LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
BEIRUT-LEBANON

Iran-Iraq War
and
Syria's Position
during
The First Gulf War

By Rana Moghrabi

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF A MASTERS DEGREE IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

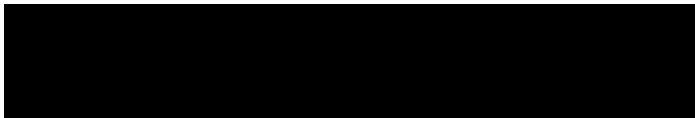## THESIS ADVISOR: SAMI BAROUDI, Ph.D.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
February 2007

LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

BEIRUT – LEBANON

IRAN-IRAQ WAR
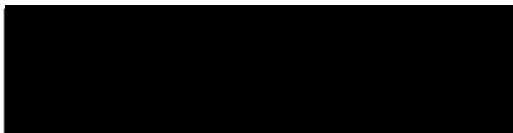AND
SYRIA'S POSITION DURING THE FIRST GULF WAR

A thesis submitted to the Education and Social Sciences Division in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Arts in International Affairs.

We hereby approve the thesis of Miss Rana Moghrabi

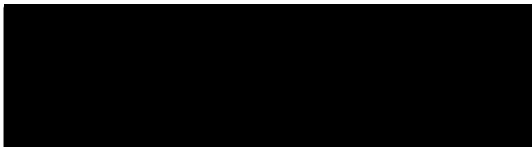Sami Baroudi, Ph.D.   Advisor

Paul Tabar, Ph.D.   Committee Member

Imad Salameh, Ph.D.   Committee Member

February 2007

To the person who inspired me, Martyr Prime Minister Rafic Hariri

Jury

Advisor: Dr. Sami Baroudi (LAU)
Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs.

Dr. Paul Tabar (LAU)
Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs.

Dr. Imad Salameh (LAU)
Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This study examines the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s, focusing, in particular, on Syria's position during that War. The thesis first provides a discussion of the Iran-Iraq War, highlighting the history of the conflict between the two countries and the military, regional and international dimensions of the War. Following that, I provide an in-depth exploration of the Syrian posture during the War, emphasizing the political, strategic and ideological reasons that promoted Syria to take Iran's side in the conflict. The thesis then engages in a discussion of Syrian-Iraqi relations in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war with the aim of identifying the factors that brought the two countries closer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

For most of its history, Iraq suffered from unstable conditions and highly conflicting relations with its Arab neighbors and some of the western powers. It is essential to examine the geography and history of Iraq as well as its motives in the region in order to understand its international conduct. It is also important to look at the Western interests in the region driven by the quest for control over resources, particularly oil. The following events characterized the period of late 20th century in the region. interests of the United States in the Gulf, the support of the West to Middle Eastern dictators and the rise of terrorism, the Islamic revolution in Iran against the Shah in 1978, the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980, the subsequent Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait, the policy of expansion of Iraq, the Middle East crisis, the position of the West and the U.S. throughout all these events, the relation between Iraq and Syria, which swung between cooperation in some and intense conflict in others.

The purpose of my thesis is to highlight the different factors that have lead, whether directly or indirectly, to the Iraq-Iran War, while emphasizing the role of Syria in this war and how this role influenced Iraqi-Syrian relations. In addition, there is a theoretical part on international relations explaining how various interests are always the drive force behind state's behavior.

With a view to build this study on solid grounds, it is a must to

examine the region's history and geography, mainly since it has been a hotbed for religious conflicts for years as well as wars over rich resources and Arab lands, which drew European and Western attention and intervention. At early stages, the West helped corrupt Arab leaders maintain power as long as they supported Western strategic and economic interests in the region.

The West had many interests in the region that evolved with time, starting from securing a route to the East. These interests were later deepened by the struggle over the lands of the Ottoman Empire (Europe's sick man) and at a final stage, expanded with the discovery of Oil.

Being the provider of almost 80 percent of the oil that fueled the European economies at one point of time, Iraq became the center of the Western attention and formed a vital crossing point of major trade routes between the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe. This fact turned it into a source of conflicts. After the end of World War I, and in order to control Iraq, Britain appointed a branch of the noble Arab Hashemite family, which stayed in power with its support till 1958. The new borders of Iraq included three provinces of the former Ottoman Empire. Iraq was demographically divided into three main parts. The South dominated by Shiite Muslim Arabs, the Middle including Baghdad and comprised mainly of Sunni Muslim Arabs, and the North populated by Arab and Kurds. The pro-Western Prime Minister, Nuri al-Said represented the ruling figure on behalf of the Hashemite monarchy. With the flow of money into Iraq as a

result of increasing oil revenues, al-Said wanted to invest much of it in modernization. For this he sent young people abroad, especially to Europe and America, so to learn professions. However, after returning to the mother country, a considerable majority of these young educated Iraqis was motivated to revolt against the regime of al-Said, as a result of its rigid nature causing frustration and despair. These revolt attempts led eventually to the murder of Nuri al-Said in a coup. After this, the United States was not certain of whom it should deal with in its interactions with Iraq.

During that period, the Ba'ath ideology emerged in the region. This ideology and eventually the party formed in both Syria and Iraq under the same name of Baa'th is an Arab political party around the resurrection of Arabs. It appeared first in the Syrian capital Damascus in 1941 and was improved in the early 1950s under the "Ba'ath" banner. The Baa'th party grew rapidly in Syria and reached high power. Secularism, socialism, and pan-Arab unionism had been the main ideological objectives of the Baa'th party. Despite the fact that they believed in Pan-Arab unionism, the conflict between the Arabs was noticeable from the beginning. In 1958, the Syrian foreign minister Salah al-Din Bitar, who was one of the Baa'th founders, led Syria into the unity project with Egypt under the United Arab Republic (UAR). However, and like most Syrians, the Baa'thists were shortly after opposing to the Egyptian domination, which led in December, 1959 to the resignation of the Baa'thist members of the union government, and eventually, Syria withdrew from the UAR in 1961.

The Ba'athists first came to power in Iraq after the coup of February 1963, and at that time Abd al-Salam Arif was made president. Another coup in July 1968 brought to power the Ba'athist general Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr whose government suffered internal conflicts. In the year of 1979, another high rank officer of the Baa'th party, Saddam Hussein became the leader of Iraq.

The Ba'athist regimes in both Syria and Iraq have been complete rivals from the very beginning since their ascendance to power. Although the ruling parties in both Syria and Iraq maintained the Ba'ath name, both nations were distanced from the Baa'th principles under Hafez al-Assad and Saddam Hussein.

In Iraq, Saddam was able to establish some degree of stability and to make good use of the oil revenues. As a result, the country was emerging as the major political force in the region, especially after the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel which led to depriving Egypt from the leading position in the Arab World.

Three factors led to the emergence of Iraq as a significant player in the politics of the region. First, the vast oil deposits it had. Second, the military strength built under the regime of Saddam. Third, are the internal developments that manifested mainly in the consolidation of power in the hands of Saddam and a small group led by him. These three factors together had enhanced status of Iraq and led to its recognition as a significant superior in the Middle East.

Saddam always resorted to military solutions in order to handle Iraq's longstanding border disputes. First, and after terminating a previous treaty with Iran, he launched a severe war that was disastrous for both countries and that lasted for eight years. Second, he invaded his neighbor state of Kuwait in 1990 which had long supported him during his war against Iran. This invasion led to the defeat of Iraq in what was known as the Second Gulf War and the imposing of international economic sanctions on Iraq. The ruthless attitude of Saddam and his cruel actions have created so many enemies both within his country and beyond. His quest for power in the area was unrestrained, he attempted to acquire and develop weapons of mass destruction and his goals created a threat to stability in the region. Based on the different points raised above, the present thesis is divided into the following five chapters.

Chapter one offers a general survey of the History of Iraq from 1958 (the year in which The Hashemite monarchy was overthrown) till present date. It discusses the series of consecutive regimes and leaders from Nuri Al-Sai'd to Ahmad Hassan Al-Bakr, then Saddam Hussein. It also discusses the emergence of Al-Ba'ath Political Party and its role in controlling Iraq till the early 21st century.

Chapter Two analyzes the troubled Iranian-Iraqi relationship and provides a general overview of the conflict over Shatt al-Arab between Iraq and Iran after World War I. It also discusses the border dispute between the two neighboring countries. It describes the periodic crises that both countries suffered, then

the compromises that took place between Iraq and Iran in 1974 and 1975. It sheds the light on the conflict that arose in 1980 after Iraq's war on Khomeini's Iran following the Islamic Revolution in Iran. In general, it covers the prelude to the Iran-Iraq war, as well as the role of international diplomacy in containing the conflict between the two nations. Most important, it examines the objectives that Iraqi leaders sought to achieve through invading Iran.

Chapter Three examines the war that took place between Iraq and Iran and the aggressive confrontation it witnessed. It also draws the main drive behind Iraq's decision to go through this war.

Chapter Four discusses the relations between Syria and Iraq, the shared history between both countries and the shared ideology, and the role of the Ba'ath Party in both countries. It also examines the similarities and differences between Saddam Hussein and Hafez al-Assad. It underlines the iron regime of both dictators, as well as the historical conflicts between them, while describing their relation prior to 1980, including the conflict over Arab Unity and the dispute over water between them; as well as their relations after 1980, including the conspiracy of both countries towards each other. Then, it gives a general overview on the relationship between Iraq's Saddam and Syria's Bashar after the end of the Iraqi-Iranian War.

Chapter Five analyzes Syria's position during the Iran-Iraq War, and Syria's ideological position regarding the Shah's and its

support for Khomeini. It examines the Syrian motives behind supporting Iran and its implications on the economic and political relation between Iraq and Syria. It also discusses the similarities between Iran and Syria. Moreover, it illustrates the Arabs' reaction to Syria's position. In addition, it examines Syria's change of position towards Iraq after the end of the war and its rapprochement towards it.

Chapter One

History of Iraq since 1958 till Present

A major turning point in Iraq's history was in 1958 when King Hussein, and as a result of his fear from the spread of Lebanese anti-western revolt to Jordan, requested assistance from Iraq while another Iraqi plan was being put in place. The Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri As-Said, ordered his army to move towards Jordan under the command of Colonel Arif on the 14th of July of the same year. However, things went in a different way; "instead of moving towards Jordan, Colonel Arif led his troops into Baghdad and immediately announced a new republic and the end of the old regime".[1] "The Hashemite monarchy was overthrown in a rapid

---

[1] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*. (Cambridge University Press 2000); p.p. 175

predawn coup by officers of the Nineteenth task force under the leadership of Abd Al-Karim Qassim and Colonel Abd-Salam Arif".[2]

"The July 14 Revolution met no opposition and the declaration of the revolution brought crowds of people into the streets of Baghdad cheering the slaying of Iraq's Prime Minister, Nuri As-Said, who attempted to escape dressed as a veiled woman King Faisal II and , many other members of the royal family"[3]. The social structure of Iraq was radically changed by the revolution; the power of the landlords and the Sheikhs was wiped out, whereas the position of the peasants, the urban workers and the middle class was improved.

As a result of altering the old power structure, the ethnic conflicts were revived as well as the sectarian and tribal divergences. "The strongest of these conflicts were those between Kurds and Arabs and between Sunni and Shiite Muslims".[4]

The July 14th Revolution click faced internal difficulties, despite their common military background. These difficulties were mainly around the lack of a rational ideology and efficient organizational skills. Another problem was the fact that many of the senior officers did not like taking orders from Arif, a relatively junior officer. The unity between Syria and Egypt caused a conflict between Arif who was pro-Nasserite and supported by the Ba'ath Party, and Qassim who was against the unity and who was

---

[2] Morris M. Mottale, *The Origins of the Gulf Wars*. (University Press of America, Inc. New York); p.p. 104-105.
[3] Morris M. Mottale, *The Origins of the Gulf Wars*. (University Press of America, Inc. New York); p. 106
[4] Ibid; p.p. 105 – 106

supported by the communists. Eventually, the direction of Qassim prevailed. "Arif was first discharged, then brought to trial for disloyalty and condemned to death in January 1959; he was subsequently pardoned in December 1962".[5]

Qassim introduced many reforms that were in favor of the lower class. He introduced a series of plans to improve the living conditions of the poor class, and tried to maintain the wealth of the more fortunate. However, as a result of lack of support, Qassim's policies failed to be efficient in improving the situation.

"Unlike the military officers, Qassim did not come from the Arab Sunni northwestern towns nor did he share their enthusiasm for pan-Arabism; he was of mixed Sunni-Shiite parentage from southeastern Iraq".[6] Qassim' success in staying in power was achieved through his depending on both the Communists and the pan-Arabs.

Qassim's economic policies reflected his origins from a poor community and his affiliations with the Communists. "He sanctioned trade unions, improved workers' conditions, and implemented land reform, which aimed to take apart the old feudal structure of the countryside".[7]

The arrangements made with the oil companies were also tackled by Qassim who aimed at diminishing the profit shares of the

---

[5] Ibid; p.24
[6] Dann Uriel, *Iraq under Qassem*. 1958–63" (New York: Praeger, 1969); p.p. 12-14

[7] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, (Cambridge University Press 2000); p.149

companies in favor of the public sector. For this purpose he passed on December 11th 1961, a public law that deprived the Iraqi Petroleum Company of the great majority of its renowned area, leaving it only with few areas that were still witnessing extraction procedures. With this move the oil revenues of the government were significantly increased. "Qassim also announced the establishment of Iraq National Oil Company, in order to exploit the new territory".[8]

A group of officers, coming from conservative Arab Sunni families, were unsatisfied by Qassim's increasing links with the communists As a result, these officers, who called themselves "Free Officers" attempted a revolution in March 1959. In order to face this situation, Qassim mobilized in Mosul around 250,000 men, mainly form his supporters and those of the communists. "The ill-planned rebellion attempt never really happened and the Communists massacred the Nationalists and some well-to-do Mosul families, leaving deep scars that proved to be very slow to heal".[9]

At the end of the 1960s, The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was getting bigger with increasing presence in both the military and the government. On the other hand, Qassim revived the diplomatic ties with Moscow in the same year. "An extensive Iraqi-Soviet

---

[8] Dann Uriel, *Iraq Under Qassem*. 1958–63" (New York: Praeger, 1969); p.23
[9] Dann Uriel *Iraq under Qassem*. 1958–63" (New York: Praeger, 1969); p.p. 26-29

economic agreement was signed, and arms deliveries were initiated". [10]

Led by Fuad Rikabi, the Baa'th party attempted a coup against the regime of Qassim, but the person in charge of killing Qassim (no other than Saddam Hussein), failed to kill him and the attempt merely resulted in Qassim's injury. As a result, the latter suppressed the activities of the Ba'ath and other Nationalist Parties and worked on improving the ties with the communists. However, these ties failed to last for long. "In 1960 and 1961, Qassim opposed the Party, sensing that the Communists had become too strong, thus eliminated members from sensitive government positions, and shut down the Communist press". [11]

Qassim was not able to reach a solid power base due to several factors. These factors included first his distancing from the Communists, his domination of power and his separation from the Nationalists. The situation of Qassim was weakened with the uprising of the Kurds against his government in 1961. This move by the Kurds came despite the fact that they supported the revolution of 1958 when the new constitution at that time had set as equal partners both the Kurds and the Arabs. "Thus, exiled Kurdish leaders, including Mullah Mustafa al-Barzani, were allowed to return".[12]

---

[10] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*. (Cambridge University Press 2000); p.163

[11] Dann Uriel, *Iraq under Qassem. 1958–63* (New York: Praeger, 1969); p.p. 146-147

[12] M.S. El Ashary, *The Iran-Iraq War*. (Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn); p.8

The relationship between Barzani and Qassim soon exploded leading in September 1961 to grave clashes between the Kurdish fighters and the Iraqi army. Eventually, the army was not able to control the situation and this fact led to more weakening of Qassim's power base by the spring of 1962. "Thus, the growing opposition stimulated the plans to overthrow him".[13]

The problems of Qassim increased affecting his domestic support after the rise of many diplomatic problems. His disagreement with the Shah of Iran was the primary problematic issue. "Although Qassim had reined in the Communists, his leftist sympathies aroused fears in the West and in the neighboring Gulf States of an expected Communist takeover of Iraq"[14]. "In December 1959, Iraqi-Iranian relations rapidly deteriorated when Qassim, reacting to Iran's reopening of the Shatt-al-Arab dispute, cancelled out the 1937 agreement and claimed sovereignty over the waterfront area near Abadan".[15] By stating Iraqi claim to the state of Kuwait, which was part of Iraq, Qassim made another move that drove him further from the West and pro-Western regional states. With the approval of Kuwait's membership to the Arab League, Iraq suspended its diplomatic ties with its Arab neighbors. "As a result, Qassim was completely isolated".[16]

---

[13] Dann Uriel, *Iraq under Qassem, 1958–63*. (New York: Praeger, 1969); p. 49
[14] Dann uriel, *Iraq under Qassem, 1958–63*. (New York: Praeger, 1969); p. 53

[15] Ibid; p.58-61
[16] Ibid; p. 49

On the 8th February 1963, a group of officers from the Ba'ath Party overthrew Qassim and assassinated him the following day. The fate of Qassim was not surprising to the region for he had built an army of enemies while facing the Kurdish uprising in the north besides the growing Nationalist movement in southeast Iraq. Despite Qassim's long list of enemies, millions of the poor class peasants perceived him as a hero and hurried to his defense, but to no avail.

"As a result of the coup, Abdul Salam Arif became president and the relations with the Western world improved".[17] Soon after, "in April 1966, Arif was killed in a helicopter crash and General Abdul Rahman Arif took over"[18].

By that time, the diplomatic relations with the United States had become worse. "During the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War in 1967, the Iraqi troops and artilleries were sent to the Jordanian-Israeli border; subsequently Iraq declared war on Israel and stopped its oil supply to the Western nations, whom it accused of siding with Israel".[19]

In July 1968, a group of officers from the Baa'th party overthrew the government of general Arif. "Former Prime Minister, Major General Ahmed Hassan Al-Bakr, was appointed head of the newly

---

[17] Majid Khaddouri, *Republican Iraq* . (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); p.p. 31-33

[18] Ibid; p. 39

[19] Marr Phebe, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1985); P.64

established Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), the country's supreme executive, legislative, and judicial body".[20]

In the 1970s and 1980s, the diplomatic relations of Iraq became much diversified. Iraq's hostility towards the West was maintained, as well as its friendship with the USSR, while its relations with most of the Arab countries were shaped with conflicts. The main reason behind the friction between Iraq and most of its neighbors was their positions with regards to Israel.

"In 1971, following Jordan's efforts to crush the Palestinian guerrilla movement operating inside its borders; Iraq closed its border with Jordan and called for its removal from the Arab League".[21]

Iraq supported Syria in terms of troops and artilleries during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. When the cease-fire ended the conflict, Iraq denounced it calling for continued military action against Israel. "Later in 1974 and 1975, it strongly opposed the temporary agreements negotiated by Egypt and Syria with Israel". [22]

Starting 1954 and with the discovery of oil, Iraq started to witness a prosperous improvement. The foreign oil companies operating in the country were fully nationalized between the years 1972 and 1975, while in late 1973, it enjoyed considerable increase in oil revenues with the rise in the prices of Petroleum. "It is only in

---

[20] Ibid; p.68

[21] Marr Phebe, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1985); p.p. 61 -62

[22] Marr Phebe, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1985); p. 68

1975 that the discovery of major oil deposits in the surrounding area of Baghdad was announced publicly".[23]

Despite the fact that the Iraqi economy had succeeded to become strong, Iraq failed in ensuring political, sectarian and ethnic stability due to several setbacks, which reflected in a deep depression.

In the year 1979, the authoritarian Saddam Hussein took the reigns of power in Iraq. The regime of Saddam Hussein was marred with the suppression of any internal opposition.

Hussein had a major role in enhancing Iraq's position in the region as well as on the international scene. Thus, in order to understand better Iraq during his rule, one should take an overview of the major stops in his life.

Hussein hails from a poor farming family from the north of Baghdad. In the year 1955, he moved to Baghdad and joined the Baa'th party which formed his initial involvement in the political life. He quickly grew in the party and in 1959 he was among the group of officers who organized the assassination attempt of Abdul Karim Qassim. "Following the failure of the attempt, Hussein fled to Cairo".[24]

[23] Ibid; p. 91
[24] Marr Phebe, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1985); p.225

Hussein finished his law studies in Cairo, where he was involved in the Baa'th party activities, and returned to the Iraqi capital of Baghdad in 1963. Soon after, he became the assistant secretary general of the Ba'ath Party. "It is worth mentioning that the party remained in opposition to the government until 1968, when it held power in a coup". [25]

Throughout the years, Hussein surrounded himself with many related persons, who were most from his mother town, Tikrit. These people formed a group with Hussein and recognized themselves as the Revolutionary Command Council with complete power in the country, and with Hussein vice chairman to this council in 1969. "He worked closely with General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, the council's chairman and president of Iraq". [26]

Hussein heavily concentrated on handling the country's main problematic issues. In 1970, he worked on an agreement with the separatist Kurds, granting them self-rule. However, this agreement failed to be implemented, which led to vicious fighting between the Iraqi army and the Kurdish fighters. Hussein made an achievement in helping realize the nationalization the Iraqi oil industry, which is the main source of wealth. "In 1973, oil prices skyrocketed, allowing the government to pursue an ambitious economic development program that included new schools, universities, hospitals, and factories". [27]

---

[25] http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/people/A0824631.html
[26] http://www.emergency.com/hussein1.htm

[27] Ibid

The radical regime of the Ba'ath party was a source of worries to many Arab states. Iraq's relations with the US were disengaged as a consequence of its close friendship with the Soviet Union and following the co-operation treaty signed between the two countries in 1972. "Under this treaty, Iraq was able to obtain extensive technical assistance and military equipment from the Soviet Union". [28]

On the other hand, Hussein played a major role in the politics of the Middle East. In 1975, he concluded an agreement with Iran around his recognition of its borders in return of an Iranian commitment to stop supporting the Kurdish opposition in Iraq. He also played a major role in 1979 in leading the Arab opposition against the Camp David Accords realized between Egypt and Israel.

After the retirement of President al-Bakr in 1979, "Hussein became the chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council and the president of the country".[29]

During this period, relations between Iraq and Syria were quite distant. After he became president in 1979, Saddam Hussein accused Syria of participating in a coup attempt against his regime.

In the same year the Islamic revolution took place in Iran and the government was overthrown. Hussein feared the spread of radical

---

[28] M.S. El Ashary, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn); p. 86
[29] http://www.desertstorm.com

Islamic ideas, especially among the Shiite Muslim population, which forms the majority in Iraq.

As a result of the long-aged dispute over the waterway of Shatt al-Arab, Hussein attacked Iran in 1980, breaking by this the 1975 agreement between the two countries. By 1982, despite the few gains, Hussein was trying to end the war after his troops were stopped and reached out to his Arab neighbors for support at the financial and diplomatic levels. However, being eager to bring Hussein down, the Iranians did not approve a cease-fire until 1988. "It is worth noting that Syria strongly opposed the Iraqi invasion of Iran and cut off the flow of Iraqi oil through a pipeline that passed through Syrian territory".[30]

The Iraqi invasion of Iran affected its relations with its allies, primarily the Soviet Union. However, the latter kept on supplying Iraq with arms during the Iran-Iraq War. So to crush the Iranian troops, the Iraqi army resorted to the use of chemical weapons against. "The Iran-Iraq War left Iraq burdened with hundreds of thousands of casualties and a debt of about $75 billion".[31]

With the end of the war between Iran and Iraq, Hussein aimed at investing his experience and his well equipped army to improve Iraq's position in the region. In order to get out of his debts to Kuwait, Hussein invaded the latter in August 1990. "An international coalition led by the United States, drove out Iraq in

---

[30] M.S. El Ashary, *The Iran-Iraq War.* (Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn; p. 81)

[31] Mazarr, Snider & Blackwell, *Desert Storm.* (published by Westview Press); p.p.43-44

January and February of 1991 in a conflict known as the Persian Gulf War". [32]

"Although the Persian Gulf War was briefer than the Iran-Iraq War, it was equally disturbing, leaving Iraq isolated and rolling from international economic sanctions". [33] Hussein was able to suppress any form of opposition despite the fact that he had led his country into two armed conflicts and had wasted the country's oil wealth by doing so. Soon after the end of the First Gulf War, Saddam crushed down a Shiite revolution in the South of Iraq, he also wanted to suppress the rebellion Kurds in the north, but the intervention of the international community saved and protected them from a complete crush down. "Hussein's small group of friends and family was divided after the war and in the following years Hussein arrested, exiled, and killed many among them who were thought to threaten his rule".[34]

After the Persian Gulf War, the UN Security Council assigned inspection teams to ensure that Iraq had ended the development of weapons of mass destruction whether nuclear, biological or chemical and had also demolished any stocks of these weapons. Nonetheless, instead of cooperating, Hussein interfered with the teams' work, while "his government insisted that the sanctions against Iraq should be raised in return for its obedience to the UN

---

[32] Ibid; p. 35

[33] http://www.desertstorm.com

[34] http://www.gurunet.com/t1-method-4-dsid-2040-dekey-PersGWar-curtab-2040_1

resolutions and accused the United States of seeking not to disarm Iraq but to overthrow the Iraqi regime".[35]

The conflicting stances of Hussein led to a series of divergences on the international scene. While he allowed inspections to proceed in February and November 1998, which prevented conflicts, Hussein interfered in December of the same year.

In February and again in November 1988 Hussein accepted the inspections and permitted them to continue. Nevertheless, he obstructed the inspections again in December of the same year, something that led to several air raids by the United States and Britain on Iraqi industrial targets.

Such violent aggressions received a strict response from Hussein, who "declared that Iraq would no longer allow UN teams to proceed with their inspections".[36]

As a result of heavy pressure exercised for months by the United States and the UN, Saddam submitted in November 2002 to a UN resolution calling for the direct come back of inspectors to Iraq. Nonetheless, the United States Kept being skeptic on Iraq's level of commitment to the UN resolution, and insisted on the fact that Iraq did not comply with the orders of the inspectors and continued to conceal forbidden weapons of mass destruction.

---

[35] http://www.gurunet.com/t1-method-4-dsid-2040-dekey-PersGWar-curtab-2040_1

[36] Mazarr, Snider & Blackwell, *Desert Storm.* (published by Westview Press); p. 56

In an attempt to overthrow the regime of Hussein and to get rid of the alleged stocks of banned weapons, the U.S. army with other allies invaded Iraq in March 2003. Hussein's regime fell down in April of the same year when the U.S. forces conquered Baghdad and Hussein disappeared. In December 2003, it took eight months for the US forces to capture Hussein, who was at that time hiding in a secret underground chamber in a farmhouse near Tikrit.

The Ba'athist regime was always doubtful of the intentions of the West. Moreover, the Arabs were always under the belief that Western countries were against Arab unity and this was made clear through the support of the West for Israel. During the 1970s, the rapprochement between Iraq and the West was building up. "Iraq adopted a more practical policy approach towards the West as the need for Western technical proficiency and trade contracts were recognized". [37]

The United States, France, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia supported Iraq with sophisticated weapons and military equipment and offered it openhanded credits. This support came as a result of the fear from the victory by the Islamic regime in Iran that was opposing the West. "The limited support Iraq enjoyed during the 1980s came to a rapid stop when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990". [38]

---

[37] Chubin and Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*. (I.B.Tauris Publisher); p. 13

[38] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*. (Cambridge University Press 2000); p.p. 13-15.

Chapter Two

The Iranian –Iraqi Relations

Relationship between the Arabs and the Persians has been characterized with hostility for centuries. "When investigating the history of the two countries, many reasons stand for solid evidence for this antagonism, whether geographically, politically and/or religiously".[39]

One of the most conflicting issues was the waterway connecting the Persian Gulf to the ports of Khorramshahr and Abadan in Iran, known as Shatt al Arab, in addition to the Iraqi port of Basra.

---

[39] Chubin and Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*. (I.B.Tauris Publisher); p. 13

Iran became the inevitable rival for centuries following the Ottoman Empire's conquest of Iraq in 1534.

The treaty signed between the Ottomans and the Persians in 1847 recognized Shatt al-Arab as a border line between Iraq and Iran. In this treaty both nations agreed to respect navigation rights of each other in the waterway, and this move appeared to put an end to the long-aged conflict. However, Iran requested control over two predominant Arab cities, Khorramshahr and Abadan as a condition to cease its interference in Northern Iraq. "What could have ended the dispute was nothing but the beginning of another age of wrangles".[40]

With the end of World War I (1914-1918), Iraq was declared a separate state. "The conflict over the precise borders between Iran and Iraq rose back to surface"[41]; a series of attempts to end this conflict were made and in 1937, "an agreement was reached between both nations defining the official borders, granting Iraq control over Shatt al Arab"[42]. In 1975 and after almost 40 years, the issue was raised once again, "stating the midpoint of Shatt al Arab as the boundary between the two antagonists".[43]

Just when the dilemma over Shatt al Arab finally became part of the past, the good relations between Iran and Iraq was soon distressed by another series of crises, giving the impression that

---

[40] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*. (Cambridge University Press); p.p. 13-15

[41] http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/arabs/iraniraq.html

[42] http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0825449.html

[43] M.S. Al Azhary, *The Iran-Iraq War*. (Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn); p. 17

these two neighbors were never destined to enjoy healthy relations.

A major incentive for further disagreement was the issue of political loyalties. Iraq is predominantly Arab while the majority in Iran is Persian, and these two natures had never enjoyed harmony. At both sides of the border, a large population of "neutral" Kurds inhabited the north while further to the south, the Iranian province of Khuzestan was home to an Arab minority in the midst of majority of Persians.

The majority in both Iran and Iraq was Shiite Muslim and the common religious beliefs were thought to bring the two nations closer; however, it only drove them farther from peacefulness. Iraq was a refuge to many Shiite religious leaders who were opposing the Iranian secular government, resulting in nothing but more damage to the Iranian-Iraqi relations. "The most prominent refugee was Iranian Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini, the leading Shiite scholar who settled in Iraq after being exiled in 1964". [44]

Third were the alliances between the two countries and the world superpowers. While the Iraqi Ba'ath Party socialist and associated with the Soviet Union, the Shah of Iran was pro-Western and opposed socialism, something that constituted an absolute divergence.

Fourth is the issue of the Kurds. The Kurdish community in Iraq revolted against the government in the early 1970s. Aiming at

---

[44] M.S. Al Azhary, *The Iran-Iraq War*. (Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn); p.p. 23-25

gaining returns and advantages over its neighbor, Iran joined a number of other countries in their support of the revolution. In 1974, Mustafa Al-Barzani rejected a new law around the rights of the Kurds and that was based on the 1970 agreement, and led the Kurdish nationalists into heavy clashes against the government forces in northern Iraq. During these conflicts, Barazani received weapons and supplies from Iran. In 1975, Iran agreed to cease all kinds of aid and support to the Kurds as a result of an agreement signed with Iraq around sharing the waterway of Shatt al-Arab. "the border between Iran and Iraq was drawn down the middle of the Shatt al Arab rather than along its eastern Iranian bank as agreed in 1937". [45]

However, Iran and Iraq did not enjoy peace for long as in January 1979 an Islamic revolution took place in Iran, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, and leading to the overthrow of the country's secular government. Following the revolution' success, Khomeini returned to Iran and initiated the establishment of a new government. "In April, Iran was declared an Islamic Republic"[46]. "On the other side of the border, in the July of the same year, General Saddam Hussein, a Sunni Muslim and a fellow member of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party"[47], was pronounced Iraq's new President.

Iraq saw in the revolution a great threat to the Iraqi government and at the same time a huge opportunity.

---

[45] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq.* (Cambridge University Press,2000); p.p.194-195
[46] Ibid
[47] M.S. Al Azhary, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn); p.p. 12-16

However, the coalition that overthrew the Shah suffered from severe internal conflicts; the fact that army was still fresh and the issue of the American hostages put Iran in a complete turmoil. After taking the American hostages in November 1979, and driven by the strong belief in the new government aiming at stopping any foreign intervention or influence, Iran was left isolated on the international and regional levels. As a result, Iraq's enemy became so weak.

On the other hand, the success story of the neighboring Iranian Shiite Muslims inspired many Iraqi Shiites to seek similar movements in their country. However, with the success of the Iranian revolution, the secular Iraqi leadership became under threat, especially when Ayatollah Khomeini began encouraging Iraqi clergies to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein for being anti-Islamic. Saddam's response was directed against the Shiite fundamentalists and materialized in providing aid and support to the Arab separatists in Iran. "The earliest clash occurred in June 1979, when an Iraqi aircraft attacked Iranian villages that were believed to be supporting Khomeini-backed Kurdish rebels". [48]

In the following months, rebel movements rose considerably in both countries benefiting from large support. Iran encouraged Shiite protests in Iraq against Saddam, and on the first of April 1980, the Iraqi Foreign Minister Tareq Aziz was targeted by an Iranian-supported rebel group. As a consequence, Saddam expelled many Iranian-born Iraqis, and executed Muhammad Baqir

---

[48] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq.* (Cambridge University Press,2000); p.p. 223-225

Al-Sadr, a Shiite leader and religious clergy who shared same political views as Khomeini and had led protests against Saddam's regime. This move came to deepening the crisis in the Iranian-Iraqi relations in addition to angering many Iraqi Shiites.

Chapter Three

The Events of Iran-Iraq War & Iraq's Objectives

The war between Iran and Iraq was known as the Persian Gulf war until the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (1990-91), where it became recognized as the second Persian-Gulf war. This war cost one million casualties and over USD 1.19 trillion, and was well-known for widespread use of chemical weapons by Iraqi forces against the Iranian troops and civilians, as well as against Iraqi Kurds.

To predict the 1980 field clash, one should take a thorough look into the long history of disputes between Iran and Iraq over geographical, political or religious issues. However, one indisputable fact is that it was not expected to last 8 years; for this

it was recognized as the "longest conventional war of the 20th century".

The war changed heavily the politics of the region, and many related factors led in 1990 to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

It was on September 22, 1980 that Iraq made its first military field move. A group of Iraqi air fighters attacked several air bases at several Iranian cities. Stemming from the lesson they learnt from the Arab-Israeli June 1967 War, the Iraqi's main objective was to destroy the Iranian aircrafts in their bases. The raids' success was limited to the destruction of the airplanes runways and the fuel reservoirs, but the Iranian aircrafts were saved as they were protected in special hangars, besides the fact that the bombs were intended to destroy runways.

Despite the fact they were taken by surprise, the Iranians were able to call on a state of alert within hours. Iranian air fighters took off from the same attacked bases, targeted strategic Iraqi targets and returned without major losses. Iraq's response was considerable; six divisions of the Iraqi army attacked Iran from three different points in a successful surprise assault. These troops drove into Iranian territory and occupied many square kilometers of it.

The Iraqi forces encountered unexpected resistance despite the fact that the Iranian defense was disorganized and surprised. Rather than turning against Khomeini and his government, the Iranians gathered around their revolution and formed a strong

resistance. "In January 1981 Iran launched its first defense, but Iraq could destroy the attack. The war entered a prolonged deadlock".[49]

The Iraqis soon discovered that the Iranian military was in very good shape and not exhausted as they hoped. In June of 1982, the Iranians launched a successful counter-attack and recovered the areas previously lost to Iraq. After this, most of the fighting took place in the Iraqi lands. The fact that the fighting was being limited in Iraq helped Saddam Hussein in rallying popular Iraqi support. The Iraqi forces were fighting on their own territory and were in defensive positions, while the Iranian depended on their basic human wave attacks.

"In 1982, Iraq offered a cessation of hostilities, yet Iran was determined"[50]. After 1982 the Iranian determination to bring down the Iraqi government led to prolong the conflict for just another six years.

During the year 1983 both Iran and Iraq showed strong ability to absorb any attack and to inflict severe losses on the counter party. Iraq succeeded at constructing strong defensive points and controlling the fighting areas to contain the Iranian power. Iraqi forces widened the war and targeted civilians; they also used chemical weapons against Iranian forces. Moreover, they attacked the Iranian cities with missiles, bombed the Iranian oil pipelines

---

[49] M.S. Al Azhary, *The Iran-Iraq War*. (Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn); p.p.38-41
[50] http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.htm

and attacked the Iranian ships in the Persian Gulf. "Iran responded with similar attacks against civilian and economic targets in Iraq".[51]

On the international scene, the reaction to the Iran-Iraq War was insignificant. After a week of fighting, the United Nations Security Council called for a cease-fire, but this call came only after Iraqi forces occupied Iranian territory. Moreover, the UN Security Council did not agree on aiding Iran against the Iraqi invasion. As a result, Iran accused the UN Security Council of being biased in favor of Iraq. However, some governments made few steps to end the war outside the international organization. The international isolation of Iran and its conflict with the West after the birth of the Islamic revolution formed the main reason behind the international silence. Furthermore, the Iranians did not want to bound themselves with any obligations to other countries, something that kept them from seeking international help. "Iraq, expecting an easy victory against a weak opponent, also did not seek international support in the early stages of the war".[52]

On the other hand, while keeping a cautious stand on Iraq, most Arab States feared the victory of the revolutionary Iranian regime. As of 1982, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, among many Arab States, gave their military and diplomatic aid to Iraq. Nevertheless, Iran received the support of few Arab States, mainly Syria which had been for long at odds with Iraq while Libya offered its support on several occasions. Iraq also attacked Iranian shipping. "This

[51] http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.htm
[52] Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Gerd Nonneman & Charles Tripp, War and Peace in The Gulf. (Ithaca Press, 1991); p.138

brought Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, to the Persian Gulf to protect the valuable shipments of oil from the Middle East".[53]

The Iranians retaliated against the Iraqi ships and also against those of the countries supporting Iraq, such as the United States and Kuwait.

After many Iraqi attacks on the main exporting facility of Iran on Khark Island, The Iranians launched an attack on a Kuwaiti tanker near Bahrain, and another one on a Saudi tanker in the Saudi waters in 1984. After that the attacks on ships in the Persian Gulf increased, and this phase of the war was named the "Tanker War."

With the war escalating, both Iran and Iraq were desperately searching for military equipments, regardless of the side supplying these equipments. When the war started, Iraq did not have diplomatic relations with the U.S. due to its close relationship with the USSR and its aggressive stand towards the Unites States main ally in the Middle East, Israel. However, and as the war continued, Iraq aimed at gaining the American support by soothing their approach towards the U.S. As a result, Iraq was granted trade credits and its armed forces received intelligence information by the US and through Saudi Arabia.

In addition, after objecting it for years, the United States allowed some states among its allies to give military aid and other supplies to Iraq. This important move came as a result of both the U.S. desire to support its friends in the region and its fear of the

---

[53] http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.htm

consequences of a possible Victory of the Islamic Republic. "Iraq also relied heavily on the USSR for military supplies".[54]

On the other hand, the Iranians were also seeking support from others including their former enemies. Most of Iran's military was of American origin, as it was mainly built during the rule of the Shah. Thus, this military needed American spare parts, despite the fact that the Iranian regime was hostile to the U.S. However, this supply of spare parts came from Israel, the United States main ally in the region that was eager to weaken the potential Arab opponent represented in Iraq.

In 1985 the United States government was secretly selling weapons to the Iranians, while it was urging other governments to stop selling it any arms. "American motives seemed designed partly to persuade pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon to release Americans held captive there, and partly to improve relations with Iran".[55]

By 1986, and as the war continued, the condition of Iraq was getting weaker and with it, the hope for achieving a big victory was diminishing. Iran was very aggressive and willing to suffer enormous losses to win this war, something that threatened the Iraqi defensive positions. At the borders, the Iranians drove large numbers of citizens to form human shields against the Iraqi forces. Even though this human shield was not efficient against the Iraqi better equipped armed forces, and despite the fact that thousands

---

[54] Morris M., Mottale, *The Origin of the Gulf Wars*. (University Press of America, 1984) p.p. 120-121
[55] Ibid; p.p. 120-121

of the people forming this shield were massacred with every attack, the government continued sending them to form the shield. "With its larger population, Iran seemed confident that it would ultimately succeed".[56]

When Iran occupied the Iraqi gulf town of Al Faw in 1986, Iraq retaliated by using massive amounts of poison gas, to prevent Iran's attacks. The Iraqis waged more attacks on Iranian cities, Iranian ships and oil pipelines, causing severe losses. This led to improving the situation of the Iraqi oil industry prompting more American presence in the region. "The American presence nevertheless brought an end to Iranian superiority over Iraq at sea, giving Iraq time to re-supply its weaponry and stop the Iranian ground advance".[57]

It was only until 1988 that the Iraqis were able to drive out the Iranian forces of Al Faw, after improving their military capabilities. With more international support to Iraq, the position of Iran was getting weaker and its chances to win the war were being lost. As a result, many Iranian leaders tried to persuade Khomeini to accept the UN Security Council Resolution 598. The latter had several aims such as removing Saddam, the payment of reparations and the recognition of Iraq as the offensive party that started the war; however, in July 1988 he authorized the ceasefire, although these aims were not provided by that resolution. "On August 20 of the

---

[56] Morris M., Mottale, *The Origin of the Gulf Wars.* (University Press of America, 1984) p.p. 120-121
[57] Ibid; p.p. 114

year 1988, both sides ceased fighting in accordance with the terms of Resolution 598".[58]

3.1 The Aftermath

The war was damaging for both of Iran and Iraq. It harmed economic development and decreased oil exports. It cost Iran around 1.5 million casualties, and a financial cost of $350 billion. On the other hand, Iraq came out of the war with huge debts to several Arab states especially in the Gulf, something that contributed to Iraq's invasion of the latter in 1990.

The oil industry of both Iran and Iraq was heavily affected by the war and much of it was damaged by the attacks. still, the production capacity of Iran was able to fully recover from the damages during the war. The main dispute between the two countries was not solved leaving the borders between them unchanged after the war. Two years later, Saddam acknowledged the rights of Iran over the eastern half of the Shatt al-Arab.

This war was extremely costly and was also considered as one of the deadliest since the Second World War. Many of the prisoners of war taken by both parties were not released before 10 years after the end of the war.

---

[58] Morris M., Mottale, *The Origin of the Gulf Wars*. (University Press of America, 2000); p. 114

Here we would like to mention that the current president of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and most of his cabinet members are veterans of the First Gulf War.

On the local scene, and on one hand, the war resulted in the following: Saddam Hussein came out more secured than before; despite the fact that he led his country into a disastrous war. On the other hand, the prolonged years of struggle united the Iranians around the Islamic republic.

The war helped in resolving few issues between the two countries; however, negotiations remained impossible for almost two years after the ceasefire. In addition, the UN Security Council Resolution 598 urged both parties to achieve the following: the return to the prewar border, the discharge of prisoners, and to go into negotiation around all problematic issues.

It was until the Second Gulf War that the relations between the two antagonists started improving. Then, Iraq retreated to the 1975 border and went through an exchange of prisoners. However, both parties kept some prisoners and the separation of the borders was not complete. "A decade after the 1988 cease-fire, Iran and Iraq had yet to settle these differences".[59]

---

[59] Morris M., Mottale, *The Origin of the Gulf Wars*. (University Press of America, 2000). p.p. 128-0

3.2 The Objectives of Iraq

Iraq had several strategic objectives behind its decision to move to war.

Similar to any Arab country, the main objective lies in saddam's aim to dominate in the Gulf region, especially since Iran was regarded under the rule of Shah as the watchman of the Gulf region with the support of the U.S. and its great oil wealth. "In times where Iran seemed vulnerable due to the then ongoing revolution, and Khomeini's struggling efforts to become the recognized Iranian leader, let alone the disorder of which the Iranian army was suffering, Saddam saw in the region the perfect opportunity to make his move".[60] In order to gain the support of the countries in the region during the war, Saddam aimed at presenting Iraq as the protector of the Arab interests and claimed that his fighting against Iran was to protect his country, since that "Iraq had always argued that Iran had illegally occupied Arabian territories; namely the east bank of the Shatt, the province of Khuzestan (called Arabestan by the Iraqis), and three Gulf islands (Abu Moussa, Big Tumb and Little Tumb)".[61]

Second objective was the desire of Saddam to become the leader of the Arab World. One of the most recognized Arab leaders was Anwar Saddat, however after his peace treaty with Israel, he had

---

[60] Ibid; p.p.40-42
[61] Dilip Hiro, *Neighbors, Not Friends, Iraq and Iran After the Gulf Wars*. 9Routledge publisher, 2001); p.p. 44-47

started to lose public and regional support. Besides, the Gulf States were militarily weak despite being wealthy and Syria was financially weak even if militarily strong. "Thus, Saddam believed he could seize the situation in the region to banish the revolution in Iran, then confused and baffled, and emerge as the new pan- Arab leader, an Iraqi Nasser, and completely dominate the oil rich states of the Arabian Peninsula".[62]

The third objective was to prevent the Iranians from stimulating the Kurdish revolution and to protect the secular regime of the Baa'th party from the intention to overthrow it; such intentions were declared by Khomeini. After the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, many Iraqi Shiite leaders, who many ties of religious and political contact with Iran and who opposed the Iraqi secular regime dominated by the Sunnis, started promoting similar moves in Iraq by the Shiite community. Like most of the Iranians, the majority of Iraqis were Shiite. All this caused Hussein a big fear from exporting the revolutionary affiliation across the border leading to the overthrow of his regime; especially that "the Ayatollah Khomeini had called for an Islamic Revolution in Iraq and had attempted to challenge the Shiite population".[63] Thus, "Saddam refused the possibility of having a passionately revolutionary neighbor that regarded his regime as Godless and was inciting the Shiite part of his population to rise up against him".[64]

---

[62] Morris M., Mottale, *The Origin of the Gulf Wars.* (University Press of America, 2000); p. 135
[63] Ibid
[64] Financial Times; 1-4-1985

Iraq's fourth objective was to secure and protect its borders against any military aggression as well as to maintain control over the wide range of land near Qasr-Shirin and Mehran towns especially that these towns were promised in the 1975 treaty by the Shah to Iraq.

The fifth objective was the long dated conflict between the two neighboring countries over the Shatt-al-Arab. Saddam aimed at restoring the 1975 Algiers Accord and at gaining control of the said waters, especially that the Shatt stands for Iraq's lifeline and losing such a strategic location would lead to economic problems in Iraq.

Sixth was Iraq's plan to destroy the then weak Iranian military power which lacked any ammunition or support from the U.S. especially with the issue of American hostages being held by Iran's affiliated Lebanese Hezbollah. "Iraq had doubts with regards to Washington's plan on whether it would exchange money, supplies and equipment for the safe return of the captive Americans, especially that the US has great interest in seeing an anti-Soviet power, not necessarily pro-Western, be in the position of the Gulf's policeman"[65]. In 1980 the U.S. perceived Iraq as a client-state for the U.S.S.R. and Saddam was not certain of the willingness of the United States to resume diplomatic relations with Iran.

The seventh objective was the desire to get rid of Khomeini and his fellow mullahs and replace them with secular and moderate

---

[65] Morris M., Mottale, *The Origin of the Gulf Wars.* (University Press of America, 2000); p. 136

government that would not pose a threat to the regime of Saddam Hussein. Both Iran and Iraq were unable to secure the position of a regional leader and any disagreement between the two seemed to weaken the other.

Finally, was the Hussein's wish to secure the Province of Khuzestan in order to secure the oil exports of Iraq. The situation of Iraq was critical as its exports must either cross countries such as Syria or Turkey, or undergo the gun threats of an unfriendly neighbor such as Iran. For this, Iraq needed to secure its movements in Shatt-al-Arab and also to provide a good access to and out of the Persian Gulf.

Chapter Four

Iraq & Syria – Similar yet Different

Syria and Iraq come both from the same ideological school of the Ba'ath party, "Syria and Iraq represent two neighboring states under highly personalized rule and sharing a unique bond".[66] In the late 1960s, the regimes in both countries achieved power and overthrew previous unpopular dictatorships. In 1966, a group of the Ba'ath party coming from the Alawi minorities from northwest Syria, took over power in Damascus. After two years, a rival group of the same party, removed the regime of Arif in Baghdad, this group was dominated by Sunni personalities from Takrit region in Iraq who were also a minority. However, Damascus and Baghdad rulers had a continuous conflict around the identity of the true Arab front line leader. The fact that it was driven by its emphasis on

---

[66] Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism*, 3rd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 118, 144,

Arabism, soon transformed the Ba'ath into an ideological tool for the minorities to achieve their ambitions.

In 1978 a proposed unity between Iraq and Syria failed and negatively affected the relationship between the two nations. Assad attributed the collapse of the Arab Union to Iraq. He explained in his speech on March 1982 how the Iraqi regime was responsible for turning Arab power ineffective vis a vis Israel. Assad said, " From the very first birth of this Iraqi regime, Saddam withdrew from the Arab Union operation that was almost to take place between Syria and Iraq(,.....). But, after Saddam came to power, he threw away all these agreements exactly after four days of the beginning of his regime".[67]

Iraq's and Syria's paths then diverged. Their regimes evolved differently despite their common ideology, something that can be indicated from their distinct modern histories.

In order to replace pan-Arabism, Assad came up with a new ideology on nationalism, aiming at solving the long dated conflict between the Alawi minority and Sunni majority in modern Syria. "He built Syrian nationhood as a group of people who have selected to live together under a common government. He presented himself as someone who led by popular approval, expressed through a succession of elections".[68]

---

[67] Assafir, March 3, 1982

[68] Fred H. Lawson, *Why Syria Goes to War, Thirty Years of Confrontations*. (Cornell University Press, 1996); p.p.98-102

On the other hand, Saddam used the cultural notion to build the Iraqi nationalism. He united all ethnic and sectarian communities of Iraq in his own person. "Upon the rise of the Iraqi Ba'ath to power in 1968, it began to elaborate an official national description that exceeded ethnic and sectarian cleavages between Kurds and Arabs, Sunnis and Shiites".[69] The main goal of the Ba'ath Party was to restore the Arab feeling and affiliation that distinguished Islam as a pure Arab Islam and to remove rigid religious practices. For this, Saddam worked at refreshing the nationalism hidden in Islam and focused on Arabism rather than Islam. He presented the war between Iran and Iraq as a conflict between Arab Muslims and Persians, rather than Sunnis and Shiites. He also stressed on the high status of the Arabs, stirred by the fact that the Koran was revealed in the Arabic language and in the Arabian Peninsula. According to Saddam, the interpretation of Islam relies on the Arabs and Muslim nations who are not Arabs should depend on them in similar issues, thus depriving Khomeini from the role of a Muslim leader for he is not an Arab.

Iraq and Syria had common grounds regarding the political dominance in each of the two nations, being both Sunni. Nevertheless, the Alawite minority of Syria soon controlled the Syrian political scene. Facing the Sunni majority, it was not an easy task for Hafez el Assad, an Alawite, to legitimate his rule in civil terms. Thus, he always based his legitimacy upon the high cast of voices in the election. "In less than three years, Assad called Syrians for at least five times to the election box to confirm

---

[69] Ibid; p.p.124-129

him as president".[70] Despite the fact that Assad declared the people as the source of every authority, this remained to be a mere statement as the candidates for the parliamentary elections were pre-selected by the regime, and the parliament itself did not have much of authority. As he hoped to minimize the sectarian feelings and the fear of the Sunni community, Assad focused on participation of the civic society in order to create a Syrian civic affiliation that rises above sectarianism.

The outbreak of the Lebanese civil war forced Assad to change his presentation of civil nationalism. When Assad sent out the Syrian troops to support the right wing Christians in 1976, widespread corruption and economic crisis pushed hostility with the Ba'ath regime to a high level. The Sunni Islamists started attacking government officials and other famous figures, especially among Alawites. "The violence ended in February 1982 when Assad sent out his brother Rif'at and his largely Alawite defense companionship to crush the Muslim uprisings in Hama, Homs, and Aleppo".[71] As a result, Assad resorted to political sectarianism.

In order to improve his image among the Sunni community after years of conflict, Assad made a major step by declaring the "Bay'a", which is a traditional oath of loyalty related to the election of the head of a Muslim state. "The Bay'a implies equal obligation; the leader promises faithfulness to divine recommendations, the

---

[70] Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 177
[71] Ibid; pp. 283, 316-18

public swears loyalty to the leader".[72] The declaration of the Bay'a helped bringing Assad closer to his people.

Assad faced a major issue on integrating the Sunni Muslims in the government. Being a member of an Islamic minority, he came up with a formula for realizing such a goal. This formula was mainly about having a click of Sunni personalities around the president to give more legitimacy to his rule and eventually better acceptance among the Sunni community; such as having Sunni vice president and prime minister. "He brought into power many Sunni leaders such as Mustafa Tlas and Hikmat Shihabi"[73] This step enabled Assad to establish several bodies to encourage the principles of a Syrian civil state.

4.1 Iraq- Syria Conflicts Before 1980

Despite the many similarities Iraq and Syria have had in the past, the last decades reveal the causes that have led the two nations in opposite directions and created a tensed relationship. They both shared the sense of hostility towards the West, they are both Muslim states with secular governments that make no room for Islamic activism and their common objective was to bring the Arab World together in order to erase the boundaries resulting from the defeat of the Ottomans and the agreements between the Western

---

[72] Mordechai Kedar, *Asad's Islamic Image* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press) p. 28
[73] Rachel Bronson,. *Syria: Hanging Together or Hanging Separately*. (The Washington Quarterly. Autumn 2000). p.94

powers after World War II. However this unity could not be realized and the common grounds between Iraq and Syria were not strong enough to eliminate the political differences between the two countries.

Arab Unity Conflict

In the 1950s and the 1960s, and despite the fact that they both appeared to strive for the implementation of an authentic Arab Unity, Iraq and Syria unveiled other implicit goals they had as they accused one another of using the "Arab Unity" as a cover to strengthen their own domestic regimes.

Euphrates River Conflict

The water rights of Euphrates and Tigris, two of the largest rivers in the region both originating from Turkey, flowing into Iraq and Syria and going through Shatt Al-Arab into the Persian Gulf, these rights have for long represented a major source of conflict, which led to clashes of greater magnitude.

Even though Turkey hardly owns one third of the basin of the Euphrates River, it forms the origin of ninety percent of its water, and the rest of the flow originates in Syria. "Given the fact that Turkey, Syria and Iraq, have large and growing populations, they have ambitious plans to increase their withdrawals of water for irrigation".[74]

---

[74] The Economist; 12 May 1990

The Euphrates river is the only major one crossing Syria with dependable water flows, even though it has other water resources. "On the other hand, at present Iraq is most heavily dependent on the Euphrates, but has an alternative source of water in the Tigris system, which currently is lightly used".[75]

The neighboring nations have shown mixed feelings regarding Turkey's major developments on the Euphrates, especially the massive Ataturk Dam. "Such developments could help to reduce the extreme variations in flow and ensure predictable supplies in downstream countries, but they could lead to a reduction in overall flows to Syria by as much as 40 percent and to Iraq by up to 80 percent, especially during dry years".[76] "Iraq believes that both the Anatolia Development Project and the irrigation plans in Syria would deprive Iraq of sufficient water for its own irrigation plans".[77]

Since Turkey, Syria, and Iraq have been at odds for long, the negotiations over the Euphrates among them did not lead to sustainable accord. "Syria and Iraq have opposed Turkey over its membership in NATO; Syria and Turkey opposed Iraqi military actions in the 1970s; Turkey and Iraq tended to band together against Syrian military aggression in the 1980; and Turkey and Syria sided with the allied forces against Iraq during the Persian Gulf War in the early 1990s".[78]

---

[75] Ibid
[76] The Economist, 12 May 1990
[77] Ibid
[78] The Economist, 12 May 1990

While Saddam was trying to turn Iraq into a major power in the region, Syria started its development of irrigation programs during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1968, it started building the Tabaqa (later renamed al-Thawara) dam on the Euphrates. On the other hand, Iraq had several projects such as the Gharraf Project. "Al-Thawara and Keban dams were both completed in the period between 1973-1975, when particularly dry seasons had been experienced, making the operation of both dams generative of a crisis".[79] The divergences between the two countries reached a peak during the filling of Lake Assad, which reduced the flow of the river to a drop.

The most serious disagreement between the two neighboring countries took place in 1974-1975 with the Iraqi accusation to Syria of reducing the river's flow endangering by this 3 million Iraqi farmers benefiting from the river's irrigation water. In 1975 Iraq demanded the deployment of the Arab League troops along the border. As a result, tensions between the two states peaked. Being unsatisfied with the negotiations, Syria left the Arab League Committee in April of the same year. As they considered the Syrian dam the reason behind the low levels of Euphrates flows, the Iraqis threatened to bomb it. Later that year, Iraq threatened to take all measures to ensure the flow of the Euphrates River. It also complained to the Arab League that Syria was intentionally diminishing its share of the river's waters.

---

[79] Asit K. Biswas, *International Waters of the Middle East: From Euphrates-Tigris to Nile*. (Bombay; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) p.34

As a result, on May 13th, Syria took several hostile steps against Iraq as it suspended its flights to Baghdad and brought the troops stationed at the front with Israel and drove them to the borders with Iraq. However, the tension ended shortly before any military action after the intervention of the Saudi Arabia. "Unofficially, Syria agreed to keep 40% of the water from the Euphrates River and let 60 % flow into Iraq".[80]

When both Turkey and Syria began to draw big plans for irrigation withdrawals form the river in the early 1960s, tension rose between the three neighbors. In 1965, Turkey, Syria and Iraq complained from the fact that their usage of the river's water was more the capacity of the river. In the same year Iraq and Syria went into negotiations around the allocation of the river's water but no formal agreement was reached before the 1970s but it was never signed. "In the mid-1970s, dams at Keban of Turkey, and Tabqa of Syria were completed, and their reservoirs began to fill, reducing flows to Iraq".[81]

In the past decade, the Turkish projects around the supply of water have been the focus of political concerns in the region. When Turkey started filling the reservoir of the Ataturk dam in January 1990 after completing its construction, tensions became very high as this step interrupted the flow of the Euphrates for a month. As a

[80] T. Naff and R. C. Matson, eds., *Water in the Middle East: Conflict or Cooperation?* (Westview Press, 1984) p.87
[81] Middle East Economic Digest, 13 October 1989, 4-5

result both Syria and Iraq claimed that Turkey had a water weapon that could be used against them, despite the advance warning made by the latter. "In October 1989, Turkey had threatened to restrict water flow to Syria to force it to withdraw support for Kurdish rebels operating in southern Turkey".[82] However, the claim made by Turkey that the filling of the reservoir was entirely for technical reasons did help appeasing Syria and Iraq, "who argued that Turkey had already used its power over the headwaters of the Euphrates for political goals and could do so again".[83]

"The ability of Turkey to shut off the flow of the Euphrates, even temporarily, was noted by political and military strategists at the beginning of the Persian Gulf conflict".[84] At the beginning of the second Gulf War, "behind-the-scenes discussions were being conducted at the United Nations around using Turkish dams on the Euphrates River to cut off water to Iraq in response to its invasion of Kuwait. Although no such action was taken, the threat of the water weapon was again made clear".[85]

During the Second Gulf War in 1990-1991, another dispute over water took place between Syria and Iraq, when "Iraq placed human shields at the al-Thawra Dam in northern Iraq to prevent potential Syrian disruption".[86]

[82] New York Times, 7 February 1990, A4
[83] New York, Times, 11 November 1990, op. ed
[84] New York Times, 11 November 1990
[85] Ibid
[86] Ibid

4.2 The Relation between Iraq and Syria After 1980

After Saddam became president, Iraq accused Syria of conspiracy against the Iraqi regime. Saddam Hussein cancelled the entire Arab Union plan, which was formerly planned for between Syria and Iraq.

Syria's response to Saddam's move was highly clear in Syrian president's words, "Saddam's regime took an earlier wrong step when he aborted the Planned Union operation between Syria and Iraq, when Ahmad Hassan Al-Bakr was the president".[87]

In 1979 Iraq accused Syria of a conspiracy to remove Saddam's regime. In Al-Seyasah Kuwaiti newspaper dated January 22, 1981, "the foreign Minister of Iraq, Sa'adoun Hammadi, accused Syria with the conspiracy against Iraq".[88]

"The bad relation between the two countries originating in 1980 as the result of Syria's support to Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, started to improve in 1997 before the death of Hafez Al-Assad. This approach was a major issue for Washington".[89]

---

[87] Teshrin, 7-3-1982
[88] Al-Siyasah, 22-1-1981
[89] Eberhard Kienle, *Ba'th V Ba'th, The Conflict between Syria and Iraq, 1968-1989* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990)

In June 1997 the borders between Iraq and Syria were opened for the first time since 1980 to allow the exchange of trade. This step came as the first sign of rapprochement between the tow nations. Since then, the economic and commercial ties were strengthened and in July 1998, the two countries approved the re-opening the pipeline linking the Kirkuk oil fields in northern Iraq with the Syrian port of Banias.

After he realized that Saddam Hussein was not a threat anymore to Damascus, Assad aimed, in 1997, at having closer relation with Iraq as a part of an informal alliance against the United States and Israel. However, "although Hafiz al-Assad renewed the relations between Syria and Iraq, he was very cautious".[90]

After he became president, Bashar worked on improving the relations between his country and Iraq under Saddam Hussein. In order to face the American plans to bring down his regime, Saddam tried to make friends out of his old enemies in the region. By smuggling its oil to Syria, Iraq got rid of a long-aged conflict with its neighbor.

Bashar Al-Assad followed his father's steps in this relation. His government expressed support to the Iraqi leaders who were welcomed in Syria all the time. In addition, the relations of Syria with the Iraqi opposition were decreased, and the Syrians tried to restrict their activities. For example, "a radio station run by the Iraqi opposition group operating in Syria was shut down in early

---

[90] Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy – Syria in Transition* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 86-87

2001 and the publication of anti-Iraq newspapers in Damascus was outlawed".[91] Iraqi oil was flowing into Syria via the Kirkuk-Banyas pipeline and this was making both nations happy. The transfer of this oil to Syria allowed it to increase its own exports of oil.

Syrian officials admitted that legal trade with Iraq had melted the old divergences, but they refused accusations that their country was violating the UN sanctions and buying Iraqi oil.

The U.S. protested against the violation made by the Syrians regarding the boycott on Iraq. In response to that protest, "Bashar explained to Secretary of State Powell and later to President Bush that the flow of oil had been part of a technical examination of the pipeline, which had been idle for almost two decades, and that with the completion of the examination, the flow of oil would be stopped".[92]

In 2002, Syria and Iraq concluded a trade agreement and announced that they had resolved their dispute over the Euphrates River. The Iraqi market was opened to the Syrian industries and large scale trading between the two countries was observed.

Syria's ties to Iraq were upsetting to Washington, especially with the rapprochement of Iraq with Iran that was helping create a group of hard-line states that could have an impact on the process of peace in the Middle East.

[91] Al-Watan, May 12, 2002
[92] Al-Quds al-'Arabi (London), October 10, 2000

"Ties between Syria and Iraq, both during Hafiz al-Assad's rule and that of his son Bashar, were first and foremost of economic significance".[93] Iraq formed a lacerable source of income to Syria because of the increase in trade between the two countries, "which reached at least $3 billion by the end of 2002".[94]

In an obvious violation of the sanctions, an airline route between Baghdad and Damascus was installed in addition to a railroad line linking Mosul and Aleppo. "The Iraqi oil was sold to Syria at a reduced price and Syria used it for the domestic market, letting it increase its own oil exports and realize high profits".[95]

---

[93] Ibid
[94] Al-Hayat, October 26, 2001, December 13, 2002
[95] Al-Safir (Beirut), November 23, 2000

Chapter Five

Syria's Motives and Stance

5.1 The International Relations Theory

To better understand the motives behind a state's behavior one should look at the international relations theory and in particular Realist theory. According to Realist theory, relations between states are not based on friendship, preferences or liking, even though sometimes states seem to prefer some countries than others but this preference is about common grounds and common interests. However, international relations are driven by a set of tactical and strategic interests and eventually state's behavior is governed by these interests. "The nation-state is assumed to be a unitary, rational actor pursuing its national interest viewed in terms of

power".[96] The interests of states are mainly about security and power; nevertheless, there is always an immense role for economic interests that also guide the state's behavior whether directly by state's officials or by the various interests group within a state who usually have strong influence on the decision makers.

In the case of Syria, where the political system is dominated by one man at the head of the Ba'ath party, we find that the state behavior is motivated by Assad's considerations related mainly to security and quest for power in the region, as well as to several economic interests. According to one author, "Syria seized the opportunity of the Gulf War to reshape to its advantage the regional order in the Middle East".[97]

Thus the siding of Syria with Iran during the Iran-Iraq war was driven by nothing but its own interests, whether those related to the balance of power in the region and the Arab-Israeli conflict or the ones of an economic nature. "With Egypt out of the equation in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Syria found itself with few reliable allies as events unfolded in early 1979".[98]

In the 1980s, Syria saw in Iran one ally that shared its apprehensions regarding Israel's occupation of Arab lands and (equally important) its suspicions regarding the regional aspirations of Iraq under Saddam Hussein.

---

[96] James Dougherty & Robert Pfaltzgraff, *Contending Theories of international Relations*. (Harper Collins Publishers 1990) p. 25.
[97] Ismael and Ismael, *The Gulf War and New World Order*. (University Press of Florida 1994) p.385
[98] Jubin Goodarzi, *Syria and Iran*. (I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd 2006) p.19

5.2 Syria's Motives behind supporting Iran

There are many reasons behind Syria's support to Iran. First is the nature of the Syrian regime, which is largely drawn from the Shiite-oriented Alawite group. This group had greater affinity towards Iran than Sunni dominated Iraq.

The second reason lies in the fact that the Islamic Revolution in Iran revealed the presence of another enemy to Israel; thus, Syria and some other Arab countries (e.g. Libya) hoped to gain an ally in the Arab-Israeli dilemma by supporting Iran. "Damascus was eager to see the end of the Iran-Iraq war in favor of Iran, and wanted to witness the reawakening of the Arab-Israeli conflict".[99]

The third reason relates to President Hafez Assad's ambitions, regarding "Greater Syria" and its role in the region. The victory of Iraq would naturally lead to strengthening the Riyadh-Amman-Baghdad axis, something that would jeopardize Syria's ability to play the role of the true leader of the Ba'ath movement and to influence the Arab world. Syria always wanted to symbolize the Arab voice in the Arab-Israeli conflict. To achieve this goal and make certain that Syria would lead in the Arab World; Assad attempted several steps to wane his antagonist in Iraq, by supporting its enemy. "Syria provided moral support to Iran by cutting-off the Iraqi oil pipeline that runs through Syria and

---

[99] http://www.oranim.ac.il/courses/meast/water/WATER%20AND%20CONFLICT%20IN%20THE%20MIDDLE%20EAST%20.htm

provided fuel for the Iranian fighters after each mission over Iraq".[100]

Fourth, and after losing the support from most Arab countries, it was vital for Syria to maintain its political and economical association with Iran. Iran had previously granted Syria financial aids exceeding one billion dollars a year to purchase advanced Soviet weapon so that the latter does not allow Iraq to export its oil across the Syrian land.

The fifth reason goes back to the past relationship between Syria and Iraq. Syria and Iraq had been involved in conflicts that led to nothing but hatred and antagonism. Thus, it is only normal that Syria would be in favor of weakening Iraq.

Sixth, being an authoritarian regime, Iraq represented a threatening neighbor to the Syrians who accused that regime of carrying out terrorist attacks against Syria. Thus, it would have pleased the Syrians to find its opponent suffer a prolonged war.

Finally is the fact that the Iraq-Iran war provided high economic returns to Syria.

---

[100] http://www.oranim.ac.il/courses/meast/water/WATER%20AND%20CONFLICT%20IN%20THE%20MIDDLE%20EAST%20.htm

5.3 Syria's Position towards Iran-Iraq War

When the Iranian Islamic revolution took place in 1979, Syria was in favor of it for it had always been against the Shah and considered his regime a threat for the whole region.

President Assad stated many times that the Iranian revolution represents a victory not only for the people of Iran but also for all the Arabs. "He added that the relations between Syria and the leaders of the revolution were great and he would be willing to visit Iran and meet Al-Khomeini when the conditions were right".[101]

Assad was certain that the Shah of Iran had friendly relations with Israel and that the he was in not willing to support the Arabs to recover their rights and lands. For this, the Islamic revolution represents a support to the Arabs, as well as to the Palestinian cause.

The siding of Syria with Iran was made obvious on several occasions. Hafez Al-Assad said the following to Tashreen newspaper on the 20th of November 1984: "After the success of the Iranian Revolution against the Shah, we should have supported this revolution to pass the difficult phases not to cause obstacles or to invade it as some Arab regimes did. And according to our analysis, we noticed that the invasion was against the interests of

---

[101] *Al-Mustaqbal*; 28-4-1979

the Arabs and that of the Iraqi people who are part of the Arab Nation; in fact it was for the interest of Israel." [102]

On the other hand, President Assad declared in different events that he was willing to work hard in order to end the Iraq-Iran War. Fifteen months after the beginning of the war, Assad announced that he would be going to Iran for talks with the Iranian leaders in order to help putting an end to the war. However, it was not easy for Assad to play the role of an impartial arbitrator since he had previously blamed Iraq for starting the war.

The relations between Syria and Iraq deteriorated further when Syria did not support Iraq in its military activities. "The Syrian president stated that the Iran-Iraq War was not an Arab-Persian War. It was a war between Iran and the Iraqi regime". [103]

Another divergence between Syria and Iraq took place when Iraq accused Syria of permitting Iranian warplanes to use Syrian bases and airspace to launch raids into Iraq. "Syria denied such claims accusing Iraq of covering its failure in the unfair war against the Islamic revolution". [104]

Things escalated further more between Syria and Iraq When the Syrian President ordered the shut down of a key Iraqi pipeline to the Mediterranean, affecting by this the income of Iraq. "Iraq's accusation to Syria worsened an already wide rift between Damascus and Baghdad, which were ruled by rival factions of the

---

[102] *Teshrin*, 20-11-1984
[103] *Teshrin*, 20-11-1984
[104] *Al-Safir*, 6-10-1981

Ba'ath Socialist Party".[105] Another issue that added to worsening the relationship between the two countries was the statement by Syria's deputy foreign affairs minister, Nasser Khadour, "that called for Saddam Hussein's removal as the only solution to end the War did not help ease the building tensions between the two states".[106]

After that came the execution of pro-Syrian members of the Iraqi Ba'ath party at the notorious prison of Abu Ghreib, a story reported by the Associated Press, to form a repercussion of the deteriorating relationship.

The Syrians attempted several economic, diplomatic and military steps that helped in weakening the fighting capacity of the Iraqis in favor of strengthening that of the Iranians. With time accusations of conspiracy between the two countries were increasing and eventually the antagonism with them. Saddam supported the Islamic fundamentalists in Hamah with weapons in order to help topple the Assad regime. Prior to the incident in Hamah, "the Syrian authorities got hold of a car sent by the Iraqi regime to explode in Damascus and In Homs".[107]

"To add pressure on Iraq, Syria closed its border and it shut off the oil pipeline".[108] By shutting off the Iraqi oil pipeline to the Mediterranean through Syria in April 1982, Assad reduced the oil revenues of Iraq which had been already decreasing.

---

[105] *Al-Safir*, 30-12-81
[106] *Al-Safir;* 1-6-1982
[107] *Al-Ba'ath,* 8-3-1982
[108] *Al-Ba'ath,* 8-3-1982

Another support from Syria to Iran was the providing with extensive intelligence on Iraq, and since the beginning of the war. "Damascus also provided Iran with Soviet weapons, spare parts and ammunition needed for the Soviet arms captured from the Iraqi forces by Iran".[109]

The Gulf countries were disapproving of Syria's position towards the Iraq-Iran war, yet "Syria affirmed to the Arabs that Iran did not have any intentions to invade these countries".[110] This step strengthened the Iranian claim that their war was not with the Gulf States or the Arab countries, but with the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Nevertheless, the Arab conservative regimes were afraid of the threat of the Islamic Revolution. On one hand, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia signed a joint security treaty, and on the other hand, Qatar announced plans to conclude a similar accord with the Saudis. "The rush by these small states to seek protection behind Saudi Arabia followed the reported discovery in Bahrain of a group of saboteurs who were accused of plotting to overthrow Bahrain's government and spread instability in the entire Gulf region".[111]

Syria changed its position towards the Iran-Iraq war on different occasions and the Syrian-Iranian relationship witnessed several trembling incidents. Among such incidents we mention the one when the Syrian army clashed with the Iranian supported group,

---

[109] *Herald Tribune*; 7-11-1983
[110] *Al-Safir*; 9-5-1982
[111] *Al-Ba'ath*, 8-3-1982

Hezbollah in Baalbek in the Bekaa area of Lebanon and the one when Tehran welcomed the visit of the "Ikhwan Muslimin" (the Muslim Brothers) from Syria who were opposing the Assad's regime in Syria.

However, "the Syrian foreign minister Farouk Al-Shar'a succeeded in calming the situation after his visit to Tehran".[112] Al-Safir quoted, "Relations with Iran are good. But Mr. Assad implied possible tension by noting that he had sent his foreign minister to Tehran to re-emphasize Syria's concern about the Iran-Iraq war spreading to other countries in the Gulf. Iran's occupation of Iraqi territory around the old oil-exporting port of Faw in a continuing offensive has embarrassed Syria, Iran's only important Arab ally."[113]

Driven mainly by economic needs, Syria started a slow process of rapprochement with Iraq in 1998. "Syria continued to play an active pan-Arab role, increasing as the peace process collapsed in September 2000 with the start of the second Palestinian uprising Intifada against Israel".[114]

The relations of Syria with its Arab neighbors were stressed by its stance during the Iran-Iraq War. When the war ended in August 1988, Syria started approaching the other Arab states. This rapprochement came clear, in 1989, when it stood with the rest of Arab world in allowing the re-admission of Egypt to the Arab

---

[112] *Al-Safir*; 15-5-1986
[113] *Herald Tribune*; 19-5-1986
[114] http://www.oranim.ac.il/courses/meast/water/WATER%20AND%20CONFLICT%20IN%20THE%20MIDDLE%20EAST%20.htm

League following the latter's conclusion of a separate peace with the state of Israel. "It coincided with the end of the 10-year Arab financial support to Syria and other front-line Arab countries promised in Baghdad in 1978. Syria reestablished full diplomatic relations with Egypt in 1989".[115]

In conclusion, Syria was from the very beginning on Iran's side during the Iran-Iraq war and this was due to many political and economic reasons in addition to its deteriorating relationship with Iraq. Syria had many economic interests with Iran which was also helping it with several aids. In addition, Syria had a geo-political interest in Iraq losing the war so to strengthen its position and role in the Arab World.

[115] http://www.oranim.ac.il/courses/meast/water/WATER%20AND%20CONFLICT%20IN%20THE%20MIDDLE%20EAST%20.htm

CONCLUSION

The long-aged conflict between Iran and Iraq, that reached its peak in the 1980-88 war, was not restricted to the two countries, but had massive consequences on the whole region. These consequences were obvious in the events of the initial support of the Gulf countries to Iraq, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Syria's support to Iran during the war and the incidence of the Syrian army in the Lebanese territory. These events underline the competition between the Arab countries to improve their position in the Arabian Peninsula, moreover the world was exposed to new equations, and the Arabs were not the major players in regard to the West, especially the United States of America.

Many events that took place in the region during that period formed some kind of irony. The meeting of the two enemies, Syria and Israel, on their support for Iran; the shift in the support of the Gulf countries from Iraq to the US against Iraq; Syria's support for Iran which made it an enemy to many of the Gulf countries, the supply of weapons by Israel to Iran, whereas the US, its ally, was supporting Iraq with arms.

The Iran-Iraq war was not about principles as this war and the conflict between Syria and Iraq during the war had distracted the Arabs from their long-aged struggle against Israel which seized the

opportunity to diffuse the Palestinian problem and benefit the most out of the situation. This war was also used by the U.S. to contain both Iran and Iraq and to improve its chances and its political and military presence in the Gulf region in order to control the area's oil resources.

The fighting of Iran and Iraq encouraged the U.S. and the Soviet Union into more interference in the affairs of the region. In May 1987, the U.S. restated its commitment to prevent an all-out Iranian victory; however this commitment became under suspicion with the American transfer of arms to the Iranians, a step that was made to assist in freeing American hostages held in Lebanon. "American motives seemed designed partly to persuade pro-Iranian groups in Lebanon to release Americans held captive there, and partly to improve relations with Iran"[116].

The Soviet Union perceived the war as the golden opportunity to rise back to the armament supply scene, for this it resumed considerable arms sales to Iraq in 1982 despite its declared neutrality in the conflict. "The Soviet Union resumed its pre-1980 role as the major supplier of sophisticated arms to Iraq"[117]. On the other hand, the United States went into discrete and direct as well as indirect negotiations with Iranian officials in 1985, and resulted in several arms shipments to Iran. By late 1987, and as a result of their fear from an Islamic republic in Iraq affiliated with Iran, both

---

[116] Morris, M.Mottale. (2000) *The Origins of the Gulf War* (New York: University Press of America). p.p. 120-121
[117] Ibid; p.98

The U.S. and the Soviet Union took major roles in ensuring that Baghdad does not fall.

On the other hand, and despite its alliance with Iran during the war, Syria came out unharmed. While it supported Iran, it ensured not to be lead into the opening of a new front with Iraq. The position and strategy of Syria did not experience major changes during the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam, especially when Assad sent his troops to take their position by the side of the American forces, a strategic decision that prevented Syria fro any harm and compensated it with several returns. "The revolutionary regime that came in Iran after Shah is against Israel and would normally stand with the Arabs in their struggle in the Arab-Israeli conflict, thus our position in supporting this regime".[118]

The elimination of the Iraqi threat to Israel, encouraged an Israeli reconsideration of the Syrian threat, which now seemed less aggressive. As a result of the decline in regional support, and while it tried to maintain its military capabilities versus Israel, Syria had to reevaluate its strategy. Pleased to see Saddam Hussein removed from power, the Syrians opposed the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq and considered it as undermining Syria's security, rather than promoting it.

This thesis has tried to shed light on one of the longest struggles that the Middle East region witnessed in the modern era, namely the Iran-Iraq War. Each chapter sought to highlight one dimension

---

[118] Teshrin. 20/11/1984.

of that conflict. The overall lesson of the Iran-Iraq war (a simple one indeed) is that regional wars and conflicts have always been in the benefit of the Western World, and in particular the United States and its close ally Israel. Moreover, it is to conclude that wars do not resolve conflicts. "The lessons of the Gulf War for the new world order were two-fold: Conflicts should be resolved by peaceful means, and Western claims and interests should be defended".[119]

---

[119] Ismael and Ismael, *The Gulf War and New World Order*. (University Press of Florida 1994) p.384

Bibliography

(1) Baram, A. (1990) *Territorial Nationalism in the Middle East* (Middle Eastern Studies).

(2) Biswas, A.K. (1994) *International Waters of the Middle East: From Euphrates-Tigris to Nile* (New York: Oxford University Press).

(3) Bronson, R. (2000) *Syria: Hanging Together or Hanging Separately* (The Washington Quarterly).

(4) Chubin and Tripp. (1988) *Iran and Iraq at War*, (I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. Publishers).

(5) Dougherty, J. & Pfaltzgraff, R. (1990) *Contending Theories of International Relations* (Harper Collins Publishers).

(6) Ehteshami, A. Nonneman, G. & Tripp, C. (1991) *War and Peace in The Gulf* (Ithaca Press).

(7) El Azhary, M.S. (1998) *The Iran-Iraq War* (Biddles Ltd, Guildford and King's Lynn).

(8) Goodarzi, J.M. (2006) Syria and Iran (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. Publishers).

(9) Helms, F.R. & Dorff, H.R. (1993) *The Persian Gulf Crisis* (New York: Praeger).

(10) Hiro, D. (2001) *Neighbors, Not Friends, Iraq and Iran After the Gulf Wars* (Routledge publisher).

(11) Ismael & Ismael. (1994) *The Gulf War and the New World Order* (University Press of Florida)

(12) Kedar, M. (1999) *Asad's Islamic Image* (Sussex Academic Press, Brighton).

(13) Khadduri, M. (1969) *Republican Iraq* (London: Oxford University Press).

(14) Kienle, E. (1990) *Ba`th V Ba`th, The Conflict between Syria and Iraq, 1968-1989* (London: I. B. Tauris).

(15) Kolars, J. (1991) *The Future of the Euphrates River* (World Bank, Washington, D.C.).

(16) Lawson, F. (1996) *Why Syria Goes to War, Thirty Years of Confrontations* (Cornell University Press).

(17) Mazarr, Snider & Blackwell. (1993) *Desert Storm* (Westview Press).

(18) Mottale, M.M. (1984) *The Origins of the Gulf Wars* (University Press of America, Inc. New York).

(19) Naff, T. & Matson, R.C. (1984) *Water in the Middle East: Conflict or Cooperation?* (Westview Press).

(20) Phebe, M. (1985) *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press).
(21) Seale, P. (1988) *Asad of Syria* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
(22) Tibi, B. (1997) *Arab Nationalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press).
(23) Tripp, C. (2000) *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge University Press).
(24) Uriel, D. (1969) *Iraq under Qassem. 1958–63* (New York: Praeger).
(25) Zisser, E. (2000) *Asad's Legacy – Syria in Transition* (New York: New York University Press).

Websites

- http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/people/A0824631.html
- http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0825449.html
- http://www.emergency.com/hussein1.htm
- http://www.desertstorm.com http://www.desertstorm.com
- http://www.gurunet.com/t1-method-4-dsid-2040-dekey-PersGWar-curtab-2040_1 -
http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/arabs/iraniraq.html
- http://www.bartleby.com/65/ir/IranIraq.html
- http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0825449.html
- http://www.bartleby.com/65/ir/IranIraq.html
- http://lexicorient.com/cgi-bin/eo-direct-frame.pl?http://i-cias.com/e.o/iranirqw.htm
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayatollah_Ruhollah_Khomeini
- http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.html
- http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.html
- http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.html
- http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.html
http://www.oranim.ac.il/courses/meast/water/WATER%20AND%20CONFLICT%20IN%20THE%20MIDDLE%20EAST%20.htm
http://www.oranim.ac.il/courses/meast/water/WATER%20AND%20CONFLICT%20IN%20THE% 20MIDDLE%20EAST%20.htm
http://www.oranim.ac.il/courses/meast/water/WATER%20AND%20CONFLICT%20IN%20THE%20MIDDLE%20EAST%20.htm
http://www.oranim.ac.il/courses/meast/water/WATER%20AND%20CONFLICT%20IN%20THE%20MIDDLE%20EAST%20.htm
www.kuna.net.kw

Others

(1) Al-Ba'ath.
(2) Al-Hayat.
(3) Al-Mustaqbal.
(4) Al-Nahar.
(5) Al-Quds al-`Arabi (London).
(6) Al-Siyasah.
(7) Al-Watan.
(8) Assafir.
(9) The Economist.
(10) Financial Times.
(11) The Herald Tribune.
(12) The Middle East Economic Digest.
(13) The New York Times.
(14) Teshrin.