CHAPTER - IV


The 1980-88 war in the Persian Gulf between Iran and Iraq was one of the major conflicts in the Indian Ocean arc. The war engulfed the other states in the Persian Gulf region.1 Also the Gulf conflict turned into a major concert of global politics as it stretched out for a period of eight years. It was one of the longest drawn conflicts in the Indian Ocean region in contemporary political history. The United Nations Organisation (UNO) played a decisive and influential role during the conflict. It was eventually responsible for drawing up the terms based on which the war ended. The 1980-88 Gulf war also became a major arena of U.S -Soviet rivalry.

This chapter is an attempt to analyze the Gulf war, between Iran and Iraq in its varied but related dimensions. It discusses the geographical and ethnic distribution as well as the religious and political divergence in the nature of the two states. These factors and differences were directly or indirectly related to the rivalry between Iran and Iraq. The chapter also dwells on the involvement of third parties in the conflict. In the process it studies the UNO’s reconciliatory efforts and the involvement of the USA and the Soviet Union in the Iran-Iraq war.

The outbreak of the war which was started by Iraq, involved multi-dimensional issues in Iran-Iraq relations. Some of the issues
were historical and others were based on the existing and emerging political relations between the two major states in the Persian Gulf. Their rivalry and the long drawn conflict affected the political environment of the states in the region which shared their borders, religion and oil resources with one or both the belligerents. Apart from affecting the entire Persian Gulf, the conflict had larger global ramifications as well.

Globalisation of the conflict in the Persian Gulf was almost inevitable as the region was a major supplier of crude oil to the different parts of the world. In the East, states like Japan and China and on the West major West European states like Germany and the U.S.A were dependent on crude oil supplied from this region. The Soviet Union which was not dependent on oil supply was interested in the region owing to geo-strategic or geo-political consideration rather than any geo-economic reasons. Keeping in view their respective interests the U.S.A and the USSR were actively involved in this conflict.

The Gulf conflict (1980-88) exposed the ideological and political differences between Iran and Iraq. Iraq was responsible for opening the attack on the 22nd Sept 1980. Thereafter both the major states of the Persian Gulf battled it out to establish their hegemony in the region. Internal politics of Iraq prior to the war was well under the control of the Ba'ath Party government headed by Saddam Hussain. Regionally the state had no animosity with its immediate neighbours, like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Syria and Jordan. Iraq's relationship with the Shah of Iran (1942-1979) could be described as congruent since the Algiers
agreement of 1975.\(^4\) Both the states shared certain common interests as members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). They also opted to avoid differences leading to tensions in the Gulf region.

Iraq was one of the first states to recognise the new Islamic Revolutionary regime of Iran (1979). The new regime headed by Ruhollah Khomeini a Shi'ite Ayatollah was in place after the Islamic Movement deposed the Shah of Iran in February, 1979.\(^5\) However Iraq's acknowledgment of the new Islamic Republic did not receive similar reciprocation from the Ayatollah and his regime. The Islamic regime in Iran was not only trying to change the existing order of the Iranian society but was aiming to alter the existing ideas of Pan-Arabism in the Persian Gulf. Similarly it was not willing to accept the status quo in Iran- Iraq relationship.\(^6\) Differences between the two states eventually resulted in a major confrontation which lasted eight years.

However before discussing the war at its different stages it would be necessary to understand the geographic, the ethnic, religious and social distribution of both Iran and Iraq. This analysis will give an insight into the traditional and existing causes of rivalry between the two states.

The Islamic Republic of Iran:

Topographically Iran is at an elevation of more than 1,500 ft. (450 mls) above sea level. The heartland of the state is generally a high
plateau which is surrounded by mountains on almost all sides rising up to a height of about 6,500 ft. above sea level. The lowlands of Iran are along the Karun river along its borders with Iraq. It has a narrow coastline along the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman in the south. The land that meets the sea is also at an average elevation of 1,000 ft. above sea-level at most places.7

Iran is a mountainous state. Some of its major mountain ranges are the Elburz (Alborz) mountains in the north, the Khorasan mountain chain in the east and the Baluchistan ranges in the South which extends to form the eastern plateau of Iran. The Zagros mountain is the longest mountain range of Iran. It originates from the north-west of Iran and the border of the former Soviet Union. It extends to meet the Makaran mountain ranges in the south-east of Iran. This mountainous state has vast stretches of barren plateau which are mostly salty deserts. The only relief to this harsh landscape is provided by the river Karun, which is also a navigable river. The capital of Iran is Tehran.8

As a result of its geographical attributes most of Iran is a wasteland and an uninhabited place because of its salty deserts. Only 10% of the country is cultivable while another 27% is fit for grazing. The agricultural land is located between the mountains and the deserts and only 40% of it is irrigated. The forest area of Iran is along its border with Caspian sea. The country’s major wealth is its petroleum reserves. In the early 1960's the reserves were an estimated 7,734,000,000 metric tonnes.
This accounts for more than 8% of the world’s reserves. Natural gas reserves of Iran were only second to that of the erstwhile Soviet Union, and made up 1/6 th of the world’s reserves. The country also had substantial reserves of coal, copper and iron ore.  

The total land area of Iran measures 1,648,000 sq. kms. The state shares its international borders in the north with the Soviet Union and the Caspian sea; on the east are the states of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Located on its western borders are Turkey and Iraq. The Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman wash its southern coastline. The estimated population of Iran in 1984 was approximately 43,820,000. Iranians or Persians are the majority and they inhabit different parts of the state. The other major ethnic groups are the Kurdish and Lurs or aboriginal Persians. They speak the same language as the Bakhtiyaris, another tribe who live in the Zagros mountains.  

A majority of the Iranians follow the Shi’ite faith of Islam. Infact Shi-i-Islam is the official state religion. The Kurdish and the Turkmens are Sunni Muslim. The political business of the state is conducted in accordance with the Islamic Constitution adopted in 1979. The supreme political power is vested in the ‘Faqih’, the leader of the Shi-i-te sect of Iran. On the death of the Faqih, an elected council is empowered to select a religious leader or a council of religious leaders who are to assume the power of the ‘Faqih’.  

The Faqih of Iran commands the military forces, approves the Presidential candidate and chooses the highest judicial authorities. He
also appoints six clerical members of the 11 members council of guardians. The council reviews all the bills passed by the unicameral legislature (National Assembly) known as the Majlis. This is done to ensure constitutional validity and conformity to the Shi-its faith.(14)

The Majlis comprises 270 members elected for a period of 4 years by popular vote. The highest executive office of Iran is the President who is elected for a term of 4 years. The President nominates the Prime Minister with the approval of the Majlis. The ruling Islamic Republican Party had continued to play a dominant role in Iran’s polities, while other parties also participated in the political process. The highest judicial organisation comprises the religious jurists. They form the Supreme Court and High Council of the judiciary.(15)

The social life of Iran since 1979 was completely dictated by the Islamic Constitution and the dictates of the Faqih. Even in the early 80’s illiteracy was as high as 50%, though primary education was compulsory. There was no freedom of the press. Instead a special law was enacted in 1979 prohibiting newspapers from writing against or questioning the political and religious leadership. Planned economic development initiated in 1949 was ended by the revolution in 1979. The Islamic Republic of Iran had a military strength of 2,00,000 and a para military force of 75,000 men.(16)

With the administrative, political and social controls of the Iranian society dominated by the clergy the foreign policy expectedly moved
along similar lines. The new regime was unwilling to accept any kind of flexibility in international relations as well. The Ayatollah’s regime began to assert itself as champion of Islam and the Arabs. The regime pledged to work against the non-Islamic and Western imperialistic influences in the Muslim world. Iraq was cited as one such anti-Islamic state inspite of Iraq’s policy of Arab nationalism. Iran’s attitude towards Iraq resulted in the direct confrontation between the two states leading to the Gulf war. However, before discussing the war scenario it is important to analyse Iraq’s geo-political characteristics.

Iraq : A Socialist Arab State :

Iraq is located in the north western end of the Persian Gulf and covers an area of 437,522 sq. kilometers. It is bordered on the north by Turkey; on the east by Iran ;and on the south-east by the Persian Gulf;on the west by Syria and Jordan and on the south by Kuwait and Saudi-Arabia. The population in Iraq was around 15,000,000 in 1984. The capital of Iraq is Baghdad.¹⁷

In comparison to Iran, Iraq is primarily made up of lowlands which seldom exceeds 1,000 ft. in height. Less than 15% of the country is above 1,500 ft. The country can be divided into three major physiographic regions i.e. the south western deserts’ the Tigris-Euphrates Basin and the North-Eastern highland that rises to a height 5000 ft. above sea level. Rawanduz the highest peak of Iraq rises to a height of 12,001 ft. above sea-level ,where the borders of the three-states namely Iran, Iraq and Turkey converge.¹⁸
The south-western deserts of Iraq covers 40% of the state. Starting from an elevation from the volcanic plateau of Syria and Jordan it gradually descends to reach the sea-level at the head of the North-Western Persian Gulf. The river basin of the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates separates the highlands from the South-western deserts. The river basin accounts for 5% of the land area of Iraq. It extends from the north-west to the south-east and forms well marked upper and lower basins separated by a mountainous projection near Baghdad. The lower basin forms extensive marshlands because of its low gradient.\(^{19}\)

The rivers Tigris and Euphrates converge at a point known as Al-Qurnah near the marshlands. The Shatt-al Arab, the major water way of the Persian Gulf emerges from this point. The Shatt-at Arab is 204 Kms long and 548 meters wide. The final 102 kms before it meets the Persian Gulf forms the Iraq-Iran border below the city of Basra. This water way is navigable. The river Karun flowing through Iran also converges in the Shatt-al-Arab. As a result this water way which is used for navigation by both Iran and Iraq has been a major topic of dispute between the two states.\(^{20}\)

Most of the arable land in Iraq comprises of the Tigris and Euphrates valley which is around 13% of the total land area. One third of this land is irrigated. Petroleum and natural gas are Iraq’s richest mineral resources and the mainstay of its economy. Apart from agriculture and petroleum, manufacturing industries also contributed to the state controlled Iraq’s economy. Its major industrial centers have been Basra, Baghdad, Mosul and Kirkuk.
Iraq's population mainly consists of Arabs who are concentrated around central and southern Iraq. They make up for more than three fourths of the total population. There is also a settlement of Persian migrants from Iran in the east of Iraq. They form a distinct ethnic group. However from the 1970's they had to face deportations by the Ba'ath regime whenever relations between Iran and Iraq worsened.

Another distinct and articulate ethnic minority are the Kurdish or Kurds. They occupy the north eastern highlands and share a commonality with the Kurdish population in Iran. The Turks or Turkmens another ethnic group of Iraq has merged with local Arab population to become a part of it. 95% of the population are followers of Islam; 52% of the Muslims are Shi-i-tes while 43% are of the Sunni sect. A few Turkmens and a majority of the Arabs are Shi'ites while the followers of the Sunni sect include the Arabs, Turks, Turkmens and Kurds. Christians comprise 4% of the population.\(^3\) Therefore most of Iraq's population belong to the Arabic race.

The Arabic factor has been playing a dominant role in the social and political life of Iraq. Theology, religion or sect divisions has had a minimal or a subtle influence unlike in Iran. Iraq has been a single party state governed by the Arab dominated Ba'ath socialist party, which is a pan-Arab organisation.\(^3\) Political power in Iraq has been in the control of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) comprising nine members. They are the Ba'th party's regional commanders as well.
Legislations or the laws of the state are enacted by decrees made by the RCC.

The President of the RCC is the head of the Iraq state and the supreme commander of its armed forces. In the 1980's defense forces comprised a military force of 255,000 men and a volunteer popular army of 250,000 men. The R.C.C appoints a council of ministers or the cabinet which is responsible for the daily administration of the state. Iraq also has a legislative body called the National Assembly which is bi-cameral. Its members numbering 250 in all, are elected for a period of five years. Iraq's provisional constitution which was adopted in 1970, vested the highest judicial authority to the Court of Cassation.[24]

The state of Iraq has been divided into eighteen province for the sake of administrative convenience. Three of these provinces, i.e. Dahluk, Irbil and as Sulmniyah make up the Kurdish Autonomous Region which has limited self-government controlled by Baghdad. The Ba'ath government had however outlawed the organized political parties or groups in the Kurdish region. The Kurdish people have been demanding complete independent status as a sovereign state for quite sometime.[25]

The Ba'ath party rule has been opposed to this Kurdish demands. As a result it has often become targets of attacks by pro-Kurdish members. It has also been the target of resistance from Muslim Shīʿite groups from within Iraq and outside. This is because the government of Iraq is dominated by the followers of the Sunni Sect though the Shīʿites
have a slender majority. As a result the Shi'ite majority has often created obstacles for the Ba'ath Party Government in Iraq. The government while putting down these resistance often deported the Shi'ite population, mainly to Iran.(26)

The Government of Iraq had earned the dislike of the Khomeini regime in Iran as a result of Sunni domination in the former state. Apart from the inter-sect rivalry Ayatollah Khomeini also nurtured a personal hatred for Saddam Hussain. Hussain had ordered the expulsion of the Ayatollah from Iraq where he had stayed in exile for 14 years seeking refuge fearing the wrath of the Shah of Iran. He was expelled as relations between Iran and Iraq improved following the Algiers agreement signed in 1975.(27)

The new Iranian regime began a systematic policy of rallying other Arab states against the Ba'athist regime of Iraq. From this point of time the relationship between the two states worsened. Khomeini considered the pan - Arabism of Iraq as racist, fascist and anti-Islamic.(28) Iraq considered Khomeini's statement against it as medieval fanatic thinking. Iran's action against Iraq was considered not only as an act against Iraq but also as a threat to the other countries of the region.(29) As Iran became more vociferous against the Ba'ath regime in Iraq several anti-government activities followed in Iraq. Iran increased its support to the Kurdish groups who were seeking independence and secession from Iraq in the North West. The Shi'i-al Dawa party consisting of Shi'ites was backed by the Khomeini regime to work against the Sunni dominated
Ba'ath rule. Several attempts were made on the ministers in the government. One such attempt was made on the life of Iraq’s Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz who escaped. However this incident resulted in the death of two students of the Mustan-Sirriyah University.\(^{30}\) In a retaliatory move Iraq began attacking Iranians residing in Iraq and ordered their mass expulsion. The Ba'ath government was also considering a military action against Iran. Stable economic condition allowed Iraq to strengthen its defence system and contemplate a military attack on Iran. Iran however did not lessen its tirade against Iraq. A possible military action against Iran provided Saddam Hussain a good opportunity to set the power balance in the Persian Gulf in Iraq’s favour. At the same time Iraq’s military action could also contain the spread of Iran’s Islamic fundamentalism. Iran however refused to take cognizance of a possible military threat from Iraq.

President Saddam Hussain directed his ire against Iran by first abrogating the Algiers Agreement 1975, on the 7th September 1980. Iraq complained of Iran’s constant interference in its internal affairs while ending this accord with Iran.\(^{31}\) Iran in retaliation blocked the Shatt-al Arab waterway and attacked Iraq’s ships plying on it. Eventually on the 22nd September, 1980 Iraq launched a multi-pronged attack on Iran.

The Eight Years War:1980-1988 :

Iraq launched its attack both on ground and in air. Iraq’s air force carried out simultaneous air attacks on ten Iranian air-fields while is
ground forces moved forward along the Shatt-al-Arab border with Iran. Even though it was a multi-pronged attack, Iraq's onslaught lacked quick execution. Infact it did not commit all its military strength in the war at once. Territorially also Iraq's offensive was limited to the border regions of Iran near the Shatt-al-Arab. Initially, Iran also limited the attacks to Iraq's military and strategic targets. Because of a limited attack by Iraq, Iran was able to successfully defend the targeted areas. Thus Iraq's aggression and the war at its initial stages has been described as a limited war by writer Efraim Karsh. According to Karsh, *A limited war may be defined as one which does not demand the utmost military effort of which the belligerants are capable, leaving each sides civilian life and armed forces largely intact. More specifically, limited war involves a small portion of the local armies, our conducted within confined theatre boundaries, are directed against counter-force rather than counter-value targets.*

However even a limited war was capable of bringing pressure on the adversary. Iraq's attack on Iran lacked the elements of shock and surprise. It did not have the required pressure that could create a devastation or crisis in the enemy ranks. Instead Iran had sufficient scope to recover from being a defensive force to an offensive one within a short period of two months. By November 1980, Iran's military was able to launch a counter-offensive against Iraq. Thus began a war that lasted eight years without any decisive conclusion. Both states returned back to their pre-war conditions.
For the sake of convenience the eight years of war-fare between Iraq and Iran (Sept 1980-July 1988) has been analysed in four phases.\(^{(36)}\)

**The Initial Years (September 1980 - July 1982)**:

Iran's counter offensive earned a measure of success during 1981. Iran was able to liberate most of the territory occupied by Iraq's army.\(^{(37)}\) Simultaneously, Tehran made efforts to bring diplomatic pressure on Baghdad for the withdrawal of its troops from the remaining Iranian territory. Iran also welcomed third party mediations like the Islamic conference, the Non-aligned Movement and the UNO. However the efforts of the international organisations failed to stop the war.\(^{(38)}\)

Algeria offered its good offices and made considerable efforts in order to reconcile the two warring sides and end hostilities. It tried to resolve the issue on the basis of Algiers Agreement of 1975. Accordingly Algeria insisted on Iraq's payment of compensation for targeting non-military areas or population. The Algerian efforts seemed to pay dividends by April May 1982. However the chances of ending the conflict fell through as the aircraft carrying the Algerian delegates from Baghdad to Tehran crashed enroute on 4 th May 1982.\(^{(39)}\)

Iran blamed Iraq for the plane crash and announced an open invasion of Iraq and the end of the Ba'ath party government there. By May 1982 Iran had gained in confidence and military strength. This was indicated by Iran's approach to the conflict as well as its denouncement of Iraq
for the accident. By June July 1982 Iran was no longer on the defensive, it was more an offensive partner in the war. From then on Iran had gained a clear initiative in the war.\textsuperscript{(40)}

**The Second Phase (July 1982 - Winter 1983-84):**

In this phase Iran’s military forces were able to push back Iraq's army across the border and also occupied certain sectors along the border in Iraq's territory. Apart from these initiatives Iran did not register any significant victory over Iraq. Nevertheless Iran’s attitude towards Iraq became even more hostile during this period of one and half years. Tehran rejected any diplomatic efforts at ending the war. President Ali Khamenhi and other prominent leaders of Iran called for the ouster of Saddam Hussin.\textsuperscript{(41)} This stance further worsened relations between the two state and made reconciliation efforts more difficult. Iran even rejected U.N’s second cease-fire resolution in 1983 even as casualties mounted on both sides as a result of the 'Holy war'.\textsuperscript{(42)} By the end of 1983 and the beginning of 1984 injuries and war-deaths increased alarmingly. This managed to lower the zeal of the common man towards this war.\textsuperscript{(43)}

Apart from the common man, both states in general began showing signs of war weariness. However the conflict continued without any major changes. While Iran became more aggressive it could do little to stop Iraq's onslaught. Thus attacks and counter-attacks balanced the advantages and disadvantages for both parties. In the meantime the war had entered the fourth year which marked the beginning of the third phase.
The Third Phase (January 1984 to July 1987):

As the conflict dragged on, each party became increasingly aware of the destructions caused by the military option. This phase was also the longest one. Both parties tried to end the war by using non-military options. Iran and Iraq, each wanted the result of the conflict to end in its own favour. Also, during this phase the Iran-Iraq conflict affected other states of the Persian Gulf. Both Iran and Iraq tried to gain the support of other Arab states which had earlier declared neutrality in this war. Iran made efforts towards regional cooperation and friendship. As a result, from mid-1985 there were a number of exchanges and mutual visits between Iran and Saudi Arabia (from May 1985). This was also followed by visits and exchanges with United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman.¹⁴⁵

Efforts towards a negotiated settlement were more forthcoming from Iran than Iraq. Tehran drew the attention of the UNO to resolve the crisis. The Secretary General J. Perez de Cuellar responded to Iran’s invitation and visited the state in April, 1985. The Secretary General put forth proposals to end hostilities and cease-fire. However both the parties had no agreement about the line of cease-fire. Moreover Iraq refused to be blamed as aggressor.¹⁴⁶ Thus the UN proposal once again failed to reconcile both the warring states. Iran still continued to make attempts to stop more bloodshed.

Iran’s action was spearheaded by its Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati. He aimed to end the conflict with or without any territorial
gains for Iran. There were some radical factions within Iran which were still in support of a military solution to the Iran-Iraq rivalry. This radical group was encouraged by Iran's success in capturing certain key areas of Iraq such as the Fao Islands in 1986.\textsuperscript{47} However there was a growing resentment among the people towards the war, which was resulting in mass casualties due to the use of chemical weapons by Iraq.\textsuperscript{48} The youth in Iran deliberately tried to avoid recruitment into the armed forces. Such incidents prompted the government to reconsider the peace proposals of the UN. It began to invoke the UN 9 step peace Resolution to achieve cease-fire.\textsuperscript{49}

The draft document was at its final stages, when sudden development on the war-front blocked the chances of ending the Iran-Iraq conflict. An U.S. destroyer ship U.S.S. Stark, in the Persian Gulf was attacked by Iraq's war-planes on the 17th May, 1987. This attack killed 37 U.S. Marines on board the ship. Iraq apologised to the USA stating that it had mistaken the US ship for an Iranian vessel. The U.S. administration accepted Iraq's explanation but blamed Tehran for creating and escalating tensions in the Persian Gulf. This incident was a manifestation of this tension according to the U.S. administration.\textsuperscript{50}

The Reagan administration reacted diplomatically to the incident and introduced a Resolution (No.598) in the Security Council.\textsuperscript{51} The Resolution ordered both states to cease-fire and hold negotiations to end the seven year-old war. Iran refused to accept the U.S. sponsored resolution terming it as biased and against Iran's interest. Therefore
negotiations once again ended abruptly and the war was extended by a further period of one more year.


This phase was marked by U.S.A's dominating presence and role in the conflict. The U.S. involvement (as discussed later) in the Gulf increased since 1987. U.S.A's presence frustrated Iran which was incapable of militarily countering the U.S. forces. In the meanwhile U.S. administration justified its naval presence for protecting the oil-traffic routes of the Gulf. Its umbrella not only served its own interest but that of its Western allies like U.K. and Germany and its allies in the Gulf like Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. (52)

While the U.S. military presence posed a powerful challenge to Iran, U.S.A's ire in the war was directed against Iran rather than Iraq. U.S.A's military build-up increased tremendously during this phase. Iran considered such a presence as a threat to its territorial sovereignty and integrity. On the 3rd July, 1988 the U.S. aircraft carrier U.S.S Vincennes shot down an Iran-Air passenger jet-liner, flying over the Gulf. All its 290 occupants lost their lives in this attack. (53) The shooting down of the jet-liner was a major set-back for Iran. The Iranian leadership had to seriously reconsider its decision on continuing the war with Iraq. Therefore the Ayatollah was prevailed upon to accept the UN Security Council Resolution 598. (54) It agreed to cease-fire the pre-war conditions of both the rivals, were restored. The conflict ended under UN
supervision. The world body had played a central role in the Iran-Iraq war. The UNO was untiring in its efforts in ending the war despite setback in the early stages. The role of the UN had begun from the initial stages of the war when Iran appealed against Iraq’s attack on its territory.

The U.N.O. and the Iran-Iraq Conflict:

As the war progressed from the fourth year to the fifth year the UN’s mediatory role grew in significance. Iran in particular appealed time and again to the international organisation to bring an end to the conflict. Iran’s interest and the interest of the international community prompted the Secretary General to visit Tehran in 1985 with the proposals to end the war. However, these proposals failed to end the dispute. Towards the close of 1986, Iran’s Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati tried to revive negotiations in a bid to end the war. The U.N. once again responded with a nine point peace proposal. Even these proposals were unsuccessful. Iran expressed its insecurity as the U.S. presence in the Persian Gulf increased. The continued strife between Iran and Iraq resulted in mounting human casualties particularly with the use of chemical weapons by Iraq. Third party and neutral shipping was also adversely affected as it became targets in the conflict. Thus international demand to end hostilities increased in the UNO.

The 20th July, 1987, UN Security Council voted unanimously in favour of a Resolution which was introduced in 1986. It demanded that Iran and Iraq observe an immediate cease-fire so that negotiations to end the war could begin. While passing the UN Resolution 598 the
Security Council disapproved the bombing on civilian centers, attack on neutral shipping and aircraft and the use of chemical weapons. The resolution also included an important clause. The clause stated that the UN Security Council would urge a worldwide arms embargo against the state that would refuse to accept the terms of the UN Resolution 598.\(^{56}\)

In September, 1987, the UN Secretary General, Perez De'Cuellar visited Iran and Iraq. However he was unable to move Iran to accept the resolution. Iran considered the Resolution to be against its interest. After the downing of Iran's passenger air-liner by the U.S.A, Iran accepted the same proposals unconditionally. Thus the international organisation was able to prevail upon both side to end hostilities on the 8th July, 1988, by accepting the cease-fire and withdrawal of troops from each other's territories.\(^ {57}\)

The Iran-Iraq war was internationalised in more ways than one. As mentioned earlier in the chapter the Persian Gulf was virtually threatened not only by the two belligerants but also by the major U.S. presence. The U.S.A. had placed atleast two of its aircraft carriers in the Gulf waters and alerted its forces and facilities available at Diego Garcia. The cause and the nature of U.S.A.'s presence and its role in the conflict requires a separate treatment.

The U.S.A. and the Persian Gulf Conflict (1980-88) :

In writing the history of the Iran-Iraq conflict the U.S. involvement forms an important component. Even before the war broke-out n
September, 1980, U.S. - Iran relations were already on a collision course. The U.S.A. had very close ties with the former regime of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran (Shah of Iran). This regime was overthrown by the Islamic Revolution led by Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979. The Ayatollah's government followed certain anti-U.S. acts soon after the assumption of power. In one such act in November 1979, 66 U.S. citizens were taken as hostage in Tehran by the Islamic regime. Most of them were granted early release by Iran except for 14 U.S. diplomats who continued to be in Iran's captivity for more than a year.⁵⁹

When the war began the U.S. administration was occupied in exploring the possible means for the release of its hostages being held by Iran. The hostages were eventually freed in January 1981 which coincided with the change of Presidents in the U.S.A. Ronald Reagan assumed the office of the President, taking over from the former President Jimmy Carter. However the release of the hostages was a result of the efforts by the Carter Administration.⁶⁰ The release of the hostages was achieved only after the U.S.A. exchanged armaments with Iran for the release of its diplomats, in October, 1980. The whole process of exchange was a clandestine act committed with the help of Israel. This was later confirmed by the U.S.A.'s National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.⁶¹

Even after the release of the hostages the anti-Iranian mood prevailed in the U.S.A. For all practical purposes Iran was the most despised state in the U.S.A. The Reagan administration adopted a stand of neutrality as far as the events in the Persian Gulf region was concerned

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However it was not totally indifferent to the political conditions in the Gulf, particularly that of its allies such as Saudi Arabia. This was evident through supply of Air-borne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) to Saudi Arabia. In this way the U.S. administration continued to fulfill such commitments of its allies. Therefore in the period between 1981-1982 the U.S.A. kept away from the crisis between Iran and Iraq.⁶²

However in 1983 U.S.A. expressed its increasing concern for the other neutral states of the Persian Gulf particularly Kuwait and Saudi Arabia because of their close proximity to the theatre of war.⁶³ The war could affect their security interests adversely as a result of this closeness. The U.S.A.'s major concern, however was the protection of the oil-traffic and oil-routes of the Persian Gulf. Geo-strategic considerations such as the close proximity of the Soviet Union sharing its land borders with Iran and Iraq was another cause for concern in the U.S. Thus support for its allies, the maintenance of open-sea lanes for oil traffic and Soviet containment, were the major factors in U.S.A's policy towards the Persian Gulf since 1983.⁶⁴ The Reagan administration, while expressing concern towards its Arab allies in the region opted to revive its relations with Iran. In this the U.S.A. did not make any secret of its intention of containing Soviet influence in the region and in Iran in particular. The U.S. President, Ronald Reagan, in a statement on the 13th November, 1986 clarified the U.S. as follows:

"America's long standing goals in the region have been to help preserve Iran's independence from Soviet domination; to bring
an honorable end to the bloody Iran-Iraq war; to halt the export of subversion and terrorism in the region. A major impediment to those goals have been an absence of dialogue and cut-off in communication between us. Its because of Iran's strategic importance and its influence in the Islamic world we chose to probe for a better relationship between our countries."\(^{(65)}\)

However Washington's effort in rebuilding its relations with Tehran had already begun in 1985, when contacts were established on the shy between the two states. The contact was followed by the visit of U.S.A's National Security Adviser Robert Mac Farlane in May, 1986 to Iran\(^{(66)}\). Renewal of contact between Iran and U.S.A. resulted in the supply of armaments and spare-parts from U.S.A. to Iran after 1986. The arms-sale was also a clandestine operation.

The revelations of these secret deals with Iran turned into a major embarrassment for the U.S. administration internally as well as internationally. The issue came to be known as the ‘Iran Gate scandal’ or the ‘Iran-Contra issue’ in political circles. The findings of the report revealed that the revenue earned from the sales of arms to Iran was diverted to aid the Contra-rebels in Nicaragua, against the Sandinista Government there\(^{(67)}\). Following this disclosure the U.S. attitude to the Gulf-conflict changed considerably within a year. The U.S.A. conducted its foreign policy with a clear support for the Arab cause, against Iran's
fundamentalist Government. This was evident by the sharp increase in the U.S.A.'s naval and military presence in the Gulf since 1987.\(^{83}\)

The U.S.A. became more involved in the Gulf War as it intensified its role of a protector of neutral shipping in the Gulf waters. Iran retaliated to the increased U.S. presence by threatening to block the Strait of Hormuz. Iran's forces often attacked third party oil vessels.\(^{89}\) Kuwait was one such state to earn the wrath of Iran for extending its port facilities to Iraq. The Kuwaiti leadership sought American protection against Iran. The U.S.A. readily offered help to Kuwait. Thereafter Kuwait's ships often plied by flying the American flag. This was justified by the U.S.A.'s Foreign Secretary Caspar Weinberger in an interview\(^{70}\). He stated,

"We have had a naval presence in the Gulf for almost forty years. Our presence has been and is to ensure the flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz to show our concern for the rights of neutral shipping in international waters and to ensure the security of friendly regional states......"

Between 1987-1988 (till the end of the war). The U.S.A. and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation NATO naval vessels in the Persian Gulf numbered 102 ships approximately.\(^{71}\) The U.S.A. not only made its military presence in the Gulf but also used non-military options acted diplomatically to bring pressure on Iran. It initiated a move in the U.N. Security Council (Resolution 598) to bring pressure on Iran, though the
resolution was intended for Iraq and Iran. The anti-Iran tirade of the U.S.A. eventually resulted in the shooting down of the Iran Air jet-liner on the 3rd July, 1988, by the U.S. marines aboard U.S.S. Vincennes. This incident hastened the end of the eight year old war.

The Iran-Iraq war drew to an end in which the U.S.A. moved from a position of professed neutrality to emerge as a third external actor, in the rivalry between Iran and Iraq. In contrast the Soviet Union played a more subtle role. The Soviet presence was natural as it was a neighbouring state to both Iran and Iraq.

The Soviet Union and the Gulf War 1980-88:

The Soviet Union like the U.S.A. maintained a state of neutrality as the war between Iran and Iraq engulfed the Persian Gulf in 1980. However according to western estimates the Soviet Union in comparison to the U.S.A. had the initial advantages. It was believed in the Western circles that the fact that U.S.S.R's border was only 700 miles from the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman granted the Soviet Union a significant littoral advantage. In addition to this the U.S.S.R. also had its presence in Afghanistan since 1979. Afghanistan was only 235 miles from the Persian Gulf which gave the Soviet Union an upper hand vis-a-vis the regional conflict. (22)

The advantageous position of the Soviet Union according to the Western viewpoint could allow the Soviet Union to maintain its neutral
stance. At the same time the Soviet Union could conduct an easy surveillance of all activities in the region, including the U.S. naval operations from its bases in Afghanistan.\(^\text{73}\) Also from the same bases the Russians were in a position to conduct combat operations if required. In all this the Soviet Union was seen to have gained the advantage as the revolution of Iran had ended the U.S.A’s influence there.

The revolution in Iran could possibly act to the advantage of the U.S.S.R. because of the presence of the Tudeh party which had supported the new Ayatollah regime.\(^\text{74}\) The Tudeh party was the socialist party in Iran which was supported by Moscow. Therefore by supporting the new regime the Tudeh party had the chances of playing an important role in the domestic politics of Iran.\(^\text{75}\) The presence of the Tudeh Party in Iran allowed the Soviet Union to gain a better position than the U.S.A. Moreover the Soviet Union had already signed a Treaty of Friendship and cooperation with Iraq in 1972 which was honoured even during the war. The military dimension of the Treaty of Friendship was well established. According to Article 9 of the Treaty, the parties would "continue to develop cooperation in strengthening of their defense capabilities."\(^\text{76}\) Accordingly Soviet arms deliveries to Iraq since 1974 comprised few hundreds of T-62 tanks, Scud SS missiles, 4 squadrons of MIG-23 fighters with an order for the large Soviet IL-76 transport aircrafts and some small to medium sized naval craft.\(^\text{77}\) Even at the periphery of the region the Soviet Union had built close ties under Gorbachev with the government of North Yemen. Oman, the U.A.E.,
Bahrain, Jordan and Egypt. Thus the Western view point assessed Soviet Union's edge in Gulf war while justifying the U.S.A's role.

Whatever position the U.S.S.R. might have taken, Moscow's approach to the war was more cautious, and remained the same for most part of the conflict. When the war began the Soviet Union did not announce its support for Iraq or against Iran. Though the Soviet Union did not take sides during the conflict it reportedly supplied arms to both Iran and Iraq in the initial stages of the war.\(^{(78)}\) However this supply was made indirectly through its allies in Eastern Europe namely Rumania and in West Asia namely South Yemen, Syria etc.\(^{(75)}\)

The Soviet Union's arms supply to its allies gained momentum after the initial years of the conflict. Infact by 1983 Iraq received Soviet arms worth $ 7.2 billion which comprised 41% of the total imports from the Soviet Union. The highest recipient of Soviet arms was yet another Arab state, that was Syria. It received $ 9.2 billion worth of arms which was about 67% of its imports.\(^{(80)}\) Apart from the arms supply the Soviet Union was believed to have a continuous naval presence of 27 ships, comprising 10 combatant and 17 support vessels in the vicinity of the Gulf.\(^{(81)}\)

However the Soviet Union did not participate or get directly involved in the conflict. This could be explained by the U.S.S.R.'s lack of economic or oil dependence in the region. By 1986, the war began to spill-over into the open seas affecting neutral shipping. Soviet ships
also became targets of Iran’s attack. Since then Soviet ships carrying war material to Iraq were accompanied by the Soviet Union’s naval vessels in the Persian Gulf. In 1987 Soviet naval ships plying as escorts in the Persian Gulf comprised 6 Soviet frigates, 3 mine sweepers and an Intelligence gathering ship, according to official reports. Apart from escorting its own ships the Soviet navy did not participate in any combat in the Persian Gulf war.\(^{(82)}\)

In the diplomatic sphere the Soviet Union voted for the U.N. Resolution 598 of July 1987 at the Security Council. However, it opposed the idea of an arms embargo against Iran which was one of the clauses of the Resolution initiated by the U.S.A. Vsevolod Oleandrov, the head of the Soviet Ministry’s UN desk clearly stated - “There is no case in history of an arms embargo ending a war”.\(^{(83)}\)

Despite maintaining international neutrality the Soviet Union also had to bear certain consequences of the Gulf War. For instance the resumption of arms supply to Iraq, resulted in the banning of the Moscow backed Tudeh party by the Ayatollah regime. Soviet ships were also not spared from attacks by Iran. Another major Soviet casualty was the storming and the bombing of the Soviet Embassy in Tehran in early 1988.\(^{(84)}\)

The U.S.S.R.’s involvement in the Gulf war had very little official commitment unlike that of the U.S.A. As was the nature with Soviet policy, official statements or explanation rarely supported its action. Soviet
official statement did not explain its low key relationship with Iraq or lack of support for Iraq during the initial stages of the war. The Soviet Union had a long standing Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation with Baghdad. Finally, unlike its American counterpart the Soviet Union’s role in the Iran-Iraq War 1980-88 was less decisive. However it endorsed the UN Resolution 598 which was the basis of cease-fire between the two rivals after Iran accepted it unconditionally in July, 1988.

The results of the war did not favour any party and therefore remained undecisive. Differences between Iran and Iraq continued to exist even though both states signed the U.N. Resolution 598. Having discussed the last case study of the conflicts in the Indian Ocean, we now proceed to draw up the final analysis of the causes of the regional conflicts in the Indian Ocean region.
CHAPTER IV FOOT NOTES


5. Sreedhar op.cit. p.131.


8. Ibid pp 374-376.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

13. Ibid

14. *The New Encyclopaedia* op.cit p.376


17. Ibid op.cit p.377

18. Ibid op.cit p.376

19. Ibid.


22. Ibid

23. According to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. "Our party is not neutral between belief and unbelief; it is on the side of belief always. But our party is not a religious party and it should not