CHAPTER - I

Iraq Kuwait Conflict: A Historical Overview

The traditional regimes in the Middle East can be subdivided into kingdoms and emirates (Principalities) since Saudi Arabia, Oman and Jordan are ruled by Kings, while Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates by Emirs. All these states came into being between 1921 and 1971 and always with the active help of Britain, then the leading imperialist power in the region.¹

All the kingdoms and emirates are in the Arabian Peninsula, the least populated part of the Arab-East, which until the late 1960s was also the least economically developed.² The discovery of oil in the beginning of the century has entirely changed the economy of the Middle East countries. Russia, Britain, Germany and USA established their presence in this region in one way or the other for their oil interest and thus a network of refineries came into being with the collaboration of local entrepreneurs in a form of joint ventures. Oil is produced by nationalized companies or corporations. State owned corporations or multinationals oil producing companies were engaged

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2. Ibid., p.9.
by the Governments and the profit was divided between the companies and the producing countries as per mutually agreed terms.\(^3\)

The United States being an important player in world politics has always tried to make its presence felt in the region. The primary objective of American policy in the region has been the establishment of American dominance, to control a politically volatile region which is of great economic and strategic interest to the policy makers in the State Department. The Gulf region is one of the major producers of oil and they control the oil wealth and be in a position to defer the mine price of oil in the world markets. At the same time exercise considerable influence in the economic policies of its competitors.\(^4\)

Oil is perhaps the most volatile commodity in the world whereby governments have been overthrown and wars fought to secure possession of oil fields in the region. An American presence in the Gulf poses a threat to Central Asia, the strategic underbelly of the former Soviet Union. The continuing turmoil in the former Soviet Union and the growing restiveness of the Muslim people of Central Asia could provide the United States an opportunity for overt and covert intervention and it is not surprising that elements in the former Soviet Union view with extreme suspicion the possibility that the US military presence would continue despite the opposition from the local people.\(^5\)

Emergence of Kuwait:

Among the territories that the Saudis failed to overrun and add to Saudi Arabia in the 1920's was Kuwait. Along the entire South-Western shore of the Persian Gulf lived half-wild Arab tribes, led by Semi-independent Sheiks (Chiefs). The Ottoman Turks had never really made good their control here, though eastern Arabia was nominally a part of their empire. In the late nineteenth century, increasing attention was focused on this area, there were proposals to build a railroad all the way from Central Europe to Baghdad and the Persian Gulf and to concentrate the trade between Europe, India, and the Far East on this eastern railhead. Under such a plan, the shores of the Persian Gulf would assume very great strategic importance.6

The sheikdom of Kuwait, lying directly to the Southwest of the delta of the Shatt-al-Arab, had been ruled by the descendants of Sabahabu Abdullah since the middle of the eighteenth century. In 1897, Sheikh Mubarak thought his semi-independence was being threatened by the Turks and asked the British government to give him protection. If the route through the Persian Gulf* was going to


* The Persian Gulf is an arm of the Arabian sea separating Iran from the Arabian Peninsula. Connected to the Gulf of Oman by the strait of Harmuz, the Gulf is about 990 km (650mil) long and 56-338 km (35-210mi) wide; it has an area of approximately 240,000 km² (92,500mi²). The gulf is bordered by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The island Sheikhdom of Bahrain is the largest of the many islands in the gulf. See for details, S.Shashi (ed.), Encyclopaedia of Humanities and Social Sciences, (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1979) Vol., 35, p.457.
become important, Great Britain was resolved to have some share
in its control. So Britain accepted the Sheikh's invitation and established
a protectorate over Kuwait in 1899. At the outbreak of World War-
I, in which Great Britain was aligned against Turkey, the wholly
theoretical Turkish sovereignty over this area was renounced, and
Kuwait became a sovereign state under British protection. At this
time, Kuwait was an ill-defined area, its boundaries had never been
agreed upon on paper or marked on the ground. In 1922, with the
rise to power of the Saudis, it became necessary to clarify this matter.
It proved difficult, however, to secure agreement, and in one geographical
area no agreement was ever reached. To the south of Kuwait is a
so-called Neutral Territory, in which Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in default
of a boundary settlement, agreed to share equal rights. They continue
to do so, even now that oil has been found there. West of Kuwait,
a second Neutral Territory is shared by Saudi Arabia and Iraq.²

Kuwait might today be as obscure as several other Sheikdoms
in eastern Arabia if oil had not been discovered there. Oil production
began in 1946 and increased quickly. Kuwait was found to have one
of the richest reserves of oil in the world. An oil port and refinery
were built at Mina al Ahmadi; oil royalties began to pour into the
treasury of Sheikh Sir Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah, and the eyes of
Kuwait's neighbours were turned on this small, weak but rich state.
The British protectorate ended in 1961. At once, Kassim of Iraq put

²  Ibid.
forward a claim to the territory, based on flimsy historical grounds, and his threat to annex it brought back the British forces that had only recently been withdrawn. This show of force deterred Kassim. The independence and sovereignty of Kuwait received general recognition when the territory was admitted to the United Nations, but Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and even Egypt were quietly awaiting their chance to move in.  

The Kuwait affair was the first major crisis of the post-Cold-War period in the Gulf region. In August 1990, when Iraqi President Saddam Hussein annexed Kuwait claiming it as a part of Basra region of Iraq. Kuwait owes its origin to the British imperial decision at the beginning of the century and it remained a source of dispute between


*Basra (Busra, Bussora, or Bassorah) is an oil-shipping port of South-eastern Iraq and the capital of Basra province. It is situated on the Shatt-al-Arab about 115 km (71 mi) from the Persian Gulf. The population is 720,000 (1981 est.). Industries include oil refining and the manufacture of petrochemicals and fertilizer. Petroleum products, wheat, wool, barley, and dates are exported.*

The city was founded in 636 by Caliph Umar I. An important centre of letters, science, poetry, finance, and commerce under the early Abbasids. It declined in later centuries but revived with the completion of the railroad to Baghdad in the early 20th century. Occupied by the British in World War I and II, it was an important staging post in the Allied supply route to the USSR after 1941. Basra’s rapid commercial development after world war II was due to its advantageous location as a port and to the major oil fields nearby. Since the long Iran-Iraq war broke out in 1980, however, the port has been virtually closed. See for details, S.S. Shashi *ed.*. *Encyclopaedia of Humanities and Social Sciences* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, Vol. 4, 1979) p.247.
the two states since the beginning of 16th Century. The Iraqi* claims over Kuwait was based on two issues, namely the historical connection of Kuwait with the Ottoman Empire and the succession of the new State of Iraq to the territorial Sovereignty of that Empire over Kuwait. Until the turn of the twentieth century Kuwait had been officially part of the Ottoman Empire since the eighteenth century, however, the Empire’s rule over the principality had been nominal. The al-Sabah family descendants of the Bedouin Utub Clan, had settled around the Gull’s finest natural harbor, and in 1756 they established an autonomous sheikdom in Kuwait. It was a patriarchal desert society where authority was based on traditional tribal rule without elaborate administrative hierarchy.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Kuwait and Britain discovered each other due to common interest. Kuwait feared the


* Iraq has not only been the cradle of the earliest world civilization of Mesopotamia, but it is also one of the “new states”. The present state of Iraq came into existence after the World War-1 with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The modern history of Iraq as a politically organized community begins with the Revolt of 1920 against the British occupation. The country came under the British Mandate which, for its own convenience, created a throne in Iraq for a person brought in from Hijaz in 1921. The monarchy lasted for 37 years as it was abolished by a break through Coup d’etat in July 1958. See for details, M.A. Saleem Khan, *The Monarchic Iraq: A political Study* (Aligarh: Centre of West Asian Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, 1977) p.v.


reassertion of Constantinople's authority while Britain resented Germany's growing ambitions in the Gulf. On January 23, 1899, the two parties signed a bilateral agreement which gave Britain responsibility for Kuwait's defense and foreign affairs. When the news of agreement reached Constantinople, the Sultan hurried to declare Kuwait a district of the Velayet (Province) of Basra and nominated the Sheikh of Kuwait as Qaimaqam (district Officer), implying that Kuwait was subordinate to the Governor of Basra. This move, however, was purely symbolic and in October 1913 Britain and Kuwait renewed the 1899 agreement with its exclusivity clause to cover oil as in important source of promoting and strengthening bilateral relations. Britain was the sole country to grant concession in dealing into oil and its wealth.\(^\text{13}\)

Earlier that year, on July 29, 1913, Britain and the Ottoman Empire concluded a significant agreement, "The Draft Convention on the Persian Gulf Area", which restricted Ottoman sovereignty over the Sheikdom, recognized the autonomy of the Sheikh of Kuwait and acknowledged Britain's status in Kuwait. According to this agreement, the territory of Kuwait proper was to be delineated by a semi-circle to indicate the area within which the tribes were to be subordinated to Kuwait and the Ottomans were not allowed to establish garrisons or undertake any military action in the Sheikdom without London's approval or to exercise administrative measures independently of the Sheikh of Kuwait. The agreement also stipulated the inclusion of the

\(^{13}\) Ibid., pp. 63-64.
Warba and Bubiyan islands, strategically located at the northern tip of the Gulf, within Kuwait’s boundaries. However, as a result of the outbreak of the First World War the agreement was not ratified.\textsuperscript{14}

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the First World War created a pressing need for delineating the borders of the new entities established on the ruins of the regional empire. This problem was especially acute in the Arabian peninsula not only due to the lack of a historical legacy of precise permanent territorial boundaries, but also because there were no outstanding topographical landmarks or clear-cut ethnic divisions. At an international conference in the early 1920s, the boundary of Kuwait were established, both on its northern side with Iraq and in the South with Saudi Arabia. Since some difference remained unresolved, the so called Kuwait Neutral Zone was as declared that both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to share jurisdiction and oil resources, should these be discovered.\textsuperscript{15}

On June 19, 1961 Kuwait was proclaimed an independent state, and a month later was admitted to the Arab League. Britain guaranteed the newly established state military support if the latter so requested. That same year the monarchy elected a Constituent Assembly, which adopted a constitution for the independent state in November, 1962.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{itemize}
\item 14. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 64.
\item 15. \textit{Ibid.}
\item 16. \textit{Ibid.}
\end{itemize}
Kuwait anxiety to promptly assert its newly gained independence was not motivated by domestic considerations alone, but rather by the desire to affirm its determination to cling to its independence. A tiny state in possession of mammoth wealth, with a large natural harbor and some 120 miles of Gulf coastline, Kuwait was painfully aware that it would have to constantly vigilant with the neighbours because of their evil designs on its wealths. Although immediately premier Nuri Sa'id recognized the boundaries set in the 1913 treaty*, Baghdad never shed away from trying to subvert the Al-Sabah regime. Moreover, in the late 1930s King Ghazi began openly demanding the incorporation of the whole of Kuwait into Iraq.17

During the mid - 1950s, when Kuwait raised the question of demarcation of its borders with Iraq, it seemed as though the countries might agree to solve the border dispute in a favour of Iraq. Under this proposal, Kuwait would have granted Iraq a 99 year lease over the most northerly parts of its territory, together with the island of Warba. Iraq was to guarantee supplies of fresh water to Kuwait in exchange. This was the first occasion when an Iraqi government linked

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* Kuwait registered the agreed minutes as a Treaty with the U.N. more significantly Kuwait showed its readiness to review the 1961 agreement with Britain and made a grant of 30 million dinars to Iraq. Iraq in return agreed to provide Sweet water to Kuwait from Shatt-al-Arab. But this understanding did not lead to the resolution of their border demarcation problem. See for details, A.K. Pasha (ed.), The Gulf in Turmoil: A Global Response (New Delhi: Lancers Books, 1992) pp. 23-24.

17. Ibid., pp. 64-65.
the question of its border with Kuwait with certain territorial adjustment and demanded transfer of certain island by its southern Sheikhdom. The Amir, however, rejected the idea or any change in the border as he worried that Iraq could blackmail Kuwait often and its claim for Kuwait might be perpetuated.  

In 1954 the pro-western Iraqi Nuri Sa'id had tried unsuccessfully to persuade Nasser to bring Egypt into a western-sponsored alliance designed to secure the Middle East against Soviet expansionism. The first element of the alliance was already in place by February that year when Pakistan and Turkey signed a mutual defence pact. Nuri Sa'id had been an officer in the Turkish army captured by the British in the Basra campaign in the First World War. But he had since come to regard the relationship with Britain as the key to Iraqi foreign policy. He saw the Soviet Union as Iraq's natural enemy. Premier Gamal Abdel Nasser too was an anti-communist but he believed that the real Soviet threat was of internal subversion which could only be combated by improving the lot of the Arab masses. He had, in any case, defied the Western powers by purchasing arms from the Soviet block.

Nasser declined to join the new alliance and in February the following year Iraq went its own way by signing a defence treaty

with Turkey, the foundation stone of what became known as the Baghdad pact including Iran, Pakistan, the United States and Britain. Iraq’s membership of the pact created an irrevocable rift with Egypt and was viewed by nationalists at home as yet another surrender to western interests. Nuri Sa'id’s reputation was further damaged when it was revealed that he had conspired with the British before the Suez crisis to plot the overthrow of Nasser. These factors helped to sow the seeds of the revolution of 1958, as did Nuri Sa'id’s creation of the so-called Arab Federation between Jordan and Iraq, presided over by the Hashemite monarchs, Faisal II and Hussein, a conservative reaction to the setting up of the United Arab Republic.  

In 1958, Nuri Al-Sa'id suggested the accession of Kuwait during a meeting of the Baghdad Pact. But the ruler of Kuwait Abdullah al Saleem. rejected this because Kuwait had no desire to join the Pact. He also rejected Nuri Al- Sa'id call to Kuwait to join a Hashemite Federation of Iraq and Jordan to counter the Egypt - Syria federation.

Syria and Gamal-Abdel Nasser’s Egypt at that time formed a unified country, the United Arab Republic which had been formed in 1958, and in February 1960 Saddam moved from Damascus to Cairo. Ostensibly a student, his main activity for the next three years was to increase his stature in the Baath. He became a full member of the inner party, having up to then been only a probationer. The Egyptian

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tolerated the exiled Baathists, who formed a large community in Cairo, but it seems the intelligence services had reason to distrust Saddam, and they denied him the funding often disbursed to exiles. He nevertheless succeeded in getting a small retainer paid from the petty cash of the presidential palace. Saddam is said to have regarded life in Cairo as the equivalent of a prison sentence.

Saddam Hussein and Modern Iraq:

The three and a half years of exile until the Baathist-led coup which overthrew Qaseem in 1963 were the most obscure of Saddam's often shadowy and contradictory history. The failed assassination attempt in 1958 in which Saddam played his part had created a rift in Baathist ranks, because a small group of the party's regional (Iraqi) leadership had gone ahead with the attempt without the direct approval of the national (pan-Arab) leadership, then based in Damascus. After the failure of the plot some Baath leaders abandoned the party believing that it should not resort to criminal acts. However, the organizer of the plot, Fuad-al-Rikabi Justified the assassination attempt on the grounds that Qassem was a traitor to Pan-Arabism and that the attack had the approval of the masses. As a result of the split, the Iraqi party in exile was dissolved and reformed under a new leadership. Ali Saleh Saadi, who was to become deputy premier after the 1963 coup, was appointed secretary of the new Iraqi party in 1962 and made clear his opposition to those responsible for the botched murder.

attempt. It was Saadi's party that finally took control of Iraq with a bloody coup on 8 February 1963 that overturned the Qassem regime. This so-called Ramadan Revolution was mounted by a group of Baathist army officers, although the Baath disguised its role, preferring to hide behind the anonymity of a National Council for the Revolutionary Command.23

At the behest of Ali Saleh Saadi, the Secretary of the Baath, Abdel Salem Aref was installed as provisional president. Aref was one of the leaders with Qassem of the 1958 revolution but had subsequently been purged by the dictator, tried and sentenced to death. In line with his usual practice, Qassem had left the sentence unsigscruptles and had Qassem executed the day after the coup. Perhaps it was from this that the young Saddam learned the lesson that, once in power, it was safer to liquidate one's opponents rather than leave them to fight another day. Saddam had returned to Iraq after the coup, to find the party still riven by ideological struggle. Between the right and the left factions (the latter led by Saadi) a centrist faction held sway, led by Saddam relative, the former army officer from Takrit, Hassan al-Bakr. Saddam was soon seen gun in hand, acting as bodyguard for Bakr. The leftists wanted to give priority to the introduction of socialism, and warned against relying on the military elements who had organized the Ramadan Revolution. But Saadi, the deputy primer in the new regime, was criticized as trying to impose

single party rule, rather than co-operating with other nationalist groups. In an effort to reconcile the factions, Michel Aflaq, the Syrian founder of Baath was brought to Baghdad. But he effectively supported the rightist group.24

**Iraqi Claims Over Kuwait:**

It was clear that the Sheikh of Kuwait wanted to keep his state away from any political alliance with Iraq. He rejected the Iraqi demands of unity or federation. He did so in order to avoid giving any kind of opportunity to Iraq to establish its leadership which may eventually lead to Iraqi influence or domination over Kuwait or even of giving Iraq another excuse which might be used by Iraqi leaders to justify their claims over the State of Kuwait.25

On June 1961 just six days after Kuwait gained independence, Premier Qasim of Iraq stated that “Kuwait is an integral part of Iraq. The expected Iraqi congratulations turned into a confrontation when the Iraqi premier laid irredentist claims on the whole territory of Kuwait”. In a press conference on 25 June 1961, Qasim announced that he did not recognize a “forged treaty” imposed on Kuwait by the Britain. He also claimed that Sheikh Mubarak was bribed to sign the treaty of 1899 and said that a decree would be issued appointing Kuwait’s ruler as Qaimmqam (Governor) of the Kuwait district of Iraq. He


stated that Iraq's border extended from 'north of Zago' (Zaiko to South of Kuwait).  

Qasim's claims were based on shaky historical grounds- (1) Kuwait had been part of the Basra Wilayet in the Ottoman Empire, and (2) that Britain and other powers had recognized Ottoman's sovereignty over Kuwait both before and after the signature of the 1899 agreement under which Kuwait became a British protectorate. So Iraq, as the successor of that Empire was legitimately and rightfully the proprietor of territories. The above historical ground, even if it is fully valid, did not justify Qasim's claim over Kuwait because Kuwait is not the only new state which was created by foreign powers. Applying the rule of historical rights as criterion for international relations paves the way for Turkey and Iran to demand the annexation of Iraq. The agreement that Qasim pointed at and tried to use as evidence to justify his claim, was signed between two states in various stages, either between the ruler of Kuwait and the Ottoman Empire or between Britain and the Ottoman Sultan. The two were the colonialist powers of the area and Iraq was not a signatory to this agreement. If the Kuwait had submitted at a time to the terms of an Ottoman rule of Basra it was because the entire Arab region was under the Ottoman domination. It is true that the Sheikh of Kuwait once accepted the title of Qaimmaqm in order to protect this state from external threats. Thus, the claim on territory which is based on the concept of "historical right", if

agreed to, would lead to chaos not only in the Arab world but in the whole world.  

Despite the fall of Qasim’s regime, the consequence of the crisis lingered in the sentiment of Kuwait and other Gulf States. That manifested itself in the continued complaints of Kuwait from the probable renewal of Iraqi ambitions. Hence came the attempt of the new regime leaders in Iraq reasserting their will of rectifying what Qasim’s regime had spoilt through the good neighbourhood and the bolstering of bilateral economic and cultural relations. The two governments soon moved to purify their relations by meeting in Baghdad in October 1963. The Kuwait side was led by Sheikh Sabah Al Sabha the Prime Minister and the Iraqi side was led by General Ahmad Hasan al Bakr, the Iraqi Prime Minister. Discussions ended by signing a mutually agreed upon minute containing the consolidation of the bilateral relations to their mutual interest and desire to erase the damage inflicted on these relations by Qasim’s regime and to open a new chapter of bilateral relations between the two sister states in conformity with their bonds and relation free from all shades of estrangement fabricated by the former regime. Therefore, the two sides agreed on the following terms:

1. The recognition by the Republic of Iraq of the independence and total sovereignty of the state of Kuwait within its borders as defined in the letter of the Prime Minister of Iraq dated  

July 21, 1932 and approved by the Ruler of Kuwait in his letter dated August 10, 1932.

2. The two governments will bolster their fraternal relations between their two brotherly countries inspired by their national obligation, common interests and aspiration to a comprehensive Arab unity.

3. The two government will undertake to establish bilateral, cultural, commercial and economic co-operation and to exchange technical information.

4. To accomplish the above goals, the two countries have decided to promptly exchange diplomatic representation at ambassadorial level. (An agreed upon Minute between the Iraq Republic and the state of Kuwait, Baghdad 4/10/1963).

It is worth mentioning that the Kuwaiti Government has registered that agreement with United Nations and the Arab League thus becoming recognized at the Arab and international levels. And though Iraq has not objected to these registration procedures its ill-intention towards Kuwait was evident in its deliberate refrain from submitting it to the concerned Iraqi council for its ratification so as to evade its responsibility in the event of an available opportunity.

Nevertheless, the following years witnessed the growth and strength of bilateral economic, political and cultural relations. Kuwait

28. The Iraqi Aggression on Kuwait, The Truth and the Tragedy (Kuwait: Centre for Research and Studies on Kuwait, 1994) p. 50.
29. Ibid., p. 50.
in particular benefited from the loans and the generous financial grants offered by Kuwait. After the signing of the aforesaid agreement, an Iraqi delegation visited Kuwait, detailed agreement were reached by which Kuwait offered Iraq a free loan of thirty million dinars. The Kuwaiti Government emphasized that loan was within the scope and goals of the Kuwaiti Fund which was created to serve developmental projects in the Arab countries in December 1961 shortly after independence.\textsuperscript{30}

Though the Iraqi - Kuwaiti relations moved within their natural course, tension between the two states re-emerged due to the continued Iraqi ambition in the wealth of Kuwait, asking for more loans and grants using the border problems with small neighbour as a means of pressure or blackmail. That, naturally, led to a halt in coordinating the Joint economic and developmental projects. And though Kuwait did not object to signing an agreement approved by the National Assembly to convey without conditions, about 120 million gallons of water from Shatt-Al-Arab, yet the political sensitivity and other obstacles associated with the project have suspended it preventing its realization. Another agreement has been reached after the quiescence in the border problems in the late seventies when the two sides agreed in the early part of 1978 to adopt the necessary steps for implementation. However, Iraq's domestic problems and its problems with neighbour Iran prevented the adoption of practical measures to implement the

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., pp. 50-51.
project which no longer remained vital for Kuwait.  

Following the end of the Kuwait - Iraqi crisis by the collapse of Qasim’s regime and the signing of October 1963 Agreement between the Kuwait and Iraqi Governments under which Iraq recognized the independence of Kuwait, its existing borders and exchanged the diplomatic representation, talks regarding the demarcation of those borders were held directly between the Kuwaiti and Iraqi Governments under which Iraq recognized the independence of Kuwait, its existing borders and exchanged the diplomatic representation, talk regarding the demarcation of those borders were held directly between the representatives of the two governments.  

Despite the financial commitments of Kuwait in the Arab summit conference held in Khartoum to offset the impacts of the Israeli aggression on the Arab territories in 1967, it did not hesitate to offer a twenty five million Kuwaiti dinars to Iraq in October of the same year to finance the power project of Samerra Dam and other development projects. It has been proved that the Kuwaiti loans helped to alleviate the crises fabricated by the Iraqi Regime against Kuwait. That transpired in Al-Sameta event of March 1973 when some Iraqi troops attacked two Kuwaiti border posts in the north east of Kuwait and penetrated three Kilo-meters inside Kuwait.  

31. Ibid., p.51.  
32. Ibid.  
33. Ibid.
Those forces did not withdraw till Kuwait offered Iraq a loan with easy terms. Though Iraq showed response to Arab mediation after the crisis to go ahead with the demarcation of the borders as per the 1963 Agreement, Iraq used to justify the delay by its domestic problems. Soon after, the Iraqi Regime got engaged with Iran after the advent of its Islamic Revolution. It announced the revocation of Algiers Agreement of 1975, then it got invaded in a war that lasted for eight year (1980-1988).^4

It is true that Saddam Hussein is an ambitious man. Merely eight months before invading Iran, he had boasted that “Iraq is as great as China, as great as the Soviet Union and as great as the United States”. It is equally true that the Algiers Agreement, which established Iran’s sovereignty over half of the Shatt-al-Arab and recognized its superiority to Iraq, was anathema to him. And yet, despite the humiliation attending the conclusion of the 1975 Agreement, the outbreak of war in September 1980 could not have been more ill-timed for the young and dynamic President. Due to the world oil boom in 1979 and 1980 the Iraqi economy enjoyed unprecedented prosperity. Oil export revenues rose from $ 1 billion 1972 to $ 21 billion in 1979 and $26 billion in 1980. During the months preceding the war, these revenues were running at an annual rate of $ 33 billion, enabling Saddam to carry out ambitious development programmes. Numerous construction projects mushroomed throughout the country. Baghdad was grooming itself

to host the summit of the non-aligned movement in 1982. Living conditions of many groups within Iraqi society were on the rise. War could only risk achievements and, in consequence, render Saddam's domestic standing more tenuous.\textsuperscript{35}

But even if these weighty disincentives to war had not existed, explanations that concentrate on Hussein's ambitions present only one aspect of the determination that drove him to invade Iran. The other aspect was most certainly his insecurity, a growing fearfulness bred by the precariousness he perceived in his own regime and by Iraq's glaring vulnerability vis a vis Iran. To the contemporary state of Iraq, Iran represented the major geo-political challenge. A much larger country in territory and population, with its major strategic centers located deep inside the country and with a long Gulf Coastline, Iran easily towered over its smaller neighbour to the West. Recognizing Iran's fundamental superiority, Iraq had no aspirations of competing with its larger neighbour for gulf supremacy. Instead, it directed its energies toward the Arab world (as evident by Saddam's Eight - Point National Charter of February 1980), a less risky and potentially more rewarding arena. In concluding the 1975 Algiers Agreement Saddam virtually acquiesced in a new regional order based on Iranian hegemony in the Gulf in order to stave off any threat to Iraq's lands and his political position. There were no indications what so ever during

\textsuperscript{35} Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, n.12, p.136.
the latter part of the 1970s that he was seeking to upset this peace with Iran, let alone go to war for this purpose.\textsuperscript{36}

Against this backdrop Hussein followed with much concern the growing revolutionary turmoil in Iran in the late 1970s, which threatened to undermine the status quo set up by the 1975 Algiers Agreement. It is true that a weakened and fragmented Iran could turbulence is channeled outside a state's boundaries to engulf its neighbours.\textsuperscript{37}

Saddam's positive attitude toward the revolutionary regime continued well throughout Spring and Summer 1979. When Iran decided to pull out of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) - an organization for military and economic cooperation formed in 1959 by Britain, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey as a successor to the Baghdad Pact\textsuperscript{*}-Iraq offered its good services in case Iran should decide to join the non-aligned-movement. When in June 1979 Iraqi aircraft mistakenly bombed the Iranian side of the border in the course of operations against the kurds, Baghdad quickly filed an official apology. By that time President Baker, was referring to Iran as a brotherly nation, linked to the Arab people of Iraq by "strong ties of Islam, history and noble tradition", and praising the revolutionary regime in Tehran for pursuing a policy that underlined these "deep historical relations". In July 1979, the

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., pp. 136-137.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 137.

\textsuperscript{*} In 1955 Iraq joined Britain, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan in forming a regional defence organization known as the Baghdad Pact. See for details, Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, n. 12, p. 10.
newly installed President Saddam Hussein of Iraq reiterated his interest in establishing close relations with Iran "based on mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs". The dismissive Iranian response to his appeal did not dissuade Saddam Hussein. As late as in August 1979 he extended an invitation to Bazargan to visit Baghdad. Tehran did not, however, reciprocate Hussein's goodwill. On the contrary, from its early days in power the revolutionary regime sought to overthrow the Iraqi regime.

In June 1979, the revolutionary regime began publicly urging the Iraqi population to rise up and overthrow "the Saddamite regime". A few months later Tehran escalated its campaign by resuming support for the Iraqi Kurds (which had been suspended in 1975), providing aid to underground Shia’ite movements in Iraq and initiating terrorist attacks against prominent Iraqi officials. These reached their peak on April 1, 1980, with a failed attempt on the life of the Iraqi Deputy premier, Tariq Aziz, while he was making a speech at Mustansirriya University in Baghdad. Two weeks later, the Iraqi Minister of Information and culture, Latif Nusseif al-Jasim, narrowly escaped a similar attempt. In April alone, it was estimated that at least 20 Iraqi officials were killed in bomb attacks by militant Shi’ite underground organisations.

38. Ibid., pp 137-138
39. Ibid., p. 138
40. Ibid., pp. 138-139.
With the isolation of Egypt over the Camp David Agreement Iraq after the Baghdad Arab Summits (1978-79) emerged as the dominant Arab state. The Iranian revolution further pushed Iraq to primacy in Arab affairs. In fact the Gulf region appeared ripe to respond positively to Iraqi goals. It had become well known that Saddam Hussein wished to spread Baath ideology in the Arab world especially Gulf, under the Iraqi leadership. This Iraqi boldness emerged partly because of the perceived decline of Iranian power.41

The revolution in Iran in 1978-79 was a watershed in the postwar politics not only in the Gulf but in entire area of South-West Asia. It changed the politics and role of Iran in the region. The area was overturned. At the same time it brought about a profound change in the relationship between regional states including Iran and the west. The revolution approximately coincide with cataclysmic events taking place by about the same period, Camp David accord in 1978, disbanding of CENTO. Kaaba seizure and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan an 1979, Gulf war starting in 1980 and the seizure of US diplomats in Tehran - all contributed towards a qualitative transformation of Middle East politics.42

The Iranian revolution practically marked the end of the west’s

"informal reliance on Iran - Saudi cooperation in the Gulf (envisaged


on the local substitute for Britain's paramountcy after 1971). For the first time, the US political and military dominance of the Gulf was directly challenged. The period also witnessed a general decline in US influence in the region. The CENTO was disbanded by about this time and the US connection had started to be looked upon as an anathema in the Gulf. The seizure of US diplomats as hostage in Tehran exacerbated the situation further lowering US prestige in the region. The Gulf's oil supply on which west's both economy and security were critically dependent had been seriously threatened. The Soviet efforts were a foot in gaining foothold in areas close either to the Gulf or Red sea. As the US position in the region seemed to be touching an all time low in postwar period, Soviet invasion in Afghanistan added a new dimension to the prevailing scenario. The US concern was distinctly voiced by President Jimmy Carter of United States, in his State of the Union Message to the Congress in 1980: "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America. And as such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary including military."

A rather desperate situation prompted the US to make some adjustments in its security arrangements in the Gulf. The US first few steps in the direction was to "increase its naval power in the Indian Ocean, create Rapid Deployment Force and work towards a

43. Ibid., 11.
structure of base facilities in or near the region that would be available for use by the US forces. Initially few came forward to provide base to the US because of apparent US inability to protect her allies in crisis and a US backed Camp David accord universally condemned by the Arabs. Even Saudi Arabia, one of the twin pillar of US security “started demanding that the United States presence should be ‘over the horizon’ and not on its soil”.

Just as the Iranian revolution alarmed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States they were also concerned with the export of the Iraqi revolution. They suspected Iraqi intentions as outlined in Saddam Hussein’s “Arab National Charter”, of February 8, 1980. Undoubtedly, this charter at least in part at Saudi dominance of the lower Gulf States. Riyadh clearly resented Iraqi intrusions and attempts to spread its influence. Thus GCC states came to suspect both Iran and Iraq. Although the Iraqi threat (despite Saddam recent moderation) in the long run was considerable the Iranian threat was seen as more serious and immediate. It is against this backdrop the Iran - Iraq war broke in September, 1980. Although Iraq went out of its way to exploit GCC states’ fears, the Arab pledge of support for Iraq before the war was not easily forthcoming. Initially the GCC States, although concerned at Iranian threat to export revolution, gave only verbal support to Iraq. Even after the outbreak of the war Arab suspicion of Iraqi ideology and its export persisted, (besides not wanting to antagonize Iran). The full measure of Iraqi irritation found expression in a passage
of Saddam Hussein's speech on July 17, 1981 in which he complained not only of those Arab States “blatantly avowing total bias” in favour of Iran, but also those who had failed to conform with the “minimum level of the Pan-Arab bond” and had “outdone themselves in expressing neutrality”. In order to pre-empt any support from Gulf Arabs to Iraq, Tehran threatened to launch air strikes against any Gulf states that helped the Iraqi war efforts. Basically due to the revolution (and fears of the spread of the Gulf war) the GCC was formed in May 1981. The GCC leaders went out of their way to reassure Iran when they said: “We do not want the GCC to be misinterpreted as an alliance against Iran”.

With the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq again raked up the question of control over the Warbah and Buhiyan islands and justified its demand on national security and strategic grounds. The summer of 1981, President Saddam Hussein, in a statement, expressed his desire to control two islands for five years. The Kuwaiti official discreetly refused to accept the proposal. However, immense financial aid by Kuwait and political and logistic considerations put effective constraints on Iraqi pressure for some time.

But in 1984, in the face of Iranian military pushes, Iraq redoubled its pressure for securing the Kuwaiti islands. Kuwait eventually relented and when Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah visited Baghdad in mid-

44. A.K. Pasha n. 41, pp. 26-27.

November, it was reported that the two countries had agreed that three islands of Kuwait-Warbah, Bubiyan and Faylaka would be put under Iraqi control for security reasons. In a sense this was the first de-facto step towards Iraq's complete control over Kuwait.46

The response of the GCC to the Kuwaiti bombing was in essence a reiteration of its previous policy: Some tough language towards the Iranian threat, followed by the return to a more moderate position. The GCC foreign ministers in June 1984 reiterated their calls for a peaceful end to the fighting. Concurrently, in order to "provide teeth" to their diplomacy, their military chiefs of staff met to plan responses in the event of further escalations. In the face of growing external threats and internal discontent the Kuwaiti ruler dissolved the National Assembly in mid-1986 at the very time when Iran recaptured Mehran. The Iranian Majlis Speaker Rafsanjani linked the Kuwaiti move to Iraq's defeat. "To our belief, Kuwait's political crisis has nothing to do with the (Gulf) war and the (Kuwaiti) people's growing opposite views on oil prices and oil production". Iranian hostility was also directed at Kuwait because of its policies which hurt Iran more than any other OPEC country. Iraq's intensified campaign of air strikes against economic and oil targets led to further Iranian reprisals against shipping on the Arab side of the Gulf. Iran stepped up attacks on vessels to and from Kuwait identifying it as one of Iraq's key supporters. Kuwait went public and invited former Soviet Union, China and US

to reflag its oil tankers. This brought about massive naval presence in the Gulf of the US and other states. Kuwait became the target of vitriolic Iranian propaganda, and the government faced persistent requests from the US naval forces for facilities in Kuwaiti territorial waters which were politely but firmly turned down. Kuwait’s determination to see its policy through despite Iranian intimidation was widely praised. Kuwait’s handling of the delicate issue showed considerable depth of experience in dealing with world powers.47

Soon after the Iran-Iraq cease-fire in August 1988 Kuwait confident of Iraqi friendship asked for the demarcation of its border. The Iraqis sent their interior Minister Samir Abdur Razzaq to Kuwait and both agreed to constitute a joint committee to complete the task of demarcation. Again Iraq raised the issue of Bubiyan island and was firm that unless this is transferred to Iraq there won’t be demarcation. As before Kuwait turned down Iraqi demand and the situation reverted to the stalemate. It must be stressed that the Al-Sabah rulers were convinced that if they were to yield Iraq on this issue, it would be seen as a grave provocation by Iran. Later in October 1990 Iran told Kuwaiti exiled rulers not to grant the island of Bubiyan to Iraq and that it would take appropriate measures (meaning they themselves will occupy it) if they actually did so as part of any settlement.48

The Kuwaiti delegation to their shock discovered that Saddam Hussein

48. Ibid., p.31.
remarks on Kuwait’s support to Iraq against Iran. Moreover he said “we expected that after the termination of the war the Emir of Kuwait would pay a visit to Iraq”. Of course, the Kuwaitis quickly realized that there is no use expecting gratitude for the immense help given to Iraq, but the Iraqis by inviting other Arab countries “particularly Kuwait” to join the Arab cooperation council which had given the Iraqis a stronger line of defence against Kuwaiti demands were making it clear that Kuwaitis “still have dues to pay before they can expect a border agreement”. Al Azmina-al-Arabia concluded that Kuwait’s “hopes of drawing up a border agreement have been drowned in the waters of the Shatt-al-Arab” Fed up with the protracted border problem the Kuwaiti ruler in a rare gesture had gone to Baghdad in September 1989 to sort out the problem of demarcation, but was sent packing in a manner that was barely polite.

Saddam Hussein by borrowing heavily from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and others had mortgaged Iraq’s extensive oil resources for into future to pay for a war that brought Iraq none of the territorial gains or battlefield glories that he promised. However, he was convinced that but for Iraq’s “Victory” over Iran, most of the Gulf Arab states would have fallen to Iran, the first being Kuwait. It is this assessment which propelled him to mount pressure on the Al-Sabhas to be more generous in financial aid and when not forthcoming he invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990.

49. Ibid., p. 32.
50. Ibid. p.33.