Chapter V
COMMON EXTERNAL THREAT - A FACTOR IN PROMOTING
REGIONAL COOPERATION: GCC AND IRAN 1980-88

It is argued that one of the main factors behind establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council was the common fear shared by these countries about the possible repercussions on them of the Iranian Revolution as well as of the Iran-Iraq war. This clearly implied that dangers posed by Iran to all the member countries of the GCC were more or less of the same nature and gravity. If this assumption was correct, it would have meant that all the GCC states should have reacted in similar ways to the developments taking place in relation to the Iran-Iraq conflict. A review of the manner in which the GCC members reacted to these developments would help in assessing the correctness of the above proposition.

Kuwaiti-Iranian Relations

Evolution of Kuwaiti-Iranian relations during 1980-88 can conveniently be studied by dividing them into four phases: phase one consists of the period intervening between 1980 to mid-1985; during these years, though considerable animosity existed between Kuwait and Iran, Iran's relations with some other GCC members like Saudi Arabia were also fairly strained. Phase two is the period between mid-1985 to the end of 1986 during which not only Kuwaiti-Iranian ties deteriorated further but Iran made it clear that its enmity was mainly confined to Kuwait within the GCC for permitting essential war supplies,
including armaments, needed by Iraq to transit through its territory. The third phase starts with the beginning of 1987 which marked a period of further escalation of tension between Kuwait and Iran. The threat to Kuwaiti-bound shipping due to stepped-up Iranian attacks became so intense this year that Kuwait was forced to seek protection of American warships for its oil carriers. The fourth phase coincides with the dawn of 1988 and continues until the announcement of ceasefire between Iraq and Iran in August, 1988 during which Kuwait-Iranian relations registered a slight but distinct improvement.

Historically speaking, there have been no bilateral problems between Kuwait and Iran in the period 1960-80 when Kuwait looked upon Iran as a deterrent and counter-poise for Iraq's hegemonistic ambitions. In the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, Kuwait tried to maintain normal relations with Iran and avoided any critical reference to it. Kuwait lambasted in strong terms the abortive US bid to rescue its diplomatic hostages from Tehran in April 1980. Condemning the rescue attempt, Kuwait's Minister for Cabinet Affairs, Abdul Azees, termed it as being violative of international conventions and said it could lead to wider conflagration. This was clearly an attempt to placate the Iranians.  


However, relations between the two countries became strained soon after Iranian aircraft carried out air raids on Kuwaiti territory in November 1980, June 1981 and October 1981, during which they tried to strafe oil installations on Iraq-Kuwaiti border; a Kuwaiti ship was seized by the Iranians in April 1981. Incidents of this kind did not take place between Iran and any other GCC member.

There was no doubt that the Iranians were antagonistic to Kuwait because of the assistance it had been giving to Iraq. The Iranian Parliament Speaker, Rafsanjani had said on 26 November 1980: "Iranian air attacks on Kuwait were a warning to that country against grant of financial assistance to Iraq." He also mentioned that military supplies were passing to Iraq through Kuwait.

Though during the early years of the war, the Iranian media and Iranian dignitaries censured the Gulf rulers in general, accusing them of decadence, corruption and unIslamic practices and though they 'singled' out the House of Sauds for pouring their ire, there were certain causes of tension peculiar to Kuwait and Iran.

Iran suspected that Kuwait was allowing the Iraqis to deploy their forces from the strategic island of Bubiyan and

3. This ship was seized by the Iranians on 30.4.1981 on the ground that it had intruded into Iranian waters. This incident followed grant of a loan worth 2 billion dollars from Kuwait to Iraq. Tehran Times, 1 May 1981.

repeatedly warned Kuwaitis against doing so.\(^5\) No other GCC member was being accused by Iran either of giving base facilities to the Iraqis or permitting transhipment of their war supplies through its territory. Kuwaiti-Iranian relations took a turn for the worse during early 1983 following signing of a tripartite accord between Iran, Syria and Libya in January 1983 which was directed against Iraq. This accord was strongly criticised by the Kuwaiti National Assembly.\(^6\) Editorials began to appear in Kuwait's Arabic press accusing Iran of war mongering and hegemonistic designs.\(^7\)

Iran-Kuwaiti relations deteriorated sharply again in December 1983 when a series of bomb explosions took place in vital installations including an oil refinery and Iranian complicity in this outrage was widely believed.\(^8\) These bomb blasts created a wave of panic in Kuwait and led to unprecedented tightening up of security measures.\(^9\) These bomb explosions were followed a few months later by Iranian attacks

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on three Kuwaiti oil carriers on 13 May, 14 May 1984, and 10 June 1984, further aggravating Kuwaiti-Iranian relations. Despite these provocations, Kuwait continued to maintain that it was neutral in the Iraq-Iran conflict and stressed that it desired peaceful relations with Iran. In May 1983, the Foreign Minister of Kuwait had visited Tehran along with the Foreign Minister of the UAE in a mediatory bid for settlement of the Iraq-Iran conflict.

The middle of 1985 marked the beginning of a new phase in Kuwaiti-Iranian relations. In May 1985, an attempt on the life of Amir of Kuwait was made while in July 1985, violent explosions took place in two cafes in Kuwait, injuring and killing a large number of people. Two cargo vessels belonging to Kuwait were seized by Iran in June 1985 while another Kuwaiti-registered vessel was seized by it in September 1985. The Iranians also began for the first time to intercept and search the merchant marine plying to Kuwait on the ground that some of them carried goods for Iraq. Iran did not take measures of this kind against merchant ships


11. Kuwait became so apprehensive that it immediately turned to the USA for acquiring highly effective Stinger anti-aircraft missiles.


bound for other GCC countries. Similarly, there were no major incidents of terrorism anywhere else in the GCC.

That Iran was singling out Kuwait for reprisals would become clear from the following: "Iran has significantly raised the tone of its criticism of Kuwait's role in the Gulf war. Teheran media blasts against the Gulf states have been reinforced by renewed statements of Iran's right to stop and intercept Kuwaiti-bound merchant shipping." 16

Iran's war information Head Quarters Chief Kamal Kharrazi said on 18 September 1985 with reference to Kuwait, "we cannot have friendly relations with someone who helps our enemy. This is in effect a declaration of war and participation in the war. Iran had always asked small countries such as Kuwait to stay away from the fire." 17

The Iranian occupation of Iraq's FAW Peninsula in February 1986 virtually brought the war to the doorsteps of Kuwait and the Kuwaiti National Assembly issued a statement denouncing Iranian aggression. Kuwait's Defence Minister in a press statement in February 1986 said inter-alia, while affirming Kuwait's readiness to repel any aggression, "if Iran chooses to be an enemy then we are ready to face this option." 18

were made; evidently, Kuwait felt far more threatened by Iran than other GCC members did.

In April 1986, the Chief of Staff of the Kuwaiti Defence forces denied an allegation made by the Teheran Radio that Kuwait was engaged in espionage activities against Iran. It was also repeatedly denied that Kuwait was allowing its military facilities to be used by Iraq against Iran. 19

Major explosions took place in Kuwaiti oil installations in June 1986 and Iranian covert support for these incidents of subversion was generally acknowledged. Subsequently, the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the UN requested its Secretary General to take measures to stop Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti oil tankers. 20

In October 1986, an unknown aircraft believed to be Iranian intruded into the Kuwaiti air space when it was reportedly shot down. Iranian media again reiterated its earlier claims in October 1986 that Iraqi troops had been deployed on the Bubiyan island. 21

It had become evident by this time that the Iranian aggression on Gulf shipping was mostly confined to ships either owned or chartered by Kuwait or trading with it.

Quoting from a Kuwaiti daily,22 the source said the recent pattern of attacks has been fairly consistent - an Iranian frigate halts and interrogates a vessel at night. If identified as connected with Kuwait, an attack usually followed within two hours.” During September-October 1986, following oil carriers owned or chartered by Kuwait were attacked by Iranians: Al Fintas (160,000 DWT) on 22 October 1986;23 Al Faiyah (136,000 DWT) on 22 October 198624 and S. Brooks on 16 October 1986.25 The number of ships attacked by Iran in 1986 (most of them trading with Kuwait) rose to 45 as against only 14 in 1985.26

During the whole of 1986, the Iranians had attacked only one Saudi tanker in May 1986 while no other ship belonging to any GCC country suffered Iranian aggression.

Following excerpt from an editorial in Teheran Times illustrates how strained were relations between Kuwait and Iran:27

"But Kuwait by placing its ports at the disposal of Iraq and providing it with every kind of facility to pursue its aggression on Iran was seen as an attempt to alleviate

the impotence felt by Iraq with regard to Iran's gains. The presence of Iraqi army personnel and installation of modern espionage facilities, together with the provision of facilities in allowing Iraqi war planes to bomb Iranian residential areas, all represent Kuwait as an important logistic port for Iraq in the region. Additionally, Kuwait has always taken an active role in its political, financial and propaganda support for Iraq."

It was thus clear by the end of 1986 that Teheran looked upon Kuwait as being entirely on the side of Iraq and this naturally aroused intense Iranian hostility against Kuwait.

The beginning of 1987 marked a new phase in escalation of tension between Kuwait and Iran. Iran was vehemently opposed to convening of the Islamic Conference Organisation (ICO) summit in Kuwait in January 1987 and its Foreign Minister responded to Kuwaiti Foreign Minister's appeals for Iran's participation in this conference in following caustic terms, "You put your ports at the disposal of Iraq for the shipment of destructive arms; you sell oil in favour of Iraq and you provide political and propaganda support for this regime."28

Iran began to exert utmost pressure on Kuwait for postponing the Islamic Summit. Quoting from an editorial in Khaleej Times "Yesterday, another tanker was attacked by Iran, the fourth in eight days and the third carrying Kuwaiti oil. Is this Iran's reply to efforts to persuade it to attend the forthcoming Islamic summit in Kuwait."29

A spate of three bomb blasts rocked Kuwait on 19 January 1987, just prior to the summit and large caches of arms and explosives were unearthed which were going to be used by a group of militants, mostly Kuwaiti Shias, to create chaos and anarchy during the summit.30 Existence of Iranian complicity in and covert encouragement for this terrorist conspiracy was generally acknowledged. Arab Times commented editorially as follows:

"One can imagine the magnitude of the destruction that could have resulted if these evil men had used all the arms and weapons at their disposal."

"What do these devils really want and for what evil side do they work."31

Kuwaiti-Iranian relations took a further turn for worse in April 1987 when Iran began to instal silkworm missiles on the FAW peninsula just opposite Kuwait's Bubiyan

island and these missiles could strike the city of Kuwait, including its vital oil export terminals. Warning Kuwait, the Iranian President Ali Khamenei said:

"We have been patient with Kuwait when its cities, ports and ships are at the mercy of our fire."

"If Kuwait stops providing facilities to Iraq for attacks on our tankers then everything will be solved."³²

Kuwait had by this time began to finalize arrangements with the USA and the USSR for leasing of oil tankers and this had infuriated the Iranians who accused Kuwait of inviting the superpowers into the Gulf and thus aggravating the tension in the region. Senior members of the Kuwaiti ruling family including its Prime Minister, Defence Minister and the Amir himself reiterated on numerous occasions Kuwait's resolve to repel aggression and to defend its sovereignty and independence.

It may be worth emphasising here that while Kuwaiti-Iranian relations were passing through such a critical phase, other GCC members hardly evinced any anxiety over their security, whether internal or external.

In May 1987, the Iranian Prime Minister Musavi asserted, "The Kuwaiti government which has embarked upon this disastrous policy (of leasing its oil carriers to superpowers) with the connivance of the Baghdad regime and other Persian Gulf states sill suffer."³³ The Kuwaiti newspaper "Al Qabas" reported in

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its issue dated 18 May 1987 that the Iranian "War Council" had decided to look upon Kuwait as enemy number two after Iraq.

During the first week of June 1987, Iran seized seven Kuwaiti fishing vessels on the ground that they were carrying out espionage against it. During the last week of June 1987, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister wrote to the UN Secretary General, lodging a strong protest against Iran's inimical actions towards Kuwait when he said inter-alia:

"We in Kuwait have endeavoured to improve our relations with our neighbour, Iran, but that country unfortunately has not shown any response.

On the contrary, it has deliberately escalated its propaganda campaigns and unleashed direct and repeated threats against Kuwait through its senior officials.

Iran was continuing to escalate the war and to harass Kuwaiti ships by every possible means."35

Iran began to mine the narrow approaches to Kuwait's Ahmadi oil terminal in retaliation of the Kuwaiti decision to redeploy its eleven oil carriers under American flags.36

Iran repeatedly admonished Kuwait against leasing its oil carriers to the USA and threatened that any military facilities given to the US navy will invite Iranian reprisals. The Iranian President Ali Khamenei issued a strident admonition to Kuwait in July 1987 in following stentorian terms:

"Iran will strike back with surface-to-surface missiles if Kuwait continues its present policy in the Gulf."

"No other Gulf Arab state had openly supported and assisted Iraq as Kuwait had done." 37

During the months May-July 1987, a number of oil carriers in the Persian Gulf were hit by Iranian mines and not surprisingly all of them were trading with Kuwait. This would become amply evident from the following chronology:

i) Soviet tanker Marshal Chuykov was hit on 16 May 1987. This tanker was leased to Kuwait and struck a mine just outside its port.

ii) Liberian supertanker on charter to Kuwait hits a mine on 26 May 1987 in northern Gulf after being loaded with Kuwaiti crude.

iii) Greek supertanker carrying Kuwaiti crude struck a mine on 9 June 1987 near Kuwait.

iv) Liberian supertanker "Stena Explorer" carrying Kuwaiti crude hits a mine on 19 June 1987, close to the port of Kuwait.

v) The first reflagged Kuwaiti oil carrier christened as Bridgeton was damaged by a mine on 24 July 1987 during its maiden voyage to Kuwait. 38

Apart from mining waters close to Kuwait, Iranians continued during the first half of 1987 to primarily attack vessels trading with Kuwait - out of 30 merchant vessels which were damaged by the Iranians between September 1986 to May 1987 as many as 25 were linked to Kuwait. 39

In addition Iranians continued to intercept for inspection a large number of ships coming to Kuwait to find out whether they carried Iraq-bound cargo; Captain Malekzadeyan of the Iran Navy said in a press interview in February 1987 that the Iranian navy had intercepted and searched as many as 1200 vessels until then. 40 This was again a measure mainly meant to humiliate and harass Kuwait as the armaments for Iraq which were mostly exported by the USSR and France used to be transported by their ships under protection of their navies and these ships were not interfered with by the Iranians. It is also to be noted that while wreaking havoc

on shipping linked with Kuwait, it left mostly undisturbed the mercantile traffic trading with other GCC countries. During the first seven months of 1987 only two ships belonging to other GCC members suffered from Iranian depredations - a small Qatari freighter "Rashidah" was fired on by the Iranians in May 1987 (this vessel was on its way to Kuwait) and a Saudi tanker, Arabian Sea, was attacked in March 1987 but it escaped without suffering any damage.41

Further aggravating the tension between Iran and Kuwait, the Kuwaiti Embassy in Teheran was ransacked on 1 August 1987 by Iranian mobs while a senior Iranian commander threatened to impose a blockade on Kuwaiti ports and destroy all ships heading towards it.42

Following these developments, the Kuwaiti press unleashed a virulent propaganda offensive against the rulers of Iran accusing them of pursuing hegemonistic designs to bring the entire Islamic world under their sway through instigation and subversion.43

In a major further escalation during the first week of September 1987, Iran launched a silkwork missile against Kuwait which landed near a major oil refinery and Kuwait

41. Arab News, 14 March 1987. This tanker was attacked on 13 March 1987.


43. Al-Watan, 8, 11 and 17 August 1987; Arab Times, 23 August 1987.
which landed near a major oil refinery and Kuwait protested by expelling five Iranian diplomats from Kuwait. 44 Kuwaiti Foreign Minister undertook a tour of major countries, including the UK, France and the USSR, to mobilize world opinion against Iran and called on the Security Council to impose an arms embargo on it. 45 It may be noted that Kuwait was not supported actively in this diplomatic initiative against Iran by any other GCC member. 46

During the third week of October 1987, Iran again struck Kuwait with silkworm missiles which struck ships in its territorial waters apart from causing extensive damage to its off-shore export oil terminal. No other GCC member had suffered aggression at the hands of Iran in this manner; in fact barring the incursion of two Iranian aircraft into Saudi airspace in June 1984, Iran had never violated the territorial integrity of any other GCC member. During October, November 1987, a number of bomb blasts took place in the Kuwait city which were regarded as the handiwork of pro-Iranian sympathizers.

In December 1987, Iran reiterated its warning to Kuwait against granting any base facilities to the US Navy; Iran's Parliamentary Speaker Rafsanjani said publicly, "If

44. Al-Qabas, 6 September 1987. Iran had not launched silkworm missiles against any other GCC member.


46. See the subsequent parts of this section.
you give them (US Navy) a floating base, you must give us (one) too; otherwise we will seize this base one day in the event of a confrontation and you would have no claims against us." 47 Another silkworm landed on the Kuwaiti soil on 8 December 1987 though it did not cause damage.

During the second week of December 1987, Egyptian Defence Minister Abu Ghazala arrived in Kuwait when possible Egyptian role in strengthening Kuwait's armed forces, especially its air defences, was discussed. The Egyptian Defence Minister said inter alia in a press statement, "Egypt is living day by day and hour by hour with Kuwait and the area. The security of Kuwait and the security of Egypt is an indivisible Arab security." 48 It is noteworthy that Ghazala did not visit any other GCC member nor did he refer to Egypt guaranteeing security of other members of the GCC - a clear indication that Kuwait alone within the GCC was feeling threatened. The sharp deterioration of Kuwaiti-Iranian relations in 1985-87 was accompanied by overt affirmations of Kuwaiti support for Iraq.

Despite the severe Iranian pressure, Kuwait continued to permit Iraq to transport its imports, including vital armaments, across its territory. Senior Kuwaiti dignitaries

as well as the Kuwaiti media highlighted solidarity with Iraq in no uncertain terms. No other GCC member including Saudi Arabia has been endorsing Iraq in this manner.

The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Shaikh Sabah said in a press conference in March 1985:

"Iraq is Arab land... and it is the duty of all Arabs to defend any part of Iraqi territory occupied by Iran." The Kuwaiti National Assembly stressed in a statement issued in April 1985 the need to preserve historical ties between Kuwait and Iraq whose people were bound by a common destiny."49

The Kuwaiti press often waxed eloquent in its adulation of Saddam Hussain. For instance, Arab Times in an editorial in September 1986 observed:

"The man who denies that Saddam Hussein, with his special leadership, is not a strong support and protector of the eastern gateway to the Arab world is not just a man."

Kuwait has been historically wary of linking itself too closely with Iraq. It did not agree to establishment of a rail link connecting the two countries or to procurement of its requirements of drinking water from Iraq's Shatt Al Arab. In a significant reversal of this policy, Kuwait agreed in June 1987 to construction of a natural gas pipeline connecting it with Iraq through which it has began to import 400 million cubic feet of gas per day.50

49. Kuwait Times, 10 April 1985.
50. Al Qabas, 1 June 1987.
The fourth and final phase in the changing relationship between Iran and Kuwait emerged during the beginning of 1988 and came as an anti-climax to what had happened until then.

In a most unexpected manner, relations between Kuwait and Iran took a turn for the better in early 1988. The first three months of 1988 were characterized by a marked toning down of Iranian threats and criticism directed against Kuwait; more significantly, attacks on ships' trading with Kuwait almost ceased while not a single terrorist or subversive incident involving bomb blasts, fires, etc. was reported until the end of March 1988.51

Echoing this transformation in Kuwaiti-Iranian relations, Kuwait's Foreign Minister in an interview with Arab Times dated 23 March 1988 spoke of the possibility of Kuwaiti diplomats returning to Teheran to reopen the Kuwaiti embassy there which was closed in the previous year following mob attacks in August 1987. The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister also described his country's relations with Iran as "good".52

It is also worth noting that during early 1988 while Saudi Arabia tried strenuously for imposition of an arms embargo on Iran through the United Nations, Kuwait made no such efforts.

adverse impact on them, mention may be made of:

i) Iran's strafing of Kuwait's military installations on the Bubiyan island on 31 March 1988.53

ii) Hijacking of a Kuwaiti airliner in April 1988. The hijackers demanded the release of persons belonging to Iran-based "Al-Dawa" organization who were convicted and imprisoned for their involvement in a spate of bomb explosions which had rocked Kuwait in December 1983. The Kuwaiti press repeatedly and categorically had accused Iran of being the guiding spirit behind this hijacking which had led to death of two hostages. Quoting from Arab Times dated 12 April 1988:

"We should not continue deceiving ourselves. From the first few moments of the hijacking, it appeared that it was executed by a country and not by an organization."

"The carefully-planned hijacking and then directing the plane to Mashhad, Iran, certainly suggests that the hijackers are instruments of a state - Iran, the leader of international terrorism."

iii) Launching of a "Scud" missile by the Iranians against Kuwait on 20 April 1988.

iv) Following incidents of subversion/terrorism took place in April/May 1988:

(a) Bomb explosion on 9 April 1988. No casualties were reported.\textsuperscript{54}

(b) Bomb blast on 7 May 1988 which caused extensive damage to an American car rental firm.\textsuperscript{55}

(c) Arrest of four persons during the second week of May 1988 for conspiring to commit acts of sabotage.\textsuperscript{56}

(d) Bomb blast in the third week of May 1988 causing death of two persons.\textsuperscript{57}

Despite all these developments, there was no significant increase in the tension between the two countries. The Iranian media continued to desist from being unduly critical of Kuwait; ships trading with Kuwait faced no particular danger of being attacked by Iranians while the Iranian navy almost gave up its earlier practice of intercepting and searching cargo vessels plying towards that country.

Kuwait, on its side too, went to great lengths to avoid causing offense to Iran and unlike the Saudis forebore from making statements of unflattering nature about it. Kuwait did not even categorically endorse the Saudi initiative in severing relations with Iran in April 1988 nor did it affirm its support and understanding for the Saudi decision to procure long-range ballistic missiles from China which were designed to bolster Saudi defences against Iran.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{54} Khaleej Times, 10 April 1988 \\
\textsuperscript{55} Arab Times, 8 May 1988. \\
\textsuperscript{56} Gulf Times, 11 May 1988. \\
\textsuperscript{57} Arab Times, 19/20 May 1988. \\
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 20 March 1988.
Iranian aggression on UAE's Mubarak oil field in April 1988 elicited no protest from the Kuwaitis while this attack was denounced in no uncertain terms by the Saudis. There is no doubt that Kuwait felt far less vulnerable and threatened by Iran during the first half of 1988 as compared to 1987. This was vividly highlighted when following the shooting of an Iranian airbus by the Americans during the first week of July 1988 Iran publicly conveyed its appreciation to Kuwait for the message of condolence sent by it over this incident. An editorial in Kuwait Times described Khomeini as an "Octogenarian saga"—this marked quite a change from the vituperative language normally employed by the Kuwaiti press to depict the Iranian leadership.

It is also significant that Iran did not "thank" in this manner its closest friends in the GCC like Oman and the UAE for the condolences conveyed by them over the airbus tragedy.

**Saudi-Iranian Relations**

The evolution of Saudi-Iranian relations from 1980 to mid-1988 can be conveniently divided into three phases as follows: Phase one began with the Iranian Revolution and lasted until and end 1982 during which the Saudi-Iranian ties...
were marked by extreme tension and hostility. In the second phase between early 1983 and the Meccah riots of July 1987, there was a gradual improvement in Saudi-Iranian relations. The third phase began from August 1987 and continued until mid-1988. Though Saudi-Iranian ties deteriorated sharply following the Meccah riots of August 1987, there were indications that Saudi Arabia was still interested in normalising relations with Iran. The Saudi attitude towards Iran during the closing months of 1987 was marked by extreme suspicion, tempered by occasional conciliatory gestures. Early months of 1988 were characterised by a marked aggravation of tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia when the latter severed diplomatic relations with Iran (in April 1988) and put a ceiling on the number of Iranian Hajis who would be permitted to visit the Kingdom. Saudi Arabia also equipped itself with long-range ballistic missiles procured from China to deter any intemperate action on the part of Iran - this was clearly reflective of the profound apprehensions which they were harbouring vis-a-vis the Islamic Republic.

Turning now to a detailed analysis of the above phases in Saudi-Iranian relations: during the 1960s and 1970s relations between the Kingdom and Iran were certainly amicable, cemented by the fact that both of them were ruled by monarchies with a strong pro-western bias. No doubt there was subdued
rivalry between the two but it did not stand in the way of peaceful resolution of disputes between them. For example, the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran over demarcation of their continental shelf boundary was resolved amicably even though it involved claims of sovereignty over the islands of Farsi and al-Arabi in the Persian Gulf. 62

The kind of relations which existed between the Kingdom and Iran during the 1970s were illustrated by a report prepared by the US Defence Department about external threats confronting Saudi Arabia. According to this report, Iran was looked upon as a deterrent to an outright Iraqi invasion and if such an invasion took place it envisaged involvement of Iranian forces on the side of Saudi Arabia. 63

The downfall of the Shah of Iran and coming into power of the revolutionary Islamic government had perhaps caused more apprehensions and consternation in Saudi Arabia than in any other GCC member state. 64 It has already been noted in an earlier section how Saudi Arabia had gone in for massive acquisition of sophisticated weapons including the AWACS and F-16 aircraft to counter the Iranian threat. Though officially Saudi Arabia claimed to be neutral in the Iran-Iraq war, there was no doubt that its relations with Iran were marked by a high

63. Nadav Safran, n.1, p.207.
64. Ibid., pp.352-85.
degree of suspicion and undisguised hostility during the early phase of this conflict. The Iranian press as well as leading Iranian Ayatollahs used to routinely denounce Saudi rulers and brand them as unIslamic, corrupt persons who were unworthy of being custodians of the Holy cities of Makkah and Madina.65

When an Iranian-inspired Coup attempt took place in Bahrain in December 1981, Saudi Arabia lost no time in signing a bilateral security pact with it; the Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia, Prince Nayef, accused Iran of conspiring to destabilise the Gulf region. Subsequently, Saudi Arabia in early 1982 signed bilateral security pacts with all the GCC countries with the exception of Kuwait and tried to persuade these countries to enter into a collective security treaty which was clearly directed against Iran.

Another factor which further vitiated Saudi-Iranian relations was the political demonstrations held by Iranians Hajis in the Kingdom in 1981 when more than 70,000 Iranian pilgrims had chanted slogans voicing support for the Islamic Revolution and Khomeini.66

Saudi-Iranian relations reached their nadir towards the end of 1982. Iran did not even send the customary condolence message when King Khalid expired in June 1982.67 Saudi Arabia

66. Ibid., p.337.

King Khalid passed away on 13 June 1982.
for the first time in October 1982 called for a pan-Arab effort to help Iraq. 68 Saudi-Iranian ties got further strained as a result of massive demonstrations held by Iranian Hajis in September 1982. 69 During the third summit held in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia advocated substantial financial assistance for Iraq and called for establishment of an integrated air defence system linked to its AWACS aircraft. 70

First signs of a thaw between Iran and Saudi Arabia began to emerge from early 1983. Iranian President Khomeini, while speaking with a Kuwaiti correspondent in June 1983, mentioned that Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia were improving. He also asserted during this interview that Iran desired to have friendly relations with all the Persian Gulf States. 71 The Haj pilgrimage during 1983 passed off peacefully without being marked by any untoward incidents as had happened in earlier years.

During 1984, Iranians for the first time attacked a Saudi tanker on 16 May 1984 (Yanbu Pride 220,000 DWT) 72 and two Iranian aircraft intruded into the Saudi air space on 5 June 1984 73 when they were shot down. Despite these serious

70. See the section dealing with the third summit in Part I.
73. Ibid., 6 June 1984.
provocations, Saudi Arabia forebore from accusing Iran of aggression. The Iranian press toned down its criticism of the Saudi monarchy and King Faisal personally authorised the visit of 1.5 lakh Iranian Hajis to Saudi Arabia in 1984. The Iran Air began regular flights to Jeddah for transporting Haj pilgrims. In November 1984, Rafsanjani, Iranian Parliamentary Speaker, commended Saudi Arabian role in the OPEC.74

In May 1985 the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia visited Iran and this was the first visit to Iran by a leading Saudi dignitary since the outbreak of the revolution. This visit was returned by the Iranian Foreign Minister in December 1985. MEED in May 1985 commented as follows:75

"There is no hard evidence of a change in Saudi policy on the war. However, diplomats in Teheran think Saudi Arabia is trying to cultivate reputed government moderates in the hope of a compromise solution."

It is also to be noted that the Haj season of 1985 passed off in a peaceful manner. In 1986, there was unmistakable evidence pointing towards Saudi-Iranian understanding, if not cooperation, in the vital field of oil. Since the beginning of 1986 oil prices had began to fall precipitately, mainly

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74. Teheran Times, 5 November 1984. An OPEC meeting held on 31 October 1984 had agreed to reduce oil production by 1.5 million barrel a day - an outcome which the Iranians no doubt liked.

75. MEED, 24 May 1985.
because of the substantial increase in Saudi oil production from the end of 1985. The oil prices had reached an abysmally low level of $8.5 per barrel by June 1986 and it caused a sharp diminution in Iranian oil revenues which were the mainstay of their war effort.

In a major and unexpected reversal of policy in September 1986, Saudi Arabia decided to sharply cut its oil production and announced its support for stabilising oil prices around 18 dollars per barrel. The Iranian oil Minister had visited the Kingdom in September 1986 and subsequently the veteran Saudi Oil Minister Shaikh Yamani was sacked who all along had called for higher oil production and lower oil prices. King Fahd of Saudi Arabia himself in November 1986 reiterated Saudi Arabia's commitment to maintenance of the oil price around 18 dollars per barrel76 and no doubt the Iranians must have been highly pleased by this change in Saudi oil strategy. There were press reports in November 1986 about supply by Saudi Arabia to Iran of refined oil products which it critically needed for pursuit of its war with Iraq.77

All these developments, not surprisingly, fuelled media speculation about a pro-Iranian shift in Saudi Arabian policy especially as they coincided with disclosures about clandestine supply of arms by the USA to Iran. "But now the Saudis' and

76. Saudi Gazette. 11 November 1986.
Iranians have reached an agreement that covers oil, an understanding that extends to a broader geo-political context, the Iraq-Iran war, said Bijan Mossavar Rahmani, a former Iranian official.\footnote{International Herald Tribune, 24 November 1986.}

Quoting from a well-known international daily:

"But it is a fact that Saudi Arabia in a fundamental shift has now rallied to Teheran's strategy of driving up the oil prices. This, too, has enhanced Iranian hopes to win the Gulf war."\footnote{Ibid., 21 November 1986.}

There were also press reports about active Saudi involvement in supply of American arms to Iran during 1986.\footnote{Ibid., 1 December 1986.}

Moreover, this impression regarding improvement in Saudi-Iranian relations was strengthened by a message of thanks to the Saudi authorities published in the Iranian press for the services rendered by them to the Iranian Haj pilgrims.\footnote{Riyadh Daily, 1 September 1986.} Earlier, the Saudis had issued a public invitation to the Iranian Parliament Speaker Rafsanjani in July 1986 to visit the Kingdom for the Haj pilgrimage.\footnote{MERD, 3 August 1986.} The same issue of MERD also reported that Iran was holding back its long-expected offensive in the Gulf War to provide time for diplomatic efforts, led by Saudi Arabia, to succeed in ending the hostilities.

79. Ibid., 21 November 1986.
80. Ibid., 1 December 1986.
82. \textit{MERD}, 3 August 1986.
Rumours began to circulate towards the end of 1986 about Saudi moves to end the Iran-Iraq war. "Under these circumstances, the Saudis instead of witnessing the destruction of Iraq and letting themselves get swamped by the Ayatollah's hordes, would, as a last resort press the Iraqis to make a negotiated settlement of the war by ousting Saddam Hussein. The Saudis have already agreed to pay $150 billion on Iraq's behalf as reparations to Iran. In that case, the Iranians might settle for Saddam's departure and then the peace of exhaustion." 83

During 1987, the thaw in Iran-Saudi relations continued. The Saudi press had almost totally stopped publishing anti-Iranian articles and its coverage of the Iran-Iraq war was fairly unbiased. On the other hand, Iranians too had began to forebear from censuring the Saudi monarchy and critical reference in the Iranian press to the Saudis became infrequent.

"Some Iranian leaders to be sure are toning down the rhetorical broadsides aimed at their neighbours." Rafsanjani, for instance, tried to sound a moderate tone when a reporter asked him about Iran's frequent criticism of Islamic neighbours. "Some (Islamic) countries are not practicing Islam completely." He said, adding "we are not going to impose the Islam we practice here on them by force." 84

84. Indian Express, 2 April 1987.
During the first quarter of 1987, the Saudi oil production was around 3 million barrels a day, well below its quota of 4.133 million barrels a day.\(^85\) which no doubt contributed to propping up of oil prices as desired by the Iranians.

During the early months of 1987 a number of statements were made by Saudi dignitaries asserting that conditions in the Gulf region were none too bad.

Prince Sultan, Defence Minister of Saudi Arabia said, "There is no animosity between the Gulf states and Iran that causes anxiety or need for caution... rather there is desire for good neighbourliness and cooperation."\(^86\)

Referring to the attacks on oil tankers which were causing so much anxiety among Kuwaitis, Prince Sultan said, "I do not think any plans are being made." He hoped that such attacks would be only accidental and would be settled through good offices.\(^87\)

While attending a graduation ceremony of Commissioned officers in King Abdul Aziz Military Academy on 19 April 1987, he said, "there is no military presence in the Gulf waters that might cause worry and the regional waters of the Arab Gulf states are being protected by their own forces whereas the

\(^85\) *MEED*, 21 March 1987.

\(^86\) *Arab News*, 6 March 1987.

\(^87\) *Ibid.*
international waters are open for the whole world, East and West."

Talking about the protection of Gulf waterways, he said, "we hope that love, fraternity and detente would prevail among all the region's countries including Iran." 88

It has been noted earlier that the early months of 1987 had witnessed sharp escalation in Iran-Kuwaiti tension and Kuwaiti rulers had gone to the extent of leasing their tankers to the USA for their safety. However, during the very same months, the Saudi Defence Minister was speaking about peace and tranquility reigning in the Gulf.

London Times reported in April 1987 that Saudi Arabia was trying to arrange a ceasefire between Iraq and Iran followed by peace talks under a face-saving formula that would see voluntary stepping down by Saddam Hussein. This news item, significantly enough, was published in Iranian press without comments. 89 The Iranian media also spoke of high-level contacts taking place between Saudi and Iranian dignitaries as a part of this Saudi move. 90

Subsequently, when Kuwait-based oil tankers began to be hit by mines in the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia did not immediately send its mine sweepers to clear the waterway; in

88. Ibid., 20 April 1987.
90. Ibid.
fact, the Saudi Government went to the extent of officially denying a New York Times report which had claimed that Saudi minesweepers were used to sweep the mines from the Gulf describing such reports as fabricated. A Saudi official spokesman categorically stated that the task of the Saudi minesweepers was confined only to the Kingdom's recognised territorial waters. 91

It is also noteworthy that from the beginning of 1986 to August 1987, only two Saudi oil tankers were subjected to Iranian attacks in May 1986 and March 1987. 92 While during the same period numerous Kuwaiti ships were hit by the Iranians. Not a single ship trading with Saudi Arabia or any other GCC member was hit by a mine from May to the first week of August 1987 while during the same period approaches to the port of Kuwait were heavily mined.

Improvement of Saudi Arabia's relations with Iran was not, unexpectedly, accompanied by cooling of Saudi-Iraqi ties. No direct financial assistance was extended by Saudi Arabia to Iraq after 1982 despite its growing debt burden; by the end of 1987 export insurance cover for only 180 days against irrevocable LCs was being provided to Iraq reflecting its critical foreign exchange position. 93 Saudi Arabia withheld

permission to Iraq for building an oil pipeline across its territory leading to their red sea port at Yanbu in order to avoid provoking Iran. Moreover, Saudi Arabia dragged its feet over renewing the agreement about supplying to Iraq 250,000 barrels of oil from the Saudi-Kuwaiti neutral zone which had lapsed in February 1987, despite Kuwaiti willingness to do so.

This budding thaw between Iran and the Kingdom ended with the Makkah riots of July 1987 in which over 402 persons died and over 600 got injured, most of whom were Iranian pilgrims. This traumatic event marked a turning point in the evolution of Iran-Saudi relationship. Though political demonstrations were also earlier held by the Iranians during the Haj, the violence witnessed during the July 1987 Haj was unprecedented. Following the riots the Kingdom put its armed forces on alert in response to Iranian threats to avenge the death of Iranian pilgrims. The propaganda warfare between the Kingdom and Iran reached a level of virulence never seen before.

For instance, Al-Riyadh, newspaper of Saudi Arabia commented, "entangled in a mad war, driven by the illusion of being at the source of civilizing conscience, Iran is spreading the fire that consumes it to scorch its neighbours." The Tehran Times said, giving Iranian version of the Makkah riots.

95. APS Diplomat, 3-10 October 1987.
96. Times of India, 3 August 1987.
disturbances, "It is now clear that the whole scenario was materminded by the US and its puppet Saudi regime. And it is clear too that they committed one of the most tragic massacres of modern times." \(^9\) Quoting from Riyadh Daily, "Destroy everything and call it victory - this is a Latin proverb that accurately describes the current Iranian thrust towards war in the Gulf area." \(^9\)

More significantly, senior Saudi Ministers, abandoning their normally cautious and restrained approach, openly condemned and denounced Iran in strong terms. This had happened for the first time in the history of the war. Lambasting Iran in an international press conference in the last week of August 1987, the Saudi Interior Minister Naif described the Iranian regime as a group of terrorists. He also asserted that the Kingdom would not hesitate to shoot down any Iranian plane that might attack the Kingdom's eastern province. \(^10\)

Saudi Arabia censured Iran in the Arab League meetings held in August, September 1987 and in the UN called for imposition of sanctions on it as well as its complete isolation. \(^10\) The Iranian missile attack on Kuwait in October 1987


\(^10\) *Khaleej Times*, 30 September 1987.
elicited a strong protest from the Saudis while the Saudi
Crown Prince asserted in November 1987 that in the event of
Iranian aggression on Kuwait the Saudi ruler himself would
be among the forefront of the defenders. 102

During this period, Iran also stepped up its aggression
on Saudi oil carriers and four such ships were hit by the
Iranians on 20 September 1987, 13 October 1987, 18 December
1987 and 26 December 1987. It may be recalled that during the
twenty months from the beginning of 1986 to August 1987, only
two Saudi tankers had come under Iranian fire. The upsurge in
Iran's air attacks naturally unnerved the Saudis. "The Saudis
have been making noises about the large number of their ships
which recently have been attacked by Iran" said a defence
official. A State Department Official described the Saudis
as"more nervous: than ever about trends in the war." 103 The
Saudis too retaliated by giving permission to Iraq to build
an oil pipeline with a capacity of 1.50 million barrel per
day across their territory to the port of Yanbu on the Red Sea,
thus bypassing Hormuz. The Kingdom had long withheld granting
such a permission to the Iraqis. 104

While the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia thus
became extremely tense in the wake of the Makkah massacre, the

Kingdom continued to hold an olive branch. The Saudi Foreign Minister in a press interview in September 1987 said that, "Saudi Arabia had been looking forward to becoming a bridge between Iran and the Arab world and the Kingdom is still following this policy."\textsuperscript{105} Following the Iranian missile attack on Kuwait in September 1987, Saudi Arabia refrained from directly blaming Iran for it. More significantly, King Fahd did not attend in person the emergency Arab summit held in Amman on 8 November 1987 which was primarily convened to discuss unified Arab action against Iran.\textsuperscript{106}

The Saudi-Iranian relations further aggravated during the last week of November 1987 when Iran organised an international conference attended by Islamic scholars and Mullahs from 36 countries in which they accused Saudi Arabia of being responsible for deaths of Iranian pilgrims in July 1987. It was decided that a world committee to guard the holy shrines, e.g., Makkah and Madina, would be set up. Rafsanjani, Iranian Parliamentary Speaker, said \textit{inter alia}: "If the world of Islam and its scholars decide so, we are ready to fight under any circumstances for liberation of Makkah and establishment of an Islamic international." He declared 'that pilgrimage to Makkah and Madina was neither useful nor safe as it was under the tutelage of Saudi rulers who were under non-Islamic influences.'

Concomitantly, the Teheran Radio kept on playing a new refrain

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
"Shame and Hatred on the Saudi family till the dooms'day." 107

It is easy to imagine how the Saudis would have reacted to these Iranian propaganda diatribes especially as the Saudi ruling family derived its raison d'être more than anything else from its guardianship of Islam's Holy places. Consequently King Fahd in an unprecedented move castigated Iran, both by name as well as by implication, during the eighth GCC summit. The Saudi monarch had never in recent years publicly condemned the Iranians and even in the aftermath of the Makkah riots the King had maintained a dignified silence.

The dawn of 1988 again ushered an era of reduced hostility between the Kingdom and Iran. The Saudi media toned down their criticism of Iran while the Saudi Crown Prince expressed the belief in a press interview that the Iraq-Iran war was coming to an end. 108 While addressing troops in King Khaled Academy in the first week of February 1988, King Fahd declared that the Peninsula Shield Force was not directed against anybody. 109

Subsequently, the relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran took a sharp turn for the worse in March 1988 when the Kingdom announced that it would restrict the number of Iranian Hajis who would be allowed to enter the Kingdom during the Haj season of July 1988 to 45,000 as against 1.5 million Iranian Hajis.

Hajis who had performed the pilgrimage during the previous year. Saudi Arabia a little earlier had announced acquisition of long-range ballistic missiles (with a range of 3000 kms.) from China and it was made clear that these missiles were meant to meet any possible threat from Iran.  

The Iranian attack on Kuwait's Bubiyan island at the end of March 1988 elicited a strong protest from the Kingdom. Following the Iranian strafing of UAE's Mubarak oil field, the Saudi Cabinet issued a statement highly critical of Iran in which it said inter-alia: "On many occasions, the Kingdom had stated that the Iranian regime had not merely been content with its war with Iraq, which did not leave anything undestroyed, spread tension and anxiety in the region, exposed it to the threat of foreign intervention and threw it into the inferno of international rivalries. Instead, the Iranian regime had also attempted to expand the radius of war to other parties by according itself the right to attack the interests of countries which are not involved in the dispute and threaten the security of other states and disrupt the international navigation in the Gulf."  

110. Arab Times, 20 March 1988. These missiles were acquired by the Kingdom shortly prior to the beginning of the Haj season for 1988 and were probably meant to deter Iran from retaliation against the Saudi move to drastically curtail the number of the Iranian pilgrims.  


Shortly afterwards, Riyadh severed diplomatic relations with Iran on the ground of "Iran's involvement in operations that contradicted with principles of good neighbourliness and mutual respect." The Kingdom also accused Iran of "smuggling explosives into Saudi Arabia during the 1987 Haj season and exploiting religious slogans during the pilgrimage to start riots and incite strife and differences among Muslims."\(^{113}\)

Subsequently, King Fahd himself in a press interview castigated Iran as follows: "We hope that we will not be forced to use this defensive capability (e.g., the long-range ballistic missiles) because we know that the region's people want to live in peace and security."

"Our spirit of tolerance should not motivate Iranians to believe that we are weak. We hope Iran will stop its wrong doing because we do not want it to test the ability of our people in defending themselves."\(^{114}\)

There was thus a palpable increase of tension between the Kingdom and Iran. Iran on its side stepped up the tempo of its propaganda diatribes against the Saudi monarchy and asserted that the Iranian Hajis had a fundamental right to stage political demonstrations during the Haj season.\(^{115}\)

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The Dy. Prime Minister of Iran Ali Reza Moayyari accused Saudi Arabia of complicity with the Baathist Iraq and the USA and said that the main objective behind Riyadh's snapping of ties with Iran was to prevent Iranian Muslims from performing the Haj pilgrimage.\(^{116}\) Iran also accused Saudi Arabia of attacks on Iranian consular staff in Jeddah before the consulate was closed.\(^{117}\) There was a distinct step-up in Iranian attacks on Saudi-owned ships as well as those trading with it. During the month of April 1988 two Saudi-owned tankers were hit by the Iranians - on 13 April 1988\(^{118}\) and 25 April 1988\(^{119}\).

During May 1988, the Iranian attacked four ships which were trading with the Kingdom.\(^{120}\)

While Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia had deteriorated, its ties with GCC states more or less remained unaffected. There was no move on the part of other GCC members to break relations with Tehran after Saudi Arabia had done so. In fact it appears that Saudi Arabia had not even consulted its GCC partners before it decided to sever ties with Iran. "There was no sign that other Gulf states would follow Saudi Arabia's lead (in breaking relations with Iran). Diplomats said it was unclear if other states were warned in advance."\(^{121}\)

\(^{116}\) *Teheran Times*, 2 May 1988.

\(^{117}\) Ibid., 7 May 1988.

\(^{118}\) *Khaleej Times*, 14 April 1988.


\(^{120}\) *Kuwait Times*, 28 May 1988.

\(^{121}\) *Gulf Times*, 28 April 1988.
Thus during the first half of 1988 it was Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia alone which had become the main object of the Iranian wrath and which was feeling apprehensive about possible Iranian intentions. The Iranian media criticism was almost solely directed against the Kingdom, especially its ruling family, and ships trading with it faced a great danger of being attacked by Iranian gunboats. It may be recalled that in the previous year it was Kuwait which was exposed to Iranian intimidation and whose shipping then bore the brunt of Iranian aggression. Saudi apprehensions about Iranian intentions persisted even after Iran agreed to abide by the UN resolution 598. King Fahd said *inter-alia* in an official meeting on 26 July 1988:

"If Iran or anyone else thinks that Saudi Arabia is unable to defend itself, then it is mistaken". 122 During this meeting, King Fahd also gave a detailed account of how Iranian revolutionary guards dressed as pilgrims had tried to disturb and commit acts of sabotage during the Haj season of July 1987.

A few days earlier on 20 July 1988, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had lambasted the Saudis in following harsh term:

"Iran's Muslim people will shortly celebrate the triumph of righteousness over the army of unbelievers and hypocrites and will set foot on the Muslim holy shrine of Grand Mosque."

God willing, we shall empty our hearts' anguish at the appropriate time by taking revenge on Al-Saud. 123

The primary cause of the hostility and antagonism between the Kingdom and Iran was their religious rivalry and therefore tension between the two persisted even after the Iraq-Iran war had come to a standstill.

Evolution of Relations Between the UAE and Iran

Historically speaking, the bilateral links between the UAE and Iran were marked by considerable acrimony, bitterness and mutual distrust. During the early decades of this century considerable tension existed between the Trucial States (now the UAE) and Persia as a result of their conflicting claims of sovereignty over certain islands in the Persian Gulf such as Abu Musa, Tanb Kubra, Tanb Sughra, Sirri etc.; in 1928, Iranian authorities had seized a dhow near the Tanb island which was proceeding to Dubai with 22 persons on board. This incident had brought Dubai and Iran to the brink of war. 124

Subsequently, tension between the Trucial states and Iran aggravated further during 1930s. There was large-scale smuggling of foodstuffs into Iran (to circumvent high customs duties in force there) from the Trucial states, Kuwait, etc.;

similarly, many Iranians who were unhappy with Reza Shah's policy of modernization which they regarded as un-Islamic had fled to the Trucial states. 125

Coming to more recent times, during the 1960s Iran revived its claims of sovereignty over the islands of Abu Musa and the Tanbs and in October 1970 126 the Persian government informed the British authorities that it would not recognise the existence of the UAE unless its claims over these islands were acknowledged. 127 Finally, Iran occupied these islands on 30 November 1971, just a day before the federal state of the UAE was due to come into existence.

However, during the seventies, Iran-UAE ties especially those between Iran and Dubai rapidly improved. Commercial and economic links between Iran and Dubai were considerably strengthened and Dubai began to look upon Iran as an ally in its rivalry with Abu Dhabi for supremacy within the UAE federation. 128

The Iranian revolution and the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war no doubt created some uneasiness in the UAE and it joined Kuwait, Qatar, etc. in making collective financial contributions for the Iraqi war effort.

125. Ibid.
126. Britain was then thinking of withdrawal from the Gulf.
127. See, J.B. Kelly, Arabia, the Gulf and the West, A Critical view of the Arabs and Their Oil Policy (London, 1980).
However it became apparent by 1982 that the UAE did not share the apprehensions and suspicions of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait vis-a-vis Iran. The Iranian Foreign Minister visited the UAE in May 1982 when Shaikh Zayed, President of the UAE, told him *inter alia*, "The Iraq-Iran war was neither in your interest nor in the interest of Iraq. If Iran wanted UAE help in a peaceful settlement then we are ready." The MEED in its same issue of July 1982 reported:

"Overall Iran's relations with the UAE are less hostile than those with other Gulf states."

The UAE was no doubt one of the GCC members which opposed the Saudi request for extending long-term loans to the tune of 35 billion dollars to Iraq during the third Bahrain summit held in November 1982. 1

Iran decided to upgrade its diplomatic representation in the UAE to the ambassadorial level towards the end of 1982 and the Iranian Consul General in Abu Dhabi was quoted as saying in October 1982 that the UAE-Iranian relations were satisfactory. 131

Apart from maintenance of political contacts at high level between Iran and the UAE, the links between the two in the

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129. MEED, 11 July 1982.


131. The Iranian ambassador presented his credentials on 11.1.83. *Khaleej Times*, 12 January 1983. UAE was the first GCC member with which Iran had upgraded its diplomatic relations after outbreak of the war.
fields of trade and commerce remained virtually unaffected, while bilateral trade between Iran and Kuwait, Saudi Arabia etc. had slumped to negligible levels. Iranians could enter the UAE with relative ease while it was extremely difficult for an Iranian to get a visa for Kuwait, Bahrain, etc. The Iranians in the UAE were not looked upon with suspicion as was the case in other GCC countries and no harassment was faced by them.

Quoting now from an article published in the magazine "Arab Banking and Finance" sometimes in early 1984 which gives an excellent review of Iran-UAE links in preceding years.

"The UAE has the largest concentration of Iranians (80,000-100,000) of all the GCC states and Teheran's diplomatic representation in the emirates is considerable, with three diplomats in Abu Dhabi (including an Ambassador) and a further three in Dubai (including a labour attache). Ayatollah Khomeini also has a personal representative, Syed Raza Borghai, based in the emirates. The links between the two countries have been steadily growing during the past years. Iran's Red Crescent Society is believed to have spent DH 20 million (£15.5 million) for hospital equipment in the UAE, in addition to other ancillary medical equipment, and on 20 March this year the society's secretary general visited some four to five hospitals in the emirates. In late April a ferry, appropriately named Iran-Hormuz I, had restarted between Dubai, Sharjah and Bandar Abbas, with plans to expand the service to twice a week
in the near future and call at other ports outside the UAE. Dubai already has excellent airline communications with Iran—nine flights a week to Teheran, three to Shiraz and two to Bandar Abbas—and in late March, Iran Air introduced a pay-in-Iran freight system to help stimulate imports from Dubai.

As the Gulf's major re-export centre, Dubai has provided a convenient conduit for Arab-Iranian trade over the past four troubled years in the face of the political undesirability of direct trade. Although not that large, the fact that such traditional trading ties have carried on undisturbed reflects the multi-tiered structure of Gulf relationships."

It may be noted that no other GCC member country was Ayatollah Khomeini allowed to maintain a personal representative; direct air service to Iran did not exist from any other GCC member except Qatar from where a weekly flight to Iran operated. It has been reported that during this period Abu Dhabi had quietly began to make payments to Iran to ensure its goodwill and friendship. 132

It was, therefore, evident by the beginning of 1984 that UAE's relations with Iran were far more amicable than those of other GCC members with it. The subsequent period from 1984 to 1987 was to witness acceleration of this trend and the

132. See Cordesman, n.130, p.615.
UAE in some ways became closer to Iran than to Iraq.

An interesting example of UAE's neutral stance in the Iraq-Iran conflict was provided in the aftermath of an air raid carried out by unidentified aircraft on Abu Dhabi's offshore oil field "Abu Al Bukhoosh" in November 1986 in which considerable material damage, including loss of life, had taken place. The UAE media scrupulously avoided blaming Iran for this attack and Sheikh Zayed himself said in a press interview that the identity of the attacking aircraft was not known. Evidently, the possibility that this aggression could have been undertaken by Iraq was left open.

Following this incident, perhaps to soothe the ruffled feelings of the UAE, the Iranian Ambassador to UAE himself lauded the warm relations between the UAE and Iran in an interview with Teheran Times dated 26 December 1986 in which he specifically mentioned Iran's close ties with certain emirates like Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah.

Improvement of UAE-Iran ties naturally caused friction between Iraq and the UAE and during this period, it openly accused the UAE of providing assistance and facilities to Iran. In an interview given by Lt.Gen. Adnan Khoir Allah, the Iraqi Defence Minister, to the Arab Times, he said that some of the

Gulf states had acquired 10,000 machine guns and 200 small submarines though there was no need for them, clearly implying that these weapons were meant for Iran. The APS Diplomat quoted Iraqi officials as saying that the UAE had re-exported arms worth $1 billion to Iran. The Iraqi Defence Minister in an interview with a Kuwaiti newspaper Al Watan dated 22 July 1986 had also cast aspersions on a GCC member having a large Iranian community (obviously the UAE), blaming it of extending economic support to Iran. During the latter half of 1986, a number of ships were equipped in the port of Dubai with special devices which were intended to ward off attacks from Iraqi exocet missiles. Dubai thus was clearly helping Iran to keep open its vital maritime links with the rest of the world.

The UAE-Iranian relations further strengthened during 1987. In early 1987 UAE's Al Ittihad newspaper referred to the possibility of the Islamic summit which was scheduled to be held in Kuwait in January 1987 being postponed if Iran and Syria refused to attend it. This report in Al Ittihad assumes significance as Kuwait and some other GCC members were extremely keen to ensure that the Islamic summit was convened as planned while Iran was totally opposed to its being held in Kuwait.

In February 1987, Dubai announced a 10 per cent reduction in its oil production to boost up oil prices, a move clearly designed to please Iran. 137

In May 1987, the Iranian Foreign Minister visited the UAE (this was a period when the tension between Iran and Kuwait was at its height) and the talks showed existence of a broad agreement between the UAE and Iran over the strategy to be followed for bringing peace to the Gulf region. Quoting from Sheikh Zayed's statement as reported in Teheran Times:

"Therefore, he stressed it was not advisable for the regional governments to take an action which would provoke Iran. He stressed on the continuation of bilateral relations between Iran and the UAE and said there was no obstacle for the expansion of fraternal relations which were based on wisdom and experience." 138

When Iran began to mine the waters of the Persian Gulf from May 1987 onwards, the UAE did not initially send any minesweepers to remove mines from these waters, even though they were posing a grave threat to Kuwait-bound shipping. During this period, the US navy which was assisting Kuwait was itself experiencing a shortage of minesweepers. The UAE minesweepers began to participate in clearing of mines only in August 1987 when mines were detected off the port of Fujerah. (an emirate of the UAE).

On the political front, the UAE had made it abundantly clear that its sympathies were with Iran. During the meetings of GCC Foreign Ministers in the latter half of 1987 as well as during the conferences of Arab League Foreign Ministers in August/September 1987, it opposed any punitive measures being imposed on Iran and stressed the need for a dialogue with it. During the eighth GCC summit held in December 1987, the UAE had emphasised the desirability of a balanced approach between Iraq and Iran. During 1987, moreover, in the field of trade and commerce, the links between the UAE and Iran, especially between Dubai and Iran, continued to strengthen and Dubai's re-exports to that country registered impressive growth. Grant of visas to Iranians for visiting the UAE, especially Dubai, was further facilitated and Iranians began to go to Dubai in large numbers for short periods for trade and tourism.

Relations between the UAE and Iran continued to be warm and amicable during 1988 despite the fact that in April 1988 Iranian gunboats had strafed UAE's offshore Mubarak oil field and had attacked a UAE-owned tanker on 19 April 1988.139 These serious incidents were not allowed to vitiate the warmth of the ties between these two countries; Iran's bombing of the Mubarak oil field was probably inadvertent as Iran itself has been receiving a part of the revenue from this oil field.

Shortly afterwards UAE's President was quoted as saying:

"We can protect the Gulf and ensure its security and stability if there is cooperation and understanding among all states of the region." 140 It is clear from this statement that the UAE desired amicable relations with Iran. Following this attack, Iranian Foreign Minister had visited the UAE and Teheran Times dated 5 May 1988 had then commented as follows:

"During the talks, President Zayed laid stress on the long-standing relations existing between Iran and the UAE. He furthermore pointed to Iran's decisive role in safeguarding regional security."

"Iran's friendly ties with the UAE, Oman, Libya and Syria is a clear pointer to Iran's good will in its politico-ideological policies."

It is to be noted that the rapid deterioration of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia during the first half of 1988 had produced no noticeable impact on UAE-Iran links. Saudi Arabia had severed ties with Iran during the last week of April 1988 but shortly afterwards as described on the previous page not only had the Iranian foreign minister visited the UAE where he was warmly received but Shaikh Zayed himself had affirmed his desire to maintain good relations with all states in the region, including of course Iran.

In the commercial field relations between the UAE and Iran remained excellent during the first half of 1988. Dubai remained the main entrepot through which Iran continued to procure most of its requirements of imported goods. Abu Dhabi had agreed in May 1988 to slash its oil production by 150,000/170,000 barrels per day following the visit of the Iranian oil minister.\(^\text{141}\) This decision was taken by Abu Dhabi even though it constituted a clear reversal of the policy of increasing its oil output which was being followed by it since early 1987; no doubt Abu Dhabi took this step to please the Iranians.

**Evolution of Relations Between Oman and Iran 1981-mid 1988**

The Iranian-Omani ties were marked by a great deal of mutual confidence and commonality of strategic objectives during the 1970s when Oman requested Iran to send its troops for subduing the Communist-aided insurgency in its southern province of Dhofar. Subsequently, the Iranian revolution undoubtedly created doubts and apprehensions among the Omani ruling circles and relations between the two countries cooled. The Iranian press during the beginning of 1980s often bracketed Sultan Qaboos of Oman with the Saudi rulers describing them as stooges of American imperialism.\(^\text{142}\) The Iranian Ambassador to Oman was withdrawn after the revolution and a kind of uncertainty prevailed over Omani-Iranian relations.\(^\text{143}\)

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143. It was reported in October 1982 that Oman might withdraw its Charge d'Affaires from Teheran. *Arab Times*, 13 October 1982.
During the early years of the war, Oman tried to avoid giving provocation to Iran. The Omani-Iranian ties deteriorated during the latter half of 1983 when Iran began to issue threats about blockading the straits of Hormuz and this caused apprehensions among the Omani ruling circles. The Omani Foreign Minister while in Kuwait in August 1983 urged the GCC to meet the Omani request for a grant of 1.8 billion dollars to modernise its navy in order to enable it to meet the Iranian threat. Subsequently, Oman was accused by Teheran of acting in the interest of US imperialism.

First indications that Oman had began to adopt a more distinctly neutral stance in the Iran-Iraq war began to emerge from early 1984. In a press interview by Sultan Qaboos to a West German newspaper Dieoyet as published in Daily Oman Observer dated 3 July 1984, he said that blockade of the straits of Hormuz by Iran was regarded as unlikely. The Sultan also mentioned that oil carriers of other countries would not be allowed to traverse close to the Omani coastline - this was clearly meant to avoid provocation to Iran. The timing of this interview is also significant as it came shortly after Iran had

146. Ibid., 3 August 1983.
began to strafe Gulf shipping, especially oil carriers belonging to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and the GCC countries were considering how to ensure safety of navigation through the Gulf.

MEED in its issue of 1 August 1984 said as follows:

"Oman like the UAE is cited as a country which does not want to see Iran isolated because it believes over the longer term the Arab States will have to live and to do business with Teheran."

Sultan Qaboos in an interview to an Austrian newspaper in January 1985 affirmed Oman's neutrality in the Iraq-Iran conflict and said that Oman would not take any part on the side of Iraq or Iran. During the inaugural speech delivered by Sultan Qaboos while addressing the sixth GCC summit in Muscat in November 1985, he called upon both Iran and Iraq to show more flexibility - this was taken as a distinct sign of Omani tilt towards Iran.

It was, however, during 1987 that Oman started going out of its way to emphasise its even-handed approach in the Iraq-Iran conflict. Sultan Qaboos did not attend the Islamic summit held in Kuwait in January 1987 despite the importance attached to it by the Kuwaitis, probably as a conciliatory gesture towards the Iranians who had strongly disapproved the convening of this conference in Kuwait.

In a press interview to Oman Observer, the Sultan said

inter-alia: 148

"As I see it, we have to ask ourselves whether it is good to hold the conference now or whether it is better to wait for a more suitable time."

During the same interview the Sultan stressed the need for an amicable settlement with Iran in following terms:

"I do not think there is any alternative to a negotiated settlement. Even if it appears otherwise there are still elements in Iran who desire peace and negotiations because losses have been heavy on both sides."

"The Gulf states are not in any more danger at the time being than two years ago. The situation could have been worse if we had allowed our ambitions and sympathy to be an additional factor to aggravate the situation."

Earlier, in the beginning of January 1987, Oman had announced a 5 per cent cut in its oil production to keep up the level of oil prices as was desired by Iran. 149

The Foreign Minister of Oman visited Iran in May 1987 when he was warmly received and the talks were described as "very fruitful" by the Iranians. The Omani Foreign Minister said inter-alia "it was essential that all the Persian Gulf states should cooperate with each other to maintain its safety and solve the existing problem." 150 It was also decided that

150. Ibid., 21 May 1987.
government officials from Oman and Iran would meet to "activate the ties between the two countries."\textsuperscript{151}

Earlier in January 1987 the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs discounted the possibility of any attack being launched against the GCC states in following terms, "The Council States are not worried about direct military aggression taking place against them, noting that explosions or simple raids are natural because of their proximity to the war areas."\textsuperscript{152} It may be recalled that this was precisely the period when a major terrorist conspiracy was uncovered in Kuwait and Iran had stepped up its attacks on Kuwait-linked shipping.

Subsequently, an agreement was reached between Oman and Iran in mid-1987 by virtue of which they agreed to share the responsibility for maintenance of security of the straits of Hormuz. This accord was reached during a meeting between Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and the Iranian Parliament Speaker.\textsuperscript{153} APS Diplomat\textsuperscript{154} subsequently hinted at the possibility of naval cooperation between Oman and Iran.

During the latter half of 1987 Oman adopted a patently neutral attitude vis-a-vis the Iran-Iraq conflict and within

\textsuperscript{151} Riyadh Daily, 21 May 1987.
\textsuperscript{152} See Arab Times, 27 January 1987.
\textsuperscript{153} MEED, 23 May 1987.
\textsuperscript{154} APS Diplomat, 3-10 August 1987. This was not altogether a new development. Iran and Oman jointly patrolled the Hormuz in 1974. R.K. Ramazani, n.62, p.140.
the GCC it became most sympathetic to Iran, even more than the UAE which until the beginning of 1987 was regarded as closest to Iran. The Foreign Minister of Iran paid a return visit to Oman in August 1987 accompanied by a high-level delegation. It may be noted that such exchange of visits at the level of Foreign Ministers did not take place between Oman and Iraq during 1987.

Economic cooperation between Oman and Iran began to expand with the visit of Oman's Minister for commerce and Industry to Teheran in September 1987 and the reciprocal visit of a high-level Iranian economic delegation to Muscat in December 1987. Earlier, Oman's Information Minister Abdul Azeez Al Rawas informed the Qatari Weekly Al A'hd in November 1987 as follows, "Omani-Iranian relations are dictated by history and geography. We seek to maintain good ties with Teheran." In December 1987, the Omani Oil Minister called on the OPEC to lower its production in order to boost oil prices (which is what the Iranians wanted) and asserted that though Oman could have easily increased its oil production by 50,000/60,000 barrels per day, especially in view of its excellent geographical position, it was not doing so. Subsequently, Oman cut its oil production by 5 per cent with effect from February 1988, no doubt pleasing the Iranians.

On the political front, Oman did not in any way blame Iran for its missile attacks on Kuwait in September and October 1987 while even the UAE had condemned Iran indirectly over these attacks. Further, Oman consistently stressed the need to establish a dialogue with Iran and lobbied along with the UAE against any punitive measures being taken against it in intra-GCC and intra-Arab meetings.

Oman entered into diplomatic relations, including exchange of Ambassadors, in December, 1987 with Syria and this move again reflected Oman's desire to move towards Iran, considering the warmth of Syrian-Iranian relations.

It has been well recognised that during the latter half of 1987 Oman edged closer to Iran, notwithstanding its membership of the GCC. Quoting from MEED: 159

"But there has emerged in the past six months, according to one Muscat-based diplomat, a more visible relationship with Iran. This culminated in Oman being used as an intermediary to help to repatriate the 26 crew members of the 'Iran Air'."

"Ultimately, Oman is concerned with the kind of Iran it will have to deal with over the next ten years and the impact Iran will have on Oman's neighbours. In the meantime, the emphasis is on keeping open lines of communication with all parties".

159. MEED, 24 October 1987.
During the first half of 1988 Oman continued to follow the policy of strict neutrality in the Iran-Iraq conflict. It had become quite evident by this time that there were profound differences between Oman on the one hand and Kuwait/Saudi Arabia on the other in their attitudes towards Iran.

During February 1988 Sultan Qaboos himself spoke strongly against imposition of an arms embargo on Iran, describing it as an "unrealistic idea."\(^{160}\) It may be recalled that Saudi Arabia during this period was striving to mobilize international support for such an embargo and the Saudi Foreign Minister had visited Moscow and Washington in this connection.\(^{161}\)

A number of serious incidents had taken place between Iran and GCC members during the second quarter of 1988, among which mention may be made of: Iranian strafing of Kuwait's Bubiyan island at the end of March 1988; hijacking of a Kuwaiti airliner with suspected Iranian involvement in the first week of April 1988; Iranian aggression on UAE's Mubarak field during the third week of April 1988 - not unexpectedly, Oman observed diplomatic silence on these developments, despite the fact that they represented undisguised hostile action on the part of Iran against the UAE and Kuwait.

The sharp deterioration in Saudi-Iranian relations which took place during this period had also no impact on Oman.

\(^{160}\) Arab Times, 7 February 1988.
\(^{161}\) Ibid., 11 February 1988.
Shortly after Saudi Arabia broke diplomatic relations with Iran (on 28 April 1988), a senior Omani minister Sayyid Fahd described Oman's relations with Iraq and Iran as follows: "We face no problems in our relations with Iraq and Iran. With Iraq, we are connected by strong ties within the joint Arab framework and with Iran we have the common bonds of religion, neighbourhood and cooperation for the benefit of the peoples of the region."

It would indeed be difficult to imagine a more forceful exposition of the Omani policy of equidistance and neutrality vis-a-vis Iraq and Iran.

Qatar and Iran

Qatar is a small country with indigenous population of less than 80,000 and is known to follow a low-key approach in foreign affairs. Considering the smallness of Qatar and considering its proximity to Saudi Arabia as well as the fact that it is also ruled by a conservative Sunni monarchy, one would have been justified in assuming that Qatar would have taken the cue from Saudi Arabia while formulating its policy vis-a-vis Iran. This, however, did not happen.

During the early phase of the war, Qatar no doubt participated along with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE in

collective lending to Iraq. However, in the subsequent years, Qatar began to adopt a relatively neutral stance in the Iran-Iraq conflict.

It would appear that Qatari-Iranian ties in the period 1980-83 were better than those between Iran and Saudi Arabia and far better than the Kuwaiti-Iranian relations; high-level visits between Iranian and Qatari dignitaries were not disrupted during these early years of the war as happened in the case of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Quoting from a well-known journal\textsuperscript{163} "In an attempt to improve relations with Gulf states, the Iranian government has said that it has neither military nor other ambitions in the region. This message was conveyed to the rulers of the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar by Ambassador to Kuwait Ali Shams Ardekani." It was also mentioned in the same report that "contacts with Saudi Arabia are not known to have taken place." In June 1982, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran visited Qatar along with the UAE when he emphasised Iran's friendly relations with these two countries. It may be relevant to mention here that Qatar, apart from the UAE, was the only GCC country from where flights to Iran of "Iran Air" were not discontinued.

It became quite apparent after 1984 that Iranians were far more friendly towards Qatar as compared to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The Iranians had attacked until the end of 1987 only

\textsuperscript{163. MEED, January 1980.}
one Qatari ship. This incident had taken place on 22 May 1987.\footnote{Khaleej Times, 23 May 1987.}

It has been noted earlier that Iranians had attacked numerous ships owned/chartered by Kuwait as well as those trading with it.\footnote{These attacks had started from mid-1984.} Mining of waters near the port of Kuwait had begun to pose a grave threat to the safety to navigation in waters adjacent to Kuwait. Qatar remained virtually unaffected by this menace and mercantile traffic with it was more or less undisturbed. In the same way the internal situation in Qatar remained peaceful, tranquil and free of acts of terrorism while as has been observed numerous acts of terrorism had been perpetrated in Kuwait.\footnote{The only major incident of terrorism witnessed by Qatar during the course of the war took place shortly before the fourth summit held in Doha in November 1983 when a large cache of arms and explosives were discovered. Though this conspiracy was attributed to pro-Iranian elements, it was not allowed to mar the ties between Qatar and Iran. See Arab Times, 1 October 1983 and Al Anbaa, 29 September 1983.}

The coverage of the Iran-Iraq war in the Qatari press especially after 1984 was unbiased while the Iranian media too never censured the Qatari ruling family as it did in case of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The Iranian dignitaries generally desisted from issuing threats against Qatar as they did repeatedly against Kuwait. An interesting illustration of Qatar's neutral posture in the Iran-Iraq conflict was provided by its reaction to strafing by unidentified aircraft of Abu Dhabi's offshore "Al-Bukhoosh" oil field in November 1986. Commenting on this incident the \textit{Gulf Times} of Qatar reported as follows:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
"According to salvage experts the large-scale attack by unidentified aircraft on Abu Dhabi's offshore oilfield at Al Bukhoosh which took place in the first week of November 1986 was carried out by the Iraqis." 167

The fact that the officially-controlled Qatari press could name Iraq as being behind this bombing raid highlights Qatar's neutral posture in this war.

Qatari-Iranian ties registered further improvement in 1987. The Iranian Foreign Minister visited Qatar in June 1987 and after this visit he commented that Qatar and Iran held identical views in their opposition to superpower interference in the Persian Gulf region. 168 It is to be recalled that during this period American naval ships had began to establish their presence on a significant scale in the Gulf waters to provide protection to Kuwaiti oil carriers from Iranian attacks.

The APS Diplomat dated 3-10 August 1987 reported that one of the reasons behind Qatar's pro-Iranian posture was the promised Iranian support for Qatar in its territorial dispute with Bahrain. Though Qatar expressed regret over Iranian missile attacks launched against Kuwait in September and October 1987, it desisted from being unduly critical of Iran. The Qatari reaction towards the missile attack on Kuwait launched

by Iran on 7 December 1987 was even more lukewarm and it did not even express its disapprobation over this incident. Interestingly, establishment of direct dialling telephone facility between Qatar and Iran was announced in the first week of December 1987.169

Though Qatar has a sizeable population of Iranian emigrants they were never deported in large numbers nor any special restrictions placed on them. The Iranian media never blamed Qatar for maltreating and harassing the local Iranians as it repeatedly did in case of Kuwait.

Evolution of Relations Between Bahrain and Iran: 1981-1988

Bahrain was under Iranian occupation for about 150 years from 1602 AD to 1783 AD170 and though ruled by a Sunni monarchy, the majority of its population is Shiite which was believed to be highly susceptible to the Iranian propaganda. After the Iranian revolution, Shias in Bahrain organised large-scale demonstrations in 1978-79, openly proclaiming their allegiance to Khomeini and some of these demonstrations had to be put down with violence. During these years, some prominent Iranian Ayatollahs revived the old Persian claim on Bahrain and a section of Bahrainis had began to call for overthrow of the Amir of Bahrain and establishment of an Islamic government.

Perhaps the worst fears of Bahraini authorities were confirmed by the abortive coup fomented by Iran in December 1981 which aimed to overthrow the Bahraini monarchy. Following this coup, the Iranian Charge d'Affaires was expelled from Bahrain, and the Bahraini Prime Minister charged the Iranian regime with "harbouring ambitions of expansionism and sabotage in the Gulf, stirring up conflicts and planting sectarian strife." He branded Iran as the fundamental enemy of the Gulf states. Following this incident, Saudi Arabia entered into a bilateral security pact with Bahrain and the Saudi Interior Minister offered all-out support to Bahrain to protect it from local and foreign intrigues and conspiracies. The Bahraini Interior Minister in an interview with a Kuwaiti daily "Al Anbaa" called for creation of a rapid deployment force by the GCC. No doubt the Iranian-inspired coup of December 1981 marked a nadir in Bahraini-Iranian relations, with Bahrain looking to Iran with undisguised hostility and suspicion.

The GCC recognised the need to bolster Bahraini defences in view of its vulnerable position and the small size of its armed forces; the GCC therefore began to consider providing collective assistance to Bahrain to modernise and upgrade its defence forces and it was decided during the third summit in Bahrain held in 1982 that headquarters of the unified GCC forces would be established there.

However, contrary to expectations, relations between the two registered a gradual but steady improvement from 1982 onwards. In fact, even during the earlier years, Iran had maintained contacts with Bahrain. The Amir of Bahrain reportedly said in 1980, "some while ago we received from Iran assurance that our Muslim neighbour was anxious for security and stability to be established in the area and assurances that these statements both now and in the past reflected only the view of the people who made them." 172

During the subsequent years, the Iranian media rarely made critical remarks about the Bahraini ruling family and to Iran almost never threatened Bahrain as it often did Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. It never accused Bahraini rulers of providing succour to the Iraqi war effort. Despite the proximity of Bahrain to Iran, the merchant traffic to Bahrain was rarely intercepted or attacked by Iranian naval ships. Bahrain on its part tried to evince neutrality in the Iran-Iraq conflict by avoiding criticism of Iran as well as by desisting from exhibiting support for Iraq. During the meeting of the Arab League Foreign Ministers held in Tunis in August 1987, Bahrain along with the UAE and Oman opposed the Saudi move for imposition of sanctions on Iran. 173

172. MEED, 2 May 1980.
The internal situation in Bahrain too remained stable and the sectarian violence of 1978-79 did not recur again. Even in the aftermath of the Makkah riots when Iranian media were trying to whip up religious frenzy, the Shias in Bahrain were by and large unaffected. The Iranian community in Bahrain was subjected no special hardships and the Bahraini ruling circles never betrayed the kind of nervousness and uncertainty as exhibited by their Kuwaiti counterparts.

Following quotation from MEED brings out the normalcy of the situation prevailing in Bahrain: 174

"It is still very much business as usual in Bahrain. Confrontation may be brewing between Iran and the US but the Island concedes little to the pressures of lying so close to the Gulf war zone."

"It is a view echoed throughout island's business community. Bankers say there is no evidence of a flight of capital precipitated by developments in the Gulf."

It is thus seen that despite Bahrain's small size, proximity to Iran and dependence on Saudi Arabia in the crucial areas of defence and finance, Bahrain succeeded in forging a far better relationship with Iran as compared to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

During the first half of 1988 Bahrain continued to pursue its finely-tuned foreign policy which aimed to achieve

a balance between its relations with Iran on the one hand with Kuwait/Saudi Arabia on the other. Seen in this perspective, Bahraini reaction to Saudi Arabia's decision to snap ties with Iran in April 1988 was most significant and was indicative of Bahraini desire to appear supportive of Saudi Arabia while at the same time not offending the Iranians. The Amir of Bahrain had commented on this development as follows:

"Naturally other states may proceed to cut ties if tension increases and reaches the same state that relations between the Kingdom and Iran passed through."

"We want good relations with all to maintain security and peace in the region."175

It is noteworthy that Bahrain was the only GCC member which officially commented on the Saudi move to break relations with Iran. The Amir of Bahrain probably felt compelled to vaguely endorse this Saudi action but he attempted simultaneously not to irk the Iranians by referring to Bahrain's desire for "good relations" with all states in the Gulf.

In the preceding paragraphs the manner in which GCC members' relations evolved with Iran has been examined from which their differences of perception vis-a-vis that country become evident. One reaches a similar conclusion by analysing

the speeches delivered by their Foreign Ministers in the UN General Assembly in September/October 1987. The analysis of these speeches not only brings out the dichotomy in GCC members' policies vis-a-vis Iraq and Iran but also shows the lack of consensus between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia even when they were being imperilled by Iran. Quoting first from a speech made by the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister in the United Nations:

"The security of the Gulf was the exclusive responsibility of the countries of the region but Iran's persistence in continuing the war turned the area into a tinderbox and led to the presence of foreign warships."

"It has now become clear, and through developments in the past few weeks, that Iran is determined to infringe by all means upon our nation and territorial integrity."

"The leaders of Iran have nevertheless resolved to continue depriving us of a secure flow of our oil exports, thereby undermining our ability to meet our domestic and international commitments."

"Iran's policy fanned the flames of war towards other countries that were not parties to it, endangering freedom of

176. This refers to the latter half of 1987. Saudi-Iranian relations had reached an all-time nadir in August 1987 due to Mecca riots while Kuwait was subjected to missile attacks during this period."
navigation in the Gulf by striking at ships from non-belligerent states. 177

It is noteworthy that the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister in this speech desisted from condemning the Iranians for Makkah disturbances and confined himself to blaming them for escalation of war, attacks on Gulf shipping and threatening Kuwait's sovereignty.

Quoting now from a transcript of the speech made by the Saudi Foreign Minister in the UN General Assembly:

"Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister has condemned Iran in the UN General Assembly for its war with Iraq, accused it of terrorism and called for sanctions and complete isolation of the Teheran government."

"He blamed Iran for the war in the Arabian Gulf and said it was giving itself the right to attack non-belligerent countries, to assault interests of other countries and to threaten international navigation in the Gulf."

"He also blamed Iran for the horrendous massacre of pilgrims in Makkah in the summer and denied charges of Iranian President that Saudi Arabia and the USA were behind the killings."

"The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia believes that the complete isolation and the unanimous Arab and Islamic condemnation of

Iran today is the proper response to such false allegations and practices."178

To see now how the Foreign Ministers of the other four GCC states spoke in the UN during the same period.

The salient points occurring in the transcript of the speech of the UAE Foreign Minister were as follows: "He called for implementation of the Security Council resolution 598 ordering a ceasefire in the 7-year old conflict."

"The UAE has been preparing to contribute to political efforts aimed at achieving a just and peaceful settlement that safeguards the legitimate interests of the two parties."

"The UAE objected to the use of holy places for political purposes and referred to the incidents earlier this year in Makkah. The UAE also objected to non-belligerent nations being drawn into the war and cited the example of the attacks on Kuwait."179 It is to be noted how the UAE carefully avoided casting blame in any way either for the Makkah riots or the missile attack on Kuwait which had taken place earlier during the first week of September 1988.

Turning now to the speech made by Qatari Foreign Minister,180 "Qatar was pleased with Iraq's endorsement of resolution 598 and its preparedness to cooperate with the UN Secretary General."  

178. Khaleej Times, 30 September 1987. It is to be noted that the Saudi Foreign Minister did not allude to Iranian threats against Kuwait.


180. From a speech given in the UN General Assembly as quoted by Gulf Times, 3 October 1987.
The recent incident at the holy sanctuary of Makkah, the attacks on the embassies of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in Teheran and the launching of a missile at Kuwaiti territory are ominous indicators of what the region may be heading for.

We express our regret and dismay at these incidents and demand that they not be repeated against any states in the Arab Gulf.

Turning now to Oman, its Foreign Minister said *inter alia*:

"We are geographically neighbours to both Iraq and Iran. We have in common the same religion, the same history and same common interests. So we have an obligation to seek all avenues that may bring about peace and security and cooperation between the two nations who will then work in harmony with all peoples of the Gulf." 181

Finally, the highlights of the Bahraini Foreign Minister's speech in the UN General Assembly were as follows:

"We welcome the 'positive response of brotherly Iraq' in expressing its willingness to implement the Council decisions, including the last July resolution (598) demanding an immediate ceasefire and mutual troop withdrawal."

"We also address once again a sincere appeal to Iran to comply with the international will and with the endeavours

181. From a speech delivered in the UN General Assembly as quoted by *Oman Observer*, 3 October 1987.
of the UN Secretary General by implementing in its entirety and as an indivisible whole Security Council resolution 598 calling for an end to the war."

"We are hopeful that the Security Council will maintain its unanimity with respect to the implementation of the said resolution without delay and impose on the non-compliant party sanctions called for in the UN Charter."

"In addition the Iranian shelling of residential areas south of Kuwait with rockets and abuse of religious rights of pilgrimage in the holy city of Makkah by Iranian pilgrims has led to an escalation of tension which could further complicate the war."182

Thus it is seen that the Omani attitude was one of complete equality between Iraq and Iran. The speech of the UAE representative was also carefully calculated to avoid displeasing Iran; he did not even commend Iraq for accepting the resolution 598. The Qatari representative was little more tilted against Iran but he too scrupulously desisted from condemning Iran by name. The Bahraini stand was more sympathetic to Iraq but was certainly far less hostile to Iran as compared to Kuwait and Saudi posture vis-a-vis that country.

Sharp disagreements among these countries vis-a-vis the policy to be pursued towards Iran can also be seen by comparing their reactions to following developments:


ii) Entry of Western warships, especially of the US, into the Persian Gulf since the middle of 1987.

iii) Reaction to Iranian missile attacks on Kuwait in September, October and December 1987.

Turning first to the Makkah riots of July 1987, the profound panic and consternation caused by them in the Kingdom has already been reviewed. Both the Saudi government and the Saudi media had denounced Iran in most vitriolic terms. The reactions of other GCC states were far less hostile to Iran and the member which evinced least annoyance vis-a-vis Iran was Oman. A special envoy of Iranian President, Ali Ardenakni, had met Sultan Qaboos in the wake of the Makkah massacre, and during this meeting the Sultan stressed the importance of Iranian-Omani relations and described as "irrational" actions that tend to aggravate tension in the region. The Sultan also reportedly said that a powerful Iran is a pride to the region rather than a cause of fear. 183 Hardly any press coverage was given to these happenings in Oman and not even indirectly the blame was cast on Iranian pilgrims for this tragedy.

The reaction in the UAE press was a little more partial to Saudi Arabia but every care was taken by it (no doubt at official behest) not to charge Iran with complicity in this

massacre. The Imam of Grand Mosque of Makkah while delivering the Id Al Adha sermon said *inter-alia:* "What do the Iranian saboteurs want? All defend our country against the saboteurs and wicked ones."

In UAE mosques, on the other hand, preachers confined themselves to urging unity among Muslims; during an Eid sermon attended by Shaikh Zayed himself the preacher called on Islamic leaders to unite, forgive and sacrifice for the sake of the Muslim nation. 184

The semi-official Bahraini newspaper *Akhbar Al Khaleej* contented itself by saying that Muslims could only condemn the actions of the Iranian pilgrims in Makkah. It added, "without doubt, any Muslim can only support any severe measures taken by the Saudi Government to deter all those who want to spoil the pilgrimage." 185

The reaction in the Qatari press was also lukewarm and overt criticism of Iran was scrupulously shunned. Interestingly, even Kuwait, despite its strained relations with Iran, expressed its disapprobation over the events in Makkah in a mild language and the Kuwaiti media reaction was far less strident than that of Saudi Arabia. At the official level, there was hardly any denunciation of Iran for its role in Makkah happenings. The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister made a number of public statements in

185. Ibid.
September 1987 when he condemned Iran in strong terms for its hegemonic and expansionist policy; but he was careful not to allude to the Makkah tragedy. Thus despite its own highly-strained relations with Iran, Kuwait did not whole-heartedly join Saudi Arabia in censuring Iran for instigating the bloody riots in Makkah.

Turning to another important development which took place in mid-1987, namely entry of a large naval armada from Western countries into the Gulf waters, the responses of the GCC members were far from identical. During the meetings of GCC Foreign Ministers held in June, September and October 1987, they did not explicitly endorse the Kuwaiti decision of plying its vessels under American colours which had ultimately led to presence of a sizeable US naval armada in these waters.

Many GCC members, especially the UAE and Oman, were certainly not too happy with this Kuwaiti move. Turning first to the UAE reaction: the semi-official UAE newspaper Khaleej Times published numerous editorials leaving no doubt about UAE’s reservations over the Kuwaiti policy. Quoting below from some of them:

"The growing presence of big powers' fleets in the Gulf is certainly not a healthy sign. But what led to their build-up

186. See the section dealing with meetings of GCC Foreign Ministers in Part I."
in the first place should be carefully examined, as also the reason behind the escalation of their activities. It is not that the superpowers' strategic considerations have suddenly become compatible with the interests of small states."

"The need to keep the Gulf free of superpower rivalry cannot be over-emphasised but this can be achieved only byreactivating regional and Islamic efforts for ceasefire."\textsuperscript{187}

"From Gulf to Pakistan, there is in one way or another increasing superpower militarisation. This poses a test for the will to preserve national independence on the part of the countries involved. They have to decide whether they want to act as pawns for one superpower or the other or act safely on the basis of their interests and in the interests of their people."\textsuperscript{188}

"It is unbelievable that America's frantic efforts to mount a joint anti-mine operations in the Gulf have been torpedoed by its staunchest ally, Britain."

The Khaleej Times is UAE's semi-official newspaper and, therefore, the views expressed in these editorials assume significance. It was not only through the media that UAE's disagreement with Kuwait over leasing its oil carriers to the

\textsuperscript{187} Khaleej Times, 26 April 1987.

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 8 June 1987.
USA found expression; the UAE dignitaries from time to time gave vent to their reservations, if not opposition, to the Kuwaiti move.

The UAE Oil Minister Al Oteiba in an interview with a Kuwaiti daily in June 1987 commented as follows: "The naval presence of foreign powers in international waters is a right which we cannot challenge. But we do not have to allow foreign forces to enter our territorial waters."

"Kuwait, as an independent state, is absolutely entitled to take any decision it deems appropriate to protect its commercial interests. But we hope that circumstances will not oblige other states to follow suit." 189

Earlier, the UAE had officially said that it saw no reason to request foreign navies to protect its vessels. This statement was issued while denying news reports to the effect that the UAE had sought protection of the British Navy for its shipping. 190

The UAE President asserted on 19 September 1987 that "the Gulf region has caught a flame of fire due to the presence of foreign naval forces in the waterways. The foreign presence in the region is what we have feared since the Iraq-Iran war started seven years ago." 191

It would appear that the UAE had basically taken the view that the security of the Gulf had to be guaranteed by the regional countries alone (which included Iran) and it looked upon presence of foreign warships as a factor further aggravating the situation.

As early as May 1987 Shaikh Zayed, the UAE President, had stated that the "UAE appreciated Iran's stance on maintaining security of the Persian Gulf by the regional states and that the presence of the superpowers would not be in the interest of regional countries." Similarly sentiments were again reiterated by the UAE President in December 1987 when he said during a meeting with acting Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Besharati, "foreign powers are definitely seeking their own interests in the region and they do not feel any sympathy for the regional countries." Shaikh Zayed had also occasionall endorsed the concept of a UN peace-keeping force in the Gulf.

It would not be wrong to conclude that the UAE did not sympathise with Kuwait in its predicament; it saw no justification for the Kuwaiti move to protect its tanker fleet from Iranian depradations by leasing a part of it to the USA.

Turning now to the Kingdom, it too never endorsed the Kuwaiti policy of leasing its tanker fleet to the Americans, though it expressed its reservations in a more muted manner as compared to the UAE.

The Saudi Defence Minister affirmed in March 1987, "the Kingdom's rejection of any foreign fleets in or near the Gulf and attributed the presence of such fleets to the escalation of the Iraq-Iran war." 195

A delegation of American senators had visited Saudi Arabia during the first week of June 1987 and it was informed by the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud, in categorical terms that the Kingdom preferred that the Gulf remained away from superpower intervention. It was also mentioned that the Kingdom looked upon stepping up of the American military presence in the Gulf as a solution of last resort to be adopted only after diplomatic solutions had failed. 196

Moreover, despite the close relations between Saudi Arabia and the USA, especially in the defence field, the Kingdom consistently denied the use of its ports to American warships deployed in the Gulf. 197

As regards Oman, it more or less maintained a carefully-calculated diplomatic silence over the presence of Western

197. Saudi Arabia has only occasionally allowed US minesweepers to use the port facilities in Jubail on the east coast. Newsweek, 29 February 1988.
warships in the Gulf but made it clear that in its opinion there was no significant threat to the freedom of navigation in the Gulf. Given below are some of the statements made by Omani dignitaries on this subject:

"The threat to the freedom of navigation was not yet critical. We are still in the yellow light stage and have not reached the red signal phase."\(^{198}\) The Omani Foreign Minister in April 1987 ruled out the possibility of closure of the Gulf of Hormuz.\(^{199}\)

If Oman believed that there was no perceptible threat to navigation in the Gulf, obviously it did not accept the very raison d'être of the American naval presence in these waters.

Oman in April, 1987 had given a call in the UN for converting the Indian Ocean into a zone of peace - this clearly implied its endorsement for withdrawal of all foreign warships, including the US, from the Gulf.\(^{200}\)

It was also seen earlier that from mid-1987, Oman and Iran had begun naval cooperation to ensure safety of navigation through the Hormuz.\(^{201}\)

Oman like the UAE believed that security of the Gulf region should be left to the littoral countries e.g., there

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198. See a statement made by Omani Information Minister quoted from Khaleej Times, 23 November 1986.


201. MEED, 23 May 1987.
was no locus standi for presence of foreign warships in these waters. During a visit of Iranian Foreign Minister to Muscat in May 1987, the Omani Foreign Minister said, "all Persian Gulf states should cooperate with each other to maintain its safety and solve the existing problems."\(^{202}\)

Oman's disagreement with Kuwait over leasing its tankers to the USA was articulated by its under secretary for political affairs, Sayyid Haitham, who termed as "mismanagement and miscalculation" for the way Kuwait's request to reflag its ships had brought Western navies into the Gulf.\(^{203}\)

Quoting now from a speech made by Omani Foreign Minister in the UN General Assembly in October 1987:

"The clearing of mines by western countries was a good job as long as they do not get involved in regional conflict."\(^{204}\)

It is also to be noted that though Oman had granted certain port facilities to the US Navy as early as 1980 it did not allow them to be utilised by US warships deployed in the Gulf; MEED in late 1987 had reported that more than once Oman had turned down US requests for access to the Masira airbase.\(^{205}\)

A senior Omani official "Al Maskari" said, "that foreign powers had taken advantage of the plan to protect .

\(^{202}\)Teheran Times, 21 May 1987.

\(^{203}\)MEED, 24 October 1987.

\(^{204}\)Oman Observer, 3 October 1987.

\(^{205}\)MEED, 24 October 1987.
Kuwaiti tankers to increase their naval presence to a proportion that went beyond imagination". 206

The Omani Foreign Minister while speaking in the UN in October 1987 expressed the hope that the mine clearing operations undertaken by the Western navies would not lead to their embroilment in regional conflicts. 207

The Omani Information Minister, Abdul Azees Al Rowas in December 1987, hinted that "it would be advisable if the navigation in the Gulf was controlled under the UN flag." 208 Omani Foreign Minister categorically said in February 1988 that Oman would support deployment of a multi-national naval force in the Gulf if it helped to make navigation safer. 209

Thus Oman was far from pleased with the fact that the Kuwaiti decision to lease its tankers to the USA had led to the entry of a large number of Western naval ships into the Gulf. Paradoxically, the same Oman in September 1979 had proposed establishment of a joint naval force with western participation to protect navigation through the Gulf and this proposal then was found totally unacceptable by other GCC members, including Kuwait. 210

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208. Ibid., 20 December 1987.
The only GCC member which had endorsed, though in a lukewarm way, escorting of Kuwaiti tankers by US ships was Bahrain. It is to be noted that American ships deployed in the Gulf in 1987 enjoyed certain facilities in the Manama port though this was done in a very discreet manner. The Bahraini Foreign Minister said in April 1987, "We welcome US readiness to ensure free navigation in the Gulf. If the US made such protection offer, we welcome it." 211

To sum up, Kuwait had decided to turn to the USA as a step of last resort to ensure protection for its ships from Iranian attacks. Quoting from a statement made by Abdullah Bishara in the USA in late February 1988: "Referring to the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers and the Western naval escort in the Gulf, he said, 'It did irritate Iran, the Soviet Union and it did not satisfy us. But the alternative was to invite havoc in the area, threatening the stability and security of the whole region.'" 212 The other GCC members did not share Kuwait's threat perception and did not endorse the Kuwaiti move except in a vague, indirect manner. Moreover, some of them looked upon the entry of Western naval ships into the Gulf as a development likely to cause a setback for peaceful resolution of the Iran-Iraq conflict.

211. Saudi Gazette, 6 April 1987.
A review of reactions of GCC members to the third important development during the latter half of 1987 e.g., repeated Iranian missile attacks on Kuwait, also highlights the differences in perception among these states. The Omani press reported these attacks (without attributing them to Iran) and avoided any comments. At the official level, no statements were made by the Omani authorities. The reactions of the other GCC members were a little stronger and forthright. The Iranian missile attack on Kuwait in September 1987 drew condemnation from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar but they used restrained language and avoided implicating Iran by name. 213

The Saudi reaction in case of Iranian missile strike against Kuwait in October 1987 was much more vehement; King Fahd himself expressed sorrow over the Iranian aggression and the Kingdom pledged full support for Kuwait. 214

Reaction of the UAE was lukewarm while Bahrain conveyed its regrets over escalation of the conflict to the resident Iranian envoy. 215 The official statement issued by Qatar was couched in a moderate language which while affirming solidarity with Kuwait refrained from blaming Iran by name. 216

As regards the missile attack on Kuwait in December 1987, none of the GCC members protested perhaps because no damage was caused by it.

The launching of Iranian silkworm missiles against Kuwait during the last quarter of 1987 signified a sharp escalation of the conflict between Kuwait and Iran. Iran had thus directly begun to threaten the territorial integrity of a member of the GCC - namely, Kuwait. The missile attack in October 1987 had caused considerable damage to the Kuwaiti export oil terminal.

Evidently, notwithstanding the oft-repeated GCC doctrine that "threat to one member was threat to all" and, "security of the region was indivisible", other member countries did not feel threatened in any marked way. It was partly as a result of these differing attitudes that their protests over Iranian missile strikes against Kuwait (with the exception of Saudi Arabia) were made in a moderate and restrained manner.

As seen earlier, during the post-1982 period, relations of all member countries of the GCC, except Kuwait, with Iran registered a gradual improvement. While Iran's rapprochement with Oman and the UAE was maximum, its relations with Bahrain and Qatar too were marked by a degree of normalcy. Though Saudi Arabia remained the favourite bete noire of Iran, Saudi-Iranian ties until the Mecca riots of July 1987 remained free
from the intense antagonism bordering on a state of war which characterized the links between Kuwait and Iran.

This variation in the state of relationship between Iran and various GCC members was affirmed by Iranian First Deputy Foreign Minister who was quoted by Radio Teheran as saying, in February 1988: "Iran had good relations with Oman, the UAE, Qatar and to some extent with Bahrain. Iran's poor relations with Kuwait will not improve so long as they assist the Iraqi regime. Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia were critical after violent clashes involving Iranian demonstrators at the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Makkah last year."^217

Thus, during the years 1981-87, GCC members were riven with sharp differences as regards the policy to be adopted towards Iran. Though Oman, the UAE and Qatar were on good terms with Iran, there was no understanding between them on how they were to deal with the Iraq-Iran conflict. Saudi Arabia followed its own distinct policy which it did not harmonise either with Kuwait or other GCC members. Why this was so could be understood in terms of the following analysis.

As pointed out earlier, the overthrow of Shah of Iran appeared a highly destabilising event for the Gulf monarchies. The new rulers of Iran were fiercely opposed to the monarchical

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system; they accused the Gulf rulers of being un-Islamic, corrupt and lackeys of American imperialism while fanning the flames of discontent among Shias everywhere. No doubt the Gulf monarchs felt insecure and apprehensive as to what the future held for them and about the nature of relationship that was going to evolve between them and Iran. Though they tried their best not to provoke Iran, they decided to come together under the umbrella of the GCC to give each other assistance, strength and succour.

The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war added a further dimension to the Iranian threat; it is noteworthy that Saudi Arabia announced the despatch of US AWACS aircraft to it on 30 September 1980,218 e.g. within three weeks after the outbreak of this conflict. The coup in Bahrain in December 1981 must have given another jolt to the Gulf monarchies who hastened to enter into bilateral security agreements with Saudi Arabia. The decisive defeat suffered by the Iraqi armies during the summer of 1982 and the entry of Iranian troops into Iraqi territory must have engendered fresh fears among the Gulf rulers. No doubt as a result of these developments, the third GCC summit held in Bahrain in November 1982 decided to establish a unified force consisting of contingents from various GCC states. Saudi Arabia had then

recommended massive financial assistance to Iraq and the GCC states began to contemplate integrating their air defence systems.

The middle of 1982 could be taken as a period when the sense of insecurity of the Gulf rulers vis-a-vis Iran was at its apotheosis. The threat perceptions of these countries then vis-a-vis Iran could perhaps be categorised as follows:

i) Iran was an expansionist power and after occupying a part of Iraq, it was going to mount fresh aggression against Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.

ii) Iran was interested in fomenting disturbances and subversion within the GCC states for bringing about overthrow of their monarchies and for establishment of Islamic governments on the Iranian model.

iii) During the course of the Iraq-Iran conflict, Iran was likely to launch surprise attacks on any of the GCC states.

Fears and apprehensions of these kind induced the GCC members during the early phase of the conflict to boost mutual cooperation, both in the field of defence as well as internal security.

There is little doubt that as the time passed, the GCC countries gradually realised that Iran did not necessarily mean any harm to them and that long-term stable relations with that country were possible. If the Gulf rulers did not have this
kind of confidence about Iran's peaceful intentions in the long run, then Oman, the UAE and Qatar which were among the weakest of the GCC countries would not have tried so steadily to bring about improvement in their ties with Iran.

This group of countries must have been convinced that adoption of an accommodating attitude towards Iran would strengthen the position of the moderate faction there and would prove conducive to long-term stability of this region. In fact, Saudi Arabia too must have to some extent shared this assessment which was reflected in gradual improvement in Saudi-Iranian relations until the Makkah riots of July 1987. Quoting here from a well-known journal:219

"A new mood, called optimism, has spread in the conservative countries of the Gulf. These countries say to the inquiring visitor that they are no longer as worried as they once were about the consequences of Iran beating Iraq in the Gulf war... This wary new optimism is based partly on a belief that a post-war Iran would be too exhausted to seek new adventures."

It also needs to be emphasized that Iran had always been asserting from the early days of the war that it had no quarrel with the Gulf countries and desired normal relations with them. Though immediately after downfall of the Shah Iranians spoke about the export of Islamic revolution, this kind of propaganda had ceased long ago.

It was becoming apparent from 1985 that Iran was no longer supporting subversive movements abroad as before. The arrest of a radical Iranian cleric Mehdi Hashemi was a clear pointer to the fact that moderates among the Iranian clergy were slowly gaining ascendancy. Iran had initiated moves by 1986 to improve relations with the Western countries and was secretly importing arms from the USA.

If this were so and if the rulers of Oman, the UAE, Qatar and to some extent Bahrain were of the view that Iran was not an expansionist country intent on destabilising the Gulf, then why did not the rulers of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia think the same way?

The answer to this question lies in certain factors and causes which are unique to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

It does appear very odd in the first instance that Kuwait should have taken so much risk and courted Iranian displeasure to permit transhipment of Iraqi war supplies across its territory, especially as Kuwait had been living under the threat of Iraq ever since its independence in 1961. It is to be noted that Kuwait in its own way had tried to maintain a kind of balance between Iraq and Iran - it did not allow the Bubiyan island to be used by the Iraqi navy despite its strategic

220. He was responsible for grant of assistance to revolutionary movements outside Iran and was brother of the son-in-law of Ayatollah Montazeri - Khomeini's successor. Iran had also distinctly reduced the level of its support for the Islamic militants in Lebanon by the end of 1985.

221. International Herald Tribune, 10 November 1986.
location; Kuwait did not extend any outright financial assistance to Iraq after 1982; it did not give any military facilities to the Iraqis; it did not allow itself to become overtly tied with Iraq through projects such as establishment of a connecting rail line.

Kuwait did not, however, stop the flow of war materials and other essential supplies to Iraq through its territory. It is indeed puzzling as to why it did not do so.

Due to geographical proximity to Iraq, Kuwait faces much greater pressure from Iraq than any other GCC country. One does not know what were the precise means employed by the Iraqi rulers for inducing the Kuwaitis to permit transhipment of their arms imports in the face of vehement Iranian opposition. Quoting from a well-known publication:\footnote{222}{See, Cordesman, n.130.}

"Iraq desperately needs the Kuwaiti support for sustaining its war effort and it has quietly threatened the Al Sabah family with personal reprisals if they give way to Iranian pressure."

There is a large community of Palestinians and Iraqis in Kuwait. It cannot be ruled out that Iraq had established links with militant groups among them and used that as a leverage to pressurise the Kuwaitis. No other GCC country has such a large number of Palestinians and Iraqis, both in
absolute numbers as well as in terms of percentage of total population, as Kuwait has. Apart from all this, Kuwait shares a long border with Iraq which is bereft of any natural barriers or impediments. It should not be at all difficult for Iraqis from the purely military point of view to seize and hold a chunk of Kuwaiti territory as well as to occupy the strategic Bubiyan island. On the other hand, it would be much more difficult for Iraq to threaten Saudi Arabia militarily (Iraq does not have a common border with any other GCC state except Kuwait and Saudi Arabia). Barring the fact that unlike the Kuwait-Iraqi border the Saudi-Iraqi border has been demarcated, large-scale movement of troops in the border region between Iraq and Saudi Arabia would be extremely difficult as it is surrounded by vast stretches of almost impenetrable desert.

There is another factor, to some extent peculiar to Kuwait, which perhaps made them more fearful of possible repercussions of a limited Iranian victory than other GCC members. Kuwait has a sizeable Shia community (about 30 percent of the total population) among which many harboured pro-Iranian sentiments. It is possible that the alienation of Kuwaiti Shias and their disenchantment with the Kuwaiti ruling family during the Iraq-Iran war was more than was the case in Bahrain or Saudi Arabia. The fact that the Kuwaiti Shias have been discriminated against is well accepted. For instance, the number of Assembly seats assigned to Kuwaiti Shias was reduced
from ten to four during the Assembly elections held in February 1931. It is also known that the Shias in Kuwait have been denied appointment to senior posts in the army, the civil services as well as in the Ministerial Council.

No doubt there are a large number of Shias in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain who too have not been fully integrated in these countries. But these Shia communities are relatively further away from the Basrah region than is Kuwait. Kuwait had every reason to fear that establishment of an Islamic government in southern Iraq might encourage its own Shia community to become more volatile and turbulent. The rulers of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia perhaps felt that even if such a denouement (e.g. collapse of the Iraqi front near Basrah) was to take place, the repercussions on their indigenous Shia communities would be limited in the absence of geographical proximity.

Due to all these reasons perhaps, Kuwait felt impelled to support and prop up the Iraqi regime to some extent; it concluded that its long-term interests were best served by permitting the Iraqis to procure their requirements of armaments through the port of Kuwait, even if that led to ever-mounting threats, including direct aggression, from Iran. Since the other GCC members did not share these compulsions with Kuwait they could follow a relatively more neutral approach in the Iran-Iraq conflict.

223. Cordesman, n.130, p.570.
Reasons for the tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia are again in some ways distinct. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are unabashedly theocratic regimes; literal implementation of Islamic teachings and creation of a true Islamic state — these are the supreme objectives of both these countries. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia claim to speak in the name of Muslims of the world and aspire to their leadership. The rulers of both these countries claim to derive raison d'etre of their rule from the mandate given to them to propagate Islamic values. Is it any wonder, therefore, that a considerable degree of antagonism had come to exist between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the wake of the Islamic revolution. 224

It is worth recalling that the sharp deterioration in Saudi-Iranian relations which was witnessed during the first half of 1988 had very little to do with the course of the Iraq-Iran conflict. In fact Saudi Arabia snapped ties with Iran and acquired long-range missiles from China (in March/April 1988) when Iraq had began to establish its military superiority over Iran. The main grudge of Iranians against the Kingdom was not that they extended assistance/facilities to Iraq but their refusal to permit Iranian Hajis to hold political demonstrations during the Haj of July 1987.

224. "Saudi Arabia and Iran share a burning Islamic Fundamentalism but religious rivalry is driving the two oil-rich nations further apart — and even bring them close to war." See, Arab Times, 24/25 March 1985.
It can, therefore, be concluded that religious rivalry and competition for leadership of the Islamic World have been the dominant factors behind the feud and animosity between Iran and the Kingdom.\footnote{Diplomatic ties could not be restored between Iran and the Kingdom by the end of 1988 due to their disagreement over the number of Hajis to be allowed and their right to hold political demonstrations. See \textit{Arab Times}, 24 December 1988; \textit{Oman Observer}, 2 February 1989. The same issue continued to bedevil relations between the two during the first half of 1989.}

Since the other GCC member countries were relatively less theocratic, less doctrinaire and more secular as compared to Saudi Arabia, they found it easier to accept co-existence with Iran.

The above analysis explains as to why there was no consensus among the GCC countries vis-a-vis Iran and Iraq. It also elucidates as to why Iran's relations remained strained only with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and not with other members. Another basic factor which prevented evolution of a pan-GCC approach vis-a-vis Iran was the inability of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to pull together.

Historically speaking, relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have often been tense and uneasy and there has been much warfare and blood-letting between the two. Ever since it became independent in 1961, Kuwait had pursued a fiercely independent foreign policy which differed from the Saudi policy in many crucial aspects. The Kuwaiti refusal to
join other GCC members in signing the comprehensive security pact or its unwillingness to integrate its air defence networks with those of Saudi Arabia despite the immense military advantage which such a link-up would have conferred on it. All this cannot be understood except in terms of extreme Kuwaiti wariness and reluctance to promote relations with the Kingdom beyond a certain point.

Even during the post-Makkah riots period when both Kuwait and the Kingdom were feeling menaced by Iran, they could not forge a united political front. During the last months of 1987 Kuwait acting alone tried to mobilise the world opinion against the Iranian threat; in the speech delivered in the UN by Shaikh Sabah in September 1987, no reference to Makkah riots was made. On the other hand, the Saudi representative, while addressing the UN a few days later, did not allude specifically to Iranian threat to Kuwait. During the eighth summit while King Fahd censured Iran the Amir of Kuwait more or less refrained from criticising it. Subsequently, the Saudi Foreign Minister was not accompanied by his Kuwaiti counterpart when he visited Moscow, Washington, etc. in early months of 1988 in connection with imposition of sanctions on Iran.

226. See the sections dealing with growth of intra-GCC cooperation in the fields of defence and security in Part II.
More significantly, there was a distinct improvement in Kuwaiti-Iranian relations during the first quarter of 1988. Kuwait decided in March 1988 to post two diplomats to its Mission in Teheran to reopen it, and the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister in a press interview asserted that Kuwait's relations with Iran were good and that the two countries were not in a state of war. 227

On the other hand, it was in March 1988 itself when Saudi-Iranian relations underwent a rapid deterioration as a result of the Saudi decision to restrict the number of Iranian hajis to 45,000 as well as its acquisition of long-range ballistic missiles to ward off any threat from the Islamic Republic. Subsequently, the Kingdom severed diplomatic relations with Iran and Saudi dignitaries publicly accused it of terrorism and attempting to destabilise the Gulf. While Saudi Arabia and Iran were thus engaged in a propaganda war and in trading abuses, Kuwait hardly made any attempt to affirm its solidarity with the Kingdom.

Thus Kuwait and Saudi Arabia failed to act in concert even when both of them were feeling gravely threatened.

The above analysis also helps to explain why the GCC summits as well as the meetings of their Foreign Ministers

failed to come up with any decisive policy initiatives and confined themselves to mere reiteration of certain well-known cliches (e.g. support for the Palestinians). These meetings failed to deal with the most crucial issue facing these states e.g., likely repercussions of the Iraq-Iran conflict and the possibility of some of them getting embroiled in it. The GCC Supreme Council as well as the Ministerial Council were hamstrung by the profound differences among perceptions of their members vis-a-vis Iran. This rift was further aggravated by the inhibitions of two of its most powerful members - e.g., Kuwait and Saudi Arabia - against acting in concert.