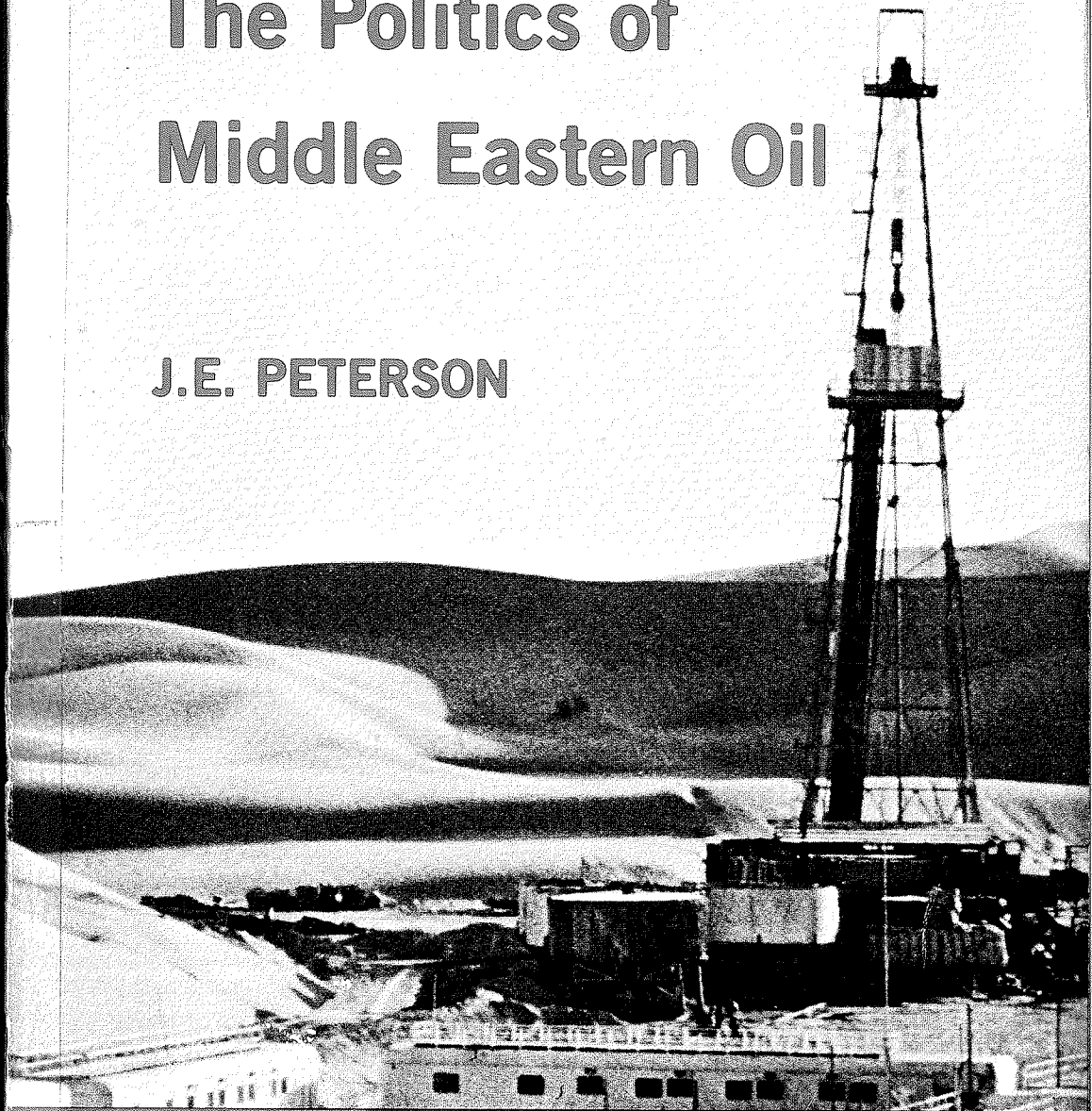


# The Politics of Middle Eastern Oil

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MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE

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# *Regional and Worldwide Implications of the Gulf War*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Speaking about the regional and worldwide implications of the Iraq-Iran war is reminiscent of John Dewey's observation that "a sculptor may see many different figures in a block of stone." So, too, may an analyst view the present Gulf war from many different perspectives. Defense and security specialists who perceive the importance of a balance of forces in the region, for example, have been unable to determine the exact military nature of the conflict inasmuch as neither combatant to date has demonstrated the ability to inflict a decisive defeat upon the other. Other observers, who minimize the significance of the confrontation between the two countries' armed forces, insist that the larger implications of the struggle stem from the Sunni-Shi'a religious differences between Iraq and Iran—and among Muslims elsewhere in the region. Still others have been acutely apprehensive all along about the possibility of increased superpower involvement in the conflict.

All of this is but to say that the regional and worldwide implications of the conflict to date have been and remain characterized by extreme complexity. Such phenomena are all the more confusing in the midst of the disorder accompanying any war in progress. Hence, an analyst of its implications must contend with a myriad of sometimes not-so-obviously related forces and factors. While these phenomena may at times appear quite vague and inseparable, a tentative assessment of the war may be reached if one but gauges the respective responses to the war by outside parties.

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## EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

Perceptions of the war to date have passed through at least six stages. In the first, there was a widespread perception among the Arab Gulf states that the war might sooner or later involve everyone in the region. This was the inspiration behind the early *de facto* move of these states to align themselves with Iraq. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Oman, for example, indicated their willingness to extend important logistical and financial support to Iraq only days after the fighting erupted.

Perceptions later entered a second stage whereby these same states reasoned that it was indeed possible to remain detached from the actual military dimensions of the conflict. A major factor was Western diplomatic intervention during the early stages of the war which resulted in Iraq's curtailing its earlier intentions to wrest control from Iran of three disputed islands near the mouth of the Gulf. For the next fourteen months, maritime traffic through the strategic Strait of Hormuz remained relatively unimpeded; US-dispatched AWACS airplanes to Saudi Arabia served to bolster the air surveillance and defense capabilities of a considerable portion of the Gulf's southern littoral; and foreign access to and local production and export of the non-combatants' petroleum resources continued apace.

A third phase came with the December 1981 *coup* attempt in Bahrain, which illuminated much more clearly than previously the broad implications of the war. The conflict was still perceived as confined to Iraq and Iran, but began to carry with it a potential for Sunni-Shi'a confrontation on a scale much broader than envisioned earlier. A fourth phase evolved when a number of Arab states with close ties to Moscow—Syria, Libya, South Yemen—plus Israel and North Korea, extended various forms of political and military support to Iran. This demonstrated to some analysts that the aforementioned third phase, which had seemed to raise the specter of sectarian conflict, had affected as well a coalition of "radical" Arab states and such unlikely bedfellows as Israel and North Korea. Arrayed in opposition to this coalition, in the eyes of these analysts, was a "moderate"-to-"conservative" grouping in alignment with the heretofore-considered "radical" Iraq. To still other observers, these developments were less relevant or significant than the irony of such countries as Soviet-supported Syria, Libya, and South Yemen, together with Israel, aligning themselves with Iran not so much in pursuit of radicalism, but rather as a manifestation of anti-Iraqi sentiments. This placed the regional role and involvement of the USSR in a position of potential influence on matters affecting Gulf security quite unlike any series of developments in recent memory.

A fifth phase began in July 1982 with the Iranian invasion of Iraq in what appeared to many as a possible means for Tehran obtaining a better bargaining position in an eventual settlement. But the Iraqi resistance succeeded. Finally, a sixth phase evolved after the failure of the Iranian in-

vasion. The war reached a military and diplomatic stalemate with no end in sight to what, all analysts were forced to concede, had degenerated to an inconclusive situation.

### **SOME STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS**

Among the many regional and global implications associated with the conflict to date, the war has served to highlight the view that Iraq, in regional geo-strategic terms, is in some ways less significant strategically to the Gulf states, the Soviet Union, and the West than is Iran. Some analysts, for example, consider that Iraqi ambitions to play a regional security role remain seriously constrained by its having the shortest littoral of any of the eight Gulf states. The length of its coastline is less than fifty miles, with most of that lying in shallow water and of uncertain access and sovereignty (the latter as a result of Iraq's territorial disputes with both Kuwait and Iran).

Iran is seen by contrast as sharing not only contested land and water frontiers with Iraq, but also offshore boundaries with the entire north Arabian Peninsula littoral across its more than six-hundred-mile coast from the Shatt al-'Arab all the way to Pakistan. Iraq, moreover, lacks Iran's strategic significance due to the latter's position astride the northern shores of the Strait of Hormuz. Through the latter waterway passes the bulk of the oil bound for sale on the international market. Thus, on the matter of applying laws of the sea to international waterways, it is Iran's policies, not those of Iraq, that have come to matter the most in regional and international councils. If Iraq were to prove unable to secure its own border with Iran, let alone make good its claim for undisputed sovereignty over the strategic Shatt al-'Arab waterway—the country's only outlet to the sea—how much less credible, in the eyes of many analysts, would be its pretensions to a leadership role in matters of regional security.

Iraq's *global* geo-strategic significance has likewise paled in comparison with Iran's. The Soviet Union, for example, neighbors not Iraq but Iran. And no small neighbor it is. The two share 1,500 miles of common frontier. Though little noticed by the rest of the world, the day-to-day interaction between Iranian and Soviet citizens exceeds that of the Soviet Union and any other Middle Eastern people.

Iraq to date may have had a longer and more comprehensive military relationship with Moscow than has had Iran. Libya, Ethiopia and Syria may have served Soviet ideological and military interests more effectively in North Africa, the Red Sea, and the eastern Mediterranean. Both Ethiopia and South Yemen, in addition to ideological compatibility and geographic complementarity, may have better met important Soviet needs for access to and a physical presence in the Horn of Africa. But these roles notwith-

standing, none of them has had quite the potential global and regional geo-strategic significance that has characterized Iran.

### **MILITARY UNCERTAINTIES**

It has not been conclusively determined thus far whether one of the combatants is militarily stronger than the other. Although Iran is clearly by far the greater in terms of size and overall population, it remains to be seen whether this can or will be translated into an unmitigated defeat of Iraq. In any case, whether the war's outcome would be determined on the battlefield remained open to question. Matters of a logistical nature were also important. Certainly, when Syria closed its frontier with Iraq in 1982, that left open only the routes to and from Iraq by the way of Jordan, Turkey, Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. In theory then, it remained plausible that Iran might resort to such economic measures as blockades or aerial and maritime interdiction of key supply routes rather than a deep military incursion to achieve its aims in Iraq.

If in the long run clear military victory of either party alone seems improbable, an external factor contributing to such an inconclusive outcome may be Turkish and Egyptian interests. Turkey, the most militarily powerful Islamic Middle Eastern state, a member of NATO and a neighbor of both countries, has stated its opposition to an Iranian invasion and occupation of Iraq and has indicated that it would not hesitate to intervene if its own national security and related interests were to become endangered. Egypt, still regarded by many as the most militarily powerful Arab country, has also stood opposed to Iran in this context and, as indicated below, has enhanced Iraq's strategic and military prospects for resisting Iran.

### **FOREIGN ASSISTANCE**

Throughout the war, Iran has had more limited outside assistance than Iraq. To date, Tehran's main supporters have been Syria, Libya, South Yemen, North Korea and Israel. Helping to facilitate the assistance of the first four have been Kremlin officials who, for the reasons indicated, regard Iran as the greater prize to be sought and who have retained the hope that, the growth in Iranian anti-Soviet propaganda and other setbacks notwithstanding, some way might be found to further Soviet interests there. Yet Moscow has not had a free hand in choosing whether or not to directly support—or oppose—Iran. A potentially enormous cost of heavy Soviet assistance is that most of the Arab states would view such action as hostile toward their own interests.

In addition, the Soviet Union has domestic restraints. It has a vested

interest, for example, in not becoming over-extended or precipitously involved in events beyond its borders, given the recent leadership succession at home plus uncertainties along its European and Asian frontiers. Moscow's behavior in the 1980s to date has indicated a reluctance to allow events within client states to exceed the point where it might be obligated to intervene on their behalf.

A further constraint to Soviet intervention thus far has been the nature and orientation of the Iranian regime. Many have questioned the extent of a Soviet inclination to intervene in support of a regime in Tehran which is neither communist nor socialist nor likely, in its makeup, to extend a significant degree of recognition or tolerance to either ideology. Beyond the insecure political climate in Iran, staying the hand of the would-be Soviet interventionist further has been the lack of a sufficiently mass-based, pro-USSR political constituency.

Still another inhibiting consideration has been the fact that just as Iran's many geo-strategic attributes have warranted ongoing Soviet attention in connection with Moscow's hopes to enhance Soviet global and regional interests, so has the reverse argument also been valid. Iran, far more than Iraq, has a potential for destabilizing an important region inside the Soviet Union—the Central Asian Soviets—because its Islamic perspective is closer than Iraq's Ba'athist outlook to the sentiments of the Soviet Union's Muslim citizens. In the absence of the above-mentioned grass-roots support, it cannot be ruled out that a Soviet intervention against the Khomeini regime in Iran, following the Soviet invasion and costly occupation of Afghanistan, could provoke negative consequences inside the USSR that would outweigh whatever international strategic benefits might be gained.

The prospects for Soviet intervention in Iraq have been similarly bleak. Moscow has been without a secure political base there as well, not only as a result of the Ba'ath Party's entrenched position in the government. As in Iran, it has also been due to the absence of a mass-based, well-organized constituency favorably inclined toward the Soviet Union.

If the threat of Soviet intervention has been shown to be considerably less credible than some had imagined, there nonetheless remain other reasons for concern. It is highly questionable, for example, whether the Gulf states will be able to continue to finance Iraq in the period ahead at the level which they did during the first two years of the war. Israel's invasion of Lebanon resulted in the needs of Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinians for billions of dollars in economic assistance. Yet these needs appeared at a time when, due to dwindling financial surpluses and depressed market conditions in the petroleum industry, the Gulf states are without the kinds of resources that were at their disposal previously.

Quite apart from these considerations, were Syria to succeed in its request for large-scale financing from Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states, this quite possibly could affect the regional balance between Syria

and Iraq in favor of the former which, throughout, has supported Iran. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, and Qatar have, therefore, had little option but to proceed with great caution and no small amount of discretion in assessing the weight of various variables affecting their interests. Not the least of these has been avoidance of Khomeini-inspired disturbances by their own Shi'ite Muslims. The regimes of those non-combatant countries in immediate proximity to the conflict have already pumped into Iraq an average of a billion dollars a month since the war began. Many analysts, in assessing the implications of such contributions, have concluded that the GCC states might go to considerable lengths to find ways to be even more generous if it would facilitate a settlement which would accomplish two objectives: an end to the daily possibility of an Iranian air strike on one of their oil installations and an end to Tehran-inspired attempts to spread the fundamentalist Shi'ite movement to the south side of the Gulf.

Failing a settlement, this much is certain: Iraq will be in continuous need of external assistance to defend itself against Iran. Toward this end, some analysts, indulging perhaps in wishful thinking, have opined that Baghdad, in an effort to forge a fundamental strategic realignment in the region, might go so far as to cancel the 1971 Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship. Whatever stake one may place in the day-to-day substance of such treaties, there is no denying that such documents carry with them a symbolic significance that is ordinarily not treated lightly by either of the parties. Yet in this instance, the treaty has remained dormant since both parties disregarded one of its most important clauses—the obligation of one signatory to inform and consult with the other in advance of any military action—when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and when Iraq, a year later, invaded Iran.

There is, moreover, ample regional precedent for the renunciation by an Arab state of a close identification with one or the other superpower. Syria's rupture with the United States some years ago, for example, was viewed both regionally and further afield as both the necessary and expedient thing to do in view of Damascus' shift in orientation toward the Soviet Union. A more dramatic, recent and memorable case, however, was Egypt's severance of the Cairo-Moscow Treaty of Friendship in 1972 as a prelude to turning toward the United States. Reference to these previous instances of abrupt regional-global realignment suggests that if Iraq were in fact to find itself in need of more far-ranging assistance from the West than has been forthcoming to date, it may turn to a European state, such as France, with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states helping to pay the bill.

Certainly, this would be a more convenient and expedient option for Baghdad to pursue, for it is quite unlikely that Iraq would be able to receive direct assistance from the United States. The reason has less to do with strategic realities than the widespread public image in the US of the Baghdad regime as one which continues to harbor and sponsor terrorists. Com-

pounding the difficulty is that, in contrast to the regime in Tehran, Iraq has had a far longer and more multifaceted relationship with the Soviet Union, with which the Reagan Administration has been considerably more preoccupied than any US Presidency in a quarter of a century. However much Iraq might wish it were otherwise and hope that an attentive American public as well as US policy might recognize and reward the change in Iraq's international posture in recent years, the legacy of earlier days when most Americans, and particularly Congressmen, perceived Iraqis as villains, lives on in Washington.

### IDEOLOGY

Many of the implications for foreign involvement in the war have turned on the ideological dimension of the conflict. In this context, many have seen Iraq as competing at a distinct disadvantage. In this regard, a substantial component of the Ba'th Party's ideology is viewed as secular and imported—from sources which were themselves inspired by Western ideas—and, as a consequence, without enduring impact in depth on the majority of the country's population.

By contrast, Iranian ideology has generally been viewed as more indigenous in its origins and more pervasive, both inspirationally and sociologically, in its extent. In addition to these attributes, the combination of the Ayatollah Khomeini's religious zeal and political power has produced an inner dynamic that has rendered the Iranian "model," on balance, a far greater challenge than Ba'thism to the regional *status quo*. Given the relatively low literacy rates in both countries, few have been surprised to find that a homegrown variety of Islamic ideology has had greater appeal to large masses of Iranians and Iraqis.

On the Iranian side, how much of the motive has been ideological and how much, at the highest levels, has been personal, has been an open question from the day the war began. Khomeini himself, when he has addressed topics of an ideological nature concerning the Baghdad regime, has often confused the issue by making little distinction between Iraqi President Saddam Husayn and the Ba'th Party as a whole. Although some Iranian demands have called for his ouster, others have indicated that the entire Party would have to step down before Iran would agree to a cessation of armed hostilities. The reason for the ambiguous distinction made between Saddam Husayn as Head of State on one hand, and the Ba'th Party as the basis of the government, on the other, may be, as many have claimed, that Khomeini has all along believed fervently that Iraq is destined to become the next Islamic Republic. By all accounts, it has so far been a source of major dismay and disappointment on his part that Iraq, with its majority Shi'a population and the strong cultural ties with Iran of many of its inhabitants, has not yet produced such a republic.

## REGIONAL SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

Among the more immediate concerns of the Arab Gulf states since the outbreak of the war was their awareness that both their national security as well as the jugular of their economic well-being could be dealt a devastating blow literally within minutes by actions involving one or the other of the two combatants. The need to find a more credible and effective means to deal with the pressing problem of security was, indeed, one of the most compelling reasons for establishing the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The reaction of Saudi Arabia to the Iraq-Iran war to date has been quite different than that of the other Gulf states. The Riyadh regime has been and remains profoundly disturbed by the sectarian character of the war. Saudi Arabia has traditionally preferred to align itself with the conservative side of the Sunni Muslim camp. Moreover, the fundamentalist foundation of its own regime has served as the repository of a very different interpretation of Islam. Thus, on a sectarian level, Saudi Arabia has been especially concerned about the potential of the Tehran government to undermine an important dimension of the Kingdom's regional role. Qatar's reaction has been similar to that of Riyadh.

Kuwait has also had numerous reasons to worry about the war but for different reasons than Saudi Arabia. Being a closer neighbor to both combatants than Saudi Arabia, having been bombed several times by Iranian pilots during the first two years of the war, and lying far more exposed militarily than any other noncombatant due to the crucial logistical role it has played in channeling supplies to Iraq from abroad, Kuwait lived as dangerously as any GCC state as the war continued. Kuwait's position in the Baghdad-versus-Tehran ideological competition was also different from the outset; it had been developing for some time as a secular rather than sectarian state, overtly sympathetic to neither the Saudi Arabian brand of Islam nor the Iranian interpretation; neither had it been anti-Sunni or anti-Shi'a in its policies and actions.

In terms of the UAE, there has been, in effect, a mirror image of Kuwaiti policy, *i.e.* the successful management of relations with a far more influential neighbor despite the difficulties emerging out of a highly asymmetrical power equation. Just as Kuwait for most of its existence to date has managed to co-exist with Iraq, so has the UAE managed to live alongside Iran despite disputed claims over islands. In addition, both the UAE and Kuwait have built up a reservoir of considerable international goodwill in return for the vast number of financial favors they have provided others through the generosity of their foreign economic assistance programs—assistance which, with an eye to strategic and security interests, they astutely intertwined with ongoing support for their national independence and territorial integrity.

Bahrain, on the other hand, has been a special case. As the Arab world's only island state and one of the few Gulf countries lacking the financial

wherewithal to ingratiate others through aid programs, Bahrain had ample reason to be acutely apprehensive about the implications of the war for its unique population. As in Iraq, a clear majority of Bahrain's Muslim inhabitants have for quite some time been Shi'a. The government itself, such as in the incumbent regime in Iraq, has long been dominated by Sunnis. This factor alone has sufficed to sustain ongoing Iranian interest—and, as already indicated, indirect involvement—in Bahrain's internal affairs.

Oman, which occupies a position on the Strait of Hormuz that puts it in a different situation than that of the other GCC members, has been the Gulf state least worried about the sectarian dimension of the war. The reason is that the Shi'a population of Oman, unlike the situation in the other Gulf states, is not indigenous but consists rather of longstanding emigrant communities from southern Iraq, Bahrain, Pakistan and India. In further contrast to most of the other Gulf states, the implications of the war for Omani national security and related interests have centered mainly on matters of a strategic nature. Muscat's abiding concern has been the extent to which, if at all, the course of the conflict might give Tehran cause to rely to a greater extent than before on the Soviet Union.

In addition to the Arab states of the Gulf, Pakistan—as an Islamic country bordering Iran—has come to figure more and more in the regional security equation. It is important to underscore that the Pakistani government has indicated with increasing frequency that it will not involve its military forces abroad in combat against Muslim people. Some Pakistani defense planners are still smarting from the help that Pakistani soldiers provided King Husayn in September of 1970 when the Jordanian army was fighting Palestinian guerillas. Although actual Pakistani units did not take part in the fighting, there is little doubt that individual Pakistani soldiers, whether as trainers or instructors, got caught up in the fighting with particular units and found themselves in the midst of a conflict with fellow Muslims, in this instance Palestinians. It is unlikely that Pakistan would commit its armed forces to a conflict with Iran due to the long-standing neighborly relations and underlying affinity between the two peoples; historically, they have been much closer to one another than either has been to neighboring Arab nations. In response to a lesser level of challenge, however, it remains possible that the Pakistanis might be willing to extend direct military assistance, if invited, to help protect one or more of the GCC states, should the need arise.

Returning to Iraq, with its Sunni minority regime as compared with Iran's Shi'a majority rule, it withstands underscoring that Baghdad's policies in the past few years have posed far less of a challenge to security in the Gulf than have the policies of Iran. This marks a significant shift from the not very distant past, when the predominantly Sunni Arab Gulf states had reason to be more concerned by Iraq's numerous *coups* and revolutionary rhetoric than they were assured by the Sunni composition of its regime.

In addition, the constraints on intervention elsewhere in the Gulf by either of the two combatants are considerably stronger in Iraq than in Iran. Baghdad remains vulnerable to the unpredictable actions of Khomeini, on one hand, and to the financial largesse of the Arab Gulf states, on the other. Both factors have had the effect of shortening Iraq's political leash. The Arab Gulf states, for their part, have been well aware that should the government of Saddam Husayn happen to fall, its replacement might be much more threatening to their security.

Despite the foregoing, Gulf Arab security concerns *vis-à-vis* Iraq, on balance, have been alleviated in the eyes of some since Baghdad, under Saddam Husayn, has leaned increasingly toward the West and the dynastic Arab states, even while Iran, under the Khomeini regime, more often than not has seemed to be doing its utmost to wrench away from both. From the global perspective of various Western countries, as well as in the context of the other Gulf states' concerns of a regional nature, the consequence, again, has been that the more worrisome of the two countries has clearly been Iran, not Iraq.

The regional implications of Iraq's predicament *vis-à-vis* its Arab Gulf neighbors can withstand still further comment. Certainly, evidence of Iran having moved away from many of the other Gulf states, and of Iraq having moved towards them, has been reflected in Iraq's steadily improved relations with Saudi Arabia. Of additional importance in this regard have been reduced tensions between Iraq and Kuwait, and the non-recurrence, since 1975, of Iraq's previous support for the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman.

Indeed, since Khomeini came to power, the record indicates that Iraq has forged a broad range of cooperative ties with other Gulf states aimed at enhancing their respective capabilities against Iranian-sponsored infiltration activities. In many other ways as well, Iraq, though not a GCC member, has adopted policies and on occasion taken actions on issues of regional importance that have been complementary to GCC needs. In short, the anxieties occasioned by the Iranian revolution and civil war, as well as by Iraq's failure to win a quick or decisive victory against Iran, has kept Iraq committed to improved relations with Jordan and the other Arab Gulf states. It is these states upon which Baghdad has had to rely continuously for economic, logistical, political, and diplomatic support, and upon which it will likely remain dependent in the near term whether the war continues or reaches a settlement.

The above considerations notwithstanding, it is important to stress that not all Iraqis have discarded a point of view articulated with some force to this writer by a group of Ba'athists a year before the war began. That view advanced the thesis that an Iraqi victory over Khomeini-led Iran would enhance, rather than endanger, Western interests in the Arab world. What these Ba'athists had in mind was mainly the six GCC states, but it was clear

that they envisioned Jordan and Egypt as benefitting also. However debatable such a proposition may have been or could yet become, those who proclaimed its validity at the time emphasized that the setback for Western and Gulf states' interests which would occur, should Iran defeat Iraq, was—and would remain—beyond question.

To what extent such Ba'hist reasoning was indicative of mainstream governmental thought in Baghdad was unclear at the time. The fluidity of circumstances occasioned by the war, requiring tactical ingenuity, pragmatism, and at times unbridled opportunism, hereby served to reassure the Arab non-combatants that the recipient of their support was a fundamentally and permanently re-oriented Iraqi Government that was favorably disposed to their long-term interests. Certainly those upon whom Iraq remained the most dependent for supplies, loans, and mediational efforts to bring the war to a rapid end evinced an abiding interest in not seeing Iraq emerge from the conflict with a renewed capacity or intent to export Ba'thism to lands beyond its shores.

A markedly different view could be heard outside the region among the countries which had helped Iran in the conflict. Various officials within the Syrian, Libyan, and South Yemeni governments, for example, indicated that they would not necessarily view with disfavor a scenario whereby Iran, after the war, might serve as a greater inspiration than it had previously for radical and revolutionary forces operating in and adjacent to the Arab Gulf states. Again, the regional implications of the conflict became clearer when one considers that Iraq has had neither the stated intent nor the individual conduits at hand for such actions but Iran, in addition to its considerable advantage over Iraq in terms of geography, demography, and military forces available for these purposes, has had both.

For those who had any doubt, Iranian intentions towards the south side of the Gulf were sufficiently demonstrated by the 1981 *coup* attempt in Bahrain. Not knowing whether other subversive groups might also be training inside Iran for future strikes at a Gulf regime, and, if so, how many and/or which GCC state might be the next target, the GCC states, with Saudi Arabia at the forefront, reacted swiftly. Within a week, Riyadh and Bahrain had signed a security agreement designed for consultation, exchange of intelligence and mutual military assistance in the event of any similar incident occurring in the future. Qatar signed a nearly identical agreement with Saudi Arabia shortly thereafter and within two months the remaining GCC states had entered into similar arrangements.

#### MINORITIES

An important consideration for security analysts on both sides of the Gulf has been the position and role of minorities in Iran and Iraq and the potential involvement at some point in the conflict of their ethnic and

sectarian compatriots elsewhere in the region. Here again, the greatest focus has been on Iran. To the surprise of many Western analysts, the activities of the several minority groups in Iran who had previously sought autonomy from the Tehran government have all been contained since the war erupted. One reason has been that the overwhelming majority of Iranians, without regard to ethnic identity, class, or sectarian orientation, have coalesced in what, in essence, has been a national effort to defend Iranian territory in the face of the original Iraqi invasion.

An equally telling factor has been that this war, like all wars, has created its own conditions of severity. No less than many another government at war, the regimes in Baghdad and Tehran have sought to suppress any domestic challenge of the conflict. In time of peace, most governments have responded to rebellious citizen activity with force, to be sure; in time of war, however, the tendency has been to use maximum brutality to defeat such rebels and brand them as traitors. Given this reality and the almost certain harsh response of either of the two governments in this matter, minority groups in both countries have been exceptionally cautious in their behavior since the war broke out.

It is, of course, important to underscore the fact that Iraq is not immune from such phenomena and that, with particular respect to its Kurdish population, it has had greater experience than Iran in dealing with this kind of problem. Nonetheless, should Iran lose the war, Saddam Husayn may anticipate renewed heavy support by Iran for the Kurds in Iraq and, also, for disaffected Shi'ites who, although outnumbering Iraq's Sunni Arabs, remain very much a political minority.

Iran's minority problems, by contrast, have been more complex to date than Iraq's because: (1) the groups in question have been larger in number, both in category and in terms of overall size (including Kurds, Turkish-speaking Iranians, Arabs, and Baluchis, to name the most prominent); (2) they have been based in areas some distance—and in different directions—from the capital; (3) they have been simultaneous, on more than one occasion in recent history, in their breakaway activities; and (4) there is the consideration that the uncertainty of whether the central government in Tehran will be able to come to terms with these groups, and *vice versa*, is both greater and more recent, being held in abeyance since the Iraq-Iran war began.

Despite the foregoing, one of the implications for Iran's minorities may be the option of resuming active pursuit of their aspirations once the war is ended. In this event, an important question would be whether one or more of the minorities in question might turn to outside groups for assistance, for example, to the Soviet Union or to kindred groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the GCC states. If so, it would be important to consider what might be the response. Would the Soviets be able and/or inclined to extend the kind of aid to any of these groups that it provided, from its

presence in South Yemen, the insurgents in Oman's southern province of Dhofar? And were it to do so, what might be the expected result? Might this be likely to set off a conflict different from any which has involved the Soviet Union and/or other non-Gulf powers in the region to date?

Conversely, were the minorities to receive aid from non-Soviet sources, what kinds of problems might this entail? More specifically, if minorities thusly aided were to rebel against the Iranian regime, might that regime, or its successor, be inclined to accept foreign assistance for the purpose of quelling the insurrection? In such a scenario, might a country such as the Soviet Union, citing insecurity on its southern flank, be inclined to intervene without regard to the niceties associated with whether or not a formal invitation was extended?

With the war coming to an end, there will therefore be reason to query the near and longer term fate of such groups. Will they renew pressure for greater autonomy and/or a greater voice in the national government? If so, would the policy of the central government be accomodational or confrontational? If at all the latter, to what extent might this compel one or more of the groups in question to seek external support?

Of the various options and scenarios at hand, one similar to that in which Baluchistan were to achieve autonomy or to successfully pursue secession from Pakistan could increase in significance. Analysts who have studied this scenario point to the larger number of Baluchis in Soviet-dominated Afghanistan; their potential ability to provide the Soviet Union with a corridor to the sea; the fact that they are widely dispersed not only in Pakistan and Iran but throughout the Arab states of the Gulf; their reputation as reliable fighters; and their position and role as one of the most economically resourceful minorities in the region.

#### **LINKAGE AND DIPLOMACY**

The situation of any war in process defies the certainty of precise analysis. This has especially been the case in the Iraq-Iran war due to the constantly changing events in the eastern Mediterranean, most particularly in Lebanon, but also in the West Bank and Gaza. Looking down the road, if peace were to be established in Lebanon and the Palestinians were to become engaged in a direct dialogue with the United States, the degree of antagonistic and alienated feelings amongst regimes and people alike toward one of the superpowers with a stake in the conflict's outcome—the United States—would diminish. This could have a comprehensive and altogether salutary impact on the region, substantially weakening the export appeal of Iran's fundamentalist revolution in the process, especially if the Palestinians were to be seen as part of a process in which the United States was playing a positive role.

On the other hand, if the reverse were to occur, the potential for a

backlash against the more moderate regimes supporting Iraq could be anticipated, and this could only work to the benefit of Tehran. The mutuality and reciprocity of certain Israeli and Iranian strategic interests must, therefore, not be ignored. When Iran crossed into Iraq it was a net gain for Israel in that it diverted the attention of the Arab Gulf states away from Lebanon. To compound matters, Iran advanced its own cause and embarrassed the Arab regimes by being the first—and by most accounts the only—regional state to provide actual military assistance to the Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians during the Israeli onslaught in the summer of 1982.

This was all the more ironic with regard to certain other aspects of the Iran-Israel relationship. Evidence of collusion between the two countries has not exactly been elusive. On numerous occasions, each has seen an advantage in operating in the cover of the other's military moves. Certainly Israel has been central to Tehran's ability to prolong the war by sending weapons and spare parts. In May 1982, a senior US Department of Defense spokesman conceded to this writer that the extent of such Israeli assistance to Iran up to that time had been "massive." And one month later, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, there appeared fresh evidence of the nature and scope of collaboration between Tel Aviv and Tehran. In one incident where Israeli forces had captured a cache of 50,000 completely unused, Soviet-manufactured Kalashnikov automatic weapons, eyewitness accounts of American military personnel serving with the UN peacekeeping forces indicated that, within 48 hours of their capture, the entire consignment of these weapons, plus two and a half million rounds of ammunition, had been sold and delivered by Israel to the Iranian Government.

For their part, the Arab states of the Gulf, although acutely conscious of the broad range of regional security problems that these events have occasioned, have been dismayed at the inability of international diplomacy to bring the war to a close. To be sure, there have been numerous unsuccessful attempts by third parties—the UN, the Islamic Conference Organization, non-aligned groups, and Turkey, Pakistan and Algeria—to find a peaceful settlement to the war. In regional eyes, the superpowers have been suspected, and in several instances actually accused, of having an interest in seeing the conflict prolonged. Such cynicism, although consistently deemed unwarranted and unfair by US government spokesmen, has stemmed as much as anything else from official US policy statements issued during the course of the war. Aside from emphasizing that the US "has remained from the beginning, and will remain, neutral in the war", official US policy has been "supportive of the independence and territorial integrity of both Iran and Iraq", opposed to seizure of territory by force, and has reiterated the need for "an immediate end to hostilities, and a negotiated settlement."

A formal White House statement of July 14, 1982, declared US support for the security of friendly states in the region which might feel threatened

by the conflict, and announced that the United States was prepared to consult with those states in the region which might feel threatened by the conflict on appropriate steps to ensure their security. Statements of intent aside, however, the US had no formal diplomatic relations with either Iraq or Iran, although some American diplomats were in Iraq. Although the outcome could be so potentially serious for Western and Arab interests in the Gulf, the US continued to claim that it held little sway over the course of hostilities, despite its disposal for constraining Israeli support for a crucial aspect of the Iranian war effort.

Europe, meanwhile has been distancing itself from the political quagmire of the Middle East and devoting itself more and more to European problems. To the extent that Europe has remained involved in the Middle East, it has been overwhelmingly in the context of economic interests. European statesmen have continued to apply the proper and locally much-appreciated rhetoric on political questions. However, there is little evidence that such actions have done much to influence US policies and actions on the question of Palestine, Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, or the Golan Heights. Similarly, with regard to bringing the Iraq-Iran war to a close, Europeans have had little impact to date. What might have been an exception, of course, was the mediation effort by the Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme. The Palme mission, however, was premature and thus of only marginal significance.

The history of Iraqi-Iranian relations—as well as those of other Middle Eastern countries—demonstrates that only when both parties to a particular dispute are themselves ready for agreement can other parties play a role, not *vice versa*. On no occasion of this or earlier conflicts between Iraq and Iran has a unilateral mediation effort by outside parties produced results of any lasting benefit. An example in this context was the Algiers Agreement of March 1975, when the Shah of Iran and Iraq's Saddam Husayn met in Algiers and signed an accord to end their longstanding disputes over the Shatt al-'Arab, the Kurdish question, and Iraqi support for radical movements in the Gulf. Only then, when both states were ready to conclude an agreement, was mediation effective, even if Iraq's Husayn was beleaguered at the time and the Shah was at the height of his power, thereby lending credence to the view of many that the agreement was adhered to by Baghdad under circumstances akin to duress.

Until recently, neither country has indicated a readiness to resolve the current dispute. As a result, international initiatives to end the war have provided both countries with opportunities to exploit such initiatives for their own purposes. On the Iraqi side, the war in Lebanon provided Baghdad with an exceptional opportunity to orchestrate a diplomatic end to the war. Had these efforts been successful, the Baghdad regime might thereby have avoided the far higher domestic costs which it could expect to face in the event of its defeat on the battlefield. Certainly, many Iraqis were

hopeful that a diplomatic settlement could be achieved before the non-aligned meeting, which was scheduled to take place in Baghdad on September 6, 1982. But fighting continued and the conference was transferred to New Delhi.

On the Iranian side, Tehran's confidence during the same period was demonstrated first by its refusal to comply with an Arab-led call in OPEC for ceilings on individual oil production by the main producers, and second by its decision to ignore a unanimous UN Security Council resolution on July 12 for a ceasefire in the Gulf war. Staying the hand of every UN mediation effort to date has been Iran's flat rejection of any actions by that body to end the dispute, with its reason being that the UN made no effort to intervene when Iraq had the upper hand.

### **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

If the foregoing attests only in part to the numerous regional and worldwide implications of the conflict to date, it nonetheless indicates several directions that policy formulation might be expected to take in the near future. In terms of Western concerns, a major theme had clearly come to be the degree to which the intensification of the war, on the one hand, and mounting evidence of aggressive Iranian intentions against virtually every Arab Gulf government, on the other, posed direct and immediate challenges to Western strategic, economic and political interests.

Secondly, while a neutral Western response to Iraq's 1980 invasion of an Iran which was still holding the US hostages was seen as only appropriate in the eyes of most Western analysts, the continuation of such a policy in light of the reversal of the war and Iran's increasingly anti-Western vehemence was viewed by many of the same observers as counterproductive to the interests of Western countries, the Arab Gulf states, and most other Arab countries.

Thirdly, all Western countries with interests at stake in the outcome of the conflict have indicated that they see little choice but to ensure that Iraq has the capability to withstand a sustained Iranian invasion. Such steps as these powers have considered undertaking towards this goal have included: (1) providing assurance that Iraq would receive adequate military equipment and supplies, including additional shipments through Arab states friendly to Iraq (an example was a British-facilitated \$400-million arms transaction through Egypt in the spring of 1982); (2) recommending that the United States normalize diplomatic relations with Iraq and support an intensification of diplomatic efforts to end the conflict; and (3) urging the US to call Israel unequivocally to account for violating US laws in the process of providing Iran—even while Iran held Americans as hostages—with military equipment and spare parts for its predominantly US-manufactured weaponry, most particularly the crucial aid which Tel Aviv

supplied the Iranian air force.

A number of subsidiary themes have commanded attention as well. Prominent among these has been acknowledgement by many that so long as the Khomeini regime remains virulently anti-West, there may be little the West can do in the short run aside from not radically altering its relationship with Iraq to such an extent that a later improvement in Western-Iranian ties would be precluded.

In the interim, the more constrained of the Western powers—the US—has limited itself to lending assistance where possible in the construction of a GCC-centered air shield over the Gulf's southern oil fields as a means of guarding against an Iranian threat, and strengthening American "over-the-horizon" capabilities against the worst case possibility, however remote, that a future Iranian government might seek US help against Soviet intervention.

Influencing the political interests of numerous Western countries was the fact that Iraq, in comparison with Iran, has in recent years become increasingly open to relations with the West in general. Western diplomats were well aware that almost simultaneous with Saddam Husayn's assumption of office, Baghdad initiated a shift in policy away from Moscow. Thousands of Soviet advisors subsequently left Iraq and normal diplomatic relations were being conducted between Baghdad and all of the major Western countries except the US. Further testimony to the reorientation of Iraq's foreign policy in recent years was its severance of diplomatic relations with North Korea and its establishment of consular relations with South Korea in their place.

Western foreign policy officials also seemed to give increasing weight to the fact that, in comparison with Iran, Iraq's economy was clearly the more dynamic of the two. Baghdad had increasingly, in almost ideological aversion to Tehran, intensified its economic ties with the Western world. Politically as well, it was Arab Iraq, not non-Arab Iran, which held a position of leadership among the non-aligned countries, many of which had had longstanding plans to attend the Non-Aligned Conference which was to have been hosted by Iraq.

Finally, and again in terms of any American involvement in settlement of the conflict, it remained a source of widespread concern, one fraught with unpredictable regional and global implications, that the US might send troops to protect what it declared at the time of the Carter Doctrine in January 1980 to be its vital interests in the region. At this writing, it was in no one's interest—neither that of such global actors as Europe, the US, or the Soviet Union, and, among regional actors, least of all the Gulf states, whether Iraq or Iran or the non-combatants—that such a scenario come to pass. Weighing all costs, regional and global actors alike had every reason to reject further passivity toward this conflict and to ensure that neither the Iranian invasion of Iraq, nor the opposite, would be allowed to succeed.