

II. The CONDITIONS THAT SHAPED the IRAN - IRAQ WAR

2.0 The Conditions That Shaped the Conflict

Unlike many modern wars, the Iran-Iraq War was shaped by a wide variety of historical and military factors that both helped to cause the conflict and shape its course once it began. Some of these factors were the result of long standing historical tensions between the two cultures and nations. Others were the result of the personal world view and character of the two autocrats heading each state. Still others were the result of the economic, manpower, and military trends that occurred in the period just before the war, and which often helped shape the entire course of the conflict.

It is difficult to draw specific lessons from many of these conditions, except to note that an understanding of the factors that cause a war are as critical to understanding the outcome of that war as the military decisions and technology which are brought to bear in actual conflict. At the same time, the conditions that shaped the Iran-Iraq War do provide a number of important insights as to how the risk of war needs to be appraised, as to the difficulties in assessing how foreign leaders make their decisions, and as to how one should assess the effectiveness of Third World military forces, particularly under conditions of revolutionary change.

2.1 The Prelude to Iraq's Invasion of Iran

There are complex historical, cultural, and strategic causes for any conflict. This is particularly true of the Iran-Iraq War, where both nations involve cultures and power blocs that have been rivals for centuries, and which have squabbled over their borders and access to the Gulf ever since their emergence as modern states. At the same time, this long history of conflict and tension between Iran and Iraq, and of their political and cultural rivalry, does not really explain why the Iran-Iraq War took place, and why it escalated beyond yet another series of border clashes or political confrontations.

It is unlikely that a major war would ever have taken place if historical, cultural, and strategic causes were really the issue. The Iran-Iraq War is primarily the result of a conflict between the goals and ambitions of Saddam Hussein and Iraq's Ba'athist leadership elite and the Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran's new religious leadership elite. It is a grim warning of how quickly long standing tensions in the Third World can be transformed from low level conflicts into much more intense wars of major strategic impact.

2.1.1 The Rivalry Between Arab and Persian

The historical rivalry between Arab and Persian has had great propaganda value to both sides since the start of the conflict, but does relatively little to explain its causes. Most of the extreme rhetoric on each side regarding Arab nationalism versus Persian nationalism arose after the Shah's departure from power. It is true that many historical conflicts occurred between Arab and Persian since the rise of Islam and the battle of Qadisiyah, and that similar conflicts between plateau dweller and river basin dweller can be traced back to the pre-history of the region. At the same time, there have been many periods of peace, and each culture has had other enemies and has shared many common bonds - including a common religion and many common economic interests.

Something approach a separate "Arabistan" did exist in southwest Iran between roughly 1690 and 1923. A local emir, Ali Bin Nasir al-Khabi established a Kabide Emirate that controlled Ahwaz in the north, the Shatt al-Arab and the waterways to the Gulf, and Hindian in the east. This emirate managed to play the Persians off against the Ottomans for nearly two hundred years, and collected tolls from all the ships moving up from the Gulf to the Ottoman port city at Basra. At this point in time, the Shatt al-Arab -- the "Arab River" that flows from the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to the Gulf -- had relatively little trade impact and the Kabides seem to have deliberately avoided provoking the Turks into military action.

The Abides came into rising conflict with the British forces in the Gulf, however, and tension rose when the Abide Emirate established its own port on the Shatt al-Arab at Khorramshahr (Muhammarah) in 1813. This tension exploded into war in 1823, when Persia invaded the Abide Emirate, destroyed most of its military forces, conquered the Emirate, and seized Khorramshahr. To all intensive purposes, the Abide Emirate and "Arabistan" then became part of Persia.

The Ottomans waited for over a decade, and then invaded the area in 1837. They fought a major battle with Persia and seized virtually all of the Abide Emirate and incorporated it into the Turkish Wilayat of Basra. Turkey's main motive seems to have been to secure its access to the Gulf, but Britain and Russia forced Turkey to withdraw from the east bank of the Shatt in an effort to maintain their own influence over Persia. Their motive was to preserve their influence over Persia, and to strengthen British trade influence in the northern Gulf.

As a result of the British and Turkish pressure, a mixed boundary commission was established in 1843, and this led to the second Treaty of Erzerum in 1847. This treaty stabilized most of the land frontier, allowed for international navigation of the Shatt al-Arab, gave Turkey control of most of the Shatt to the east bank, and gave Iran control of Khorramshahr and the Island of Abadan. The treaty left the Abide Emirate in existence, but it was firmly under Persian influence and had only limited British protection.

A series of boundary commissions, protocols, and treaties followed between 1911 and 1923 that affected the border area, but none of these efforts really concerned themselves with the Abide Emirates, which had become little more than a regional fiction after the 1850s. When the Treaty of Lausanne established Iraq as a state in 1923, it paid no attention to the issue of "Arabistan" at all. The entire area was assumed to be part of Persia.

The British had no interest in the area at the time for several reasons. They were far more interested in obtaining unchallenged control over the oil areas around Mosul, and they were actively encouraging the commander of the Iranian Cossack Brigade, Reza Shah, to consolidate his power in Persia and allow Britain to maintain its control over the oil concessions in that country. Reza Shah had seized power in 1921, and eliminated his rivals in 1923. During 1923-1924, he ruthlessly suppressed Persia's various ethnic minorities. In 1924, he put down all Arab resistance in "Arabistan" and changed the name to Khuzistan. He then proceeded to methodically crush any signs of Arab nationalism, suppress Arabic as a language, resettle the population to reduce what was then a strong Arab majority, and to exploit the province for his own ends.

There was only limited cultural tension at the time the Shah fell from power. Iran had had half a century to "Persianize" the area and a strong

incentive to do so. Khuzistan included considerably more territory than the original Abide Emirate, including the province where oil was discovered in 1908. It was hardly surprising that successive Iranian governments encouraged Persian migration into the area, and ruthlessly suppressed Arab nationalism, and attempts at Arab autonomy.

While this treatment of Iran's Arabs left some bitterness, too much time had elapsed and too many changes had occurred by the time of the Shah's fall, to leave Arab separatism a driving political force. The "Persianization" of Khuzistan had also had considerable success. Khuzistan had become the center of Iran's oil industry and wealth and had nearly 80% of its oil installations. Almost all of the oil company personnel, officials, security forces, and technically skilled workers were Persian or Farsi speakers. According to Iranian estimates, only 40% of the province had Arab roots. In fact, even a fairly narrow geographic definition of Khuzistan based on the old Abide Emirate would probably have left the Arab population in the minority or as a only bare majority. There also had long been considerable intermarriage between Arab and non-Arab, many Persians were working in Arab states in the Gulf, and the Arab minority in Iran had lost much of its cultural identity.

More broadly, Arab ethnic influence had relatively little impact on Iran as a whole. Any estimates of the ethnic divisions in Iran highly uncertain, but at the time the war began, about half of Iran's 45 million-plus population was Persian speaking. The rest consisted largely of non-Arab minorities. Anywhere from six to 13 million people were Azerbaijani or Turk, four million were Kurd, and 1.5 million were Baluchi. Only about one million of Iran's citizens seem to have retained a significant degree of identity as Arabs.

Some radical Arab nationalist movements did exist in Khuzistan in 1978, and still claimed the province should be a separate nation called "Arabistan". These movements were weak, however, and many were funded by Iraqi intelligence, or were affiliated with outside extremist groups like the PFLP.

The bulk of the Arab demonstrations that did occur in the Khuzistan during early years of the revolution called for a limited degree of regional autonomy, a greater share of revenues, the teaching of Arabic as the primary language, and higher priority for Arabs in local jobs -- not for separatism. While some large demonstrations took place in Khorramshar and Abadan in April, May, and June 1979, they scarcely threatened Iranian control. In fact, Arab separatists were one of the least threatening ethnic movements Khomeini faced during his consolidation of his rule over Iran.

If anything, the Arab separatists probably had more impact on the perceptions of Iraq's leaders than on the political situation in Iran. Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath colleagues seem to convinced themselves that there was a serious Arab separatist movement that would rise up and join a "liberating" Iraqi army and create a separatist state in one of Iran's richest oil production areas. In fact, one of the major miscalculations that Iraq made in invading Iran was to assume that it could win enough local support to rapidly occupy this area and either partition Iran or use the resulting loss of oil revenue to help bring down the Khomeini government. This miscalculation also seems to have led Iraq to assume that the Arab minority would help reduce the size of the invasion force necessary to seize Khuzistan and the amount of preparation and support it would need.

2.1.2 The Religious Tension Between Iran and Iraq

Religious tension between Iraq and Iran became a major issue largely as a result of Khomeini's rise to power. Both Iran and Iraq are Moslem states in which the Shi'ite sect is dominant. At the time Khomeini came to power, Iran was as much as 90% Shi'ite and Iraq was 50% Shi'ite. While most of Iraq's Ba'athist leaders were Sunni, there was relatively little effort to control Shi'ite religious activity in Iraq, and most of it was targeted against a relatively few outspoken opponents of the regime. The average Shi'ite cleric did relatively well under the Ba'ath regime. The Iraqi Shi'ite clergy were certainly not strong supporters of the Ba'ath, but they also were not stronger supporters of any of the Iranian Ayatollahs. They also disagreed with the Iranian Shi'ite clergy over a number of religious practices, had somewhat different cultural and ethnic traditions, and disagreed over the status and importance of many of the Shi'ite shrines.

Neither the Iranian or Iraqi government had a recent tradition of religious rule, and both Iran and Iraq had extensive secret police networks that permeated all religious activity. At the same time, neither state attempted to suppress religion per se. Each used a mixture of "sticks" in the form of censorship and arrest; and "carrots" in the form of salaries and subsidies for religious schools, shrines, and mosques; to try to control their respective clergies.

Both the Iraqi Ba'ath Party and the Shah, however, did support rival radical or anti-regime Shi'ite movements in the opposing country during the 1960s and early 1970s. They offered leading opposition clerics in the other country both funds and a sanctuary in exile. Khomeini, for example, was allowed to settle in the Shi'ite shrine of Najaf in 1965, after the Shah expelled him for his increasingly vitriolic attacks on the Shah's religious and constitutional legitimacy.

This situation changed when the Shah and Ba'ath Party reached a general settlement of their differences in the Algiers Accord of 1975. Both sides agreed to stop all subversive activity directed from their soil at the other state. Iraq generally lived up to this agreement. For example, Iraq placed Khomeini under house arrest in late 1978, at the Shah's request. It expelled him from Iraq on October 6, 1978, allowing him to fly to Paris after Kuwait refused him entry. The Iraqi government hosted a tour by the Shah's sister of Iraq's religious shrines only a few weeks later.

At the time the Shah fell, the anti-regime Shi'ite clergy in Iran and Iraq were pursuing their national political objectives in relative isolation, and the primary religious tensions in each country were those resulting from the conflict between the secular ruling elites that were attempting the radical reform of each country and the more conservative elements of their respective Shi'ite clergy.

Khomeini's rise to power, however, quickly created a different concept in Iran of the role the Shi'ite religion should play in all Islamic states. As early as February, 1979, Khomeini was exchanging messages with former colleagues in Iraq. Between February and June, Khomeini began to appeal to the Iraqis to overthrow the Ba'athist regime as anti-Islamic, and between June and July, 1979, this triggered a bloody effort by Saddam Hussein to suppress all anti-Ba'athist Shi'ite elements. Hussein used the Iraqi Army to fire on Shi'ite demonstrations, conducted a number of executions, and arrested several thousand Shi'ites. He

also countered by greatly increasing the funding of the Arab separatists in Iran and began the first major Iraqi arms shipments to such movements. .

Ironically, both Khomeini and the Ba'athist regime then miscalculated the nature of Shi'ite feeling in Iraq. Khomeini seems to have felt that the Iraqi Shi'ites in Southern Iraq would eventually rise up and welcome his forces if they could drive out the Iraqi government forces. Saddam Hussein and those around him seem to have felt the threat of a fundamentalist Shi'ite movement in Iraq was stronger than it really was, and this made them more willing to take military chances in invading Iran. In practice, however, the vast majority of Iraq's Shi'ite population proved to be loyal, and more interested in nationalism than religion

2.1.3 The Border and Waterway Conflicts Between Iran and Iraq

The importance of the geographic issues dividing the the two states is equally easy to exaggerate. There were two continuing border controversies between modern Iraq and Iran. The first was over the control of the Shatt al-Arab, the major waterway connecting the Gulf with Iraq's port of Basra and Iran's ports of Khorramshar and Abadan. The second was the control of key defensive points along the land border, and particularly the land approaches to Iraq's capital of Baghdad and its key oil facilities at Kirkuk.

These two issues had strategic importance because Iraq had only 58 kilometers of sea coast, its only major port at Basra was less than 30 kilometers by road from Iran, and its capital of Baghdad was only a little over 100 kilometers from the border and had few natural defenses. Iraq lacked both secure access to the Gulf and strategic depth as a protection from Iran.

The issues were also the heritage of a long history of similar controversies between Turkey and Persia in the period before World War I. In regard to the Shatt al-Arab dispute, the Ottoman Turks generally had the advantage over Persia and controlled the entire "Arab River" to the Persian bank. Neither state agreed to established land borders during the 19th Century, however, and attempts to demarcate the border in the mid and late 1800s had little success.

The feuding over the border took on considerably more importance in 1908, after the discovery of oil in Iran. Iran's only modern port was then at Khorramshar, and free access to the Shatt al-Arab became critical to Iran's ability to export and its economic development. This led to new boundary meetings between Turkey and Iran in 1911, but no agreement was reached until Britain and Russia intervened. This led to the Constantinople Protocol of 1913, which gave Iran the right of navigation and Turkey control over most of the disputed territory, the Shatt al-Arab to the Iranian bank, and the islands in the Shatt except for three islands including Abadan and the port of Khorramshar and the waters above and below the confluence of the Karun River.

The Protocol became the de facto settlement of the boundary disputes for some years, but it had an unusually uncertain status. It was never signed by the Ottoman Empire, and virtually all the parties involved in reaching it had changed radically by the mid-1920s. The Soviet Union was largely excluded from international negotiations after the Soviet revolution of 1918. The Ottoman Empire finally collapsed in 1922, and Britain had already created modern Iraq as part of the Treaty of Sevres in August, 1920. Reza Shah rose to power in Iran

in 1921-1923, and this meant new governments had come into existence along both sides of the border.

The Treaty of Lausanne redefined the Iran-Iraq border in 1923, but it did not clarify the status of the Constantinople Protocols of 1913. This led to new border and boundary disputes between 1929 and 1934, and finally to the referral of the issue to the League of Nations. Iran then argued that the border should run down the middle of the Shatt and both sides should have freedom of navigation and the right to freely move warships. Iraq argued it had sovereign rights to the entire waterway, customs jurisdiction over all traffic, and the right to control the movement of all warships.

While the two nations could not initially agree on a settlement, a coup in Iraq in 1936 created a weaker Iraqi government, and one that was more willing to negotiate. As a result, a treaty was signed in 1937 which stabilized most of the land border between the two countries, and which largely agreed to the Constantinople Protocol of 1913. The agreement put the border in the Shatt along the line of the Thalweg. It gave Iran control of the island of Abadan and of the Shatt al-Arab to the middle of the channel for five miles around Khorramshar. The treaty also allowed for free navigation of all merchant ships from any nation, and allowed Iranian ships to anchor at Iran's main port without being subject to Iraqi customs duties. Finally, it established a joint commission to handle the dredging of the Shatt al-Arab, tools, and other issues and called for a Convention on Navigation and Conservancy -- although the latter convention was never agreed to a led to more disputes in the years that followed.

Both Iraq and Iran continued to quibble over the border and control of the Shatt al-Arab from 1937 to the late 1950s, but the issues involved were of negligible practical importance until a coup d'etat overthrew the Hashemite Dynasty in Iraq in July, 1958. Iraq's new rulers then made new claims to Khuzistan and attempted to unilaterally extend Iraq's territorial limit in the Gulf to 12 miles. They even demanded Iran cede its sheltered anchorages at Khorramshar and Iran's main refinery complex at Abadan. In 1960, Iraq added to the dispute by first claiming sovereignty over Abadan. In 1961, it demanded that only Iraqi pilots could navigate ships up the waterway.

The Shah responded by sending Iranian warships into the Shatt, and by ceasing to use Iraqi pilots or use Iraqi tolls. Both sides deployed troops into the border area during this period, although Iraq's demands produced more sound than fury and no serious military clashes occurred. The only real impact on the control of the Shatt was that Iran eventually accepted renewed Iraqi control of piloting up and down the waterway, although Iran made no other concessions to the new Iraqi regime.

These claims and incidents did, however, lead Iran to try to find strategic solutions to its problems. They were one of the major reasons Iran built opened its massive new crude oil export facilities at Kharg Island in 1965. This new oil port freed Iran from dependence on the Shatt, although it still left Iran heavily dependent on Khorammshar and exports from the refinery at Abadan. This became particularly important in June, 1967, when Iraq tried to use its control over the waterway to force Iran not to export oil to Israel and the West. They also were a reason that the Shah reached an accommodation with the USSR in the early 1960s, and began to reorient his forces from the defense of the north to a defense of the border with Iraq. In March, 1965, the Shah established a new 3rd Army Corps at Shiraz, and began a major land and air build-up, including new casernes and air bases to the rear of the border area.

The announcement of British withdrawal from the Gulf in 1968, also changed the strategic situation significantly. Iraq revived its nationalist ambitions. The U.S. turned to the Shah as its new "pillar" in the Gulf, and the Shah rapidly began to create the largest navy in the Gulf, a major new seaport at Bandar Abbas at the mouth of the Gulf, and new ports and rail or road links to the Gulf at Bandar e-Shahpur (now Bandar e-Khomeini), Ganaveh, and Bushehr. This freed Iran's rapidly growing naval power from dependence on the Shatt.

This renewal of tension took tangible form in 1969, shortly after the Ba'ath Party again seized power in Iraq. Iraq's new government renewed its claim to all waters of the Shatt al-Arab on April 19, 1969. This led Iran to denounce the 1937 treaty, and on April 22, an Iranian ship entered the Shatt with a military escort and refused to pay tolls to Iraq. This confrontation reflected the growing political tensions between the Iraqi government and that of the Shah, and both sides then supported coup and assassination attempts in the opposing country.

On November 30, 1971 -- the day before the British left the Gulf -- the Shah seized three strategic islands in the lower Gulf which were owned by the UAE. These included Abu Musa and the Greater and Lower Tunbs. This seizure led Iraq to sever diplomatic relations with Iran.

There were reports of scattered shooting incidents on the border in 1972, and Iraq expelled some 74,000 Iranians from Iraq and increased its financial support to the opponents of the Shah. Iran retaliated by starting a massive covert action program in coordination with the CIA to aid Kurdish insurgents in Northern Iraq. This effort proved to be extremely successful, largely because of the inability of the Ba'athist regime to make intelligent compromises with the Kurds. The resulting battles seriously hurt Iraq financially and militarily, but scarcely crippled it. It was the outbreak of the October War in 1973, however, that virtually forced Iraq to secure its Eastern flank. The day the October War broke out, Iraq proposed resuming diplomatic relations with Iran, and relations were resumed on October 15, 1973.

This resumption of diplomatic relations did not bring peace to the Iranian and Iraqi border. A new series of border incidents occurred in February, 1974, and both sides deployed substantial numbers of troops. The Shah seized a number of strategic heights and positions in the still disputed parts of the land border in the Mehran region in February, and serious local fighting took place near the Konjam Dam on February 19 and March 6, 1974.

The Shah's key lever against Iraq, however, lay in the fact that he had begun to provide money and arms to anti-regime Kurdish factions in the early 1960s, and had steadily stepped up his support in the early 1970s. With the support of both Israel and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, he had turned the Kurds from a nuisance into a major threat to the Iraqi regime, and it became clear to the Iraqi government that the Shah had the fully support of both President Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger in this effort.

During early 1974, Iran again stepped up its support for the Kurds, and used its growing U.S. supplied air force to demonstrate its air superiority over the border. By May, 1974, Iraq reached the point where the Shah's support of the Kurds forced it to compromise. Both nations set up a mixed boundary commission. When Iraq delayed reaching an agreement, the Shah used his support for the Kurds to pressure Saddam Hussein to agree directly to a favorable settlement. This settlement took the form of the Algiers Accord, which was announced at the end

of an OPEC meeting in Algiers on March 6, 1975, and which was signed by both the Shah and Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

The Algiers Accord was followed by a treaty in June, and by a land boundary demarcation effort and navigation commission that were completed in December 1975. The result made the Thalweg the border along the entire length of the Shatt. This gave Iran half of the Shatt al-Arab, and effectively turned the Shatt into an international waterway. In this sense, the Algiers Accord was a victory for the Shah. However, the Accord also generally adopted the land boundaries of the Protocol of 1913. It promised Iraq some 240 square miles of disputed territory, some of the land Iran had seized in the Mehran region, and token improvements in the land border to give it some additional terrain barriers to help compensate for its lack of strategic depth. In this sense, it was a victory for Iraq.

Even in retrospect, it is difficult to argue with the resulting settlement. While Iran never turned over all of the promised points along the border, and Iraq unquestionably had suffered a political defeat, the Algiers Accord did provide a reasonable basis for developing the ports and navigation channels in the Shatt al-Arab. It also provided terms for a settlement of the land boundary dispute that favored Iraq, and in theory meant an end to the constant efforts each regime made to exploit the ethnic tensions in the other state.

It is also important to understand that the military issues that had been important in the 1960s, and early 1970s, were also of steadily diminishing importance by the late 1970s. Two major trends affected the importance of the Shatt al-Arab and the border area.

The first trend was that each side was steadily reducing its economic dependence on the Shatt al-Arab. Iraq had created a new road new through Turkey and Jordan to reduce its dependence on Gulf ports. Iraq had created a new port and naval base at Umm Qasr, another port at al Faw, and offshore oil loading terminals in the Gulf. Iraq had also created new pipelines to reduce its dependence on Gulf ports. By the late 1970s, two pipelines were in operation. The first was a 1,000 kilometer pipeline through Turkey which ended in Yumurtalik on the Mediterranean. This pipeline was finished in 1977, and had a capacity of 650,000 to 750,000 BPD. The second pipeline was a strategic pipeline through Syria which ran to the port of Baniyas and could carry 700,000 to 850,000 BPD. These developments reduced each side's vulnerability to low level incidents and unilateral political action by the other.

The second trend was that the massive growth of each side's air power, artillery, and armor after Britain's announcement of its withdrawal from the Gulf in 1968, made the control of given border positions and the dividing line along the Shatt al-Arab less important. Each side now had major strategic hostages to the other nation's growing armed forces, and each had the power to close the Shatt at any time.

In the case of Iran, Khorramshar and Abadan were still of critical economic importance, in spite of Iran's new ports and oil export facilities at Kharg Island. Regardless of the outcome of any of the arguments over the boundary line in the Shatt al-Arab, the port and the refinery would remain within artillery range of Iraq. Both could easily be cut off if Iraq shelled shipping or mined the waterway. In the case of Iraq, its main port of Basra, its new oil port at al-Faw, and its new naval base at Umm Qasr were equally vulnerable to Iranian military action.

Iraq and Iran's refineries and oil facilities away from the border area, and their oil loading terminals further out in the Gulf, were also becoming steadily more vulnerable to the other side's air power. Iran's oil terminal at Kharg was within range of Iraq's new fighters and bombers. Iraq's new pipelines to Turkey and Syria could provide a maximum sustained shipment capability of 1.5 MMBD, but Iraq was exporting 3.2 MMBD. More than half of Iraq's oil had to move through its deep water loading points in the Gulf, and loading points for the supertankers in the Gulf had to be placed south of Iran, and east of the dividing line in the Shatt al-Arab, in order to find waters deep enough for the tankers to load.

As for the land boundary dispute, it was now confined largely to a 200 square kilometer region which was bounded to the north by Khanaqin and Qasr e-Shirin, and to the south by Badra and Mehran. The disputed territory varied in width from three to 16 kilometers, and involved the control of heights in the area where the Iranian plateau drops to Iraq's river plain. From Iraq's perspective, control of these heights offered a potential geographic barrier to block any Iranian invasion of Baghdad. From the Shah's perspective, there were ample defensive positions for Iran on the other side of the disputed area, but retaining it gave him continued leverage over Iraq.

What both sides had to consider was, however, that Iraq still had significant terrain defenses near the border, regardless of control of the disputed areas. Iraq could freely operate its armor in the river plain against an Iran which had far longer lines of communication and which had to channel any attacking forces through a limited number of passes and routes. This increasingly made armor and air power, not control of the highest ridge lines and passes in the mountain barriers, the critical factor in securing the border. This became particularly true in the mid and late 1970s, as the Shah built up a massive heliborne attack force and acquired the capability to outflank the terrain barriers at the border by air.

In short, these changing geographic and military facts of life scarcely made a war for control of the Shatt al-Arab or the border area a strategically sound idea. They made it clear that both sides could not protect themselves by diverting ships away from the Shatt, and they made it clear that Iraq could not acquire any significant strategic depth, or protection from Iran, by squabbling over adjustments to its land borders. Iraq's main cities were too close to Iran, and modern aircraft and armor could rapidly overcome the kind of geographic barriers that had previously been in contention. Further, Iraq could not secure its borders without reaching a full settlement with the Kurds, and the Ba'ath leadership proved unable to do so. The Shah continued to do a far better job of accommodating and coopting his Kurdish population, and retained the option of renewing the Kurdish conflict in Iraq virtually at will.

2.1.4 The Struggle for Regional Influence

If there was any significant issue between Iraq and Iran before the Shah's fall, it was the struggle for regional influence and dominance between the Shah of Iran and Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party elite in Iraq. By the late 1970s, however, Iraq had been forced to accept the fact that it was second best. The Shah's access to U.S. and Western arms after 1969 gave him an immense qualitative advantage over the arms Iraq could obtain from the USSR and France. Further, Iran devoted far more of its resources to arms imports than Iraq.

If one compares the total flow of arms imports by each side between the Algiers Accord in 1975 and the beginning of 1980, Iran imported \$15.5 billion worth of arms and Iraq imported \$8.1 billion worth of arms. Many of Iran's arms were the most modern Western systems available. The bulk of Iraq's arms were Soviet bloc systems that were inferior to their Western counterparts when they were first deployed and which were then often a generation old.

Regardless of the public rhetoric of both sides, and particularly of that of Iraq's Ba'ath Party after Khomeini came to power, both sides understood these strategic facts of life as long as the Shah remained in power. Iraqi and Iranian military and intelligence officers were well aware of the trends in the military balance, and each side's relative geographic and political vulnerability.

The Iraqis were acutely aware not only of their own military limitations, but the potential ability of Iran to exploit the Kurdish issue. Further, Iraq's Ba'athist leadership had serious problems with Iraq's communist party, became embroiled in a feud with Syria's Ba'athist elite, and came to realize that its only major way of countering Iran would be to establish more stable relations with the Arab states in the Southern Gulf. In 1978, a direct Iraqi challenge of Iran's regional power seemed as unthinkable as the rapid fall of the Shah.

It was the Iranian revolution that fundamentally changed the conditions under which Iraq and Iran conducted their rivalry. The fall of the Shah created a new political system in Iran that was messianic in character. It was led by a man who felt he had divine inspiration to create a broader Islamic revolution and who had good personal reasons to regard the Ba'ath regime in Iraq as being as much a betrayal of Islam as the Shah's regime had been in Iran. The Ayatollah Khomeini's sudden rise to power created a regime in Iran that was far more of a political threat to Iraq than the Shah had ever been.

While Iraq attempted to reach a modus vivendi with Khomeini, it rapidly became apparent that he was ideologically committed to overthrowing the Ba'ath Party and creating an Islamic Iraq that was dominated by Shi'ite clergy loyal to Khomeini's ideology. Khomeini's rise to power did not produce any massive popular support in Iraq, but it was unquestionably threatening. Further, it raised the prospect that Khomeini might move from relatively low level political action to much more aggressive subversion and even military action.

At the same time, the initial course of the Iranian revolution created near chaos in many Iranian military units and cut Iran off from the U.S. and the West. During the year after the Shah fell, many parts of Iran were in near civil war, Iran became involved in a massive confrontation with the U.S. and was cut off from its primary source of arms, and a murderous power struggle broke out between the religious revolutionaries under Khomeini and Marxist radical movements.

This internal disarray in Iran made Khomeini seem far more vulnerable than he really was, and led Saddam Hussein to feel he had first real opportunity to transform Iraq into the dominant power in the region, and even in the Arab world. Egypt's near isolation from the other Arab states as the result of the Camp David accords, and Syria's limited financial resources, must have seemed to be an unusually good opportunity to make Iraq the leader of the Arab states.

It is difficult to put the views and motivations of such different leadership elites into perspective because their public rhetoric was so extreme, and because both sides made so many charges and counter charges with so little regard for the truth. Nevertheless, it is clear that Khomeini and Saddam Hussein

systematically attempted to exploit what they felt to be their opponent's vulnerabilities, and engaged at efforts at subversion and in border incidents that steadily increased the tension on both sides.

2.2 The Clashes That Led to The War

The issue of which side is most to blame for the war is one that may well be impossible to determine. By the time the war began, Iran and Iraq were led by two competing autocrats who saw their struggle from totally different perspectives. Khomeini unquestionably saw the struggle primarily in ideological and religious terms. He and his supporters saw Islamic revolution both as the primary means of overthrowing Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath, and as a preface to a broader revolution that would eventually dominated the Islamic world.

Saddam Hussein, in turn, saw an opportunity to build on Iraq's emergence as a leader of the hard line movement against Israel, and the Baghdad conferences of 1978 and 1979, to become the key leader of the Arab world. He also saw the revolution in Iran as one that severely weakened Iran. He saw both the opportunity to dominate the Gulf region, and the struggle with Iran as being one which could be resolved in military terms.

Khomeini's ambitions seem to have been absolute in the sense he sought to create a fundamentally different regime in Iraq and a different kind of Iraqi state. Saddam Hussein's ambitions may have been more limited in that he sought military advantages for Iraq that would have made it the dominant state in the region, but did not make Khomeini's overthrow and a complete change in Iran's government a major objective.

Both leaders seem to have operated from a fundamentally egocentric and distorted perspective, which was reinforced by the fact that they obtained virtually all their information through colleagues who were equally ideologically committed to a given view of the situation, or which had to simulate such commitment to survive. Neither had access to objective intelligence, or paid great attention to the views of the other side except to reinforce their own preconceptions.

The irony behind these different perspectives is that they also had a number of things in common, particularly at the beginning of the war. Both sides severely overestimated the vulnerability of the opposing side, and the extent to which key segments of the population in the opposing state would or would not support its leadership. Both sides pictured themselves as leading national movement with broad popular support, but both sides were led by small and relative isolated elites that were continuously forced to deal with armed internal opposition movements and to take Draconian measures to suppress them. Both sides failed to understand the nature of the opposing state's political history and revolution. a broad coalition of other states or movements that only existed to the extent that other states found this to be to their particular advantage. Both sides saw the other as the cause of a fundamentally illegitimate struggle in which the other side had deep moral and ethical guilt for the war.

Both sides also began the war with certain key limitations. Both sides had highly politicized armed forces. They never could fully trust their armed forces or allow them to either become fully professional or conduct the details of their military operations. Further, both sides lacked members of their ruling elite with real military professionalism and failed to admit such members throughout the war. Both began the war with intelligence services which could

not provide accurate data on any issue because of their political character and both failed to solve their problem throughout the conflict.

Finally, both sides began the war without any real understanding or analysis of the risk and cost of large scale conflict and allowed the war to become institutionalized without really considering the meaning of that institutionalization. Finally, both sides began the war with leadership elites that were unprepared to deal with the leadership elites of other nations, particularly the leadership elites of the U.S. and USSR. While Iraq was able to improve its diplomatic situation with far more skill than Iraq, it still failed to understand key aspects of Western opinion -- such as Western reaction to the use of chemical weapons -- at the time the war was suspended by a cease-fire.

It may be argued that most wars grow out of similar failures on the part of each side's leadership elites to objectively understand both the political realities they face and the true cast of war. This may, in fact, be one of the most consistent lessons of war, at least in terms of grand strategy. At the same time, it is equally important to note that the war started, continued, and escalated at least in part because the diplomatic and intelligence services of outside powers failed to understand both the process that led to the conflict, and the different character of Iran and Iraq's leadership elite. This also is an important lesson of war. Outside powers tend to deal with conflicts in reactive terms and to become caught up in them without ever understanding the true character of the leadership of the combatants. Strategic warning and understanding, are the exception, not the rule. In most cases, the West cannot count on either and must plan its diplomatic and military actions accordingly.

As for the details of the events that led to large scale fighting, many may remain controversial. The war only occurred after a long series of political and military clashes that began in 1979, and increased steadily in intensity and tempo throughout 1980. It is difficult to provide any clear date for the the start of these clashes, but they began shortly after Khomeini first came to power. In February 1979, however, a leading Iraqi Shi'ite cleric in Najaf, the Ayatollah Muhammed Baqar al-Sadr, congratulated Khomeini on his success, and noted that "other tyrants" would see their day of reckoning. At roughly this point, Iran began a propaganda effort calling for the overthrow of "non-Muslim" Ba'ath rule, and Tehran radio began to refer to the Ayatollah al-Sadr as the "Khomeini of Iraq". Pro-Khomeini groups planted bombs in public areas and buildings, and the leading anti-Ba'ath Shi'ite group -- Al Dawaa -- began to organize active opposition to the government.

Iraq had initially greeted Khomeini's rise to power with great caution and had sought to restore much the same relationship with Iran it had established with the Shah. As it became clear that this relationship could not be restored, however, it reached out to the opposition factions in Iran and increased its financial support to the Arab nationalist factions or "rebels" in Khuzistan. Iraq had already begun a major crackdown on opposition elements in 1978. It had actively moved to suppress Kurdish nationalists and had executed 21 Communists in May, 1978.

Early in 1979, Iraq began to include Shi'ite elements in these purges, although it had previously treated such factions as being so ineffective that it did not regard them as threats. These crackdowns took on new intensity when minor riots took place at the two key Shi'ite Holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. The Iraqi government conducted bloody crackdowns on pro-Iranian Shi'ite groups

like Al Daawa. Some 97 members of these groups -- including a significant number of Iraqi military officers -- were executed in March, 1979.

Meanwhile, Iran experienced internal security problems of its own. Iran had been forced into a major military campaign to suppress the Kurds and Azerbaijanis in April, 1979. In May, 1979, Iranian Arabs in Khuzistan began to demonstrate for independence or autonomy, and clashed with Iranian troops in Khorramshar. at the same time that Khomeini was calling for Shi'ite uprisings in Iraq he was dealing with near civil war in Iran. During much of the summer and early fall, Iran was also actively involved in a war for control of the Kurdish sections of its own territory while providing arms and money to the Kurdish rebel factions in Iraq.

The end result was that the Kurds became pawns in the struggle between Iran and Iraq for the rest of the war. While Iran's Kurds had originally joined Khomeini in calling for the Shah's fall, Khomeini rapidly made it clear that he opposed any form of ethnic separatism or autonomy. As a result, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), led by a left-wing radical named Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, began to organize military forces and occupied many of the Kurdish areas along the Iraq border in northwest Iran. His forces, called the Pesh Merga, were able to occupy much of the countryside that had been abandoned by the regular army and were even able to occupy the city of Mahabad.

By late 1979, the Iranian Army had only two light formations in the area, and Iran's new Revolutionary Guards only had the strength to take some of the main towns and control the roads by day. The Iranian government could not take permanent control of Mahabad, and Iraq almost certainly began to provide Ghassemlou with funds and arms.

The situation in Iraq was equally complicated. When the Shah ended support of Iraq's Kurds in 1975, the rebel coalition called the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) collapsed. These forces were led Mufstafa Barzani and his sons Massoud and Idris. Many fled into Iran. Most settled in refugee camps and towns in the area, and the elder Barzani eventually died in exile in the U.S. Massoud and Idris, however, kept the KDP going. Syria also sponsored another faction of the KPD led by Jalal Talabani, which was called the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

The PUK originally sided with the KDPI against Khomeini. Khomeini responded by offering the faction of the KDP led by the Barzanis funds and arms to resume their attack on Iraq in return for their support against the KDPI and PUK forces fighting in Iran. While the Barzanis and KDP did not prove particularly effective in fighting against Iran's Kurds, they did develop the capability to conduct military operations in Iraq. In contrast, the PUK increasingly flirted with the idea of some kind of deal with Iraq which steadily increased its support of the KDPI.

The first serious military clashes between Iran and Iraq seem to have begun In June, 1979. Three Iraqi aircraft attacked several Iranian villages in the northern border area, which were believed to house Kurdish rebels. Iran responded by working with the Ayatollah al-Sadr to encourage pro-Khomeini riots in the Shia districts of Baghdad and in Southern Iraq. This led the Ba'ath leadership to use the Iraqi Army to suppress the riots and the arrest of up to 3,000 people.

The Iraqi government placed the Ayatollah Sadr under arrest on June 11, after it discovered that al-Sadr was planning to "visit" Khomeini in Iran. Tehran Radio responded by calling upon Shi'ites to replace the "gangsters and

tyrants of Baghdad. While new protests in Najaf and Karbala led to the Iraqi government to limit its public action against the Ayatollah al-Sadr to house arrest, these same protests led to harsh action by the Iraqi security services and they were put down with military force. They also seem to have convinced the government that al-Sadr could not be allowed to survive. Al Sadr seems to have been quietly executed the moment public attention diminished. Further, the Ba'ath seems to have purged Abd al-Hussein al-Mashhadi, the Shi'ite Secretary General of the Revolutionary Command Command Council (RCC), and up to 50 senior Shi'ite members, by the end of June. "

While the struggle between Iran and Iraq was largely covert during most of the rest of 1979, but it scarcely decreased in intensity. On July 17, 1979, Saddam Hussein quietly replaced Ahmed Hassan Bakr as President of Iraq and Chairman of the Ba'ath Party Revolutionary Command Command Council, and Bakr left the country for "reasons of health".

Saddam Hussein seems to have taken power as President at least in part because he felt Bakr was too weak in dealing with "subversive" elements. Days later, Saddam Hussein announced the discovery of what he claimed was a plot by the Ayatollah Sadr to exhort Shi'ite leaders to rise up and create a Khomeini-like revolution in Iraq. The arrests related to this "July Plot" rapidly turned into a purge of the Ba'ath as well, and 68 people -- including a number of senior Ba'ath Party officials and military officers -- were soon announced to have been arrested as part of a Shi'ite-al Daawa conspiracy. The actual number of arrests ran well over 100, and Saddam Hussein publicly executed 22 of those he had arrested on August 8, 1979.

Saddam Hussein continued to arrest, and sometimes execute, hostile Shi'ite leaders during the rest of the year. He also cracked down on Kurdish opposition elements, and ruthlessly continued the purge of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) that he had begun May, 1978. This reached the point where the ICP formally ended its participation in the so-called National Progressive Front that had included the Ba'ath, the Kurdish Democratic Party, and the ICP. While the Soviet Union attempted to ease the treatment of the members of the ICP the Ba'ath arrested, a number of its members were executed.

Meanwhile, Iran shifted towards a steadily more radical and extreme form of Khomeini's revolution. The regular armed forces underwent a long series of purges and changes in command. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, which had emerged out of several small militias on June 16, 1979, fought a series of small civil wars for control of Iran's ethnic minorities, and began to actively trained forces to export the revolution. Students seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979, and Khomeini began to issue broadcasts that called for a regrouping of the regular armed forces as the "protectors" of Islam.

While Khomeini and his colleagues were clearly preoccupied with the the problem of consolidating power in Iran -- and began to face a new challenge from Marxist movements like the Fedayeen Khalq and Mujahideen Khalq in addition to the earlier threat of ethnic separatism --they sent an increasing number of agents or "messengers" into Iran in an attempt to encourage Iraq's Shi'ites to have an Islamic uprising of their own.

Iraq reacted by steadily increasing its internal security measures. In December 1979, Saddam Hussein called for the annulment of the Algiers Accord, and Iraq may have gone further. Tehran Radio charged on December 14, 1979, that Iraq had entered Iranian territory and had been forced to withdraw. He also held Iraq's first elections for its National Assembly since 1958. The actual

elections were held on June 20, 1980, and a carefully selected group of 250 men, including large numbers of carefully chosen Shi'ites, gave Saddam Hussein a new degree of "legitimacy".

The Iranian government became increasingly concerned during this period with the fact Iraq was sheltering Iranian exiles and encouraging a coup d'etat in Iran. Iran's new President Bani Sadar claimed that Iraq was actively sponsoring the Shah's last prime minister, Shapur Bakhtiar and last military commander, General Oveissi, and had established some 20 training camps with a total of 45,000 men, with another 25,000 men in Bahrain and Oman. There was some truth to these claims, but these figures seem to have included virtually every opponent of the regime that had fled to other Gulf countries. While senior Iraqi officials admitted that Iraq had supported Bakhtiar and Oveissi in attempts to overthrow Khomeini, they stated that there were at most several thousand active supporters in Iraq and that Bakhtiar and Oveissi relied almost solely on the prospect of military coups and uprisings within Iran.

By early 1980, both nations were sending arms to rebel groups in the opposing country, and were conducting limited guerrilla training. Little of this conflict was public, however, until Al Dawaa made an unsuccessful hand grenade attack on the life of Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi foreign minister on April 1, 1980. Al Dawaa immediately took public credit for the attack and claimed that it was in part a reprisal for the fact that the Ba'ath had executed nearly 40 of its members the previous month. Saddam Hussein retaliated by making membership in Al Dawaa punishable by death. Three days later, Khomeini made a broadcast that openly called for the Iraqi armed forces to overthrow Saddam Hussein.

Iraq replied by bombing Qasr-e-Shirin on April 9. Iraq began to deport large numbers of Iraqi citizens of Iranian birth to Iran, and quietly executed the Ayatollah al-Sadr -- who had previously declared the Ba'ath regime was un-Islamic and that relations within it were religiously forbidden -- and his sister Amina bint al-Huda. Khomeini declared three days of mourning, called for an uprising by the Iraqi military forces, and increased Iran's paramilitary training of Iraqi Shi'ites.

Iraq, in turn, arrested large numbers of Shi'ites in the key religious area of Najaf, Karbala, and al-Thawa, and expelled large numbers of Shi'ites as "Iranians", although many had only the most tenuous connection to Iran. Saddam Hussein also threatened that he would conduct, "any kind of battle to defend (Iraq's) sovereignty and honor."

Both nations severed diplomatic relations in June, 1980. Iranian radio began constant broadcasts calling for the overthrow of the Ba'ath, and attacking Saddam Hussein. Iraq allowed Khomeini's opponents -- like Shahpour Bakhtiar and General Oviessi -- to broadcast attacks on Khomeini. Iraq also supported attempts to create anti-Khomeini coups inside Iran. The most notable of these coup attempts was sponsored by Bakhtiar, and occurred in July, 1980. It was called the "Nojeh Coup" and led to the arrest of some 500 army and air Force personnel during July 21-29, long jail terms for at least 200, and the execution of 50. The failure of this coup may well have been a major reason that Iraq decided on overt invasion.

The tension between the two countries rose steadily during the rest of July and August. Saddam Hussein demanded that Iran return the land it had seized from Iraq under the Shah and control of the entire Shatt al-Arab in July. While Khomeini and the rest of Iran's leadership were more involved with the struggle to consolidate power in Northern Iran, they continued to step up their own

propaganda attacks and efforts to obtain support from Iraq's Shi'ites, Kurds, and military forces. This may explain why Iraq suddenly elected a 50 man Kurdish Legislative Council on September 19, 1980.

A major new outbreak of fighting took place on September 2-4, when a new series of border clashes began near Qasr-e-Shirin. Both Iran and Iraq have claimed that the war began in response to the other side's expansion of this clash. Iran has charged that Iraq provoked the clash as an excuse for its invasion of Iran. Iraq has charged that that Iran attacked across the border near Qasr-e-Shirin, Nasrabad and Kalantari on September 4, 1980, and that Iran shelled the Iraqi border towns of Khanagir, Mendali, Zubatya and Naft-Khana.

What is clear is that on September 6, Iraq reacted to these border clashes by threatening to seize some 350 square kilometers of Iranian territory in the area from Qasr e-Shirin to the Musian on the grounds that this territory should have been transferred to Iraq under the 1975 Algiers Accord. When Iran refused to cede the territory, Baghdad acted on its threats. Iraqi radio announced on September 10 that it had seized some 80 square kilometers of the disputed territory in the Qasr-i-Shirin area and has taken additional disputed territory near the villages of Saif Said and Zain al-Qaws. On September 14, Iraq announced that it had taken some 140 more square kilometers near Musain and the villages of Diyaal and Haila-Khadir.

Similar border clashes continued during the following week, and sporadic artillery fire occurred across the Shatt al-Arab. Iraq abrogated the 1975 Algiers Accord on 17 September. It declared Iran had refused to abide by the Accord, and that the Shatt al-Arab was "totally Iraqi and totally Arab." When Iran refused Iraqi demands that its ships take on Iraqi pilots, heavy fighting broke out along the waterway. Iran admitted losing two F-4 fighters in combat on September 19, and President Bani Sadr decreed a general mobilization on September 20.

2.3 The Causes of Iraq's Decision to Invade

It is important to note that large scale war still was not inevitable. Up to this point, the clashes between Iran and Iraq were no more severe than the clashes in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While both regimes were hostile and were actively working to undermine the other, there was nothing inevitable about committing all their forces to a border struggle, or letting a war become an end in itself. Both sides were certainly vulnerable to internal political forces, but neither state had showed it could win major support from any faction in the other state or had the ability to cause a major political upheaval or coup. While both sides could point to the other's actions as cause for war, there was nothing inevitable about a large scale conflict.

It rapidly became apparent, however, that Saddam Hussein had taken the decision to go beyond border clashes. Iraq's troop movements in early and mid-September showed that it had been preparing for a large scale invasion for at least several weeks, and more probably for several months. Within a matter of days after the clashes on September 14, Iraq launched its invasion and the two nations became involved in a conflict that was to last nearly a decade and involve millions of men on both sides.

2.3.1 The Question of Iraqi Objectives

There is no way to determine Iraq's precise intentions and goals in invading Iran. It is virtually certain, however, that Saddam Hussein and his colleagues acted to achieve some mix of the following eight objectives:

- Securing the Baath regime from Khomeini's declared intent of overthrowing it, and from his efforts at subversion.
- Securing Iraq's borders from military incidents, and obtaining the defense positions in the border area that the Shah had promised to transfer as part of the Algiers Accord, including the 200-300 square kilometers of territory around Qasr e-Shirin and Mehran that would help shield Baghdad from an Iranian invasion.
- Revoking the Algiers Accord and giving Iraq full control over all the waters of the Shatt al-Arab.
- Destroying Iranian military power while Iran was still weakened by its purges of its regular military forces and in the process of creating new revolutionary forces, while it was cutoff from Western technical support and resupply, and while its manpower, training, logistics, and maintenance system was in a state of near chaos.
- Creating conditions which would overthrow Khomeini and create a more friendly and secular regime in Iran.
- Conquering or liberating Iran's key oil province of Khuzestan, and placing it under Iraqi or Arab rule. This would simultaneously secure Iraq's access to the Gulf and deprive Iraq if the economic assets needed to recover its status as a major Gulf power.
- Becoming so powerful that Iraq would be the dominant power in the Gulf, that no Southern Gulf state would risk Iraqi hostility, and forcing the Baath Party in Syria to accept Iraq's preeminence.
- Taking advantage of its victory, and Egypt's isolation as a result of its peace treaty with Israel, to becoming the dominant power in the Arab world.

It is important to note that the fact Iraq invaded Iran is not prima facie evidence of aggressive intent or guilt for the war. The creation of a contingency capability to invade Iran cannot, under the circumstances, be regarded as a premeditated effort to either invade or dominate Iran. Given the conditions involved, such preparations were a prudent measure. Further, Iraq's preparation for its invasion, and initial execution of its attack, often provided so inadequate that it is at least credible that Iraq was reacting to the border clashes in September by rapidly executing a plan that it has never fully analyzed or prepared for.

While the idea of a defensive invasion may seem a contradiction in terms, it is scarcely historically unusual. Israel, for example, preempted its Arab neighbors in 1967 under conditions where it can scarcely be called an aggressor. It is also important to note that Saddam Hussein publicly accepted the first UN call for a cease-fire (UN Resolution 479) as early as September 28, 1980, and proposed a cease-fire of his own when Iran rejected the UN proposal.

It is also possible that Saddam Hussein cloaked the reason for his war in terms of very broad and ambitious rhetoric, but expected to end the war quickly

and to make only limited gains. He may have been willing to settle for a peace that would have overcome any taint of defeat that still lingered from the Algiers Accord of 1975, that gave the dispute area along the land boundary to Iraq, which returned control of the Shatt al-Arab to Iraq, which resulted in an end to political and religious pressure from Khomeini, and which enhanced Iraq's status in the Arab world by returning the islands the Shah had "seized" in the Gulf to Oman and the UAE.

It does, however, seem probable that Iraq's leadership acted with at least some hope of overthrowing the Khomeini regime and/or weakening Iran to the point that Iraq would emerge as the dominant military power in the Gulf. Iraq was actively involved in supporting various coup attempts in Iran, both those supported by ex-prime minister Bakhtiar and those supported by various parts of the Iranian military. Iraq was actively encouraging Arab separatism in Khuzistan. It invaded Iran at a time when Iran was isolated in the world community by its seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, and was fighting a variety of ethnic dissidents and two violently hostile Marxist movements. It also invaded at a point when Iran's military forces were in a state of chaos.

While Iraq made many defensive claims in launching its invasion, and soon stated it had limited objectives, this could easily have been political window dressing for a far more ambitious attack. Baghdad Radio certainly encouraged the idea of an Arab uprising in Khuzistan and the Iraqi Ministry of Information circulated books and pamphlets talking about the liberation of Khuzistan. Iraq also backed Bakhtiar in plans to create a government in exile.

Finally, it is also all too possible that Saddam Hussein led Iraq into war on the basis of a confused and ill-defined mix of all these different goals and objectives. Anyone who has dealt with the senior leadership of the Ba'ath becomes aware of the fact that emotion and ideology are real, and not simulated, forces in shaping its behavior. Setting clear grand strategic objectives for military action is unusually in any culture at any period in history, and Iraq's fundamentally distorted world view scarcely equipped it to make highly sophisticated and controlled judgments. One of the basic lessons of war is that nations that see war in terms of rational actors and bargaining are neither able to predict war or understand it once it occurs. Seeing Iraq in such terms may well be exceptionally unrealistic.

2.3.2 The Question of Iranian Objectives

The question of Iranian objectives is equally difficult to understand. Like many of the detailed diplomatic and military actions of the leaders of the French and Russian revolutions, or the American declaration of war in 1812, Iran's new leadership unquestionably did a great deal to provide a war. It seems likely that Iran's leadership really did expect some kind of major uprising in Iraq and did everything possible to encourage it, including committing the kind of acts of covert subversion that must be treated as acts of war.

At the same time, however, Iran scarcely was ready to launch any large scale conflict of its own. From the beginning of 1979 to the day that Iraq invaded, Khomeini's new revolutionary elite was engaged in a struggle for control of the Shah's armed forces which it generally resolved by weakening the capability of the Iranian army, navy, and air force. Khomeini triggered an initial wave of desertions when he called upon Iranian servicemen to the Shah and joined the revolution on January 17, 1979. He purged and executed members of the general officer corps beginning in February, 1979, and over 550 senior

officers (many generals) had left the military or been killed by the end of March.

Disagreements over the use of the regular armed forces against Iran's Kurds led to additional purges at the high command level, and these were reinforced when the regular armed forces were used to fire on Arab demonstrators in "Arabistan" in April and May. These events also helped lead to the rise of revolutionary forces as a substitute for the regular armed forces, and to the creation of a new 6,000 man Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (Pasdaran e-Inqilal e-Islami) on June 16, 1979. At the same time, the IRP created its own military action arm called the Party of God (Hezbollah).

The debates over the role of regular and revolutionary forces in suppressing the Kurds and Arab separatists, and in providing security, for the revolution, led to constant changes in high command through out the rest of 1979. At the same time, the new revolutionary government cut the conscription period in half, and allowed some 40-60% of the Shah's military manpower to leave the armed forces through a mix of desertion, purges, resignations, and reassignments to revolutionary forces. Khomeini's new government also cancelled most of its military orders when it came to power and attempted to sell its 80 F-14 aircraft and Phoenix missiles back to the U.S.

The situation grew even worse after Iranian students seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979, and took its occupants hostage. While the U.S. had arranged for a spare parts shipment in October, the Iranians failed to take delivery, and the U.S. then suspended all spare parts deliveries and imposed an embargo. All remaining U.S. technicians also left the country. Britain, which had been Iran 's second largest Western supplier, also cut off most military deliveries.

Virtually all advanced training and maintenance activities came to a near halt, combined arms and joint exercises halted or degenerated to nearly farcial levels, and something like 30% of Iran's land force equipment, 50-60% of its aircraft, and 60% of its helicopters were not operational when the war began. Repeated purges and reviews led to the loss of anywhere from 25% to 50% of the majors and field grade officers in the Iranian army and air force by February, 1980, and thousands of skilled technicians and junior officers left the services.

While Iran acquired a new commander-in-chief when it elected Abdul Hassan Bani-Sadr President on February 3, 1980, this immediately added a struggle for political power between Khomeini's secular and religious supporters to the other convulsions in the Iranian military. Senior command shake-ups continued during June, and the July, 1980 coup attempt led to purges and executions which were still going on when the war started.

There was no agreement in Iran as to what -- if anything -- should replace the regular armed forces. The leftist movements -- like the Tudeh, Mujahideen e-Khalq, and Mujahideen e-Fedayeen -- opposed any regular forces. Leaders like Prime Minister Rajai wanted revolutionary popular forces which depended on mass mobilization and guerrilla warfare rather than regular forces and technology. Khomeini and President Bani-Sadr seem to have been more cautious, but their detailed goals and intentions were still totally unclear.

Khomeini had authorized attempts to reintroduce an effective conscription program before the war began, but these were still far from operational. The Iranian mobilization system -- which had never been particularly well thought

out -- had become largely inoperable. The new Pasdaran or Revolutionary Guards only totalled about 30,000 men in lightly armed organized units, and were concentrating on internal security missions. The untrained volunteers, or Baseej, may have constituted an "arm of 20 million" in speeches but they had little military meaning in September, 1980.

While Bani-Sadr was nominally commander-in-chief, there is no evidence that any true high command was still functional within the Iranian regulars forces, and the new revolutionary forces lacked any coherent command or direction. Bani-Sadr and Rajai could not agree on the need for spare parts, how to reestablish and manage conscription, or even the need to man skilled positions like military maintenance and logistics. Leaders like Hashemi Rafsanjani and other senior members of the new Islamic Revolutionary Council (IRC) and Islamic Republican Party (IRP) openly stated that they would rather lose much of the country than see a secular government under Bani Sadr restore professional military forces. In fact, the IRP was still committed to this position to the extent that it help sabotage the agreement that the U.S. would resume some shipments that came in 1981, as a result of the Algiers accord on the hostage crisis.

Iran's lack of preparation for war is indicated by the fact that it did not even have a higher command operational in the border area at the point when the war began. There were no major combat units located at the border along the 450 mile front where Iraq invaded, and no Iranian regular artillery or armored battalions, or attack helicopter units, were located near the areas where Iraq claimed Iran fired across the border. Any Iranian artillery fire, therefore, had to be limited in volume and independent of any early intention to begin military operations. There were no major Iranian formations in the most critical area of the border, near Khorramshahr and Abadan. The nearest Iranian division had to move forward from Ahwaz, some 50-60 miles away. In fact, even Iraqi communiques indicate that Iraq did not encounter a single brigade sized or large unit during the first two days of its invasion.

This does not absolve Iran of guilt for the war, but it does show that the bulk of the blame for any military escalation during September, must be laid on Iraq, and that Iran was far from ready to go beyond subversion when the war began. For all the various Iraqi and Iranian claims relating to the incidents before the war, it is clear that it was Iraq that was preparing and deploying its forces for a major invasion of Iran, and Iran was not even prepared for an effective defense.

The principal Arab tribe in the region was the Bani Kab. This tribe occasionally controlled both banks of the Shatt al Arab, but control normally fluctuated between the Persians and Turks, with the Bani Kab shifting loyalty to the side that offered them the most, or dividing according to the interest of different tribal factions. Between 1920 and 1925, the local Sheik of the eastern faction of the Bani Kab attempted to capitalize on the various political upheavals in the region to create a separate emirate. He and his son were seized by the Shah's agents on April 25, 1925. The Arab population of the region then was forcibly Persianized, leading to a series of small tribal revolts between 1925 and 1946.

The rise of Nasser and Arab nationalism in the mid-1950s led to the birth of a "peoples liberation" movement among the Arabs in Khuzistan and then an Arabistan Liberation Front (which was funded by Egypt and then Iraq). Iran's treatment of those who asserted their Arab identity, or which it regarded as Arabs, after the mid-1950s was often discriminatory, as was true of the

treatment of all non-Persians. This, however, was typical of the region. The Savak did not conduct particularly stringent effort to suppress Arab nationalism efforts in the area after the late 1960s, although it did conduct some arrests and executions of activists between 1970 and 1975. The first major outburst of "Arab" activity after that period occurred in April, 1980, when Iranian forces under the commander of the Iranian Navy, General Madani, disarmed Arab activists and order a series of arrests that led to scattered fighting, some 300-500 dead, 200-300 wounded, and 400-700 arrests. By this time, however, Iraq was actively using the PFLP and other front groups to channel arms and money to the Arabistan Liberation Front, and providing military training in Iraq.

Footnotes:

- For an Iraqi or pan-Arab view of these issues see Nicola Firzli, Nassim Khoury, *The Iran-Iraq Conflict*, Editions du Monde Arabe, 1981 (No location of publication listed). Distributed by the Iraqi Ministry of Information, pp. 48-49.
- See Nikkie R. Keddie, "The Minorities Question in Iran," in Shirin Takhir-Kheli and Shaheen Ayubi, *The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons and Old Conflicts*, Boulder, Praeger, 1983, pp. 85-108, especially pp. 91-98, and Ervand Abrahamian, "Communism and Communalism in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 4, October, 1970, p. 293. Abrahamian estimates Iran's ethnic divisions in the late 1960s as 19% Azari (Turkic), 7 other Turkic, 7% Kurd, 3% Arab, 2% Baluchi, 1% Armenian and Assyrian, and 2% other. He estimates native Persian speakers as 45%, with 8% Mazandarani and 6% Bakhtiari and Lurs as marginal linguistic minorities. The figures then issued by the CIA in the annual *World Factbook* show a higher Persian speaking estimate, but the CIA analysts involved feel this estimate was too high.
- Iraqi intelligence used the PFLP, as well as other "cutouts" to fund and train such movements.
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *World Factbook*, 1981, Washington, GPO, 1981, pp. 92-94.
- Khomeini spent roughly a year in Turkey between expulsion from Iran and entry to Iraq. For a good description of Khomeini's role in Iran and Iraq during the 1960s and 1970s, see Philip Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, New York, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, pp. 42-81.
- This agreement backfired in part against the Shah. Later talks allowed 130,000 Shi'ites from Iran to visit the key shrines in Iraq each year, and this allowed Khomeini to increase his contacts with Iranian Shi'ites by circulating large numbers of cassettes and pre-recorded sermons and messages.
- Khomeini did not preach openly against the Ba'ath regime during his stay in Iraq. He was carefully watched by the Iraqi secret police because the anti-Ba'athist Al Daawa al Islamiya (Islamic Call) movement had been founded in Najaf in the late 1960s. Khomeini did, however, establish close ties with Iraqi Shi'ite leaders like the Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir Sadr who were definitely anti-regime. Reports that Iraq somehow had something to do with the unexplained death of Khomeini's son, Mustapha, in late October, 1977, seem totally spurious. Islam does not allow an autopsy and the cause of his death has never been established. The only charges made at the time, however, were that he was poisoned by the Savak. The facts are unclear, but

the Savak may have done this in retaliation for an attempt on the life of the Shah's twin sister, Princess Ashraf, on September 13, 1977.

- One of the rumors surrounding President Ahmed Hassan Bakr's resignation in July, 1979, is that he split with Saddam Hussein over the latter's ruthlessness in suppressing the Shi'ites.
- Philip Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, New York, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, pp. 164-170.
- Both Iraq and Iran had long standing arguments over their boundaries dating back well before the treaties between Persian and the Ottoman empires. During the 17th and 18th centuries, control of the border area went to the strongest nation, or to the strongest tribe when both were weak.
- For an excellent description of the issues involved, and their history, see Daniel Pipes, "A Border Adrift: Origins of the Conflict," in Shirin Takhir-Kheli and Shaheen Ayubi, *The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons and Old Conflicts*, Boulder, Praeger, 1983, pp. 3-26.
- Keith McLachlan and George Joffe, *The Gulf War*, London, Economist Intelligence Unit, 1984, pp. 10-19.
- About 630 kilometers of the line are in Turkey. It ends at Iskandarun bay, and the port is about 10 kilometers from Dortyol and is less than 25 kilometers from the U.S. base at Incirlik.
- More than half of the line to Syria is in Syria. It was the subject of major disputes long before the Iran-Iraq War began. Syria halted shipments during December 1966 to March 1967, it unilaterally nationalized the portion in Syria in 1972, and unilaterally doubled transit fees in 1973. Shipments halted between April, 1976 and February, 1979 because of fights over transit fees and the Lebanese civil war. Production then averaged only 300,000 to 500,000 BPD, and Syria kept 80,000-100,000 BPD for use at its refinery in Homs. Syria finally shut off Iraqi shipments on April 10, 1982, when it made a deal with Iran.
- For a good discussion of Iraq's views of this vulnerability see Christine Moss Helms, *Iraq: Eastern Flank of the Arab World*, Washington D.C., Brookings, 1984, pp. 45-54.
- The Gulf waters off of the coast of Iraq are less than 18 meters or 60 feet deep.
- Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers (WMEAT)*, 1986, Washington, GPO, 1987, pp. 120-121
- See the discussion of Egypt in Nicola Firzli, Nassim Khoury, *The Iran-Iraq Conflict*, Editions du Monde Arabe, 1981 (No location of publication listed), and the various writings of Tariq Aziz and Saddam Hussein as distributed by the Iraqi Ministry of Information during 1978-1980 .
- The evidence is uncertain, but Iraqi security forces seem to have uncovered a plot by the Ayatollah Sadr to flee to Iran in May, 1979. The Ayatollah and a number of his followers seem to have been ready to organize a movement in exile to create a Shi'ite movement to overthrow the Ba'ath. Philip Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985, pp. 164-173; Edgar O'Ballance, *The Gulf War*, London, Brassey's, 1988, pp. 26-27; and Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, Boulder, Westview, 1988, pp. 24-28.
- Edgar O'Ballance, *The Gulf War*, London, Brassey's, 1988, pp. 26-27
- Based on interviews in Baghdad in 1984.

- Al Dawaa claimed there had been a total of 79 political executions in Iraq during March.
- See Nikola B. Schahgaldian, *The Iranian Military Under The Islamic Republic*, Santa Monica, Rand R-3473-USDP, 1987, pp. 22-24.
- Experts dispute the extent to which Oman and the UAE prepared at the start of the war to support an Iraqi invasion of the Tunb islands in the Strait, and the Aba Musas. It is important to note that the Shah did not seize the islands in the Straits of Hormuz when the British left, they had been in Iranian hands for years. Similarly, it is far from clear that any element of the UAE had the slightest element in getting involved in a war over any of the islands in the Gulf. Nevertheless, some authorities in the Gulf feel that Oman and Abu Dhabi did agree to allow such Iraqi action and were only stopped from granting such support after quiet British intervention. Unconfirmed reports also exist that Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia agreed to provide Iraq with the financial and material support it needed to conduct the war two days before Iraq invaded Iran. There is no question that Saddam Hussein did inform several leaders in the Gulf that it planned to invade Iran in July and August, and the author was told this by some of the leaders involved, but it is far from clear that Iraq got a "blank check" from any Southern Gulf state.
- Senior officials in several southern Gulf countries have indicated that Iraq began to "consult" on its intention to attack Iran in May 1980, and senior Saudi sources stated in early 1981 that President Hussein of Iraq clearly announced his intention to invade Iran during his visit to Saudi Arabia in early August.

A
 79-81, and Annual Energy Review, 1986, Washington,
 GP 3 8 _ > l y
 @ A -ç -f #° #• \$Ê \$Á *ó *... +,vqhqhqhqaqaqaqaqhq Z
 +, +,, 2. 2/ 3 3 4 4 8x 8y 9 9 ;ë ;-
 @q @r D D
 d d løxsxsxsxsxsxsjsxsxsxs Z lø lç mD mE sR sS
 tt tu }Ñ }Æ Ä† Ä° ç\ ç] è_ èÖ ° °
 ß @xsxsxsxsjsxsxsjsxsc J Z ® Ñy Ñz Gi E
 j ` „ `‰ fi• fifi „» „Ö Ö- Ö-
 ~ø ~Í ø ç •zszszlzczczcsczlz Z J •
 f - - -a -w -' -' - è
 3 !" !• "% "& "Ü "á "´ "ø " „ "%x x o x o o o x x o x B
 "% #§ #• #Û #1 % %
 (ë (í)K)L)Z)s)")• *Ö *E +• +Ø +" +' +^ v o o o o v o o v o
 B +^ , ,: ,i ,~ , - /d /e /° /• 0 0 0d 0e 0í
 0ç 0Û 0Û 12 1H 2

2 v o o o v o o v o v o B 2 3> 3W 3ü 3´ 3~ 4
42 43 4F 4R 4w 4x 4° 4ç 4, 4" 5 5I 5} 5~ 9~ v v v o v o o o v o
B 9~ : i= ig ih iu iv iç ié i• i• i• i... i x sn
sns s sh @ P B
3 4 ` Æ > l € Ÿ

İ ° „ İ § Ò ÷yuuqmumiyeeqia]Y

•{{{wsia]{{Y{wUO ÷ !• #ø \$È '0 *ó * .É 0U 20 4v 6 9 iè ië ;

$i \cdot i = -1$?J A D

Fë H‡ L" Os Q^ T~ W Y? ZU]åyuqm̄iuea]YuuUQ

{wsc_[Q

]å _H ag d g i4 j< m; o\ q¶ tv w yÍ }Ñ }Ø{wsokgs

}ø •õ Åî É Ö= áõ â• ãã ç_ è_ è` èö ë† îN îÒ ñ wokgçg[_UQgkk_
ñ ö• ù ü £• ßâ ©° 'Œ ÆP •, •O ¥{ •• •ç °

• $g \in G \rightarrow \{ws\{okgwsckkg_c[k$

"q 'F •î Ÿ' <ã fi• fi± fifl .' „» „...{wsookgo{scs__ckY

© L / i ˘ • é - - · " % " Û " „ # Û %-
(ë)K) " * Õ + " { { wsfbbbbbbbbbbbbbb ^ "

5 >

+ " , : , ~ / d 0 0 d 0 ũ 2

5 >

\ Ɖ à È w 4 ° M ° 0 K o ¥ fi -9 -• #< \$y \$
z :• ;• Ɖ ï & { "ø)ó 0ÿ 6
<• Cè K" S~ \ \$ cÉ kí q1 y± ÅR â3 è˘ ò †c ®° •° • ø» «Í œ~
÷î fi` Â„ Ìz Ūk
(/ :• @

© • ! " # \$ % & ' () * + , - . / : ; < = > ? @ [\] ^ _ ` { | } ~ • Ä
+ " ; ; Å Ç È Ñ Ö Ü á à â ã ä å

÷ ; •] å } Ø ñ - ö „ … ÿ ®

$i =$ $i \cdot @$ \neg \bullet $:=$ $:\bullet$ $:\bullet$ $i \dots$ \bullet