

# **Iraq's Quest for Regional Supremacy in West Asia, 1979-91**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University*

*for award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

Under the supervision of

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**2011**



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**DECLARATION**


I declare that the thesis entitled “Iraq’s Quest for Regional Supremacy in West Asia, 1979-91” submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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**CERTIFICATE**

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiner for evaluation.

  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my Supervisor, Professor A.K. Rama Krishnan, without whose valuable guidance and constructive criticism this work would have not seen the light of the day. His cheerful enthusiasm and kindness was something I will always cherish. I also owe a great amount of gratitude to all other teachers at my Centre for West Asian Studies, who played a critical role in creating a great interest in this wonderful and dynamic area studies. I would like to thank my colleagues at Department of Political Science, Janki Devi Memorial College for Women, Delhi University, where I have been on a teaching assignment for the past one year for making me a comfortable member of the family, which allowed me to balance both the tasks.

I always remain indebted to many of my friends and well-wishers, among whom I can never forget a few. Pushparaj, Mahender, Sridhar, Anil, Meghanath, Radha Krishna, Mohib, Abdul Gaffar, Raghbir, Chandra Sain, Mirwais, Annavaram, Priya Ranjan, Roma, Shruti, Kavitha, Nisha, Karuna and Alamelu for their constant support and encouragement. I owe special thanks to Muddassir Quamar for all the valuable help he extended in correcting the draft.

I express my heartfelt thanks to all my family members, particularly my Brothers and Sisters for their love and affection, Papa and Ammy, who has been the rock of support in all my endeavours, Mamupasha for his immense support and guidance from time to time. If I have failed to mention other friends and family members in this limited space, it is because my affection towards them is more precious, and their memories in me are worth more than to be put in these printed pages.

While the strength and the significance of this dissertation is solely the contribution of the wise guidance of my teacher, and affectionate help of my friends and family, all inadvertent errors remain mine alone.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

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Wars are much like road accidents: they have profound causes and particular causes. In the last resort every road accident is caused by the discovery of the combustion engine and the human propensity for movement from one place to another. But city authorities, policemen, and judges are not interested in these profound causes and look instead into the particular ones: the conduct of the driver, his state of mind, the extent of his inebriation, and so on. --- A.J.P. Taylor

The place of powerful states in the world has never been static because of conflicts and power politics. It is more so in the case of the West Asian region which is one of the most conflict prone areas in the world and therefore, there is constant competition among states to assert their supremacy whenever there is change in the political milieu of the region. Hence, because of the changes which took place in 1979 in West Asia, Iraq under Saddam Hussain saw itself as a potential power which is a state that has the capability to dominate a region by overpowering its neighbours. The potential power only seeks to achieve domination when the anticipated costs and risks are low for the state.

Iraq made attempts for establishing regional supremacy after Saddam Hussain assumed the final position of power by becoming the President of Iraq in 1979 succeeding Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr. However, since 1968 onwards Saddam Hussain enjoyed the decisive position in almost all the matters of the Baath Party and the government by being second in hierarchy to Al-Bakr. He played a leading role in laying the foundation for powerful Iraq by dealing with issues related to the government's stability and economy.

The frequent instability of government which was prevalent ever since its inception in 1921 was put to an end by the Baath Party once it attained power, and the stability of the government was ensured for the next 35 years. This was possible in Iraq because the Baathist leaders realized the importance of concentrating the entire state power in their hands from the beginning, which was felt to be the necessary condition for the legitimacy of the state. They decided to ensure that there should not emerge forces

within Iraq that would challenge or compete with them. This responsibility was taken up by Saddam Hussain, who interpreted its ideology according to his comfort.

He consolidated his hold on power by promoting the people to the positions of influence in the party and the security organizations who were loyal to him personally and eliminated potential rivals by uncovering real and imagined plots against the government. He realized the danger of military to the stability of government, so he reduced the number of the military officers in top decision-making bodies such as the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) and the cabinet, and increased the number of civilians to ensure the subservience of the defence establishment to the civilian leadership.

Under Hussain's direction, the increased revenue of Iraq after the oil embargo of 1973 was put to constructive use by embarking on an ambitious development plan that brought unparalleled prosperity to Iraq by the end of the decade. Iraq's development plans were instituted with an eye towards reducing the gap between the rich and the poor such as building modern dwellings for poor, free education right through university level, and expansion of free medical facilities. The state also enacted legislation on social security, minimum wages, and pension rights (Dawisha, 2009: 221-22).

All these efforts led to rapid growth in most of the social and economic indicators of Iraq. Per capita income increased from \$382 in 1972 to \$ 2,726 in 1979. Between 1973 and 1980, student enrolment in secondary schools rose from 600,000 to almost a million, and at universities it almost doubled from 49,000 to 96,000. By 1980, women constituted 70 percent of all pharmacists, almost half of all teachers and dentists, and just under a third of all physicians (Sluglet and Sluglet, 2001: 227-32).

After significant achievements domestically, Saddam Hussain wanted to expand his area of influence beyond the boundaries of Iraq. Along with his desire, three major political developments occurred in 1979 which shook the power balance in West Asia. Egypt which acted as a leader of Arabs in the capacity of a frontline state in fighting with Israel was expelled from the Arab League and Organisation of Islamic Conference for signing a unilateral treaty with Israel. In Saudi Arabia, Juhayman al-Otaibi, a radical cleric along with his associates seized the Grand Mosque in Makkah;

and to remove them, the Saudi government took the help of French paratroopers. The use of non-Muslim forces to secure the Mosque clearly displayed the limitations of monarchy in safeguarding the two holy places of Islam. This incident has raised questions on the legitimacy of the Saudi rule.

Iran witnessed an Islamic Revolution which led to the overthrow of the monarchical rule of the Shah which resulted in a political turmoil. The second powerful army of the region was the first casualty of revolutionary forces. All the officers above colonel level were either executed or forced to flee from state, and consequently, the Iranian military became weak. Ethnic rebellions broke out demanding autonomy, throughout the provinces. The economy was in disarray in the aftermath of the revolutionary months. Oil production had reached to a halt, and with that there was loss of revenues and markets. There was struggle for leadership between moderate and religious forces after the overthrow of the Shah which created an unstable situation in Iran.

All these political developments in the same year in major states of West Asia created a power vacuum. Saddam wanted to take advantage of the situation, so he made Iran his first target. He launched a limited war on unstable Iran in 1980, in order to display Iraq's supremacy over West Asia. As a result of misreading of the opponent's abilities, the war dragged on for eight long years. The consequences of this war on Iraq were horrible. It fought the war without any significant gain but incurred massive human and material loss. It faced enormous difficulties in rebuilding the destroyed state infrastructure. The total population of Iraq in 1988 was 19 million out of which one million were under arms, this army was raised during the war. It became difficult for the Iraqi government to maintain this army and pay salaries which resulted in revolts from military (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 1997: 80).

To come out of these problems, Saddam Hussain took up the second external mission against affluent Kuwait on August 1990. He thought that he can successfully subdue Kuwait due to its small size and resolve his problems, but this level of understanding was proven wrong. Within few weeks, a huge military from 35 countries supported by United Nations assembled and expelled the Iraqi forces from Kuwait. This war completely destroyed Iraq; the power of Saddam Hussain over Iraq was curtailed through the imposition of no-fly-zones on Kurdish and later on Shia areas. A

sanctions regime was imposed on Iraq by the international community which further worsened the condition of the people and the government. Therefore, what one could find is that Iraq's quest for regional supremacy was a failure due to more reliance on the military by Saddam Hussain's regime.

## **Review of Literature**

This review of literature is divided in to three themes: the consolidation of Baathist power in Iraq in the first decade of the Baathist rule, the political developments of 1979 in West Asia and the wars of Saddam Hussain for regional supremacy.

### **The Consolidation of Baathist Power in Iraq in the First Decade of the Baathist Rule**

Khadduri and Ghareeb (1997) identify the factors which made Iraq one of the complex and conflict-prone states in West Asia. The first modern government of Iraq was created in 1921 by the British under the mandate rule which was an artificial creation through secret agreements between British and French diplomats neglecting the local population and circumstances. It was a monarchical form of government. The artificial formation of state and imposition of monarchy from outside of Iraqi territories was not liked by the Iraq's population who were grossly divided on ethnic, Arabs or Kurds; sectarian, Sunnis or Shias; and religious, Muslims or Christians or Jews. What they did not have was Iraqi identity. Due to the artificial nature of the boundaries of the state, these groups are divided with the neighbouring states which have provided an opportunity for neighbours to interfere in the domestic politics of Iraq by supporting one against other. It had trade routes and abundant oil resources which attracted great powers to penetrate in the state politics.

Therefore, the state since its inception has never been stable; rebellions and coups staged by military generals and political elite with external support was a normal phenomenon which led to the frequent change of government. However, Dawisha (2009) notes that, this frequent change in the government was stopped by the Baath Party once it attained power, and the stability in the government was ensured for later 35 years. This was possible in Iraq because the Baathist leaders realized the importance of concentrating the entire state power in their hands from the beginning.



They decided to ensure the absence of forces within Iraq that would challenge, or compete with them. This responsibility was taken up by their young comrade Saddam Hussain, who was second in the hierarchy in the Baath party.

Although Saddam Hussain did not assume the presidency of Iraq for the first 11 years of Baathist rule, he had a decisive say in all the affairs of the party and the government. He spent the first two years of Baathist regime consolidating his hold on power by promoting the people to the positions of influence in the Party and the security organizations who were loyal to him personally (Aburish 1999). Al-Khalil (1989) says that Saddam Hussain used terror to concentrate the power of the state in his hands. He did spare neither civilians nor military. He put out conspiracy after conspiracy, some were real, many were manufactured. Fast trials were held which concluded in just few days, and harsh punishments were given in the form of imprisonments and executions. He video-graphed the entire trials and punishments, and circulated among the military and government officials to terrorize them.

Saddam Hussain put the increased revenue from oil in the 1970s to constructive use by embarking on an ambitious development plan that brought unparalleled prosperity to Iraq. Iraq's middle class had grown considerably and become manifestly wealthier. This bolstered the regime's stability, since middle class would be less likely to undermine a political order from which it benefited (Dawisha, 2009).

Sluglett and Sluglett (2001) discussed the various development plans of Saddam Hussain which were instituted with an eye towards reducing the gap between rich and poor such as: substantial building program of modern dwellings for the poor, free education right through university level, and an expansion of free medical facilities. Iraq also enacted legislation on social security, minimum wages, and pension rights, as well as building electrical grids and generators. Sluglett and Sluglett observe that all these efforts led to rapid growth in all fields. Women were primary beneficiaries; they made impressive strides, particularly in educational attainment and participation in the work force.

## **The Political Developments of 1979 in West Asia**

In 1979, as noted above, three significant events involving major states took place in the politics of West Asia. The monarchical regime of the Shah was overthrown in Iran through a revolution which resulted in political turmoil in the state. The Iranian military became weak in the context of the revolution (El-Afandi, 1992). Ethnic rebellions also broke out in Iran demanding autonomy. El-Afandi says that disappointed by the lack of an open mind on the part of the revolutionary forces towards ethnic groups' grievances, the Kurds, Baluchis, Arabs, Azores and other ethnic minorities saw the only available option to them as open rebellion in pursuit of more democratic objectives and autonomy. He further explains the effects of the revolution. The economy was in a disarray in the aftermath of the revolution, oil production went down and with that there was loss of revenues and markets.

As pointed out earlier, in Saudi Arabia, Juhayman al-Otaibi a radical cleric along with his associates seized Grand Mosque in Makkah and to remove the attackers, the Saudi government used French paratroopers. Al-Rasheed (2006) argues that the use of non-Muslim forces to secure the Mosque clearly displayed the limitations of monarchy in safeguarding the two holy places of Islam.

Egypt, the front line state which fought four wars with Israel between 1948 to 1973 has unilaterally negotiated a peace treaty with Israel. The leaders of both Iraq and Syria collaborated to suspend Egypt's membership in the Arab League and Organization of Islamic Conference, in which it was the founding member. They led and pushed for an Arab boycott of Egypt. They competed for the role previously played by Egypt as the spokesman of the Arabs and the defender of Arab claims in the international arena (Stein 1999).

## **The Wars of Saddam Hussain for Regional Supremacy**

After accomplishing stability and rapid economic development through coercion domestically, Saddam Hussain as President took up external missions to establish Iraq's supremacy over the region. Unstable Iran became his first military target in 1980 as he launched the war. As Karsh (2002) argues, one of the war's main ironies is that what was conceived as a limited campaign of Saddam Hussain became the

longest and bloodiest conflict between Iran and Iraq since World War II which went on for eight long years. The critical strategic error, and the one that caused the war's extension, was Iraq's failure to strike a balance between its foreign policy goals and its war strategy. He further argues that the most common explanation for this failure views the invasion of Iran as evidence of Saddam's unbridled regional ambitions, ranging from the occupation of Iranian territories (the Shatt al-Arab and Khuzestan), through the desire to inflict a decisive defeat on the Iranian Republic, to the need to assert Iraq as the pre-eminent Arab and Gulf state. By this line of argument, Iraq's inability to bring the war to a swift conclusion reflected the wide gap between these ambitious goals and the limitations of its military power having overestimated its own power and underestimated that of its opponent.

The consequences of this war on Iraq were horrible. It fought the war without any significant gain but incurred enormous human and material loss. It found itself burdened with a heavy debt to foreign countries estimated then at seventy to eighty billion dollars at the end of war. Contrary to this situation, at the beginning of war, it had 35 billion dollars foreign reserves (Edwards and Hinchcliffe 2004). The states which extended financial and material support to Iraq during Iraq-Iran war stopped extending the support for rebuilding the war ravaged state.

Khadduri and Ghareeb (1997) looked into the difficulties faced by Saddam Hussain to take up the post-war rebuilding activity. He postponed or abandoned several development projects due to the lack of funds. He concentrated only on very essential projects to kick-start the economy; even to do this, Iraq did not have funds. In this connection he made appeals to Arab countries, but they did not pay heed to Iraqi appeal. To make the scenario worse, the price of oil also fallen drastically in the international market, which further made the economic condition miserable. Thus, the consequences of Iran-Iraq war on Iraq triggered the spark for Kuwait war in 1990-91. The Gulf countries did not exterminate the spark through constructive engagement; rather they entered into confrontation with Iraq. Kuwait aggravated Iraq's situation by asking it to pay back the loan given during Iran-Iraq war. Despite repeated requests by Iraq and Arab countries to cut-down the oil production Kuwait did not pay heed (Finlan 2003).

Rodman (1991) gives the complete chronological account of summit and shuttle diplomacy of Arabs to defuse the growing threat of war between Iraq and Kuwait, but all this did not work because the rulers of both the countries were adamant on their stands. In these circumstances the progress could not be made through diplomatic channels because the entire power of the country was concentrated at the centre in the hands of a single head of the state. He argues that Saddam Hussain who was known for his unwise military strategies added one more admiration as a flawed diplomat by undermining the diplomatic efforts of Arab leaders.

Freedman and Karsh (1991) state that U.S. forces were initially committed to the Gulf to deter a perceived threat to Saudi Arabia following the August 2, 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. They were later joined by forces from 35 countries which were providing assistance in one form or another. The main contributors to the coalition (other than Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) were Britain and France from Europe and Egypt and Syria from the Arab world. No country gave Iraq significant material support; the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) declared solidarity. Jordan showed sympathy to Iraq but economically and militarily was in no position to give much material support. While Turkey cut off Iraq's oil pipeline and then offered the coalition use of its air bases. A huge army supported by United Nations expelled the Iraqi forces from Kuwait. This war completely destroyed Iraq; the power of Saddam Hussain was curtailed through the imposition of no-fly-zones on Kurdish and later on Shia areas. Sanctions were imposed on Iraq by the international community which further worsened the condition of the people (Pasha 2003).

### **Rationale and Scope of the Study**

Literature reviewed above provides useful insights into understanding the political, military and economic developments of 1970s in Iraq; the political changes in West Asia and the wars launched by Iraq under Saddam Hussain's presidency. However, not much attention has been given to explaining the domestic and international changes as factors for Iraq's quest for regional supremacy in West Asia and its failed experiment to impose supremacy through wars in the region from 1980 to 1991. Therefore, a comprehensive study of both internal and external factors that contributed for Iraq's quest for supremacy in the region is needed. Such factors

include the rapid improvement in domestic economy and military capabilities of Iraq in the 1970s through coercion, the political developments involving the major states of the region in a short span of time which provided the required fillip to become a regional leader and the attempts of Saddam Hussain to accomplish Iraq's quest for supremacy by depending on his military. The main focus of the study has been on the limitations of military power in accomplishing external ambitions by Saddam Hussain.

## **Research Objectives**

The main objective of this research is to examine the role of consolidation of power in Iraq under Baath Party in the 1970s in Iraq's the quest for regional supremacy. It also tries to analyse the political developments of 1979 in West Asia and their role in providing the push for Iraq's quest. The study also aims to see how the two wars launched by Iraq on its neighbours failed to accomplish regional supremacy.

## **Hypotheses**

This study revolves around two hypotheses: (1) regional political developments had a direct bearing on Iraq's quest for regional supremacy and (2) Iraq's over-reliance on military power undermined its ability for attaining regional supremacy.

## **Research Methodology**

The present study has followed an analytical method while examining the prospects and failure of Iraq's quest for regional supremacy in West Asia. The study is mainly based on secondary sources of information and data. Books, journal articles, Internet sources, etc. are used extensively in this research for the procurement of data for the study.

## **Scheme of Chapters**

The dissertation is divided into five chapters including introduction and conclusion. This introductory chapter tried to examine the background and context of Iraq's quest for regional supremacy in West Asia and its failure to attain such an ambition.

Chapter II deals with the consolidation of Baathist power in Iraq. It has largely focused on the management of domestic politics by the Baathist regime in its first decade of rule. It attempts to examine how Saddam Hussain had adopted various coercive tactics to establish the legitimacy of Baath Party in Iraq by being deputy to President Al-Bakr, both in the Party and Government, and established parallel intelligence agencies which were directly under him to keep a watch on every aspect of Iraq. He meticulously planned and purged all those military officers who were perceived as potential threats for Baathist regime or, who's loyalty towards the Baath Party was under question by forced exile; uncovering the real and imagined plots against Baath regime; targeted assassinations at home and abroad etc. that helped Hussain to concentrate the power in his hands, the array of which is discussed in detail. It attempts to analyse the use of carrot and stick policy of Hussain to reduce the mass base support of Communists, Kurds and Shia Parties in order to Baathify the Iraqi society. The nationalisation of oil and the subsequent fourfold increase of oil price in the world energy market after the oil embargo of 1973 had significantly increased the revenues of Iraq. Hussain put these revenues for productive use by investing in infrastructure, education, health, industry and modernisation of military. All these made Iraq a stable and powerful state in terms of military and economy, which boosted Hussain's ambition to assert a dominant role for Iraq in the region.

Chapter III is devoted to a discussion on the political developments of 1979 and their impact on Iraq's regional ambitions. It attempts to examine the challenges posed by such developments for Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the major states of the region. These developments shook the power balance in the region. Iran witnessed an Islamic Revolution that led to the overthrow of monarchical rule of Shah. Saddam Hussain thought that he could exploit the unstable situation in Iran to pursue Iraq's regional ambitions. Egypt, which acted as a leader of the Arabs in its capacity as a frontline state that fought four wars between 1948 and 1973 with Israel for the Arab cause, had digressed from its position and unilaterally entered into negotiations and subsequently signed a peace treaty with Israel. This step of Egypt was considered as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause by fellow Arab states and expelled it from the Arab League. In Saudi Arabia, Juhayman Al-Otaibi, a radical cleric along with his associates seized the Grand Mosque in Makkah and to remove them, the Saudi government took the help of foreign forces. The use of non-Muslim forces to secure the Mosque has raised

questions on the legitimacy of the Saudi regime. In Iraq, Saddam Hussain became the President succeeding Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, the event is explained in detail in the chapter. It evaluates Hussain's attempts to exploit the power vacuum created by Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt in order to assert Iraq's supremacy in the region.

Chapter IV concentrates on the wars of 1980 and 1990 launched by Saddam Hussain on his neighbours Iran and Kuwait to display Iraq's military might in the region. It examines the long and short time causes for the Iran-Iraq conflict, the strategies employed by both the parties, and the consequences of war particularly on Iraq. This chapter also evaluates the use of military power and its limitations in accomplishing political ambitions of Iraq.

## **Chapter II**

### **Consolidation of Baathist Power in Iraq**

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Iraq's quest for regional supremacy in West Asia projected by the Baath Party during 1979-91 was not projected hastily. Prior to it, there was an attempt to have total control over the state affairs by its leaders, especially by Saddam Hussain. The leaders of the Party knew very well about the complex nature of Iraqi state and the threats emanating from internal as well as external forces before they took over power of the state. So, they used coercion as an effective weapon to curb the internal dissent and set Iraq on the path of development. The analysis of the events of the first decade of the Baath rule suggests that its young leader Saddam Hussain, who was fully supported by Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr (General Secretary of the Party), in a way developed a Weberian state (Weber, 1946) in order to establish legitimacy for the regime.

Weber defines the state as possessing "a monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force". Thus, an essential condition for the legitimacy of the state is the absence of forces within it that would challenge, or compete with it. In other words, the state should be able to demonstrate power throughout its geographic domain, and if a threat to its dominance arises from outside, the state should have the capacity to subdue it (Dawisha, 2009: 279). The program of establishing the Baath as the only legitimate force in Iraq was initiated immediately after the successful coup by Saddam Hussain through the use of coercion.

#### **The Baathist Coup of 1968**

On 17 July 1968, there was an announcement on television and radio which declared the removal of the government of Abd al-Rahman Aref. This was the seventh announcement over one decade declaring a military coup. Before it, three had succeeded and three failed. The coup against Aref was planned by few veteran military officers who had been involved in some capacity in military coups and plots since the 1950s. The most senior officer was Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr who had been a



key figure in the 1963 Baathist coup, but he and the Baath Party were ousted from power by Aref. After his removal, he had become the General Secretary of the Regional Command of the clandestine Baath Party, and had begun plotting to grab political power, an attempt well supported by the ambitious Saddam Hussain in the Party. Despite the ouster from power in November 1963, the Party was still able to maintain networks within the military.

The clandestine Party had established a three point plan to seize power, based on first infiltrating the armed forces, using the military to bring the Party to power, and finally ensuring that the Baath would control the army once they had seized power (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008: 109-10). While planning the coup against President Aref, al-Bakr and Hussain realized that Aref loyalists controlled pivotal military units and organizations, particularly in the capital Baghdad that would make a successful execution of a coup difficult.

However, given the military's craving for political power, it proved easy for the Baathists to seduce Aref's three most trusted loyalists, Abd al-Razzaq Nayef, Head of Military Intelligence and Ibrahim Abd al-Rahman al-Daud, Commander of the Republican Guard and Saadun Ghaydan, who commanded the tank regiment of the Guard, the Tenth Armoured Brigade. Al-Bakr was in contact with all three of these officers for quite some time, though these military officers did not necessarily subscribe to Baathist goals. They had their own motivations for conducting the coup and betraying President Aref that they would be the rulers of Iraq once the President is overthrown (Ibid, 108-11).

The coup was unfolded on the day Brigadier General Said Sulaybi, the powerful officer of the military, and who had been a key supporter of the Aref brothers was in the UK. Therefore, he was unable to offer any resistance (Sluglett and Sluglett, 2001: 112). Saadun Ghaydan, with the coordination of the Baathist officers Al-Bakr, Hardan Al-Takriti and Salih Mahdi Ammash, mobilized the Republican Guard tank regiment in the morning. Al-Nayif, head of Military Intelligence used his forces to take over the Ministry of Defence and Al-Daud, who commanded the Republican Guards, seized the key radio station and announced what was essentially a bloodless coup. Unlike 1958, Aref, who had not committed any serious transgressions against the coup plotters was not executed, he was allowed to go into exile.

The day after the coup, Al-Bakr was declared President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and head of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) of the Baath Party. The other three prominent coup plotters also assumed new roles. Al-Nayif became Prime Minister and Al-Daud headed the Ministry of Defence, and Ghaydan assumed the command of the entire Republican Guard (Ibid, 113). Saddam Hussain's name was absent from the list of cabinet ministers, but continuing to be the Deputy Secretary-General of the Party, the young Hussain kept his real power base by hatching the conspiracies.

The Baathists believed that the army should be made subservient to the Party, as they were aware that the military has been the primary force behind every regime change in Iraq since 1936. However, the Baath also followed the same pattern for seizing power from Aref. As Al-Marashi and Salama note, the Baathist civilians did not really play any concrete role in helping their allies in the military taking power. So, they observe that the civilian Baathists were conscious of the impending danger for the regime emanating from military, that the officers could expel the civilians from the new government, as was demonstrated in 1963 when the symbiotic relationship between the Baath and armed forces did not continue (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008: 110-11).

Therefore, the civilian Baathist government's immediate priority was to eliminate their allied military conspirators in the new regime, non-Baathist and Baathist officers alike. They were not interested to share power with officers claiming loyalty to the nationalist cause but avoiding membership in the Baath Party. Particularly adamant on the necessity for the Party to monopolize power was Saddam Hussain. The day before the 17 July coup, he told the assembled Baathist plotters that, "the elimination of Nayef and Daud after the coup is as necessary as the alliance with them before the coup" (Dawisha, 2009: 210). He personally took the responsibility for carrying out the putsch against the non-Baathists in the future government of Iraq.

After the successful coup, Al-Bakr in his capacity of the President of the state and also as a loyal Baathist who sided with the civilian wing, wanted to control the military by appointing officers from the Party to the Republican Guard and other units in the armed forces. But, within two weeks of the coup, tensions emerged between Baathists represented by Al-Bakr and Al-Daud and Al-Nayif because Al-

Daud and Al-Nayif declared their opposition to the socialism of the Party. Therefore, The Baathists began to plan for their ouster which was realised within two weeks after the 17 July coup.

On July 30, while Prime Minister Nayef was having lunch at the Presidential palace with President Bakr, a group of Baathists led by Hussain burst into the room, with weapons in hand, and bundled the distraught Prime Minister into a plane out of Iraq. Al-Daud was already been manoeuvred out of Iraq on some pretext of a military cooperation mission in Jordan, and was later told not to return to Iraq. On that same day, a new Cabinet was formed and announced to the Iraqi public. The names of the cabinet ministers were read, this time the Baath Party alone shaped the structure, and commanded the direction of the Iraqi state administration (Ibid, 210-14).

### **Establishment of a Coup-Proof Mechanism**

The regime which comes into power through military coup or revolution always has a threat to its stability. Therefore, it is very essential to have a credible coup-proof strategy in place. Coup-proofing needs the creation of structures that prevents small groups, such as factions within the officer corps or clandestine parties, from overthrowing the system. The strategies a regime must undertake to prevent a coup include: first, the recruitment of family, ethnicities or religious groups tied to the regime must be placed in all crucial positions such as in armed forces. Second, the regime must create a counter-coup force through parallel armed forces to prevent the monopoly on coercion enjoyed by the regular military. Third, the regime must create multiple internal security agencies with overlapping jurisdictions to check not only the loyalty of the armed forces, but also the other security agencies. These agencies should have direct access to the leadership bypassing the military hierarchy (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008: 109-10).

### **Controlling the Regime through Family Ties**

The Baath Party in Iraq was founded by a Shia, Fuad Al-Rikabi, who made efforts to recruit the impoverished Shias as members as they were looking for organizations beyond those of the clergy to advance their interests. By the time of its involvement in the 1963 coup, the Baath was transformed into a party dominated by Arab Sunnis,

particularly dependent on army officers, mostly coming from Takrit. As Hasan Al-Bakr assumed a more prominent role in the Baath after his ouster from the government in 1963, he was inclined to recruit men he could trust, and those he could trust shared his personal origins, either coming from Al-Bakr's tribe or town (Ibid, 115).

Saddam Hussain also began to play a prominent role in the Party along with Al-Bakr in the same period though he did not share Al-Bakr's military background, nor came from the same generation as he was twenty-three years younger. What they had in common was that Hussein was Al-Bakr's cousin and they both belonged to the Al-Bayjat clan of the Al-Bu Nasir tribe, dominant in Takrit. It was this area where a large number of Iraq's officers were recruited from after Iraqi independence. Due to the number of Takritis who entered the military academy during and after the monarchy, by 1968 many of them had become high-ranking officers (Baram, 1994: 94).

Al-Bakr, forged a tactical alliance with his younger cousin Saddam Hussein for capturing power and consolidating it. Hussein who had been in charge of internal security in the Party during its underground phase continued his role of eliminating political rivals for the Party. Even though Al-Bakr was a military officer himself, Hussein had never served in the military yet; they shared the same goal of ensuring that the military returned to the barracks, guaranteeing civilian domination of the Iraqi political process and the subordination of the armed forces to a civilian administration.

In 1976, perhaps to boost his own military credentials, Saddam Hussain, who had not served in the armed forces, assumed the rank of Lieutenant General. His promotion was justified after receiving an honorary degree from Iraq's military college. In 1977 Adnan Khayrallah Talfa was promoted to the Regional Leadership of the Bath Party, who had received an accelerated promotion to Staff Colonel even though he was not a senior military officer like Al-Bakr. Al-Bakr, who also held the Minister of Defence portfolio after 1973, gave the position to Talfa in October 1977, who was then promoted to the rank of General. Talfa was the son-in-law of Al-Bakr, having married his daughter. At the same time Talfa was Hussain's brother-in-law as Hussain had married his sister. Talfa and Hussain were also maternal cousins and childhood

friends (Sluglett and Sluglett, 2001: 206-7). This military promotion for relatives demonstrates the use of family by Al-Bakr to control the armed forces.

Hussain took these as an opportunity and further sought to consolidate his personal control over the armed forces, Talfa as Minister of Defence helped Hussain establish further networks in the military. However, coming from Takrit did not always guarantee protection at the highest echelons of power. While Al-Bakr and Hussain were from Takrit, so were their personal rivals in the military such as Hardan Al-Takriti. While coming from Takrit facilitated one's promotion in the military, one also had to demonstrate his allegiance to Baathist ideals, and more importantly the power emanating from Al-Bakr and Hussain to survive. This failure on Hardan Al-Takriti's part ultimately led to his downfall (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008:116).

### **Purging Potential Enemies from the Military**

The responsibility of purging potential enemies from the military for the Baathist regime in general and, Al-Bakr and his close associates in particular was taken by Hussain. As he had a decisive say in all the affairs of the Party and the government which was secured by him through demonstrating the strong loyalty for Bakr. As an admirer of Joseph Stalin, Hussain "realized the value of the infamous 1930s purges to the longevity of the Soviet dictator's absolutist rule" (Dawisha, 2009: 211). He spent the initial years of the Baathist regime on consolidating its hold on power by promoting the people to the positions of influence in the party and the security organizations who were loyal to him personally, and eliminating potential rivals by uncovering real and imagined plots against the regime. He sought to Baathify the military and society as he interpreted the foundations of the Party to suit the Iraqi context.

He adopted a two-pronged policy to prevent threat. He tamed the military by increasing the salaries and providing inducements for all ranks of military persons, and on the other hand he eliminated the influential officers from the military. He used the terror to concentrate the power of the state at the centre. He put out conspiracy after conspiracy, some were real, many were manufactured. Fast trials were held which concluded in just few days, and harsh punishments were given in the form of imprisonment and executions. He video-graphed the entire trials and punishments,

and circulated among the military and government officials to terrorize them (Ibid, 210-12).

He used the Party to assassinate, expel or retire officers deemed threatening to the new government. Officers whose loyalties were in question, particularly those with alleged Nasserite, Syrian or Communist sympathies, were the main victims; they were purged from the military and replaced with Baathists disregarding their military experience. Taha Yasin Ramadan, a Baath Party loyalist oversaw the purge of 2,000 officers during this period

By the end of 1968, the Baathification of the armed forces led to the dismissal of the Chief of Staff Faysal Al-Ansari and eight commanders at the division level, who were replaced by officers trusted by the Baathists. Major General Saadun Husayn and Brigadier Said Hammu of the Fifth Division stationed in the north were executed in June 1969 after they were alleged of plotting against the government. In October 1969, Baathist rivals in the commanding forces in the east of the country died in mysterious circumstances. Major General Muhammad Nuri Khalil died in a car accident while Major General Ali Rajab died of a heart attack, both believed to have been orchestrated by the state (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008: 113).

While the deaths of senior officers took their toll on the operational readiness of the armed forces, at this juncture the priority of Hussain was on consolidating Baathist control over the military. By the end of 1970, 3000 Baathists were granted military ranks, which gave the Party a network of political commissars spread within all units of the armed forces. Baath Party ranks, which included “active members,” “member-trainees” and “partisans first grade,” were given intensive courses at the Military College so that they could serve in the armed forces (Ibid 115). A Baathist who had studied for two years at the college received the rank of lieutenant. These tactics led to the formation of parallel chain of command under the Party that controlled formal military hierarchy (Sluglett and Sluglett, 2001: 120).

Hussain was not obsessive of the Baathification of the military, rather, the circumstances swayed him to be so, as the threat of coups was looming on regime. One of the documented coup attempts in 1970 against the Baath government was that of Major General Abd Al-Ghani Al-Rawi and Colonel Salih Mahdi Al-Samarrai. Al-

Rawi was a retired officer who was loyal to the Aref regime and Al-Samarrai had served in the military since the monarchy. However, their plans were uncovered by the regime and the coup plotters were ambushed once they were in motion for the act.

After the failure of coup, General Al-Rawi fled to Iran. A Special Court led by Taha Yasin Ramadan of the RCC and Nazim Kazzar, Director of the General Security Directorate (Mudiriyyat Al-Amn Al-Amma) ordered the execution by firing squad of twenty-seven military men involved in the coup. These coup attempts were followed by purges and executions of officers accused of belonging to Islamist organizations, the Sunni generals such as Muhsin Al-Janabi and Shia generals such as Muhammad Faraj were among the victims of these purges (Tripp, 2000: 202-3).

Ironically, Nazim Kazzar, a close ally of Saddam Hussain, who had a role in prosecuting the 1970 coup planners, orchestrated a coup attempt himself. Kazzar had served as Director of the General Security Service since 1969 but, within four years he realised that Al-Bakr and Hussain would no longer allow him to have his independent power base in the security services as he is Shia and not even from Takrit. He unfolded the plan for coup on 30 June 1973. First, he wanted to eliminate remaining officer politicians, Lieutenant General Hammad Shihab Al-Takriti, Minister of Defence, who controlled the military and Lieutenant General Saadun Ghaydan, Minister of Interior, who had controlled the police for the coup to succeed.

On the day of the coup, he invited both of them to his headquarters for a meeting and detained them. Afterwards he had planned to assassinate Al-Bakr in the airport after arriving from an official trip to Poland. As the plane was delayed for four hours, Kazzar's men at the airport dispersed fearing the coup had been discovered (Aburish 1999: 103-04). Upon hearing of the delay, Kazzar took the Ministers of Defence and Interior hostage and made an escape attempt to the Iranian border but, he was intercepted by Al-Bakr's loyal units. During a standoff, Hammad Shihab Al-Takriti was shot dead and Saadun Ghaydan was wounded, Kazzar was captured. In the hastily concluded trial, along with Kazzar, Muhammad Fadhil of the Baath Military Bureau was also found guilty of taking part in the coup and both were executed (Sluglett and Sluglett, 2001: 160-63).

The Kazzar coup provided the pretext for Hussain to expand his intelligence network not only to check the General Security Service, but to counterbalance the Military Intelligence as well. A new Department of General Intelligence (Mudiriyyat Al-Mukhabarat Al-Amma), was established as a response to the 1973 coup. In the same year, the Directorate of Political Guidance (Mudiriyyat Al-Tawjih Al-Siyasi) was established to monitor the military. These institutions further strengthened Hussain's position in the regular military and ensured his eventual control over the armed forces establishment (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008: 120). The goal of all this purges was to ensure that the officers lack organizational independence, even if it means hurting their overall professionalism for the sake of keeping the armed forces out of domestic politics and strengthening the hold of Baath Party on the regime.

### **The Use of Carrot and Stick Policy towards Communists, Kurds and Shias**

The Communists, Kurds and Shias had developed considerable political support base in Iraqi society in 1950s and 1960s. This factor was well known to the Baath Party leaders as they fought with the previous regimes alongside these three groups from time to time. Therefore, along with the establishment of coup-proof mechanism to protect the regime, Saddam Hussain also engaged in reducing the power base of Communists, Kurds and Shias by using a carrot and stick policy in order to strengthen the Baath Party hold over Iraqi society and state.

#### **Severing of Communist Mass Base**

After the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958, the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and its front organisations gained strength and popularity to the extent that it was able to command the streets of Baghdad. Its popularity can be gauged from the fact that it was forced to announce in January 1959 that it could not accept any new members, as it is short of the administrative capacity to deal with them. This spectacular rise in its membership, and the gradual takeover of the executive committees of the Students Union, Youth Federation, Women's League, Lawyers, Engineers and Teachers Unions by Communists created a profound sense of alarm in the minds of those who had no sympathies for communism, particularly the post monarchy ruling regimes (Sluglet and Sluglet, 2001: 63).





To reduce the mass based threat from the Communists to the Baathist regime, the Baath Party wanted to enter into an arrangement of sharing power with them. However, this attempt had failed largely because of the Communists' unwillingness to participate in the government before civil liberties were guaranteed or the ICP itself legalised. Hence, the regime continued its carrot and stick policy to deal with Communists, continuing to negotiate with the party leadership while simultaneously harassing rank and file members. It constantly disrupted the protest rallies by using its armed militia which resulted in several deaths.

Little progress towards an agreement was achieved at this stage, but it was clear from the negotiations that the Baathists wanted to come to some sort of arrangement with the Communists, who had more influence among certain sections of the population than the Baath. It was very crucial for the Baath either to weaken or in some way to absorb the Kurdish and Communist movements, which were the two most important political forces within the country. Without conceding them any concessions in terms of actual power sharing, in order to expand its own power base, the Baath wanted some accommodation with them. It was therefore necessary to keep the Communists on boat by means of relatively insignificant gestures and at the same time to make it clear to them that the Baath were in power and were going to stay there.

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Thus, while the Communists were granted permission to publish their monthly review, *al-Thaqafa al-Jadida*, these concessions had come with random acts of violence. The Communist party members were attacked in the streets of Baghdad, some of the prominent leaders, Sattar Khudayr al-Haydar and Abd al-Amir al-Sayyid were assassinated. The targeted assassination was further exacerbated by the Baathist regime after the negotiations culminating in the Manifesto of March 1970, which ushered in a brief period of Baath-Kurdish friendship that gave the Baath sufficient confidence to continue its verbal and physical attack on the Communists (Ismael, 2008: 207-8).

In June 1970, while addressing to a mass rally in Kirkuk, Taha Yasin Ramadan in the presence of Idris and Masud Barzani of KDP on the stage, complained that "we extended our hand to the ICP and other national forces ... but our calls [were] either rejected or ... met with frustrating conditions" (Sluglet and Sluglet, 2001: 140). The Baath exasperation at the Communists continuing their unwillingness to participate in

a National Progressive Front was expressed in some detail in the media. The tone of these statements was dualistic in nature; they expressed the regime's distaste for the Communists on the one hand, and on the other hand, they recognised that, given the nature of the social and economic programmes it was attempting to implement, and its growing reliance on the Soviet Union and the socialist countries it was in need of IPC's positive support (Ismael, 2008: 207-11).

Although the Baath regime moved closer to socialist countries in the international arena, at the domestic level it simultaneously continued its tirade against the Communists. They were criticised for their support to Qasim, and also for never taking power by staging a revolution in this direction. They were accused of bad behaviour towards the regime because the regime acted in an admirably democratic manner when it released all political prisoners, including the Communists and reinstated them in their jobs. However, the Communist leaders had failed to make their political attitudes and behaviour consistent with the Baath. Therefore, they were incapable of leadership. Thus, it was declared that "the Communists have no right to lead the National Front because they lack the ability to lead" (Sluglet and Sluglet, 2001: 141). The implication of this was of course, that only the Baath is entitled to lead the country because it had set off the revolution on its own, and that in the event of a National Front being formed it must be understood that the participating bodies must accept Baathist supremacy

This dualistic nature of the Baath was recognised by Communists at their Second National Congress in September 1970; they praised the Baath regime's positive achievements in the social and economic fields and its strong anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist foreign policy, while criticising the continuing absence of democratic liberties and the suppression of the struggle of the masses for freedom. This gesture of praise by Communists was rebuffed and in the course of that year, a number of Communists were arrested and later many of them were found dead in distant countries such as Argentina or Guatemala. The regime denied knowledge or responsibility of these acts (Ibid, 141-2).

Thus, the constant violent attacks on ICP led to the weakening of its organisational structure. It lost its base among the masses because the public became afraid of having membership in the Communist organisations. It was felt by members that

participating actively in those activities of the party which were banned by the regime means inviting the wrath of the state. All these certainly indicate that the Baath regime in Iraq had offered carrots for Communists by conducting the negotiations for sharing power and moving closer to socialist countries at the international level. On the other hand, the regime had stabbed the Communists at their back by tactically attacking their mass power base by creating difficulties in their participation in all kinds of union activities.

### **Clash with the Kurds**

The Kurds are an ancient Indo-European people, ethnically different from their Arab, Turkish, and Iranian neighbours. They have their own language (Kurdish) and unique cultural tradition. They live in the landlocked mountains and high plateaus of the Zagros, Taurus, and Pontiac ranges surrounded by Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. The inability of neighbouring powers to access the high mountain regions enabled them to preserve their unique culture and way of life.

It is impossible to obtain accurate demographic figures for Kurds from the countries in which they reside for political reasons therefore, various estimates are only source to no their number. They are perhaps as many as 25 million people, spread through Turkey (12 million), Iraq (5 million), Iran (6 million), Syria (1 million), Central Asian countries (1 million), and at least 1 million living overseas in Europe, North America, and Australia as part of the Kurdish Diaspora. They constitute the fourth-largest ethnic group in the region after Arabs, Turks, and Iranians but do not have a state of their own in West Asia (Anderson and Stansfield, 2004: 158-59).

However, they are the sizable minority in the states in which they reside; but, for political reasons, they have been sidelined from participating in their respective national governments. The Kurds in Iraq identify themselves primarily as being Kurdish and then Iraqi and certainly not Arab. This issue of being a non-Arab people in a state that has been dominated by a succession of strongly Arab nationalist regimes has led them to remain as a provincial force, concerned politically with achieving local autonomy and gaining control of localities in which Kurds constitute a majority through armed groups. Though they comprise of 25 percent of the Iraqi

population, the Kurds did not enjoy beneficial representation proportionate to their size; instead have suffered oppression and coercion (Ibid, 155-56).

These oppression and coercion did not dissuade their fighting ability, rather made them an effective force in Iraq by the time the Baath Party captured power. To reduce the threat emanating from Kurds to the Baathist regime and to fight with other enemies, it was Saddam Hussein who negotiated a Manifesto in 1970. The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) still commanded considerable power. Iraq also faced external threats posed by other regional powers like Israel and indirectly by the US through the Shah of Iran. The Kurdish rebel party (KDP) under Barzani exposed the vulnerability of Iraqi petroleum corporation installations in Kirkuk by repeatedly attacking them successfully. These attacks also displayed the military capability of Barzani and his followers. The fact that the Kurds were armed by the Iranians heightened the Baath Party's desire for conciliation with them to ease pressure from the north (Yildiz, 2004: 16-7).

Saddam Hussain negotiated the Manifesto with Mahmud Uthman, who represented the KDP, and it was announced on 11 March 1970. Almost all of Barzani's demands were met in the Manifesto. Kurdish, alongside Arabic, was recognised as official language in areas where the majority of the population was Kurdish and taught throughout Iraq as a second language. The Kurds were allowed to participate fully in government, including senior army and cabinet posts; Kurdish education and culture would be reinforced and all officials in Kurdish areas would be Kurds, or speak Kurdish; Kurds would be free to establish student, youth, women's, and teachers organisations; funds would be allocated for the development of Kurdistan; pensions would be provided to the families of Peshmerga (the fighters of KDP) killed in battle; agrarian reforms would be implemented; a Kurd would be one of the vice-presidents of Iraq; and finally, there would be unification of Kurdish majority areas as one self-governing unit (Ibid, 175-79).

Had this Manifesto been implemented, then the Kurds might have occupied the official positions upto the level of Governor, including district officers and chiefs of police and security. The region might have received extra investment from Baghdad, in the form of an economic development plan undertaken with regard to Kurdish underdevelopment, extending to relief and assistance for the needy and unemployed.

There would be official promotion and promulgation of Kurdish literary, artistic and cultural endeavours, a Kurdish press and a television station, as well as an amnesty for those who had fought against the state from the Kurdish areas.

Nonetheless, preliminary steps taken immediately after the Manifesto by the Baath regime were encouraging. It constituted a taskforce consisting of four Kurds and four Arabs, and they were given the task to work out the implementation of the Manifesto. The leaders of KDP were appointed as governors of Sulaimaniya, Erbil and Dohuk. The Interim Constitution of Iraq was amended to declare that the Iraqi people are composed of two principal nationalisms: Arab nationalism and Kurdish nationalism. The villages which were destroyed in the conflict were rebuilt and Peshmerga were even paid by the government to act as border guards (Ibid, 16-9).

Within three years after signing the Manifesto, it became clear that Saddam Hussain lacked the will to implement the Manifesto as he engaged in sabotaging the negotiations through various acts which included the following: Barzani was subjected to several failed assassination attempts, possibly government-backed ones; the Kurds' choice of the vice-president candidate, Habib Karim was rejected by Baghdad; negotiations on the status of Kirkuk and its surrounding oil fields were not allowed to continue; and Saddam Hussain deliberately made attempts to alter the demography of the region, bringing in Arab settlers from the south and the north of the country (Sluglet and Sluglet, 2001: 167-68).

In 1974, bitter fighting erupted between KDP militia and the state military which led to unprecedented loss in both men and material for the Baath regime. The KDP was able to continue armed struggle against the strong Iraqi military due to the external support which it received from Iran and America. Both Iran and America supported the Kurds for their own aspirations in the region. Since 1937, Iran had felt humiliated by restrictions on its right to use the Shatt al-Arab waterway connecting the Persian Gulf to the Iranian port of Abadan and the Iraqi port of Basra. Iran under the Shah was Iraq's major rival, and the Shah found that backing the Kurds financially and militarily was a useful means of putting pressure on Baghdad. America was concerned by Baghdad's increasingly close relationship with the Soviet Union which was its cold war adversary.

Due to the direct support rendered for Kurds by Iran had brought Iran and Iraq on the brink of a full-fledged war. However, the impending war was averted by negotiations culminating in early 1975 in a peace agreement signed at a meeting of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in Algiers. In return for dropping support for the Kurds, the Shah gained sovereignty over half of the disputed waterway. In addition, Iraq had agreed to abandon its claim to Khuzistan, one of Iran's oil-rich regions. Within 48 hours, Iran withdrew its military support of the Kurds.<sup>1</sup> This restored peace between the powers which left the Kurds exposed and without a sponsor.

After this agreement, The Iraqi military unleashed a campaign of reprisal, killing thousands of Peshmerga and civilians. The Iraqi army created a security zone in the border areas between the Kurdish region and Turkey, Syria and Iran which was 600 miles long. This resulted in the destruction of an estimated 1,500 villages. Around 300,000 Kurds were resettled in Arab provinces far from the north. Arabs occupied the destroyed Kurdish villages and boundaries were redrawn to ensure that previously Kurdish provinces now had Arab majorities. At this time of difficulty, there was a split in the KDP. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was founded in Damascus by Jalal Talabani which further weakened the Kurdish power in Iraq (Yildiz, 2004: 23-4).

### **The Challenge of the Shia Clergy**

The Shias constitute about 60 percent of the Iraqi population, but they did not have a representation in the government which was dominated by the Sunnis since its inception. The Shias in Iraq consider themselves to be Iraqi nationalists. While different manifestations of Shia political forces which had origins in the clergy have targeted successive Iraqi governments, the Shia masses on the whole have no doubts about accepting and supporting the validity of the Iraqi state. The Kurds ultimately strived for autonomy and control of their own territory, and have little interest in issues relating to Iraqi nationalism, but the Shias stood with the idea of an Iraqi nation. For example, Shia tribes were heavily involved in the 1920 revolt against the

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<sup>1</sup> Saddam Hussain held these negotiations with Kurds and Iran, when he was only a deputy in the Bath Party and the government.

British, and a majority of the Shias supported the Iraqi state against Iran in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988 even when Shia identity assertion was at its zenith after the 1979 Iranian Revolution (Lukitz, 1995: 3-4).

The Sunni regimes of Iraq have maintained their political dominance by keeping the Shias weak and divided. A variety of techniques such as co-option, rewards and punishment have been employed to prevent the emergence of a coherent and unified Shia opposition force capable of challenging Sunni dominance. The key to this strategy has been to prevent the politicization of the Iraqi Shia religious establishment (the Hawza) and to maintain its political isolation from the Iraqi Shia masses. The fear of successive Sunni regimes was neither the Hawza itself, nor the masses of Iraqi Shias, but the potential for both together to initiate mass political activity against Baghdad. The regimes feared the emergence of a figure or organization which may bridge the gap and succeed in politicizing the Hawza and spiritualizing the masses.

The most significant of these figures was Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (1935-1980), the inspirational *marja* who united the Shias' sacred life with the political via the popular Hizb al-Dawa al-Islamiyya (The Party of the Islamic Call) which presented a serious challenge to the legitimacy of the ruling Baath regime. He had provided worldly direction for the Shia establishment to identify political and economic solutions for the problems of Iraqi society. He outlined many components of an Islamic government, culminating in the publication of *Falsafatuna* (Our Philosophy) in 1959, criticizing communism. After two years, he published *Iqtisaduna* (Our Economics) which introduced a theory of Islamic economics and attacked the economic theories of both communism and capitalism. The works were well received by the Shia audience, and succeeded in depleting the morale of the Communists (Aziz, 1993: 208-09). However, he laid low for few years with Baath regime to consolidate his position among the Shia clergy and common public.

During this period, the Baathist regime was embroiled in a bitter squabble with Iran that had disastrous consequences for Iraq's Shias. When Ayatollah al-Hakim refused to condemn the acts of the Shah of Iran on the request of Iraqi President Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, the fate of the Shias was set. The regime set out to eliminate systematically the political forces of the Shia community, particularly the influence of the Hawza that was motivated, popular, and ideologically opposed to the secular

socialist doctrine of the Baath. Religious schools and colleges were closed, and their publications were removed from circulation. Ayatollah al-Hakim's son was arrested and tortured, and prominent Shia figures were eliminated by the regime. Recitation of the Koran on television and radio was stopped, and Islamic instructions were removed from the school curriculum. The Shias of Iraq were divided and weakened by a government skilled in the art of manipulating its opponent's weaknesses in order to strengthen its own position (Anderson and Stansfield, 2004: 25-26).

After the death of Ayatollah al-Hakim in 1970 due to natural causes, Ayatollah al-Sadr took over and continued the fight against the Baathist program of secularisation. The fight between Saddam Hussain and al-Sadr reached to a blistering point in 1977 because of the brutal subjugation of Shias. The regime banned the annual religious ceremonies commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussein in Iraq. The Shias defied the ban and around 30,000 of them gathered to make their pilgrimage between Najaf and Karbala, with anti-Baathist banners and slogans making the political feeling against the regime clear. Faced with such dissent, the regime mobilized the military against the pilgrims which resulted in riots in Karbala.

Al-Sadr and al-Dawa were singled out and targeted for being the primary instigators of politically motivated Shiism. Faced with this upsurge in state-sponsored violence and encouraged by the success of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, Sadr chose to promote violent confrontation with the Baath regime. In doing so, he sealed his fate. He was imprisoned from June 1979 until March 1980. During this period, the imprisoned Sadr encouraged his followers to stand against the Baath regime under the noses of his captors through tape-recorded messages to all Muslims in Iraq to unite and secure an Islamic state through violent means (Aziz, 1993: 214-15).

These appeals of al-Sadr led to the expansion of militant Islamist groups, fuelled by the Islamic Republic of Iran, who made daring and violent attacks against the Baath regime. In one of the attacks, Saddam himself was targeted but he was narrowly missed (El-Afandi, 1992). Heightened Islamic militancy was met with increased brutality by Saddam Hussain. Many members of al-Dawa were executed, the membership in the party was made a capital offence and thousands of Shias were expelled to Iran. On 8 April 1980, Ayatollah al-Sadr and his sister, Bint al-Huda,



were executed (Anderson and Stansfield, 2004: 125-29). The death of al-Sadr had a profound impact upon the Islamic movement in Iraq. Losing their spiritual leader led to the disintegration of movement. In September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran, commencing a bloody eight-year war during which Saddam demonized the Shia threat posed to the entire West Asian region. The Shia clergy in Iraq was thus thoroughly isolated.

## **Rapid Growth of Economic and Social Sectors**

Under Saddam Hussain's directions, the increased revenue of Iraq after the oil embargo of 1973 was put to constructive use by embarking on an ambitious development plan that brought unparalleled prosperity to Iraq by the end of the decade.<sup>2</sup> The GDP per capita literally took off from \$382 in 1972 to \$2,726 in 1979, as noted in the previous chapter. Although Hussain continued to highlight Baathist socialist slogans as a rhetoric, in practice he encouraged private enterprise by giving various incentives for market forces to expand the share of the free market in the state's economy. By the end of the decade, Iraq's middle class had grown considerably and become manifestly wealthier. A revealing statistics is that the number of privately owned cars in the country rose from 67,400 in 1970 to 170,100 in 1978 (Dawisha, 2009: 220).

This fact had indeed bolstered the regime's stability, since the middle class would be less likely to undermine a political order from which it benefited. At the same time, Hussain did not shun his responsibility for the poor as several development plans were instituted with an eye towards reducing the gap between the rich and the poor. He introduced a variety of governmental initiatives aimed at the poor classes, including a substantial building program of modern dwellings for the poor, free education right through university level, and an expansion of free hospitals, clinics, and other medical facilities. He also enacted legislation on social security, minimum wages, and pension rights, as well as building electrical grids and generators so that electricity could be extended to remote villages.

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<sup>2</sup> There was fourfold increase in the prize of oil in the world due to the oil embargo imposed by Arab producers in support of Arab states against Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israel conflict.

There was a clear political benefit in these extensive reforms which significantly expanded Hussain's support base, as the largest beneficiaries were the Shias of the south, traditionally impoverished and most socially disadvantaged of Iraq's communities. He made education as his major priority during this period. He was motivated by a modernist outlook and a desire to elevate himself above other leaders of Arab countries and therefore he poured significant resources into education and culture.

Between 1973 and 1980, student enrolment in secondary schools rose from 600,000 to almost a million, and at universities it almost doubled from 49,000 to 96,000. In the same seven-year period, the number of university teachers increased from 1,721 to 6,515 (Ibid, 221). Women were the primary beneficiaries of Hussain's development programs. They made impressive strides, particularly in educational attainment and participation in the work force. By 1980, they constituted 70 percent of all pharmacists, almost half of all teachers and dentists, and just under a third of all physicians (Ibid, 222).

In 1978, Saddam Hussain launched a governmental campaign to eradicate illiteracy within three years, however, this ambitious goal was never achieved, but by the end of 1980, about 2 million Iraqis between the ages of 15 and 45 had been taught rudimentary reading and writing. The main impetus behind the program was to add to Saddam's stature in the region; the state propaganda agencies made sure that international organizations were well aware of Iraq's Herculean efforts. UNESCO duly obliged by awarding Iraq a prestigious international prize in 1980. All these had certainly projected Iraq as a major economic power in the West Asian region (Sluglet and Sluglet, 2001: 227-40).

Iraq's ability to achieve such a rapid growth in various fields between 1970 and 1980 in such a short time could be duly attributed to the coercive control of the centralized policy-making mechanism under Hussain. Many believe that these achievements in the fields of social and economic sectors would have been difficult with such speed and efficiency, had Iraq possessed a democratic structure in which every policy is scrutinized and debated minutely.

## **Expansion of Military and People's Militia**

The increase in revenues after the oil embargo had allowed the government to expand the military and popular militia. Between 1973 and 1980, the Iraqi military expanded on a massive scale in comparison with that of Arab military during those years. The size of the Iraqi military doubled to 210,000 men, which led to the addition of nine divisions. After signing a Friendship Treaty with the USSR in 1972, the Iraqi military took possession of 1,600 tanks which included at that time, the advanced T-72 tank, in addition to armoured infantry fighting vehicles, anti-tank, surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles, and self-propelled artillery and anti-aircraft guns (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008: 123-24).

Although the USSR remained the primary supplier of military equipment to Iraq, by September 1976, the military began to receive arms shipments from France for the first time since 1958 arms were provided from a Western power. These deals with France allowed the military to take possession of between sixty to eighty Mirage F-1 interceptor fighters and 200 AMX-30 tanks, as well as armoured fighting vehicles from Brazil and naval vessels from Italy (Sluglett and Sluglett, 2001: 181). As pointed out by Marashi and Salama (2008),

the expansion was designed for the armed forces to maintain its traditional role of preserving internal security and projecting Baathist power against Kurdish guerrillas. Second, the expansion allowed the Baath to construct an image of the most powerful military in the Arab world, allowing Saddam Hussein to fulfil his ambitions of emerging as the dominant regional player (Marashi and Salama, 2008: 124).

At the same time, the Al-Jaysh Al-Shaabi, or the Popular Army (also known as the People's Army or the People's Militia), which was structured as a parallel army whose loyalty rested with the Baath and was subordinated to the Party, was also expanded. These militias served as a reserve, allowing all citizens to contribute to the defence of the Party for short periods during the year, usually ranging from two weeks to two months. While such militias are often incapable of fighting in the battlefield, they offer a means of cementing the political loyalty of the masses with the state. However, in Iraq's case, the People's Militia was forcefully conscripted into the military during the Iran-Iraq war was a testimony in itself of the Party's coercive

ability to force the people to defend it. This Army was formed in 1970 to provide military training to Party members who helped Hussain to weaken the political power of the regular Army. By 1975, the Popular Army's numbers had reached 50,000 and by 1979 it had 75,000 men. Its education apparatus was separate from the military college. The Popular Army School provided courses on politics and on the use of small arms and it gave air defence training to every male member. Their units trained weekly twice for three hours, and participated in an annual two weeks summer camp on combat techniques (Ibid, 127-28).

Thus, the Baathists under Saddam Hussain had managed to do what no party had done in Iraq's history; it brought the military under civilian control. The expansion of the military and people's militia strengthened Hussain's leadership and projected his image as a West Asian regional leader. According to Chubin and Tripp (1988), "the massive modernization and expansion of the military also presented Hussein with a dilemma: creating such a force was of little use to the Iraqi leader unless he could employ it in a decisive demonstration of his power" (Chubin and Tripp, 1988: 243). The threat to Iraq emanating from Khomeini's Islamic Revolution ultimately provided Hussain with the opportunity to use this expanded military in such a demonstration of power during Iran-Iraq war for asserting Iraq's supremacy over the region. Along with these, the domestic achievements by the Baath Party such as, elimination of potential enemies in the military; establishment of coup-proof mechanism; reduction of Communist, Kurd and Shia challenge through carrot and stick policy, the healthy economy had provided an encouraging support for Saddam Hussain to launch his external endeavours.

## **Chapter III**

### **Iraq's Quest for Regional Supremacy:**

#### **Implications of Political Developments in 1979**

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The year 1979 has considerable significance in West Asian politics as the region witnessed developments that remained a challenge for Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia; the major states of the region. They shook the power balance in the region.

Iran witnessed an Islamic Revolution that led to the overthrow of the monarchical rule of Shah. The second powerful army of the region became the first casualty of the revolutionary forces. All the officers above colonel level were either executed or forced to flee from state, consequently Iranian military became weak. Ethnic rebellions broke out demanding autonomy throughout the provinces. The economy was in a disarray for months after the revolution. Oil production had reached to a halt, and with that there was loss of revenues and markets. There was struggle for leadership between moderate and religious forces after the overthrow of the Shah which created an unstable situation in Iran.

Egypt, which acted as a leader of Arabs in the capacity of a frontline state and fought four wars with Israel between 1948 and 1973 for Arab cause signed a unilateral treaty with Israel under the mediation of America, ignoring the concerns of other Arab parties to the conflict. This decision of Egypt was considered as a betrayal of Arab cause by all Arab countries, and subsequently, it was expelled from Arab League.

In Saudi Arabia, Juhayman al-Otaibi, a radical cleric along with his associates, seized the Grand Mosque in Makkah. To remove them, the Saudi government took the help of French paratroopers. The use of non-Muslim forces to secure the Mosque clearly displayed the limitations of the monarchy in safeguarding the two Holy Places of Islam. This incident has raised questions on the legitimacy of the Al-Saud regime.

The occurrence of all these political developments in the same year is neither out of a design by some person or country, nor due to the sacrosanct importance of the year; rather, it was a mere coincidence that they had culminated in the same year. In fact, the course of action for these political developments was started well before 1979. Lesch observes that “the events of 1979 climaxed a series of processes that closed the door on previous interwoven paradigms that had established the parameters of interaction in the Middle East and opened the door to new ones” (Lesch, 2001: 4).

These new political developments affecting the standing of three major countries of West Asia had created a power vacuum in the region. The ambitious and powerful Saddam Hussain saw the situation as an opportunity for Iraq to assert its supremacy over the region. To accomplish his desired goal, he used the Iraqi state machinery in a big way.

### **The Ascent of Saddam Hussain to the Presidency**

As it is clear from the previous chapter, Saddam Hussain was actively involved in every policy formulation and implementation of the Baath regime in Iraq ever since its inception in 1968. His vigorous involvement had led to the consolidation of Baath Party power over every aspect of Iraqi state. Further, he had also consolidated his personal control over administrative and military institutions. By the end of 1970s, he emerged as the only power centre in Iraq though Al-Bakr was the President. Therefore, it was expected that Hussain will come out of the shadows of Al-Bakr and takeover the presidency at any moment.

The moment had come on 16 July 1979, which was a day before Baath Party’s anniversary celebrations of Iraq’s takeover. Al-Bakr declared the transition of power in a televised address to the nation. He said,

For a long time, I have been talking to my Comrades in the Command, particularly cherished Comrade Saddam Hussein, about my health, which no longer allows me to shoulder the responsibilities with which the Command has honoured me. My health has recently reached the stage where I could no longer assume responsibility in a manner that satisfies my conscience (Coughlin, 2002: 150).

In his address, he had also declared Saddam Hussain as his successor;

the man best qualified to assume the leadership during the bitter years of struggle prior to the revolution, Comrade Saddam Hussein was a brave and faithful struggler who enjoyed the respect and trust of the party's strugglers. On the eve of the revolution, he was at the head of the brave men who stormed the bastions of dictatorship and reaction. During the revolution's march he was the brilliant leader who was able to confront all the difficulties and shoulder all the responsibilities (Ibid, 151).

With Al-Bakr's resignation, Hussain assumed the title of President of the Republic, Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. He had also promoted himself in the process to Field Marshal, the highest military rank in Iraq (Chubin and Tripp, 1988: 115).

However, this smooth transfer of power from Al-Bakr to Hussain is perceived as questionable by Coughlin (2002), Aburish (1999) and other biographers of Saddam Hussain due to the various developments taking place at that time in the Party, regime and foreign policy of Iraq. Aburish (1999), who has first hand knowledge of Baathist regime as a journalist and arms dealer, says,

I have interviewed more than a hundred Iraqis, a knowledgeable collection of people who belong to different political groupings with different agendas, and not a single one accepts the Bakr resignation on face value. All of them insist that what took place in Baghdad in July 1979 was a coup within the Ba'ath Party. To them, Saddam simply ordered Bakr to go home - under guard (Aburish, 1999: 169).

The gulf between Hussain and Al-Bakr had grown considerably due to the Al-Bakr's plan of merging Iraqi and Syrian Baath parties. This plan was devised by Al-Bakr perhaps to undermine Hussain's position in Iraq. Apart from putting Saddam in his place, the other more pressing motivation for the proposed merger was the desire of the regimes in Damascus and Baghdad to present a united Arab front that could challenge the growing Egyptian-Israeli negotiations for a peace agreement to settle the territorial disputes under the mediation of USA at Camp David. Iraq and Syria, who had vehemently opposed the existence of Israel, regarded the Camp David agreement as a sell-out of the Palestinian issue because the agreement had left the issue of Palestine unresolved (Ibid, 179-70).

With the walk out of Egypt, a frontline state in the struggle against Israel, from the Arab fold, the Syrian and Iraqi Baath parties in October 1978 agreed to set aside their own long-standing ideological differences in order to establish a joint charter for national action against Israel. As usual, this time also the Baath Party regime in Iraq had assigned Saddam Hussain the responsibility of negotiating a deal with Syrian President Assad. In January 1979, Hussain travelled to Damascus to take forward the negotiations for merger; this trip was the first by a senior Iraqi politician to Syria in ten years. During the visit, he signed a deal with Assad to merge the two countries respective ministries of foreign affairs, defence, and information. Deal was considered as a first step towards total merger of both the regimes which they scheduled in the following April (Coughlin, 2002: 151-52).

However, the total merger in April did not materialise due to the changing dynamics of West Asian regional politics in the context of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. But the regime change in Iran did not reduce the interest of Iraq to merge with Syria because it saw the merger as a means of protecting itself from the new threat posed by Iran's Islamic Revolution after Ayatollah Khomeini seized power in February 1979. In a speech shortly after revolution, Saddam Hussain spoke enthusiastically about the proposed Iraq-Syria merger and declared that "this unity was not a system, but rather the principal part of the entire Arab revolution" (Ibid, 153).

This initial enthusiasm of Hussain for negotiating the merger between Iraq and Syria did not last long as he failed to overcome his strong reservations about the enterprise, as it became more well-defined as the negotiations continued. His biggest concern appears to have been that a link up with Syria would limit his power. Therefore, Hussain decided to undermine the merger proposal without pronouncing it in the public. But, the disinterest of Hussain did not remain hidden for long, it was noticed when President Assad came to Baghdad on 16 June 1979 to discuss the latest proposals. Saddam Hussain insulted him by refusing to go to the airport to meet him. At the last minute, Al-Bakr went in his place, and after three days of talks, Al-Bakr and Assad announced a declaration of unity under which the governments of the two countries would be merged as a means of confronting "the Zionist-imperialist-Sadat onslaught" (Ibid).



According to the terms of the proposal, Syria and Iraq would become a loose federation, with Al-Bakr as its head, Assad as deputy, and Hussain as number three. This arrangement was not acceptable for Hussain because he was already the de facto number one in Iraq. The prospect of being relegated to the position of number three in the newly merged nation did not appeal to him, as he knew about the regular ill health of Al-Bakr in which case Assad would become the main power in the new union. If the merger went ahead, Assad would purge Saddam in the same way that Saddam had dispensed with his own rivals (Aburish, 1999: 169-70).

Therefore, the only way for Hussain to prevent the federation from taking place, and to remove the threat to his position was to seize power from Al-Bakr. The Syrian writer Patrick Seale wrote that, shortly before Saddam assumed control, Bakr sent a message to Assad, asking him to speed up the proposed union between Iraq and Syria because "there is a current here which is anxious to kill the union in the bud before it bears fruit" (Quoted in Coughlin, 2004: 153).

The reference of the message was clearly about Hussain's intentions of sabotaging the proposed merger and therefore, he wanted it to be realised as soon as possible when he was the President of Iraq.

The concern of Al-Bakr became true the moment a special closed session of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) was convened on 11 July 1979, at which it was decided to replace Al-Bakr in the following week, and all his powers to be transferred to Saddam Hussain. Hussain chose 16 July as the date to succeed Al-Bakr so that his celebrations could coincide with the anniversary celebrations of Baath Party's accession to the power in Iraq, in order to symbolize the continuity of the revolution (Anderson and Stansfield, 2004: 58-9).

After taking office as the President, Hussain had accelerated the campaign of vicious terror on suspected and potential opponents in the regime. First on the hit list was Muhie Abdul Hussein Mashadi (the deposed General Secretary of RCC), who had demanded for voting during an RCC meeting to determine a successor to Al-Bakr. He was relieved from his duties three days before Al-Bakr's resignation, but the news of his removal was temporarily withheld and he was tortured until willing to confess to anything (Aburish, 1999: 170).

Hussain wanted to put an end to the proposal of Iraq-Syria merger as a single federal unit and he used Mashadi to realize it. On 22 July, he convened a special Party meeting to allow Mashadi to give details of an elaborate Syrian plot to overthrow the regime. He had got the meeting videotaped to threaten the members of the Baath Party. Following the confession from Mashadi, a list of co-conspirators' names were read out. As the names were announced one by one, the members of Party were taken out from the room by security officials. At this time, 66 Party members became victims of Hussain's brutality; then the meeting continued to send the message for the remaining delegates. Among these 66 members, 22 were sentenced to death by a hastily convened RCC special court. The wickedness of Hussain did not end here, Two weeks later, he convened Party officials ones again to administer collective justice. One by one, Party leaders were asked to put bullets into the brains of the unfortunate 22. In this manner, he got almost the entire Party leadership implicated in the executions (Anderson and Stansfield, 2004: 59-60). Thus, he could hit three birds with one stone as merger with Syria was dumped, possible opponents in the Party were eliminated and existing members of the Party were implicated in his brutal policies.

At the same time, state agencies in charge of cultural production had engaged exclusively in exaggerated glorification of Hussain and his lineage. Number of books and articles by journalists and academics, fully supported by the Ministry of Culture and Information were published. The extent of glorification can be understood from a writing of a professor of literature at Baghdad University.

According to this starry-eyed groupie, Saddam's genius covers all aspects of the lives of individuals, their societies, countries, nations, and humanity as a whole, through the submissions, treatments, values, practices, explanations, writings, speeches, declarations and responses which are the hallmark of the personality, genius, wisdom and humanity of Commander Saddam Hussain (Dawisha 2009: 218).

The Ministry of Culture and Information had also began to dig deep into Iraq's illustrious history and draw a continuous cultural and political route starting from the great civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia so that a common identity could be established for all Iraqis. The biggest single use of history to unify Iraq was the claim that Hussain and Bakr were descendants of Ali Bin Abu Taleb, the Prophet's cousin

and son-in-law whose murder led to the creation of the Shia sect. This claim was made to unify sectarian groups of Islam and to dilute the growing antagonism against the Baath regime by Shias (Aburish, 1999: 127).

The manipulation of history to establish Hussain as a powerful man did not stop there.

His propaganda machinery repeated stories about Caliph Haroun Al Rashid of Arabian Nights fame who wandered the streets incognito to check on the welfare of the poor. The people were reminded that Iraq was the country of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian who sent the Jews into exile. And much was made of the fact that Hamurabi, the first man in history to codify the law and use it to protect people, was an Iraqi. Naturally, there was a suggestion that Saddam was the embodiment of all these men (Ibid).

All this tactics were intended to make Saddam Hussain an unchallenged power-house in Iraq. However, the Islamic Revolution in Iran kept presenting a challenge for Hussain's presidency.

### **Challenges and Opportunities of the Revolution in Iran**

The year 1979 had witnessed the culmination of the Iranian Revolution with Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Teheran on 1 February, signalling the end of the reign of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi (the Shah of Iran) and the beginning of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The success of Islamic forces in Iran gave a moral boost to Islamist forces which had posed a challenge to the stability of ruling regimes in West Asia. This change also had reverberations in the entire world as two-thirds of the world's proven oil reserves are in the Persian Gulf region.

The country that had got most effected due to the overthrow of Shah of Iran in 1979 was America because the Shah was always pro-West in regional politics. In fact, he was installed on the throne in 1945 by America and Great Britain after his father Reza Shah (the then monarch of Iran) was removed from power in 1941 because of his pro-German sympathies. The Shah who was in his teens could not manage the challenges on his own; therefore he depended on the British and later on the Americans for saving his throne. Britain and America were always forthcoming to safeguard the

Shah from any kind of challenge as they wanted to protect their economic and Cold War interests in the region.

The example which is quite often referred to indicate the extent of reciprocal relationship between Shah and America is the coup against Muhammad Mussadiq in 1953. Mussadiq was the Prime Minister of Iran, he was popular and liberal constitutionalist, who tried to limit the powers of the Shah and nationalised the petroleum industry. The coup against him was engineered in Washington and London which created a gulf between the regime and the Iranian people (Lesch, 2001: 28). This gulf had further widened in the 1950s and 1960s as the Shah had used brutal force to curb the growing dissent among the public. But he failed to exterminate it as his authoritarianism could not totally control the mosque and its affiliated education and welfare institutions, which were becoming centres of revolutionary activism (Owen, 2004: 64).

Instead of reducing the widening gulf, Shah adopted measures to display his intense megalomania that alienated Iranians from the regime and created more fodder for revolutionary propaganda. The event which is considered as an example of the Shah's megalomania and how out of touch he was with the vast majority of his subjects was the \$300 million party he hosted in 1971 to commemorate the 2500th anniversary of the Achmaenid dynasty, held at the ancient site of Persepolis, one of the capitals of the dynasty.

Lesch argues thus:

The celebration of a pre-Islamic entity or event was offensive to the religious classes (ulama) and to a deeply traditional society as a whole. The Shah's subsequent adoption of the Persian calendar to replace the Islamic calendar reinforced the view that he had an utter disregard and ignorance of the feelings and sensitivities of most Iranians (Lesch 2001: 30).

This kind of acts of the Shah impelled the religious opposition to cooperate with the mainstream discontent which unified diverse opposition groups against his rule. The economic hardships also made the common public disenchanted with the regime. The revenues from oil were not translated into jobs and economic well-being. Such

disillusionment was used by Ayatollah Khomeini and others to generate the support for the revolutionary movement during 1977-1979 (Lesch, 2001: 30).

The increased revenue also made the Shah obsessive of Iran's military strength. The military budget rose from \$ 1.4 billion in 1972 to \$9.4 billion by 1977 (Freedman 2008: 64). A large portion of the increase budget went for the purchase of advanced weapons from America as it made available to Iran almost any weaponry desired by Shah in order to build him up as an agent of American regional policy. Even in September 1978, days before his fall, the Shah sent a list of military equipment worth \$12 billion to be procured over four years which included fighter, maritime patrol, and tanker aircrafts (Ibid, 65).

The policy of rapid growth in the military and industrial sectors had involved lacks of specialists from America who brought Western culture to Iran which challenged the Islamic character of the society. Therefore, sighting the Western influence on Iranian society, the clerics had mounted a scathing criticism against the regime in their Friday sermons and writings which had fuelled the opposition. Film theatres, night clubs, wine bars and shopping malls etc. came under frequent attacks by Islamist groups (Owen, 2004: 66).

The opposition to the Shah's regime was wide-ranging. They included liberal constitutionalists, leftist, religious and paramilitary guerrilla groups. Among the liberal opponents were the remnants of Mussadiq's National Front of the early 1950s, which had survived as a loose coalition of reformers and nationalists. They were supported in public by jurists, writers, and academics, who did not have a wider political programme other than emphasising on the need to respect the rule of law and allow basic freedoms. The party which had presented mass based resentment of the regime and subsequently suffered as a prime target among the opposition groups was the Communist Tudeh Party. In the 1960s and 1970s, some of the opposition groups became more violent and started guerrilla campaigns. Among these were the Mujahideen, who used Shiaism and opposed capitalist ideology, and the leftist Organization of the Iranian People's Fedayeen Guerrillas (Gasirowski, 2007: 51-2).

Ayatollah Khomeini was the one man, who presented continuous challenge for the Shah since the 1960s and, as a result, he became the living symbol of resistance for

Iranians. He criticised the rule of the Shah especially for its closeness with America and Israel. He was residing in and exile in the Iraqi city of Najaf, a centre of Shia theology. It was an exile forced on him by the Shah.<sup>3</sup> The exile could not stop Khomeini from criticising the Shah and his regime. In fact, the making of Najaf as his base had helped him a lot in disseminating the opposition literature to various parts of Iran because many Iranians paid annual pilgrimage to various shrines in Iraq among which Najaf was a main place.

He offered an uncompromising and unrelenting vision of an Iran free from malign foreign influences and the institution of the monarchy. This vision was articulated in his sermons which were reproduced in pamphlets or captured on tapes, and were distributed through the mosques and bazaars that had contributed for phenomenal increase in his followers. He had taken advantage of this extensive network of followers who made it possible to organize and mobilize the masses, appealing to their deep attachment to Islam.

To put an end to the dissemination of hatred against him, the Shah convinced Iraq to expel Khomeini from his base at Najaf which turned out to be an unwise decision. Khomeini ended up in Paris with unlimited access to the world's media which was denied to him by the Iraqi regime (Freedman, 2008: 67-8).

If brutality and suppression of the opposition were major part of the Shah's strategy to quell the movement. But, by the end of 1978, the Shah's regime had lost its courage and did not clamp down on the strikers because there were mutinies taking place in the military. Taking the changing circumstances and subsequent erosion of his power into consideration, the Shah decided to modify his strategy from confrontation to co-optation in order to save his influence in Iran. Hence he began to talk with members of the moderate opposition, leading to a new government under Shapour Bakhtiar of the National Front. This new government was formed only after the Shah had agreed to the condition of National Front that he will leave the country. But, in public, the Shah claimed that he agreed only to go on holiday. After he left on 16 January 1979, he never returned to Iran (Freedman, 2008: 68-9).

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<sup>3</sup> Khomeini was exiled by the Shah for criticising the Iranian regime in his lectures and publications in 1964 first to Turkey, then in 1965 to Iraq where he lived up to 1978.

The new Prime Minister Bakhtiar made efforts to speak to Khomeini, but he refused all contact and negotiations. Therefore, Bakhtiar tried to prevent Khomeini's return by closing airports, but his decision faced mass demonstrations, more than before. Finally, Khomeini arrived in Tehran on 1st February 1979, after one-and-half decade of exile. He received an enthusiastic welcome from three million Iranians which he used for denouncing the new government by directly addressing the people and urged them to continue strikes and demonstrations.

Bakhtiar's government lacked authority and could not count on the loyalty of the armed forces because senior military commanders issued an announcement on 11th February that "the armed forces would observe neutrality in the confrontation between the government and the people" (Gasirowski, 2007: 55). The next day after the announcement from the military, Bakhtiar went into hiding and the revolutionaries began to take control of Iran's institutions. Khomeini appointed Liberation Movement leader Mehdi Bazargan to head the provisional government.

However, political turmoil did not end with this; the fight ensued between radical leftists and radical Islamists on various issues. Bazargan tried to negotiate between the two groups in which he could not succeed. His power was regularly undermined by radical Islamists, who in the capacity of the members of revolutionary committees arrested the top officials of the Shah's regime and in hastily concluded trials executed them. In all this, Khomeini sided with radical Islamists who were literally running the parallel government through their majority in the Revolutionary Council and other revolutionary institutions (Ibid, 55-6).

At the end of March, a referendum was conducted by asking the Iranians whether they are "for or against the Islamic Republic". The Islamic Republic choice got 75 percent of polled votes. The referendum set the direction completely towards the establishment of an Islamic State. The groups which opposed the Islamic state and Islamist groups regularly clashed with each other, resulting in to hundreds of casualties. The Islamists suspected American role in these clashes.

Around 300 young Islamists seized the American embassy in Tehran on 4 November 1979 in order to put an end to American presence on the Iranian soil. They took 66 diplomats and marines as hostage, among them, 52 were held for 444 days. This

hostage incident had led to various international sanctions and isolation of the Iranian regime.

At the regional level, the Islamic Revolution provided new energy for dormant Islamist opposition which threatened the basis of regimes in West Asia. Among all the states of the region, the threat for Iraq looked particularly menacing due to several reasons: Iran and Iraq shared a long border because of which the chance of spill-over effect of the revolution was acute in case of Iraq. Iranian style of revolutionary Islam became popular among people across the Gulf region that had challenged Iraq's brand of secular Arab nationalism. Particularly disturbing to Iraq was the possible appeal of the revolution to Iraq's large Shia community because Iran's revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Khomeini had taught and mobilized opinion against the Shah from his exile at the shrine city of Najaf in Iraq. He enjoyed considerable following among Iraq's Shias in Najaf and other shrine cities (Bakhash, 2004: 20-1).

Along with these threats for Iraq, there was also an opportunity for Saddam Hussain because of various reasons: Iran was seen as vulnerable for intervention by outside powers due to the domestic turmoil between the parties that formed the coalition and opposed the Shah's rule were themselves competing for positions within the new government. The executions by revolutionaries and the fleeing out of the country of military personnel in large numbers had depleted the fighting ability of Iranian armed forces. The change of power created shortage of military equipment because America stopped all kinds of military supplies. The hostage of American diplomats had led to the isolation of Iran at international level (Lesch, 2001:79-80).

However, the environment for direct confrontation with Iraq was created by the new regime of Iran through various hostile activities. The revolutionary government stopped the work of an Iran-Iraq frontier commission that was mapping the border between the two countries, which was required to be completed under the 1975 Algiers Agreement. Though the work of the commission was almost completed by 1979, it was stopped before a small rectification could be made in Iraq's favour around Qasr-e Shirin. This lack of interest on the part of Iran had indeed displayed the non-seriousness about Algiers Agreement (Bakhash, 1989: 21).



The new regime in Iran had started supplying arms for opposition groups and openly encouraged the Shias to rebel against the Baath Party rule in Iraq. With the help of agents inside Iraq, it engaged in targeted assassinations and disturbances to destabilise the country. On 1 April 1980, a failed attempt to assassinate Deputy Premier Tariq Aziz was made by an Iranian agent, Samir Nur Ghalam while the former was visiting Mustansariyah University in Baghdad. The attack killed many students.

Saddam Hussain became angry and on the same day he went to the university to deliver his response:

It is not our tradition to make smears, but we tell you by God, by God, by God, in the name of every particle of earth in Iraq that the pure blood that was shed in Mustansariyah University was not shed in vain. The Arab nations will triumph everywhere, so that the banner of the Arab revolution will fly aloft everywhere, and so that the banner of revolution will be raised high in Iraq (Halliday, 2005: 53).

Thus, the challenge that was emanating from the neighbour was accepted by Hussain for two reasons: to teach a lesson to revolutionary Iran for encouraging Iraqi Shias to rise up against the Baath regime and to take advantage of the political turmoil in Iran to display his quest for regional supremacy. Therefore, he launched a direct war on Iran in 1980.

## **The Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty**

In March 1979, Egypt and Israel, the bitter enemies in West Asia signed a peace accord which is regarded as the major diplomatic breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The culmination of the accord in 1979 was possible due to several developments which took place in Egypt and Israel since 1967. Israel became a leading military state in the region by making a pre-emptive attack in 1967 on three frontline Arab states, Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Within six days, it had totally destroyed the air power and ruined the strategy of defence of frontline states and occupied Sinai and Gaza from Egypt, West Bank from Jordan, and Golan Heights from Syria (Stine, 2007: 183-5).

It held these newly occupied territories as bargaining chips to exchange for peace, recognition, and security from the Arab neighbours in the initial years (Quandt, 2004:

65). As the time passed, it refused to give up the newly occupied territories to respective countries. Instead, it started consolidating its position by allowing new Jewish settlements. There was also an economic reason for holding on to the territories as they possessed natural resources like water and oil (Stein, 1999: 11).

The 1967 war also made Israel a strategic ally of America which helped Israel diplomatically and economically as it received diplomatic support in United Nations and huge military aid (Lieber, 2000: 20-21). America played a significant role in passing U.N. Resolution 242 unanimously by all members of Security Council, which set the framework for the “land for peace” formula between Israel and its Arab neighbours, which gave a structure to all subsequent diplomatic measures in the region.

Some of the provisions of Resolution 242 are: withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the 1967 conflict; termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force; guaranteeing freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area; achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem; and guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every state in the area through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones (Journal of Palestine Studies, 1979: 10-11).

However, the passing of Resolution could not force the states in West Asia to come on to the negotiating table to address their dispute. Therefore, American Secretary of State, William Rogers, spelled out the implications of 242 on the Israeli-Egyptian front in a proposal popularly known as Rogers Plan and visited the region to get their approval. The plan had highlighted some of the key points which can be agreed to settle the dispute and restore peace between Israel and Egypt. The proposal included

establishment of demilitarized zones, the taking of effective measures in the Sharm al-Shaykh area to guarantee freedom of navigation in the Strait of Tiran, and arrangements for security and the final disposition of Gaza. Within this framework, ‘the former international boundary between Egypt and the mandated territory of

Palestine would become the secure and recognized boundary between Israel and the UAR'. In exercising sovereignty over the Suez Canal, Egypt would affirm the right of ships of all nations, including Israel, to pass freely through the canal without discrimination or interference. Egypt and Israel would agree to mutually respect and acknowledge each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and right to live in peace within secure and recognized borders (Quandt, 2005: 67-8).

The Rogers Plan was originally a joint position put forward with the support of the Soviet Union, but it was rejected by both Israel and Egypt when it was introduced to them in 1969. However, the proposal had laid down the foundation for future negotiations for settling the Arab-Israeli conflict, as ten years later, the two parties signed a peace treaty based more or less on the terms of the same rejected proposal (Quandt, 2004: 67).

The President of Egypt, Anwar Sadat took a bold decision of attacking Israel in October 1973. Such a drastic step was taken by Sadat because he realised that the Egyptian unrest sprung from an acute sense of hurt to their honour, which can only be remedied by a renewed control of land that had fallen under Israeli occupation after the war of 1967. There were also economic reasons behind Sadat's decision for all-out attack as three out of four pillars of the Egyptian economy in terms of generating foreign exchange were directly or indirectly got affected due to the loss of Sinai.

First, Egypt registered sharp decline in oil production and depended on imports for its domestic consumption because most of its oil reserves were located in or around the Sinai Peninsula. Second, Egypt relies heavily on Suez Canal tolls, but the canal was blocked after 1967 war, restoring it was a difficult task because Israel held the east bank of the Suez Canal in the Sinai and could easily impede passing ships. Third, Egypt is one of the world's most visited tourist places because of its unique Pharaonic and Islamic history, the government depended on tourism to generate revenues and foreign exchange, but tourism declined sharply after the 1967 war. Therefore, his main objective since taking office of President was to get back the lost territories from

Israel to restore the honour and economy to consolidate his position in Egypt (Lesch, 2001:31-2,).<sup>4</sup>

The war on Israel by Egypt and Syria caught America by surprise. In this war, Egypt shattered the belief of Israel that its power is impenetrable by making the attacks deep into Israeli positions. Although it could not hold on to the initial advantage in the war till the end, the war certainly changed the course of diplomacy. As Kumaraswamy (2006) observes, while earlier Arab-Israeli conflicts sowed the seeds for the next round of hostilities, the 1973 War resulted in the way for first peace between Israel and Arab states. The war changed the view of both Israel and America. It opened the way for a creative period of American diplomacy with Egypt. Kissinger spent long hours working for a series of interim agreements between Israel and Egypt, and achieved the first breakthroughs toward establishing peace.

Another objective of Sadat behind negotiating with Israel was to move closer to America and get financial aid. The previous alliance with the Soviet Union had proved unreliable, so Sadat thought that America would be a more consistent ally in terms of economic and diplomatic support for Egypt. He understood that the road to have favourable relations with America passes through Israel; hence he took a different route from other Arab states towards Israel. He encouraged secret diplomacy between Egyptian and Israeli officials. He even paid a visit to Jerusalem in 1977 to negotiate the territorial issue and establish normalcy between Egypt and Israel (Quandt, 2004: 66-8).<sup>5</sup>

However, due to the mutual distrust between Egyptian and Israeli leaders, the negotiations could not progress. Therefore, both countries wanted American mediation to continue their diplomatic efforts. So they requested Jimmy Carter to take steps to take forward the failing negotiations. Early in August 1978, appalled by the breakdown of negotiations, Carter dispatched Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to Cairo and Jerusalem to deliver personal invitations to Sadat and Begin to a summit meeting at Camp David in September 1978 (Mahmood, 1985: 68-9).

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<sup>4</sup> The fourth pillar of getting foreign exchange for Egypt is the remittances from its expatriates in the Gulf countries.

<sup>5</sup> President Sadat is the first head of an Arab state who visited Israel after its founding and recognised Israel as an independent state through his visit to Jerusalem.

After intense negotiations, two documents emerged from Camp David. One was the blueprint for an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, which called for an Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai, including the dismantling of the air bases and the Israeli settlements after the approval from Knesset, in return for peace with Egypt. The second document envisioned a five-year period of autonomy for the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza. An administrative body, or authority, would be elected and at the end of the first three years, negotiations would begin over the question of eventual sovereignty. The final signature on the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty was penned in March 1979 (Mahmood 1985: 77).

The outcome of the Camp David is a significant success for Israel; it had gained much and conceded little. It had effectively neutralized the one Arab power that presented a significant military threat to its security. In addition, by pursuing a bilateral peace treaty it skilfully avoided linkage to the Palestinian issue. On the other hand, Egypt regained the Sinai, but lost the respect of the rest of the Arab world. It received around two billion dollars economic aid annually from America after 1978 which was largely spend on purchasing arms and building the military. The treaty could establish only cold peace between Israel and Egypt because the relations did not progress as expected, which is an unusual phenomenon after the establishment of peace treaty and the hostility towards each other among public continued (Stine 1999: 154).

Though, it could successfully achieve the friendship of America, but it earned hostility from Arab countries spearheaded by Iraq. Saddam Hussain invited Iraq's Arab allies on 17 November 1978 for a meeting in Baghdad, to coordinate the action to be taken in the aftermath of the Camp David Accords of 17<sup>th</sup> September. The meeting failed to take any concrete steps against Egypt apart from asserting the Arab nation's commitment to a just peace and a threat to take various economic sanctions if and when the treaty with Israel was formally signed. The threat of action from fellow Arab countries could not prevent Sadat from signing the accord in March 1979 (Sluglet and Sluglet, 2001: 203-04).

Once again Hussain called for the Arab League meeting for the second time in Baghdad which was convened in the same month of signing the agreement. This time, the meeting opted for the diplomatic isolation of Egypt, which had resulted in her expulsion from the Arab League in which it was the founding member and the

shifting of League's headquarters from Cairo to Tunis. Thus, with the expulsion of Egypt, a vacuum of power was created in the Arab-Israel arena and Iraq tried to obtain this position among Arab countries to assert its supremacy in the region (Lesch, 2001: 70-1).

### **The Challenge to the Legitimacy of Al-Saud**

The Al-Saud dynasty in Saudi Arabia derives its legitimacy from the fact that they are the custodians of two holy places of Islam. However, their power was challenged from time to time by radical section of Wahhabis for not complying with the puritan form of Islam. In the late 1920s, the first challenge was mounted by some tribal leaders who were the members of Abdul Aziz Al-Saud's Ikhwan warriors (the force which assisted in the founding of modern Saudi Arabia) accusing him of deviating from the path of Islam, but they were defeated in the Battle of Sabala in 1929. Another puritanical protest took place in mid-1960s, it was led by Prince Khalid bin Musa, in opposition to King Faisal's policies of incremental modernization, but the opposition was crushed by killing the Prince in 1965.

The most serious threat for the regime occurred on 20th November 1979, when an ex-national guard and former student at the Islamic University in Medina, Juhayman Al-Otaibi along with his associates challenged the Saudi monarchy by seizing the Grand Mosque of Makkah (Dekmejian, 1994: 627-28). This incident clearly displayed the carelessness of Saudi administration in protecting the holy places and questions were raised inside and outside the country on the legitimacy of Saudi monarchy.

The revolt of Juhayman Al-Otaibi was not supported by any foreign actor, rather it was a home grown opposition, but it had drawn inspiration from 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran which overthrew the Shah (Al-Rasheed, 2006: 103). The message of provocative speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini, declaring monarchy to be an un-Islamic form of government and his call for Saudi citizens to rebel against their government were having their impact. The idea of exporting his brand of Islam to put an end to the unpopular and anti-people monarchical systems operating in the oil-rich Gulf states seems to have given a fillip to the already existing hatred among the rebels against the Al-Saud monarchy (Pradhan, 2002: 28). In fact, Juhayman Al-Otaibi and most of his associates enjoyed the patronage of some of the top Wahhabi ulama as

they were the students of prestigious Islamic universities of Makkah and Medina. They actively took part in Salafi activities of Medina which were funded and encouraged by Sheikh Bin Baz (the Rector of Islamic University of Medina). But, this support of Sheikh in 1970s for Juhayman's group was stopped in 1977 because of their criticism of Sheikh for his growing closeness with the ruling elite which they hated.

This hatred of ruling elite was developed in Juhayman over a period of time. In the initial years of 1970s, he made appeals to the monarchy; calling for a return to pure Islam, denunciation of all Western influences, an end to school and college education for women, the ban of television, the expulsion of all non-Muslims from Saudi Arabia, and the use of oil revenues only for religious purposes (Simons, 1998: 257, Al-Rasheed, 2006: 105). But his appeals failed to make any difference in the attitude of King Faisal who wanted to modernise Saudi Arabia by treading on the Western technological advancement. Hence, he changed his statements from appeals to direct threats, in a pamphlet entitled "Rules of Allegiance and Obedience: The Misconduct of Rulers", Juhayman declared:

Our belief is that the continued rule [by the House of Saud] is a destruction of God's religion even if they pretend to uphold Islam. We ask God to relieve us of them all ... Anyone with eyesight can see today how they represent religion as a form of humiliation, insult and mockery. These rulers have subjected Muslims to their interests and made religion into a way of acquiring their material interests. They have brought upon the Muslims all evil and corruption (Simons, 1998: 309).

The distance from Sheikh Bin Baz and the increase in hostility against the government in the content of pamphlets by Juhayman and his associates gave a chance for the Ministry of Interior to take action against them. In 1978, Juhayman and 98 of his associates were arrested and held in prison for six weeks for questioning. But, they were let free on the judgement of Sheikh Bin Baz as he did not find the grounds on which to declare their preaching contrary to Islam (Niblogue, 2006: 61).

However, the detention and interrogation by the police failed to put an end to their anti-monarchy activities, instead, they had intensified them by going underground. As they had emerged from the Wahhabi circles, they had a clear idea about the weaker

side of the Saudi Arabian state. Hence, they selected the Grand Mosque of Makkah to overthrow the monarchy on an auspicious day, which was 20 November 1979 (corresponding to the first day of the fifteenth century in the Islamic calendar). A group of about 200 men seized the Grand Mosque. The rebel group was led by Juhayman and his brother-in-law, Muhammad Ibn Abdallah Al-Qahtani, a former student of the Shar'iah at Riyadh University.

They had anticipated a long siege because they knew very well that the government would not be able to take tough action risking the structure of the Mosque. So, they had smuggled arms, water and food supplies one day before the seizure and hidden them in the cells of Mosque. Immediately after seizing the Mosque, Juhayman proclaimed his brother-in-law to be the Mahdi (the Divinely Guided One) on microphone and asked every one to recognize as such. The worshippers were not convinced and protested; and those who protested were shot by the rebels. The Imam and many others escaped, but 30 people were taken hostage (Kour, 1991: 49-50).

The armed forces laid siege to the Mosque and repeatedly called the rebels to surrender, but they did not respond. After lengthy deliberations with the ulama for five days, the government got a *fatwa* issued for taking action against the rebels. The troops were ordered to storm the Mosque which was strongly resisted by the rebels and this inflicted many casualties. The troops were able to clear the Mosque in two weeks only after receiving the help from French paratroopers (Alam, 2007: 30). In this operation, state forces incurred 127 deaths and 451 injuries, the rebels lost 117, which included the Mahdi who was killed on the fourth day of the fighting and nearly dozen worshippers caught in the gunfire on the first morning of the seizure (Kour, 1991: 50). Juhayman and 62 of his associates had surrendered on 4 December 1979; they consisted of 41 Saudis, 10 Egyptians, 6 South Yemenis, 3 Kuwaitis, one North Yemeni, one Sudanese and one Iraqi national. The rebels were tried in secret and the trials were rapidly concluded to avoid all publicity and on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1980, they were dispersed to eight different cities for public beheading (Simons, 1998: 310).

This rebellion caused an embarrassment for Al-Saud regime inside and outside the Kingdom. Juhayman belonging to one of the main tribes of Najd, which had been the core support for the Al-Saud family and its religious tradition, which is the ideological backbone of the Kingdom, displayed the fragile nature of Al-Saud regime's



foundation of legitimacy (Alam, 2007: 30). The handling of the rebellion invited criticism by Muslims across the world. Khomeini called it as a plot by imperial forces led by America to destroy the holy places of Islam. The Muslims of Pakistan, Iran, India and Philippines held mass demonstrations while the seizure was continuing, and condemned America and Al-Saud monarchy for the incident (Simons, 1998: 57). Looking at the growing concern regarding the holy places' security among Muslims, many West Asian countries offered military help to deal with the rebels. The Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar university of Cairo, which is one of the top most Islamic learning centre in the world, sent a telegram and suggested for calling a meeting of top Islamic scholars from across the world to deal with the religious aspects of taking a action against the rebels inside the Mosque (Lacey, 2009: 29). This offer of assistance was a direct challenge to the authority of both the ruling monarchy and the Wahhabi ulama.

While the fight to end the seizure of the Grand Mosque was going on, trouble erupted in the eastern province of Al-Hasa by the Shias. Al-Hasa is a Shia majority province in Saudi Arabia and it possesses majority of Kingdom's oil wealth under its soil and water. The Shias are the largest minority in Saudi Arabia constituting anywhere between four and 15 percent of the population and numbering anywhere between one and four million (Dietl, 2006: 20). The discontent among Shias against the Al-Saud rule had grown because they were treated as second grade citizens by the Sunni majority. Their rights related to faith and political participation are not recognised (Pasha, 1999: 96-7).

Hence, they needed a fillip to put out their discontent against the government, which they got from Revolution in Shia Iran and the Saudi government's full occupation with the events in Grand Mosque. The Shias of Al-Hasa came out on to the streets on 10 Muharram for celebrating the Martyrdom of their Imam Al-Hussain, the son of Ali, an anniversary which was forbidden to celebrate since the Wahhabis occupied Al-Hasa in 1913. The National Guard dealt severely with them, killing at least eleven people and arresting many (Kour, 1991: 49-50). The use of force failed to quell the demonstrations completely as they were once again witnessed on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1980, commemorating the first anniversary of the return of Ayatollah Khomeini to Iran.

The challenge to the legitimacy of Al-Saud monarchy by the Juhayman incident and Shia demonstrations in Al-Hasa province had indeed affected the image of Saudi

Arabia in the world. Saddam Hussain wanted to cash in on this image fall of Saudi Arabia through popular gestures (Lesch, 2001: 60). He was not only one of the several Arab leaders who condemned the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan on 25 December 1979, he went ahead and signed an anti-Soviet pact with Saudi Arabia on 25 March 1980 in support of North Yemen's efforts to resist a Soviet-backed attack from South Yemen. The Saudis were also happy to embrace Saddam as a staunch defender of Arab interests in the Gulf.

In fact, after their first meeting in 1975 at the OPEC summit in Algeria, King Fahd developed a very close relationship with the Iraqi President when both of them were the second in hierarchy, but were the real power centres in their respective countries. Their personal friendship improved the relations between the Kingdom and Iraq after a long period of acute tension that had grown further after the Islamic Revolution in Iran. When Hussain launched a war on Iran, Saudi Arabia threw all its weight behind Iraq and provided financial assistance (Simons, 1998: 57-8).

Thus, the political developments involving Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the major countries of the West Asian region, coincidentally in the same year had created a power vacuum in West Asia. Iran had become weak both inside and outside in the immediate aftermath of the overthrow of Shah, Egypt lost the leadership position among Arabs after signing the peace treaty with Israel and questions were raised on Al-Saud's legitimacy after the Makkah seizure. Saddam Hussain wanted to exploit this vacuum for asserting the Iraq's supremacy in the region. So, he got Egypt expelled from Arab League, made friendship with Saudi Arabia and launched the war on Iran.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Iraq's Quest for Regional Supremacy:**

#### **The Wars of 1980 and 1990**

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The place of powerful states in the world had never been static because of regular conflicts and power politics. It is more so in the case of the West Asian region which is one of the most conflict-prone areas in the world. There is constant competition among the states to assert their supremacy whenever there is a change in the political milieu of the region. Hence, because of the political changes that had reduced the position of three major powers, Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia in the region in 1979, Iraq under Saddam Hussain's presidency saw itself as a potential power, a state that has the capability to dominate the region by overpowering its neighbours. The potential power only seeks to achieve domination when the anticipated costs and risks are low for the state.

The Baath Party had significantly enhanced the capabilities of the Iraqi state after its 1968 coup by using the revenues obtained from the sale of oil; the state had made impressive strides in economic, military, education and foreign policy arenas in the 1970s. This phenomenal turnaround in the fortune of Iraq in such a short time was possible because of the centralisation of Iraqi power in the hands of the Baath Party and particularly, due to the active role played by Saddam Hussain, first as the deputy leader of Party and the Government and later as President, in formulating and executing the regime's policies. Hussain had meticulously purged all those high level military officers from the military and administration, who were considered as potential threat for the Baath regime and he was able to put an end to the frequent change of government in Iraq. This helped it to emerge as a powerful country in West Asia.

As already discussed in the previous chapter, Iraq in 1979 had made efforts to demonstrate its newly acquired powerful position to assert its supremacy over the region by taking the political developments of the time into consideration. It had employed diplomacy to expel Egypt from Arab League for signing a unilateral peace deal with Israel, and secured the support of Saudi Arabia for its external ambition by invoking the common threats from Shia Iran and Communist USSR. It also made diplomatic gestures towards Iran in its initial response to the overthrow of the Shah and the emergence of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as the revolutionary leader. In a congratulatory message send to Khomeini by Iraqi President Al-Bakr said, “a regime which does not support the enemy against us and does not intervene in our affairs, and whose world policy corresponds to the interests of the Iranian and Iraqi people, will certainly receive our respect and appreciation” (Karsh, 1987-1988: 87).

This positive attitude of Iraq had continued towards the revolutionary regime in Iran throughout 1979. For example, after the formal withdrawal of Iran from the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), the Iraqi government offered its good offices for Teheran to join the Non-Aligned Movement and in August 1979, Iraq’s new President Saddam Hussain extended an invitation to the Iranian Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan to pay a visit to Iraq for improving bilateral relations (Gause, 2002: 63-4). During the same period, the Iraqi leaders in their statements referred Iran as a “brotherly nation, linked to the Arab people of Iraq by 'strong ties of Islam, history and noble traditions', and praised the revolutionary regime in Tehran for pursuing a policy that underlined these 'deep historical relations'” (Karsh, 1987-1988: 87).

Iraqi leaders’ demonstration of goodwill was not reciprocated by Iran. Instead, in June 1979, the revolutionary regime began urging publicly the population of Arab Gulf including the Iraqis to rise up and overthrow the regimes (Pradhan, 2002: 28). This propaganda campaign was followed up by widespread anti-Baath demonstrations in Iran, some of the participants turned violent and conducted armed attacks on Iraqis and its installations. At the end of same year, the Iranian regime escalated its anti-Baathist campaign by resuming its support for the Iraqi Kurds. It had also extended support for Iraqi Shia opposition by providing moral and material support to Shi'ite underground movements like Daawa Party (Parasiliti, 2003: 158). It initiated targeted assassination attempts of prominent Iraqi officials with the help of its agents, the most

significant attempt of assassination was the failed attempt to kill the Iraqi Deputy Premier, Tariq Aziz, on first April 1980.

The Baath regime tried to control these Iranian pressure tactics in the domestic sphere by suppressing the Shi'ite underground organizations and expelling Iranian citizens from Iraq. At regional level, Iraq made attempts to organize a united Arab front to oppose the export of the Iranian revolution. It countered the Iranian propaganda campaign in a direct manner by launching verbal attacks on the Islamic regime, and by extending its moral and material support to Iranian separatist groups like Iranian Kurds and Arabs in Khuzestan.<sup>6</sup> However, these counter-measures could not make an impact on the revolutionary regime instead, it escalated the tension between both countries. After the first anniversary of Khomeini's return to Iran from forced exile, the direct confrontation was started between Iran and Iraq; regularly the armed forces clashed on the border. These skirmishes, which took place along the frontier, had some times resulted in severe fighting, involving tanks and artillery duels and air strikes (Karsh, 1987-1988: 87-8). In September 1980, Iraq took a decision to launch a limited war on Iran to put an end to its internal interference in Iraq and display the powerful position of Iraqi military. But, the limited war of Iraq had dragged on for eight long years and had become one of the longest and brutally fought wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## **Causes of the Iran-Iraq War**

The Iran-Iraq war started on 17 September 1980 and ended in July 1988 after Khomeini accepted the conditions laid down in Resolution 598 unanimously passed by the UNSC. Though this war was caused primarily by the regional political developments and the regional ambitions of both regimes in 1979-80, the fault lines were always in existence between Iran-Iraq which was deeply entrenched in their history dating back to thousands of years.

The conflict in the 1980s between Iran and Iraq was a manifestation of an old rivalry between Arabs and Persians. It goes back to their ancient civilizations as they had always competed for power. The Persian influence was extended to the

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<sup>6</sup> Khuzestan is a province in Iran which is Sunni Arab dominated and it has huge oil reserves.

Mediterranean, where as the Mesopotamian and Tigris/Euphrates civilizations were extended well into the heartland of Persia at different times. The tug of war between the two civilizations seemed to reach a truce when most of the people were united under the banner of Islam after the battle of Qadisiyya in 635, in which the Muslim Arabs defeated the Persian Sasanian Empire (El-Afandi, 1993). Yet, the conflict did not die between Arabs and Persians; it took the new shape of inter-Islamic conflict for power and succession in West Asia.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the traditional rivalry was once again revived after the establishment of Safavid dynasty in Persia, which set up Shi'ism as the state religion. The Safavids fought against the dominance of the Ottoman Empire since their founding. Meanwhile, they have also formalized the split in Islam between two distinct branches of theology that grew more and more irreconcilable. Until then, the Shia school of thought was considered as a fifth school of jurisprudence, alongside of the other four schools that are collectively labelled as Sunni or traditionalist. With the formal change over to Shi'ism, the Safavid dynasty pitted Arabs against Persians on sectarian lines (Kunt, 2005: 199-202). The inactive rivalries were awakened, and the earlier forms of conflict gave birth to modern day nationalism and dispute over national boundaries.

There was long standing border dispute between Ottoman and Safavid empires, and later in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century between Iraq and Iran. The dispute was started in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century between Ottoman and Safavid empires, but both the parties made efforts to settle their disputes through negotiations. "They agreed on vaguely defined boundaries that included areas of influence rather than boundary lines" (El-Afandi, 1992). From time to time, they concluded various treaties like Zuhab (1639), Kurdan (1746), Second Treaty of Erzerum (1847) etc.; all these treaties recognized the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire over the Shatt al-Arab waterway and some territories to its east. However, The Treaty of Erzerum, guaranteed freedom of navigation to Persian vessels in the Shatt al-Arab under the supervision of Ottoman forces (Kunt, 2005: 200). The Persians were not completely satisfied with the above treaties, therefore, they continued to push their claims westward. They wanted to control part of the Shatt so that their vessels could get unhindered rights of navigation. When the post World-War-I redefinition of boundaries was being taken up after the

demise of the Ottoman Empire, Persia staked a claim on parts of Iraqi territories. But, the claims were rejected by the British, who acquired a Mandate over Iraq from the League of Nations and held the territory as its zone of influence in spite of Persian claims to application of the thalweg principle to define the Persia-Iraq boundaries. Application of the thalweg would have meant drawing the boundary line in the middle of the navigation channel (Schofield, 2004: 32-8).

Instead, Persia was able to get only minor concessions unofficially during the British Mandate, particularly after the British involvement in production and export of Persian oil through Anglo-Persian companies. The thalweg was applied in the waters near Abadan and Muhammara, in order to facilitate the movement of oil tankers in the porting areas. After the independence of Iraq in 1921, Persia withheld its recognition of the new country due to the pending recognition of its territorial claims. therefore, a treaty was concluded in 1937 to settle the territorial dispute between both the parties; the treaty recognized thalweg in front of Abadan in Shatt as the official demarcation line (Karsh, 2002: 8).<sup>7</sup>

After the Baath regime came into power in Iraq in 1968, the Shah's fear mounted because of the Baathist charter, which talked about the establishment of a pan-Arab identity and its open pronouncement to establish a united Arab front after the Arab defeat in the war with Israel in 1967 under Iraqi protection. That would mean shifting the power centres, and the conflict potential, close to the Iranian borders. This potential challenge of the Baath was not in the interest of Iran as it wanted to continue its dominant position in West Asia. Therefore, the Shah abrogated the 1937 Treaty and demanded the application of the thalweg as the boundary between the two states to expose the vulnerability of Iraq (Hiro, 2001: 2-7).

The Shah's 1969 decision to abrogate the 1937 treaty was challenged by the Iraqi government in the International Court. Subsequently, the Shah shifted the battle front from the legal arena to the political/military arena. He began to support the claims of the Kurdish population for autonomy within Iraq in the 1970s by actively extending financial and arms support for Kurdish guerrillas, which he continued until the Shatt al-Arab dispute was settled to his satisfaction. This civil war with Kurds supported by

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<sup>7</sup> Persia was officially renamed as Iran in 1935 by its ruler Reza Shah.

Iran had a significant impact on the Iraqi state as it exhausted the wealth obtained from oil and also inflicted huge military losses. Therefore, the Baath regime wanted to put an end to the problem. In 1975, in Algiers, the Shah and Iraq's Vice-President, Saddam Hussain, signed an agreement that gave Iran the thalweg in return for Iran's pledge to not interfere in Iraqi internal affairs and to stop supporting the Kurdish rebellion (Yildiz, 2004: 20-22).

Both countries agreed to establish commissions to redraw the disputed boundary lines, but the work of these commissions could not be completed because of the Iranian Revolution that toppled the Shah's regime in 1979 (Bakhash, 2004: 21). The hostilities were renewed once again between Iran and Iraq which resulted in frequent military confrontations in the later part of the year. On 17 September 1980, Iraq abrogated the 1975 Agreement under the claim that Iran had failed to live up to its treaty obligations. Five days later, the Iraqi troops and air force crossed the borders into Iran which marked the beginning of the Iraq-Iran war (Schofield, 2004: 54-6).

Iraq has its longest border with Iran. This is also the border where there has been the incessant and longest controversy. Iraq's north is inhabited by Kurds, who are also present in the adjacent territory of Iran. So, the regimes in Iran had used the Kurds to undermine the authority of the Iraqi government. The Kurdish problem started because British pledge to grant Kurds the right of self-determination at the end of World War I in return for the Kurdish help in bringing down the Ottoman Empire during War was not fulfilled (Yildiz, 2004: 11). As a result of this, the Kurds were found divided between five countries Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and the former Soviet Union after World War I; but none of them were willing to give up control over their Kurds (Anderson and Stansfield, 2004: 152).

Irrespective of this, the Kurdish nationalists wanted to realise their long-held national aspiration of creating an independent state of Kurdistan. For their goal to be realized, the sovereignty and political integrity of the regional states in which they inhabit have to be undermined. Among the five host countries, Iraq was the most vulnerable and volatile because the Kurds constitute about 20 percent of the population, a much higher percentage than in any of the other countries (Yildiz, 2004: 9-10). It is for this reason that Iraq had witnessed the most intensive and persistent nationalist demand by



Kurdish nationalists among all the host countries. Violent encounters in the form of guerrilla warfare and rebellion broke out since 1920s to destabilise the regimes.

Although none of the host countries would allow a Kurdish secessionist movement to succeed, they used them in the neighbouring country to extract political concessions. This strategy was widely used by both Iran and Iraq at different periods. The most extensively referred example of this type of relationship is the support which Iranian government gave to the Iraqi Kurdish rebels during the civil war of 1970s. The Shah's Iran actively supported the Kurdish rebellion financially, politically and militarily. They were provided safe sanctuary, offered military training, and supplied with arms, ammunitions and logistics (Anderson and Stansfield, 2004: 152-53).<sup>8</sup> However, the support for the Iraqi Kurds ceased in April 1975, following the signing of the Algiers Treaty between Iran and Iraq. But, once again the rebellion of Kurds mounted after a lull of four years in 1979-80 in Iraq for which Iraqi government accused Iran of supporting the Kurds (Edwards and Hinchcliffe, 2004: 72-83).

The traditional rivalry between Iran and Iraq can be regarded as competition by both states to impose their domination particularly in the Gulf region because of the vacuum created by the departure of Great Britain in 1971 from the region. Iran under the Shah saw itself as the sole guardian of Gulf security. This position was articulated in 1971 by the Shah stating that "I believe that the Persian Gulf must always be kept open - under Iranian protection - for the benefit of not only my country but the other Gulf countries and the world" (Karsh, 1987-1988: 85). To realise this function, the Shah embarked on a massive military build-up as he wanted Iran to be the most powerful force in the region. He had justified his program by arguing that "often military might alone had been our sole guarantee of survival" (Ibid). In order to procure advanced military equipment, he cultivated strong relations with President Nixon of America. The close ties amounted to Nixon giving the Shah complete freedom to have direct contacts with both the State Department and the Pentagon (Freedman, 2008: 64-5).

The Shah's military build-up raised suspicion in Iraq that it was aimed against them. This suspicion about Iran was further consolidated due to the various territorial and

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<sup>8</sup> It is noteworthy that the sympathy of the Iranian governments did not extend to the Iranian Kurds who were also suppressed with impunity.

political attempts of the Shah in the region. He made efforts to create a Gulf states' alliance without Iraq to establish Iran's dominant role in the region. He concluded a naval agreement in 1971 with Oman over patrolling of the Strait of Hormuz which is the supply route for Gulf oil. Immediately after the departure of Great Britain from Gulf, he occupied the islands of Abu Musa and Tunbs in 1971. He also made attempts to annex Bahrain (Potter and Sick, 2004: 18-9).

After the Shah's regime was overthrown, the new revolutionary regime in Iran did not relinquish the Shah's policy of regional domination. It encouraged the Shia population in the Gulf to stage Iranian-style Islamic revolutions. Iraq was the direct victim of this Iranian position because the appeal went out to its own Shia population through al-Dawa Party and other organizations which threatened the Baath rule.

On the other hand, Iraq's efforts to extend its control in the Gulf were restricted by the small size of its naval forces and limited access to the Gulf waters, and the shared sovereignty over Shatt al-Arab after the 1975 Algiers Agreement. Iraq's ambitions were not limited to the Gulf area alone because of the Baathist ideology and the Iraqi leaders' perceptions of their special role in the drive of Pan-Arabism. The Baathist leadership wanted Iraq to pursue the quest for leadership of the Arabs of North Africa and West Asia. After Egypt negotiated a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, Iraq and Syria vied for the role previously played by Egypt as the spokesman of the Arabs and the defender of Arab claims in international arenas. The leaders of both countries collaborated to suspend Egypt's membership in the Arab League and led the drive for an Arab boycott of Egypt.

The Iranian Revolution and the change of leadership in Iraq occurred in 1979. Saddam Hussain succeeded Ahmed Hassan Al-Bakr as President. Hussain's ambitions were to confer Egypt's vacated leadership role upon Iraq. Thus it became necessary for Iran to destabilize Iraqi politics in order to prevent such an eventuality. These competing and simultaneous efforts to gain domination had contributed for accelerating border hostilities in 1979 and 1980 (El-Afandi, 1993).

Due to the purges of the Shah's military men in the aftermath of the Revolution, the Iranian army lost over half its officers in the ranks from major to colonel, the air force lost half its pilots and 15 to 20 percent of its non-commissioned officers and

technicians. About half of the regular servicemen deserted the army and many more had been killed during and after the Revolution. As a result, the Iranian armed forces were below their pre-revolutionary strength before the start of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980. The size of the army decreased significantly, from 285,000 to around 150,000, whereas the Iraqi army stood at 200,000 (Karsh, 1987-1988: 89).

The economy of Iran was in a disaster stage during the revolutionary months. Oil production had reached to the lowest levels (Lesch, 2001: 79-80). There was struggle for leadership between moderate and radical factions of the Revolution which created a chaotic situation in Iran. The state had experienced the breakdown of police, judicial and local administration (Gasiorowski, 2007: 55-6). Thus, the turmoil in Iran had provided an opportunity for Saddam Hussain to take advantage of the situation and he invaded Iran in 1980 to display the supremacy of Iraq over West Asia.

### **War Strategies of Iran and Iraq**

The war strategies of Iran and Iraq throughout eight long years were dictated by respective political elites, who gave more importance to their personal ambitions rather than leaving the war for military professionals during the most part of the conflict. Though both parties had widely used modern weapons in the battle, their combat strategies were outdated in nature. They had invoked religious vocabulary, ethnic difference, sectarian divide etc. from time to time for motivating the masses to join the army and fight for their identity. They stretched the age limit in order to recruit children and old people for combat operations, build huge infantry force, inhumanly attacked the civilian areas, craved for complete defeat of the opponent etc.

The full fledged war was started by Iraq on 22 September 1980, five days after its President Saddam Hussain's televised address to the nation in which he announced that; "Since the rulers of Iran have violated this accord ... I here announce before you that the Accord of March 6, 1975 is terminated on our part too. Therefore, the legal relationship in the Shatt al-Arab must return as it had been prior to March 6, 1975" (Sick, 1989: 233). The Iraqi military provided the justification for starting the invasion by claiming that it had launched the war in self-defence. It cited that Iranian aircraft violated Iraqi air space on 69 occasions between April and September 1980, and on 4 September Iranian artillery opened fire across the Iraqi border from the three

small portions of land that were supposed to be handed over to Iraq under the 1975 Treaty.

The Iraqi attack was severe and pre-emptive in nature; its bombing targets were spread all over Iran and it captured more than 4,000 square miles of Iran's Khuzistan Province. This response to the alleged provocation of Iran was indeed disproportionate (Karsh, 2002: 21). Actually, Iran had no plans to confront Iraq in a direct battle as it did not build forces, and in the first few weeks, there was total absence of any Iranian military preparation for the war. On the other hand, Iraq had built up its military forces in a systematic manner between April and September 1980 in preparation for a lightning offensive to overthrow the hostile revolutionary regime in Iran.

Saddam Hussain took such a drastic step against Iran in order to overthrow the revolutionary regime on the basis of the following calculations: the confidence that in the wake of the revolution the Iranian military would not be capable of resisting a determined military attack from Iraq because of its disorganized and demoralized troops and the military's weakness due to the stoppage of cooperation from the West (Lesch, 2001: 79).

Saddam Hussain thought that in order to realise the longstanding Iraqi claims on Khuzistan which Iraq officially described as "Arabistan" during Iran-Iraq war, the Arab population of that territory would welcome liberation by Iraq. The confidence that Khomeini's rule would be unable to survive if a lightning military defeat inflicted on Iran, and a successor regime would be composed of individuals less hostile to the existing order, was the result of a perception which was probably reinforced by Iranian exiles and opposition elements. There was expectation that a swift and total defeat of Iran would shift the power balance in the Gulf region which may fulfil Iraq's ambition to be regarded as a regional power and would contribute for securing an unrivalled leadership position in Arab politics (Sick, 1989: 34).

However, the Iraqi invasion produced the opposite results to those intended by Saddam Hussain because he failed to understand the fervour among the Iranian people during the revolutionary period. In fact, the attack had helped Khomeini to strengthen his control by directing the nationalist sentiments around the Revolution, which

suppressed the internal opposition. He accelerated the efforts to rebuild an effective military machine along Islamic lines to defend Iran (Sterner, 1984: 132). The Arab population of Khuzistan province had displayed the patriotic feeling for Iran and resisted the Iraqi advance.

The pre-emptive attack by Iraqi air force to destroy Iran's air capability in a single stroke had failed largely due to the faulty intelligence and wrong strategy. Iraq's pilots depended on high-altitude bombing instead of making low-level attacks which would have ensured greater accuracy. As a result, the bulk of Iran's air force was able to escape safe. Iraq's forces completely left out the naval front of Iran by which it conceded control over the Gulf to the Iranian forces. Pelletiere notes: "failure to neutralize either Iran's air force or navy was a major blunder on the part of the Iraqis and caused immediate grave difficulties" (Pelletiere, 1992: 35). The strategy of Iraq was to keep the war limited, But it failed to do so, the war was expanded by attacking the targets deep in to Iraqi territory by Iran. On September 25 and 26, Iranian aircrafts attacked several oil refineries, the hydroelectric complex at Darbandi Khan, damaged Iraq's nuclear facility and raided the capital Baghdad. The navy ships attacked Iraqi oil refineries at Faw and caused extensive damage that significantly reduced Iraq's oil production capacity (Ibid, 35-6).

Iraq's military offensive was stalled by November 1980 as Iran began to counter-attack effectively and was able to drive Iraqi forces back toward the border in some occupied territories. With this, Iraq's ambition was widely perceived as a failure, which had undermined its regional influence and the drastic reduction in the oil revenue made it dependent on the financial and political support of its oil-rich Arab neighbours to continue the war (Razi, 1988: 710). After the successful retaliation and pushback of Iraqi forces by Iran at some places, a military stalemate ensued till the Summer of 1981 during which the Iranian army re-grouped its strength. Between September 1981 and May 1982, Iran conducted three major military offensives which forced Iraq to relinquish almost all the territories of Iran (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008: 138-39).

These gains by Iranian forces had provided for the first time an opportunity for a negotiated settlement of the conflict on the terms favourable to Iran. A debate had ensued within Iran whether to stop at the border or to continue its military advantage

with an attack into Iraq. At the end, the hardliners among the revolutionaries won the day (Sick, 1989: 235). Following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in early June 1982, Iran declared that its forces will liberate Jerusalem, passing through the holy city of Karbala in Iraq. "The road to Jerusalem lies through Baghdad" became one of the popular slogans of Iran's revolutionary armies (Bakhash, 1989: 57).

With in few days from then, Iranian military launched a series of massive offensives intended to make a dent in the Iraqi defences, to cut down Iraqi supply lines between the south and the capital and to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussain. This decision of the military might have been influenced by its own revolutionary hubris. Iran might have calculated that the Iraqi military was demoralized due to the combat losses, and would collapse in the face of a determined attack. It also thought that the Shia population of southern Iraq would welcome the Iranian army as liberators, the Iraqi regime would collapse in no time and Iran would emerge as the major power in the Gulf (Sick, 1989: 236-37).

The outcome of Iranian ambitions was also disastrous. The Iraqi forces had hardened their homeland defence with the support from Western states, and the conflict turned into a war of attrition (Pelletiere, 1992: 75-6). In the following years, out of desperation, Iraq began to attack civilian targets in Iran with missiles and aircraft, which are termed as the "war of the cities". It also started missile attacks against Iranian oil shipments (the "tanker war"), and eventually resorted to chemical weapons and poison gas to ruin Iran's mass infantry tactics (Karsh, 2002: 23-84). As Sick argues,

If Iran had chosen to sue for peace in mid-1982, it would have been in a good position to influence the terms of a settlement. At that time, Iran was widely perceived as having snatched victory from the jaws of defeat, and its military forces were regarded as perhaps the most potent in the region. By pursuing peace, Iran could have gone far toward restoring its image with both the regional states and the international community, and it could have established a role for itself as a power broker in the region. Instead Iran once again chose to let its revolutionary fervour overcome a realistic appraisal of its own long-term interests (Sick, 1989: 236-7).

The war of attrition starting from late 1982 had led to huge losses for Iran because its young conscripts' bodies were no match for Iraqi tanks, aircraft, helicopter gun-ships and the occasional use of poison gas. Therefore, Iran changed its strategy of conflict for the time being and began to rely on small-scale actions and guerrilla attacks to

continue the challenge for Iraqi forces. Meanwhile, it made secret preparations for a bold military strike which surprised Iraq and its allies. This attack was launched on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1986, few days after the seventh anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. The Iranian forces had crossed the Shatt al-Arab under the cover of a rainstorm, and broke the Iraqi defence in its southern part and occupied the port city of Faw (Pelletiere, 1990: 17-8).

This brilliant feat of attack was altogether different from previous Iranian offensives which was meticulously planned and rehearsed for more than one year. While planning, sheer religious fervour was put aside and importance was given for military professionalism to boldly blend the strength of Iran's several military organizations. Encouraged by the success of Faw offensive in 1986, Khomeini had openly declared that "there was a time when the situation was chaotic and everything was in ruins, but thank God everything is now proper and right. . . . Domestic and international affairs are put right" (Sick, 1989: 237).

Khomeini made that statement only after receiving intelligence briefings from America on both Iraq and the Soviet Union, and the delivery of some 1500 TOW missiles and components for its American built Hawk air-defense system from Israel which was used in Faw offensive (Myloie, 1989: 52-3). Actually, few days before Khomeini's optimistic appraisal of Iran's domestic and international situation, America had secretly send Robert C. McFarlane, the former National Security Council Adviser, to Tehran to urge Iran's assistance in freeing US hostages in Lebanon and to seek a broader political dialogue with the Islamic revolutionary regime. However, this growing cooperation between America and Iran was not liked by powerful factions of revolutionary Iran; they opposed all kinds of attempts of tampering of revolutionary objectives, and viewed any dealings with the "Great Satan" as a treasonous act (Freedman, 2008: 187-88).

This secret dealing of America with Iran had come in to full view of public through Iran-Contra revelations in the American Congress, which exposed the dual face of America in the Iran-Iraq conflict. The loss of face of America among its allies in the Gulf was aptly presented by Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Richard Murphy in front of the congressional Committee on Foreign Relations. He said; "Frankly, in the light of the Iran-contra revelations, we had found that the

leaders of the Gulf states were questioning the coherence and seriousness of U.S. policy in the Gulf along with our reliability and staying power” (Ibid, 197).

Hence to reinstate the confidence among Arabs, America dispatched Richard Murphy to Iraq in early 1987, who met Saddam Hussain on 11 May. During his visit, Murphy had promised Hussain that America would make an effort for a resolution calling for a mandatory halt of arms shipments to Iran in the UN Security Council without naming Iran directly in the resolution. Rather, the resolution would call on both Iran and Iraq to agree to a cease-fire and to withdraw their forces to the international boundaries. He is also reported to have said that the UN would take measures to impose worldwide arms embargo on the party that rejects the demand. This strategy was made expecting that Iran would reject the resolution (Ibid, 201-2).

Subsequently, Resolution 598 was presented by America and it was adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council on 20 July 1987. The key demands of the Resolution were that Iran and Iraq had to observe an immediate ceasefire; put an end to all military actions on land, sea and air; withdraw all forces to the internationally recognised borders without delay; start mediation to establish a comprehensive, just and honourable settlement acceptable to both the parties; and explore the idea of establishing an impartial body to inquire the responsible state for starting the conflict (Malone, 2006: 36).

Contrary to the expectations of America and Iraq, Iran did not reject the Resolution. Instead, it offered to observe a cease-fire on the condition that, at first, in accordance with paragraph six of the resolution, a commission should be formed to determine who started the war. Iraq rejected this offer of Iran as "invalid", and demanded that the Resolution had to be implemented in the order of its paragraphs. Sluglett and Sluglett point out two reasons behind Iraq’s rejection of this offer of Iran because Saddam Hussain wanted to claim a meaningful victory, and the implementation of paragraph 6 of Resolution 598 “inquiring into the responsibility for the conflict” would have established that Iraq had started the war (Sluglett and Sluglett, 1990: 20).

Shortly thereafter, once again Iraq launched full-scale attacks on Iranian cities and ships to end any opportunity to test the Iranian offer of a negotiated cease-fire. Iran also retaliated by bombing the territories of Iraq and placing mines in the central



Persian Gulf which struck the naval vessels of America, and set off a round of clashes with American forces in the Gulf (Pelletiere, 1992: 129-30). Iraq's offensive had yielded results against Iran's disorganized and disheartened military forces. It was able to recapture the Faw peninsula in a lightning attack on 18 April 1988 and had pushed back Iranian forces all along the front almost after two years of fighting. The losing of Faw was a political and psychological loss for Iran because it was the major tangible symbol of Iranian success in the war, whose loss had made Iran virtually empty-handed in eight year long war (Chubin, 1989: 11). Iraq inhumanly attacked the Iranian cities with missiles and chemical warheads in large numbers. It had launched 160 extended-range SCUD missiles called "Al-Hussain" toward Tehran alone between mid February and late April 1988. This had created panic among the armed forces and the common public (McNaugher, 1990: 4).

The loss of territorial advantage and the panic of weapons had led to anti-war demonstrations and open criticism of war in the major Iranian cities. The information began to circle in the public that Khomeini was severely ill and virtually incapacitated which had created confusion in the military. To put things in order, Khomeini appointed Hashemi Rafsanjani (the Speaker of the Majlis) as the acting commander in chief in an effort to halt the uncertainty and disintegration of the armed forces, and to start new peace efforts at UN. Consequently, on 18<sup>th</sup> July, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Vilayati sent a letter to UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar formally accepting all the provisions of Resolution 598. Iraq was surprised on the rapid developments in the UN, and initially it had refused to accept a cease-fire. Its military continued the mopping-up operations by using chemical weapons for territorial advantage in the war by utterly disregarding the Security Council and world opinion (Sick, 1989: 241-42). However, Saddam Hussain could not continue this for long and had succumbed to the international pressure to put an end to the offensive on Iranian positions, and agreed to accept a cease-fire on 6<sup>th</sup> August, but on one condition that the cease-fire should be followed by direct talks. Subsequently, a UN observer force was deployed to the region, and a cease-fire had come into effect on 20<sup>th</sup> August. As demanded by Hussain, formal talks were held between the Foreign Ministers of Iran and Iraq in Geneva on 25<sup>th</sup> August, under the auspices of UN Secretary General to settle the pressing issues (Malone, 2006: 42).

The outcome of this eight years long Iran-Iraq war on both Iran and Iraq was equally debilitating. Though Iraq had gained some territorial advantage almost in the final months of the war, it was too little to be regarded as victory in any conflict. The main irony of the war is that what was envisaged by Saddam Hussain as a limited campaign, had turned out to be one of the longest, costliest and bloodiest conflicts after the World War II. The war got extended for such a long period because Hussain had failed to strike a balance between his regional ambitions and war strategies. Moreover, the war strategy of Iraqi military had also failed because it did not destroy the significant portion of the Iranian forces at a time when it was perfectly capable of doing so in the initial stages of the conflict. This failure on the part of Iraq allowed itself open for counter-attack and was unable to hold on to its territorial advantage (Stern, 1984: 130). Thus it can be said that "Iraq's grand strategy failed not because its military power was insufficient to the attainment of national goals but because too little was asked of it at the right time" (Karsh, 2002: 87).

On the other hand, the inconclusive termination of the war without a clear victor, represented a setback for the status of revolutionary Iran. It has not only failed to oust the Baath regime and stir up a wave of religious opposition throughout the West Asian region but also ended up in its vision of an Islamic order being widely rejected by most of the Sunni religious groups. Only in Lebanon, the Iranian version of Islamic order had made a lasting impact, with the rise of Shi'ite movements such as Amal and Hezbollah (Norton, 2007: 39-42).

Although Iraq had emerged severely damaged from the war, it had also emerged as a much stronger military power than it had been in 1980. In 1979-80, the strength of Iraqi army was 19, 0000 men, but by 1987-88 it had registered more than fivefold increase to around one million. There was similar increase in military hardware in the same years. The tanks increased from 1,900 to 6,310, combat aircraft from 339 to more than 500, helicopters from 231 to 422 and armoured vehicles from 1500 to 4000 (Sluglet and Sluglet, 1990: 21).

### **Consequences of Iran-Iraq War**

The exhaustive eight years long war with Iran without any significant gain for Iraq had increased its difficulties in rebuilding the destroyed state infrastructure, which had

contributed for a conflict this time with another neighbouring state, Kuwait. Although, Iraq-Kuwait conflict of 1990-91 was not a new one as it had its origins in the colonial rule, the consequences of Iraq-Iran war on Iraq had an immediate effect which brought both the states on to the stage of conflict.

At the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq found itself burdened with a heavy debt to foreign countries estimated then at seventy to eighty billion dollars. Contrary to this situation, at the beginning of war it had 35 billion dollars foreign reserves (Mofid, 1990: 51-4). The states which extended financial and material support to Iraq during Iraq-Iran war stopped extending the support for rebuilding the war-ravaged state. It became extremely difficult for Saddam Hussain to take-up the post-war rebuilding activity; he postponed or abandoned several development projects due to lack of funds. He concentrated only on very essential projects to kick-start the economy, even for this, he had faced financial crunch. Therefore, he made appeal to oil rich Gulf states in this connection. The Gulf states did not pay heed to Iraqi appeal. Instead they said, they will only provide funds for charity work. On the other hand, the lender countries like Kuwait started asking Iraq to pay back money that Iraq owed to it (Edwards and Hinchcliffe, 2004: 95-6). This step was taken by Kuwaiti leaders despite knowing that the capacity of producing oil by Iraq in 1990 was very low in comparison to 1980 levels because of regular attacks on its oil establishments by Iran. To make the scenario worst, the price of oil also fallen drastically in the international market, which further made the economic condition miserable for Iraq.

The other problem with which Saddam Hussain was grappling related to the maintenance of a large army. The total population of Iraq in 1988 was 19 million out of which one million was under arms (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 1997: 80). It became difficult for the Iraqi government to maintain this huge army and pay salaries which resulted in revolts from the military. There were four attempts between 1988 and 1990 to overthrow from power or kill Hussain by his own military commanders.

Even after fighting an eight years long war, the main threat for Iraq was still coming from Iran. Hussain was completely aware of the following facts: in terms of population, territory and resources Iran was better placed than Iraq. Iran has the control over the entire eastern Gulf coast, including several islands. While Iraq's Gulf coast is hardly forty miles long, and almost all of it is made up of alluvial mud,

unsuitable for the construction of maritime port facilities. Thus, Iraq is geographically speaking, a Gulf country, but its access to Gulf waters has primarily been through the Shatt al-Arab that it shares with Iran, and it was inadequate for the country's commercial requirements (Karsh, 1990: 258-60). Hence, Iraq was concerned about the security of its maritime trade which could be exposed at any moment to Iranian threats. Therefore, Iraq asked Kuwait for Umm Qasr and the two adjacent islands (Warba and Bubiyan) to meet its commercial and security requirements. But, Kuwait did not respond to Iraq's request to develop a maritime port in a suitable area for navigation (Khalidi, 1991: 10).

To come out of all the economic and geopolitical quagmire of Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi leadership accelerated a policy of rearmament which it started during the war. It thought that it can bully the opponents with this policy to set right the home and the borders. But Iraq's rearmament program aroused concerns among Gulf neighbours as well as others in the region and beyond, including Western powers. The armament issue was particularly raised by Israel with American officials. Consequently armament plan of Saddam put Iraq in the American scanner from 1989 onwards (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 1997: 95-6).

### **Negotiations for Quotas and Oil Prices**

The inability to persuade Kuwait and other Arab Gulf states to contribute funds for reconstruction forced Iraq to depend on its own income from oil. But, the income from oil was also not sufficient for Iraq to meet even its basic needs. On the other hand, the income from oil was drastically declining because some of the Arab Gulf states, including Kuwait, had indulged in overproduction that caused a steep fall in world oil prices. To resolve this problem, Iraq asked the Gulf states to agree on a higher level of price by reducing overproduction.

The overproduction rose during the Iraq-Iran war because the oil production of both Iraq and Iran suddenly dropped due to the destruction of almost all the oil fields, which gave an opportunity to the other oil producing countries to increase their oil production considerably. This was done by Gulf states for two reasons: to take the advantage of the situation to increase their revenues and to finance Iraq in the war. However, after the war, when Iraq resumed oil production, Kuwait was reluctant to

lower its war time increased quota of oil production. Because of this situation, the price of oil had dropped to a level as low as eight dollars per barrel in 1988-89. It was a sharp contrast to the price before the Iraq-Iran war which was at twenty-five dollars per barrel.

Along with Iraq, other oil producing states like Saudi Arabia and Iran were also in favour of higher level of prices. They had proposed eighteen dollars per barrel and reduction of oil quotas which was accepted in the OPEC (the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) meeting. Though OPEC's decision was well short of the proposed twenty-five dollars per barrel of Iraq, yet, it had agreed for it. But, Kuwait was adamant on its position of maintaining its war quota of oil production. Hence, it did not show interest to obey the revised quota by OPEC on the grounds that it would instead follow market pressure. In the June 1989 meeting of OPEC a step was taken to restrict Kuwait's quota of oil production to 1,037,000 barrels a day, but the Kuwaiti oil minister demanded that his country should have a quota of 1,350,000 barrels per day in order to meet its budget requirements. Actually, according to reports, Kuwait was then exporting more than 1,700,000 barrels per day (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 1997: 80-1).

In the November 1989 OPEC meeting, Iraq proposed to raise the price of oil upto the level of twenty dollars per barrel and demanded that steps be taken for not allowing the price to get lower than eighteen dollars per barrel at any circumstances. Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirate were ready to support the Iraqi proposal. As Kuwait made no promise that it would accept such a high price, Saddam Hussain made personal efforts to convince Amir Jabir (the monarch of Kuwait) to accept the OPEC decision. Jabir reluctantly accepted the OPEC quota, but his acceptance did not last long (Edwards and Hinchcliffe, 2004: 99-100).

Jabir was determined never to give up Kuwait's policy of overproduction irrespective of Iraq's financial difficulties. A question arises, why Jabir the leader of a small state like Kuwait with no significant military defence capability at its disposal was behaving like this? Probably he took such a firm and persistent stand because he had the undisclosed support of powerful ally like America for all his acts. Kuwait's dependence on the support of a great power was not a new phenomenon. It has been the traditional policy of Kuwait's ruling family to seek the support of Great Britain, as

British interests in the Gulf coincided with the interests of the ruling Sabah family to maintain the independence and security of the state. After 1971 withdrawal of Britain's military presence in the Gulf, the responsibility of British policing in the Gulf had fallen on American shoulders (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 1997: 87-88).

The issue of oil between Iraq and Kuwait became a central point in all Arab meetings after the Iran-Iraq war. In the first half of the year 1990, the politics started taking a confrontation mode between them. Arab diplomacy entirely shifted towards resolving Iraq-Kuwait dispute. The confrontation was seen in almost all Arab state's meetings.

For the first time the war of words came into focus on 24 February 1990 when Saddam Hussain went to Jordan for attending the first anniversary of the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC), which included Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Yemen. In his opening speech, he made a direct attack on America for supporting Kuwait. This made Hosni Mubarak the President of Egypt who was the close ally of America angry. Hence a direct meeting was arranged by the host, King Hussain of Jordan between Mubarak and Hussain to openly address their issues. During their meeting, Hussain acknowledged the 30 billion dollar loan to Iraq by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia during its difficult war with Iran, and also issued a warning, "If they don't cancel the debt and give me another \$30 billion, I shall take steps to retaliate". Mubarak warned Saddam that "his demands were going to cause a lot of trouble for the region" (Salinger, 1995: 595).

King Hussain was upset by what had happened at the meeting and had decided to visit the Gulf States on 26 February 1990 to defuse the impending crisis through negotiations between Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. However, He failed to convince the rulers of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for negotiations. He briefed Saddam Hussain on his visit, and informed that the Amir of Kuwait, Shaykh Jabir Al-Sabah, had refused to enter into any negotiations until Iraq officially recognize Kuwaiti sovereignty over all its borders. In fact, Iraq had recognized the independence of Kuwait in 1963, but had not reached an agreement on the demarcation of all its borders. Immediately after his meeting with King Hussain, Saddam Hussain ordered the massing of troops on the border of Kuwait in order to create pressure.

On 28 May 1990, 21 Arab monarchs and heads of state assembled in Baghdad to attend a summit meeting of the Arab League. Hussain in his speech issued another warning. Talking about the Gulf States, he said;

They are extracting too much petrol and helping to keep prices at too low a level. Every time the price of a barrel drops by one dollar, Iraq loses dollar 1 billion a year. You're virtually waging an economic war against my country. Indeed, brother Arabs, it has to be clearly understood that we are today living through another conflict (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 109-10).

By July 1990, the possibility of a war between Iraq and Kuwait had increased because of strong and direct accusations levelled by Iraq on Kuwait which were clearly stated by Tariq Aziz (the Foreign Minister of Iraq) on 16 July during his visit to Tunis to attend a meeting of the Arab League. He brought with him what he called "an important memorandum that has to be distributed to all the members of the Arab League" (Ibid, 103).

The 37 page memorandum of Iraq had mentioned the following key points: it named Kuwait and the UAE as the two "culprits" in overproduction; assistance from Kuwait to Iraq during its war with Iran should not be considered a "debt" and should be cancelled; alleged that during 1980-1990 Kuwait pumped oil belonging to Iraq from Rumaila field illegally, the worth of which was quoted \$2.4 billion, and which Kuwait owed Iraq; it claimed that Kuwait's pumping of "Iraqi" oil from Rumaila was "tantamount to an act of war", because it is an attempt "to effect the economic collapse" of Iraq through overproduction which was regarded as "not less than an act of war"; it alleged that the overproduction of Kuwait and UAE was synchronized with efforts of foreign powers to denigrate Iraq because of its increasing championship of the Palestinian cause and its role as a deterrent to Israel; it claimed that Iraq is entitled to expect the Gulf countries to launch a Marshall Plan to support its recovery from the war, just as the United States had done in Europe after World War II; it claimed that in June 1988, even before the ceasefire with Iran and soon after the Iraqi victory at Faw, Iraq informed Kuwait of its readiness to settle all outstanding issues amicably but Kuwait had refused to do so (Khalidi, 1991: 11-12).

The Gulf states became nervous on the harshness of the language in the document because it increased the possibility of war in the region. Their worry had got further

conformed and increased on the next day after Saddam Hussain gave a speech in Baghdad in which he confirmed the eventuality of war. He said;

Thanks to our new weapons, the imperialists can no longer launch a military attack against us, so they have chosen to wage an economic guerrilla war with the help of those agents of imperialism, the leaders of the Gulf States. Their policy of keeping oil prices at low levels is a poisoned dagger planted in Iraq's back. If words fail to protect us, we will have no choice other than to go into action to re-establish the correct state of affairs and restore our rights (Salinger 1995: 597).

The same day, the first Iraqi troops started to move toward the Kuwaiti border. This time instead of King Hussain, President Mubarak took up the shuttle diplomacy to ease the tension between Iraq and Kuwait (Pasha, 2003: 38). Mubarak during his visit to Baghdad told Saddam Hussain that the Kuwaitis were scared because of the presence of Iraqi troops only 20 kilometres north of the Kuwaiti border. Hussain answered Mubarak, "regardless of how many troops there were, he would not do anything until he met with the Kuwaitis". He also said, "If, when we meet, we see there is hope, nothing will happen. But if we are unable to find a solution, then it be natural that Iraq will not accept death, even though wisdom is above everything else" (Ibid, 600). The message of Hussain to Mubarak was clear that, if the negotiations with Kuwait that were to take place in Saudi Arabia on 31<sup>st</sup> July did not work, Iraq was going to take the final step in dealing with Kuwait.

For both sides, 31 July was a critical and final day to stop the approaching catastrophe on them at Jidda. However, the conference at Jidda was a confused and tragic event that resulted in war because nobody was able or willing to avoid it. Only three hours before the meeting, the Amir of Kuwait announced that he would not attend the meeting instead he will send his representative. Saddam Hussain viewed this news as an insult. Hence, he also decided not to attend the conference, instead, send Izzat Ibrahim (the number two man in the Iraqi Baath Party). The Kuwaiti delegation included Prime Minister, Crown Prince Sa'ad, the Foreign Minister and the Justice Minister. The two other Iraqi negotiators were Deputy Prime Minister Sa'dun Hammadi and Saddam cousin, Ali Hassan Al-Majid, the one who was appointed as governor of Kuwait after few weeks of occupation.

Crown Prince Abdallah greeted the two delegations but left the hall as soon as the meeting started in order to allow both the delegations of Iraq and Kuwait to negotiate



among themselves. Izzat Ibrahim read a prepared speech of Iraq reiterating all the charges against Kuwait, which were refuted by Crown Prince Sa'ad. The discussions had become strained when the subject moved to financial matters. Izzat Ibrahim demanded ten billion dollars as a loan, if Kuwait cannot gift. After long discussion, the Crown Prince agreed in principle to a loan of nine billion dollars. His refusal to grant one billion dollars more struck the Iraqis as a deliberate attempt to humiliate them. Ibrahim replied to the offer, "I don't have the authorization from President Saddam Hussain to accept less than 10 billion dollars" (Salinger, 1995: 601). This way of proceedings suggests that, if the only power centres who are also the heads of there respective states, would have attended the conference, probably a negotiated settlement might have been reached.

King Fahd of Saudi Arabia tried to break the deadlock on the question of one billion dollars by announcing that Saudi Arabia would give the one billion dollars as a gift to Iraq, without any strings attached (Khadduri and Ghareebpp, 1997: 120). The Saudi King thought that, with this gesture, he had defused the tension between the two delegations. However, this generous gesture of the Saudi King did not induce Iraqi delegation because as it is mentioned earlier Saddam Hussain not only wanted the money from Kuwait but from other wealthy Arab States also. Probably, the plan of Saddam was that, after dealing with Kuwait he can shift his "extortion tactics" against other states.

After the deadlock was broken by Saudi King, the second round of negotiations was started. Ones again, the Kuwaitis and the Iraqis were left alone to continue the negotiations. During the discussion, Crown Prince Sa'ad said to Izzat Ibrahim that, before they settled the details of the 9 billion dollars loan, they have to discuss about the exact demarcation of Kuwait's borders with Iraq. "We can do it now, at this meeting, and then the money is yours" (Salinger, 1995: 602). Ibrahim was taken by surprise on this new condition and accused the Kuwaitis of bad faith. He told Prince Sa'ad that Iraq knows very well how to get money from them. Those threatening words were the last spoken by an Iraqi delegate which put an end to the Arab diplomacy for stopping the invasion. Immediately after Ibrahim's appraisal of Jidda negotiations, Saddam Hussain summoned the members of the Revolutionary

Command Council, and a decision was taken within an hour to invade Kuwait (Pasha, 2003: 37-40).

## **The American Role**

Initially after Iran-Iraq war, America was not paying serious attention at West Asian politics. Rather, its concentration was at the unfolding scenario in the Soviet Union and Eastern-bloc countries. But, it kept sending messages from time to time to Saddam Hussain that, it wants to be Iraq's friend. In February 1990, American Assistant Secretary of State, John Kelly, made his first visit to Iraq and met Hussain. During the meeting with Hussain, Kelly said, "you are a force of moderation in the region, and America wishes to broaden her relations with Iraq" (Salinger, 1995: 597). A few days later, the Voice of America (VOA), the radio representing the American government, put out a statement about dictators around the world. It concentrated on Saddam Hussain, who was condemned as "one of the worst tyrants in the world" (Ibid).

This convinced Hussain that the America was playing a double game. On 12 April a delegation of US Senators led by Senator Robert Dole of Kansas, the minority leader of the Senate, arrived in Baghdad and then travelled to Mosul. There, the Senators had a long meeting with Hussain and discussed a number of important issues. At one point during the conversation, Hussain complained to Senator Dole about a campaign against him by American and European Media. Dole informed Hussain that such a campaign was not sanctioned by President Bush. Referring to the issue of the VOA's attack against Saddam Hussein in February, Dole apologized for the program and informed Hussain that the journalist responsible had been fired. He also stated that in his last conversation with President Bush, he was told that the President and his government were hoping to improve relations with Iraq (Ibid, 596-99).

In the next two months, after the Arab League meeting of 28 May in Baghdad, as the possibility of war got closer, the US government did not address the danger, rather, it continued to give positive messages to Hussain. In early June, the CIA warned the White House that a Gulf war was becoming increasingly possible. The White House paid no attention (Khadduri and Ghareeb, 1997: 101). By July 1990, the possibility of a war increased. On 16<sup>th</sup> July, Tariq Aziz, who was then the Foreign Minister of Iraq,

gave a speech in Tunis in a meeting of the Arab League and distributed a memorandum for all the members of the Arab League. The next day, the first Iraqi troops started to move toward the Kuwaiti border. That was 17 July, 16 days before the invasion of Kuwait. At no time, in those 16 days was any warning sent out by America to the Iraqi regime.

But, other messages were sent that must have convinced Hussain that the America was not worried about an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. By contrast, when Hussain moved troops once again to the Kuwaiti border, in October of 1994, American President Bill Clinton reacted within hours, warning Hussain not to cross the border. He immediately dispatched ships and troops to the West Asian region, thereby demonstrating American resolve to launch a brutal air attack on Iraq if its troops moved any further. Hussain quickly pulled back and the possibility of a second invasion of Kuwait was halted (Finlan, 2003: 9).

On 24 July 1990, the CIA informed the White House that Saddam Hussain had deployed two divisions in the direction of the Kuwaiti border. The next day Hussain met with April Glaspie (American Ambassador in Iraq). She expressed her admiration for his efforts to rebuild his country and her understanding of his need for funds to do so. But she added, "We have no opinion on Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait" (Ryan, 2009: 57). By 26 July, there were 30,000 Iraqi troops on the border. On 27<sup>th</sup> July, the CIA sent the White House satellite photos showing an even greater concentration of men and equipment on the border. By 30 July, the CIA was in a position to assess the state of Iraqi forces massed near the borders of Kuwait: 100,000 men, 300 tanks, and 300 pieces of heavy artillery (Finlan, 1995: 11). The Bush Administration and Washington remained silent at the clear impending conflict.

On 31 July, the day of the Jidda meeting, John Kelly (American Assistant Secretary of State) testified before the Middle East Subcommittee of the US House of Representatives in Washington. Congressman Lee Hamilton (the Chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee), asked Kelly "Defense Secretary Richard Cheney has been quoted in the press as saying that the United States was committed to going to the defence of Kuwait if she were attacked. Is that exactly what was said? Could you clarify this question" (Salinger, 1995: 98). Kelly replied "I don't know the

quotation to which you refer, but I have confidence in the administration's position on this matter. We don't have any defense treaty in the Gulf states" (Ibid). Kelly's statements were broadcasted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) which was heard in Baghdad. Kelly had thus, sent a signal to Hussain that could be understood as an assurance that the America would not intervene militarily in case Iraq invaded Kuwait. Hence, looking at the various messages issued by America from time to time, it can be said that despite of knowing the aggressive intentions of Saddam Hussain on Kuwait, America did not make attempts to address them rather; it gave the green signal for Hussain's plan to invade Kuwait.

## **Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait**

Iraq invaded Kuwait on the early morning of 2 August 1990. It used its four units of special security forces (Republican Guard) for entering into Kuwait City supported by helicopter and sea-borne attacks. Within four hours these forces had encircled Kuwait City. The small Kuwaiti military numbering around 16000 offered some resistance, but it was overwhelmed by Iraqi forces. By the afternoon, the Iraqis were in total control of Kuwait and installed a provisional government replacing the Kuwaiti monarchy. Iraq justified its invasion in the name of supporting an internal Kuwaiti uprising against the royal family (Al-Marashi and Salama, 2008: 176-77).

In fact, the royal family of Kuwait had fled safely to Saudi Arabia just before the attack was launched by the Iraqi military. Immediately after fleeing to Saudi Arabia, Amir Jabir, the ruler of Kuwait, made contacts with several states in order to secure international help in recapturing Kuwait. The members of UNSC came into action on the same day of Iraqi attack on Kuwait. They passed Resolution 660 on 2 August condemning Iraq's invasion; and called for its "complete, immediate and unconditional withdrawal" (Khalidi, 1991: 15).

Later, they passed Resolutions 661 and 662 on 6 and 9 of August respectively and imposed sanctions on Iraq and declared the annexation of Kuwait null and void. All these three resolutions were endorsed by the UNSC member states' Foreign Ministers in a summit meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> August. They called for the restoration of the legitimate government of Kuwait and also supported the measures taken by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states in self-defence by requesting for foreign forces (Pasha, 1995 309). The

passing of three UNSC resolutions and the summit meeting of Foreign Ministers of UNSC Members in a span of a week certainly indicate the panic in the world on the unfolding events in Gulf region.

The panic in such a proportion at international level was caused because the Iraqi occupation posed a real security threat even for other Gulf states, particularly for Saudi Arabia which is the largest supplier of oil in the world. Hence, King Fahd requested America via Prince Bandar (Saudi Ambassador to United States), for help with air power and for additional military equipment to deter Iraqi advancement. However, the Bush Administration estimated that large American force would be required, either to compel Saddam Hussain to withdraw or to dislodge the Iraqi forces out of Kuwait.

Subsequently, America began its efforts to convince the Saudi King for the deployment of American ground forces on the territories of Saudi Arabia along with the use of air power. For accomplishing this, President Bush sent a high level delegation led by Richard Cheney (the Defense Secretary of U.S.) to Riyadh on 6<sup>th</sup> August. The delegation showed the latest intelligence information that included satellite imagery about the Iraqi force deployment. After receiving the sophisticated intelligence information from the Americans, King Fahd approached the chiefs of armed forces of the Kingdom for further clarification on the battle front. The chiefs underlined the miss match of Saudi forces in comparison to Iraqi military. The Saudi administration approached Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Bin Baz with all the information obtained from military on the looming threat from Iraq, and requested for the permission to allow American forces on Saudi territories. After lengthy deliberations with more than 300 ulamas, Sheikh Bin Baz issued a *fatwa* allowing the American military into Saudi Arabia (Badanskey, 2004: 44-5).

On 6 August, a day after the issue of the *fatwa*, America started deploying its forces in Saudi Arabia under the code name Desert Shield, and within a few weeks, it amassed a huge force over two lakhs which was doubled in November and increased to 4, 30000 (Karsh and Freedman, 1991: 7). Meanwhile, the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, PLO, Soviet Union, France along with UN General Secretary made efforts to convince Saddam Hussain to withdraw its forces from Kuwait. Saddam Hussain did not budge

from his position, instead, declared Kuwait as the nineteenth province of Iraq (Edwards and Hinchcliffe, 2004: 102).

After doubling its forces in the Gulf, America made its intentions clear. It pressured the members of UNSC to pass one more resolution, issuing an ultimatum to Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. Subsequently, Resolution 678 was passed by the UNSC on 29 November which demanded "that Iraq comply fully with Resolution 660 (1990) [calling for the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait] and all subsequent relevant resolutions, and decides, while maintaining all its decisions, to allow Iraq one final opportunity, as a pause of goodwill, to do so" (UNSC Resolution 678, 1990). The Resolution had also set a deadline for Iraq to withdraw, if it fails to comply, then the Council authorized member states to use "all necessary means to uphold and implement Resolution 660 (1990) and all subsequent relevant resolutions and to restore international peace and security in the area" (ibid).

On the other hand, Saddam Hussain invoked the issues sensitive for Muslims in his speeches as a tactic to break the strong Muslim and West coalition against Iraq, in order to drag on the conflict and dilute the American threat. He said that Iraq will withdraw from Kuwait only after Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. He invoked Islamic identity and reminded Muslims about the act of Saudi rulers which "not only challenged... the Arab nation; but challenged God when they placed Mecca and the tomb of the prophet Muhammed under foreign protection" (Dawisha, 1999: 60). Therefore, he appealed to Muslims to attack the invaders, "strike at their interests wherever they are and save Mecca and the tomb of the messenger Muhammed in Medina" (Ibid). Taking the lead from its President, the Iraq's National Assembly issued a statement for Muslims, "liberate Islamic lands from the filth of foreign occupation and to declare blessed jihad in defence of our holy places, values and Islamic heritage" (Ibid).

The other issue which Saddam Hussain had invoked regularly in his speeches was related to the Vietnam War losses and its effect on American society. President Bush attempted to dispel the Vietnam analogy in a press conference for his domestic and international audience. He said to the journalists;

I know there are fears about another Vietnam. Let me assure you, should military action be required; this will not be another Vietnam. This will not be a protracted, drawn-out war. The forces arrayed are different. The opposition is different. The resupply of Saddam's military would be different. The countries united against him in the United Nations are different. The topography of Kuwait is different. And the motivation of our all-volunteer force is superb (Ryan 2009: 67).

Thus, the above actions and statements of both Iraq and America clearly shows that none of them were willing for a diplomatic resolution of the conflict.

Hence, on 17 January 1991 which was two days after the expiry of UNSC deadline, the coalition forces launched a united counter war on Iraq. The coalition had the forces from 35 countries, who provided assistance in one form or another when the counter war was launched. America was the largest contributor for coalition; it provided 80 percent of the forces. The other main contributors to the coalition were Saudi Arabia and Kuwait the victims of aggression in the Gulf, Britain and France from Europe, Egypt and Syria from the Arab world. Turkey, the powerful neighbour of Iraq had cut off its oil pipeline and offered the air bases for coalition forces. No country gave Iraq significant material support; the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) declared solidarity. Jordan showed sympathy to Iraq but economically and militarily was in no position to give much material support (Karsh and Freedman, 1991: 6).

From 17 January to 24 February, the attack of coalition forces on Iraq was largely based on air power. Around 52000 air-to-surface sorties delivered approximately 2, 10000 unguided bombs, 9300 guided bombs, 5400 guided air-to-surface missiles and 2000 anti-radar missiles. American forces also launched more than 300 cruise missiles at the enemy. This massive air attacks in a highly sophisticated manner decimated The Iraqi military infrastructure, electrical grid, oil refineries and most of the telephone and communications system. In reply, The Iraqi military could cause very little damage to the coalition forces (Cohen, 1994: 110-11). Despite huge losses, Saddam Hussain did not surrender or seek for cease-fire because he still believed that Iraq can create Vietnam type of situation for America once ground operation starts.

The ground war was started by Coalition forces on 24 February 1991 that continued approximately for 100 ours and forced Iraqi military to withdraw from Kuwait. The coalition forces did not leave the retreating Iraqi army, instead, they launched air

attacks and killed large number of soldiers (Bourque, 1997: 568). Looking at the dire situation of the Iraq's military and fast approaching threat to the existence of his regime, Saddam Hussain asked for cease-fire on 28 February that was accepted on first March. But, it was formally signed on third March between the representatives of Iraq and the coalition (Karsh and Freedman, 1991: 34). Hence, 44 days of intensive air attacks and 100 hours of land operation by coalition forces could successfully evict Iraq's military out of Kuwait. This war demonstrated the effectiveness of advance air technology in achieving the victory. The rapid advancements of land forces backed up by air attacks had dispelled the notions of Vietnam War.

Thus, the examination of Iraq's wars of 1980 and 1990 clearly shows that they were launched by Saddam Hussain primarily in response to the provocative acts by Iran and Kuwait against his state. The first one was started as a limited war on Iran, to display the military might of Iraq in the region and to have a say in its politics by replacing revolutionary regime. By occupying Kuwait, Hussain wanted to send a strong message that he can go to any extent if defiance is showed to Iraq's interests. In both the cases, he underestimated the response for his aggressive acts. The wars had clearly demonstrated the limitations of Iraq's military power and the flawed diplomatic and military strategies of Hussain. The wars which were launched to assert Iraq's supremacy in the region based on its promising economic growth and military strength had in fact turned its fortune otherwise. The exhaustive eight years long Iran-Iraq war had completely destroyed its economy and the Kuwait war devastated its military.



# Chapter V

## Conclusion

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Iraq has been one of the most complex and conflict-prone states in West Asia since its creation in 1921. Its first government was appointed by the British under the UN mandate rule by bringing the monarch from outside. This was an artificial creation through secret agreements between British and French diplomats neglecting the concerns of local population and circumstances. The artificial formation of the state and imposition of monarchy from outside of Iraqi territories were not liked by Iraq's population who were grossly divided on ethnic, Arabs or Kurds; sectarian, Sunnis or Shia's; religious, Muslims or Christians or Jews and others because they never had a common Iraqi identity in their history. Due to the artificial nature of state boundaries, all these groups also have a significant presence in the contiguous territories of Iraq that provided an opportunity for neighbours to interfere in its domestic politics by supporting one group against other.

It has abundant oil resources that attracted great powers to penetrate into the state politics from time to time, in order to further their interests. As a result, the state since its inception had never been stable; rebellions and coups staged by military generals and political elite with external support became a normal phenomenon that led to the frequent change of government. However, this tendency of frequent change in government was stopped by the Baath Party once it attained power in 1968, and the stability in the government was ensured for almost 35 years. This was possible in Iraq because Baathist leaders realized the importance of concentrating the entire state power in their hands from the beginning, which they felt as a necessary condition for establishing their legitimacy over the state. They decided to ensure the elimination of forces inside Iraq that might challenge or compete with them. This responsibility was taken up by their young leader Saddam Hussain, who was the deputy to President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, both in the party and government, and adopted various coercive tactics to establish the legitimacy of the Baath Party over Iraq.

Hussain established parallel intelligence agencies which were directly under him to keep a watch on every aspect of Iraq and to gather information. This information was used for meticulously planning the purge of all those military officers who were perceived as potential threats for the Baathist regime or, whose loyalty towards the Baath Party was under question. He employed tactics like forced exile; uncovering the real and imagined plots against Baath regime; targeted assassinations at home and abroad etc. to eliminate the threat for the regime. In place of purged military officers in both armed forces and administration, Hussain appointed those who were personally close to him. All this had considerably strengthened the hold of the Baath Party in general and Hussain in particular. Simultaneously, he used the carrot and stick policy to reduce the mass base support of the Communists, Kurds and Shia parties in order to Baathify the Iraqi society.

The nationalisation of oil and the subsequent fourfold increase of oil price in the world energy market after the oil embargo of 1973 had drastically increased the revenues of Iraq. Hussain put these revenues for productive use by investing in infrastructure, education, health, industry and modernisation of military that had yielded positive results and registered rapid growth by the end of the 1970s in Iraq's development indicators. All these made it a stable and powerful state in terms of military and economy, which gave it an influential position in regional politics.

Coincidentally, three events occurred in 1979 that challenged the authority of Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the major states in West Asia, shook the regional power balance. Iran witnessed an Islamic Revolution that led to the overthrow of the monarchical rule of the Shah. The second powerful army of the region became the first casualty of revolutionary forces. All the officers above colonel level were either executed or forced to flee from the state and consequently, Iranian military became weak. The economy was in disarray for months after the Revolution, and oil production had reached to a halt which resulted in loss of revenue. There was struggle for leadership between moderate and religious forces after the overthrow of the Shah which resulted in an unstable situation in the initial months of the Revolution. The international community imposed the economic, military and diplomatic boycott of Iran after the American embassy Hostage crisis.

Egypt, which acted as a leader of the Arabs for long in its capacity of a frontline state that fought four wars between 1948 and 1973 with Israel for Arab cause, had digressed from its position and unilaterally entered into negotiations and subsequently signed a peace treaty with Israel. This step of Egypt was considered as a betrayal of Palestinian cause by fellow Arab states. In Saudi Arabia, Juhayman Al-Otaibi, a radical cleric along with his associates seized the Grand Mosque in Makkah, and to remove them, the Saudi government took the help of French paratroopers. The use of non-Muslim forces to secure the Mosque clearly displayed the limitations of the monarchy in safeguarding the two Holy Places of Islam. This incident had raised questions on the legitimacy of the Saud regime that provided an opportunity for Shias of Saudi Arabia to revolt against their government. All these events had created a power vacuum in the region.

Encouraged by the newly acquired prosperity, stability and power, Iraq made efforts to demonstrate its position to assert its supremacy over the region by taking the power vacuum into consideration. It employed diplomacy to expel Egypt from the Arab League for signing a unilateral peace deal with Israel and attempted to occupy the vacated position in Arab politics. It secured the support of Saudi Arabia for its external ambitions by invoking the common threats from Shia Iran and Communist USSR. It also made diplomatic gestures towards Iran in its initial response to the overthrow of the Shah and the emergence of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as the revolutionary leader in order to restrict its support for Shias in other states. Hence, the analysis of the above events justifies the hypothesis of this study that “regional political developments had a direct bearing on Iraq’s quest for regional supremacy”.

During the same period, Saddam Hussain, the one who was behind the enhanced position of Iraq in regional politics, emerged out of the shadows of Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and became the President. Hussain continued the policy of friendship towards the revolutionary regime in Iran in his initial days of presidency. But, this was not reciprocated from the opposite side. Instead, the revolutionary regime engaged itself in provocative acts against Iraqi regime. It provided arms and ammunition for Shia and Kurdish underground parties, openly encouraged Iraq’s population to revolt and overthrow the Baath rule, tried the targeted assassinations of higher officials with the help of its local proxies, and occasionally clashed with Iraqi military on the borders.

These provocative acts of the revolutionary regime against Iraq and the turmoil in post-Shah Iran had impelled Hussain to launch a war on it in 1980. The main intentions of Hussain behind the war were to display the Iraq's military might in the region and to have control over regional politics. Therefore, he launched only a limited war and occupied some Iranian territories. Once he became sure that the bargaining position of Iraq had increased, he halted the military advancement and offered a cease-fire. This offer was totally rejected by Iran, and used the halt of war to its advantage by regrouping its forces. It launched counter offensives on Iraqi positions and pushed back the military from most of the occupied territories and in the process shifted the main point of battle inside the borders of Iraq.

At one point of time in 1982, a large portion of Iraqi army was on the verge of complete decimation in the hands of Iranian armed forces. To avoid this situation, both the super powers and other Western states provided military assistance to Iraq that helped it to create a stalemate for six years. Almost at the end of the eight years long and exhaustive war, Iraqi military was able to regain its lost territories. This war completely destroyed Iraq's economic infrastructure and made it dependent on its Gulf neighbours, even to fulfil its basic needs.

However, its Gulf neighbours particularly Kuwait was not forthcoming to provide huge financial assistance as demanded by Saddam Hussain. Instead, Kuwait engaged in provocative acts by over producing oil that reduced the price of oil in the world energy market, which further increased the economic miseries of Iraq. Hence, to come out of the acute economic crisis and to deal with Kuwait's defiance, Hussain directed Iraqi military to capture Kuwait and occupied it. This step of Iraq received all-round condemnation from the states that helped it financially and militarily at various stages of the Iran-Iraq war. They formed a coalition and deployed a huge force and ousted Iraq's military out of Kuwait.

This war significantly destroyed the Iraq's military that led to open rebellion in Kurd and Shia dominated provinces. Hussain tried to put down the rebellion using indiscriminate force on civilians which was stopped by the UN by imposing no-fly-zones. With this, the Baath regime lost its control on a large part of Iraq's territories. Thus, the examination of the two wars launched by Iraq on its neighbours clearly demonstrates that Hussain had over-relied on military for accomplishing his regional

ambitions. In the process, Iraq lost economic prosperity, military strength and political stability. Hence, the hypothesis that “Iraq’s over-reliance on the military power undermined its ability for attaining regional supremacy” is also successfully proven.

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