

VIII Phase Five: New Iranian Efforts at "Final Offensives", 1986-1987

8.0 Iran Prepares for New "Final Offensives"

Iran's failure to launch new "final offensives" during most of 1984 and 1985 was deceptive. Iran had taken serious losses during 1984 and its spring offensive of 1985, but it had scarcely given up its ambitions to topple Saddam Hussein's regime. Iranian planners continued to try to find some way to strike across or around the Hawizeh Marshes and developed detailed plans to attack Iraq in the south and to capture the Faw Peninsula and Umm Qasr.

The problems Iran faced were formidable. Iran still could mobilize a maximum of little more than a million men. Its regular Army had a strength of roughly 305,000 and the Pasdaran a strength of about 350,000. Iran had roughly 1,000 operational main battle tanks, and Iran had about 1,400 other armored vehicles, and between 600 and 800 artillery weapons. Its Air Force still had some 35,000 men, but only about 60 to 80 operational aircraft.

In contrast, Iraq's regular Army and Popular Army had a strength of roughly 800,000, including some 230,000 active reserves. Except for those periods Iran rapidly mobilized the Baseej, Iraq had the advantage in manpower. Iraq also had roughly 4,500 operational main battle tanks, 4,000 other armored vehicles, and over 5,000 artillery weapons. Iraq's Air Force had some 40,000 men, including air defense personnel, and about 500 operational combat aircraft.

This Iraqi strength was reflected in the fact that it was Iraq launched the first major offensive of 1986. Iraq spent weeks preparing its supply depots near Majnoon, and improving its access to the Islands. It then lowered the water level and built up a massive reserve of engineering equipment to support an attack on the Iranian-held northern island. On January 6, which Iraqi Army Day, two brigades of the Iraqi Third Corps attacked the Iranian positions on the northern island. The Iranian positions were not particularly sophisticated and designed more for offensive forces than a strong defense. By January 8, Iraq had pushed Iran out of the southern half of the island.

This Iraqi success did not, however, either halt or delay Iran's plans to attack. Iran's leadership continued to believe that if it could put sufficient strain on Iraq's forces and regime, it could force Iraq's defenses to collapse. Some leaders, like Khomeini, may also have believed in some form of divine intervention.

As a result, Iran had built up a powerful attack force in southern Iran during the latter half of 1985. Iran also made major improvements in its amphibious assault capabilities.

Iran had also bought large numbers of small boats, bridging equipment, and pontoons during 1985, and had begun major amphibious training exercises in the Caspian. It carried out extensive engineering efforts south of Abadan, and built a new military road

system on earth mounds through the marshes and flooded areas along the Shatt.

Iran began to use women for rear area military tasks for the first time in October, 1985, in order to free men for assignments at the front. It also drew up provisions for sending civil servants to the front, with up to 10% of them serving at full pay.

It called up at least 50,000 new volunteers in December 1985 and January 1986, and some estimates went as high as 300,000. Iran bought more chemical defense equipment, and indications began to appear in late 1985, that Syria was providing Iran with aid in developing its own chemical warfare agents.

When Iran mobilized, it deployed its forces to the south. These deployments included nearly two thirds of its elite Pasdaran Corps, including the Karbala 25th division, Najaf-Ashraf 8th division, Ashoura Division, and Special Martyr's brigade, and nearly half of the regular Army, including the Bakhtaran 81st Division, Mazandaran 30th Division, and the Khorassan 77th division. These deployments created a total force of nearly 200,000 troops and the equivalent of some 20 to 25 divisions. A significant number of these Iranian forces were deployed between Ahwaz and Dezful, and in the Hoor-al-Azim and Hoor-al-Howeizeh regions.

During early 1986, Iran deployed its new amphibious lift along the Shatt al-Arab south of Abadan, and stockpiled large amounts of small craft and pontoon bridging equipment. Iran also deployed amphibious commando units of roughly 1,000 men. These units were specially trained for amphibious assaults and fighting in wetlands, and which had an effective command structure similar to that of airborne or special forces units. These deployments gave Iran greatly enhanced capability to strike across the Shatt al Arab.

8.1 Wal Fajr 8: Iran Takes Faw

By early February, Iran was ready to launch its new series of offensives. While Iran's exact objectives in launching these offensives are unclear, the main strategic goals seem to have been to seize and retain the Faw Peninsula and block Iraqi access to the Gulf, to carry out a follow-on attack to seize Basra from the north, to disrupt oil production in Southern Iraq, to disrupt Iraqi access to Kuwait, and to support a Shi'ite uprising or anti-government operations in Southern Iraq.

On February 9th, Iran launched the first phase of a two-pronged attack against the Iraqi 3rd Corps and 7th Corps. Iran attempted to split Iraq's forces by attacking at both the northern and southern ends of the Southern Front. The Iranian forces in the northern prong of the offensive launched three separate thrusts. These thrusts were pressed home as though they were actual offensives although their real purpose seems to have been largely diversionary.

One thrust occurred near Qurnah at the junction of the Iraqi 3rd and 4th Corps. It ran head on into well prepared Iraqi defenses, and although Iran launched human wave attacks for nearly three days, Iraqi firepower drove the Iranian forces back with heavy losses of manpower and equipment. The second thrust was a small armored attack across

relatively dry ground south of Qurnah, and this led to a shooting match between Iranian and Iraqi forces at close ranges. Iraq had superior numbers and better trained forces and Iran again suffered heavy losses and around 4,000 casualties. The third thrust occurred on February 14, when Iranian forces attempted to recapture the northern island of Majnoon and were contained in their existing position after suffering heavy losses.

The outcome of the Iranian attacks in the south was different. Iran used the cover of night and poor weather on the night of February 10-11 to launch a major two-pronged amphibious assault on Faw. One part of this assault, supported by frogmen, attacked an island group in the Shatt called Umm Rasas, just south of Khorramshahr. Iranian forces quickly took the virtually undefended main island and moved on towards the Basra-Faw road. The Iranian advance then began to encounter heavy Iraqi opposition, however, and Iranian forces lacked the armor and artillery strength to hold or counterattack. Iraqi forces retook Umm Rasas on February 12, and the Iranian division fell back across the Shatt.

It was the second attack that made major gains. These forces struck at the Faw Peninsula in the area near Siba. Although the Shatt was 280 meters wide at this point, and the Iranian forces had to make their crossing at night and in the middle of a driving rain, the Iranian landings were successful. Iran did not succeed in rapidly putting a pontoon bridge across the Shatt near Siba, but it did use boats to land nearly a division's worth of troops at six different points and Iranian troops began to move forward along a broad front on the coast of the Faw Peninsula.

The Iraqi high command was fooled into thinking Iran's attacks to the north were the main thrust of the offensive. They had most of their reserves in the area around Qurnah and were slow to react. The Iraqi senior commanders in the region were preoccupied with a major near Iranian artillery barrage of Basra, and once they understood that Iran was attacking, they seem to have felt the main Iranian thrust was directed at Iraq's positions immediately south of the city.

The Iraqi defenses covering Faw were also relatively poorly prepared. Iraqi planners do not seem to have fully considered the possibility of an Iranian amphibious assault in this area before the Iranian landings, and seem to have ignored Faw's potential strategic importance.

While the port of Al Faw was largely abandoned, and the long marsh-ringed Faw Peninsula was isolated from Basra and Iraq's main lines of communication, a successful Iranian thrust still offered Iran the ability to cut Iraq off from the Gulf. It also put Iran into a position to both attack Basra from the South, and Iraq's main lines of communication to Kuwait.

The local Iraqi forces near Iran's main landing points were limited in number, and the city itself had only about 1,000 Iraqi reservists to defend it. These local forces could not cope with either Iran's multiple landings or Iran's ability to rapidly move over water barriers and surround the town. Iranian forces penetrated deep into Iraqi positions during the initial hours of the attack. The Iraqi troops in Faw held out until February 14, but some of the Iraqi units outside Faw panicked and abandoned their fixed defenses and

much of their heavy equipment. While estimates disagree, Iraq seems to have suffered about 4,000 casualties during the initial fighting for Faw, versus 2,500 for Iran, and Iran took some 1,500 Iraqis as prisoners of war.

Further, Iraq could not use its air power effectively during the critical initial phase of the battle. Although Iraq later claimed to have flown up to 355 fighter and 134 combat helicopter sorties per day during the Iranian assault on Faw, the heavy rain over the battle area during the first day of combat made it difficult to fly effective attack sorties. Adequate flying weather did not occur until February 14, and even then the weather was erratic. Iraqi took serious fighter losses without being able to find suitable targets. Iran's infantry had learned to disperse, dig in and take cover, and move heavy equipment and supplies in small amounts or at night. Iraq lost 15 to 30 aircraft during the first week of Wal Fajr 8, and found few exposed targets. This scarcely justified the loss of airplanes which were each worth nearly twenty million dollars.

Iraqi air attacks were also ineffective in destroying communications along the long causeway along the shore of the Shatt al-Arab from Khorramshahr and Abadan City to the Iranian launch point on the southern tip of Abadan Island. Most movement took place at night. The weather was poor during the day, Iraqi efforts to bomb the causeway were quickly repaired, and Iraqi aircraft failed to do consistent enough damage to any of the bridges across the canals or khors that cut through the main causeway to inhibit Iranian movements.

As a result of these developments, Iraq was not ready to counterattack during the first few days of the attack and this allowed Iran to reinforce its troops in Faw to a total of nearly 20,000 men. The Iraqi high command held back its reserves far too long because of its fear of an Iranian attack on Basra and of the Iranian attacks farther north.

Once the Iraqi high command did rush forces from the Barsa and Qurana fronts, its initial counterattacks on February 13 and 14 were poorly organized. Iraq did not have elite infantry trained to fight on foot in the assault role. When Iraq did commit elite units, like its 10,000 man Republican Guard Brigades, these were not ready for infantry assaults, close fighting, or movement through the wet lands and marshes. Iraq's superiority in artillery and armor also proved to have little effect against well dug-in troops.

At the height of Iran's success, Iran threatened to break out of the Faw Peninsula and attack Umm Qasr. Iranian troops reached the Khor Abdallah waterway opposite Kuwait, and there were even reports that Iranian forces had surrounded the Iraqi navy base at Umm Qasr, which was only 16 kilometers from Faw. Iran also captured Iraq's main air control and warning center covering the Gulf, which was located north of Al Faw.

This resulted in near panic continued in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The resulting fear of an Iraqi defeat led to constant consultation among nearby Arab states, as well as a special Arab Foreign Ministers meeting.

By February 14, the fighting had reached the point where Iran had lost some 8,000 to 10,000 casualties, and Iraq had lost 3,000 to 5,000. Iraq, however, was now deploying its reserves and steadily improving its defenses. Iran also had begun to reach the limit of the forces it could deploy and support. It held Faw and positions near Siba in the north and the Mamlaha salt flat in the West, but was not strong enough to take on the Iraqi forces in open terrain.

Iraq was now able to contain Iran, but it experienced problems when it tried to launch major counter-offensives.

Iraq began its counterattacks with three reinforced brigade groups operating as separate columns. These groups rapidly grew to divisional strength. One column moved southward along the road along the bank of the Shatt al-Arab. It was halted at positions south of Umm Qasr. The second, or central column, moved south along a new road built the previous year in order to allow rapid Iraqi movement without coming under observation or fire from across the Shatt. This road, however, cut through terrain which is soft desert in the dry season and a sea of mud in the wet season. The Iraqi attack was road bound and could not advance against Iranian forces equipped with large amounts of artillery and light anti-tank weapons. The third column moved along the road on the northern shore of the Khor Abdullah. It too had to fight in open territory and under conditions where its forces could not move off the main road.

Iraq's forces took unacceptable casualties whenever they attacked Iranian forces under these conditions. Iranian troops still fought with fervor and had extensive stocks of weapons. Although Iraqi forces attempted to drive south for nearly a week, they could only make limited gains. While estimates are uncertain, Iraq seems to have lost at least 5,000 dead or critically wounded during these counterattacks. The weather also did not allow Iraq to make optimal use of its superiority in fighters, armed helicopters, and artillery until February 22. By this time, Iranian forces were fully dug-in and Iran had had more than 10 nights to move men, equipment, and supplies across the Shatt -- possibly using a pontoon bridge that was disassembled during the day.

Nevertheless, Iraq then tried to push Iran out of Faw by using sheer brute force. It assigned its best combat commanders to each of the three columns and then used artillery barrages and short infantry rushes to advance from one defensive position to another. Iraq had now fully deployed its superiority in air power, firepower, and armor. Improving weather helped Iraq to make more effective use of multiple rocket launchers for area fire, and reduced its use of largely ineffective tube artillery weapons -- which could not deliver the required mass of fire within a sufficiently short time period. Iraq expended massive amounts of ammunition against scattered infantry targets in the process. It used up some 200 tank barrels. It fired up to 600 rounds per artillery weapon per day--usually without clear targets. In fact, Iraq used up so much of its artillery ammunition and had to scour the world for emergency purchases of new ammunition stocks.

Both sides committed many of their key assets to the battle. Iraq continued to lose major amounts of armor, and suffered significant fighter losses to ground based air defenses. Iran claimed to have shot down roughly seven Iraqi fighters a day, while Iraq

claimed to have shot down several of Iran's remaining F-4s. Even so, the Iraqi air force kept up a sortie rate of several hundred sorties per day, and Iraq claimed to have flown 18,648 sorties over Faw between February 9th and the 31st of March.

Iraqi pilots began to press home their attacks at unusually low altitudes as the weather improved, and took the losses inevitable in flying more effective attack sorties.

They also began to deliver comparatively large amounts of mustard gas and at least some Tabun. While these fighter attacks had limited killing impact, they did force the Iranians to dig-in and largely paralyzed rear area activity and daytime infantry attacks during fair weather daylight hours. Mustard gas was particularly effective because the Iranian forces were no properly trained in the use of chemical defense gear and the Baseej received only negligible training and protection equipment.

Iraq was able to score some gains from this effort, but they were scarcely worth the cost. Iraq found that it was paying a high price for its lack of infantry assault and infiltration capability. Even though Iraq committed major further reinforcements from its Third Corps area after February 21st, Iraq still could not fight or maneuver effectively. Iraq also continued to take heavy losses when it counterattacked. It lost nearly two battalions in one such attack on February 23-24th. Iraq's clumsy attempt to launch a small amphibious flanking attack on 9-10 March may have cost it several additional battalions, and Iraq lost the equivalent of another brigade trying a three-pronged counterattack against dug-in Iranian troops.

Many of the limited gains Iraq did make during the day were lost at night -- when Iran could make use of its superior ability to fight on foot.

Iraq's 28th and 704th brigades took particularly severe casualties while attempting to advance on Faw in March, and Iraq was forced to organize special trains to carry its wounded.

Iraq went to such extremes as forced blood donations, trying to mass recruit the staff of some leading tourist hotels, and forcing empty taxis going north from Basra to carry corpses inside the vehicle and on their roof racks.

Although Iraq launched another counterattack on March 11, Iraqi troops were only able to advance about 7 kilometers over the course of three weeks. By the time Iraq recaptured most of the Mamlha salt beds, the fighting had taken its toll, and both sides had reach a point of near exhaustion. This point of exhaustion finally seems to have been reached on March 20, when an Iranian attempt to improve its position sputtered out and Iraq then failed to take advantage of the drier terrain to launch newcounterattacks.

By this time, some 20,000 Iranians and 25,000-32,000 Iraqis were locked into positions only a few hundred meters apart, and neither side had the energy to risk new offensives. Iran had suffered some 27,000-30,000 casualties and Iraq had lost 5,000-8,000.

The Iraqi counterattack on Faw also led to more use of artillery to deliver gas weapons. For example, Iraq tried to use both bombs and artillery gas to support its

offensive on February 24. It succeeded in affecting up to 1,800 Iranian troops, but also gassed some of its own forces.

As a result, Iraq gained little from its initial attempts to use gas warfare to support offensive operations. Its still developing Chemical Corps still could not develop effective area concentrations of gas in most target areas. Weather and water effects robbed Iraqi nerve agents, cyanide agents, and mustard gas of much of their impact. While up to 8,500 Iranian soldiers were affected by gas during the Val Fajr 8 and 9 offensive, only 700 seem to have been killed or seriously wounded -- an uncertain return in casualties for the size of the Iraqi effort and worldwide criticism of Iraq's use of poison gas.

8.2 Wal Fajr 9: The Continuing Struggle in the Kurdish North

Iran began another offensive while its main forces were still involved in the attack on Faw. This offensive was called Wal Fajr 9, and took place against the Kurdish area of Iraq, near the northern border and about 270 kilometers north of Baghdad, 95 kilometers northwest of Kirkuk and 22 kilometers from Sulaimaniyeh. It involved a mix of roughly two divisions worth of Iranian Pasdaran and Baseej, and Kurdish forces from the Barzani and KDP factions. It was designed to take advantage of the fact that Iraq lacked the forces to cover the entire north with extensive defenses, and it tried to take some of the valleys in the border area that opened into Iraq.

Wal Fajr 9 began on February 15 as a comparatively limited attack, and Iranian troops rapidly took some of the ground and villages in the Sulaimaniyeh Valley. They then moved towards Chwarta and took some of the key ridges in the valley about 20 kilometers from Sulaimaniyeh. On February 24-25, Iran launched an attack of up to eight brigades in strength.

This Iranian attack seems to have been directed at seizing the high ground above the Sulaimaniyeh-Chwarta road, and took place in areas with mountains over 6,600 feet and involved about 300 square kilometers of Iraqi territory.

Although most Iraqi villages in the area had already been abandoned, Iran surrounded the town of Chwarta. Iraq then began to withdraw forces from the area to help deal with the struggle for Faw, and Iran took the small garrison town of Sitak on March 2 -- the day after some 2,500 Iraqi troops had been removed from the area.

Although Iraq then began to use chemical weapons, Iranian forces got close enough to Sulaimaniyeh on March 3 to shell it for the first time in the war.

At this point, Iraq seems to have returned forces to the north, and Iran ceased to make major gains. It is clear, however, that Iran was obtaining more support from Kurdish dissidents from the Barzani faction and the KDP than it had ever obtained from Iraq's Shi'ites. This became even more clear in May, when Iraqi troops failed to sweep the area between Dohuk and Badinan free of Kurdish forces. Barzani and KDP troops were able to start raiding near the Iraqi-Turkish pipeline and seized the small garrison town of Mangesh in the vicinity of Mosul, as its supply dump. They held on to the town in spite

of a counterattack on May 19 by a regular mountain brigade, a small Republican Guard detachment, and Jash (pro-Iraqi Kurdish) forces. While the Iranian and Kurdish attacks had limited strategic value, their success did tie down significant numbers of Iraqi troops, including the entire Iraqi 11th Division, and reinforced the political impact of Iran's gains in Faw. It was also clear that only the presence of some 30,000 Turkish troops in the area ensured the security of Iraq's oil pipeline to Turkey.

8.3 A Stalemate in the South and Iraq Launches New Air Strikes

By early April, a pattern of fighting was established in Faw that was to last until early 1988. Iran retained about 200 square kilometers of the Faw Peninsula, and managed to keep pontoon bridges operating across the Shatt al-Arab. Iran used this bridge, powered floating bridges, and small craft to supply the bridgehead. Iran also maintained an active force of 20,000-25,000 men in the Faw Peninsula. Iran did not succeed in bringing many added heavy weapons into Faw, but it brought artillery forward elsewhere along the front and started to shell Iraq's main air base near Basra at Shuabia.

Iraq, however, was now fully able to contain Iran in the south. It had reestablished solid defensive positions, all along the perimeter of Iran's positions in Faw, and unlike the Iranian positions, Iraq's position had several main defensive lines fed by three major roads, and with rear areas filled with supplies, air defense units, and artillery fire points. Iraq had built up extensive ammunition stocks, and had a massive superiority in firepower of something like 5 to 7:1. Iraq also gained a much better idea of where Iranian targets were located as the front stabilized into fixed positions. This improved the accuracy of Iraqi fire, and helped force Iran's forces to stay dug in and concentrate on holding their existing gains.

At the same time, Iraq's previous losses discouraged Iraq from launching more counterattacks on Faw -- in spite of the fact that changes in the weather continued to dry out the terrain in Faw, and gave Iraq a steadily improving capability to use its armor. Iraq could not face the sheer cost in casualties, and it also could not take the risk of tying up so many of its forces in such a counteroffensive.

Iran continued to keep 300,000-400,000 men along the 1,100 kilometer front in positions where they were constantly ready for another attack, and Iran had the edge in terms of strategic position. In the north, Kurdish rebel groups expanded the areas under their control and Iranian troops remained within ten miles of Sulaimaniya. In the center, Iranian troops were in the Meimak hills about 70 miles from Baghdad. Major concentrations of Iranian troops were still in position to attack across the Hawizah marshes to reach the Baghdad-Basra highway, and Iran remained in Faw with the equivalent of two full divisions. Iran could concentrate its forces at any point, and take advantage of Iraq's lack of strategic depth, while Iraq had no major objective in Iran that its forces could credibly seize.

Iran also kept up its military pressure on shipping and the Southern Gulf. The Iranian Navy had searched its first West German ship on January 9, its first U.S. ship on January 12, and its first British ship on January 13. It carried out several helicopter

attacks on shipping, beginning with an attack on a Turkish tanker on March 3. Iran also kept up its terrorist pressure on Kuwait and it may have released some mines in the Gulf as a harassing gesture.

Iran's leadership made a new and harsher series of threats against Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and pointedly reminded Kuwait that Iraq's loss of Faw had left Kuwait far more exposed to Iranian military action.

Iran also stated on January 7 that it would open three new oil terminals on its southern coast outside the range of Iraqi fighters. These terminals were to be opened in February and March, and to be located at Bandar Lengeh in the Straits, on Qesham Island in the Straits, and Jask outside the straits. These terminals were to be fed by the Iran's shuttle of leased tankers. Iran also stated that it would create a new pumping station at Ganaveh, about 40 kilometers from Kharg.

In practice, however, Iran generally found it easier to transfer oil to tankers from a floating terminal off the coast of Larak, which opened in June, 1986, and which was to become a major target for long range Iraqi air raids.

It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that Iraq kept up its emphasis on strategic bombing. It hit targets like the Qotar Bridge, a key link between Iran and Turkey, on March 13. On May 7, the Iraqi Air Force launched a major raid on Tehran. This raid left Iran's biggest oil refinery in flames and damaged one of its processing units, although it missed both catalytic crackers in the 254,000 BPD facility. Iraq hit the Yarchin arms factory on May 23, and carried out occasional strikes against targets like trains and some civilian targets. Iraq succeeded in destroying the satellite dish at Assadabad in raids on June 9 and July 2, which knocked out much of Iran's overseas telephone and telex links for nearly two weeks.

The Iraqi air force also kept up its attacks on the Iranian tanker shuttle to Sirri. The chief of Iraq's Navy, Rear Admiral Abed Mohammed Abdullah, claimed in July, 1986, that Iraq had destroyed 58 Iranian tankers, 85 other merchant ships, and 40 supply ships since the beginning of the war in September, 1980.

8.3 The Battle for Mehran and Karbala 1

Iraq did launch one major counter-attack against Iran in 1986. While Saddam Hussein seems to have felt he could tolerate the situation in Faw and Kurdistan, he seems to have become increasingly concerned about the need to find some way of showing Iraq could win an offensive victory and about the need to secure the attack routes to Baghdad. As a result, Iraq prepared a major offensive to recapture the town of Mehran, which was on one of the key invasion routes from Iran to Baghdad.

Iraq deployed about two division equivalents of the Iraqi 2nd Corps, totalling about 25,000 men, around Mehran on May 10. Mehran was a relatively easy target. It was a virtually abandoned town, about one third of a mile inside the border, and about 160 kilometers east of Baghdad. It also was located in an area defended by only 5,000

low grade Iranian troops. As a result, it offered Iraq a relatively easy victory, and the ability to conquer Iranian territory with none of the risks inherent in counter-attacking Faw.

The Iraqi forces attacked Mehran on May 14. By May 17th, Iraqi forces took Mehran, the heights above Mehran, and five neighboring villages in Iran. They fought their way through the initial hills in the border area, and inflicted heavy casualties on the poorly prepared Iranian troops. Iraq made effective use of its multiple rocket launchers and was able to drive Iranian troops out of virtually all the lower ground.

This success gave Iraq a significant symbolic victory, although the Kurds in the KDP scored minor victories against Iraq at Mangesh and Dahok in northern Iraq. Iraq also scored another minor victory at Fakkeh in the south, and then noisily vowed to stay in Mehran until the end of the war. Iraq did not, however, succeed in taking the high ground, and mountains ranging up to 1,500 meters, to the east of Mehran.

According to some reports, this was because Saddam Hussein rejected plans by General Tawfiq, the 2nd Corps Commander, to advance toward Dehloran and secure the surrounding heights, and because the Iraqi attack force was armor heavy and lacked the infantry to fight in mountainous terrain.

Iran responded immediately with a new set of threats about a "final offensive" -- and there even indications that it might attack on May 19th, which was the anniversary of the death of the Prophet's nephew, Ali.

In practice, however, Iran secretly prepared for a counteroffensive to retake Mehran. The Iraqis had made the mistake of trying to hold the area in spite of the fact they were exposed to attacks from the heights on several sides.

Iran built up a force based on the 10th Infantry Division that was equivalent to four to five Pasdaran brigades, and which had a large number of companies with experience in mountain warfare. This force was named after the Caravan of Karabala, and it was at this point that the Karbala offensives began to replace the Wal Fajr offensives.

The Iranian forces began to attack Iraqi positions in the heights on June 20, and rapidly demonstrated that Iran retained the edge in mountain warfare. Iran used at least some poison gas, and also took advantage of the fact that Iraqi forces did not aggressively patrolled more than 20 kilometers outside Mehran, and had stopped below the first ridge in the nearby Poshtkuh mountains. As a result, Iranian forces rapidly overran the positions of the Iraqi forces defending Mehran, killing one brigade commander, and causing 1,200-2,000 Iraqi casualties.

Once again, command and control problems inhibited the Iraqi Air Force. The command to provide full-scale air support came far too late, and Iraq only flew 33 helicopter sorties during the critical phase of the Iranian assault, versus a capacity of over 500, and only 100 air support missions versus a capacity of over 300.

By the 3rd of July, Iraq was forced to admit that Iran had liberated Mehran. Iran not only took back the five heights Iraq had captured, it took four new minor hill positions in Iraqi territory, and advanced 12-40 kilometers further to the west. While it is unclear whether U.S. arms shipments played any direct role in this victory, it is important to note that the TOW anti-tank weapon was well suited for striking bunkers and weapons located in mountain cover and for stopping any Iraqi armored counterattacks.

8.4 Iraq Shifts Back to the Air and Tanker Wars

Iraq tried to respond to its defeat at Mehran with an attack on Iranian positions at Majnoon, but the attack quickly failed and forced Iraq to turn to air power.

Iraq launched a new wave of bombing directed at area targets in Iran after a three month lull. Between July 20th and 30th, Iraq hit at targets as diverse as a sugar factory, military camps, an oil refinery, and urban targets in Arak, Marivan, Sanandaj. The raid on Arak on July 27, resulted in the death of at least 70 civilians.

Iraq also extended the range of its air strikes against Iran's oil targets. On August 12, Iraqi fighters raided the Iranian facilities at Sirri Island for the first time, and which hit three tankers loading at the terminal. This attack had special importance because Iran was now transshipping virtually all of its oil exports from Kharg. Sirri was also about 640 kilometers from Iraq, and only 240 kilometers from the Straits of Hormuz. The attack showed that Iran faced far more serious difficulties in finding a secure way to export its oil than it had previously believed.

The full details of Iraq's attack on Sirri are unclear. Iraq sent four Mirage F-1s, but it is unclear whether they fired Exocet air-to-ship missiles or laser guided bombs Iraq may have used converted Antonov tankers to refuel the Mirages, or even have staged out of a friendly Gulf country. Other sources indicate, however, that Iraq simply took the risk of flying at very high altitudes -- knowing that if its fighters had to engage in air-to-air combat they would probably use too much fuel to return.

In any case, the attack on Sirri confronted Iran with major problems in transshipping its oil. Iran had already learned that it did not have easy alternatives to using Sirri. Iraqi fighters had first overflown Sirri on June 24, and this had led Iran to shift its transshipment activity to Larak. The Iranian effort to set up an alternative 1.5 MMBD terminal called Wal Fajr II at Larak Island, about 130 miles east of Sirri, presented major difficulties, however, because of weather during the Monsoon season and porting problems. As a result, the five mother tankers or transfer ships at Larak had moved back to Sirri.

The Iraqi strike now forced Iran to relocate three major transfer ships back to Larak, and to move its tanker transfer loading site to a position about 15 miles northeast of Sirri, which placed its tankers closer to its coastal air defenses. It also forced Iran to make further major oil discounts in order to attract the tanker traffic it needed to its transfer terminals.

Iraq followed up its strike on Sirri with repeated raids against the key oil shipping facilities on the mainland, against Kharg, and against Iran's refineries. By late August, Iraq had flown 120 sorties against Kharg alone in the preceding twelve months. Iran also formally declared on September 3, that all Iranian oil facilities were now within its Naval Exclusion Zone.

Iran had to raise its shuttle tanker fleet from 11 to 20 ships. Iran even chartered the world's largest tanker -- the 564,739 ton Seawise Giant -- to try to provide a stable loading platform at Larak. These charters cost Iran some \$60 million annually, excluding rising insurance premiums, the cost of replacing combat losses, and \$20,000 per day per tanker in operating costs. Nevertheless, Iraq's air strikes continued to be effective. Iran's average daily exports dropped from around 1.6 MMBD to 1.1 MMBD, and reached daily lows of as little as 800,000 BPD.

Iraq also flew an unusually aggressive number of sorties against Iranian forces at the front, averaging 45-75 sorties per day.

Iran replied by firing its first Scud missile at Iraq in thirteen months, evidently targeting the Iraqi refinery at Dowra.

It again used the annual pilgrimage to Mecca to have its pilgrims cause unrest in Saudi Arabia, and launched a conspicuous attack on a tanker loading at the Fateh oil field terminal in UAE waters south of Sirri.

This brought the annual total number of attacks on Gulf shipping up to 59, versus 46 in all of 1985, and 40 in 1984.

Iran, however, lacked the mix of air and sea power which it needed to retaliate effectively against the shipping that aided Iraq. Iran did send daily patrols by its P-3 Orion and C-130 Hercules aircraft from Lavan Island to try to plot tanker movements. It also retained a limited capability to strike with its remaining F-4s, which could fire Maverick missiles. Tankers and other ships were generally safe, however, if they could transit between anchorages around Dubai and anchorages west of Qatar at night .

The Iranians did not acquire even a limited capability to conduct night anti-ship attacks until June, 1986, when they obtained delivery of night vision goggles for their helicopter pilots, and subsystems to allow their AB-212 helicopters to fire short range wire guided AS-12 missiles. While they hit a Greek freighter off Dubai in August, and the U.K.-registered tanker Pawnee on September 25, 1986, the helicopters had limited range and endurance. This was true even though Iranian helicopters operated from forward areas in the Gulf like the offshore oil platform at Rostam and the Iranian-held island of Abu Musa near Dubai.

These strikes raised the total number of attacks on Gulf shipping to 144, since the "tanker war" resumed in March, 1984. They also led Iran to start examining tanker protection systems such as systems firing canisters of aluminum chaff, reflecting nets to be draped around tankers, and painting crew quarters with dull non-reflecting paint to weaken radar detection.

8.5 Shifts in Iranian Forces and Iranian Arms Imports

It was obvious from these events that Iran would have to win on the ground, if it was to win at all. Iran continued, however, to have manpower problems. Even so, Iran was only able to reach temporary peak manning levels 1,250,000 men, and it normally had well under 1,000,000. This manpower was not particularly well organized. It remained divided into about 650,000 full time active forces, and some 400,00 to 550,000 mobilized and reserve forces that served for different periods of time. Iran's active regular army consisted of about 300,000 to 350,000 men, but its divisions were now down to forces of around 10,000 men or roughly half the size of the division "slices" that existed under the Shah. The Pasdaran numbered about 350,000 men, and its divisions were generally smaller than those of the regular army. It also had large numbers of irregular divisions that were as small as 1,000 men. The Pasdaran were organized under a separate ministry, but even they lacked unity. Iran activated separate air and naval branches of the Pasdaran in May, and this created another new manpower management problem.

Unlike the regular army, the Pasdaran still played a role in internal security as well as at the front. They carried their arms home on leave; the regular army was not allowed to. As a result, Iraq continued to be able to maintain parity in total manpower, and had the advantage of being able to create a far less turbulent and more professional force.

The Faw offensive did not materially change Iran's manpower structure, but it forced Iran into major new recruiting efforts which indicated that Iran was beginning to reach the point where it could no longer rely on revolutionary fervor and nationalism to either provide manpower or motivation. Whole new Bassej brigades had been called up during the campaign from each of Iran's largest cities to provide a rapid flow of volunteers, and the percentage of the Bassej that each district could send to the front had been doubled from 10% to 20%.

In April, Khomeini issued a Fatwa stating that another final offensive would follow the Faw offensive, and that the war must end by the next Noroz, or Iranian New Year, which was to occur on March 21, 1987. The government called for 500 new volunteer battalions of 1,000 men each after Khomeini issued his Fatawa in April.

Iran talked about mobilizing all classes and all regions, and it decentralized the mobilization process and gave 90 provincial councils the responsibility for meeting its new manpower goals.

The Pasdaran and Bassej were given new powers to call up those who had served in the past, and civil Ministries again were required to contribute manpower.

Stiff new changes were also made to the conscription law. All conscriptees had to spend at least a year on the front and could no longer bargain for safe assignments in the rear. The punishment for failing to report for the draft was also extended to include six months additional service. Bassej began to be drafted for the first time in July. On

September 3, it was announced that the universities would be closed and the 30,000 teachers would be subject to the draft.

All of these changes, however, did little more than allow Iran to maintain the manpower strength it had had at the beginning of the Faw offensive.

In contrast, Iraq now had a relatively professional army of full time regulars, regular reserves, and experienced popular army forces of over 780,000 men. It also had some 680,000 Popular Army forces for home defense. While Iraq had had to stiffen its terms of conscription, and call up more students and civil servants, it continued to have near parity in manpower, and had a force that was considerably more professional, more coherent, and less turbulent than that of Iran.

Iraq also was able to obtain virtually all the arms it needed, while Iran continued to have mixed success in solving its arms supply problems. While Iran did obtain a growing number of Western arms, and was then getting covert shipments of arms from the U.S., it could not obtain enough arms and parts to bring its U.S. and European supplied arms to the level of readiness desirable for major combat operations.

This hurt Iran, but scarcely meant that it could not continue fighting. Iran was able to obtain some \$4 billion worth of arms from North Korea and \$230 million from the PRC between 1980 and 1985. Iran signed a new agreement for \$1.6 billion worth of PRC-designed fighters, tanks, anti-ship missiles.

Iran also got delivery of Chinese made SA-2 surface-to-air missiles, and Chinese SS-N-2 or "Silkworm" naval surface-to-surface missiles.

Total arms deliveries from the PRC between March and August, 1986, rose to \$300 million. The deliveries included such key items as T-59 tanks, anti-ship missiles, and possibly more Scud B missiles. Shipments from other sources, including Greece, provided more spare parts for Iran's U.S. made F-4 and F-5 aircraft, including vitally needed F-4 engines.

Iran got some 20 Contraves Skyguard anti-aircraft fire control systems from Switzerland.

Further, Iran obtained more arms from Czechoslovakia, and probably from Rumania and Bulgaria as well.

Nevertheless, Iran could not get enough high technology arms from such sources to convert from Western to Soviet and PRC-supplied arms, or to give Iran confidence that it could strengthen its air defenses and sustain any breakthrough it made in some "final offensive" attack on Iraq. The PRC deliveries also came slowly and often at rates that indicated they were being delayed until payment was received. Equally importantly, Iranian foreign exchange reserves continued to sink, and its foreign exchange earnings were barely enough to fund its most essential military and civil imports-- and could not meet its loan payments to critical foreign lenders like Japan.

8.6 The Karbala 2 and Karbala 3 Offensives

The end result of Iran's new efforts to build-up its offensive capabilities began to become apparent in August and September, although there were growing rumors of severe splits within Iran's leadership. New rumors surfaced of rivalry between Khomeini and Rafsanjani, and over differences between the regular forces, that advocated a careful strategy based on professional military advice, and the Pasdaran and Bassej, which advocated an emphasis on human wave tactics, battles of attrition, and revolutionary fervor.

Regardless of how real these divisions in Iran's top leadership may have been, they did not stop Iran from preparing to attack. On August 29, Rafsanjani stated that 650,000 volunteers were massed for the final attack. In September, Iran issued reports that it had sent 350,000 new troops to join the Revolutionary Guards at the front for the final offensive, and announced the arrival of its 500 new battalions of volunteers. At the same time, Iran attempted to exploit any internal divisions within Iraq. It made a token release of Iraqi POWs and Iranian officials made speeches indicating the fact that a new government in Baghdad might not have to pay reparations in the event of an Iranian victory.

Iran launched a series of land attacks to recover the key heights in the Haj Omran area on August 31, which it called Karbala 2 offensive. While the data on the details of this attack are unusually uncertain, Iran seems to have begun the attack with elements of the 28th Kurdistan and 64th Rezaiyeh divisions of the regular Army. These units struck at night at elements of about five brigades of the Iraqi 5th Corps.

Both sides made the usual conflicting claims regarding gains and losses during these attacks, but Iranian forces seem to have rapidly taken the Kordeman heights overlooking Kurdistan. Iraq flew over 100 sorties per day in support of its defensive actions and became clear that some of the local fighting was intense. By September 3, Iran was able to take Mount Marmand and score other gains in mountainous area the Haj Omran basin near Kurdistan.

At this point, Pasdaran and Bassej forces seem to have been ordered into the battle without adequate coordination because Rafsanjani sought to give them some of the credit for the battle.

Iraqi reinforcements from the 5th Corps, 404th Special Force Battalion, and 102 Presidential Guards Battalion seem to have counterattacked, and to have taken advantage of the disruption of the Iraqi offensive. They drove the Iranians out of most of their gains. Iran obtained little more than some minor villages and road bridges, and a improved position in some strategic heights near the roads in the border area.

There may have been similar coordination problems in Iran's the Karbala 3 offensive. This offensive began on September 1, when ground elements of the Aviation Corps seized the Al Amayah oil platform from a limited number of Iraqi defenders, and destroyed an Iraqi radar facility on the platform that Iraq was using to locate Iranian

shipping targets in the Gulf.. The Iranians hope to established a position where they could use artillery fire to hit Umm Qasr and the Albakr oil terminal from the south. On September 2, however, the Iranian Guards commander seems to have ordered up to 2,000 Pasdaran to move by small craft from Ras ol-Bisheh to the Al Amayah and Al Bakr oil platforms in the Gulf. In the process, they were hit by Iraqi aircraft, helicopter gunships, and artillery. Only about 130 men out of 2,000 made it to Al Amayah. Iraqi paratroopers than landed on the platform and recaptured it.

The most that Iran could do in the Gulf was to step up its search and seizure operation. Iran increased its naval intercepts of shipping through the Gulf to 15-20 inspections a day, briefly detained a Soviet cargo vessel, the Pytor Yemtsov., and hit a British ship with a helicopter fired missile on September 23.

8.6 More Iraqi Air Raids and Minor Fighting On the Land

Iraq still concentrated on the air war, and continued to fly long range air attack missions. Iraq hit the Iranian refinery at Tabriz on August 10, 1986, and then attacked the Iranian oil loading points at Lavan on September 7. Iraq then launched a highly successful series of raids on Kharg Island on September 16.

These raids forced Iran to put still more reliance on Larak Island, and made significant temporary cuts in its average oil exports.

The Iraqi air force also continued to hit ammunition dumps and other Iranian military targets along the border, and struck at border towns like Marivan, Mosk, and Rabat. While Iran launched another Scud missile at Baghdad, and fired three more Scuds at Baghdad in November, it could do relatively little in the air. Aside from a limited number of attack and air defense sorties, and a few successful kills of Iraqi aircraft, Iran had to sit back and accept the Iraqi air strikes. The war remained a struggle between Iraq's ability to use its air power to weaken Iran's economy and Iran's ability to use its ground forces to invade Iran.

Iraq still suffered from the same problems that had affected its ability to use air power throughout the war. It still lacked enough air power to have a decisive effect, and it still failed to use the air power it did have systematically and effectively. Even though Iraq scored important gains in its attacks against Iran's oil export facilities, and forced Iran to make large scale expenditures and heavily discount its oil, Iraq failed to attack with the consistency and strength needed to sharply reduce Iran's average monthly oil exports. Iraq also failed to consistently attack Iran's most vulnerable targets -- its refineries and electric power plants -- and its raids did not have a major impact on Iran's civil economy. Iraq also tended to target too many of its raids for political effect, and this seems to explain why it often struck at low value urban targets when it had far more to gain from striking at economic targets and facilities.

Iraq does seem to have understood enough of these problems to continue to building up its land power. Senior Iraqi officials like foreign minister Tariq Aziz continued to warn that the Iranian "final offensive" might come at any time, and that Iran

might attack in more than one sector and attempt to exhaust Iraqi reserves. In spite of Iraq's financial problems, total Iraqi army manning rose to around 820,000 men, and Iraq succeeded in filling out all seven of its corps along the 1,100 kilometer front with Iran.

By this time, the Iraq Army had some 46 major combat units. While Iraq called these units "divisions", they were only manned and equipped to the size of reinforced brigades, by Western standards.

More importantly, Iraq built up its elite Presidential Guard from six "brigades" to 16 to 17 mechanized "brigades" totalling about 25,000 men which were equipped with armor, including some T-72 tanks. This gave Iraq a growing "shock force" that was trained for counteroffensive and offensive action, and gradually led Iraq to change its emphasis of relatively static defense warfare. Iraq also, however, continued to strengthen its forward defenses. It added more barriers, minefields, and barbed wire, and increased the number of dug-in tanks. It increased the amount of artillery in each defense zone, and put more emphasis on pre-registered target coordinates, and immediate response with mass fire.

No major land fighting occurred between the end of Karbala 3 and late December, but Iran did not halt all ground action after the Karbala 2 and 3 offensives. It took some of the key heights above Mehran on the night of September 16, and occupied other heights in the border area around Badra, Zurbatiya, and Varmahraz.

Khomeini also held a meeting with his senior commanders on September 16, and rumors began to circulate that Iran would launch its all out offensive on September 22, the day which Iran used to date the beginning of the war in 1980.

During late September and October, Iran continued to conduct small land actions that nibbled away at Iraq's positions and morale. It kept up sporadic artillery barrages against Basra, and sponsored a series of combined Iranian and Kurdish special forces and commando raids on key targets like the major refinery at the Kirkuk oil field and the Iraqi military bases at Koi Sanjaq and Altun Kopru, although these commando raids had comparatively little initial success.

Iraq, in turn, continued strike at Iran's oil targets. It hit at Iran's gas compression facilities, the refinery at Shiraz, industrial centers in Isfahan, the Rustam and Sasan offshore oil fields, and at the oil pumping stations at the Marun and Ahvaz oil fields. Iraq continued to strike at tankers, and even hit a newly acquired Iranian shuttle tanker before it could even reach Larak. This tanker had just been converted for oil transloading at the drydock in Dubai and had some \$500,000 in defense equipment. This included non-reflective paint, radar reflectors at either end of the vessel, chaff launchers, and an electronic decoy system.

Iraq launched exceptionally successful raids on Kharg on September 29 and October 6, 1986 - the latter strike temporarily closed the last two functional terminals in all of Kharg's fourteen tanker berths.

The new Iraqi air offensive temporarily cut Iranian oil shipments to about 800,000 BPD -- or about half of Iraq's normal export level-- and delayed shuttle shipments to the point

where 25-30 long haul tankers were normally waiting off Larak and waiting to load. The raids also forced Iran to try to rush full operational capability for the two mooring buoys it had bought in 1985 to try to provide a survivable capability to load its shuttle tankers without sending them to Kharg. Finally, Iraqi raids on Iran's refineries forced Iran to start importing about 100,000 BPD in refined product, and led to still further increases in tanker insurance premiums. Once again, Iran had to increase petrol rationing.

8.7 The Iran-Contra Arms Scandal

It was at this time that the internal struggle for power between Montazeri and Rafsanjani helped lead to the exposure of the covert U.S. shipments to Iran. This tragicomic fiasco had begun in 1985, and eventually caused a major scandal in U.S. domestic politics and created political forces that helped thrust the U.S. into a major naval intervention in the Gulf. While the history of this scandal scarcely provides an important lesson in war, it does provide an important lesson in how not to handle terrorism and foreign relations, and important background to the events of 1987 and 1988.

The history of the covert U.S. arms sales to Iran can be traced back to 1980, and the U.S. effort to win the freedom of the hostages Iran had taken when it seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. The main cause, however, was the effort of various officials of the Israeli government to try to reestablish U.S. ties to Iran as a counterbalance to what they perceived as a U.S. tilt towards Iraq. The U.S. had gradually been improving relations with Iraq since Iran had gone on the offensive in 1983. It had attempted to shut off deliveries of arms to Iran in what it called Operation Staunch, and this caused some concern in Israel that the war might end with a strong and hostile Iraq that was of considerable strategic value to Israel.

As a result, a series of exchanges began between several Israeli officials and U.S. consultants outside the government that have still not been fully explained. These exchanges helped persuade the senior officials of the U.S., and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, that it might be possible to rebuild American political ties with "moderates" in the Iranian government, and to find a way to free several Americans that were held hostage by pro-Iranian Shi'ite factions in Lebanon.

This effort took place in spite of a major reappraisal of U.S. policy towards Iran that had begun in late 1984. The National Security Council (NSC) had issued a National Security Study Directive (NSSD), and the resulting study had concluded that there were no new options for rebuilding U.S. ties to Iran. Nevertheless, Senior members of the National Security Council staff who were dealing with the Contra issue, and which had close ties to some of the Israelis who were providing arms to countries in Central America, sought independent advice from the CIA. In May, 1985, this resulted in a five page memo from the CIA National Intelligence Officer on the Middle East that argued the U.S. should permit allies to sell arms to Iran to counterbalance Soviet efforts to gain influence in Iran.

Two members of the National Security Council staff -- Howard Teicher and Donald Fortier -- used this paper, indirect inputs from Iranian middlemen, Israeli

arguments, and the views of private consultants -- to prepared a draft National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) arguing that the U.S. should take short and long term initiatives to reestablish relations with Iran to counterbalance what they felt was growing Soviet influence in Iran. These options included providing limited shipments of U.S. arms to Iran in an effort to open up lines of communication to the more "moderate" factions and deal with the hostage problem.

The background to this CIA paper and NSC action is complex and some aspects remain uncertain in spite of extensive Congressional hearings and other investigations. In brief, however, the U.S. had long realized that Israel was making low level shipments of arms to Iran. The U.S. rejected quiet Israeli arguments that these shipments were of strategic value to the West, made some objections to these shipments. At the same time, U.S. officials tolerated them in part because of its hope that this might moderate Iran's conduct in sponsoring radical groups in Lebanon, and in part because it felt that keeping any line of communication open to Iran's leadership might be useful.

Israel had resumed its efforts to persuade the U.S. to join it in such initiatives and capitalized on the seizure of William Buckley, the CIA station chief in Beirut on March 16, 1984. This provided what some NSC staff members regarded as further evidence that U.S. counterterrorism efforts could not suppress the activities of pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon or win the release of the U.S. citizens they had captured.

Michael Ledeen, a consultant to the NSC also visited Israel in 4-5 May, 1985 and talked to senior Israeli officials about Iran, including Prime Minister Shimon Peres and senior members of Israeli intelligence. It is still unclear whether Ledeen did this as the result of prior contacts with Israeli officials, or contacts with European intelligence officers, and whether he acted at the formal request of National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane. In any case, Ledeen briefed McFarlane in mid-May, 1985 and McFarlane tasked the intelligence community with producing a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) on Iran on May 20, 1985.

These actions, however, ran in direct contradiction to the policies of the U.S. State Department, which still supported Operation Staunch and the effort to halt all arms shipments to Iran. Secretary of State George Shultz formally objected to Ledeen's activities on June 5, 1985 -- and McFarlane advised Shultz on June 14th that he had instructed him to discourage any arms sale initiative -- the work on the NSDD still proceeded.

Shultz's objection might have halted the entire arms deal, but a TWA airliner, Flight 847, was hijacked on June 14, 1985. This reopened the entire issue of how the U.S. should deal with terrorism. While President Reagan gave a speech calling Iran part of a "confederation of terrorist states" and "a new international version of Murder Incorporated," the NSC staff concluded that there was little punitive action the U.S. could take.

This led to new discussions of what Israel could do to help the U.S., and of alternative ways to win the freedom of the hostages in Lebanon. It also also brought the

Iranian policy issue to the attention of President's Chief of Staff, Donald Regan. The whole issue of how Iran should be treated then steadily became one which was handled at the political level, as distinguished from the foreign policy level and gradually became entangled in the issue of how the Administration could keep supplying arms to the Contras in spite of Congressional prohibitions of such aid.

McFarlane responded by transmitting the draft NSDD, recommending both arms sales and intelligence transfers to Iran, to Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger on June 17, 1987.

Both Secretaries quickly rejected the NSC argument in writing. Shultz stated on June 29th that it was "perverse" and contrary to American interests, and Weinberger stated on June 16th that it was, "almost too ridiculous to comment upon."

Once again, the whole idea of trying to build a new approach to U.S. relations to Iran might have been killed except for the problem of freeing the U.S. hostages in Lebanon. It was increasingly clear that Iran was the only outside power which could exert any control over the fate of the hostages, and the fate of the American hostages, and the fear that leaving them in captivity might hurt the President and the Republican Party, began to take steadily greater precedence over strategic considerations. This trend was reinforced by each hostage incident, particularly after Syria informed the U.S. in late 1985 that Buckley had been tortured and killed.

Meanwhile, Israel continued to take strong initiatives to support a U.S. initiative towards Iran. David Kimche, Director General of Israel's Foreign Ministry, had supported the idea of a U.S. initiative towards Iran since the early fall of 1984. On July 3, 1985, Kimche visited the White House and again asked McFarlane to support, stating that he was acting on the instructions of Shimon Peres. Another "private emissary" from Israel visited McFarlane on July 13. The next day McFarlane sent Shultz another cable supporting the Iran initiative, and indicating that it might help the seven U.S. hostages in Lebanon. This led Shultz to reply that the U.S. should show interest without formally supporting any action and that McFarlane should take the initiative.

It was at this point (July 13-17) that McFarlane visited President Reagan, who had just had an operation, in the hospital. As a result, McFarlane felt he had the President's approval to make covert contacts with Iran. These contacts were simultaneously being supported by two private arms dealers, a Saudi named Adnan Khashoggi and an Iranian named Manucher Ghorbanifar -- sometimes described as an advisor to Iran's Prime Minister. Further, an Israeli arms dealer, Al Schwimmer, was introduced to McFarlane by Ledeen at the suggestion of David Kimche.

This ultimately led Ledeen to meet in Israel in late July with Kimche, Ghorbanifar, Schwimmer, and another Israeli, Yaacov Nimrodi -- an ex-Israeli military attache to Iran.

This eventually produced a new NSC proposal to establish contacts with Iran and to trade the sale of U.S. TOW anti-tank and Hawk anti-air missiles for the U.S. hostages.

These developments led to a meeting in the White House on August 6, 1985, where President Reagan presided. Although the details are unclear, it is clear that the key issue was whether to trade arms for hostages, and that CIA Director William Casey and Donald Regan supported the arms initiative and that Secretaries Shultz and Weinberger opposed it. The meeting does not seem to have reached a formal outcome, but the practical result was that Israel felt it obtained authority from the NSC on August 30th to sell 508 TOW missiles to Iran, which the U.S. would replace.

The first 100 missiles arrived in Iran on August 30, 1985, and the remaining 400 on September 14, 1985.

This arms transfer helped lead to the release of one U.S. hostage -- Reverend Benjamin Weir -- on September 14th, but it did not lead to the much larger release of U.S. hostages that the White House officials expected. In fact, Iran established a pattern that it was to repeat throughout in 1986, when the U.S. shipped arms directly to Iran. Iran released one hostage, but kept the others to retain its leverage over the United States.

Iran repeated exactly this same pattern when it responded to later arms shipments by persuading its Lebanese supporters to release Reverend Lawrence Jenco on July 26, 1986 and David P. Jacobsen on November 2, 1986. On each occasion, the pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon carried out only one-third to one-half the releases the U.S. expected. Further, Iran seems to have encouraged such groups to take new hostages in compensation. By the time the covert U.S. arms deals became public in early November, 1986, pro-Iranian groups had as many U.S. hostages as they did before the arms deal.

The exact reason why Iranian sources leaked the existence of the covert arms sales to the Lebanese press have never been determined, but the leak seems to have occurred as the result of a complex internal political battle between Rafsanjani and Montazari. It came when *As Shiraa*, a pro-Syrian magazine in Lebanon announced McFarlane's visit to Tehran in its November 4, 1986 issue.

Its editor, Hassan Sabra, later stated that the source of his story was Montazeri's office.

Rafsanjani officially confirmed the story on November 5, 1986, and again on November 24, and December 5th.

The broad outlines of the U.S. transactions with Iran became public by the end of the first week of November, and one leak after another then led to the disclosure that the U.S. had shipped at least 2,008 TOW missiles and 235 Hawk assemblies. It also became clear that Israel had provided much larger shipments of U.S. parts and arms than had previously been believed.

This disclosure had a powerful impact on U.S. relations with the Gulf countries and the Arab world. It discredited much of the U.S. effort to improve its relations with Iraq, gave the impression that the U.S. had abandoned its efforts to reduce the flow of arms to Iran, and gave many of the Southern Gulf states the impression that they could no longer trust the U.S.

8.8 The Increasing Impact of Iraqi Air Power

The U.S. arms transfers, however, had only a limited effect on the fighting. Iraq kept up the air war while Iran prepared for new major land offensives. On November 25-26, Iraq launched another major series of air raids. Roughly 54 Iraqi fighters attacked six military targets. These included a Hawk unit near Dezful, an army base, an air base, the Andimeshk railway station, and Larak.

The Iraqi Mirage F-1EQ5 fighters that hit Larak had to fly a mission of 1,560 miles. While two Iraqi fighters ran out of fuel during the raid, and had to land in Saudi Arabia, the raid on Larak took Iran by surprise. Several ships were hit and the raid was considered a significant strategic success. The raid raised the number of tankers struck in 1986 to 90, and demonstrated that Iran could not protect its oil export facilities unless it could also rebuild its air defenses.

The extent to what Iraq actually upgraded its refueling capability is uncertain, but the Larak raid demonstrated that Iraqi Air Force now had greater range than ever before. Reports again surfaced that Iraq had modified 10 Soviet AN-12 Cub transports for use as tankers. These carried a palletized air-to-air refueling system that trailed a drogue from the rear ramp. Iraq also had the ability to use a "buddy-buddy" refueling system developed by the French air force which allowed one Mirage F-1 fighter to refuel another from a 2,300 liter centerline tank on the "mother" fighter. These refueling systems were difficult to operate and were unsuitable for mass long distance raids, but they may have helped bring Larak within Iraqi fighter range and give the Iraqi Mirages the nearly 1,400 km range Iraq needed for such strikes.

Iraq also kept up its strikes on Kharg. On November 27, it announced its 250th strike on Kharg Island and claimed there was not a single jetty still operating. It also continued to strike at the Iranian refineries in Tehran, Isfahan, and Tabriz, and at hydroelectric facilities and power plants. Iraq claimed it was able to reduce the Sirri island ferry fleet to only five ships.

Iraq made better use of its laser guided bombs and had improved its evasion tactics, and flew larger numbers of combat sorties. On the same day Iraq first struck Larak, it flew a total of 164 combat missions, including many over the front -- where it often used its Soviet made Sukhoi Su-20s and MiG-21s as well as its Mirages.

In spite of all its various arms deals, there was little Iran could do in response to improve its air-to-air combat capability. By the winter of 1986, Iran seems to have been reduced to as few as 40 fully operational fighters capable of air defense missions, and a total of 80-100 aircraft capable of some kind of operations. It no longer was able to operate the avionics on its P-3C maritime reconnaissance aircraft. Some sources indicated Iran had only seven operational F-14s, none with functioning radars.

A defecting Iranian Air Force Colonel also claimed that Iran's F-5 force was at 10-15 fighters and the F-4 force was down to 20, and he claimed that Iran now had no operational RF-4 reconnaissance aircraft, had lost three C-130s because of a lack of spare

parts, and could only operate about 10% of its 17 B-707s, seven B-747s, and remaining C-130s.

Iran did manage, however, to improve some of its land-based air defenses. It claimed that its surface-to-air missile forces and ground based air defenses shot down as many as 10 Iraqi fighters in November, and that nine out of ten of its surface-to-air missiles scored kills.

These claims were almost certainly exaggerated, but Iraq did lose at least 5-12 fighters during the fall and early winter -- and this was enough to start considerable speculation that the covert U.S. arms shipments allowed Iran to make its Hawk defenses more effective.

This suspicion was gradually confirmed in December when it became clear that Iran had operational mobile missile sites on Kharg Island, and that these were presenting increasingly serious problems for attacking Iraqi aircraft. Iraq also later claimed that its losses to the Hawks were forcing it to sharply reduce its attacks on the island, although many of its losses may actually have occurred to guns and light Swedish-made RBS-70 missiles.

Iran also compensated for its lack of air power with its surface-to-surface missiles. It continued sporadic Scud strikes against Baghdad, one of which killed 48 Iraqis, and wounded 52, when it hit a crowded apartment complex.

Further, Iran continued its pressure in other ways. In late November, Iran bombed Dihook in the souther Gulf, and may have conducted a demonstrative raid on the Abu Boosk (Abul Bukush) offshore oil field about 100 miles north of Abu Dhabi -- although some sources indicate this was an accidental raid by Iraq.

Iran also issued a new set of threats against the GCC states that Iran would "remember" their actions if they continued to back Iraq. These threats were particularly hostile to Saudi Arabia, which Iran claimed had aided Iraq in a strike on Larak.

Meanwhile, the "Tanker War" continued its grim process. While Iran had previously limited its fighter and helicopter attacks on ship to daylight hours, it began to conduct experimental night attacks in September. On October 17, 1986, Iran also began night attacks with its Saam-class surface ships. It hit the Five Brooks, a tanker, with what later turned out to be Sea Killer missiles. The ship was only five miles off the coast of Oman and suffered five dead and 13 missing. Iran then hit two more ships -- the Sham and August Star -- in November.

By early December, some 50 seamen had died in attacks on tankers in 1986, versus 50 in all of the preceding five years. Insurance rates continued to rise, and nearly a ship a week was being lost. According to Lloyd's, there had been 97 attacks on cargo ships and tankers during the first nine months of 1986, with 17 total losses. This compared with Lloyd's estimates of 259 attacks during the entire war.

Iraq kept up its air strikes on Iran's cities and economic facilities during

December, but Iran's improving Hawk and other surface-to-air defenses on Kharg Island seem to have led Iraq to limit its attacks on the Island. Further, Iraqi air losses seem to have been cumulatively significant enough to lead Iraq to be more cautious about committing its aircraft to other defending targets, and Iraqi raids "spread out" to cover a wider range of targets.

Iran replied by bombarding Basra on the 8th, and followed up with artillery attacks along a 50-mile front that included the logistic areas of the Iraqi III, IV, VI, and VII corps.

In spite of these Iranian barrages, Iraq continued to fly daily MiG-21 and Su-20 attacks against Iranian cities and oil targets, and used its Mirages with laser guided bombs to hit high value economic targets. On December 13, Iraq hit a power plant and anti-aircraft system in Tehran -- its first attack on Iran's capital in seven months.

Similar raids against Iranian towns and cities continued into late December, killing a number of civilians, although Iraq generally claimed its aircraft were hitting at major economic or military targets.

All of these attacks showed that Iraq was willing to pursue the war in the air, although the strategic effect of the strikes continued to be diluted by Iraq's failure to concentrate enough air power to attack any one of three major objectives effectively. It seems likely that if Iraq had concentrated on attacking Iran's refineries, its power plants, or its shipping facilities and tankers in the Gulf, it would have had much more effect than by sporadically attacking one set of targets and then going on to another.

8.7 Iran's Karbala 4 Offensive

Although Iran had done little on the ground between the end of September and late December, it had made repeated threats to resume its major offensives. It also had claimed in mid-October that pro-Iranian Kurds and the Pasdaran had bombarded Kirkuk, a claim that had so little substance that it seems explainable only in terms of Iran's internal politics. The winter rains came in mid-November without incident.

In fact, a steadily more serious debate seems to have gone on within the Iranian leadership over how to prosecute the war, although it is almost impossible to figure out exactly what happened. According to some Iranian sources, this debate took place between the more experienced combat leaders of the regular Army and Pasdaran, who favored a careful and well planned series of small attacks and who were backed by figures like Khomeini, and the Pasdaran and senior Mullahs, like Rafsanjani, that favored new human wave assaults whose success depended on revolutionary fervor and Iraq's vulnerability to some form of military collapse.

Other sources feel that a split occurred between the commanders of the regular forces like General Sayyad Shirazi and the commanders of the Pasdaran, like Mohsen Rezaei. According to these reports, the regular forces advocating a carefully planned envelopment of Basra from positions in Faw and Howeyzeh, while the Pasdaran favored

more direct assaults across the Shatt and more human wave attacks. Still other sources feel that the exposure of the arms deals with the U.S. forced leaders like Rafsanjani to take a much harder line and to show they favored major new offensives.

In any case, Iran seems to have first planned to renew its attacks as early as August and then to have planned to renew them in November. Some signs of these developments occurred in November, when Iran claimed it had now trained one million women Baseej since September, 1980, and had 90 military training camps for women. Iran stated that nearly 1,000 women had earned a combat instructor's rating and that women were trained to use RPGs and machine guns. Iran claimed five divisions of women volunteers marched past the past Majlis building in Tehran on November 30th.

Rafsanjani held a major military rally on December 3. He spoke to some 100,000 Pasdaran and Baseej troops, and some 2,000 Mullahs, and it was clear that Iran was preparing for some kind of attack. Iran announced that 100,000 new Baseej troops were leaving for the Gulf front. This deployment followed a pattern set in previous years when volunteer troops were called up after the rains began in late October and early November, and when the initial call up necessary to deploy them in the winter had less impact on Iran's economy. In theory, the timing of the call up allowed the new Baseej troops to receive three months of training in small arms and combat techniques, and then serve a three to six month tour of duty. The Baseej were then given the option of re-enlisting or returning home to the front .

Regardless of any debates within the leadership, Iran did not wait for its new call ups to receive any significant training. It launched a new offensive on the night of December 23-24 called Karbala 4. The timing of this attack may have had something to do with Iran's efforts to intimidate the Islamic Summit Congress that was to meet in Kuwait at the end of December. According to at least one source, it was rushed ahead for this purpose, although it originally was to be part of a much larger offensive that included a broad encirclement of Basra.

The attack was one of the few to be led by a Pasdaran commander, and the Iranian forces thrust across the Shatt al-Arab on a 25-mile wide front. The new offensive extended from Abu al Khasib, south of Basra, to the island of Umm al-Rasas near Abadan. It was directed against the positions of Iraqi 3rd Corps forces in the area east of Basra and the Iraqi 7th Corps in the area near the Faw Peninsula. These were some of Iraq's best defended positions

Sources differ sharply over the scale of the attack, which Iran later tried to minimize. It would seem, however, that the attack began with an assault force of up to 15,000 men that secured the islands of Umm al-Rasas, Umm Babi, Qate (Qatiyeh), and Sohial (Sahiniyeh) . These islands form a kind of strategic "bridge" across the Shatt, which is a slow moving river about 480 meters wide at this point. The attack was led by a first wave of commandos and frogmen and they rapidly took the weakly defended island of Umm al-Rasas and its nearby islands or sandbanks. in much the same way as they had the previous February.

Iran then launched a daylight attack on the Iraqi positions on Iraqi soil defending the Shatt road. This attack was led by elements of the so-called "Division of the Prophet Mohammed", which was the name Iran had given its efforts to mobilize 100,000 more popular volunteers in a 500 battalion force. While the attacking force did include significant numbers of experienced troops, it relied primarily on less experienced volunteers. Up to 60,000 Pasdaran and Baseej had crossed the Shatt al-Arab to Umm al-Rasas and the Iraqi side of the Shatt.

When the Pasdaran and Baseej assault force tried to move up the Shatt road towards Basra, they could only be given minimal support from Iran's regular forces, largely in the form of artillery fire from across the Shatt. Most of Iran's regular troops were in other locations opposite Basra or were concentrated in positions in the Central Front and opposite Baghdad. The assault force also exhibited little of the systematic preparation characteristic of the attack on Faw. The Iranians had to attack well-prepared Iraqi defenses in the rear of Umm al-Rasas, and they attacked head-on through barbed wire and mine fields and against the kind of firepower that turned the area into an ideal killing ground for Iraq.

The assault force was also committed in ill-coordinated human wave formations. The Iranians made no real attempt at using complex infiltration tactics, aside from using the cover of night at the beginning of the attack. Once the Iranian commanders had committed their forces, they continued to launch direct mass infantry assaults against fully prepared Iraqi positions. In fact, the Karbala 4 offensive may have been the worst planned and executed major Iranian offensive since Bani-Sadr's ill-fated offensives early in the war. It had much of the character of the hopeless mass infantry assaults that Britain, France, Germany had launched against well entrenched defenses in World War I

Roughly a day and half of fighting showed just how much Iran could still suffer when it made the mistake of a head-on attack against well prepared Iraqi positions. Iraq not only could kill with direct fire weapons and artillery, the bulk of Iran's troops were exposed to armed helicopters and aircraft, and much of the amphibious lift Iran had deployed was sunk during the battle. Iran was thrown back across the Shatt, and while experts disagree over the size of the attack, most agree that Iran lost at least 9,000-12,000 dead and wounded. Iraq claimed there 100 Iranians killed for every Iraqi and that there was a total of 60,000 to 90,000 casualties, and 10,000 dead.

Iraq may have suffered casualties of up to 1,000-2,000 dead and wounded in return, but Iran's claims that there were 9,500 to 14,000 Iraqi killed and wounded were clearly absurd.

8.4 Iran's "Final Offensive" Against Basra

Iran's reversals in Karbala 4 did not stop its efforts to defeat Iraq with new offensives. Only several weeks after Karbala 4, Iran launched two new offensives: The first offensive was called Karbala 5, and was directed against Basra. The second offensive was called Karbala 6, and was directed against the area north of Baghdad between Qasr-e-Shirin and Sumar.

Karbala 5 was by far the most important of these two offensives. It also was far better planned and executed than Iran's rapidly organized December offensive. Iran had been examining plans for a major attack on Basra since 1985. During the summer and fall of 1986, Iran had held exercises in the marshlands near the Caspian port of Anzali to test some of the concepts it could use to strike across the water barriers in front of Basra. These exercises involved combined arms exercises by the equivalent of several Iranian divisions, and involved some of the most serious Iranian efforts at organizing an offensive since period following Iran's reversals in the spring of 1984.

By early January, Iran had deployed roughly 200,000 troops in the southern front, roughly the same number as their Iraqi opponents. The pool of forces, actually used in the attack, however, did not exceed 120,000-140,000, and most were Pasdaran and Baseej. There were roughly 60,000 men in the initial strike force, concentrated to move rapidly into the forward Iranian positions near Salamcheh, the border crossing point about 20 kilometers from Basra. Another 60,000 Iranian troops were deployed in immediate reserve, and a pool of up to 80,000 more men in a rear area reserve. About 70% of the total manpower consisted of Pasdaran and Baseej and about 30% of regular forces.

The tactical objective of Karbala 5 was to strike across the border near Basra, and then drive around and through the water barriers in the area. The strike force was then supposed to penetrate Basra's massive land defenses, and cut Basra and Faw off from the rest of Iraq. Iran's precise strategic and political objectives in executing Karbala 5 can only be guessed at, but at a maximum they could have included seizing Basra and creating an alternative pro-Khomeini "capital" in the south, destroying the Iraqi army in the south and bringing down the Ba'ath government, and moving north to take Karbala and Najaf. At a minimum, they were to weaken the Iraqi army through sheer attrition, lay siege to Basra, and provide a further lesson about vulnerability to the southern Gulf states.

Iran faced serious difficulties in achieving any of these objectives. Iraq had built up formidable land defenses and water barriers around Basra. This massive effort in defensive engineering had begun in 1981, and had been constantly improved in the years that followed. Iraq created a long water barrier nearly a kilometer wide along the north-south stretch of the border opposite Basra, just near the "corner" where it suddenly turns 90 degrees to the east. It used earthen barriers to keep the marsh area along the border from draining.

Beginning in 1982, Iraq had slowly created a large man-made lake across the Shatt al-Arab from Basra called Fish Lake, which was located at the point where the Iraqi 3rd and 7th Corps joined. Fish Lake was filled with sensors, underwater obstacles, barbed wire, and areas which could be electrified with the output from power lines. Iraq was able to move to defensive positions in the lake along a causeway that began near Salamcheh, and a number of other small earthen berms existed in the lake. These major water barriers were reinforced by smaller canals and water barriers wherever possible. Roughly 200 square kilometers of water barriers which helped defend the areas nearest the border, and the Shatt al-Arab created another major barrier just behind them.

Iraq supported its water barriers with the virtual fortification of Basra, and these fortifications had five to six separate defensive rings when the Iranian attack began. Iraq also built strong earthworks and defensive positions along the border north of the Shatt, although it relied heavily on the water barriers and marshes in the area to help provide a defensive buffer against Iran, and it did not establish fall-back defenses in depth near the border. Iraq did have good forward defenses on the southern side of the Shatt to the east of Abu al Khasib -- which is a refinery complex not far from the "corner" in the border and about 10 kilometers from Basra.

These defenses might have been even more effective if Iran had not achieved some degree of tactical surprise. The exact reasons for this surprise are unclear. Iraq detected Iran's preparation for the Karbala 5 offensive, but does not seem to have anticipated its precise direction or timing. Iraq had strong forces in the area, including four divisions and five Republican Guard brigades.

Iraq should have been able to put up an equally strong defense from the start, but a number of its key defensive units were out of position at the time the attack began. Two of Iraq's divisions were kept on the western side of the Shatt to defend Basra, and Iraq did not have enough of its forces defending its forward positions.

Iraq also does not seem to have learned all the lessons it should have from its experiences in marsh warfare in 1985, or from its loss of the Faw Peninsula early in 1986. Iraqi reserves were not fully ready to move when the Iranian assault began, and then moved too slowly. Seasonal factors also favored Iran: The water in the marshy area near Basra was not at its peak, but was high enough to allow powered boats to move freely. In contrast, any Iraqi armored movement was difficult.

As a result, Iran achieved some significant early successes. On January 9, 1987, Iran forces struck in a line towards Khusk at two points northeast of Fish Lake, and at another point to the southeast in the general direction of Shalamcheh. These Iranian forces were supposed to surround Fish Lake, eliminate the Iraqi forces covering Basra on the eastern shore of the Shatt, and link up at some point near Abolhazib.

Iran committed up to 50,000 troops to this initial wave of attacks, and Iranian troops started their advance at about 1:00 AM at night. Iran was now experienced enough to take full advantage of such night attacks, and the season again favored Iran because the nights were long and there was considerable cloud cover.

As usual, Iran used waves of Baseej volunteers to attack Iraqi positions, which were followed by the Revolutionary Guards.

The Pasdaran and regular army troops involved in the attack were unusually well armed and equipped and had been briefed with well defined tactical objectives. Their initial battle management was good, and the leaders of the assault included large cadres of experienced officers, NCOs, and troops. The Baseej forces included a significant element of young volunteers of 14-15 years of age who had little training and volunteered for periods as short as 45 days. These Baseej forces, however, often did little more than

take the initial shock of the assault. More experienced Guards forces then moved forward against the remaining Iraqi troops.

During the first day of the attack, Iran's forces rapidly took the small border town of Duayji. In spite of Iraq's use of massive amounts of firepower, air power and poison gas to halt the breakthrough, Iranian forces then went on to capture other more significant positions near the border. Iran may also have made its first use of poison gas against Iraq, although this could have been either captured Iraqi shells or mistakes by Iraq's Chemical Corps. In any case, Iran took Salamcheh, about 30 kilometers south of Basra, and the first two Iraqi defensive lines near Kusk, about 40 miles to north.

This gave Iran a secure "bridgehead" across the Iranian border, and Iranian forces then moved up the eastern side of the Shatt al-Arab about 20 kilometers south of the outer suburbs of Basra.

Iraq's attempts to counterattack on January 10 were not successful. Iran tried to use amphibious armored vehicles, but these vehicles lacked mobility in wetlands and mud and Iraq was unable to maneuver effectively in the face of Iranian infantry armed with light anti-armor weapons. Iran held on to a six kilometer strip of land between Fish Lake and the Shatt, and then made further progress to the southeast. Some of Iran's initial assault forces also penetrated two of the major defense lines around Basra. Both sides made increasingly strident claims about each other's losses. By January 11th, Iran claimed to have killed or wound 14,000 Iraqis. Iraq claimed to have destroyed 11 Pasdaran divisions and four additional brigades totalling some 60,000 men.

The seriousness of the fighting is also indicated by the fact that on January 13, the Ministry for the Revolutionary Guards called upon all citizens to register for service in the "Division of the Prophet Mohammed". Efforts were made to obtain new volunteers at mosques, factories, and offices. The prior mobilization had evidently produced only about 200,000 of the 500,000 men that the government sought for the Pasdaran. Iraq, in turn, called on January 21 for volunteers from the ages of 14 to 35, although Saddam Hussein has earlier denounced Iran's use of boys under 18 as "immoral." Iraq required university students and lecturers under 35 to enroll as officer candidates.

The course of the battle began to turn on which side could deploy the most reinforcements. Iraq committed new Republican Guard forces on January 12, and Iraq's defenses then began to hold. While Iraq's troop losses were severe, they also were far less serious than those of Iran. Iraq still had most of its major equipment and artillery intact, and was able to use it with growing effectiveness. This increasing effectiveness was partly a matter of better organization and larger forces, and partly a matter of terrain. As Iranian troops moved forward onto dry land and assaulted Basra's main defenses, they increasingly suffered from a relative lack of firepower and from a lack of the mobility they needed to sustain an advanced through the Iraqi positions. Iranian forces began to have serious problems with supplies and in moving sufficient ammunition forward.

Iraq also was able to fully commit its air power after January 13, and this time Iraq did not hold its aircraft back. Iraq claimed to have flown over 500 missions in

support of Iraqi ground forces on January 14 and 15 alone. Iraq also claimed to have killed an Iranian F-14 in air-to-air combat on 15 January, and to have destroyed 218 Iranian vehicles and 21 boats.

Iran responded by committing up to 50,000 more troops to the battle. These reinforcements all Iran to make limited gains, and on January 17, Iran also launched a small naval assault at targets near the Eastern shore of the Shatt. By January 18, Iran had captured the islands of Boverin, Duwajah, Umm Tuvalal, and Fayaz in the Shatt. The main Iranian forces attacking from the north and south could not, however, link up as they had originally planned.

In spite of its reinforcements, Iran soon took so many additional casualties that it again lost forward momentum. By January 16, the U.S. estimated that the fighting had led to roughly 40,000 Iranian and 10,000 Iraqi casualties.

The evidence of such casualty levels was all too tangible. Iran suffered an exceptionally high ratio of killed to wounded, and many of the dead were left on the battlefield. On the worst days, the Iraqi mortuaries near Basra processed well over 1,000 bodies.

The best Iran could do between January 16 and January 19, was to edge forward in a few positions near Basra, and began to lay siege to the city by shelling the civil areas of the city, and firing more missiles. A new wave of Pasdaran infantry attacks took place on the 19th and 26th of January, These attacks put Iranian troops only about 14-15 kilometers miles east of Basra and about three kilometers from Iraq's main defenses at Abu Khasib, but they did not add significantly to the 60 square kilometers of ground that Iran had already captured. Iran continued to advance by meters instead of kilometers -- when it advanced at all.

Iraq suffered continuing manpower losses in the process of these Iraqi attacks, however, and took serious additional tank and air losses.

Even Iraq eventually admitted that it lost some 50 fighters, or roughly 10% of its operational force, during January and February. Iraq also experienced continuing technical problems in using its artillery and air power effectively. Iraq's shells and conventional fragmentation bombs lost much of their effectiveness because the soft or marshy terrain absorb much of the force of the explosion and offered a relatively high degree of shelter. As a result, Iranian forces were often able to infiltrate at night, dig in, and survive massive Iraqi artillery attacks on their positions.

The Iranian pressure on Basra was severe enough to force Iraq to commit more elite reserves from its Presidential Guard and to redeploy 7th Corps forces to strengthen the defenses around Basra. The exact size of the new forces Iraq committed is unclear, but it is clear the 7th Corps forces -- which normally were responsible for defending the area east and northeast of Basra -- had to aid the 3rd Corps, the forces responsible for defending the area east and southeast of Basra.

According to some reports, the fighting also exposed problems in Iraq's high command. Saddam Hussein seems to have distanced himself from immediate

responsibility for the fighting, and only rarely visited the front -- a marked contrast to some previous battles. General Abdul Jawad Thanoon, Iraq's Chief of Staff, seems to have fallen into disfavor, along with General Talia Khalil Douri, the commander of the 3rd Corps. A number of officers in the 3rd and 7th Corps were relieved from duty and several may have been shot.

Quite aside from these firings and executions, Iraq lost significant numbers of officers, NCOs, and trained personnel. It expended tens of millions of dollars worth of ammunition a week, and by late January, Iraq had lost as many as 500-1,500 major armored vehicles.

The fighting on the land was particularly brutal between January 29 and 31. Iran launched a new night attack on January 29, and cut through the third ring of Iraq's defenses and reached the west bank of the Jasmin River. These gains, however, had little practical value. Iran suffered massive additional numbers of killed and wounded in the process, and its new attack bogged down. In fact, Iran losses were so severe that Iraq again gained the initiative. On January 31, Iraq launched several counterattacks and freed around 20 square kilometers in the area around Fish Lake.

By early February, casualty estimates rose to 17,000 Iranian dead and 35,000-45,000 wounded and 6,000 Iraqi dead and 12,000-15,000 wounded. Bad as these estimates of Iranian losses may seem, they may still have been too low. Iran had now committed well over 100,000 men to actual combat, and made well have lost over 20,000 to 30,000 killed.

Iran did, however, claim to have taken 1,750 prisoners of war, including two generals, ten colonels, and about 145 other officers.

In any case, Iran now lacked the strength to provide more massive reinforcements. By February 11, 1987, the seventh anniversary of the Iranian revolution, Iran's leadership seems to have realized that the chances of a major breakthrough at Basra were slim. Rafsanjani and others began to refer to the "world's strongest defense line," and to having achieved a victory by destroying much of the Iraqi army.

The battle, however, was scarcely over. Khomeini emerged on February 12, from three months of near silence, to declare that the war was a "holy crusade" and would go on until "victory". He also reminded his audience that he had called for final victory by the beginning of the Iranian new year on March 21. Iran claimed it was building up a new force of another "100,000 volunteers" for a Division of Vali Asr (Mahdi).

At least 30,000 Iranian troops still held positions near Fish Lake, and Iran committed still more popular volunteers into the front.

Intense fighting continued through the middle of February and Iraqi troops did not always perform well. A few of Iraq's secondary positions were virtually abandoned, along with large stocks of equipment and munitions, although Iraqi forces generally inflicted very high casualties for what ultimately were minor losses of territory.

Iran only made limited further progress on the ground. While Iran occupied positions in a wide arc only 10 kilometers from Basra, it could not move out of the narrow strip between the Shatt al-Arab and Fish lake, and many of its troops were concentrated in a narrow area about five kilometers long and one kilometer wide. By the third week of February, Iran's total territorial gains consisted of about 100 square kilometers of marsh, flooded terrain, and date palms, most of which had been reduced to stumps in the course of the fighting.

Iran replied by moving some of its regular army units south from the Sumar front, and raised some speculation that it was redeploying its armor and heavy artillery for an all-out strike at Basra. Iran did launch a two pronged assault on February 22-23, but this assault involved only a few infantry divisions. It attacked the Iraqi positions east of Basra and along the road from Shalamcheh to Basra. The new assault was called the "Ya Zahra" attack. It scored some limited gains, and caused some 2,000 casualties in Iraq's 98th, 705th, and 437th infantry brigades.

Once again, however, the Iranian attack failed to significantly weaken Iraq's defenses and caused massive new Iranian casualties. For reasons that are still unclear, this failure also marked the official end of Karbala Five. On February 27, the Iranians announced that a new phase in the war had begun. This announcement came at a time when Iran claimed to have caused 56,500 Iraqi casualties and Iraq claimed 230,000-280,000 Iranian casualties.

While both sets of claims were exaggerated, the fighting had been extremely bloody by any standard.

The formal end of the Karbala 5 offensive also did not mean an end to the fighting. Only three days after Iran announced the end of its Karbala Five offensive, Iranian forces again attacked the Iraqi defenses around Basra. When this attack failed, Iraq responded with a limited counterattack on the Iranian positions around Fish Lake. This counterattack took place on March 1, and the commander of the Iraqi Air Force, Air Marshal Hameed Shaban and the new commander of Iraq's 3rd Corps -- Lt. General Dialdine Jamal, issued claims to have destroyed large numbers of Iranian troops. In reality, the Iraq scored only limited gains. It also took losses of 500 to 1,500 casualties, and at least 50 tanks and armored vehicles. As at Faw, the Iraqi Army could defend, but it still took heavier losses than the Iranian forces when it tried to counterattack.

The end result was that the battle of Basra turned into a siege in which Iran largely halted infantry assaults, but occasionally attacked and often bombarded the city. Iraq proved it could defend Basra, but was unable to drive Iran's forces back. The main impact of the battle was that Iran seems to finally have faced the fact that it could not defeat Iraq by even well-prepared head-on attacks. Several months later, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Mohsen Rezaide, referred to the attack on Basra as having, "put the war's decisive stage behind it...and (the war) has now entered a stage to determine the future of Iraq... (The coming struggle will be) a series of limited operations and a series of bigger ones. We have plans to organize, train, and arm popular forces inside Iraq...this is the new front."

This quote was particularly interesting for its emphasis on smaller attacks all along the front and use of the Kurds, although similar comments had been made after many of Iran's failures to achieve decisive results, particularly after its losses in the Spring of 1984.

8.5 Basra and the "War of the Cities"

The struggle for Basra also led Iraq to revive the "war of the cities". During January, Iraq conducted over 200 long range air and surface-to-surface missile strikes against 35 Iranian cities, including Qom, Nahawand (southwest of Tehran), Ramhormoz, Isfahan, and Dezful. By the end of January, Iran claimed that over 3,000 civilians had been killed in a single week.

Iraq also carried out some 75 strikes against Iranian economic installations between January 1, and February 14, 1987.

Iran reported that the number of Iranians hurt in Iraqi air raids during January was more than 1,800 killed and 6,200 wounded, and that as many as 202 killed and 644 wounded were hurt on a given day. Iran later claimed that a total of 4,000 civilians were killed by all causes between January 1 and February 18, and that there were 12,000 injured.

Iraq could do little to retaliate in the air, although one Iranian plane dropped bombs on Basra on February 9. Iran did, however, launch more Scud attacks at Baghdad and Basra -- six of which hit Baghdad during the first eleven days of the new offensive. This figure increased to nine Scud strikes by February 5, and massive artillery exchanges against urban targets in the border area took place on both sides.

Iraq also continued to strike at targets in the Gulf, and Iran retaliated by striking at the ships of nation's friendly to Iraq. These strikes were heavily targeted against Kuwait, which lost 15 Kuwaiti owned or chartered ships during the four months between the beginning of December and the end of March. The deliberate character of Iran's actions is indicated by the fact it struck a total of twenty ships during this period. These attacks were a major factor behind Kuwait's efforts to reflag its tankers and helped lead to the next phase of the war.

The data on the overall patterns in the strategic bombing efforts of both sides are uncertain. According to one source, however, Iraq carried out five attacks on shipping during January 1-15, and Iran carried out none. Iraq carried out 30 urban and economic strikes, and Iran carried out three. Iraq carried out two attacks on shipping during January 15-30, and Iran carried out none. Iraq carried out 18 urban and economic strikes, and Iran carried out 15, three with Scud. Iraq carried out four attacks on shipping during February 1-15, and Iran carried out none. Iraq carried out 27 urban and economic strikes, and Iran carried out five, five with Scud. Iraq carried out five attacks on shipping during February 16-28, and Iran carried out none. Iraq carried out eight urban and economic strikes, and Iran carried out none. During all of March, Iraq carried out eight attacks on shipping, and Iran carried out one. Iraq carried out four urban and economic strikes, and Iran carried

out none.

The main cause for the changes in these patterns seems to have been another ceasefire in the war of the cities which occurred on February 18. Iraq announced such a ceasefire on February 18, and claimed it was doing so in response to the wishes of Masoud Rajavi, the leader of the Iranian Mujahideen. In practice, it seems to have worked out some form of quid pro quo in which Iran moderated its land assaults on Basra in return for a halt to Iraqi air strikes on civilian targets.

The "war of the cities" may, therefore, have given Iraq a limited victory, although this victory came at a considerable cost. On January 22, Iran reported 57 Iraqi planes shot down and Iraq admitted to 15. By the end of January, Iran claimed to have shot down 69 aircraft, although Iraqi sources claimed the figure was under 38. Iraq seems to have lost three more planes on 14 and 15 February over Iranian cities like Gacharan, Isfahan, and Izeh -- at least one to a surface-to-air missile.

The primary causes of Iraq's air losses during the war of the cities seem to have been short range air defenses and a mixture of maintenance problems and pilot error. Iran rarely flew either air defense or attack sorties, and normally flew only four to 11 sorties a day.

Iran had only a limited number of operational medium to heavy surface-to-air missile units, and observers of the Iraqi air raids in Iran reported that Iraq's aircraft were able to overfly Iran's cities and inland oil facilities without little sign of Hawk missile activity. Nevertheless, some Hawk kills seem to have occurred. Iraq claimed to have lost a MiG-25 to a Hawk missile on January 9, two Tupolev bombers on January 14, and a MiG-23 flying at 13,000 feet in the rear of the Iranian front at Basra on January 28, 1987.

These Iraqi claims support the conclusion of the Tower Commission that Iran concentrated the Hawk units it had been able to reactivate as the result of covert U.S. and Israeli arms shipments in Kharg Island and the rear of its forces attacking Basra.

8.6 Karbala 6: New Iranian Attacks to the North

Iran's second major offensive during early 1987 was called Karbala 6, and struck in the area north of Baghdad between Qasr-e-Shirin and Sumar. The Iranian forces in the Sumar Basin north of Baghdad totalled roughly 80,000 men, many of whom were regulars. These forces had most of Iran's remaining armor and self-propelled tanks, and U.S. experts estimated that Iran had nearly 1,000 tanks in the region.

The Iranians concentrated up to 60,000 men of these men for the assault wave near the abandoned Iraqi village of Naft-Khaneh, about 110 kilometers northeast of Baghdad.

The Iranian forces began their advance on the night of January 13, 1987, only five days after the beginning of Karbala 5. The attack was clearly intended to confront Iraq with the threat of having to defend two fronts at once and to present problems in committing its reserves. Like most of the Karbala attacks, however, the timing was

staggered just enough for Iraq to properly characterize one attack before the next was launched.

Iranian forces quickly scored limited gains, and the fighting was intense enough for Iran to claim that it had destroyed 20 Iraqi aircraft and destroyed 400 tanks and other armored vehicles. The execution of the Karbala 6 offensive did not, however, produce the kind of hard driving or full-scale thrust that might have exploited the fact Iraq had already to commit many of its best reserves to Basra, some 375 kilometers to the south. The main phase of the Karbala 6 offensive lasted only five days and the Iranian assault ultimately failed to put any major pressure on Iraq.

It is unclear whether the limited weight of this attack had any relationship to the fact that most of the Iranian forces involved in the attack in the north were "regular", but the fact is that Iranian forces did not press hard enough to penetrate the major defenses of the Iraqi II Corps, much less threaten Baghdad, some 90 miles to the southwest. They only took some hill positions near the border, and about 65-100 square miles of territory - much of which was Iranian land that Iraq had captured in 1980.

8.7 The Fatah 4, Karbala 7, Karbala 8, and Karbala 9 Offensives: New Iranian Attacks to the North

Iran launched other attacks while it was still attempting to take Basra, or at least claimed to have done so. On February 12, shortly after Khomeini's newest exhortations to attack until final victory, Iran claimed to have carried out a "Fatah 4" attack near Haj Omran in the Northern Sector. Iran claimed that it was attacking in the direction of Arbil. On February 14, Iran stated that the attack had been successful, and claimed to have destroyed Iraqi radar installations that were being used to direct bombing missions over Iran. The evidence that any such offensive took place is uncertain, however, and Fatah 4 may have been little more than a propaganda claim designed to give Iran a morale boosting victory.

Anti-Iraqi Kurds did launch new raids in the far north above Kirkuk during this time, but they too achieved comparatively little. The Kurdish attacks were not well coordinated, had little practical effect, and did not force Iraq to divert significant amounts of manpower to the region. This was partly due to Turkey, which had steadily cracked down on the Turkish Kurdish Worker's Party, or PKK. The fighting in Turkey had led to the death of some 180 civilians and 260 "rebels" between 1984 and 1986, and Turkey had begun to arm its villages against its Kurdish rebels. Turkey also cracked down on the PUK and KDP forces in Iraq when they attempted to operate near the border. In November, 1986, the Turkish government had revealed that it had conducted two land incursions and twenty hot pursuit air raids in Iraq. On March 4, 1987, it bombed Sirac, Era, and Alanish in the Kurdish areas of Iraq, seemingly in support of Iraq's efforts to suppress PUK and KDP operations in the area.

Iran halted its offensive operations for the rest of February and most of March, except for the fighting near Basra. Khomeini's March 21 deadline for victory came without incident, even at the Basra front. It was clear that the Khomeini regime had to make some

hard decisions about what to do next. Iran was having growing trouble in mobilizing more manpower, and had now taken massive casualties since the start of its first offensive of the year on December 24, 1986. The weather was making Iranian offensives in the Southern and Central fronts far more difficult because Iraqi armor, artillery, and air power could take advantage of drier ground and clearer skies.

Iran was left with eight military options, each of which involved a different balance of risks:

- Attempting to directly overrun the ring of massive and well manned Iraqi defenses around Basra.
- Using the newly captured islands in the Shatt al-Arab as a spring board to attack across the Shatt in new areas.
- Attempting to thrust south of Basra and link up with the Iranian forces at Faw.
- Maintaining a slow siege of Basra with artillery and missile fire in an effort to deprive the city of its strategic value and wear down the Iraqi troops with continuing casualties.
- Driving towards Baghdad from the Sumar basin southeast across heavily defended Iraqi positions, most of which were well entrenched in rough or mountainous terrain.
- Launching a limited or spoiling attack to the far north to try to take advantage of the Kurdish rebel groups hostile to Iraq, threaten Iraq's oil exports, and force Iraq to move troops North.
- Using the growing naval Guard forces, and Iran's new Silkworm missiles, to counter Iraq's attacks on Iranian tankers and to try to persuade the Southern Gulf states to reduce their support of Iraq.
- Using terrorism and political intimidation to force Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to reduce their support of Iraq.

It is unclear which mix of options Iran's regular military and Pasdarn officers advised, but it is clear which options Iran's Mullahs chose. Iran first attempted to attack to the north, perhaps in part as a diversionary effort. In spite of all its previous losses, Iran then made one last attempt to seize Basra and the south.

On March 4, 1987, Iran launched a new attack called Karbala 7, This offensive took place in the mountainous area in the far north, called the Gerdmand Heights. These heights are in the region near Haj Omran region. They are west of Piranshahr in Iran, and east of the Iraqi town of Rawanduz in Iraqi Kurdistan. The area had been the scene of bitter fighting in 1983, and was important because it allowed Iran to take positions some 18 kilometers inside Iraq which overlooked the main valley road to Rawanduz, to strengthen its ties to the anti-Iraqi Kurdish rebel groups, and to increase its pressure on

Kirkuk -- some 60 miles to the south of Rawanduz.

Roughly 4,000 Iranian army regulars, Pasdaran troops, troops from the regular 64th Urumiyeh Division, and Kurdish forces from the PUK and KDP, skillfully infiltrated into fixed Iraqi positions some 8,300 feet above sea level held which was by the 96th Brigade of the Iraqi 5th Corps. The Iranians attacked on foot, but used bull dozers and road graders to create a road directly behind the advancing troops that allowed rapid resupply and reinforcement in spite of the terrain. Iraq had the firepower to defend these positions, but the Iraqi defenders were too unprepared or inflexible to use it effectively. The attacking Iranian and Kurdish forces seized the summit within less than 24 hours. They also took other positions they had seized above the Iraqi town of Shuma Mustafa, in spite of repeated Iraqi counterattacks during 5-8 March. By March 9, the Iranians had advanced 20 kilometers in some areas.

The new Iranian gains still left Iraq in a good position to protect Kirkuk and the north, but -- in combination with the continuing fighting around Basra -- they were of deep concern to Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party. On March 15, 1987, Saddam Hussein held a five hour meeting with his commanders in Baghdad, including General Adnan Khairallah, the Minister of Defense; Ali Hassab Al Mejid, a senior member of the Bath, and Information Minister, Latif Nasif Jassem. While the content of this meeting is uncertain, Iraqi sources feel that it involved discussions of the risk of Iraq being slowly defeated by attrition. They also seem to have led to decisions to further expand the Republic Guards and other elite forces and prepare a large force for counterattacks, the decisions to escalate the tanker war, and to decisions to make further use of poison gas. These decisions all reflected a growing Iraqi fear that a war of attrition might eventually lead to defeat.

There was good reason for Iraq to fear further Iranian attacks. On April 6, Iran again launched a major set of human wave attacks against Iraq's positions around Basra in the area southwest of Fish Lake. This offensive was called Karbala 8, and involved some 30,000-35,000 Iranian troops, most of which were Pasdaran. These forces attacked in a narrow front from the positions Iran had won in the previous fighting for Basra, and launched a new series of human wave attacks across the dual or twin canals which were the main water barrier in the area.

The Iranian attack only lasted about three days and was a blood bath. The Iranian forces attacked well defended Iraqi positions in head on attacks, and the Iraqi defenders either had warning or were fully ready. Iran suffered some 8,000 to 10,000 casualties and a very high proportion of dead. Iraq suffered about 2,000 casualties, with a relatively low percentage of killed. The most Iran did was to cross one of the water barriers and advance about a kilometer and a half against a minor Iraqi salient.

While it is difficult to be sure of a connection, Khomeini also promoted nine officers to general officer rank during this period, possibly to improve discipline and boost morale.

Even so, Iran did not quit its offensives. Rafsanjani made new threats on April 8, that Iran would achieve victory during the coming year.

The next day, Iran next launched a new attack in the northern part of the Central Front. This new Karbala 9 offensive took place on April 9th, near Qasr-e-Shirin, about 110 miles north of Baghdad. It involved the equivalent of two Iranian divisions, and lasted about four days. Like Karbala 7, it was designed to improve Iran's position in the strategic heights in the border area, and to force Iraq to keep a substantial part of its forces deployed along the central and northern part of the border. It did not score the same gains as Karbala Seven, however, and only made limited progress.

The Karbala 8 and 9 offensives marked the end of the major land fighting in 1987, and in some ways marked the end of Iran's effort to win the war with new "final offensives". They showed that Iran had the potential to win limited tactical victories, but lacked the capability to make a major strategic breakthrough unless Iraq made massive mistakes in using its superior firepower and committing its reserves. Iran was to continue to talk about final offensives, but it never again could both mobilize the manpower it needed and commit them to massive human wave attacks.

The key problem was casualties. By the end of April, 1987, both Iraq and Iran were suffering severely, but Iran took about three to six times as many casualties during these two offensives as Iraq. The graveyards near Tehran and Baghdad continued to grow, but Iran was clearly suffering the most.

While casualty estimates remain uncertain, Iran may have lost 50,000 killed between late December and April, and that its total losses since the start of the war may well have exceeded 600,000 - 700,000 killed and twice that number of wounded. Nearly two million Iranians had been made homeless since the start of the war, and no real economic growth had taken place since 1977.

Even in retrospect, it is not clear whether Basra became the turning point in the war, or that Iran's offensives of 1987 smashed the Iranian hammer against the Iraqi anvil. Too much depends on the uncertain issue of how they affected Iranian public opinion, morale, and recruiting capabilities. It is clear, however, that Iran took losses that began to severely affect the morale of its forces, their willing to sacrifice their lives, and the willingness of other Iranians to replace them. Even the Pasdaran began to present problems. They launched their first significant anti-war demonstration in mid-April, when a small group appeared on Vali-Ar Avenue to ask for "forgiveness" for Sadam Hussein.

It is equally clear that the rumors in Tehran increasingly blamed the Mullahs for sacrificing lives without any clear point, and that Iran began to approach the peculiar level of political and military fatigue that saps a nation's ability to continue a war -- at least one whose goals were offensive in character. Further, the offensives also clearly led to new debates over both the value of the war and the value of human wave tactics. While it is tempting to see these debates in terms of the regular military versus Rafsanjani and the Mullahs, with Pasdaran combat leaders increasingly divided against the Pasdaran leadership behind the front, there simply is not enough evidence to justify this position. What is clear is that Karbala 8 was in many ways the last time Iran could successfully throw tens of thousands of men into a frontal assault on well defended Iraqi positions.

As for Iraq, it scarcely had reason to be confident. Estimates of the Iraqi killed and wounded since the first Iranian offensive in December, 1986, reached 65,000 -- of which as many as 8,000-15,000 may have been killed. Basra was nearly half deserted, and Iraq had acquired a large refugee population. Further, Iraq had no reason as yet to believe it could defeat Iran. While Iraqi ground forces performed better than in previous years, they still could not efficiently counterattack Iranian forces with armor. They also still continued to have problems in making effective use of Iraq's vast superiority in artillery. Iraqi units often wasted their artillery superiority on mass barrages in marsh areas where much of effect of Iraqi shells was lost because of the use of untargeted fire against dug in forces and the absorptive capability of the soft ground. Some reports claimed that Iraq had fired as many as one million rounds during the worst day of the fighting and was spending \$1 billion a month on the defense of the south.

Iraq's total air losses since the beginning of Karbala 4 were also serious. Iraq lost at least 70 aircraft, and possibly as many as 90. Iraq also continued to take air losses of several aircraft per week through both March and April -- losses it lacked the pilots to easily absorb.

Once the peak moment of each offensive was over, Iraq again showed great caution in employing its attack aircraft in close support missions, and Iraqi commanders indicated that they now had to conserve attack helicopters. Iraq often used air tactics like having its helicopters fire rockets at Iranian forces from points inside the Iraqi lines, and its forces continued to fail to coordinate its ground, air, and helicopter forces efficiently. It still lacked an effective overall command structure, and it consistently committed its technology and firepower piecemeal -- rather than in a coherent form or in support of some coordinated form of maneuver warfare.

Footnotes

These strength estimates for Iran and Iraq are based on the IISS, *Military Balance*, 1986-1987, pp. 96-98, and working materials provided by the Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies (JCSS).

It is almost impossible to be certain of the strategic perceptions of Iran's leadership. Most leaders under Khomeini made at least several statements that can be interpreted as calling for moderation or caution in using human wave tactics, but these same leaders often expressed extremist views. While some authors trace clear separations between radicals and moderate, or changes in attitude regarding the casualties Iran was suffering, the evidence involved is highly ambiguous. It is also important to note that the actors managing a war rarely operate from an objective perspective. For example, virtually every available historical record shows that the British, French, and German civil and military leaders in World War I conducted a massive war of attrition without any objective knowledge of the conditions at the front and on the basis of data and a belief structure that was at least as decoupled from reality as the data and belief structure reflected in the statements of Iran's leadership.

Economist (November 2, 1985), p. 36; *Washington Times* (November 6, December 9 and

21, 1985); Wall Street Journal (November 15, 1985); New York Times (December 13 and 30, 1985); Chicago Tribune and Washington Post (January 7, 1986).

Chubin and Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, pp. 75-76.

"A New Gulf War Offensive?", *The Middle East*, February, 1986, pp. 10-12. Washington Times, October 26, 1986, p. A-9.

Jane's Defence Weekly, 8 February 1986, p. 177.

Washington Times, April 3, 1986

Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War*, p. 191.

This attack took place on the day of the seventh anniversary of the Iranian Revolution. Jane's Defence Weekly, 13 February, 1986, Los Angeles Times 12 February, New York Times, 13 February, 1986.

Washington Post, February 11, 1986; The Economist, 15 February, 1986.

Faw had exported some 75% of Iraq's oil in 1980.

Washington Times (February 13, 1986); Los Angeles Times (February 14, 1986).

Jane's Defence Weekly (February 19 and March 1, 1985); Washington Post (February 14, 1986).

U.S. intelligence sources provided a number of newspapers with satellite photo data during this phase of the fighting. For example, the Washington Post reported on February 14, 15, and 16, 1986, that satellite photos clearly showed Iraq had failed to mass forces for a counterattack during the first three days of the fighting.

Washington Times and Christian Science Monitor, February 16, 1986.

The commander, Major General Shawkat Ata disappeared after being recalled to Baghdad. Washington Times, September 19, 1986, p. D-6.

Washington Post, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 February, 1986 ; Economist, 22 February and 1 March, 1986.

The Middle East, April, 1986, p. 7-9, New York Times, February 14, 15, and 21, 1986. Iraq bought hundreds of millions of dollars worth of ammunition from South Africa, Egypt and other sources. It also had to buy barrier equipment on a panic basis to make up for the barbed wire, mines, and other material lost in Faw. The Iraqis did not help things by telling a long series of lies about repulsing the attack and successful counterattacks, all of which proved false. For example, Iraq denied losing Faw until February 16. These lies did much to further discredit Iraq's political and military credibility.

Washington Post, March 4, 26, 1986; Washington Times, 26 March, 1986.

Los Angeles Times, February 20, 1986.

New York Times and Washington Times, February 25, 1986.

Economist, March 15, 1986; New York Times, March 6, 1986; Washington Post, March 7 and 9, 1986.

The Washington Post reported this was confirmed by satellite photography on February 19, 1986.

O'Ballance, p. 179.

John Laffin, War Annual I, London, Brassey's, 1986, p. 87.

The size of the Iranian attack force is controversial and it is not clear how many Barzani and KDP forces are included in this total.

O' Ballance, pp. 180-181.

Philadelphia Inquirer, New York Times, Baltimore Sun, February 25 and 26, 1986; Washington Times, February 26 and 27, 1986, Washington Post, February 28, Washington Times, March 4, 1986.

Jane's Defence Weekly, 29 March 1986. Page 561.

Philadelphia Inquirer, March 3, 1986; USA Today, March 13, 1986, New York Times, March 15, 1986, Washington Post, March 4, 11, and 17, 1986.

Jane's Defence Weekly, December 13, 1986, p. 1373.

O'Ballance, p. 183.

The Kurdish Democratic Party claimed to have overrun an Iraqi battalion of some 800 men, and to have captured Mangesh - - a town near Mosul. These claims later proved to be exaggerated. The Iraqis did, however, arrest the local village chief (a Kurd) for refusing to support the Iraqi counteroffensive and it was clear that the KDP's strength in the area was growing. The Guardian, May 19, 1986; Financial Times, May 28, 1986; Washington Post, August 8, 1986, p. A-15.

Washington Times, July 2, 1986, p. 5B.

Financial Times, May 19, 1986.

O' Ballance, p. 180.

The refinery was supplying about 45% of Iran's refined product. Financial Times, May 8 and 9, 1986, Times, May 9, 1986, Guardian, May 9, 1986. Also See "Can Iran hold its bridgehead?", The Middle East, April 1986, pp. 7-9.

The confusion in reporting on the war is typified by the fact that Iran originally claimed to have overrun the 443rd and 705th brigades and then to have captured the deputy commander of the 71st brigade and to have broken the 71st, 72nd, 93rd, and 113th brigades in the fighting. Iraq in turn claimed to have wiped out a major portion of the Fifth, 10th, Lord of the Martyrs, 17th, 25th, 27th, and 41st Revolutionary Guards Divisions and the 2nd Guards or Imam Riza Brigade. Iran claimed to have killed 2,000 Iraqis and Iraq claimed to have killed or wounded 10,300 Iranians and captured 1,303 between June 30 and July 10, 1986. The real casualties seem to have been about 500 Iraqi killed, 1,500 wounded, and 1,100 taken prisoner. The Iraqi commander on the scene during the defeat, Major General Adin Tawfiq, was recalled to Baghdad and disappeared. Los Angeles Times, July 3, 1986, p. I-5; Washington Times, July 4, 1986, p. 8A; Washington Times, July 9, 1986, p. 7A, and September 19, 1986, p. 6D; Chicago Tribune, July 10, 1986, P. I-6.

Reports that Iraq attempted to use poison gas at this time seem to be incorrect. Timothy Renton, British Foreign Office official speaking at Geneva, did announce, however, that Iraq was expanding its poison gas facilities and that poison gas attacks had produced up to 10,000 casualties during the course of the war.

New York Times, July 25, 1986, p. A-5; Washington Post July 30, 1986, p. A-16.

Jane's Defence Weekly, 23 August, 1986, p. 268; Washington Post, August 13, 1986.

Washington Times, August 13, 1986, p. 8C, and 15 August, p. 7; Wall Street Journal, August 22, 1986, p. 21; Economist, August 23, 1986, pp. 33-34.

As usual, the missile missed and fell harmlessly in suburban areas near the refinery. Iran had only received about 20-30 Scud missiles from Syria and Libya and could not sustain a high fire rate. New York Times, August 13, 1986, p. A-3.

Washington Post, August 18, 1986, p. A-14.

Sources differ sharply according to whether they count confirmed hits or reported strikes, and depending on the level of damage they count as serious. Different sources reported in August that 45 to 60 ships had been struck in the Gulf since the beginning of the year, and that some 280 ships had been hit since the resumption of the "tanker war" in 1983.

Rupert Pengelley, "Gulf War Intensifies," International Defense Review, Volume 20, No. 3, 1987, p.279.

Washington Post, August 21, 1986, p. A-22; Washington Times, August 25, 1986, p. 8A.

These goals were set by the Supreme Council of War Support, which had been formed early in the war and which was only slightly different from the Supreme Defence Council. Chubin and Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, p. 76.

O'Ballance, pp. 187-188.

The arms shipments in August evidently included some 1,500 TOW missiles. Washington Post, December 1, 1986, p. A-1 and December 7, 1986, p. A-25.

Iran may have gotten delivery of the first of some 50 J-7 (also called F-7 and MiG-21 variant) fighters. If so, they never appeared in battle.

This agreement is thought to have been the formal outcome of an arms offer negotiated by Rafsanjani during a 1985 visit to Peking. Aviation Week, November 24, 1986, p. 29; Economist, November 22, 1986, pp. 41-42, and Jane's Defence Weekly, November 29, 1986, p. 1257.

There are some reports that Iran got critical spares for the APQ-120 radars on its F-4s from the U.S. during this period which allowed it to repair the Klystron amplifiers on the radars and use them to illuminate targets with the continuous wave beam needed to fire the Aim-7E radar guided air-to-air missile. Other reports indicated that Iran was critically dependent on covert Israeli arms sales to keep its entire F-4 force functioning. One of the major uncertainties affecting the flow of arms to Iran during this period was the flow of parts for Iran's 250 Bell 214A and 40 214C transport helicopters and CH-47 heavy lift helicopters. While both Bell Textron and Boeing refused Iranian efforts to buy parts directly from U.S. companies, some parts seem to have been sold by firms in Israeli and Italy. Washington Post, August 26, 1986, p. 1; Wall Street Journal, September 5, 1986, p. 1; Aviation Week, November 17, 1986, pp. 16-17.

This I/J band radar is normally used to control the Oerlikon 35mm AA gun and AIM-7 Sparrow or

Selenia Aspide missile.

Washington Times, October 1, 1986, p. 9A.

Uncertain reports issued during this period put Iran's total reserves at about \$43.5 billion. Christian Science Monitor, August 27, 1986, p. 1; Philadelphia Inquirer, August 27, 1986, p. E-1; Wall Street Journal, September 4, 1986, p. 3; Washington Times, September 4, 1986, p. 5B.

Reports of Iranian land strength were issued of 20,000-250,000 Revolutionary Guards and 250,000-400,000 regular army. Iraq's strength was estimated at 700,000-1,000,000. Iran released 200 POWs. It claimed to have released 650 since the start of the war, and to have 52,000 still under detention. Washington Post, August 27, 1986, p. A-7 and August 31, P. A-1.; Baltimore Sun, August 31, 1986, p. 6A.

Zabih states that major debates were taking place at this time between the regular forces, supported by figures like President Khamenei, and Rafsanjani who supported the use of the Pasdaran and human wave tactics. This rivalry is possible, but impossible to confirm. See The Iranian Military in Revolution and War, pp. 192-194.

Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War*, pp. 192-194.

New York Times, September 17, 1986, P. A-15.

New York Times, September 26, 1986, p. A-10, and October 12, 1986, p. 3. Washington Post, October 12, 1986, p. A-22.

New York Times, October 12, 1986, p. 3.

O'Ballance, p. 189.

Defense Analysts, a British consulting firm, had been aiding Iran to protect its tankers. It recommended that Iran use radar-absorbent materials and reflectors to change the radar image of the ship, simple ECM gear to help prevent radar lock-on, and boiler protection systems. Iran modified four of its chartered tankers -- Pegasus 1, Achilles, Free Enterprise, and Lady A -- to use this equipment.

Both the Achilles and Free Enterprise were still hit by Iraqi Exocets. Neither ship suffered serious damage, however, which was unusual given the impact of Exocet hits on other ships.

At least one ship owner also purchased MEL Matilda passive warning radars so his crews would know they were under attack, and could take shelter and trigger their ships automatic protection systems.

Another group, a consortium of Gulf Agency, Hotforge of Aberdeen and Special Projects Consultants of Aberdeen, offered similar protection systems for all tankers moving through the Gulf plus training in maneuver and minimizing secondary damage. This led to some changes in attack tactics. As a result, the Iraqis started firing AS-12 missiles from their Aerospatiale helicopters at the super structure and hull to affect ship control and the crew, rather than try to sink the ship. The Iranian's changed their tactics to fire without overflight to minimize warning and the use of countermeasures. Jane's Defence Weekly, October 25, 1986, p. 932; Rupert Pengelly, "Gulf War Intensifies," *International Defense Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1987, p. 279.

Washington Times, September 30, 1986, p. 8C, October 7, 1986, p. 4D, and October 8, 1986, p. A-21.

Economist, October 18, 1986, pp. 46-47. New York Times, October 19, 1986, p. E-3.

Unless otherwise referenced, this and all the following references to the history of U.S. covert arms sales to Iran are based upon the chronology in the unclassified version of the Report on Preliminary Inquiry of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 1987 and the New York Times edition of the Tower Commission Report, New York, Bantam and Times Books, February, 1987.

McFarlane later testified that he had asked the CIA if Israel was shipping arms to Iran and that the CIA denied it. His Deputy, Admiral John Poindexter seems to have been

fully aware of Israel's interests. Report on Preliminary Inquiry of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 1987, p. 2; ; Tower Commission Report, New York, Bantam and Times Books, 1987, pp. 16-29 and 102-147.

Washington Post, July 8, 1985, and December 7, 1986, and U.S. Senate Committee on Intelligence, Report on Preliminary Inquiry, January 28, 1987, p. 4; Tower Commission Report, New York, Bantam and Times Books, 1987, pp. 19-24.

Washington Post, December 7, 1986, p. A-25.

Report on Preliminary Inquiry of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 1987, pp. 1-2 ; Tower Commission Report, New York, Bantam and Times Books, 1987, pp. 23-26.

It later became clear that these later three individuals had been discussing and Iranian initiative since mid-1984.

Report on Preliminary Inquiry of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 1987, pp. 4-8; Tower Commission Report, New York, Bantam and Times Books, 1987, pp. 28-31.

Fred Reed was abducted on September 9, 1986 and Joseph James Cicippio on September 12th. Edward Austin Tracy was taken on October 21, 1986. In all three cases the U.S. State Department identified pro-Iranian radical groups as being responsible. The net result neatly balanced out the total hostage releases. Washington Post, December 7, 1986, p. A-25; Tower Commission Report, New York, Bantam and Times Books, 1987, pp. 153-334 for full details.

Washington Post, December 7, 1986, pp. A-30 to A-31. Al Shiraa (Ash-Shira) announced that an American envoy had visited Tehran, and had shipped key tank and radar parts in four C-130 cargo planes from the Philippines. See Washington Post, November, 1986, p. A-15; Newsweek, November 17, 1986; Time, November 17, 1986, pp. 49-52; and Aviation Week, November 17, 1986, pp. 16-18. Senate Select Intelligence Committee, Report on Preliminary Inquiry, January 29, 1987, p. 38; Tower Commission Report, New York, Bantam and Times Books, 1987, pp. 51 and 414-449.

The editor of Al-Shiraa later declared that the story had been leaked to him by a member of Montazeri's staff. He stated that the story was not Syrian inspired and that issue of the magazine had been suspended in Syria. Washington Post, December 7, 1986; Baltimore Sun, December 14, 1986, p. 18A; Economist, November 1, 1986, pp. 43-44; Washington Times, October 29, 1986, P. 6A; Barry Rubin, "My Friend Satan," New Republic, December 15, 1986, pp. 14-15.

Washington Times, November 25, 1986, p. 5A, and Washington Post, December 6, 1986, p. A-13.

It is important to note that the exact motivation for the split in the Iranian leadership that led to the exposure of the U.S. arms sales does not seem to have been split along

moderate versus radical lines over the arms sales per se. In June, 1988, reports surfaced about secret testimony to the Congress by George Cave and George Allen, the CIA agents who had worked most closely on the deal. Cave made it clear that Rafsanjani had develop a broad group of advisors on the deal precisely to avoid being charged with being "moderate" and that Rafsajabi had deliberately included a mix of conservatives from the bazaar and regular military and radicals from Iranian intelligence and the Revolutionary Guards. According to cave, Rafsanjani had proposed a U.S.-Iran commission on the normalization of relations in September, 1986, shortly before the arms sales became public. The Iranian side of this commission would have included conservatives, radicals, and moderates. Washington Post, December 7, 1986, p. A-25; and June 12, 1988, pp. A-4 and A-5.

The aircraft were originally denied permission to land, and were given landing rights only after they insisted that the alternative would be to crash over Saudi territory.

Jane's Defence Weekly, August 16, 1986, p. 232.

This helped lead to reports that Iraq was using mercenary pilots from Egypt, France, or Belgium. Baltimore Sun, December 16, 1986, p. 6A. These reports were not confirmed at this writing.

Jane's Defence Weekly, December 12, 1986, pp. 1372-1373.

Ibid.

Jane's Defence Weekly, December 6, 1986, p. 1323.

Wall Street Journal, March 2, 1987, p. 25.

Ibid.

Washington Post, November 26, 1986, p. A-14; Anthony R. Tucker, "The Gulf Air War," Armed Forces, June, 1987, pp. 270-278..

Washington Post, December 7, 1986, p. A-37; December 22, 1986, p. A-20, December 14, 1986, p. A-52; New York Times, December 9th, p. A-8; Washington Times, December 12, 1986, p. 6A.

The most recent previous attack had been on May 7, 1986, when Iraqi aircraft seriously damaged the Shahr Ray oil refinery.

Washington Post, December 22, 1986, p. A-20.

Based on the author's interviews with Iranian exiles and Zabih, The Iranian Military in Revolution and War, pp. 194-196.

Jane's Defence Weekly, December 13, 1986, p. 1372.

Washington Post, December 4, 1986, P. A-49; Washington Times, December 2, 1986, p. 8A.

Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War*, pp. 195.

Speech by Iraqi Minister of Defense Adnan Khairallah, December 27, 1986. The Mujahideen opposition movement claimed Iran had lost 16,000 killed.

Washington Post, December 26, 27, and 28, 1986; Economist, January 3, 1987, pp. 26-27.

Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War*, p. 196.

Washington Post, February 9, 1987, pp. A-13 and A-16. Economist January 17, 1987, pp. 36-37; Newsweek, February 2, 1987, pp. 30-31.

The geography involved is complex, and most maps do not accurately show the changes in water barriers that have occurred since the beginning of the war. The extent of wet terrain is also seasonal and is visible only from satellite photography. In general, the Iranians picked a relatively dry period since the major floods do not hit the area until March. The north-south line that forms the Iran-Iraq border in the south is parallel to a line about one kilometer east of 48.000 longitude until it hits the Nahr el Khairin River at a point called Boundary Pillar 1. It then runs along the Nahr el Khairin for about eight kilometers until the river flows into the Shatt at a point called Boundary Pillar 2 (30.26.90N, 46.06.62E). The border then generally follows the east bank of the Shatt al Arab until it reaches the sea at the end of the Faw Peninsula, although it is to the west of a large island in the Shatt variously called Jazireh ye Salbukh or Muhalla Island.

O'Ballance, *The Gulf War*, pp. 194-195.

Washington Post, February 9, 1987, pp. A-13 and A-16.

According to some reports, the commander of the Iraqi Third Corps, Major General Khalil al-Dhouri, was replaced by the head of the Fifth Corps, Lt. General Dhia ul-Din Jamal for his failure to properly prepare his forces, along with the Iraqi Army Chief of Staff. *Jane's Defense Weekly*, May 9, 1987. p. 899-900.

Iran favored cloud cover because it believed this affected satellite coverage, and reduced foreign intelligence support of Iraq.

Washington Post, January 10, 1987, p. A-16.

An October 1986 census in Iran had estimated a population of over 47 million and a growth rate of nearly 4%. Iraq's population was less than a third of this total. O'Ballance, *The Gulf War*, pp. 198-199.

Anthony R. Tucker, "The Gulf Air War", *Armed Forces*, June, 1987, pp. 270-271.

Washington Post, January 16, 1987, p. A-19; Christian Science Monitor, January 20, 1987, p. 1.

Washington Times, January 21, 1987, p. 6A.

Washington Post, January 20, 1987, p. A-1, January 28, 1987, p. A-15; Christian Science Monitor, January 20, 1987, p. I-1; New York Times, January 21, 1987, p. A-6; Sunday Times, January 25, 1987.

New York Times, January 12, 1987, p. A-1 and January 13, p. A-12; Washington Post, January 13, 1987, p. A-14.

Washington Post, February 9, 1987, p. A-16.

According to some reports, part of these losses were lost to wire-guided missiles that may well have been the TOWs that were part of the covert arms shipments to Iran. Washington Post, January 27, 1987, p. A-1.

Iran only admitted to 2,000 dead and 7,000 wounded.

Some reports indicate that the killed on both sides now approached 1 million. To put this figure into perspective, it compares with 2.9 million in Korea, 2.4 million in Vietnam, and 2.2 million in Cambodia. Washington Post, January 16, 1987, p. A-1; and New York Times, January 16, 1987, p. A-9, January 20, 1987, p. A-8, and January 23, 1987, p. A-1; Christian Science Monitor, January 20, 1987, p. 1.

New York Times, February 11, 1987, p. 10, and Washington Post, February 9, 1987, p. A-1.

Wall Street Journal, January 14, 1987, p. 27; Washington Post, January 14, 1987, p. A-19; New York Times, January 14, 1987, p. A-6; Washington Times, January 21, 1987, p. 6-A.

Washington Times, February 28, 1987, p. 5.

Washington Times, March 2, 1987, p. 7A.

Keyhan, June 29, 1987, quoted in FBIS, July 7, 1987.

Jomhuriyeh Islami, Teheran edition, February 3, 1987.

This was the 19th Iranian missile attack on Baghdad in two years. Rumors surfaced at this time that the USSR had sold Iran some 200 Scuds in an effort to improve relations and in return for two ELINT listening posts in Iran.

Based on a working paper by Gary Sick.

Anthony R. Tucker, "The Gulf Air War", Armed Forces, June, 1987, pp. 270-271.

Washington Post, January 27, 1987, p. A-1. U.S. officials later said on a background basis that the Hawk parts had only added 3% to Iran's air defenses and the TOWs only knocked out a few dozen Iraqi tanks. Washington Times, January 29, 1987, p. 6A.

Anthony R. Tucker, "The Gulf Air War", Armed Forces, June, 1987, pp. 270-271; Edgar O'Ballance, The Gulf War, p. 200.

Wall Street Journal, March 2, 1987, p. 2.

Washington Post, February 9, 1987, pp. A-13 and A-16. Economist January 17, 1987, pp. 36-37; Newsweek, February 2, 1987, pp. 30-31.

O'Ballance, The Gulf War, p. 200.

Newsweek, February 2, 1987, p. 31.

Washington Post, March 15, 1987, p. A-1.

One source claims that the Iraqi defenders were warned by Iranians opposing the attack. See O'Ballance, The Gulf War, p. 203.

Tripp and Chubin, Iran and Iraq at War, p. 48.

O'Ballance, The Gulf War, p. 202.

Washington Times, April 9, 1987, p. 6A, April 10, 1987, p. 6A, April 13, 1987, p. 9B.

Washington Post, April 22, 1987, p. A-21.

Washington Post, May 17, 1987, p. A-31.

Claims made to the author by a senior Egyptian defense official in May, 1987.

Jane's Defense Weekly, May 9, 1987, pp. 900-901.

It also began to fire a missile of its own manufacture against Iraq, called the Oghab. Iran had been developing this missile since the first Iraqi FROG attacks on Dezful in 1980. It was 4,820 mm long, 230 mm in diameter, and weighed 360 kilograms. It had a range of roughly 40 kilometers and a warhead weighing 70 kilograms, and it was evidently derived from the Chinese Type 82 field rocket. Iran fired a total of 19 Oghabs in 1986, 81 in 1987, and 104 in 1988. These missiles, however, had relatively little effect. Iran lacked any beyond visual range targeting capability, the Oghabs could not reach Iraq's key cities, and their warhead was too small to have high lethality.

Jane's Defense Weekly, February 11, 1989, p.219; Steven Zaloga, "Ballistic Missiles in the Third World," International Defense Review, 11/1988, pp. 1423-1437

The legacy of the covert sales effort is a powerful lesson in terms of the care and professionalism required in managing covert operations. The arms sales were the project

of a small group of amateurs in the National Security Council that ignored both the area experts on the region and the professionals in the State Department and Department of Defense. Their covert sales effort undoubtedly encouraged Iran to continue the war, while doing nothing to reduce the problem of hostage taking.

At the same time, the backlash from the disclosure of their program discredited "Operation Staunch" and created powerful pressures on the U.S. to reassert its power in the Gulf and prove it could be a reliable friend to the Southern Gulf states. Rather than improve relations between the U.S. and Iran, the covert sales contributed a great deal to U.S. military intervention in the Gulf under conditions that led both countries to a state of near war. Virtually none of the funds raised through the sales to Iran ever reached the Contras. Further, it later became clear that rather than dealing with Iranian "moderates", the Iranians had created a coalition of as many factions as possible -- including the most radical -- and then failed to keep the effort covert because it could not coopt all the factions and power struggles necessary to create broad support.

All in all, the entire project can only be described as a miserable fiasco.

Washington Post, June 12, 1988, p. A-4.

Washington Post, June 12, 1988, p. A-4.