsular countries are concerned, they run the risk of rupturing security ties and economic and political cooperation among themselves by doing so.

The smaller countries with a limited manpower and an underdeveloped economic base are vulnerable to a long war. Recognizing their relatively weaker military strength and the lack of strategic depth, they ensure it that they do not provide the stronger power an excuse for starting a war(62). In a few cases, these conflicts could not flare up due to the militarily weaker states’ passive reaction to a stronger power’s aggrandizement. The UAE did not resist Iranian occupation of its islands. In 1977, Saudi Arabia allegedly occupied some of the disputed islands in the neutral zone between it and Kuwait but the latter decided not to retaliate. In the wake of Saudi attack on its military post in September 1992, Qatar did not offer any resistance. It, instead, used political means, such as threatening to withdraw from the GCC, to avert the crisis. Before the Iraqi invasion the Kuwaiti government tried to use diplomatic means and financial resources, to an extent of agreeing to give in to Iraqi demand of oil price hike and waiving off its debts to it, to avert it. The UAE, whose three islands Iran had occupied, maintained most cordial relation with Tehran in the Iran-Iraq war.

In the perception of the Arab peninsular countries the security threats to them emanated from outside powers viz., Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Soviet Union. The common threat perception restrained them from blowing up the intra-regional dispute in order to exhibit unity and solidarity among themselves to extra regional threats.
THE IRAN-IRAQ AND THE PERSIAN GULF WARS — AN EXCEPTION:

The Iran-Iraq War questioned the merit of generalizing the Third World wars. Experts have held that a war between the two Third World countries tends to become a swift and short affair on two counts viz., possession of highly sophisticated weapons by them and economic inability to sustain a long war. Contrary to this, the Iran-Iraq war was the longest war of this century fought between the two countries possessing sophisticated weapons. Their economies underwent a decline but not to the extent of persuading them to end the war. Instead, they managed their economic affairs in a way that these provided sustenance to the war. Iran did it by developing a self-reliant economy based on optimum use of its industrial base and manpower strength and Iraq with the help of foreign assistance and by imposing economic austerity.

As regards the Persian Gulf War, Iraq saw its invasion of Kuwait as a quick fix to its economic woes. The economic embargo did not force it to withdraw from Kuwait when the war with the allied forces had become inevitable and the invasion of Kuwait begun to look an economic misadventure. Four years of the imposing of the economic embargo, which has severely bitten it particularly the poor section, has yet not dampened Iraq’s resolve to exhibit that it can withstand such hardships.

This particular case bring home two lessons. First, economic constraints still do not happen to be a factor influencing a Third World leader’s war-making decision howsoever ‘real’ these might be. Second, a Third World country has an inbuilt economic strength to fund a war and its people an understanding that the economic deterioration resulting from the war is not an abnormal development.

These full-fledged wars in the Persian Gulf underline a major difference between a Third World War and the one in the Industrialised World. That difference is in attitudes of the two peoples towards the war. In Industrialised World the people are haunted by the would be disastrous effects of a war on their economic well being as well as the security of their lives, particularly of the armed forces personnel. They, therefore, prefer that the war is avoided. In the Third World, the patriotic zeal and in some cases religious fervor have developed a pro-war attitude among the people. In the Iran-Iraq war, local populace constituted a major chunk of the Iranian army (63). In the Persian Gulf War, people voluntarily joined the Iraqi army. Third World People’s unfailing support to their government even though defeated further substantiates this hypothesis. After Iraqi defeat popularity of Saddam Hussein has remained more or less intact, barring the aberration of about a fortnight-long revolt by Kurds and the Shia people of marshland. But they had resorted to rebellion to cash in on to defeat their political opponent. It was not a rebellion stemming from an anguish against a government which brought humiliation to the country.

The case of victorious America was altogether different. After a few months of euphoria and despite the fact that the US army did not suffer even one tenth of the expected casualties, people began to question the American rationale behind fighting some one else’s war. The defeat of the hero of the war, George Bush, in the presidential election created an impression
that not a grand victory but its negative effects determined American people’s attitude towards the war.

The above-mentioned wars have re-started the process of Islamization of War(64). The approach to war of the Iranian army against Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War and that of the Iraqi army against the Multinational Forces is marked for religious fanaticism, indifference to death and a cult of martyrdom (65). These two wars also invalidate British Historian John Keeqen’s theory of “abolition of battle” which visualizes that due to modern weapons’ capacity to over-kill and kill brutally, there would grow a disillusionment with the war among soldiers(66). However, in the case of the two wars, patriotism, loyalty to the government, religious zeal, and sacrificial urge offset the fear of modern weapons brutality and increased soldiers’ enthusiasm for a war.

However, the Iran-Iraq war substantiates the contention that modern wars, even those involving a Third World country on each side, cannot be won. Both Iran and Iraq did not meet their primary war objectives. Yet the realization of this failure during the course of the war did not let them stop the war. The short-term gains, a few major military breakthroughs, some positive effects of the war on internal front—social cohesion and political consolidation—and the fear of people’s backlash in case the war was stopped, kept them proceeding ahead.

The Persian Gulf War reaffirmed the contention that there is no one-to-one correspondence between a victory and the objectives of a starting a war. The US victory in the Persian Gulf War was total, yet not all its war objectives were materialized. On one hand, the US succeeded in liberating Kuwait, refurbishing its dominance over the regional states, the United Nations, European allies and the world as a whole for that matter, but, on the other, it failed to oust Saddam, decimate Iraqi military strength and turning it into a docile power.

ARMS AND CONFLICTS IN PERSIAN GULF:

Persian Gulf is the world’s largest arms recipient according to the region-wise breakup. This tends one to draw a link between arms acquisition and the eruption and escalation of various disputes and the conflicts in the region. But this, in most of the cases, does not hold true. As regards the boundary disputes, the disputants’ arms spree and the resultant strengthening of their defense network have not prodded them to settle their scores through the use of force. The Persian Gulf countries launched a massive arms acquisition drive in the 70s, but they, in the same decade, settled most of their disputes also. Arms played a role in the Iran-Iraq War and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait in 1990. However, in both the cases arms (purchases and arms race) were not the cause of the war but an instrument to carry this on.

The arms acquisition has not generally caused a spurt in regional disputes mainly because it has been defense oriented. Militarily stronger powers have played the role of regional policemen (Iran and Saudi Arabia in the 70s), protecting smaller states’ security, with whom they happen to be in dispute with on territorial issues. The sources of arms supply have been either common or those from the same bloc, who have, in turn, ensured that regional allies do not use these arms to fight among themselves. In addition, arms race in the region has proved to be a deterrence also.
THE PERSIAN GULF COUNTRIES AND THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS:

Most of the Persian Gulf conflicts have failed to influence the regional and international systems with the Iran-Iraq War and the Persian Gulf War being an exception. The disputes within the Arabian peninsula did not change the political landscape of the region, disrupt friendly ties among the disputants, lead to their division into Soviet and American power blocs and prevent the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

As against this, as far as the regional system is concerned, the Iran-Iraq war established the preponderance of regional threat (from Iran) over the external one (from the USSR), stimulated the rapprochement between Iraq and other arab countries of the region, led to the formation of a common security system and political and economic union, the GCC. As regards the International system, the Iran-Iraq war became the first such case where the USSR and the US were not seen pitted against each other. The war was a non-issue in the starting or the whipping up of the Second Cold War. It was indeed a prelude to its end.

The Persian Gulf War altered the International system by checkmating the evolution of a multi-polar world order in favour of a unipolar one headed by the US, arresting the drifting of the center of gravity from the hands military power to economic powers and preventing the breaking up of the West Europe-US alliance following retrenchment of the Soviet Union from an active role in international politics.

COMMON BONDS AND CONFLICTS IN PERSIAN GULF:

Conflicts among the Arab peninsular countries are subordinated to the commonalty of political and economic interests. With monarchey being the common form of the government thorough out the region, these governments are not engaged in abetting and fomenting internal strifes in one another countries. For, they hold that any radical or revolutionary political change in one country will have a far-reaching cross-border implications. Instead, these governments have in establishing the GCC evolved a regional mechanism of quelling internal dissension by sharing intelligence information and pledging not to allow radical elements any facilities in one’s territory.

The oil is another source of regional cooperation among the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf. More or less common impact on them of the energy scenario in the industrialized world has struck a great deal of policy coordination on price and production of oil, leading to the formation of a cartel within the OPEC. The smaller oil producers have some resentment against Saudi-price moderation and over-production policy, but they have not let their resentment grow out of proportions.

Saudi Arabia, which has the potential to become the destabilising power to the regional system owing to its geographical, economic and military superiority over neighboring countries, has acted as ‘patron’ and not as a confrontationist. It has sought to evolve a system of regional cooperation to carve out the niche of a regional power for itself. In addition, the common regional threats, either Iran or Iraq or Israel, have expedited Saudi Arabia to bring the
rest of the countries of the peninsula together. In the process, Saudi Arabia has either settled its disputes with others or has not let them to remain an irritant in its relationship with the latter.

THE GCC AND THE SETTLEMENTS AND SUBSIDING OF DISPUTES:

GCC’s formation ensued the settlements of a few conflicts at least. This regional body has been instrumental in the resolving disputes between Qatar and Bahrain on Huwar island in March 1982 and Fash-Al-Dibal in 1986, and between Oman and PDRY (in 1986). However, more than resolving disputes among the member states(67), the GCC has arrested the process of the eruption of conflicts as the member-states avoid giving publicity to these lest they impinge on the existence and the functioning of the organization.

TERRITORIAL DISPUTES ARE DEVOID OF EXPANSIONIST DESIGNS:

A good number of disputes in the region do not carry the seeds of expansionist designs. This is borne out by their “give and take basis” settlement. For instance, according to the Saudi Arabia-Bahrain agreement 1958, Bahrain relinquished its sovereignty over Abu Safah island in exchange for the Saudi offer to share the revenues with the former. Under Saudi Arabia-Iran agreement on offshore boundary agreements, the two countries distributed among themselves the Firaydun and Marjan oil fields and gave half effect to Kharag island with each agreeing to have an equal share in oil and other offshore exploitation (68). Abu Dhabi and Qatar settled their dispute over Bundaq oilfield by agreeing to establish common sovereignty (69) over it.

THE LIKELIHOOD OF THE RECURRENCE OF THE REGIONAL DISPUTES:

The recurrence of majority of the regional disputes is by and large an improbability, but in the present circumstances only. Since most of them are far from being settled or are vaguely settled, their recurrence can not be ruled out if and when the regional scenario undergoes a drastic change.

The Saudi case offers an interesting example. Saudi Arabia is involved in the largest number of boundary disputes. But it has underplayed them for the sake of maintaining a ‘father figure’ position among smaller states. What if a country or most of them reject Saudi ‘paternalism’. Saudi Arabia, then, would re-enact these disputes to intimidate its erstwhile friends so as to maintain its regional power status.

Importance of Bubiyan and Warbah islands has heightened to Iraq with the transfer of its port Umm-E-Qasar to Kuwait by the UN Boundary Commission. It is now more pressed more than ever not to relinquish its claim and on these islands.

The dispute over the Shatt has since last many centuries kept on recurring mainly because the agreements on them have been signed by one of the parties under duress. Therefore, the moment situation changes in favor of the party at the receiving end, it deviates from its commitment. Saddam gifted the Shatt to Iran during the Gulf War but that decision was purely circumstantial. He might have regretted his decision after the end of Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. With the Umm-E-Qasr port having been given to Kuwait and Iraqi access to sea has quenched further, the revival of the Shatt dispute would sooner or later constitute a major policy objective of Iraq.
Most of the boundary settlements are incomplete. The northern terminal point and a few islands between Iran and Qatar are still left undemarcated despite the fact that this issue settled as per a boundary agreement between the two countries in 1969. In the case of Iran-Bahrain, Makhilu, Jabrin and Muharraq are left unsettled in the 1971 boundary settlement between them. A few terminal points were not delimited under Iran-Oman boundary agreement in 1974. These may be the fresh source of conflicts in the future.

REFERENCES AND FOOTNOTES

1. The dispute in the region have for the sake of convenience been divided as territorial ideological disputes etc. However, the afore-mentioned categorization is not a genuine one given the many-dimensional nature of a conflict in the region. The Persian Gulf war was both an intra-regional territorial dispute as well as the one between aregional and extra regional powers, rthe latter depending upon whom one considers as the two main parties to this war. Similarly, the war between Iran and Iraq can be described as both the territorial and ideological disputes or even none of them if one comes up with the argument that neither had the underlying ideological rivalry nor the territorial dispute between the two countries reached such alarming proportions that the war had become inevitable. Rather, that war was an outcome of the Saddam Hussein's comparative assessment of the existing state of political conditions in and military prowess of, the two countries, if one looks at the factors leading to the war from a micro and (agianst Iraq) angle.


4. Closure of the Shatt during the Iran-Iraq War reduced Iraqi oil exports by 50 percent.


6. The researcher does not consider the Shatt-Al-Arab dispute as one of the causes of the Iran-Iraq war. A detailed description substantiating this viewpoint is given in the chapter on the Iran-Iraq War.


9. Persia later accepted the ‘explanatory note’ on Aug. 15, 1912 under Russian pressure.

10. In 1907, Persia was divided into three zones—Russian sphere of influence in north, the British in south, and a neutral zone in the middle.


12. Iran recognized Iraq in 1929.

13. The reasons behind the abrogation of the treaty by the Shah can be attributed to his fear that the Baathist regime of Iraq, that had come to power by uprooting the Iran-friendly government of Gen. Qasim, would make maximum use of the Shatt estuary to expand its influence among other Arab powers in the name of Arabism, the corner-stone of the Baathist ideology. Another reason lies in the Shah’s hagemonic design in the Persian Gulf following the British announcement of withdrawal from the east of Suez in 1967. Unrestricted navigation to Iranian port of in the Persian Gulf was the key to this strategy.


16. It may be noted that the treaty did not make a direct reference to Iranian support to Kurdish rebellion. Rather it enjoined upon the two states to refrain from interfering in each other’s internal affairs.

17. The dispute over the Shatt during 80s and after is dealt with in the chapter on the Iran-Iraq War.


22. Eilts, Fredrick Hermann, N.18, p. 32.

23. The UAE consists of seven trucial Sheikhdoms. In 1971, after the British withdrawal from the region, they decided to merge into a federation. Ras-Al Khaima joined the federation in 1972. The seven UAE Sheikhdoms are Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ummul Qaiwan, Fujirah and Ras Al Khaima.


25. Ibid, P. 152

26. In the first quarter of the present century the oasis remained independent of the control of any of the disputants states.


32. Bahrain is rich in oil, generates moderate sized revenue from oil exports, has an oil refinery and is a leading commercial center in the Persian Gulf region.

33. The Iranian claim is disputed because after the advent of Islam Bahrain, as happened to other Arab peninsular countries, was occupied by the Arab-Islamic forces.


35. These islands are within 12 nautical miles territorial limits of both the countries. Abu Musa dispute is between Iran and Sharjah and the two Tunbs between Iran and Ras Al Khaima.

37. The agreement was signed between Iran and Sharjah on Nov. 29, 1969. It stipulated joint occupation" of the island and joint sharing of revenues. Iran also agreed to let the Butta Gas Oil Company, which was awarded the concession by Sharjah, continue exploring the oil. See “Iranian offer to Buy Three Gulf Island Reported” Middle East Economic Survey (Beirut) Dec. 15, 1971.


41. The reports of Saudi occupation of these islands in 1977 by some sources is not substantiated by relevant evidences.

42. Alsadur, Drysaddle & Blake, Gerald H, N. 5., P. 4.

43. For instance, a Qatri ministerial statement in 1976 described Hower as integral part of Qatar and condemned Bahraini military exercises. Similarly, Bahrain in 1978 criticized the presence of Qatri warships in the waters around the Howars.

44. For the text see US Department of State, “Continental Boundary: Bahrain -Saudi Arabia” International Boundary Study, March 10, 1970.

45. The agreement over the Kharag island could be finalised with most difficulty. Initially, Iran wanted that the median line be measured from the Kharag island. Saudi Arabia wanted a median line existing between the main islands of the two countries. In 1965, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to establish a boundary line existing at an equidistance from the two proposed median lines. later, Iran rejected this when it realized that this would extend Saudi control over the offshore oil discovered by the Iranian concessionaire. Saudi Arabia gave a sympathetic consideration to Iran’s position and proposed division of Boundaries in such a way that oil resources were equitably shared. Given the Saudi concession, Iran also dropped its insistence on retaining its full control of the Kharag and the measurement of the median line from the 12 nautical miles off the island.

46. It was a remarkable achievement in view of the fact that Islam is a religion which provides a whole set of code of conducts in social andcultural realms of the life of a faithful.


49. Hunter, Shireen, N. 47, P. 68.


52. The Iranian Radio Arabic broadcast begins with a Quranic verse, “kings dispoil a county when they enter it and make the nobles of its people its means”.

53. It may be noted that in Iran the head of the government—the president—is directly elected but the head of the state—the spiritual leader—who is vested with supreme executive powers and the power to exercise veto over the executive orders and legislations of the government, is not elected but appointed by a body of clerics. Some Arab monarchies have established representative political institutions. But these bodies are not elected on the basis of universal adult franchise, have limited powers, consist of a fairly large number of nominated representatives and are subject to dissolution by the King at his will.

54. Western sources say that due to Iran’s preoccupation with Iraq, the fervor behind export of revolution dampened. But this inference is not logical as the western sources relate it to a sharp decline in Iran’s visible involvement in fomenting internal dissension in the Arab countries, without evaluating whether was there really any marked decline in Iran’s export of revolution propaganda also. Iran’s export of revolution policy was confined to rhetorics in the pre-war period. So did it remain so after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War. Hence, there was hardly any “noticeable” or sharp decline in the Iranian attempt to export the revolution.


56. Iraq refrained from supporting subversive elements in the Arab Gulf largely because the left-oriented forces were week, lacked popular support, and were more Nasserite than Baathist. Iraq had little track with the other streams of rebels, the Islamists. During the Persian Gulf crisis and the war, Iraq received sympathy from the Islamic resistance groups but this did not graduate into their identification with Iraq. After the Iraqi defeat, they moved further away from Iraq, which now lacks both the will and the clout to strike a nexus with the latter. Iraq has never been in a sound position to influence the Arab armed forces, the intelligence and the internal security personnel despite the fact that they, given their modern outlook, seem more responsive to a secular ideology. A close monitoring of these elements by the ruling regimes, their unconditional loyalty to the establishment and the American influence on them have lessened the chances of military takeover or coup encouraged by a foreign power in the countries of Arab monarchies in
the Persian Gulf.


60. For example, the Shah’s main intention behind occupying the islands of Abu Musa and two Tunbs was to flank the Persian Gulf from both the sides, see Eilts, Hermann Frederick., N. 18, Pp. 26-27.


66. Harkavy, Robert G., N. 64, P. 18.

67. Most of the boundary disputes among the member states still exist. Nor have most of them been brought before the GCC for settlement.

68. Sweraingen, Will D., N. 21, P. 329.

69. Ibid, P. 329.