

# *The Arab Gulf and the West*

**Edited by B.R.Pridham**

DS 247 .A132 A62 1985

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS  
NEW YORK

## 8

## A DARKLING PLAIN: US VIEWS OF GULF SECURITY

John Duke Anthony

In a poem entitled 'Dover Beach' published in 1867, two years after the immense human loss in the American civil war and only a few years before the Prussians would lay siege to Paris, the noted British poet Matthew Arnold looked out from the cliffs at Dover. In the lines long since indelibly etched in the minds of many Englishmen, Arnold proclaimed that the world before him was a 'darkling plain/ Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight/ Where ignorant armies clash by night.' Arnold could not have known he was speaking words that would have lost none of their appropriateness more than a century later. Two world wars, to be sure, were yet to come. Since them, however, few conflicts have seemed as much the result of what Arnold termed 'confused alarms' and 'ignorant armies' as the four-year-old Iran–Iraq war.

The horrors of this war have already been, and continue to be, ghastly and hideous beyond description. The causes of its prolongation remain at once more numerous and far more serious than most Westerners, and especially Americans, seem to be aware. One need only consider the following:

- (1) To date, the human losses in terms of numbers dead are approaching the quarter-million mark.
- (2) Those who have lost not life but limo and whose minds and memories have been scarred forever already exceed a million.
- (3) For months on end oil tankers carrying the life-blood not only of the industrial West, but of many a developing country's economy as well, have been considered 'fair game' for each combatant.
- (4) What in other times would have been a highly controversial shipment of US-made surface-to-air Stinger missiles to Saudi Arabia transpired rapidly and with little of the usual Congressional temerity.
- (5) For the first time since they were provided for the purpose of being able to contend with precisely such a scenario, an

American-made but Saudi Arabian-piloted F-15 fighter plane successfully repelled an incipient Iranian air attack over the Kingdom's territorial waters.

Since American technicians were involved in the last-mentioned incident and remain tasked with the mandate to participate in comparable actions to uphold Gulf security in the future, some legitimate questions remain. One is whether Iran has been sufficiently chastened to forego any opportunities it might have in the future to threaten Gulf security in such a fashion again. Another is whether American combat soldiers, in the form of rapid deployment forces aboard destroyers or jet fighters, have moved closer to or further from the Gulf's 'darkling plain'. Although conventional wisdom offers no easy answers to questions such as these, the issues of war and peace which they address require examination of the various US approaches to security in the Gulf.

This chapter, accordingly, deals with four prisms through which important segments of the American public have viewed the Gulf in recent years in terms of important national security and related concerns. More particularly, it focuses on a range of US attitudes and policies towards the conflagration between Iraq and Iran, with special attention to the multifaceted dimensions of the war and its implications for Western and other interests. The chapter also examines American reactions to date to a relatively new phenomenon, one that emerged nearly a year after the Iran-Iraq war began: the GCC. The linkage between regional reactions to Western policies, most especially those of the US and to a lesser extent those of France, on the one hand, and the rise in anti-American and anti-French acts of terrorism in the Gulf and elsewhere, on the other, constitutes a third focus. The chapter concludes with a number of policy recommendations for the US *vis-à-vis* Gulf security.

## **The Iran-Iraq War**

### *American Perceptions*

When the Iran-Iraq conflict degenerated into open warfare in September 1980, following months of desultory Iranian shelling across the border, harassment of Iraqi diplomats, attempted assassination of Iraqi leaders and other tensions, the most immediate fear among

Washington security-minded officials centred on the possible impact of the fighting on oil supplies. In the four years since then, this fear would subside only to resurface as each country lashed out at the other's oil facilities, as Iran mounted attacks against Kuwait and as Iraq threatened Iran's loading terminals at Kharg Island.

That the War of the Darkling Plain has been more perplexing than disturbing to its American observers is due in large measure to the fact that, until quite recently, neither Iraq nor Iran was seemingly able or willing to raise the ante militarily. In reaction to massive mobilisation of troops along its borders by Iran, however, Iraq decided some time ago to break out of that deadlock. Its means thus far have been two-fold, each one signalling Baghdad's desperation and determination to bring the war to an early end: namely, the use of chemical weapons in land operations and French-made Super Etendard aircraft and Exocet missiles to strike at shipping entering or leaving an Iraqi-proscribed combat zone inside Iranian waters.

Tehran has responded with increased terrorist activity in several Arab countries and the tactic of sending human waves into battle against Iraq's superior artillery — sacrificing thousands of teenage children with virtually no military training or cover other than an *allahu akbar*. That both sides have at various times invoked the blessings of the Almighty while charging into battle has hardly helped to clarify matters for a bewildered American populace.

One American author, aware of his fellow citizens' short attention span with respect to international affairs in general, recently went so far as to call the conflict 'the forgotten war'. The truth, of course, is something quite different. The war has never been forgotten, just ignored most of the time. The intermittent fears about threats to the West's and America's oil lifeline, to be sure, continue to grab headlines but even this form of attention quickly recedes when the threats prove or appear groundless.

For most Americans, including a substantial proportion of elected officialdom, the war has simply seemed too far distant from and largely irrelevant to the US. To many, the war has been and remains essentially a conflict between two anti-American regimes. The fact that one of them, Iraq's, propounds the socialist philosophy of Ba'thism, the basic tenets of which are known and understood by fewer than a hundred Americans, only adds to the confusion. That the other one is composed of a revolutionary and exceptionally radical, albeit religious, elite, the internal dynamics

of which are even further removed from American comprehension, has not helped matters. Victory by either of these seemingly inscrutable countries has hardly seemed an attractive prospect for most Americans. In this light, some Americans have wondered, only partly in jest, whether it was not possible for both to lose. History is answering in the affirmative, without a smile: it is possible for both to lose.

But if either loses — *really* loses, as opposed to being worn down to capitulate — there seems little doubt that Japan and most of the West, including the US, also stand to lose. Such a loss could come in the form of a severe curtailment, if not the complete loss for an extended period, of oil from an area which contains 60 per cent of the world's proven reserves. In this light alone, the reasons and needs for seeking an early negotiated settlement would appear to be self-evident.

#### *Moral and Related Dimensions*

But there are other reasons, too, to be sure. One is to prevent the occurrence of acts that will be difficult to avoid in the absence of a settlement — the sending by Iran of yet more human waves of children against Iraqi defences; and the detonation of bombs in some Western — most likely American and/or French — expatriate compound. From this perspective, it can be argued that for the war to continue would be a human tragedy of such monumental proportions that the ongoing attacks on tankers will be looked upon by many as a blessing if they succeed in forcing action to end the conflict.

What began in 1980 as a typical military conflict between two states with a legacy of personal, political, economic, social and historical rivalries has now degenerated — in part because of its protracted length and in part because of the juggernaut nature of the Iranian revolution and the rigid fervour of its leaders. The war has now seen the introduction of chemical weapons by Iraq, with Iran itself preparing to use such weapons in the next stage of the battle. Since being outlawed by the Geneva Convention, the use of chemical weapons by belligerents has been horrific, if limited. In every instance, it has been a sign of the initiator's growing desperation and/or ruthlessness, of wills grown weary to the point of resorting to last resorts. The world has had to wince at the use of chemical weapons by a wearied US army in Vietnam (Agent Orange), by the Vietnamese themselves in their genocidal campaign

against the Cambodians, by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and by the Israelis in Lebanon. Thus the superpowers themselves, in addition to those among their closest allies, have not been the best example of international responsibility when it comes to the use of chemical weapons.

Nevertheless, their introduction by Iraq is a grim reminder of the bestiality of war. It is an indication, as well, of Iraq's willingness to raise the level of certain casualties as a means of deterring an all-out assault by waves of Iranian soldiery. An older generation of Westerners has, perhaps, a feeling of *déjà vu* following the initial use of such weapons in the First World War — namely, the use of poison gas by the Germans — which made the Allies issue gas masks to foot soldiers. The ghastly new weapon's effects were chronicled then by the great British poet Wilfred Owen in one of the greatest war poems of this century, 'Dulce et Decorum Est' (which itself is a gruesome allusion to the Roman poet Horace's classic ode, 'Sweet and Fitting it is to Die for One's Country'). Owen said:

Gas! Gas! Quick boys! — An ecstasy of fumbling,  
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling  
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .

Owen, a lieutenant in the British Army, was himself to die in the Somme offensive in the midst of the gas fumes.

On the Iranian side, the Islamic revolutionary government has employed and continues to use massive numbers of school-age children at the front. As if conscripting students as soldiers were not inhumane enough, large numbers have been sent without weapons to be killed either by detonating mines or by absorbing intensive defensive fire. However, the human wave has as yet proved inconclusive on the battlefield for Iran.

All wars, to be sure, are 'Hell'. The present conflict, however, is clearly producing levels of inhumanity that, by most moral standards, have long since been deemed unacceptable, and, what is worse, should they continue, pose the risk of setting ominous precedents for future conflicts. When a government decimates its own youth, committing a kind of national suicide in the name of the Almighty, and pursues victory with the overriding objective of removing a foreign chief of state from power — considering that

Iraq has already sued for peace — inactivity on the part of outsiders with vested interests in the outcome can hardly be advanced with reason as a viable policy option.

The statistical tabulation of the war's costs, as noted above, are staggering:

- a quarter of a million killed (65,000 Iraqis and about 180,000 Iranians);
- about one million wounded, many with blown-off legs caused by minefields;
- 50,000 Iraqi and 8,000 Iranian prisoners-of-war;
- the devastation of Iranian cities such as Ahwaz, Dezful and Masjid Sulaiman in the south; major destruction in one of Iraq's largest cities — Basra — as well as the Iraqi Kurdistan towns of Penjwin and Garmak;
- Iraqi attacks on the major Iranian oil terminals such as Kharg Island and Bandar Khomeini, the capping of Iranian wells at the Nowruz and Ardeshir fields, and the Syrian shut-off of its oil line from Iraq have continued to bring about a 40 per cent decline in Gulf oil production during the past three years.

Official American reaction to the human waste of lives and to the economic and related losses incurred in damage to property has been guarded, and can be seen elsewhere than the Middle East. The ineffectual US response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was to proclaim an embargo on sales of wheat to the Soviet Union and to withdraw America's athletes from the 1980 Olympic Games. Similarly, the US response to Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was delayed sufficiently — two and a half months passed before President Reagan finally telephoned Prime Minister Begin — for Israel to be able to lay waste much of southern Lebanon and encircle the capital city of Beirut with a firestorm. The latter example of inactivity and delayed decisiveness contributed directly to the results of that war: nearly 20,000 Lebanese and Palestinian civilian deaths, over 30,000 wounded, and close to 300,000 rendered homeless and jobless in the space of a summer. Yet in the face of such devastation — perpetrated via American-made phosphorus, incendiary and cluster bombs fired in violation of US law from American-made planes paid for by US taxpayers — America applied no sanctions against Israel. Even now, two years later, the same Reagan administration continues to lie low, after its abortive

efforts in support of the Gemayel government via US Marines and warships.

Since the US has no diplomatic relations with Iran or Iraq, the option of applying diplomatic sanctions as a reaction to violations of human rights by either side is well-nigh impossible. This would presuppose, of course, that in the event of relations and/or aid, the Reagan administration would be willing to use sanctions to protect human rights, a policy it has shown no inclination to effect anywhere in the world.

If American diplomatic leverage and moral suasion in the combatant countries have been non-existent or insufficient in the light of the circumstances, the same cannot be said for some of the other dimensions of the conflict, i.e. the economic, political and military spheres.

### The Economic Dimension

American economic interests in the immediate region, diverse as they are, have one essential feature in common: the need to secure Gulf oil. This has been and remains the *raison d'être* of the numerous US efforts to foster Gulf security, the prime reason for refinements and variations upon such things as the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF), 'Bright Star', 'Jade Tiger' and 'Accuracy' military exercises and the establishment in January 1983 of the unified US Central Command (CENTCOM). It is the reason why the US sells the kinds of arms it does to Saudi Arabia (\$2.5 billion for 60 F-15s alone); it is the reason why the Shah of Iran had a practically unqualified Nixonian/Kissingerian invitation to buy almost any arms he wanted from the US, until by 1974 the US was selling almost half of its arms world-wide to Iran (\$4.3 billion in that year alone).

As stated by senior administration officials, the following have been for some time the key US economic interests in the Gulf:

- maintenance of stable oil prices and supplies;
- maintenance of security for oilfields, oil refineries and terminals;
- increased co-operation between consuming and producing states as the latter assume a greater role in refining, processing and marketing oil;



- reduced dependence of both the US and other major consumers on Gulf oil.

These form a major portion of the hub of a very large wheel of American interest in the Gulf. From this hub spin financial, political, geopolitical and military concerns as various as securing naval visitation or base rights in such places as Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and monitoring domestic policy for American petroleum in salt domes under the earth. The need to keep the region's oil lanes open and secure has prompted everything from the stationing of nearly two dozen US ships of various kinds 'over the horizon' in waters east of the Strait of Hormuz to worse-case scenarios for American — or, as argued by some in the administration, even Israeli — armed intervention to deter potential or actual threats to Gulf security.

The US has attempted to secure its economic interests in the Gulf by fostering the already strong financial and commercial interdependence between the US and the area. This interdependence is evidenced by the flow of funds into US investments; the repatriation of US oil companies' profits and dividends; and US exports of goods and services to Arab states. Of additional importance, the \$75 billion exported from the US to the Arab Gulf states in 1983 provided nearly 3 million jobs for American workers by the US government's own reckoning that every \$1 billion in exports pays for 40,000 full-time jobs. Still more weight is given to US-Gulf interdependence, and concern for regional security is justified by the fact that another 75,000 US citizens live and work in the Gulf. In Saudi Arabia alone, there are 1,000 US firms conducting business, making profits and providing jobs.

On the Arab side of these economic and commercial relationships, concern exists that revenues from oil be spent on investments in the US that will continue to produce income in the event that future oil income drops. And even as the West continues to need Gulf oil, these states need to ensure revenues with which to purchase Western goods and technology. If it is in Gulf interests to industrialise, it is at least as much in the interest of the US and other Western countries to encourage the process. This guarantees that the Gulf will need huge inflows of cash to pay for imports and expertise, which in turn is a safeguard of the Gulf countries' own interest in maintaining reasonable levels of oil production and export levels.

Some Americans have made observations to the effect that a reasonable and prudent policy for the US would be to lessen its involvement in the Gulf. The reasons given are the following:

- (1) There is a global oil glut.
- (2) From the point only a few years ago where between 17 and 21 per cent of American energy imports came from the Gulf, the US nowadays imports only 3 per cent of its oil from the area.
- (3) Mainly Europe and Japan, but not the US, stand to be affected by an oil slow-down.

The proponents of this view do not attempt to negate reality, they simply do not address it. The reality is this:

- (1) There is a 'glut' only so long as oil flows out of the Gulf and into the international market. The minute that sequence is broken, there is no 'glut'.
- (2) With the demands that would be made on Western reserves in the event of a Gulf oil slow-down, the US position would be a good deal less than autarkic.
- (3) Even if it were true that only Europe and Japan would be affected by the cut-off, the blow that would be dealt to the Western economic structure by European and Japanese distress — with European and Japanese dependency ratios on Gulf oil holding at 40 and 60 per cent respectively — would be tremendous.

A short-term interruption in or minimal reduction of the quantity of oil exported through the Strait of Hormuz could be accommodated by temporary alterations in supply patterns, thanks to surplus production capacity. However, a total cut-off of Gulf oil cannot be accommodated at or near mid-1984 consumption levels. Increasing numbers of vessels and crews are already refusing to enter Gulf waters.

The implications of any cut-off in Gulf oil supply would be far-reaching and ominous. Such an interruption would produce a devastating combination of world-wide inflation and recession, a gripping financial crisis, and concomitant high levels of unemployment. If the cut-off were to endure, the economic and political consequences would be dire indeed.

To approach the economic dimension of Gulf security, it is helpful to keep in mind four realities which, US preferences to the contrary notwithstanding, cannot be brushed aside. One, already mentioned, is that there is only a 'glut' of oil so long as petroleum flows from the Gulf and into the international market. The minute that the sequence is broken, the 'glut' would disappear. Writing in the *Armed Forces Journal* in October 1983, Anthony H. Cordesman has put it another way:

The energy crisis did not vanish; it became so bad that it helped force the industrialized states into the worst recession in the post-war era and many Third World oil importing states into a full-scale depression. We traded gas lines for unemployment lines, and a capital crisis over recycling oil costs for a capital crisis over economies unable to pay for previous oil imports.

It seems apparent now — though not to these critics of sustained US involvement in the Gulf — that the reason why a worse oil crisis did not follow the Shah's fall and the Iran–Iraq war was because Saudi Arabia raised its production levels. In 1980 this meant producing two to three million bpd more than its development plan required in order to meet losses resulting from the Iran–Iraq war. Although in the first half of 1983 — at the recession's worst hour — the Kingdom's production had slipped to one-third of its 1980 production level, it still produced 7 per cent of the world total, 10 per cent of the non-communist total, and 23 per cent of the OPEC total. More important, the US Department of Energy reported in 1983 that, regardless of conservation and alternative energy supplies, the non-communist oil nations will begin a slow but steady rise in oil imports by 1990.

A second reality is that the present 'oil glut' has been the result more of recession than of Western ingenuity in reducing its dependency on Gulf oil. The recession has reduced oil imports, but it has also hindered the growth of alternative energy resources. Further, more than any other industrialised nation in the world over the past decade, the US has fallen far shorter of its goals to increase domestic and/or alternative energy supplies. The development of nuclear power, synthetic fuels and the mining of coal have all lagged behind projected needs, impressions from the US Department of Energy's projections to the contrary notwithstanding.

The one undeniable improvement in the West's oil dependency,

a third reality, is in consumption. Since the 1973 oil embargo, the ratio of oil consumption to GDP has dropped 20 per cent for those states in the industrialised OECD countries. Even so, current indications are that, from now on, such improvements in pushing consumption levels further downward will at best be modest and, as some have indicated, may already have peaked. Certainly, for even the most casual viewer of the kinds of US cars on the roads, it does not take much to realise that the middle-size economy car is making a comeback after being shoved aside by the compacts.

Reality number four pertains to the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR). Currently the SPR is capable of guaranteeing operations in the US for 90 days. A slow-down in Gulf oil shipments, let alone a cut-off, could change these figures rather abruptly, placing extraordinary strains on the Reserve, with the ultimate prospect of draining it completely.

Finally, if the NATO alliance was shaken and severely tested over the Soviet gas pipeline to Europe and the placing of US nuclear-tipped Pershing IIs and Cruise missiles in Europe, it would be shaken to the roots by a significant shut-down of oil exports from the Gulf.

In spite of an impressive array of statistics demonstrating extensive US–Gulf states economic interdependence and in spite of the millions spent on US programmes to increase exports and facilitate trade, the nature of US officialdom is such that as one part of the Federal bureaucracy works to increase trade with the Gulf, another part works to hinder it. These barriers come in the form of the anti-boycott legislation, stiff US licensing requirements, and the predictably public, frequently hostile, Congressional scrutiny that arises over most, if not all, proposed arms sales to any Arab state.

With regard to Arab investments in the US, the furore which existed in the mid-to-late 1970s and into the 1980s has largely died down except for isolated complaints. Present US investment from Saudi Arabia alone, mainly in US government securities, has been estimated at \$70 billion. The American capital market, however, has proved large enough to convince most people that it would be very difficult for any outsider group of investors to control much of anything even if they wanted to. It is clearly in US interests to strengthen the financial links which benefit not only Arab investors looking for a safe, diverse place to invest, but also the American companies whose balance sheets are strengthened, thereby helping the overall US balance of payments position. Inasmuch as Arabs

invest in the US as a 'favourite' financial haven, the theory is that greater potential thereby exists for the US to garner favour and dependability on the part of the investor. To the extent that this occurs, the result is beneficial in terms of creating a mutuality of interest in seeking ways to enhance the region's security.

### **Military Dimensions**

Four weeks after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, in his State of the Union address in January 1980, President Carter enunciated what in effect became the first expansion of the Monroe Doctrine in 150 years and, to some, a unilateral extension of the NATO alliance to cover the Gulf. The Carter Doctrine proclaimed:

Any attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

To President Carter's credit, he explained that the 'grave threat' to Gulf security had to be met by 'collective efforts' and 'consultation and close co-operation with countries of the region'. But just what would constitute an assault and how extensively the US might be prepared to pursue diplomacy before resorting to military force, not to mention what kind of military force might be utilised, have all been the subject of keen debate at the highest levels inside the US government and throughout the foreign policy and national security establishment at large. A major flaw, many felt, was President Carter's failure to address a far more likely scenario — that control or curtailment of oil supplies could be effected not by an outsider, but rather by a belligerent insider, such as revolutionary Iran.

Over-extension, awkwardness of supply lines and difficulty of securing base rights in a region simultaneously both more dependent on, and antagonistic towards, the US — these and other factors have hindered the major instruments created to render the Carter Doctrine credible: CENTCOM and its predecessor, the RDF. The risks of far-flung deployment of a country's military forces, indeed, have been noted since time immemorial by commentators dating back as far as Thucydides. The Soviet Union,

in such circumstances, has an immediate advantage over the US, were either to threaten military escalation in the Gulf, inasmuch as Soviet aircraft are a mere two to three hours' flying time away from Aden and Socotra, in South Yemen; Baku, in the Soviet Union; or Afghanistan. The US, by contrast, needs between 14 and 17 hours' flight time to arrive from the US mainland.

In the wake of the Carter Doctrine, public sentiment expressed in the rush to protect the Gulf spanned the gamut from hawkish warnings of a state national emergency to cooler minds pointing out the fact that no Arab state, Egypt included, appeared inclined to accede to a US request for bases. But the fervour was, and has remained, quite real. At a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, for example, on 6 and 7 February 1980 concerning the issue of US bases in the region, Richard Foster of the Center for Strategic Studies declared, 'The process of disintegration of the Arab tribal states in the Persian Gulf is well advanced: the Saudi Arabian government may have only a few months of life left unless we make serious moves to shore it up.' The regime in Riyadh did not oblige Mr Foster. Four years later the Kingdom is arguably stronger than before, as a result not of American rapid deployment forces coming to its rescue, but of its own successful defensive operation of fighter planes against Iran.

From the outset the realities which the RDF faced made it — so the pundits said — neither rapid, nor deployed, nor a force. Much of this sceptical opinion has been mitigated by successful joint manoeuvres between Oman (plus Egypt, Kenya, Somalia and Sudan) and the US in 1981 and 1982. Yet the inherent difficulties remain.

A 40-year old concept, the RDF essentially was an idea whose time had come; it was dusted off and launched. The force, made up of 300,000 troops and accompanying arms, would stand ready to swoop in by air and sea in a non-NATO area of crisis. Bases would be sought, new military equipment for the special force designed. Ten billion dollars were appropriated in the 1981 budget for the force's first instalment.

According to CENTCOM leaders, a fighter squadron, plus 800 paratroopers and a limited number of B-52 bombers, could be in action in the Gulf within 48 hours (with another 3,000 troops to follow by the end of the week). Impressive as this may seem, critics stress that any sustained action beyond that point would most likely be severely circumscribed, owing to geographic and political

considerations. The amount of time required to transport an infantry division to the Gulf could easily require an entire month.

In mid-1980 the American military owned 271 C-141s and 77 C-5As to transport troops and services all over the world. According to mobilisation and power-projection authorities, it could take as many as 823 C-141s to airlift a division to the Middle East, an impossibility given the existing situation. Of related concern, the dispatching of C-141s and C-5As to handle contingencies in the Gulf would risk leaving other strategic areas (most notably Europe) unprotected.

In a major effort to improve airlift capability, the Reagan administration requested \$81 million in 1981 to begin development of a new transport plane, the CX, which would be capable of carrying the XM-1, the new American battle tank, several thousand miles non-stop. The earliest date by which the CX could be made available for use in Gulf security or any other contingencies, however, is 1985. Of related concern, its production costs have already exceeded by 500 per cent the initial \$81 million estimated costs of procurement.

In addition to major problems of a heavy air-transport nature, Admiral Kidd, in the 1980 Senate hearings mentioned above, noted a particular range of difficulties which confront the US Navy in the Middle East. The following is a summary:

- (1) The Suez Canal can be closed in a few hours but it can take up to a year or longer to open.
- (2) Although it took 70 days from the US West Coast to sail to Vietnam, the operative conditions for ships making the journey were relatively benign — no naval or air threats were encountered. The Middle East is different. (The legitimacy of Admiral Kidd's concern was amply demonstrated in the US–Druze encounters in 1984 off the coast of Lebanon.)
- (3) The US aircraft-carrier fleet has declined from 24 to 12 since Vietnam.
- (4) The Soviet Union has five times the logistics-base potential and five times the number of battleships in its 'surge force' stationed in the Black Sea.

As for the effort to secure bases, the results have been minimal. Kenya, thus far the closest collaborator in such contingency planning although located furthest from the Middle East, offered

the US Navy the use of Mombasa as a regular port-of-call. The Somali government, however, demanded too high a price — five times the \$15 billion package offered for American access to facilities at Berbera. Oman, the one Gulf state to have participated thus far in the aforementioned joint manoeuvres, agreed to permit the US only limited use of an airfield, and conditional access to three other air bases. Hard and fast bases with even the most minimal trappings of sovereignty or exclusivity of access and jurisdiction, however, have been elusive. The main reason: the considerable unfinished business between the US and these countries on issues pertaining to the Palestine problem and the status of Jerusalem. Too close a US embrace of any Gulf state could become especially problematic in terms of the domestic legitimacy and regional political acceptability of the countries concerned.

In view of such difficulties, a short-range alternative to the RDF and CENTCOM has been suggested: a joint Arab force made up of Egyptian and/or Jordanian and Saudi Arabian troops. Though the forces entailed would be formidable, prior agreement on politically thorny issues would have to be reached, among which not the least is Egypt's continued expulsion from the Arab League. A contemporary irony is that because of the Camp David Agreements, Egypt's military is politically hamstrung from helping to protect the most vulnerable among the Arab states from attacks that have little or nothing to do with Israel.

Among suggestions put forward by naval specialists for improving CENTCOM's capabilities are the following:

- (1) provide it with assigned troops (rather than designating forces that are also earmarked for other contingencies);
- (2) restructure the Marine Corps so that it has no role other than that of CENTCOM;
- (3) disband the 82nd Airborne Division at Ft Bragg since, in recent years, the helicopter has replaced the parachute as a means of putting men behind enemy lines;
- (4) design strategic airlift solely on the basis of moving troops and not equipment (CENTCOM's tanks should be pre-positioned in the region and resupply carried out by fast SL-7 ships);
- (5) provide a Marine amphibious unit for availability of landing in a benign environment;
- (6) upgrade mining countermeasures (to be able to resist more



effectively any regional or other powers or groups which might seek to threaten navigation in the Strait of Hormuz).

One reassuring realisation about the Strait has been the near impossibility of anyone being able to block it by mining because of currents and the width of passage. More likely scenarios, however, include those being played out at this moment: Iran attempting air strikes on ships moving towards Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq; and Iraq blocking Iranian exports and imports by attacking tankers in the northern Gulf, the effect of which could be to seal the Gulf from international navigation.

Apart from the inherently flawed attempts at building a capacity for direct intervention in the Gulf via the RDF and CENTCOM, US military projections into the region continue to take the form of arms sales and, since the Iran–Iraq war began, the dispatch of AWACS — radar planes — to Saudi Arabia. Many analysts, however, have for several years voiced concern that the Reagan administration's emphasis on the military dimension to Gulf security has been overplayed and that far more attention should have been given to the political dimension.

### **Political Dimensions** ✓

The political and geopolitical dimensions of American approaches to Gulf security have taken several forms, each covering a number of concerns and all exacerbated by the outbreak and prolongation of the Iran–Iraq war. The most basic of these concerns has always been the objective to reduce the vulnerability of both the oilfields and the production facilities themselves and their links via pipeline and shipping to markets in the West. Successive American administrations have had to formulate foreign policies that consider everything from the possibility of another oil embargo by the Arab producers, xenophobic Islamic orthodoxy which aims at toppling regimes and which could curtail production, and Soviet encroachment in the region.

US political responses to these vulnerabilities have ranged from increased economic and security assistance to key states, through attempts to engage countries in the region in a 'strategic consensus' on the lines of the ill-fated Baghdad Pact, in order to 'face off' the Soviet Union, to an international energy-sharing agreement such

as that which led to the establishment of the International Energy Agency (IEA), in an effort to ensure adequate oil supplies in the event of a halt in Gulf oil shipments. These all bear some examination.

The transfer of control of energy resources vital to the industrialised countries to a group of countries in the cradle of civilisation, and their use of influence implicit in such a shift, would have been impossible to imagine during the colonial era, at a time when resort to military force was considerably less problematic and more 'legitimate' than it has come to be today. In effect, US foreign policy formulation and execution has become constrained and conditioned by the need to weigh more heavily than ever before the interests, views and needs of the oil-producing countries. No less important, the needs of US allies for adequate energy supplies have also had to rank high among the factors determining US foreign policy objectives and activities.

The spectre of another Arab oil embargo on the scale of the 1973 embargo cannot be entirely discounted. However, the response of the Gulf states, and indeed all Arab states, during Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was largely one of 'non-performance'. In addition, many US policy-makers have begun to conclude that the infrastructure of mutual need between Arab investors and American markets has become so tight, if not binding, that attempts to implement another embargo for political reasons would likely have as savage an effect on producers as on buyers.

Revolutionary upheaval in the oil-producing states, however, is a catalyst for change that the US has seemed chronically unable to foresee, understand or accommodate. Much of this has to do with America's isolationist tendencies as a world culture and its general unfamiliarity with the inner dynamics of the Islamic world and the needs, interests and concerns of its policy-makers. This remains so in spite of the existence of close to 100 mosques in the US and a community of Arab-Americans that exceeds 3 million. The limited intellectual and political understanding among Americans who deal with the Islamic world extends even to the highest government levels.

As for the Tehran regime, the US has been stymied in dealings with the Iranian revolution, both politically and militarily. President Carter's abortive mission to rescue the hostages with a helicopter raid was a signal that political dialogue had failed. Iran today is exporting revolution with a fervour that, to many

Americans, makes Castro appear timid in contrast. Iran's declared intention has been to hasten the overthrow of the conservative Gulf states and a number of other countries. The process of fomenting internal unrest has rapidly become one of the most destabilising factors in the region, preying upon the expectations aroused in the early development process, the frustrations of unfulfilled wants and the negative reaction of some conservative elements to modernisation, as well as the revolutionary and radical elements existing in all societies.

This destabilising impact threatens Western relations with the Gulf states and may become a great boon to the Soviet Union. Though Moscow is as uncomfortable with Khomeini as is the West, turmoil in the Gulf would certainly adversely affect the West, not the Soviet Union, and would consequently benefit the latter. But because of domestic constraints (Iraq was only recently taken off the proscribed list of foreign countries which Washington labels as 'terrorist nations'), US manoeuvrability to counter Iran through what would seem a natural ally in Iraq is, in this case, limited. Thus, it is no surprise to many that France supplied Iraq with the Super Etendard fighters and Exocet missiles that may yet prove to be the necessary violent spur to a turning-point in the war.

France, being both more reliant on Gulf oil and less hindered by a domestic lobby with the interests of a foreign country on its agenda, was merely pursuing French interests in its decision to supply Iraq with such military assistance. By contrast, one has to note the exceptional difficulty Iraq encountered in seeking two General Electric engines for its naval forces from the US in 1980 at the commencement of the war. The Israeli lobby fought the sale tooth and nail until it was finally withdrawn.

Of greater concern is the threat Iran currently poses not only to Gulf states but all states of the region. Terrorist attacks and support for insurrection against Lebanon (as well as, anomalous as it may sound, Syria at Hama) all have had their Iranian component, as did the bombings in Kuwait and the repeated disruptions by Iranian pilgrims in Mecca and Medina. The toppling of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq by the revolutionary fervour of Iran, and its replacement by a government more compatible with the regime in Tehran, would almost certainly produce a major shift in the regional balance of power at the head of the Gulf as well as its eastern border, leaving the Arab states of the lower Gulf perilously exposed. The extremes of xenophobic orthodoxy could

also be expected to continue pressing for the exclusion of US and other Western influence from the area. It does not take a major political analysis to note that most of the countries in question host individuals with major grievances against the West — some for the recent devastation of Lebanon and many more for the ongoing disenfranchisement of the Palestinians — that could propel radicals into positions of greater influence, if not real power.

Complicating the US political and diplomatic approach to Gulf security from the outset, however, has been Washington's consistent view not of itself but of the Soviet Union in the role of external villain. In statement after statement released for public consumption, high officials have harped on the nefarious and seemingly ubiquitous direct or indirect influence of Soviet involvement in major setbacks to American interests in the region for over a decade. Little attention, and even less acknowledgement, has been given to the credibility of local sentiments that it is regional reaction to American actions and policies, not local attraction to Moscow or Communism, that has been of greatest assistance to the expansion of Soviet interests and involvement in the area.

From the middle 1970s, beginning in the last days of the Nixon administration and continuing through the Ford and Carter administrations and into the Reagan years, the region has been alternatively referred to as a 'zone of ferment' and the 'arc of crisis'. Explicit in the exposition of such a conceptual framework is the view that the Gulf and adjacent areas are crisis-ridden, and that such crises as exist would be less threatening in terms of American and other Western interests were it not for Soviet meddling. The fact that close empirical examination throughout the 1970s showed the Soviet Union to be enjoying a more advantageous position than the US in only four,<sup>1</sup> or barely one-eighth, of the Middle East's 27 states and, apart from Iraq, in none of the Gulf countries, seemed of little relevance.

One could scarcely find an official US voice willing to give thoughtful, still less objective, consideration to the view that the Soviet Union, as a major Middle Eastern neighbour, unlike the US, has a legitimate concern for developments along its southern frontier, the one Soviet border where its immediate neighbours are not part of the communist community.

One wing of American analysts perceived a Soviet master plan, a kind of pincer movement, aimed at Iran and Saudi Arabia from Soviet positions of influence in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and South

Yemen. Unless the US mounted a counter-offensive to these developments, many contended, the US would have no one to blame but itself if further Soviet inroads were made at American expense. Only a distinct and consistently overruled minority argued that while concern with Soviet interest, growing involvement and possible intentions was fully warranted, attention none the less ought also to be given to other views. Among these was the view that the Soviet positions in the three aforementioned states might not have resulted from a grand design; that the US itself might have had something to do with these regimes moving away from the Western sphere; and that the reason these 'losses' occurred might also have had something to do with possible Soviet and local perceptions of a US lack of will to contest Soviet advances and/or a general indifference to the importance of those three countries in the overall calculus of American national interests. According to this view, of additional relevance was the fact that the Shah's and Haile Selassie's regimes were, after all, repressive ones and the US had provided little more than minimal assistance to the independence movement in South Yemen. The theory that the US 'handed' the Soviet Union its position of influence in these three countries on a 'silver platter' has never been popular among US Middle East specialists. Like many theories that contain a fair amount of truth, however, the 'silver platter' interpretation is one that refuses to go away.

Although less pronounced under Presidents Ford and Carter, the pre-eminence of the globalists over the regionalists was enshrined in the Reagan administration. President Reagan continues to hold fast to his lifelong view that wherever American interests suffer setbacks abroad one can usually expect to find a Soviet gain and probably, although not always, Soviet involvement in the events that led to the reversal. It did little good to note that Iraq, by the late 1970s, had become one of the world's most thorough purgers of Communist Party members or that Iran had both banned the local Tudeh Communist Party and executed or imprisoned most of its leaders.

With the exception of Afghanistan, from 1979 onwards none of the proponents of the 'Soviet behemoth' school could point to actual Soviet thrusts into the Gulf — although many regularly came close to implying as much in the popular press. The case was made to rest instead on a presumed American abandonment of the Gulf. Weary, weakened and tending to be wary of additional commit-

ments as a result of Vietnam, the US — so reasoned this school of thought — was itself to blame for the drift of events in the Gulf in the middle 1970s. To the globalists, it required little to sustain an analogy that what had happened to Europe at the end of the Second World War could as easily happen again in the Gulf if the West did not wake up in time to see and ready itself to oppose the threat. As the argument went, the Soviet Union, by American default, would recognise the inability of local states to fill the so-called power vacuum created by the withdrawal of Britain and, tempted by the lure, would move in itself.

Although area specialists challenged these formulations from the outset, their voices were few in number and drowned out by others more vociferous and close to the nexus of power. Self-assured that their diagnosis was correct, the globalist policy-makers geared up. What was needed at a minimum was a rapid build-up of conventional forces capable of protecting American and allied interests in the Gulf. Such a force, in the view of those charged with shaping its structure and mission, would at a minimum have to be able to deter the Soviet Union and serve simultaneously as a tripwire to signal US willingness to deploy nuclear weapons in the event that deterrence failed.

The resulting Carter Doctrine was seen by the globalists as the natural culmination of the points of view they had articulated. Regional specialists, however, have been troubled from the outset by the doctrine's failure to address any threat to Gulf security other than an external (i.e. Soviet) one. But to some globalists even the stern sabre-rattling of the Carter Doctrine was seen as a sign of appeasement, of letting the local states off too easily. What was really required to make the Gulf secure, they advised, was the projection and dramatic demonstration of raw American military power.

A great many military logisticians considered that an American ability to project power, in the absence of secure bases within the region, was — and many insist remains — a *non sequitur*. In their view, deterrent credibility, let alone effective defence capability, rests not on having to send troops from the US, European, Pacific or East Coast commands but from within or as near as possible to the region itself. Herein lay the principal and, to date, enduring rub. If bases could not be found within the region, the argument went, then Israel or Egypt would be asked to play this role. That there were no takers for this view was disappointing but not

undaunting. Secretary of State Alexander Haig proceeded with planning as if near-unanimous opposing arguments had not been made, as did Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. These officials, in fact, were building on policies begun by their respective predecessors, mainly Zbigniew Brzezinski and Harold Brown.

In the midst of the ensuing debate over what the nature and orientation of America's Gulf security policies should be, former US Ambassador to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Hermann F. Eilts, had sobering words to say about the Soviet Union:

While I do not share the view that the Soviet bear is about to implant himself on the shores of the Persian Gulf, neither is complacency in order. United States efforts to strengthen the security posture of the Gulf area need to be pursued. A primary requirement for success is . . . *refurbishing American political credibility in the Gulf area and re-establishing a political climate in which some measure of confidence in American willingness to pursue evenhanded area-wide policies is restored*. Simply ringing military alarm claxons will not persuade most Gulf leaders. They want constructive American political actions on bilateral and area-wide problems. (italics mine)

In keeping with the foregoing line of argumentation, others have pointed out that the need for political sophistication and confidence was hardly helped by the confrontational style which the US has adopted at times towards the Soviet Union in its approach to arms control or by the more recent freezing of the Geneva talks on arms limitation. While consideration of US policies towards the Soviet Union remains a source of interest to local security officials who view the global scene, of far greater relevance and concern to most Gulf state elites continue to be US attitudes and actions towards issues of regional and national concern. In this light, US actions in Lebanon and largesse which enables Israel to remain in occupation of the south of Lebanon, the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights have done little to convince the Gulf states that the US has grown political muscle to add to its military bones.

A final political US approach towards Gulf security (and hence towards its own security) has been somewhat successful, albeit fraught with complications. The result of this effort, launched in the aftermath of the 1973 oil embargo, is the IEA in Paris. The IEA was set up to deal with both the short-term and the long-term

vulnerability of American, European and Japanese energy import dependence. Promoted by the US as a symbol of unity, the negotiations leading to its formation and the provisions for its actions reveal the diversity of interests involved. These divergencies are so numerous and problematic as to raise serious questions in the minds of many about the IEA being truly able to assist in rendering Gulf security a reality.

US interests appear to have prevailed, in the sense of the IEA being viewed by many as a counter-force to OPEC. Certainly, a major objective is to avoid cut-throat competition which could easily occur among countries seeking to outbid one another for scarce oil supplies. To reduce vulnerability, the agreement provides for the creation and maintenance of an emergency sharing mechanism for the Western countries and Japan. All IEA participants have pledged themselves to the creation of a strategic petroleum reserve equal to 60 days of oil imports.

The objective of combining support for this build-up of energy stocks and securing agreement on a sharing formula was to deter future use of the 'oil weapon' by warning producing countries that future supply disruptions would cost them far more than in the 1973 embargo. Should deterrence fail, the hope is that the scheme of drawing on stocks and administering the sharing mechanism could provide just the right amount of cushion to allow time for more effective negotiation and political settlement. The current war in the Gulf tests this latter aspect of the sharing arrangements assumptions severely, however, since the US has no diplomatic relations with either combatant. At the same time, US relations with Syria — which has been aligned mainly with Iran — have seldom been as low as since the US bombing of Syrian artillery positions in December 1983, the first-ever such attack by the US on an Arab country. Sixty days, or even 90 to 120 days — at least as far as the US is concerned — may fall far short of being enough.

The IEA, on balance, appears to be geared best to deal with possible short-term emergency situations. As a parallel measure, undertaken almost in tacit admission of uncertainties about the efficacy of the IEA approach, Saudi Arabia has been floating its own reserves, estimated currently to be in the 60 million barrels range. Progress on other fronts of the accord, however, has been minimal. IEA members were supposed to engage in long-term co-operative efforts to develop energy alternatives, which has not happened. The Euro-Arab Dialogue on this issue continues, but



an American component of any significance in so far as credibility is concerned has been lacking.

The Reagan administration's inability to appreciate the extent of European opposition to the placement of US Pershing II and Cruise missiles in Europe during 1983–84, as well as its reluctance to acknowledge the European need for a Soviet gas pipeline, has hardly helped matters in this direction.

Apart from divergent national interests and policies among IEA member countries, other problems have evolved from different views on the IEA's principal function. From the US perspective, for example, the IEA centre-piece is clearly its sharing mechanism. In this regard, the IEA reflects the American preoccupation with a possible repeat performance of the 1973 embargo in which, most concede, neither Europe nor Japan but the US would be the primary target. The US's European allies, while discounting the possibility of a new embargo on curtailment being directed at them, have no quarrel with the wisdom of developing and maintaining emergency stocks. With regard to the emergency sharing mechanism, however, doubts regarding the commitment of all the participants are substantially greater. To the degree that stocks plus sharing do in fact deter, most agree that this is all well and good. Should deterrence fail, it is difficult to overlook the fact that, since the IEA was established there has never been Allied support for pursuing a confrontational approach to Gulf security, whether on the matter of oil supply or on any other issue. The Europeans and Japanese, in short, rightly perceive that their risks of being targeted are increased by virtue of their association with the US. More problematic, in their view, is that in the event of another embargo in which the US is the direct target, activation of the emergency sharing mechanism requires that the Europeans and Japanese risk incurring the hostility of the oil producers, sharing available supplies with an embargoed US, and thereby threatening their own security of supply. This summarises the IEA's dilemma.

Considering the pitfalls of direct US military involvement in the Gulf, defence of those Gulf states threatened by aggression seems best served by a bolstering of their self-defence capabilities. As anyone who witnessed the spectacle of the 1981 AWACS debate in the US knows, however, getting even radar planes to aid the Gulf states through an American Congress determined to avoid giving offence to Israel has brought into question whether the judicious sale of a range of US defensive equipment to the Gulf states is

politically feasible. That Israel itself is in the meantime encountering almost no opposition in gaining Congressional approval for its own Lavi fighter-plane project, which will make it a top-flight arms-export competitor world-wide, is hardly lost on those who would wish to rely on US credibility.

Despite these and related kinds of difficulties in the political and diplomatic spheres, US ties with a number of Gulf states are likely to continue to be broadly based and cover many areas of common interest, including that of national security and self-defence. As is always the case when relationships between two countries are soundly based, US–Gulf relations, if they are to survive and prosper, must be a two-way street; at frequent intervals it is important to consider what is valuable for the Gulf states and what is valuable for the US. In this context, the self-defence of these states would appear to be pre-eminently an example of joint concern and interest.

The Arab Gulf states see a number of advantages in their relations with the US, most significantly on the political level. Profoundly anti-communist and vigorously opposed to the expansion of destabilising influences in the region, they look to the US as a nation of world stature with which they share a range of common principles. Every administration from Nixon to Reagan has assessed these states' requests as reasonable — albeit limited and relatively small — and well within their capability to absorb and employ.

On the transferability concern, successive administrations have had to acknowledge that there is no ultimate guarantee that military equipment sold to one state will not end up at some point being transferred to another. The serious constraints in the Foreign Military Sales procedures, however, have been of some help, and nothing to date has shown that any of the Gulf states has ever intended to do anything other than respect US wishes in this regard. In garnering reciprocal support for its concerns about illegal transfers, and even resales of American weaponry by other countries, the US has been far less successful.

Of importance in this regard is the fact that the Arab Gulf states have chosen non-US suppliers when they have purchased military equipment for other Arab countries. Most of the concern, to be sure, would be lessened if appropriate distinctions between transfer of hardware and transfer of capability were made. The latter implies the transfer of hardware *and* the necessary supporting

services, training or trained manpower, and sources of supply — really the only meaningful kind of transfer. In these vital areas, it is no accident that the equipment sold by the US to the Gulf states has tended to require US support long after the sale; the arrangements have been structured to make it exceptionally difficult to transfer arms in such a way that they could be effectively deployed. There is no clearer case in point than the AWACS. Saudi Arabia has it; the US operates it; Kuwait needs it, but is denied it as well as the right, let alone permission, to acquire the equipment which would allow it to receive directly the AWACS intelligence data vital to Kuwait's security.

In sum, a consistently crippling factor which has diminished the effectiveness of several US approaches to Gulf security has been Congress's persistent inclination to view proposals to assist the Gulf states militarily in terms related solely to the Arab-Israeli conflict. At the very least, this view has been myopic; more often it has been inapplicable. It takes no expert to acknowledge what the Arab Gulf states have been saying for years — that the principal threat to them comes from Iran, not the Soviet Union, and that in the unlikely event of an Israeli-Gulf confrontation it is the Gulf that would require protection, not Israel.

A short series of excerpts from a Congressional hearing on the first substantive arms package to Saudi Arabia in 1975 gives the gist of the interference of the Israel lobby:

*Mr Rosenthal* Well, the information that has been brought to my attention was, in fact, there was a joint exercise [of Saudi forces] with Syria.

*Colonel Fifer* It was not a joint maneuver. There were no Syrian troops exercised in the maneuver . . .

*Rosenthal* And yet we are selling to Saudi Arabia and that same equipment is jointly commingled with the Syrians in some exercises.

*General Fish* No, sir. I think the testimony is clear that there was not a joint exercise.

. . .

*Rosenthal* General, do the Saudis buy arms from other countries, if you know?

*Fish* Yes, sir.

*Rosenthal* For example, European sources?

*Fish* Yes, sir.

*Rosenthal* Tell us what you know about that.

. . .  
*Fifer* They bought, I believe they are called Sea King helicopters from Great Britain for Egypt and they also bought some Mirages from France for Egypt.

*Rosenthal* How about Syria?

*Fifer* Not to my knowledge, sir.

*Rosenthal* How about for Jordan?

*Fifer* I believe they provide budget support, but I don't know that they bought specific items for Jordan.

*Rosenthal* So the Saudis are both buying equipment and supplying budgetary support for two out of the three countries commonly described as confrontation states *vis-à-vis* Israel.

*Fisher* I think that is accurate.

. . .  
*Rosenthal* Does Saudi Arabia have a free and open policy that any American citizen can visit that country?

*Fisher* I believe that the record is rather clear that it has restrictive visa policies.

*Rosenthal* I wonder if it is in the interest of the United States to engage in these relationships involving vast sums of money in a country that violates the very precept of the Constitution and Declaration [of Independence] of this country.

Much of the foregoing might be dismissed as an aberration from the norm in terms of American comprehension of the depth, breadth and legitimacy of US concerns for Gulf security, but it so happens that the late Congressman Rosenthal's line of questioning runs fairly close to mainstream US thinking. What is missing, of course, is context and chronology. In reference to the latter, most Americans are unaware that although US ties to the Gulf states began in the 1930s, it was after the Second World War that the US began to develop a more broadly-based relationship. That relationship included a military aspect from the beginning, because the strategic interests of the US led it to request and receive base facilities at Dhahran, while Saudi Arabia's and Iran's interests led them to request and receive advisory and training assistance from the US for their military forces. Even so, it is significant that most Americans are unaware that the security relationship thus predated the advent of the Arab-Israeli conflict and was founded on reasons totally unrelated to that conflict.

Not until the mid-1960s did Saudi Arabia turn to the US for

modern air defence equipment. In more recent years, the Kingdom began an ambitious programme to modernise its military infrastructure and to use increasing amounts of European as well as American equipment. Finally, in 1974, at Saudi Arabia's request, the US Department of Defense carried out a survey of the Kingdom's needs for the next ten years.

It cannot be emphasised enough that what was involved in this ten-year plan (whose end point is now being reached) were still relatively small and limited forces, not nearly the size of those of the other states in the area such as Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan and Israel. Not until 1978 did the amounts or the kinds of weaponry involved begin to cause serious strains in the US–Saudi Arabia and US–Gulf security relationships. In that year, the US Congress approved, after a bitter fight, the tripartite sale of advanced fighter planes to Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The sale was pugnaciously contested by Israel and its lobby, which wanted the long-range fighters to themselves. Never had US aid of any kind to Israel been tied to that which was simultaneously being extended to Arab countries; Israel feared the loss of its 'preferential status'. The Israelis nevertheless received \$480 million to buy 15 F-15s, added to the 25 previously ordered, and 75 F-16s. Saudi Arabia bought 60 F-15s for \$2.5 billion and Egypt paid \$400 million for 50 F-5Es. Extraordinary restrictions were placed on the equipment for Saudi F-15s.

As for the AWACS radar planes, a similar fight ensued in Congress, with the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee asserting that AWACS was an essential element in achieving 'strategic consensus' in the region. It also analysed four scenarios in which AWACS could be used in confrontation with Israel, noting technical and political problems with each scenario.

If there was any question of the efficacy of these sales to Saudi Arabia, it would have been dispelled by the crucial utilisation of one of those F-15s in 1984 — six years after the sale — by Saudi Arabia in repelling an imminent attack by Iranian jet fighters. AWACS, as well, monitored the defensive action by the Saudis. Many have opined that this one action may have forestalled, and perhaps even stopped, the long-predicted Iranian massive assault on Iraq that was to have come in the spring or summer of 1984. Nothing in the action was in the least bit threatening to Israel, unless one argues — as occasionally someone does — that it is in Israel's interest to see Iran take over the Gulf, if only to bind the

nexus of US–Israeli interests and strategic co-operation that much closer.

As for the current conflagration between Iran and Iraq, the US has had little recourse to providing tangible security assistance to the Baghdad regime, given the strident opposition the Israeli lobby has continued to mount whenever discussions have turned on the feasibility and policy viability of the US providing arms to Iraq. In the light of these domestic constraints, the US has had little choice but to extend tacit approval for the French shipment of the Super Etendards. At the same time, the US can take some comfort in receiving assurance that its own previous bolstering of Saudi Arabia defences has, at least at this juncture, proved judicious, if not central to the Kingdom's ability to care for its own security.

Barring direct aid to Iraq, whose 500 operational combat aircraft of Soviet and French manufacture far outweigh Iran's depleted capabilities of some 60 operational fighter-bombers, the US is best served by support for the actions of the GCC.

### **The GCC and the Iran–Iraq War**

The recent attacks on oil tankers and other vessels by Iraq and Iran, following the earlier bombing of American and other installations in Kuwait by terrorists, are stark reminders of the great dangers facing US interests in the Gulf. But before clamours mount for the intervention of American troops, elementary wisdom suggests that one look first to a small silver lining along the storm clouds in this otherwise war-torn region. At a time when US military and economic resources abroad are thinly scattered, it is heartening to see the six states making realistic and responsible plans for their own defence.

In the wake of heightened threats to freedom of navigation in the world's most strategic waterway, the GCC's Ministerial Council convened in Riyadh early in 1984. With the Iran–Iraq conflict raging only 20 minutes away by air from Arabia's borders, the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE and Oman weighed what steps they might take on their own to enhance the prospects for regional security co-operation. In the interim, the ministers were hopeful that two particular measures taken by Saudi Arabia might continue to serve as deterrents. These were the utilisation of (a) the Kingdom's US-supplied AWACS to

monitor the Gulf's airspace, and (b) US-supplied F-15 fighter planes to resist violations of Saudi Arabian territory. The ministers focused on a tough agenda:

- (a) finding a non-military, preferably diplomatic, way to end the bloody Iran–Iraq war, which has already cost a quarter of a million lives and over \$35 billion in GCC aid to Iraq;
- (b) maintaining freedom of navigation in the Gulf;
- (c) strengthening security within the GCC.

Following an extended period of Iraqi threats to continue bombing vessels entering Iranian oil export terminals and Iranian counter-threats to close the Gulf to all shipping, in early 1984 more than 60 ships began lining up outside the Strait of Hormuz, preferring to be less of a target while waiting to load half of Europe's and two-thirds of Japan's oil imports. The US and other oil-importing nations can derive some comfort at this volatile time from what the GCC has been doing to enhance self-reliance.

Foremost on the GCC agenda since its establishment on 25 May 1981 has been the need to deter a military attack by Iranian forces or any widening of the Gulf war which could lead to US or other outside intervention. As they gaze across the Gulf at over a quarter of a million men under arms in both Iran and Iraq, an overriding question for GCC military planners remains: how might the sparsely populated desert states set about forging a credible deterrent, let alone manage their defence?

As a first step, the GCC has conducted a series of joint military manoeuvres in 1983 and 1984. To be sure, the number of combat-readied troops involved — less than 15,000 — is miniscule by US standards. Yet they represent the first joint manoeuvres ever held between Arab states. Rather than seeking to make a show of force, the purpose of the exercises has been to test the co-ordination of the six states' Western equipment and command systems, especially in air defence, radar and communications.

In many ways, American analysts have failed to notice the importance of the manoeuvres as far as US national security is concerned. In local eyes, they signify that the GCC is on the right track to diminish both the needs and the pretexts for outside intervention. As Abdulla Bishara, Secretary-General of the GCC, said in January 1984:

The day when the US can dispatch naval ships in the area in total

disregard for the wishes of the people is over. A new concept, a new structure, has emerged. Yet I was shocked by the fact that still in America they have been unable to grasp the significance of recent changes in the Gulf. As a contrast, in Europe I have been overwhelmed by the intensity of interest in the GCC states.

In the event that local defences fail to deter aggression from Iran, and intervention by US forces becomes more popular, it is important to recognise the limit of these forces. CENTCOM, with its headquarters at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida, has only in theory the necessary forces to back up its heady mandate. In the event of a crisis in the Gulf requiring prolonged US intervention, American soldiers would have to be borrowed from locations scattered around the world, with the attendant risk of bringing force levels in Europe and elsewhere to unacceptably low levels.

The costs, moreover, would not be limited to American manpower. Top US military and civilian officials admit that creating a capacity for effective American intervention in the Gulf will require tens of billions of dollars for improved sea and airlift capabilities and new light-armoured divisions. Yet whether taxpayer expenditures of this magnitude would be possible or, more important, are really necessary has hardly been the subject of serious discussion and debate within the Congress. All of which is puzzling, especially as the states in question are among the world's very few which are able and willing to pay their own defence bills and to do so in cash.

Strengthening the GCC states, in short, costs the US taxpayer nothing. Most important, such assistance would lessen substantially the likelihood that American soldiers might one day have to intervene to defend US or other Western interests in the region.

The inclination of many in the Reagan administration to downplay local initiatives in international crisis areas, and to use armed intervention when US interests appear indirectly or potentially threatened, does not bode well for what is at stake for Americans in the Gulf. In this light, GCC efforts deserve far more US and other Western support and encouragement. Neither the process nor the outcome — enhanced potential for self-defence — poses the slightest threat to Israel, Iraq, Iran or anyone else. This is clearly in keeping with Western interests.



## **The Question of Iran and Terrorism**

Over the past few years there has been a forbidding new challenge to the US's foreign policy: terrorist attacks against military installations and even the attempts to blow up Congress and the Washington monument. Attacks against US embassies in Pakistan, Libya, Kuwait and Lebanon have also occurred. The most spectacular, of course, was the suicide truck-bomb which plunged into the US Marine compound in Beirut on 23 October 1983. Killing 241 Marines, while another bomb across town rained death on their French counterparts, the incident did as much as anything to effect the ignominious withdrawal of the US peacekeeping forces from Lebanon.

The attacks were carried out by members of an Iranian-backed group operating from Syrian-held territory in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. The Khomeini-backed Islamic Amal has made no secret of its goal: total US withdrawal from the Middle East and the defeat of 'Uncle Sam', the 'Great Satan'.

Although some of these attacks in Libya and Pakistan have been indigenous responses to Israeli policies, none has been directly carried out by the bogymen most targeted by the US government's Office to Combat Terrorism (OCT), the Palestinians. Iran, not the PLO or any other Palestinian group, is responsible for the attacks in Beirut and Kuwait which resulted in such heavy loss of life. Yet many in the OCT, in their tunnel vision, have concentrated on the PLO and its affiliates, even to the point on occasion of accepting Israel's charges, against all evidence to the contrary — as, for example, in the US agreement, in the face of united Arab opposition, to extradite Ziad Abu Ain from a Chicago gaol to face life imprisonment in Israel.

The great fear that the defeat of Yasir Arafat in Lebanon would lead to greater Palestinian radicalisation and terrorism has, as yet, not been founded on any reality. However, if the US is serious about warding off the potential desperation that might lead to Palestinian terrorism in the Gulf, it will have to deal seriously with the Palestinian disenfranchisement, which occurred for the fourth time in the devastating Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the subsequent Syrian eviction from Tripoli. The world awaits the first US non-partisan effort to seek an equitable peace to this four-decade-old problem. One need only be reminded of the several hundred thousand Palestinian workers in the Gulf to know that

the potential for unanswered grievances to explode in sabotage and other acts of violence there can not be discounted.

The ineffectiveness of US political and diplomatic approaches to an issue of such region-wide volatility and concern is directly correlated to destabilisation in a host of locales throughout the Middle East. The case can be made, for example, that the split in the PLO was in large part due to the dissidents feeling that the US had not responded positively to several major policy concessions and diplomatic overtures undertaken by Arafat; concessions and overtures which coincided with a period of suspension of the PLO's armed struggle with Israel. The lack of significant US response during this period contributed to the dissidents' decision to return to a more intensive form of armed struggle outside Arafat's leadership. These developments, in turn, have forced Arafat to grant concessions to the rejectionists. In the light of these trends, Washington would be well advised to find public ways of encouraging Arafat in his pursuit of diplomatic rather than military means to achieve Palestinian goals. In short, there must be a hopeful alternative to terrorism for Palestinians if the Middle East as a whole, not to mention the Gulf in particular, is to remain in a primarily Western sphere of influence.

Alongside Palestinian nationalism, religious extremism is another factor which has motivated abnormal acts of violence, of which the bombings in Kuwait and the attack in Mecca are but two examples. If nothing else, US policy could benefit by displaying greater sensitivity to the religious sensibilities of the people of the region, and the Gulf particularly, in view of Saudi Arabia's role as protector of Islam and its holiest places. The debate over moving the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is a case in point. Not only are the move's proponents ignoring the strong feelings of some 160 million Arabs, who find the serious consideration being given in the US to the proposed move deeply offensive, but they are also ignoring and incensing nearly one billion Muslims, two-thirds of whom live outside the Middle East. Proponents of the move have turned the argument of spurring gratuitous violence on its head and claimed that the US should not be 'held hostage' to the threat of terrorism. Such ostrich-like thinking, with its capacity for leading the US into dangerous chasms in the region, is symptomatic of the challenges confronting policy-makers concerned about Gulf security.

It should be obvious by now that it is not only Iraq which has

suffered Iranian excesses. Many foreign diplomats in Iran have been subjected to treatment which violates international law. The seizure of American hostages for a 444-day captivity is but the most spectacular example. Iran has made terrorist attacks on both the French and the US embassies in Kuwait, as well as the bombings in both embassies and military barracks in Beirut; has attempted a *coup d'état* in Bahrain; has waged campaigns of subversion against Iraq, Saudi Arabia and several other regional states; and has filled its airwaves with an incessant campaign of virulent anti-Western propaganda.

History has shown that religious extremism coupled with military power continues to expand beyond national borders until stopped. If the protection of important Western interests hangs in the balance of the conflict in the Gulf, the Soviet Union too has its own reasons to worry about terrorism; its 2,400-kilometre border with Iran is populated overwhelmingly by Muslim people. (At the same time, it may well be true that many in the Soviet Union are watching threats to Western oil supplies with duplicitous eyes.) Any attempt to fashion an approach that would bring the combatants to the negotiating table, and thereby enhance the prospects for Gulf security, has to recognise that Iran alone continues to insist on the war's prosecution. To what end, however, is not exactly clear, since the prospects for military victory are no longer in sight. The Tehran regime, an oddity within the international community, has been unable to receive modern weaponry from any state, though small arms trickle in from Syria, Libya, North Korea, Vietnam, Bulgaria and, in violation of the American Arms Export Control Act, from Israel. Iran's American-supplied equipment advantage of some years ago has been wasted.

It was to hasten an end to the conflict that the Iraqi Air Force declared a war zone in and around northern Gulf waters, waters in which only vessels bound to or from Iran could be found. This, to be sure, constitutes a blockade. But blockades are the standard practice of belligerents and they are sanctioned by international law. The blockade affects belligerent ports exclusively.

By contrast, Iran has begun attacks in international waters on merchant vessels clearly not bound for any belligerent port. Because some are oil tankers, Iran's action amounts to a *de facto* closing of the Gulf to international shipping and a threat to the West's vital oil flow from the region.

In light of all the foregoing, there has never been a more crucial

time for the US to join the rest of the world in helping to put an end to this war.

### Policy Recommendations

In consideration of the multifaceted dimensions of US involvement in a range of matters pertaining to Gulf security, and the spectre of terrorism and the escalation of the Iran–Iraq war, a number of policy recommendations suggest themselves. In close consultation with its European allies and other states most directly concerned:

(1) The Reagan administration should continue to provide, in an emergency framework, such military equipment to the non-combatant Arab Gulf states as is necessary to strengthen their local ground, sea and air defences against Iranian attacks, such as the recently shipped shoulder-fired surface-to-air Stinger missiles.

(2) In order to bolster the Saudi Arabian Air Force's ability to fly constant patrols to deter or drive off further Iranian attacks, the Reagan administration should sell KC-135 tanker planes to Saudi Arabia to allow F-15s to stay aloft longer. (This may not prove easy since this is one of the add-ons to the original package struck out by the Israeli lobby in Congress.)

(3) The US should continue to support Iraq *indirectly* via its West European allies, i.e. France.

(4) The US should make every effort to be as supportive as possible of the GCC's own efforts to enhance regional security.

(5) The US should encourage greater military co-operation between Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan and Iraq.

(6) Studies should be initiated at both governmental and private levels concerning the costs of continued war to *Iranian society*, as well as to the Gulf and the West in general.

(7) For the chill in US–Syrian relations to be broken, in the hope of encouraging the Asad regime in Damascus to withdraw its support for Iran, the Reagan administration will have to do far more than it has done to date to address that portion of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict which turns on the return of the Golan Heights to Syria.

(8) The congressional fervour for moving the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem must be met by a firm veto by the Reagan administration — not only on the grounds that it is certain to

intensify hatreds in the Arab–Israeli conflict, but also because it would intensify angers in the Gulf war, particularly that of militant Iran.

(9) The US should consider the sale of high-performance interceptors to Saudi Arabia with a shorter take-off delay than the F-15 to divert attacker aircraft *before* they can reach such vital targets as Ras Tanura along the coast. Failing this, the US should welcome such assistance as its West European allies may be able to provide in this regard.

(10) An allied force of whatever formal or informal structure, but composed of at least the US, Britain and France, should continue to retain forces near but outside the Gulf in the event that the war continues to expand in its effects on non-belligerents.

(11) The NATO countries should consider a joint statement to the effect that any country attacking and destroying the vital oil installations on which their economies and national defence establishments remain so heavily dependent will itself be the subject of reprisal.

(12) The US should continue to explore every avenue at the UN, despite the numerous misgivings the Reagan administration has voiced about the institution, to bring about a lasting cease-fire.

The Iran–Iraq war has indeed become a ‘darkling plain’. It has become so from a Western vantage point in general, and no less so from the perspective of forging effective policies towards Gulf security by the US in particular. The conflict, however, cannot continue without far more serious consequences than have already occurred. The horror of the war is brought home if one but ponders the conclusion of Wilfred Owen’s classic poem on the effects of the first use of chemical warfare in this violent century:

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
 Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
 His hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin;  
 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, —  
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori.

**Note**

1. Syria, Iraq, the PDRY and Libya.