Chapter 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION
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Throughout recorded history, wars have cost dearly in terms of their inevitable accompaniments—death, mutilation, grief, destruction of material resources, privation and social disorganization. Economic fluctuations and inflation have taken their toll in unemployment, dislocation, and poverty for millions of people. And over the centuries they have become increasingly costly and ever more destructive.

One of the countries which has been affected by war in recent years is Iran. The war between Iran and Iraq continued more than eight years, from 22 September 1980 till July 1988.

The abdication and flight of Shah Reza Pahalevi from the country and the return of the Shiite religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini from his exile in France in 1979 created an atmosphere of internal upheaval and political vacuum in Iran. It seemed as if Iran was on the dangerous precipice of a Civil War. Iraq, too, thought it the most opportune time to settle the old scores with Iran. The long-standing dispute over borders in the Shatt-al-Arab waterway, Shia-sunni differences, regionalism, etc. compounded together resulted first in minor armed clashes and then escalated into a full-scale war between
Iran and Iraq, when on 22 September 1980, Iraq carried out air raids on Iran.

Two issues are at the root of the prolonged Iran-Iraq war - the border dispute and religious rivalries. These issues are not only acting as fuel to this intermittent but never-ending war between the two combatants but have also been mainly responsible for generation of conflict and tension between them.

In 1971, Iran captured some islands from the United Arab Emirates and occupied them. Iraq contended with Iran the sovereignty of these islands and repeatedly asserted its claim over them. The Shatt-al-Arab strait is another cause of conflict. The 1913 Agreement gave exclusive right to Iraq over Shatt-al-Arab but subsequently in 1937, Iran also got some concession about this strait. However, the treaty of Algiers (1975) recognized equal rights of Iran and Iraq and settled the border between them in the mid stream of Shatt-al-Arab.

Now Iraq is opposed to both of the above agreements of 1937 and 1975 and wants them abrogated so that the pre-1913 situation may be restored. The Shatt-al-Arab is of vital importance to Iraq because its chief commercial port "Basra" is located there. Iran, on the other hand, dismisses any such
Iraqi claim as Iraq occupies only 2% of the area in the Persian Gulf, which gives it no right whatsoever over Shatt-al-Arab. Similarly, Iraq is also claiming the Iranian town Khorramshahr.

The second issue is the religious differences, which are not only more significant than the border one but has also given a religious overtone to the persisting Iran-Iraq conflict. It is believed that the present conflict between Iran and Iraq stemmed mainly from the religious controversy. Both are Muslim countries with a majority of Shiites. But in spite of the Shia majority in Iraq, it has been traditionally ruled by the Sunnis, while Iran has been governed by the Shiites. There are some Parsees and Sunnis also in Iran, but they have got no say in the running of the Government.

Some observers of the Gulf scenario feel that the principal cause of the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war and its being drawn out for so long is the clash of personalities between the two leaders - President Saddam Hussein of Iraq and the supreme religious leader and Chairman of the Islamic Revolutionary Council of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini.

Iran and Iraq had also fought a minor war in 1975, but due to the Syrian mediation a peace treaty was concluded putting an end to the hostilities. Iraq, however, had to pay
a very heavy price for signing this treaty. As Syria sympathized with Iran, under the terms of the new treaty that part of the Shatt-al-Arab strait over which Iran and Iraq had enjoyed equal rights, was put under the exclusive control of Iran. Besides, Saddam Hussein also undertook not to extend any help to the anti-Shah elements in Iran.

Outbreak of War

The Iran-Iraq war broke out on 22 September 1980, when Iraqi war planes raided several Iranian air bases. Iraqi forces crossed the borders and made some advances on land occupying Ahwaz and Abadan, two important Iranian towns. Iraq also established its control over the Shatt-al-Arab and the Hormuz strait. Within a week, Iraq blockaded all the sea routes to Iran cutting off its oil exports.

The Iranians also retaliated by heavily bombarding the Iraqi capital Baghdad, Basra and other oil fields and towns. Iraq also suffered tremendously from the Iranian counter-offensive. The people of Iran led by Ayatollah Khomeini resolved to fight the enemy until the aggressors retreated from their soil completely.
The intervention of the neighbouring countries further aggravated the Iran-Iraq conflicts. While Libya and Syria stood by Iran, the other small countries like Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman etc., lent their support to Iraq. Conspicuously both the super powers i.e., the USA and the USSR maintained an eerie silence. Though Iraq had Russian armament due to traditional friendly relations between the two countries, the Soviet Union was also extending its support now to Iraq though not openly. The USA, on the other hand, had used Shah Reza Pahalevi as a pawn to contain the rising tide of communism in the Middle East and for this purpose was supplying arms to Iran worth billions of dollars. After the 1979 revolution and the overthrow of the Shah, however, anti-American sentiments ran high in Iran.

By the 1975 Iran-Iraq treaty that was concluded through Syrian mediations, Iran promised to extend no help to the Kurds inhabiting the border areas in Iraq. Iran, however, renegaded from this promise after the 1979 Islamic revolution which put Ayatollah Khomeini at the helm of affairs in Iran. Iran under Khomeini gave military and economic aid to the Shiites of Iraq to instigate them against the government. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was castigated as a "Kafir" (non-believer of Islam) and all the Iranian actions against him were declared as
religious in nature. Thus Iraq only retaliated against these hostile postures of Iran.

As a result, there was a great loss in terms of economic, social and psychological considerations. The military personnel as well as the civilian have undergone a great deal of war stress. No one can fully grasp the extent of the emotional cost of war. Millions of people of these countries have been affected by stresses sometimes obvious, sometimes not so obvious. Undoubtedly such stresses could interfere with or partially wreck an individual's efficiency and normalcy in life.

**Stress and Reaction to Difficult Life Stress**

Life would be simple indeed if our needs were automatically gratified. But, as we know, many obstacles, both personal and environmental, prevent this. Such obstacles place adjustive demands on us and can lead to the experience of stress. The term stress has typically been used to refer both to the adjustive demands placed on an organism and to the organism's internal biological responses to such demands. We shall refer to adjustive demands as stressors and to the effects they create within an organism as stress.
All situations, positive and negative, that require adjustment are stressful. Thus, according to Canadian physiologist Hans Selye (1976 a), the notion of stress can be broken down further into positive stress, enstress, negative stress and distress. Both types of stress tax the individual's resources and adjustment, though distress typically has the potential to do more damage.

Adjustive demands, or stressors, stem from a number of sources. These sources represent three basic categories — frustrations, conflicts and pressures, which are closely interrelated.

The severity of stress is gauged by the degree of disruption in functioning that it entails. The actual degree of disruption that occurs or is threatened depends partly on the characteristics of the stressor and partly on the individual resources — both personal and situational — and the relationship between the two. On a biological level the severity of stress created by invading viruses depends both on strength and number of the invaders and on the organism's ability and available medical resources to resist and destroy them. On a psychological level, the severity of stress depends not only on the nature of the stressor and the individual's
resources, but also on how the stressor is perceived and evaluated.

Generally stress beyond a minimal level threatens the well-being of the organism and engenders automatic, persistent attempts at its resolution. It forces a person to try to do something about it. What is done depends on many factors. Sometimes inner factors - such as one's frame of reference, motives, competence, or stress tolerance, play the dominant role in determining one's reactions to stress; at other times, environmental conditions such as social demands and expectations are of primary importance. Any stress reaction, of course, reflects the interplay of a combination of inner and outer determinants.

There are three interactional levels that underlie reactions to stress. On a biological level, there are immunological defences against disease and damage-repair mechanisms; on a psychological and interpersonal level, there are learned coping patterns, self-defences, and the seeking of support from family and friends; on a sociocultural level, there are group resources, such as labour unions, religious organizations, and law-enforcement agencies. The failure of coping efforts on any of these levels may seriously increase an individual's vulnerability on other levels.
When stressors are sustained or severe, however, the adaptive capabilities of the organism may be overwhelmed, in which case there is a lowering of integrated functioning and eventually a possible breakdown of the organism. This lowering of integration is referred to as decompensation. Whether stress becomes "excessive" depends not only on the nature of the adjustment demand, but also on the individual's tolerance for stress and available resources for coping with it. There are specific forms of decompensation on biological, psychological and sociocultural levels.

Biological Decompensation

It is difficult to specify the exact biological processes underlying an organism's response to stress. A model that helps explain the course of biological decompensation under excessive stress has been advanced by Hans Selye (1976) in his formulation of the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). Selye found that the body's reaction to sustained and excessive stress typically occurs in three major phases:

a) alarm reaction - representing a general call to arms of the body's defensive forces brought about by the activation of the autonomic nervous system;
b) stage of resistance - in which biological adaptation is at the maximum level of operation in terms of bodily resources used; and
c) collapse - in which bodily resources are depleted and the organism lose its ability to resist so that further exposure to the stress can lead to disintegration and death.

**Psychological Decompensation**

Personality decompensation under excessive stress is somewhat easier to delineate. It appears to follow a course resembling that of biological decompensation and may involve specific biological responses.

1. **Alarm and mobilization**: At first there is an alerting of the organism and a mobilizing of resources for coping with the stressor. At this stage, it typically involves emotional arousal and increased tension, heightened sensitivity and alertness (vigilance), and determined efforts at self-control. At the same time, the individual undertakes various coping measures - which may be task-oriented or defence-oriented or a combination of the two - in attempts to meet the emergency. During this stage, symptoms of maladjustment may appear, such as continuous anxiety and tension, gastrointestinal upset or
other bodily manifestations, and lowered efficiency - indications that the mobilization of adaptive resources is not proving adequate.

2. **Stage of resistance**: If the stress continues, the individual is often able to find some means for dealing with it and thus to resist psychological disintegration. Resistance may be achieved temporarily by concerted task-oriented coping measures; the use of ego-defence mechanisms may also be intensified during this period. Even in the stage of resistance, however, there may be indications of strain, including psychophysiologic symptoms and mild reality distortions. During the late phases of this stage, the individual tends to become rigid and to cling to previously developed defences rather than trying to reevaluate the stressor situation and work out more adaptive coping patterns.

3. **Stage of exhaustion**: In the face of continued excessive stress, the individual's adaptive resources are depleted and the coping patterns called forth in the stage of resistance begin to fail. Now, as the stage of exhaustion begins, there is a lowering of integration and an introduction of exaggerated and inappropriate defensive measures. The latter reactions may be characterised by psychological disorganization and a break with reality, involving delusions and hallucinations. These
appear to represent an increased disorganization in thought and perception along with a desperate effort to salvage some measure of psychological integration and self-integrity by restructuring reality. Metabolic changes that impair normal brain functioning may also be involved in delusional and hallucinatory behaviour. Eventually, if the excessive stress continues, the process of decompensation proceeds to a state of complete psychological disintegration - perhaps involving continuous uncontrolled violence, apathy, stupor, and eventually death.

Sociocultural Decompensation

Although social science has made only modest inroads into the understanding of group pathology, it would appear that the concept of decompensation is just as applicable here as on biological and psychological levels. In the face of wars, economic problems, and other internal and external stressors that surpass their adjustive capabilities, societies may undergo varying degrees of decompensation, often resorting to extreme measures in their attempts to maintain their organization and resist disintegration.
Psychological Disorders and Stress

The psychological and behavioural disturbance that occur in response to identifiable stressors are adjustment disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. The key difference between the two disorders lies not only in severity of the disturbance, but also in the nature of the stressor and the time frame during which the disorder occurs.

In adjustment disorders, the stressor is usually one that is a common stressor experience (such as divorce), but the individual's response, which occurs within three months of the stressor, is beyond what one would normally expect in terms of impaired social or occupational functioning. Furthermore, the individual's response is not merely one instance of over-reaction to stress but rather a continuing pattern that typically lessens or disappears after (a) the stressor has subsided or (b) the individual learns to adapt to the stressor. Predisposition on the part of the individual is not usually relevant.

There are several subclasses of adjustment disorder as defined by the predominant symptoms the individual is experiencing: adjustment disorder with depressed mood,
adjustment disorder with anxious mood, adjustment disorder with mixed emotional features, adjustment disorder with disturbance of conduct, adjustment disorder with mixed disturbance of emotions and conduct, adjustment disorder with work (or academic) inhibition, adjustment disorder with withdrawal, and adjustment disorder with physical complaints.

In post-traumatic stress disorder, the stressor is uncommon (that is, outside the realm of typical human experience) and is psychologically traumatic - for example a life-threatening situation, destruction of one's home, seeing another person mutilated or die, or being the victim of physical violence. Several additional symptoms of the PTSD are noted in DSM-III-R (Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental disorder/Rev. 3rd Ed. APA. 1987).

Exposure to combat is an extremely stressful experience that can impair functioning. The actual psychological effects of combat on both civilian and military participants have never been adequately assessed. But certainly, its dehumanizing effects must be added to any final cost analysis. Men reacted to combat in many ways, 90% of the men came through without serious impairment of their function and with no serious changes in their personalities. But every "normal" soldier
developed fear; they all manifested some or many psychological and physiological "symptoms".

The two most common and conspicuous expressions of combat-related psychological disorder are combat stress reaction (CSR) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Increasing attention has been focused on post-traumatic stress disorder as a clinical entity. It has probably received most recognition thus far in its chronic form in soldiers returning from the war. In addition, there is a growing of recognition that many types of civilian catastrophes (e.g., rape, crime, victimization, violent death of a loved one) may also precipitate a stress response. Thus the range of persons who might suffer from PTSD in its acute or chronic form is potentially quite large. As we work with these individuals, we need to continue to clarify our understanding of this disorder and its natural course. In this study we hope to trace the characteristic expressions of combat-related PTSD among the war-affected Iranian population.