

THE IRAN- IRAQ WAR

An Historical, Economic and Political Analysis

Edited by M.S. El Azhary

DS 318.8 .I694 1984

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS

New York

and

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Centre for Arab Gulf Studies, University of Basra

9 REGIONAL AND WORLDWIDE IMPLICATIONS OF THE GULF WAR

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Introduction

Considering the regional and worldwide implications of the Iran-Iraq 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. Defence 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 Iran and Iraq — 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, any 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.

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 every-

one 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 and let the two protagonists fight it out between themselves. A major reason 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 defence 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 it began to carry with it a potential for some kind of Sunni-Shi'a confrontation on a scale much broader than envisaged earlier. A fourth phase evolved when a number of radical Arab states — Syria, Libya and South Yemen — plus Israel and North Korea, extended various forms of political and military support to Iran. This demonstrated to some analysts that the afore-mentioned third phase, which had seemed to raise the spectre of sectarian conflict, had also effected a coalition of radical Arab states and such unlikely bedfellows as Israel and North Korea in opposition to the moderate-to-conservative alliance backing the heretofore-considered radical Iraq. To still other analysts, 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 has placed the regional role and involvement of the USSR in a position quite unlike any in recent memory.

A fifth phase began in July 1982 with the Iranian invasion of

Iraq. Tehran's motivation in this endeavour probably was to obtain a better bargaining position in the eventual settlement. But Iraq succeeded in repulsing the Iranian forces. Finally, a sixth phase evolved after the failure of the Iranian invasion, and the war reached a military and diplomatic stalemate with no end in sight to this inconclusive situation.

Some Strategic Considerations

Among the many regional and global implications associated with the conflict to date, the war has served to highlight for some analysts the view that Iraq, in geostrategic terms, is in some ways less significant strategically to the Gulf states, the Soviet Union and the West than is Iran. Such analysts consider that as far as the Gulf is concerned, Iraqi ambitions to play a regional security role are seriously constrained by its having the shortest littoral of any of the eight Gulf states: less than fifty miles, with most of that lying in shallow water and of uncertain access and sovereignty — the latter resulting from 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 which 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 matter most in regional as well as 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.

In addition, for Bahrain, Sharjah and Ras al-Khaima, the issue of Iranian irredentism is a serious one. The matter of maritime boundaries between Iran and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states in general is either in legal limbo or regarded as unsatisfactory by one or more of the parties concerned. In other

instances, demographic considerations and their linkage to internal security rank uppermost among the anxieties which the Gulf war has occasioned throughout the region. Despite the fear of an Iranian attempt to export revolution to the south side of the Gulf, however, Iran's actions for the first two years following the ousting of the Shah have been mainly rhetorical.

To be sure, during that period there were incidents of Khomeini's lieutenants inciting Shi'a militants in Bahrain, Kuwait and the Emirates. In each instance, the militants demanded changes in the local political and social systems in order to elevate their status to one more nearly equal to that of the Sunni segment of the populace. None of the disturbances occasioned by such opposition groups during that time, however, came close to provoking the kind of reaction that occurred in December 1981. On that occasion, Iranian complicity was uncovered in a *coup* attempt in Bahrain, led mainly by some 70 Bahraini nationalists plus a dozen Saudi citizens of Shi'a persuasion from the Kingdom's Eastern Province, along with one or two Kuwaitis and Omanis.

Iraq's global geostrategic significance likewise pales in comparison with Iran's. The Soviet Union, for example, borders not Iraq but Iran; and it is no small neighbour, with more than 1,500 miles of common frontier. The day-to-day interaction between Iranian and Soviet citizens probably exceeds that of the Soviet Union with any other Middle Eastern people.

Iraq may have a longer and more comprehensive military relationship with Moscow than does Iran; Libya, Ethiopia and Syria may more effectively serve Soviet ideological and related interests in North and East Africa as well as in the eastern Mediterranean; and South Yemen, in addition to ideological compatibility, may better serve important Soviet needs for access to and a physical presence in the Horn of Africa-Red Sea regions. But none of these countries, in the final analysis, has the global or regional geostrategic significance that characterizes Iran. For these and other reasons pertaining to strategic concerns, the nature and orientation of any Iranian regime, and thus its regional and global role, have never been treated lightly by the superpowers.

Military Uncertainties

It has not been conclusively determined thus far which of the

combatants is militarily stronger. Although Iran is clearly the greater in size and overall population, it remains to be seen whether this can or will be translated into an unmitigated defeat of Iraq. Early in 1982 Syria closed its frontier with Iraq. That leaves open only the routes to and from Iraq by way of Jordan, Turkey, Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. In theory, then, Iran could rely on economic strangulation rather than a deep military incursion to achieve its aims in Iraq.

If clear military victory of either party alone seems improbable, an external factor may be Turkish and Egyptian interests. Turkey, the most militarily powerful Islamic Middle Eastern state, a member of NATO and a neighbour of both countries, is opposed to an Iranian invasion and occupation of Iraq and may intervene if its own national security and related interests are endangered. Egypt, still regarded by many as the most militarily powerful Arab country, is also opposed to Iran in this context and has already enhanced Iraq's 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. Some Kremlin officials undoubtedly regard Iran as the greater strategic plum and retain the hope that some way might be found to further Soviet interests there. Yet Moscow has not had a free hand so far in choosing whether or not to support Iran directly. A potentially enormous cost of heavy Soviet assistance is that it could easily be viewed by most of the more than 20 Arab states as hostile towards their own interests.

In addition, the Soviet Union has its own domestic restraints. It has a vested interest, for example, in not becoming over-extended or precipitously involved in events beyond its borders, given the leadership succession question at home, plus uncertainties along its European and Asian frontiers. Moscow's recent behaviour indicates that it will not allow events among 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 question 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

current make-up, 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 interventionist further is lack of a sufficiently mass-based, pro-Soviet political constituency — however tolerated — and notwithstanding the existence of the communist Tudeh party.

Just as Iran's many geostrategic attributes warrant ongoing Soviet attention in connection with Moscow's hopes to enhance Soviet global and regional interests, so is the reverse argument also valid. To wit: Iran, far more than Iraq, is capable of destabilizing an important region inside the Soviet Union — the Central Asian Soviets — because its Islamic perspective is closer than Iraq's Baathist 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 could result in as much domestic harm inside the Soviet Union as in strategic benefits of a tangible nature.

The prospects for Soviet intervention in Iraq have been similarly bleak. Moscow is without a secure political base there as well, not only with regard to the Baath party's entrenched position in the government, but also, as in Iran, without a mass-based, well-organized constituency which is favourably inclined towards the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, it is unlikely that the Gulf states will be able to finance Iraq in the period ahead as they have been for the first two years of the war. Israel's invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 resulted in demands from Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinians for massive amounts of economic assistance at a time when, due to dwindling financial surpluses and depressed market conditions in the petroleum industry, the Gulf states were without the kinds of resources that were previously at their disposal. In addition, were Syria to succeed in its request for large-scale financing from Saudi Arabia in return for accommodating in Syria a portion of the Palestinian leadership, this could affect the regional balance between Syria and Iraq. Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE and Qatar, all of which have reason to fear Khomeini-inspired *coup* attempts by their own Shi'a Muslims, have already pumped more than \$25 billion into Iraq's war effort, and perhaps would contribute equally massive sums to reach a settlement that, in the best of worlds, 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'a movement to the south side of the Gulf.

There is reason, however, to believe that Iraq will be in need of various kinds of assistance from the West if it is to defend itself credibly against Iran. To do this, it would not be surprising if Baghdad cancelled the 1972 Soviet-Iraqi treaty of friendship. The treaty, to be sure, 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 and Iraq invaded Iran, respectively.

It is unlikely that Iraq would be able to receive direct assistance from the United States, due to the widespread public image in the US of the Baghdad regime as one which continues to harbour and sponsor terrorists. Compounding the difficulty is that, in contrast to the regime in Tehran, Iraq has had a far longer and more multi-faceted relationship with the Soviet Union, with which the Reagan administration is considerably more preoccupied — many would say obsessed — than any US presidency in a quarter of a century. However much Iraq might wish it were otherwise, and hope that the 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 perceived Iraqis as 'bad guys' lives on in Washington.

There is ample regional precedent for the renunciation by an Arab state of a close identification with one or the other super-power. Syria's rupture with the United States, for example, was viewed both regionally and further afield as necessary and expedient in view of Damascus's shift in orientation towards the Soviet Union. A more dramatic, recent and memorable example, however, was Egypt's severance in 1972 of the close relationship between Cairo and Moscow, as a prelude to turning towards the United States. What these previous examples of abrupt regional-global realignment suggest is that if Iraq does in fact find itself in need of assistance from the West in the near future, it may prove more convenient and expedient for Baghdad to turn to a European state, such as France, with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states paying the bill.

Ideology

Many of the implications for possible foreign involvement in this war may turn on the progress of the ideological warfare between the combatants. In this context, many have argued that Iraq is at a distinct ideological disadvantage; they see its Baathist ideology as secular, Western and imported, without any enduring impact to date on the majority of the country's population. By contrast, Iranian ideology is both more indigenous in its roots and more pervasive in its extent, rendering it a far greater challenge to several governments in the region. Given the relatively low literacy rates in both countries, it is only natural that a homegrown variety of Islamic ideology would have greater appeal. In the simplest terms, large masses of people in both countries can and do identify with it, including many of the educated elites.

It is apparent that Khomeini makes little distinction between Saddam Hussein and the Baath party as a whole. Although some Iranian demands have called for his overthrow, 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 Hussein as head of state on one hand, and the Baath 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 to him 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 an Islamic Republic. And Tehran has doubtlessly counted on an anticipated measure of disaffection among Iraq's Shi'a Muslims against Sunni Saddam Hussein in their thrust to unseat him.

Regional Security Implications

Among the more immediate concerns of the Arab Gulf states since the outbreak of the war has been the awareness that both their national security and the jugular of their economic well-being could be dealt a devastating blow literally within minutes by actions taken by one or 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 Co-operation Council (GCC) in 1981. Cultural, sectarian, ideological and demographic issues are also at stake.

The reaction of Saudi Arabia to the Iran-Iraq war has been quite different from that of the other Gulf states. The Riyadh regime has been and remains profoundly disturbed by the Sunni-Shi'a character of the war. Not only has Saudi Arabia usually aligned itself with the traditionalist side of the Sunni Muslim camp, but the fundamentalist foundation of its own regime is the repository of a very different ideology, although in the eyes of many, it is a no less radical interpretation of Islam. Thus, on the sectarian level, Saudi Arabia is especially concerned about the potential of the Tehran government to undermine 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 neighbour to both combatants than Saudi Arabia, having already been bombed several times by Iranian pilots, and lying far more exposed than any other non-combatant due to its crucial logistical role in channelling supplies to Iraq from abroad, Kuwait has been living as dangerously as any GCC state these past 30 months. Kuwait's position in the Baghdad versus Tehran ideological competition has also been different. It is developing as a secular rather than a sectarian state, overtly sympathetic neither to the Saudi Arabian brand of Islam nor to the Iranian interpretation; nor has it been anti-Sunni or anti-Shi'a in its policies and actions.

In terms of the UAE, one has seen, in effect, a replay of Kuwaiti policy, in other words, successfully managing relations with a far more powerful neighbour despite the difficulties emerging out of an asymmetrical power situation. Just as Kuwait has managed to co-exist with Iraq, so has the UAE managed to co-exist with Iran despite disputed claims over islands. In addition, the UAE and Kuwait have built up a reservoir of international goodwill in return for the vast number of economic favours they have provided others through the generosity of their foreign economic assistance programmes — assistance which they have astutely intertwined with ongoing support for their own independence and territorial integrity.

Bahrain, on the other hand, is a special case. As the Arab world's only island state and one of the few Gulf states which lacks the financial wherewithal to ingratiate itself with others through aid

programmes, Bahrain remains acutely apprehensive about the implications of the war for its unique population; as in Iraq, a clear majority of Bahrain's Muslim inhabitants are Shi'a, but the government itself, much as in the incumbent regime in Iraq, is dominated by Sunnis. Oman, which occupies a position on the Strait of Hormuz that puts it in a different situation from that of the other GCC members, has been the Gulf state least worried about the Sunni-Shi'a dimension of the war. The Shi'a population of Oman 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 centred mainly on matters of a strategic nature. Muscat has voiced little concern, for example, about the Islamic nature and orientation of the Tehran government. Rather, its abiding concern has been whether the course of the war might give Tehran cause to rely to a greater extent on the Soviet Union.

In addition to the Arab states of the Gulf, Pakistan — as an Islamic country bordering Iran — figures in the regional security equation. It is important to stress that the Pakistani government has indicated on innumerable occasions that it will not involve its military forces in any combat against Muslim people. The government in Islamabad is still smarting from the process of helping King Hussein in September 1970, when the Jordanian army was fighting Palestinian guerrillas. Although 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 neighbourly relations and underlying affinity between the two peoples: they are much closer to one another than either is to neighbouring Arab nations.

At a lesser level of threat, however, it is possible that the Pakistanis might be willing to use force inside Saudi Arabia if a source of trouble were to arise in one of the regions of the Kingdom, or if it became necessary to guard the oilfields or the holy sites in Mecca. At present Saudi Arabia is said to be financing one or more Pakistani special forces divisions in Pakistan, but with an extra mandate for regional intervention in one of the GCC states should the need arise.

Iraq, due to its Sunni minority regime as compared with Iran's Shi'a majority rule, poses far less of an ideological challenge to regional security than does 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 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, for President Saddam Hussein is confronted by ongoing domestic opposition on one hand, and is vulnerable to the unpredictable actions of Khomeini and the financial largesse of the Arab Gulf states on the other. All of this shortens Iraq's political leash. The Arab Gulf states, for their part, are well aware that should the current Iraqi government fall, it could be replaced by one much more threatening to their security than the incumbent regime. Despite the foregoing, Gulf Arab security concerns have been alleviated in the eyes of some since Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, has leaned increasingly toward the West, even while Iran, under the Khomeini regime, has been doing its utmost to wrench away.

For the West as well as the other Gulf states, the consequence is that the more worrisome of the two countries is clearly Iran, not Iraq. For example, as Iran has moved away from the other Gulf states, Iraq has moved towards them. This has been reflected in Iraq's steadily improved relations with Saudi Arabia, reduced tensions with Kuwait, and a virtual end to Iraqi support of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman. Indeed, since Khomeini came to power, Iraq has forged a broad range of co-operative 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 taken actions on issues of regional importance that have been complementary to GCC needs.

The Iranian revolution and civil war, as well as Iraq's failure to win a quick or decisive victory against Iran, has kept Iraq committed to improved relations with the other Arab Gulf states and Jordan, upon which Iraq will have to rely increasingly for economic and logistical support — to the tune of more than \$22 billion thus far — whether the war continues or reaches a settlement.

Not all Iraqis have discarded the view, articulated with some

force by a group of Baathists to this writer a year before the war began, that Iraqi victory over Khomeini-led Iran could enhance rather than endanger Western interests in the Arab world, most notably among the six GCC states, and in Jordan and Egypt as well. However debatable such a proportion may be, those who maintain this view emphasize that the setback for Western and Gulf states' interests which would occur, should Iran defeat Iraq, is beyond question.

Those upon whom Iraq remains most dependent for supplies, loans and mediation efforts to bring the war to a rapid end — in other words, the Gulf's non-combatant Arab states — have an interest in seeing that Iraq does not emerge from the conflict with the capacity or intent to export its own radical ideology to land beyond its shores.

By contrast, those outside the region who have helped Iran in the conflict would not necessarily view with disfavour an Iran which might, when the war is over, serve as a greater inspiration than it already has for radical and revolutionary forces operating in and adjacent to the Arab Gulf states. Iraq has 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 and military forces available for these purposes, has both.

This was sufficiently demonstrated by the 1981 *coup* attempt in Bahrain. Not knowing whether other 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 Gulf states, with Saudi Arabia at the forefront, reacted swiftly. Within a week, Riyadh and Bahrain had signed a collective security pact designed for consultation 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.

If Iran should press on in its invasion of Iraq, the other Gulf states will have no choice but to reassess seriously their previous thinking about regional security. Iraq, meanwhile, will probably have to find its own means of security. It may find it convenient for the time being to continue working through Egyptian-US and other channels, with a view to reaching an understanding with Western countries on the strategic situation in the Gulf.

At the more immediate level of armaments, Iraq has little choice but to turn to Europe, relying on the supportive financial assistance coming primarily from the GCC states; otherwise, Iraq cannot count on military support from any of the other Arab Gulf states. In its current battle with Iran, Iraq therefore stands alone in the Gulf. Even a differently constituted Syrian government in Damascus can be ruled out as a potential arms supplier at any time in the foreseeable future, not only for previous longstanding political and ideological reasons, but for the more immediate considerations evolving from its six-year preoccupation in Lebanon. In the final analysis, there are only two regional states, Egypt and Turkey, from which Iraq can entertain even minimal hopes of some form of military assistance, albeit not much more than resupplies.

With the foregoing backdrop to the regional situation, two contradictory theories have emerged as to the response of the other Gulf states in the event of an Iranian victory. According to the first, if Tehran becomes more and more dominant in its campaign to continue carrying the war into Iraq with the intent of overthrowing the Baathist regime there, the other Gulf states may begin distancing themselves from the United States so as to curry favour with Tehran and thereby diminish the sense of threat from that capital.

The second theory is that the GCC states may conclude that Iran's objectives preclude a relaxation in tension at any point in the foreseeable future, regardless of what kinds of foreign policy initiatives they may undertake. In this context, the view is that 'whatever we might do would not be enough in the eyes of Tehran, so we had better try to become more secure. Only in this way do we have any hope of the threat being lessened.' For those who feel and argue this way, there is only one credible choice at their disposal: closer military ties with Western countries.

Many may conclude that the latter line of thinking is a non-option due to the political disrepute in which the United States is held by the overwhelming majority of the people in the region. The proponents of this school of thought, however, argue that priorities are priorities, and the need to survive is of such basic significance as to override what, by contrast, they hold to be more ephemeral considerations. Western countries are the only ones with the means, and at the same time the mutuality of interest, as well as a pre-existing network of compatible equipment on the ground in the GCC states, to afford a credible policy option for enhanced

strategic co-operation with these states.

All of this and more, to be sure, hinges directly and immediately on the outcome of events simultaneously taking place in Lebanon. In this regard, the visible association of the United States with the Palestinians in a positive context — for example, by announcing unequivocal support for Palestinian self-determination and/or entering into an open dialogue with the PLO leadership — would provide an essential element for improving any military relationship between the US and the states of the region. If Washington emerges from the current negotiations concerning Lebanon worse off than before, however, it is quite probable that either the Shi'a elements in a number of the GCC states or the resident Palestinian communities — and in some instances, possibly both — will turn on their host governments, managing in the process to elicit a fair amount of support from the indigenous Arab citizenry.

Minorities

The activities of the numerous groups in Iran which had previously endeavoured to win a measure of autonomy, if not secession, from the central government in Tehran have all been held in abeyance, as it were, since the war erupted. One reason has been that the overwhelming majority of Iranians, without regard to ethnic identity, class or sectarian orientation, appear to have coalesced in what is, in essence, a national effort to defend the homeland in the face of the original Iraqi invasion.

An equally telling factor, however, has been that wars tend to create rather cruel conditions; that is, governments tend to bury any source of domestic trouble which, in their eyes, might pose a threat to the successful pursuit of the struggle. In time of peace, governments often respond to rebellious activity on the part of their citizenry with a minimum of force. In time of war, by contrast, the tendency has been for governments to use maximum brutality to defeat such rebels and brand them as traitors. Given this reality and the almost certain response of either of the two governments in this matter, rebellious factions in both countries have been exceptionally cautious in their behaviour since the war broke out.

It is, of course, important to stress the fact that Iraq is not immune from such phenomena; 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 Hussein may anticipate renewed heavy support by Iran for the Kurds in Iraq.

Iran's minority problems, by contrast, are more complex than Iraq's because:

- (1) The groups are larger in number, both in category and in overall size (Kurds, Turkish-speaking Iranians, Arabs and Baluchis, to name the most prominent).
- (2) They reside in areas some distance — and in different directions — from the capital.
- (3) The uncertainty of the central government in Tehran as to whether it will be able to come to terms with these groups, and *vice versa*, is both greater and more recent. The question has been held in abeyance for the past 30 months primarily because of the war with Iraq.

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. If so, might one or more of the minorities in question consider turning to outside groups for assistance: to the Soviet Union, for example, or to kindred groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the GCC states? If so, what might be the response? Would the Soviets be able and/or inclined to extend to any of these groups the kind of aid that they provided, from their presence in South Yemen, for the insurgents in Oman's southern province of Dhofar? And were they to do so, what might be the expected result? Would 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 insurgents to receive aid from non-Soviet sources, what kinds of problems might this entail? More specifically, if insurgents thus aided were to begin to pose a serious threat to the Iranian regime, might that regime, or its successor, in order to survive, be inclined to accept foreign assistance in 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 had been extended?

When the war comes to an end, there will therefore be reason to

query the fate of such groups. Will they renew pressure for greater autonomy and/or a greater voice in the national government? If so, would it be the policy of central government to be accommodating 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, if Baluchistan achieved autonomy or pursued secession from Pakistan, this might increase in significance due to the large number of Baluchis in Soviet-dominated Afghanistan. The Baluchis can provide the Soviet Union with a corridor to the sea, and the fact that they are widely dispersed, not only in Pakistan and Iran but throughout the Arab states of the Gulf, makes them potential insurgents. In addition, the Baluchis are renowned fighters and are regarded as among the most economically resourceful of any minority in the region. Even so, the Soviet Union might well recognize the sagacity of holding in readiness any Baluchi cards which it may possess, with the prospect of using them in the absence of an agreeable relationship at government level.

Linkage

The current situation defies the certainty of precise analysis 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 is established in Lebanon and the Palestinians are engaged in a direct dialogue with the United States, the degree of antagonistic and alienated feelings amongst regimes and people alike towards 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 are seen to be part of process in which the United States is playing a positive role.

On the other hand, if the reverse were to occur, a backlash could be anticipated against the existing moderate regimes, and this could only work to the benefit of Tehran. 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. And Iran advanced its own cause and embarrassed the Arab regimes by being the first — and only —

regional state to provide actual military assistance to the Syrians, Lebanese and Palestinians in the Israeli onslaught in the summer of 1982. This is all the more ironic with regard to the Iran-Israel relationship. Although hard evidence of collusion between Iran and Israel has been elusive to date, each has seen an advantage in operating under cover of the other's military moves, and Israel has been central to Tehran's ability to prolong the war by sending weapons and spare parts.

For their part, the Arab states of the Gulf are acutely conscious of the broad range of regional security problems that these events have occasioned, and they are cognizant of the need to broaden the base of strategic co-operation with Western countries. With regard to the military most powerful of these Western countries, however, they continue to be constrained by heavy US support for Israel, even as Israel persists in expropriating and annexing increasing amounts of Arab land while simultaneously denying Palestinian self-determination.

No Arab state, much less any Gulf state with an influential Palestinian presence, can much longer afford to ignore or avoid challenging the extent to which the US backs Israel and the concomitant erosion of American credibility and regional capabilities. This is especially true today, as those Arab states which have reluctantly taken over Lebanon's role of host to the Palestinian leadership may find themselves confronted with increasingly restless Palestinian civilians already living within their borders.

Diplomacy

There have been numerous unsuccessful attempts by third parties — the United Nations, the Islamic Conference Organization, non-aligned groups, and Turkey, Pakistan and Algeria — to find a peaceful settlement to the war. Apart 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', and opposed to the 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 14 July 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, the US has no formal diplomatic relations with either Iraq or Iran, although some American diplomats are in Iraq. This makes the war especially frustrating for Washington, because although the outcome could be potentially so serious for Western and moderate Arab interests in the Gulf, the US claims to hold little sway over the course of hostilities, despite its means and obligation to constrain 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 the Europeans remain involved in the Middle East, it is overwhelmingly in the context of economic interest. European statesmen apply the proper and locally much-appreciated rhetoric on political questions; but such action has done little to influence US policies and actions on the question of Palestine. Similarly, with regard to bringing the Iran-Iraq war to a close, the Europeans have had little impact to date. An exception, of course, was the mediation effort by the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme between November 1980 and February 1981. The Palme mission, however, was premature and of only marginal significance.

The history of Iraqi-Iranian relations — as well as those of other Middle Eastern countries — demonstrates that only when the two countries themselves are ready for an agreement can other parties play a role. On no occasion in this or earlier conflicts has a unilateral mediation effort by outside parties brought results of any lasting benefit. An example is the Algiers Agreement of March 1975, when the Shah and Saddam Hussein met in Algiers and signed an accord to end their long-standing 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 Hussein 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, as is now well known, neither country has indicated a readiness to resolve the current dispute. As a result,

international initiatives to end the war have provided one or sometimes both of the countries with opportunities to exploit such initiatives for their own purposes. On the Iraqi side, the war in Lebanon in summer 1982 provided Baghdad with its first convenient opportunity for more concerted efforts to conclude the war diplomatically. By doing so, it hoped to avoid the far higher domestic costs which could be expected to be borne by either country in the event of a military defeat. Perhaps Iraq was hopeful that a diplomatic settlement could be achieved before the the Non-Aligned Conference, which was scheduled to open in Baghdad on 6 September 1982. But the fighting continued and the conference was transferred to New Delhi.

On the Iranian side, Tehran's confidence has shown itself defiantly in recent weeks — first by refusing to comply with Arab-led call in OPEC for ceilings on individual oil production by the main producers, and second by rejecting Iraq's offer of a limited ceasefire in the Nowruz area to allow technicians to repair the damaged Iranian oil-wells at the head of the Gulf. The Iranians have flatly rejected any UN actions to end the dispute, giving as their reason the fact 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 increasing anti-Western vehemence was viewed by many of the same observers as counter-productive 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 helping 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 most constrained of the Western powers — the US — has limited itself to lending assistance where possible in the construction of a GCC-centred 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 worse 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 Hussein'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 long-standing 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 the time of 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.