

**THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION
AND
ITS IMPACT ON IRAN-SAUDI ARABIAN RELATIONS
1978-1982**

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PREFACE

The Iranian revolution of 1978-79 was a great event in the region's recent history. Saudi Arabia had reasons to feel alarmed at this great upheaval. The overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Iran was an eye-opener to the Saudi royal family. Since its coming to power, the revolutionary leadership made repeated calls for the overthrow of the monarchies after having dubbed them as corrupt, pro-West and un-Islamic. The Saudi royal family was particularly made the main target of sustained Iranian attacks. This dissertation is an attempt to study the genesis of the revolution and Saudi reactions to this event which posed the most serious challenge to Saudi policy makers in history. The study focusses on their bilateral relations from 1978-1982, the emphasis being on political relations.

Chapter one is the introduction which gives a brief background on Saudi-Iranian relations in the pre-revolution period. It touches on such varied issues as the Yemen factor, Saudi-Iranian collaboration for an Islamic alliance, the Bahrain and the continental shelf problems. It also deals with their differences on such issues as oil production and pricing policy, Arab-Israeli conflict and

Iran's Gulf policy and highlights the Saudi anxiety over the massive arming of Iran which they viewed with alarm.

Chapter two attempts to look at the genesis of the Iranian revolution, its impact on the region, and initial Saudi reactions. The consolidation of the new regime in Iran and its ties with Riyadh are then analysed in great detail. The Kaaba incident of 1979, which shook the Saudis, is highlighted and charges of Iranian involvement in it are examined. A related issue discussed in this chapter is the acrimonious controversy about the Iranian haj pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

Chapter three focuses on Saudi attempts to contain the escalating challenge from the revolutionary regime. The Saudi response to this challenge was at two levels: International and regional. Saudi Arabia sought US support in the form of enhanced arms sales, AWACS and over the horizon American presence in the area. Besides this the Saudis convened an Islamic summit at Taif to mobilise support in the Muslim world. The chapter assesses the extent of Saudi success or failure in containing Iran.

Chapter four dwells upon the oil factor. Perhaps the most formidable weapon which the Saudis deployed against Iran was the oil weapon.

The Saudis by greatly enhancing their oil production caused a world-wide oil glut and oil prices kept tumbling down. This greatly reduced the oil revenues of Iran and hence its capacity to create troubles for its neighbours.

Chapter five deals with the issue of Arab-Israeli conflict. It examines why Saudi Arabia condemned Egypt and opposed the Camp David agreements and analyses the Fahd Plan and Iran's reaction to it. Finally, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 and how it strained Saudi-Iranian relations is highlighted.

The concluding chapter summarizes the general conclusions flowing from the dissertation.

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Chapter I

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Saudi Arabia, although it had emerged as a State as early as 1926, was hardly known to the outside world. Ibn Saud the founder of Saudi Arabia was recognized in 1927, as king by the British, who never really showed any keen interest to control the desert kingdom. In 1932 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia formally came into existence. Politically it remained an insignificant country for long. It was only in the Muslim world that its existence came to be recognized due the location there of Mecca and Medina - Islam's holy places. The discovery of oil in a significant way, mostly after the second world war, pushed Saudi Arabia into limelight and is now viewed as the leader of the Arab world.

In its formative stages Saudi Arabia in its foreign policy concentrated more on the Arab world and interaction with countries like Iran was minimal. The Saudis were more concerned with the containing the power and influence of the Hashemites than with anything else. Since its establishment in 1926 until the mid-1950s there is nothing worth-mentioning in their relations.

The Origins of Saudi-Iranian Ties

It was only with the return of the Shah in 1953 that relations began to expand between the two States. The 1952 Egyptian revolution was a great turning point in the region's politics. The Saudis, fearful of the new radical regime, came closer to the conservative monarchies. Besides strengthening ties with Iraq and Jordan, the Saudi rulers also began to look upon Teheran as a possible ally.

Both Iran and Saudi Arabia took divergent positions on the Baghdad Pact. Whereas the Shah joined the Pact in early 1955, Saudi Arabia refused and drove home the need for Arab unity and to follow a non-aligned policy. President Nasser's opposition to the cold-war pacts was also a factor in Saudi calculations. The Egyptian President through his Pan-Arab policy came down heavily on all those countries which maintained close ties with the West especially the US and collaborated with it. In his perception, the US to its open support to Israel and opposition to his regime was seen as the greatest

enemy to be fought on all fronts. This explains his opposition to the Middle East Defence Organization (MEDO) and the Baghdad Pact. Until the Suez War, Saudi Arabia slured Egyptian perception of the Cold War.

Strengthening of Saudi-Iranian Ties

Despite their varying attitude towards the Baghdad Pact, Iran and Saudi Arabia worked to strengthen their ties. In this connection King Saud's visit to Iran on 17-19 August 1955 is significant. The joint communique issued on the occasion stated that discussions between the two rulers had revealed "a complete identity of views, notably regarding the imperative necessary of strengthening the unity of the Islamic countries". It was announced that both had decided to raise their respective diplomatic missions in Iran and Saudi Arabia to the status of embassies.¹ The Shah returned the visit in March 1957. The Shah's visit in March 1957 was viewed as an opportunity for him to press for the formation of a bloc of moderate pro-Western states.

1. Keesing's Contemporary Archives (London), 12-14 January 1956, p.14641A.

The meeting came at a time when King Saud was reportedly concerned over the "Communist penetration" in Syria and Egypt.²

The conclusion of the Czech-Egyptian arms deal in 1955, growing Soviet involvement and success in the area following the Suez War, the merger between Egypt and Syria in 1958, the overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq and the coming to power of the radical Baath Party, were all seen by the Saudis portending dangers to their monarchical regime.

The Yemen Factor and the Islamic Alliance

The great turning point which propelled Saudi Arabia to follow a more assertive foreign policy was the 1962 revolution in Yemen and the subsequent Egyptian military intervention. The Egyptian troops on the Arabian peninsula brought to Saudi doorsteps the threat of destabilization of their regime. The nervous Saudis reached at two levels. Firstly they aided militarily the royalists supporters to counter the growing success of the republicans; and secondly, being the custodians of

2. Rouholla K. Ramazani, Iran's Foreign Policy 1941-1973: A Study of Foreign Policy in Modernizing Nation, (Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1975), p.399.

Islam's holiest shrines they used the banner of Islam to check Nasser's growing and threatening influence. In this connection a proposal for an international Islamic conference was put forward in December 1965 by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. The proposal took King Faisal to many Muslim countries including Iran. He paid an official visit to Iran on 8-14 December 1965 and the joint communique stated that the Shah and King Faisal would invite all Muslim countries to a conference, "in order to further the unity of views and the defence of the common interests of the countries concerned".³

President Nasser denounced the formation of an alliance of "reactionary" Muslim States under the garb of Islam. King Faisal's attempt to mobilize pro-Western Muslim States failed, but it nevertheless brought Saudi Arabia and Iran closer more than ever. The June 1967 war and Egypt's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Israelis came to the Saudi rulers as a great relief. Soon after Egypt withdrew its troops from Yemen and virtually gave up its Pan-Arab role and concentrated on

3. Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 15-22 October 1966, p.21661A.

the recovery of lands from Israel to the immense relief of the Saudis. Moreover Nasser was dependent to a certain extent on Saudi financial support and this gave additional leverage for the Saudis to discipline Nasser. The threat emanating from Egypt greatly declined henceforth. Since President Sadat came to power in 1970 both Egypt and Saudi Arabia maintained close ties.

The Bahrain Issue

The tiny island of Bahrain in the Gulf has been claimed by the Iranians for long before the British decided to quit the Gulf in 1968. The Shah who was to pay a return visit to Riyadh in February 1968, postponed his trip, in protest against the "royal welcome" given to the Sheikh of Bahrain by King Faisal. The King declared full support for the Sheikh and there was allegedly some talk about the building of a causeway to link Bahrain to Saudi Arabia. Iran's under-secretary for foreign affairs, Abbas Ali Khalatbary, stated in an interview that it "was apparently hoped in Riyadh that His Majesty the Shah's visit would be tacit approval of this". And precisely due to this reason the Shah had

postponed his visit.⁴ A Teheran newspaper reminded the Arabs that Iran "now represented the most important factor in the future of the Gulf".⁵

Rapprochement Between Iran and Saudi Arabia

As a result of mediation efforts of King Hassan of Morocco between Iran and Saudi Arabia the Shah stopped over in Jeddah on 3 June 1968 on the way to Ethiopia. The Shah and King Faisal held brief talks and then "embraced warmly", it was announced in Jeddah.⁶

The Issue of Continental Shelf

The question of continental shelf had been a persistent irritant in Saudi-Iranian relations. An agreement delineating the continental shelf was signed in Teheran on 24 October 1968 following talks between Saudi Oil Minister Sheikh Yamani and his deputy, Prince Saud al Faisal, on the one hand and the Iranian Ministers on the other. The agreement modified a demarcation line established under an earlier agreement

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4. Christian Science Monitor (Boston), 16 March 1968, cited in Ramazani, n.2, p.412.
 5. Guardian (London), 3 February 1968, cited in M.S. Agwani, Politics in the Gulf (New Delhi:Vikas, 1978), p.58.
 6. Daily Star (Beirut), 4 July 1968, cited in Ramazani, n.2, p.413.

which had been initiated during King Faisal's visit to Iran in 1965. Iran had never ratified it because of dispute over the status of some offshore islands, including the Kharg Island, where oil was found at a later stage.

The first crucial step towards this settlement was taken on 21 August 1968, when the two countries finally initiated an agreement and signed it on 24 October 1968. As per the new agreement Iran got greater access to the oil field near Kharg Island. It also settled the ownership of two disputed islands: Iran got the island of Farsi and Saudi Arabia the island of al-Arabi. The agreement also fixed the territorial waters of each side at 12 miles, beginning at the low-water mark of each of the two islands and stipulated that, where the territorial waters overlapped, a median line should determine the border in the overlapping area.⁷

7. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 7-14 December 1968, pp.230-72. See also Robert Litwak, Security in Persian Gulf 2 : Sources of Inter-State Conflict (England: Gower, 1981), p.39; and Richard Young, "Equitable Solutions for off shore Boundaries : The 1968 Saudi Arabia-Iran Agreement", American Journal of International Law (Washington D.C.), vol.64, no.1, January 1970, pp.152-57.

The Shah finally paid a five-day State visit to Saudi Arabia in November 1968. According to Ramazani, "throughout the visit no serious and specific mention of the Persian Gulf situation was made in public in view of the Shah's need to elicit Arab support for future Iranian policies in the Gulf."⁸ The Shah spoke instead on the need to forge Islamic solidarity. The two leaders declared that the time had come when the "faithful should stand together against the common enemy".⁹ At a dinner the Shah asked, "if we believe that division, separation, machinations and particular designs have acted to the detriment of Muslim nations and of Islam, has not the time arrived for us to re-assess our approach?"¹⁰

According to Ramazani, in acknowledging King Faisal's thanks for Iran's helpful attitude during "untoward events" that had befallen certain Arab States — a reference to the June 1967 war — the Shah said Iran acted "first because we too are Muslims, and secondly because Iran always upholds justice".¹¹ The upshot of

8. Ramazani, n.2, p.413.

9. Asian Recorder (New Delhi), 15-21 January 1969, p.8722.

10. Kayhan (Tehran daily English) 10 November 1968, cited in Ramazani, n.2, p.413.

11. Ibid., p.414.

the Shah's visit to Saudi Arabia was that the two leaders agreed not to do anything in the Persian Gulf area that would be detrimental to each other and to work together to exclude revolutionary forces.¹²

To the Saudis, Bathist Iraq was another source of worry since the 1963 coup d'etat in Baghdad. The radical Baath ideology and Iraq's desire to dominate the Gulf leadership plus its close military ties and friendship treaty with the Soviets signed in April 1972, were a constant source of worry to the Saudi rulers. The only comfort the Saudis could derive was that the Iraqis were embroiled in a confrontation with Iran. Iran due to its support to the Kurds and general hostility to the Baath regime considerably put at ease the mounting Saudi worries.

The withdrawal of the British from Southern Arabia and the coming to power of a radical pro-Soviet regime (the Saudis most feared this after the British left) in South Yemen and later the rebellion on the southern periphery in Oman's Dhofar province alarmed the Saudis.

12. Ibid.

This threat at their doorsteps was viewed as dangerous to Saudi security and called for counter-measures. To begin with, the Saudis encouraged Oman's Sultan Qaboos to seek Shah's military help in crushing the Dhofari rebellion. It was mainly due to the Shah's military intervention that the Dhofari rebellion was suppressed. By 1975 the opposition had been crushed and the Saudis were greatly relieved. But the event also exposed Saudi Arabia's own military incapacity and impotence. According to Prof. M.S. Agwani:

Despite its disquietude over the insurrection in Dhofar, Saudi Arabia did not relish Iran's intervention in that Arab land for, apart from rekindling Arab-Iranian jurisdictional controversies, it made it clear that Riyadh itself was in no position to risk a direct intervention presumably because of its lack of confidence in the military efficacy or political dependability of the Saudi armed forces.¹³

AREAS OF FRICTION

1) Oil Production : And Pricing Policy

Saudi Arabia and Iran are important members of Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

13. Agwani, n.5, p.107.

and are major oil producers.

Saudi Arabia has the world's largest oil reserves and its population is less than eight million and has a limited capacity to absorb its huge oil revenues. The Saudis have all along stood for moderate oil prices because of their belief that oil should be competitive with alternative sources of energy. This is the rationale of Saudi official policy on oil. But it is only one side of the story. The Saudis, who are close to the US and the West, have a vested interest in helping these countries by keeping the price of oil low and producing more, with the hope that the US in return will come to the rescue of the Saudi regime if threatened or in danger.

The Saudis have all along opposed Iran's demand for higher oil prices and higher production quota for Iran. No less important a reason in Saudi opposition to Iran's stand was its hidden desire to curb Iran's growing economic and military power under the Shah. The Saudis viewed the energy of a militarily powerful Iran as a threat to their security if not immediately but at least

in the long run.¹⁴ Differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran over oil prices, which had just surfaced during the October and November 1973 price increase, came out into the open in the OPEC ministerial conference in Vienna in September 1975. Iran demanded a two-stage fifteen percent increase with no freeze thereafter which was rejected by Saudi Arabia. Saudi oil Minister Sheikh Yamani threatened to break away from OPEC, freeze prices of Saudi oil at current levels and let its production rise to a level where the market absorbed it within the kingdom's formidable surplus capacity of 4 million barrels a day.¹⁵

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14. Rouhollah K. Ramazani, "Emerging Pattern of Regional Relations in Iranian Foreign Policy", Orbis (Philadelphia; Pa.), vol.18, Winter 1975, p.1056.

In an interview of French television on 19 January 1977 the Shah of Iran said any "over-production" of oil by Saudi Arabia causing a drop in Iranian oil exports would be "an act of aggression against us".

Noting that Saudi Arabia had raised its oil prices by only five percent in 1 January as against the 10 percent voted by most other OPEC members, the Shah said: "Is Mr. Yamani has practised this policy (of limiting the raise of five percent), it seems I have received that it does not correspond to the ideas of Saudi Arabia", Asian Recorder, 26 February-4 March 1977, p.13617A.

15. Agwani, n.5, p.42.

Iran's case was quite opposed to the Saudis'. With its much larger population, smaller oil resources - at current rates of extraction they will deplete by the turn of century - and the need for oil revenues for its ambitious developmental programmes, Iran called for higher oil prices with a view to earn maximum oil revenues in the short run irrespective of whether this would have a negative impact on the demand for oil in the long run or not. The Teheran daily Kayhan of 28 January 1974 criticized Sheikh Yamani for his call for lower oil prices. In an editorial it said: "The Sheikh's sudden change of heart makes him nothing more than a mouth-piece of US Secretary of Treasury, George Schultz. It was Schultz, in fact, who originally called for lower prices on the pretext that the welfare of the international community was being endangered."

Iran again attacked Saudi oil policy in April 1975 when Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud bin Faisal suggested in a speech that the price of oil and the situation in the Middle East be linked. Kayhan in its editorial on 6 April 1975 curtly asked: "Is one expected

to believe that Prince Saud considers the pricing of oil a Saudi prerogative?"¹⁶

Thus, Saudi Arabia and Iran held opposing view points on the question of oil prices and oil production. The Saudis not only opposed Iran but other radical members of OPEC like Libya, Algeria, Iraq. Since the Saudis were the largest OPEC producer they could discipline the other members by simply flooding the world oil market with their increased oil production. This issue frequently brought about strain in their relations.

2) The Arab-Israeli Conflict

Another issue on which Saudi Arabia and Iran held divergent views was the Arab-Israeli conflict. It must be recalled that Iran gave de facto recognition to Israel in 1950 and since then, especially since the early 1960s, developed close economic, political and security relations with Tel Aviv. Iran supplied most of the oil needs of Israel. Although Iran and Saudi Arabia were concerned about Nasser's threats and intervention in Yemen,

16. K.R. Singh, Iran : Quest for Security (New Delhi: Vikas, 1980), p.245. See also Shahrar Chubin, Survival (London), July-August 1974, pp.172-82.

this issue ceased to be important after 1967. When during 1973 King Faisal played a crucial role in the oil embargo against the US for supporting Israel, Iran not only continued to supply oil to Israel, but refused to participate in the oil embargo and in oil production cuts.

While keeping in economic/security links with Israel in tact, the Shah supported the Arab cause and called upon Israel to vacate Arab territories occupied in the 1967 war. It also joined other Muslim States in calling for the return of Jerusalem to Arab control. The Shah repeatedly called for the restoration of "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people" and at least outwardly condemned Israel's aggressive and intransigent attitude. Iran also supported, in 1974, the Arab call to give the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) an observer status of the UN even though he refused to allow the PLO to open a mission in Tehran.¹⁷

Iran's permission to allow Soviet planes to overfly its territory to send supplies to Egypt and Syria during

17. M.G. Weinbaum, "Iran and Israel : The Discreet Entente", Orbis (Philadelphia, Pa.), vol.18, Winter 1975, p.1081.

1973 war was greatly welcomed by Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the Iranian gesture of sending medical supplies to Jordan and its decision to send planes and pilots to Saudi Arabia to help with logistical problems was welcomed by King Faisal.¹⁸

Despite Iran's apparent support to the Arabs in their conflict with Israel, the Saudi's viewed the Shah's continued links with Israel with grave suspicion and doubts. They continued to urge the Shah to relinquish their ties with Israel but to no avail. The Shah's military links with Israel were especially suspected by the Arabs because they felt that Israel was secretly helping the Shah in improving Iran's military capability which allowed her to play a more assertive policy in the Gulf.¹⁹

3) Iran's Gulf Policy

The British decision to withdraw from the Gulf, announced in 1968, signalled the Shah to try and fill the gap in the Gulf after British withdrawal. Nasser's

18. Ramazani, n.2, p.1059.

19. Weinbaum, n.17; and Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, The Foreign Relations of Iran : A Developing State in a Zone of Great Power Conflict (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p.36ff.

defeat in 1967 led him to concentrate on securing the withdrawal of Israeli troops from occupied Arab territory. In the event, he had no time and inclination for Gulf affairs. The Shah had cultivated good relations with the USSR which greatly neutralize Iraq's capacity to challenge his ambitions in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia was simply incapable of filling the vacuum and the other littoral states were too weak to question Iran's role. Iraq was successfully isolated by Iran in this regard. Even the Arab states disliked Iraqi attempts to dominate this area.

In this scenario Iran made every possible effort to normalize its ties with its Arab Gulf neighbours on its own terms. Iran and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement on the question of delimiting the continental shelf on 24 October 1968. The agreement recognised Iran's title to the newly discovered oil fields in the vicinity of the Kharg Island.²⁰

But Iran's claim to the island of Bahrain in 1968 soured Saudi-Iranian ties. Britain played a crucial role in patching up the differences between these two major

20. Singh, n.26, p.139.

states in the area. The Saudi foreign minister Omar Saqqaf visited Iran in April 1971 and both agreed to coordinate their policies on joint actions to be taken in the Gulf. Omar Saqqaf in an interview said that friendship with Iran was "a cornerstone" of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. "I came to Iran to show that Tehran and Riyadh are as close as ever -- perhaps even closer". "Friendship with Iran is a cornerstone of our foreign policy and we shall always cherish this friendship", he stressed. "I have come here to end all the rumours and false hopes of our enemies who have been whispering about what they believed was a cold spell in Irano-Saudi relations".²¹ This rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia isolated Iraq as evidenced by this fact that most of the Arab Gulf States rejected the defence alliance proposal floated by President Bakr on 16 July 1970.

As announced previously Britain withdrew from the GULF at the end of 1971. The Shah quickly took over three islands in the Gulf to strengthen Iran's position strategically in the area. Iraq, Libya and others

21. Asian Recorder, 15-21 January 1973, p.11184.

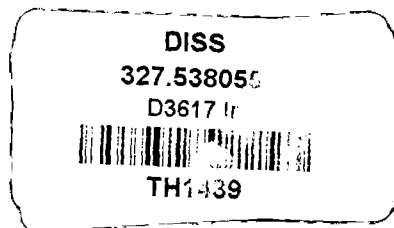
protested the Iranian take over but Saudi Arabia's reaction was the most mild one. "Even the landing of Iranian troops on the three islands did not seem to ruffle irreparably the basic friendly relations between Tehran and Riyadh", says Ramazani.²²

The defeat of Pakistan in the Bangladesh war 1971, the Nixon doctrine, British withdrawal, muted regional opposition and enhanced oil revenues after the 1973 price hike enabled the Shah to pursue a vigorous Gulf policy. The Shah stated once: "...Iran's supremacy over the Persian Gulf is a natural thing. We already have this and we shall enhance it in the future".²³

As the Shah became more assertive to disregarded the advice given to it by friendly states including Saudi Arabia. Coupled with this arrogance the Shah without consulting the Saudis greatly increased his military presence in Oman to combat the Dhofari rebels. There were press reports of Saudi opposition to Iranian

22. Cited in Singh, n.16, p.148.

23. D.L. Price, "Stability in the Gulf : The Oil Revolution", Conflict Studies (London), no.71, May 1976, p.9.



forces in Oman but it appears that the Saudis lodged no formal complaint with Tehran.²⁴ Saudi attitude towards the Shah began to change after the 1973 war. With the Saudis themselves getting undreamed of wealth, they started playing a much more active role diplomatically in the region. They began to resent the overbearing or patronizing role of the Shah. Moreover, the Saudis began to sadly realize that Iran's influence had been slowly extending on the other side of the Gulf among the tiny Sheikhdoms. This they viewed as a threat which called for countervailing moves. Soon after King Faisal's death, King Khalid visited several Gulf states and strengthened Saudi Arabia's ties with these states which earlier appeared to be moving inexorably into the Iranian sphere of influence. The Saudis made determined efforts to spread their influence and project their leadership. In this they encountered Iraqi as well as Iranian opposition. The Saudis set out to build an alternative military power in the Gulf to match that of Iran. This necessitated greater military spending. With their enhanced oil revenues, the Saudis were more than willing

24. D.L. Price, Oil and Middle East Security (London: Sage Publications, 1976); The Washington Papers, vol. 4, no. 41.



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to spend additional sums on building up a strong military machine.

Thus the Shah's desire to play a dominant role in the Gulf came to be viewed with growing anxiety by the Saudis. They woke up from their deep slumber and started taking a much more active role in the Gulf to obstruct the Shah's ambition to establish Iran's hegemony over the whole of this area. Both began to look upon each other with suspicion and fear.

4) Iran's Arms Build-up

The Arab oil embargo in 1973 and the subsequent hike in oil prices greatly encouraged the Shah to arm Iran with the most sophisticated weapons. Iran's emergence as a strong military power also had the blessings of the US. The Americans evidently wanted to build Iran as a surrogate in the area to safeguard their own growing economic/security interests.

In 1970 Iran's annual GNP stood at \$ 11.5 billion and its defence expenditure at \$ 820 million. By 1975-76 the Iranian GNP approached \$ 54 billion. According to one estimate, between 1970 and 1977 Iran

bought arms from the US worth approximately \$ 16.3 billion. All the three arms of the defence establishment were greatly strengthened making Iran the strongest and mightiest military power in the region.²⁵

Over the years, Iran's defence budget rose steeply as follows:

DEFENCE BUDGETS : 1970-1977

(in Millions \$)

1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977
880	1065	1375	1525	3680	6225	8925	9400

After Egypt and Israel, Iran's defence to GNP ratio was the highest in the region and defence allocations could be compared with those of China and the leading Western states.²⁶

The Shah denied having any aggressive military designs on the neighbouring Gulf states or elsewhere and emphasized that Iran's military preparations were basically

25. K.R. Singh, The Persian Gulf : Areas of Arms Control (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1983), pp.34-41.

26. Onkar, Marwah, "Iran as a Regional Power : Flexibility and Constraints", IDSJ Journal (New Delhi), vol.9, no.2, October-December 1976, p.154.

for its own security. He spoke of the long border with USSR in the north, a Soviet-armed Iraq to the west and the potential threats to the free flow of oil from the Gulf. He asserted that given the size of Iran it was imperative on its part to have an adequate military strength.

Saudi Arabia looked upon this massive modernization and acquisition of arms by Iran with great anxiety. It viewed with alarm the location and stationing of newly acquired Iranian arms on the southern borders of Iran near the Gulf. The Saudis felt vulnerable in the face of the huge Iranian arsenal.²⁷

Saudi Arabia responded by initiating a massive programme of its own for military modernization. The US was asked to help Riyadh in training its National Guard, and in building up an Air Force, Army and a powerful Navy. By 1976 it had ordered \$ 9.4 billion worth of arms. In 1975-76 alone Saudi arms purchase from the US touched the \$ 6 billion mark, making it the second largest buyer of arms after Iran. Although the Saudis had been

27. Ibid.

spending enormous amounts on the military their military capability was severely limited by lack of technically trained manpower. Saudis were also cautious in their training programmes lest a powerful military might pose a threat to the regime itself.²⁸

Saudi decision to have a credible military machine was largely a reaction to Iran's emergence as a powerful neighbour. It was said: "Saudi Arabia is not going to sit by while Iran makes the Persian Gulf into its own lake".²⁹ Many responsible US officials began openly to say that besides Iran and Israel, Saudi Arabia also is an important ally and deserves equal support and supply of arms.

Saudi fears about Iranian arms build-up were succinctly summed up by Sheikh Yamani. He is reported to have told James Akins, former US Ambassador to Riyadh that the Saudis were reaching this conclusion ~~that~~ the Americans "had an agreement with Iran to let it

28. Singh, n.25, pp.46-52.

29. Testimony of Professor Marvin Zonis, "New Perspectives on the Persian Gulf, Hearings sub-Committee on Foreign Affairs", 93 Congress, I session GPO, Washington, 1973, 102, cited in Singh, n.16, p.335.

take over the Arabian littoral of the Persian Gulf."

The Saudi oil Minister was convinced that the United States was deliberately bolstering the Shah's military power and that "Iran's extraordinary military build up was quite clearly aimed to occupying the Arab states across the Gulf, the Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and even Saudi Arabia itself".

The Saudis had become persuaded, Akins noted, that "in the next Arab-Israeli war Israel...would be encouraged to occupy Tobuk in northern Saudi Arabia and Iran would be told to occupy the Arabian littoral".³⁰

In summary, it was only since the early 1950s that Saudi-Iranian relations came to be established on a meaningful basis. The common threat emanating from

30. Jack Anderson, "Arab Suspect US Plot", Detroit Free Press, 20 September 1976, p.9A, cited in Mohammed Mughisuddin, Conflict and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf (New York: Praeger, 1977), p. 56.

Nasser's policies, especially, after his intervention in Yemen, brought the two countries closer. The 1967 war undermined Nasser's prestige and opened the way for Saudi ascendancy in regional politics. In ~~this~~ the meantime, the British decision to quit the Gulf prompted the Shah to pursue an assertive policy in the Gulf. Even though both were rabidly anti-Communist and pro-West, Saudi Arabia and Iran detested each other. The Saudis were fearful of a militarily strong Iran. In the last days of the Shah, the two countries frequently clashed over oil prices and production quotas and the Saudis were deeply suspicious of Iran's covert links with Israel. The issue of continental shelf and Bahrain had strained their ties but these were a passing phenomenon. Both countries were keen to dominate the area and each viewed with suspicion the developments in the other's domain.

Chapter II

THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION AND ITS IMPACT
ON IRANIAN—SAUDI RELATIONS

The Iranian revolution of 1978-79 was such a great event in the region's recent history that its ripple effect can be seen in most countries of the West Asian region. Since Islamic ideas and ideals had been articulated and used by the proponents of the revolution in Iran and since nearly all countries in the area are predominantly Muslim, the nations of the region became extremely concerned about its possible repercussions on their own people. It found expression in a variety of ways.

First, the involvement of the masses in the Iranian revolution implied that Iran's Arab neighbours could not carry on in their traditional autocratic ways and that they must positively respond to the growing domestic demand for participatory system of government.

Second, most of the regimes in the regional happened to be weak and incapable of defending themselves against internal or external threat and had therefore entered into close relationship with one external power or another. The events in Iran made them aware of the unreliability of external allies and of the dangerous domestic

implications of reliance on external support (The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) being a glaring instance of the Gulf countries efforts to look after their security themselves and avoid any overt identification with any great power).

Third, the revolution had generated a popular feeling that despotic regimes, however strong and powerful, cannot suppress a determined opposition having its roots among the masses. The Gulf countries in their perception viewed the rapid modernization programmes launched by the Shah to be one of the crucial reasons for the upheaval in Iran, which made them apprehensive and go slow on their domestic modernization programmes.

Lastly, revolutionary Iran's voluntary renunciation of the role of policeman or surrogate on behalf of a major power had a favourable impact on popular perceptions of Iran in the Gulf region. Iran no longer pretended to play the role of a self-appointed "guardian of the Gulf". It enthusiastically advocated non-alignment, initiated the closure of US bases and disengaged itself from dependence on the US Diplomatic ties were severed

with the Zionist State and the racist State of South Africa and oil sales were stopped. It also withdrew from membership in the Western-oriented Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), besides giving full diplomatic recognition to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Initial Saudi Reactions

Among all the countries of the region, the tremors of the Iranian revolution were most immediately felt in Riyadh and the Saudi leaders were greatly alarmed at this great upheaval. The overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Iran was an eye-opener to the Saudi Royal family.

Before the overthrow of the Shah the mounting opposition to the Shah and his apparent inability to contain the movement was viewed with great alarm by the Saudi leaders. In August 1978, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Fahd praised Iran's progress, accused international Communists and leftists of subverting regimes all over the world, and expressed confidence in the Shah's ability to restore domestic order. Should he fail, explained

Fahd, "the Arab States will have to support Iran, and the Shah, because the stability of that country is important to the (entire) region...and any radical change will upset its security balance".¹ In the same month the Saudi Defence Minister, Sultan ibn Abdul Aziz accused the Communists of inciting trouble in Iran. He called on all Arab states to support the Shah against anti-government violence. He further declared that "the Shah of Iran has given much to his people...but international Communism and the world left do not want tranquility to prevail in such areas".² In November 1978, Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal voiced his support to the Shah when he said: "Iran was of great importance to the region and the world, and any problem there was consequently bound to give rise to anxiety". He hoped "the situation in Iran would calm down, thus enabling (Iran) to resume its important role in the area". The Prince went on to state that "Saudi Arabia believed

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1. Barry Rubin, "Iran's Revolution and Persian Gulf Instability", in Shaheen Ayubi and Shirin Tahir, Kheli (eds.), The Iran-Iraq War : New Weapons, Old Conflict (New York: Praeger, 1983), p.130.
 2. Jordan Times (Amman), 25 August 1978.

that the Shah, whose achievements could serve as an example to all States, should remain his country's leader".³ At a time when the Shah's legitimacy at home was strongly challenged, Prince Fahd publicly reaffirmed that the Shah was "the legitimate power in Iran".⁴ These statements amply showed to which side the Saudi sympathies lay and how confident they were of the Shah weathering the storm. Though the Saudis did not very overtly support or identify themselves with the Shah, they hoped he would quickly tide over the situation and survive and remain in power.

But things in Iran were moving differently and the opposition to the Shah had reached its peak. On 16 January 1979 he was forced to leave Iran never to return again. The Pahlavi dynasty's end came soon and a Republic was proclaimed. In Saudi calculations, the situation in Iran was still in a flux, they were not sure

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3. Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, News Review on West Asia (New Delhi) (Hereafter cited as IDSANRWA), December 1978, n.2036, p.609. Emphasis added.
 4. Cited in A.H.H. Abidi, "Gulf States and Revolutionary Iran : A Study of Mutual Perceptions", Foreign Affairs Reports (New Delhi), vol.29, no.3, March 1980, p.53.

of Khomeini's staying power and they feared outside intervention fill the vacuum created by the Shah's departure. Saudi foreign Minister echoed this fear when he said:

...as long as the current events in Iran remained of an internal nature, the Saudi Kingdom would not take up any position towards them but it would oppose any changes that would be likely to attract foreign interference.

It was not the policy of the Saudi Arabian Kingdom to interfere in the internal affairs of any country. If the current developments in Iran reflected the demands of Iranians then they are quite natural and we shall have no policy against that. We object only when these changes cause foreign interference which might tilt the balance of power in the area.

The picture is no clearer to us than what is obvious to all. We hear from Iran that they are warning against any foreign interference. The picture is still incomplete and all the information we have is what is available to everyone.⁵

5. British Broadcasting Corporation (London), Summary of World Broadcast, Middle East, Part-4 (Hereafter cited as SWB/ME/), 6035/A/2, 6 February 1979. See also Financial Times (London), 6 February 1979.

The arrival of Ayatollah Khomeini was seen by the Saudi royal family as an event which might revolutionize the whole region. The Saudis had no alternative but to accept the reality and to live with it. This was obvious when on 2 April 1979, King Khalid sent a congratulatory message to Khomeini on the occasion of the proclamation of Iran as an Islamic Republic in which "he hoped the creation of the republic would strengthen Islam and achieve prosperity for all Moslem peoples".⁶ Prince Abdullah when asked about his views on future Saudi-Iranian relations sounded more optimistic. He said:

The new regime in Iran has removed all obstacles and reservations in the way of cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Islam is the organizer of our relations. Moslem interests are the goal of our activities and the Holy Koran is the Constitution of both countries. Thus you see that the ties between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran did not depend on material interests and political geography. The ties stem from sources nobler than those - I mean religious sources. For this reason I am very optimistic

6. The Arab World (Beirut), 3 April 1979.

about the future of relations between us and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Our co-operation will have an Islamic dynamism against which no obstacles facing the Moslems can stand. I am not oversteering my optimism if I say that since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran I have become solidly convinced that we will regain our Holy Jerusalem. This is what our beloved Crown Prince meant when he said in one of his statements that the Moslems will regain Jerusalem⁷

But beneath this platitudinous gesture towards the new regime, the historic event was seen as a great threat to the stability of Saudi monarchy. This was evident from the increasing Saudi attention to the question of security.

Even before the Shah had left Tehran, the US, on Saudi request, despatched twelve F-15 planes to Riyadh as demonstration of US support and show of solidarity with the Saudi royal family.⁸ To the Saudis, however, the

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7. Prince Abdullah's Interview with Gulf News Agency, SWB/ME/6099/A/1, 24 April 1979.
 8. The Tribune (Chandigarh), 12 January 1979. It was reported that Riyadh and Iraqi signed an internal security accord in view of the happenings in Iran. Khyber Mail (Peshawar) 6 February 1979. See also The Tribune, 12 January 1979.

apparent inability of impotence of the Carter administration to come to the rescue of their close and trusted ally, the Shah of Iran, was seen as a great betrayal and raised serious doubts about US credibility as an ally. The events in Iran more than anything also firmly convinced the Saudis that the US was not a reliable friend on whose strength they could bank upon in crisis.

Revolutionary Iran and Saudi Arabia

An important element in revolutionary Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia was the international relevance of the revolution itself. The most notable example was a major speech given by Ayatollah Khomeini to the Iranian people on the occasion of the Iranian New Year in 1980, he declared unequivocally:

We should try hard to export our revolution to the world. We should set aside the thought that we donot export our revolution, because Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently and is the supporter of all the oppressed people of the world. On the other hand all the superpowers and all the powers have risen to destroy us. If we remain in an

enclosed environment we shall definitely face defeat.⁹

Elsewhere Khomeini sounded optimistic in a statement to Iranian students abroad declared:

Iran's Islamic Revolution, with the support of the gracious Almighty, is spreading on an worldwide scale and, God willing, with its spread the satanical powers will be dragged into isolation and governments of the meek will be established; the way will be opened for the world government of the imam mahdi (12th imam), may the exalted God hasten his noble advent and may our lives be sacrificed to the dust of his path.¹⁰

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9. FBIS, Daily Report, Middle East and Africa, vol.5, no.058, Supplement 070, March 24, 1980. Cited in R.K. Ramazani, "Khumayni's Islam in Iran's Foreign Policy", in Adeed Dawisha, ed., Islam in Foreign Policy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.19. Emphasis added.
10. Ibid., p.17. (Emphasis added). Other quotation which reflect similar views by Iranian leaders are the following:
- In a meeting with the Lebanese Shi'i Amal delegation Khomeini said:
- Even if America and Israel were to shout: 'There is no god but God', we would not accept it from them, because they wish to deceive us...Do you expect us to be indifferent to America and Israel and the other Super Powers that wish to swallow the region? We will not

Another prominent Iranian leader Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montesseri, President of Iran's Council of Constitu-

agree to be dominated by America or by the Soviet Union. We are Muslims and wish to live. We want that kind of progress and civilization which would make us reach our hands out to aliens. We want that civilization which is based upon honour and humanity and which would preserve peace upon this basis. The Super Powers wish to dominate human beings. We, you and any other Muslim, are dutybound to remain steadfast against them, not to compromise with them and to reject plans such as those of AS-Sadat and Fahd. It is our duty to condemn these plans which are not in the interest of the oppressed people.

Ibid., p.17.

Mir-Husayn Mussavi, Iran's former Foreign Minister and present Prime Minister (as Iran's foreign minister), told the CBS television network:

The fact is that values have been greatly transformed in Iran and new values have been presented to our society. Correct understanding of the values will show that our nation regards recent events in Iran as salutary, not that our nation is fond of killing. Rather they regard this as a prerequisite to the liberation of mankind in the region and those struggles will continue until the region and the world are rebuilt upon new foundations... All over the world, today, Islam is reviving. What is being formed in the Islamic world now is the return to an Islamic human identity and the Islamic Revolution of Iran is a prerequisite for the transformation of the Islamic countries and the world.

Tehran Journal, 7 October 1981, cited in Ibid., p.18.

Khomeini told a group of young Iranians going abroad:

Today we need to strengthen and export Islam everywhere. You need to export Islam to other places, and the same version of Islam which is currently in power in our country. Our way of exporting Islam is through the youth,

tional Experts and the Spiritual Chief of Tehran said

who go to other countries where a large number of people come to see you and your achievements. You must behave in such a way that these large gatherings are attracted to Islam by your action. Your deeds, your action, and your behaviour should be an example; and through you the Islamic Republic will go to other places, God Willing.

Ibid., p.19.

Khomeini told a group of ambassadors and charges d'affaires who had been recalled to Tehran for consultation:

It does not take swords to export this ideology. The export of ideas by force is not export. We shall have exported Islam only when we have helped Islam and Islamic ethics grow in those countries. This is your responsibility and it is a task which you must fulfill. You should promote this idea by adopting a conduct conducive to the propagation of Islam and by publishing the necessary publications in your countries of assignment. This is a must. You must have publications. You must publish journals. Such journals should be promotive and their contents and pictures should be consistent with the Islamic Republic, so that by proper publicity campaigns you may pave the way for the spread of Islam in those areas.

Sourush (Tehran), March 1981, pp.4-5. Cited in Ibid., p.19.

Hajatulislam Ali Khamenei, the President of the Republic, stated that the Iranian

Foreign Ministry's officials abroad are the apostles of the revolution. The nature of an official despatched abroad by a government demonstrates the nature of his government. If our diplomatic representative in all his dealings, including with people and government

in October 1979:

We hope that the Islamic revolution of Iran will soon become manifest in other Islamic countries...I wish hereby to remind the leaders of the Moslem countries neighbouring Iran to take a lesson from what happened to the head of the Iranian Government.¹¹

"Islamic Revolution" a mouth piece of the new regime in one of its editorial said:

The Islamic revolutions ideology, its people-oriented spiritual methodology needs to be exported as a liberating idea. Iran too needs to export its Islamic revolution, otherwise foreign pressures will force it to turn inwards and it can gradually revert to nationalism.¹²

officials of the country to which he is despatched, adopts an Islamic approach, then he will be utilizing the best method to demonstrate the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Ibid., p.20.

11. Radio Tehran, IDSANRWA, October 1979, pp.567-68.
12. Nazih N.M. Ayubi, "Arab Relations in the Gulf: The Future and Its Prologue", in Shaheen Ayubi and Shirin Tahir Kheli, eds., The Iran-Iraq War : New Weapons, Old Conflicts (New York: Praeger, 1983), P.148.

Statements multiplied regarding the need to export to Islamic revolution especially to the neighbouring Arab countries which were viewed as corrupt and stooges of Western imperialism. Typical is the statement by Mr. Sadegh Tabatabai, Ayatollah Khomeini's special envoy, made in an interview with the West German news magazine Der Spiegel. He said Iran did not plan to extend its power politically or militarily but added ominously:

We cannot avoid that the people in the Gulf states, where the messages....suffer under an unjust rule, rise against their oppressors. We have great understanding for this. Whatever happens, for example, in Saudi Arabia... the pressure exerted on the people from top has caused the people of Iran to seize power.

Asked whether Iran would assist the revolutionary movements in the Gulf countries, he said:

This is generally the right and the practice of any ideologically founded revolution which demands people's liberation from foreign powers and their share in decisions governing their fate.¹³

13. Times of India (New Delhi), 9 November 1982.

In late March 1980, Bani-Sadr told an Arab magazine that relations with those states were not good, "because we do not consider them independent governments ...The problem is...they imagine that we are a serious disease and that if they open their doors to us then everybody will be infected".

Iran, said Bani-Sadr, would stress providing a model rather than spreading revolution; but, he added, Tehran would also help popular Islamic movements in Arab countries. Referring to all the chief states of the area by name, the Iranian President went on to say that "as far as we are concerned these countries are linked to the United States and are not independent".¹⁴

Apart from the statements made in connection with the need to export Islamic revolution to neighbouring Arab states, the views expressed by prominent unofficial people caused alarm in the Gulf states. While on a visit to the Gulf countries Ayatollah Sadegh Khalkhali stated

14. Al-Nahar al-Arab, Wa al-Duwali, 24-30 March 1980, FBIS, Daily Report (SA), 26 March 1980. Cited in Barry Rubin, "Iran's Revolution and Persian Gulf Instability", in Shaheen Ayubi and Shirin Tahir Kheli, eds., The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons, Old Conflicts (New York: Praeger, 1983), p.137.

in a press conference at Dubai that the Persian Gulf should be renamed Islamic Gulf in order to reflect the region's religious and not ethnic make-up. Another Ayatollah Sadegh Rohhani laid Iran's claim to Bahrain by saying that "Bahrain remains Iran's fourteenth province until its position is clarified by the National Islamic Assembly". He made it very clear that since the Shah's Parliament was not a "legitimate body" the Shah's decision to relinquish Iran's claim to Bahrain was illegal. A layman, Mohsen Pezeshkpour, leader of the Pan-Iranist Party and former member of the Majlis in a public statement on 21 June 1979, echoing a similar argument, stated that the action of the Majlis in relinquishing Iran's claim over Bahrain was "illegal and invalid" and it must be declared so and that Bahrain still "remains a part of Iran".¹⁵

In May 1979 there was a coup attempt in Saudi Arabia by air force commanders. There was a hint that the commanders were in touch with the Iranian leader

15. Abidi, n.4, pp.56-57. See also Robert Litwak, Security in the Persian Gulf 2 : Sources of Inter-State Conflict (London: Gower, 1981), p.45.

Khomeini and Dr. Ibrahim Yaffi, the Foreign Minister. According to one writer the aim of the plotters was to destroy the tribal, feudal system of government prevailing in Saudi Arabia, and to replace it with "a modern regime based on the teachings and practice of the Koran" as in Iran. The US presence in Saudi Arabia was to be ended as also the role of the mighty oil company, the Aramco.¹⁶

Iranian Clarifications

Although the statements quoted above caused serious concern in Riyadh it was not clear if these

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16. "Report on Saudi Arabia : Count-down in the Desert", Mainstream (New Delhi), vol.18, no.37, 10 May, 1980, p.21.

Ahvaz regional service in Arabic on 1 September 1980 carried a commentary saying:

Today, the Muslim rulers of Saudi Arabia have discovered that they are completely bankrupt, that the carpet has been pulled from under their feet, and that no one believes their Islamic words.

The Saudi ruler have not been content with their preachers' fatwas but have recently begun to form committees and send them to Muslim African countries. They are spending large sums of money on these committees, not out of love for Islam or in order to propagate its beliefs, but out of hatred for the Imam's State and to distort the words of Imam Khomeini.

SWB/ME/6513/A/11, 3 September 1980.

represented the official Iranian views. The statements had indeed been made by non-officials even though they were closely associated with the new Islamic government in Iran. Moreover, official Tehran had promptly reassured the bewildered Saudi and other 'Gulf governments that it did not subscribe to these statements. This helped dispell any lingering doubts in Riyadh. The Iranian Foreign Minister, Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi, said on 17 September 1979 that, "we do not want to export our revolution, nor do we want to send armed men to fight foreign regimes". But he also added pointedly; "we cannot prevent the influence of the Islamic revolution on other countries".¹⁷ Amir Abbas Entezam, former Deputy Premier for Administration and Public Affairs and

17. Arab News (Jeddah) 18 September 1979.

Tehran radio on 10th May carried an interview with the Iranian Foreign Minister, Ebrahim Yazdi. He declared that his Government's foreign policy was based on non-alignment and positive neutrality. Iran had no intention of exporting revolution to other countries. On the other hand, it was inevitable that a great many Muslim nations should be inspired by the Iranian revolution, and Iran would support liberation movements. Yazdi reaffirmed that Iran had no intention of acting as the "policeman" of the Persian Gulf region. It would, however, endeavour to safeguard peace in the Gulf through cooperation with the interested countries.
SWB/ME/6114/A/7, 12 May 1979.

official spokesman for the new government stated in an interview that Iran was seeking to consolidate relations with the Gulf countries in general. He stressed Iran's desire to establish relations based on Islamic brotherhood, good neighbourliness and respect for mutual interests.¹⁸ Former foreign minister Mir-Husayn Mussavi also disclaimed any intentions of exporting the "Islamic Revolution". He asserted:

We have declared time and again that we have no intention of interfering in other countries internal affairs, but what is shaking the Islamic world is a movement springing from the revolution among the Moslem masses of the world and, naturally, each people will shape their movement according to their own peculiar circumstances. They will force their governments to tread this path and, if not, naturally they will be confronted by the peoples' moves.¹⁹

Thus, the mutually contradictory unofficial claims and official clarifications left the Saudi leaders confused and uncertain as to the Iranian intentions.

18. Abidi, n.4, p.56.

19. Tehran Journal, 7 October 1981. Cited in Ramazani, n.9, p.20.

Taking note of Saudi apprehensions Tehran took the initiative to dispell the misunderstandings. The Iranian Minister of National Guidance and Pilgrimate, Nasser Minachi, arrived in Riyadh on 8 September 1979. After holding talks with Crown Prince Fahd, the Minachi described Saudi Arabia's role in the Gulf region as "important" and added that the Kingdom "aims at closing the ranks of, and at complete cooperation among the region's countries". He said the policy of the Iranian government "is based on cooperation with all countries, particularly with those of the Gulf". The meeting probably cleared some of the misunderstanding or misconceptions which had cropped between the two countries. It was the first official meeting between a member of the Saudi government and the new revolutionary Iranian government.²⁰

The Kaaba Incident of 1979

The overthrow of the monarchy in Iran and the assumption of power by the clergy led by Imam Khomeini

20. Arab News, 9 September 1979.

had already sent shock waves inside the Saudi leadership. What intensified their fears was not so much the assumption of power by Khomeini and his supporters but the possible impact of the revolutionary ideas preached by him. Ideas like inadmissibility of monarchy in Islam, governments to be based on the consent of the people and peoples' participation in government threw a serious challenge to the Saudi political system. The message was clear and unambiguous to the Saudi leaders.

As it happened, the legitimacy of the Saudi political system was challenged from within. The seizure of the Kaaba mosque on 20 November 1979 by a group of young armed people under the leadership of Juhayman bin Muhammad bin Safy al Otaiba clearly showed how vulnerable the Saudi government was to the Iranian influence. Although it is difficult to say that Iran had a hand in the seizure of Kaaba, the Iranian revolution did create an atmosphere conducive to such a happening. It was perhaps an indigenous Saudi event which exploded and coincided with the events in Iran. The act was not merely a seizure of the Kaaba mosque but a very grave

challenge to the very legitimacy of the Saudi dynasty. According to Otaiba, "the present Saudi rulers had forfeited their role as leaders of Islam, that a new leader was needed....for the revolt against the Saudi family".²¹ He denounced the Saudi royal family and their "impure Islam" and called upon the pilgrims to join his banner of revolt. According to Khalid al Hassan, chief of the PLO in Kuwait, the tape recorded version of Otaiba's statements shows that he talked about commissions paid to royal princes on business deals, of the drinking of alcohol and the smuggling of spirits by members of the royal family, of the need to select rulers who adhere to the religion, and of the general climate of moral collapse in the kingdom".²² He is

21. Cited in Sreedhar, The Gulf : Scramble for Security (New Delhi: ABC, 1983), p.61.

22. Ibid., p.61. See also Joe, Stork, "Saudi Arabia and the US", Merip Reports (Washington D.C.), no.91, October 1980, p.29; Paul, Jim, "Insurrection at Mecca", Merip Reports, no.91, October 1980, pp. 3-4. SWB/ME/6313/A/13, 8 January 1980; SWB/ME/6316/A/3, 11 January 1980.

also reported to have said that his "message is to challenge all these (like Saudis) rulers who have no right of obedience upon us".²³

The Saudi security forces took nearly two weeks to disarm and flush out the armed men who had taken over the mosque. It was reported that the French sent an anti-terrorist squad to help the Saudi forces. In all according to Saudi official statements the Saudi government lost 127 soldiers dead, including 12 officers, and more than 300 wounded.

The Oteibas are one of the leading tribal confederations of the Saudi Kingdom on whose support the Saudi royal family has traditionally relied. This

23. Ibid., p.62.

The leader of an underground Saudi Arabian group that claimed responsibility for the attack on Kaaba said Iran's Islamic revolution may change the course of future developments in his country. He said, "The Iranian revolution has had a psychological effect on the internal situation in Saudi Arabia. In Iran there was one Shah, while in our country there are more than 10,000 Shahs". We had no intention to occupy the Grand Mosque. All we wanted to do was to alert the world to what was happening in Saudi Arabia". Unfortunately we got no help from any side, Arab or foreign. We depend on ourselves. The revolution is coming without any doubt", he said. Hongkong Standard, 19 December 1979.

armed uprising and legitimacy challenge came as a rude shock to the already terrified Saudi leadership as the issues raised by this group were quite similar to the one raised by the overthrow of the Shah by Khomeini. The Kaaba seizure rudely awakened the Saudi rulers about the dangerous implications of the Iranian Revolution.

According to William B. Quandt, "the Mecca affair was a shock to the Saudi establishment, tarnishing its prestige internationally and leading to a spate of stories about instability in Saudi Arabia".²⁴ The Saudi leaders were suddenly awakened by this crisis and seriously began to look up Iran as a threat to their regime although it was not involved in the episode.

The Shia Uprising in Saudi Arabia

The revolution in Iran and the assumption of power by Khomeini was seen by the majority of the Arabs (who are Sunnis) as an exclusively Shia affairs. The Shia are more than 50 per cent in Iraq, more than 75 percent in Bahrain, 20-30 in Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE and

24. William B. Quandt, Saudi Arabia in the 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security and Oil (Washington: Brookings, 1981), p.95.

Oman. In eastern Saudi Arabia, in the oil-rich Al-Hasa province most Shias live, they are estimated to be around 600,000 (where most estimates say 200,000). For these Shias the event in Iran was a source of great inspiration and encouragement as they have been generally neglected and treated badly by the Sunni dominated governments. The Shias nurse economic, social and religious grievances against the Sunni leadership. According to a Saudi Shia: "In Sunni eyes first there are Sunnis, below them are Christians, and below the Christians are Jews, we are below the Jews".²⁵ According to one writer since March 1979 Tehran Radio has made regular broadcasts in Arabic, inciting Shias to revolt against their oppressive governments. Cassettes with Khomeini's speeches had also been smuggled into various Gulf countries.²⁶

Radio Tehran in one of its broadcasts in Arabic for abroad under the title "Barbaric Repression" of

25. New York Times, 3 January 1980, cited in Ibid., p.63.

26. Ibid., p.63.

Shias in Saudi Arabia said the following:

While commemorating the heroic anniversary of Ashura (making the death of Imam Husayn), thousands of faithful mojahedin vanguards in the eastern regions of the Arabian Peninsula marched in mourning processions carrying the body of one of the six martyrs who had died under barbaric torture in the dungeons of Al Sa'ud's dark jails and chanting in commemoration of this blessed occasion and reiterating their pledges to continue the march of the martyrs, the martyrs of Badr, Uhud, Hittin and Husayn's Karbala.

In view of the pact that popular movements frighten tyrants - who march along the steps of Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab, Mu'awiyah, Yazid the Pahlavi dynasty and the thousands of traitors and cowards - the Saudi authorities attacked the revolutionary masses, who were eulogizing the martyrs of liberty and justice, and opened fire on them, martyring about 40 believers of the best message-bearers in the area. The Saudi authorities also arrested about 600 persons and threw them in jail. (words indistinc) torture and gave vent to their concealed rancour.

The ruling authorities have disgraced themselves by practising such barbaric and

ferocious deeds, which lasted from 6 Muharram until the last day of (words indistinct). They forgot or are trying to forget that the rule of tyrants will come to an end. The banner of Islam and the Quran will fly high throughout the country. All the oppressed will be saved from the yoke of colonialism and slavery. God is with the Muslims. He is Almighty.²⁷

In January 1980, for example, Tehran Radio carried a program on the Shia struggle within Saudi Arabia during which it was claimed that the Saudi regime was only superficially a Muslim government; actually, it was the "opposite of Islam" according to Tehran. The Saudi monarchy was merely "another example of the domination of the Shahs and their corruption", but it, too, would be overthrown and revolutionary sparks were already visible.²⁸

In another broadcast Radio Tehran denounced the Saudi royal family for "squandering" of resources and asked if such things don't compel people to resort

27. SWB/ME/6296/A/3, 13 December 1979.

28. Radio Tehran, 7 January 1980, Daily Report (MEA), 8 January 1980. Cited in Rubin, n. 14, p.133.

to violence and follow the path of the revolution:

✓ Last Thursday (6th March), news agencies carried reports on developments that have begun to pose serious threats to the ruling regime in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the eastern area. Observers believe (words indistinct) because he wears Muslim clothing but inwardly represents the US body, mind and terrorism, and because he subjects the people, resources and strategic position of the Arabian Peninsula to the service of objectives and interests that are hostile to Islam and Muslims. The movement of (words indistinct) of the Arabian Peninsula has revealed some of the authorities' corrupt actions in the following report it sent to the voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Report says: This is a statement concerning the funds robbed from the people and squandered by the Al Sa'ud family in the following manner:

These funds are used to finance US and European arms factories. In 1978 the Saudi Government spent 5,100 million dollars on

US weapons, in addition to the outlays resulting from the purchase of 60 F-15 aircraft and

The Saudi authorities are carrying out the same treacherous role that the deposed Shah carried out in Iran. This role grew in the wake of the Shah's departure. The people's funds are spent on buying weapons the people can do without and which are stock-piled in arsenals, not to mention the exports and other services required for this purpose

The people's funds are used to pay the bills for the luxurious, frivolous and shameless way of life of the Saudi royal family and its entourage. They build palaces and buy villas and yachts. HM the King recently bought an aircraft worth 50,000,000 dollars containing a throne and equipped with a gold-plated pool The people's funds are also squandered at the gambling table. The Amir of the faithful, Crown Prince Fahd Bin Abd al-Aziz, spends billions on gambling, drinking parties and shameless dancing or orgies....

Would it be surprising if people follow the path of the revolution, resort to violence

and continue their struggle to regain their rights and resources?²⁹

It seems the new Iranian regime by early 1980 was regularly broadcasting propaganda in Arabic to Saudi Arabic in the name of the Islamic Revolution Organization in the Arabian penninsula. One broadcast began with the Quranic verse: "Kings despoil a country when they enter it and make the noblest of its people its meanest". The broadcast went on to say:

When the people have self-confidence and high morale, they will begin to demand their rights and oppose the authorities' policy and conduct. Indeed, it is this which the corrupt monarchies fear most. This is why they always attempt to trample upon the peoples' dignity and morale, oppress them and subject them to ignominy in order to prevent the people from ever contemplating opposition and confrontations and to make them yield and subjugate themselves to the ruling authorities. This is the nature of monarchy, which is rejected by Islam. This is what our people in the Arabian penninsula are suffering under Al Saud's rule.³⁰

29. SWB/ME/6367/A/2, 11 March 1980.

30. Cited in Quandt, p.24, pp.39-40.

This broadcast not only questions the legitimacy of the Saudi leadership but also points out how our "people i.e., Shias are suffering under the Saudi rule. There are an estimated 600,000 Shias (most estimates say 200,000) in Saudi Arabia mostly in the oil rich eastern provinces, who form 35 per cent of the population. According to one estimate, among ARAMCO's 17,000 Saudi workers more than 40 percent were Shias. In November and December i.e., around the Kaaba incident there were widespread demonstrations, strikes by the Shias in this area of Saudi Arabia. The demonstrations erupted on the Id Meelad day which was banned by Saudi authorities in 1979. It was in open defiance of this ban that the Shias decided to perform the function. Demonstrations were also carried out in which Khomeini's picture and his name chanted alongwith denunciation of US.³¹ They were also demonstrating to express their resentment

31. Egyptian Gazette (Cairo) 4 December 1979;
Times of India, 4 December 1979.
 Sreedhar, n.21, p.64.

Another rioting is reported to have broken out there on Friday (1 Feb.1980), the first anniversary of the return of Tehran of Ayatollah Khomeini. Four men were shot dead by Saudi security forces and the town was sealed off as buses and cars were set on fire by the demonstrators. Financial Times (London), 5 February 1980. See also SWB/ME/6365/A/2, 8 March 1980.

at being treated as second class citizens under the rule of the Sauds and Bin Jiluwis. Most of them demanded greater autonomy for the oil-rich Al-Hasa province in which they live. There were Shia riots in Qatib as well. These uprisings were put down by the National Guard with many people killed or injured. In February 1980 some more Shias were killed as they took part in demonstrations marking the anniversary of Khomeini's return to Iran.³²

Coming closely on the heels of the Kaaba seizure the Shia uprising was an additional shock to the Saudi leaders and it understood the growing danger felt from the changes in Iran. Saudi leaders could not more sit with their folded hands and just watch and wait for the Khomeini regime to collapse. The Iranian government had become a reality and the Saudis had to cope with the situation arising from this.

Promise of Constitutional Reform

The Kaaba incident brought to the fore the question of Saudi government's legitimacy. This had been

32. Christopher S. Raj, "A Vulnerable Region", World Focus (New Delhi), vol.3, no.9, September 1982, p.5.

challenged even before the Shah was overthrown and much before Khomeini landed in Teheran. In December 1978 a fatwah was issued by a senior Sunni Divine of Mecca, Al-Qadi Sheikh Mohammed Said Nawaf, denouncing the Wahabite interpretation of Islam as being alien to true belief. The Saudi ruling family, it said, had extracted power by force and had wielded it "against the manifest wishes of the majority of the Sunnis living" in Saudi Arabia.³³

Following the Kaaba incident, King Khaled ordered a committee of five ministers, two lawyers and one ex-minister to draw up plans for a 'Consultative Council' as well as "basic governments statute" as soon as possible.

The issue of Pilgrims in Saudi-Iranian Relations

Saudi Arabia being the custodian of the Islamic holy places of Mecca and Medina occupies a very unique place in the Arab-Islamic world. Hundreds and thousands of Muslims go every year to perform Haj. It is quite

33. Ibid., p.4.

natural that Iranians — whether they are Shia or Sunni also perform this holy act. The number of Iranians going for haj considerably went up after the Islamic revolution in Iran. What was unique in the organization of the Iranian hajees was that it was sent under the leadership of an Ayattollah and the hajees shouted slogans against imperialist conspiracies against the Islamic world and Muslims. This happened in the 1981 and 1982 haj season. Many thousands of Iranian hajees were arrested, jailed and eventually deported, even before they could complete all the ceremonies connected with the Haj.³⁴ In a letter to Khomeini, on 10 October 1981, King Khalid called the slogan shouting against US and Israel by the Iranians as having caused "disgust

34. One injured Iranian hajee later died in a Tehran hospital. See Tehran Times, 4 November 1981; Kayhan International (Tehran), 4 November 1981; Patriot (New Delhi), 3 October 1981; SWB/ME/7123/A/6, 6 September 1982; SWB/ME/7124/A/6~~2~~, 7 September 1982; SWB/ME/7127/1, 10 September 1982; SWB/ME/6847/A/1, 7 October 1981.

and dissatisfaction among the pilgrims of the Baytollah al-Haraam".³⁵ Khomeini in his reply defended the Iranians who took part in the demonstrations. He said participation of Muslims in socio-political gatherings are the most essential duties of the Muslims and criticised the Saudis for considering this as crime. He further said: "Saudi police entered Masjid ul-Haraam which according to the clear precepts of the Quran is an asylum for anybody even for the deviated [from the path of God] and attacked Muslims in such a place with boots and with arms, injured them, arrested them and sent them to prisons". He further asked is it a "crime of these Muslims [who] chanted slogans against the US and Israel" — the two enemies and adversaries of God and

35. Khomeini's reply to King Khalid's letter is found in Echo of Islam, Special Issue, vol.I (Tehran: Ministry of Islamic Guidance, 1981), pp.298-300. See also SWB/ME/6852/A/2, 13 October 1981; SWB/ME/6837/i, 25 September 1981; SWB/ME/6817/i, 2 September 1981; SWB/ME/6839/i, 28 September 1981; SWB/ME/714/i, 27 September 1982; 7154/i, 12 October 1981. King Khalid also wrote that some of Iranian pilgrims indulged 'in activities in your name which not only were contrary to your aims but were also contrary to the aims of pilgrimage and the honour of holy places. These pilgrims, the King continued, shouted slogans and demonstrated in the holy precinct; actions which disturbed and disgusted other pilgrims to the holy house of God and no doubt this action will damage Iran's credibility and prestige'. Ramazani, n.9, pp.26-27.

His Messenger. Khomeini further asked why "they don't prohibit Muslims for participating in politics in favour of the US and Israel and other adversaries of Islam and contrary to the behaviour of the magnanimous prophet of Islam".

Then he came to the main point and said:
"if the Saudi Government utilized this religious and political ritual, which is annually held, Islamically and politically, it wouldn't have any need for the US and its AWACS or any other super power". He further said that these AWACS are "delivered to Saudi Arabia in order to utilize them for the US interests and benefits."

In the end Khomeini touched on the issue of mass support and legitimacy of the regime. He said:
"The Islamic governments and especially the government of Saudi Arabia which is located at the center of Islamic politics, would believe unanimously and unite with us. Each would taste in their own country the sweet taste of generous and mass support for

their nations and like the popular government of Iran they would enjoy this great divine blessing."³⁶

36. Ibid., p.300.

In a message addressed to Islamic countries' Ulema, broadcast by Tehran radio, Ayatollah Montazeri, noted reported ill treatment of Iranian hajj pilgrims meted out by the "American Saudi regime" and said the pilgrims' only sin had been their effort to revive the tradition of enlightening Muslims about the oppressive policies of the world's blasphemy and Israeli usurpation, and to promote Muslim unity. He said that the Saudi Government was a strong Israeli and American base in the region. A pleasure-seeking and discredited family, installed half a century ago by British colonialism, was now administering the holy shrines in Saudi Arabia and was rendering the best service to the enemies of Islam. He called on Arab and non-Arab Muslims, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula to form a Council to take over the administration of holy shrines from the Saudi rulers.

Jumhuri Islami (Tehran, Persian edition), 19 Mehr, 1361, (10 October 1982); Sobh Azadeghan (Tehran, Persian edition), 19 Mehr 1361 (10 October 1982).

Ayatollah Montazeri said: "The problems raised by the Saudi regime in the way for Hajj pilgrimage of the Iranian Moslems are only serving the interests of the zionist and the united front of atheism against Islam". He further said, "It is greatly regrettable that while Palestine, Al Aqsa Mosque and Lebanon are under the boots of the Zionist forces, and while the Iranian nation is unsparing in its efforts to liberate Moslems and oppressed people from the yoke of the oppressive forces and to world Zionism, the Saudi regime has simply chosen to take such a hostile stand against Islam and Moslems thus preparing the way for the materialization of the sinister plots of the objectives of enemies of Islam". Tehran Times, 23 July 1983.

Khomeini thus defended the right of the Iranians to demonstrate against the US and Israel in Mecca and criticised the Saudi leaders for imposing restrictions and treating them badly. He also questioned the Saudis on AWACS and hoped the Saudis will allow their own citizens to participate in socio-political demonstrations and enjoy the support of the people as the Islamic government of Iran enjoys.

The Saudi authorities were really alarmed at the boldness and audacity of the Iranians not only to denounce their ally — USA — but also organize and mobilize other Hajees and also Saudi citizens themselves. To Saudi authorities feared that this might become a regular annual affair and in the process they might also be joined by the Saudi citizens in great numbers and challenge Saudi legitimacy also in view of Saudi Arabia's close ties with the US. Although the issue of hajees was quickly tackled by deporting them the event and the controversy surrounding it left bitter memories on both sides. The issue was not merely of chanting of slogans but wider issues of Saudi legitimacy and control of holy places were raised.

Chapter III

IRAN-IRAQ WAR AND THE BAHRAIN CRISIS

The course of events in revolutionary Iran caused deep anxieties in Saudi Arabia about its own stability and security. Saudi Arabia took a series of steps to contain the ever growing threat from Iran. These included Saudi support to Iraq in its war with Iran, Saudi request for US support and the conclusion of arms deal with US and other Western countries, the strengthening of ties with Gulf states, formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council, military support to Bahrain to crush the coup d'etat of 1981 and Saudi attempt to seek Arab/Muslim support.

Impact of Iran-Iraq War

One of the countries with which Iran's relations steadily deteriorated following the February 1979 revolution was Iraq. In mid-September 1980, following weeks of increasing border incidents, Iraq took the formal step of abrogating the 1975 Algiers Agreement and invaded Iranian territory by mounting massive attack on Iranian port of Khorramshar and the area adjacent to Abadan airport.¹

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1. In March 1975, Shah and the then Iraqi vice-president Saddam Hussein, concluded an agreement. In exchange for ceasing to support the Kurds, Iran gained the eastern half of the Shatt-al-Arab, both banks of which had earlier been in possession of Iraq.

Baghdad's war aims, as publicly enunciated during the first days of the conflict were to get Iranian recognition of exclusive Iraqi navigational rights on the Shatt al-Arab, the return of Abu Musa and the Tunmb islands to Arab sovereignty, the provision of 'self-rule' to the Arab population of Khuzestan.² But it was evident that Iraq had chosen to strike against a militarily weak and diplomatically isolated Iran because of the overriding fear of the Iranian revolution's impact on the large Kurdish and Shia communities in Iraq. Iraq, on the other hand, alleged that the Iranian Republic had made repeated efforts over the preceding eighteen months to topple the Baathist regime (as well as every other secular government in the region) through the export of its revolution.³

Since Iraq took the initiative in military operations, it succeeded in capturing large chunks of Iranian territory. Saudi Arabia by attending the

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2. "The text of the historic address of President Saddam Hussein at the National Assembly on 17 September 1980", in The Iraqi-Iranian Conflict: Documentary Dossier, (Republic of Iraq, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Consultation Committee, January 1981), pp.208-14.
 3. The Iraq-Iran Conflict (Paris: Editions due Monde Arabe, 1981), p.31.

Baghdad Arab summits on Camp David in September 1978 and March 1979, had already moved closer to the radical Baathist regime. After he succeeded Hassan al-Bakr, Saddam Hussein had also weaned Iraq away from its close ties with USSR. He had considerably moderated his policies towards his Arab rivals. After the Shah's ouster, Iraq and Saudi Arabia concluded an agreement for establishing constant cooperation on security matters.⁴ The Iraqi attack on Iran was tacitly supported by Saudi Arabia as the latter perceived that only Iraq could blunt the thrust of Iran's Islamic revolution from engulfing the Gulf.⁵ Since then the Saudis had been

4. Arnold Hottinger, "Saudi Arabia : On the Brink?" Swiss Review of World Affairs (Zurich), vol.29, no.2, May 1979, p.12. See also "New Roles for Old Driver", Middle East (New York), April 1980, p.19. and SWB/ME/6899/A/10, 7 December 1981.

5. Saudi Arabia's position in the spring of 1980 was described by Adeed Dawisha as follows:

"The Saudis may have tacitly condoned Iraq's invasion of Iran in the hope that a quick Iraqi victory might lead to a substantial domination of Khomeini's disruptive influence among the Gulfs' Shia Moslems"

Al.Dawisha, "Iraq and the Arab World : The Gulf and After", World Today (London), vol.37, no.5, May 1981, p.193.

providing aid in various forms to the Iraqis to sustain their costly war against Iran. By doing so, the Saudis probably expected to weaken both Iran and Iraq so that in the long run Saudi Arabia could emerge as the undisputed leader in the Gulf. The Saudis gave billion of dollars in loan to enable Iraq to buy arms and other materials to keep its economy afloat. When the Israelis destroyed the Iraqi nuclear reactor in June 1981, King Khalid of Saudi Arabia immediately announced that the Kingdom could bear the cost of rebuilding the Iraqi reactor.⁶ Iran viewed this as a hostile act on the part of the Saudi ruler and warned against any further extension of political, economic and other support to Iraq. Speaker of the Majlis, Rafsanjani, said: "we have been patient up till now but patience has its limits".⁷ Saudi leaders' decision to support Iraq in its war with Iran was the first major move on their part to contain the Islamic revolution.

6. SWB/ME/6778/4, 18 July 1981.

7. Tehran Radio, IDSANRWA, May 1981, p.64, no.191; see also SWB/ME/7029/A/2, 18 May 1982.

Saudi support to Iraq stemmed from considerations of self-interest. According to one writer the Saudis wished "not really to see Iraq as a clear victor in the Gulf war. That would enhance the prestige of Saddam, who has all along been intent on making Iraq the leader of the Arab Gulf states. An unbeaten but weakened Iraq would best suit the Saudi royals".⁸

Saudi Arabia Seeks US Support to Contain Iran

Though the Saudis were badly disappointed at the apparent US inability or unwillingness to come to the rescue of the Shah, they did not lose hope of US support in case of an emergency. The taking of hostages in Teheran and the US Tabas fiasco to rescue the hostages clearly showed to the Saudis that in the ultimate analysis they themselves would have to look after their security. This could be done only in the long run by developing the armed forces and getting new arms. As soon as the Iran-Iraq war broke out the Saudis, alarmed

8. Dilip Hiro, Inside the Middle East (London: Routledge & Kegan paul, 1982), p.377. The Saudis did not pay any heed to Iraqi calls to expell Iranian diplomatic mission and severe ties with Iran. SWB/ME/6919/1, 5 January 1982.

at the frequent air attacks on Iraq by Iranian phantoms, asked the US to send the AWACS planes to guard against any attack by Iran on Saudi oil fields.⁹ The US promptly despatched the planes. The Iranian media then accused the Saudi leaders of allowing AWACS to be used not for Saudi security but to monitor Iranian air and ground movements against Iraq and pass the information to Iraq. Iran viewed this as a hostile act and in retaliation Iranian phantom fighter planes were reported to have violated the Saudi airspace. When an Iranian C-130 Hercules carrying the Defence Minister and other top military officials crashed, the chief of Iran's revolutionary guards, Mohsen Razai, charged that the American AWACS had caused the crash by disrupting the electronic system of the plane.¹⁰

When Regan came to power early in 1981 he made it clear that US support to its allies would be kept up and

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9. James, Buchan, "Saudi Arabia II - Defence", Strategic Digest (New Delhi), vol.II, no.6, June 1981, p.489.
 10. Patriot (New Delhi), 9 October 1981; see also William B. Quandt, "Riyadh Between the Super Powers", Foreign Policy (New York) vol.44, Fall 1981, pp.37-56.

it would never hesitate to use force if necessary. Even under Carter administration Cyrus Vance, the then Secretary of State had declared on 18 March 1979, that the US had "vital interests" in Persian Gulf. "We consider the territorial integrity and security of Saudi Arabia a matter of fundamental interest to the United States", he added.¹¹ President Reagan re-emphasized US commitment to Saudi Arabia when he said: "We will not allow Saudi Arabia to become another Iran".¹² The strengthening of US presence in the Indian Ocean and the American decision to draft Pakistan into the emerging "strategic consensus" were designed to safeguard Saudi security vis-a-vis Iran.

The Saudi's themselves, as seen earlier, realized that in the ultimate analysis the security of the regime was their own responsibility. In view of this they decided to strengthen their armed forces and a massive programme of armament and modernization was started.

11. Cited in John K. Cooley, "Iran the Palestinians and the Gulf", Foreign Affairs (New York), vol.57, no.5, Summer 1979, p. 1032.

12. Arab World, 2 October 1981.

AWACS, F-15s, latest tanks and ships worth billions of dollars were bought from the US, France, Britain and West Germany.¹³ Though the arms acquisition list was

13. For details see Sreedhar, The Gulf : Scramble for Security (New Delhi: ABC, 1983), pp.101-02 & 14-17. See also S.P. Sethi, "Saudi Arabia's Security", Times of India (New Delhi), 12 May 1981 and Bruce R. Kuniholm, "What the Saudis Really Want : A Premier for the Reagan Administration", Orbis (Philadelphia), vol.25, no.1, Spring 1981, pp.107-22.

Tehran home service on 4 October 1980 carried a statement by Prime Minister's office, saying:

In the name of God. The Islamic Republic of Iran deems it necessary to point out the following in connection with US Government's measure in transferring AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia:

(1) The Islamic Republic Government of Iran strongly condemns this action which leads to escalation of tension and an arms race between foreign powers in the region.

(2) The Islamic Republic Government of Iran believes that this action is an extension of the US hostile attitude against the Islamic Republic.

(3) The Islamic Republic Government of Iran once again categorically declares that the safeguarding of the Persian Gulf region is solely the right of the region's states, divorced from foreigners.

(4) The Islamic Republic Government of Iran considers any use of these aircraft in the invasions launched by the Iraqi Ba'thist regime against Iran as a hostile act against itself.

(signed) Mohammad Ali Rajai, Prime Minister of Islamic Republic of Iran.

SWB/ME/6541/A/9, 6 October 1980.

Another criticism of the arms sale came in an Iranian Foreign Ministry Statement, broadcast on

quite impressive, the Saudis, due to lack of trained personnel, could not overnight increase their military capability. It only had a deterrent value against any Iranian designs to invade Saudi Arabia. The Saudi defence expenditure increased from less than \$ 1 billion in 1972 to more than \$ 20 billion in 1980.

It must be pointed out that despite growing hostility between Saudi Arabia and Iran they were still on talking terms. This is clear from the message which Crown Prince Fahd got from Prime Minister Rajai on 17 February 1981. The message was carried by the Deputy Speaker of the Majlis Hussein Haqqani. He and Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Mansouri were reported to have had wide-ranging discussions including developments in the Arab world in the light of

31 October 1980 by Tehran radio. The US Senate's approval of the sale to Saudi Arabia implied "total occupation of the holy Islamic territories" and was considered "a step against the Islamic Umma's interests in the region". The Statement also said:

We warn European countries that with the stationing of their forces in Sinai they are reviving memories of the Crusades and in practice confronting the world's Muslims. Without doubt the world oppressors, led by the United States.... SWB/ME/6869/A/i, 2 November 1981.

Iran-Iraq war. That the initiative for these visits came from Iran clearly showed that Iran was on the defensive. Iranian reassurances helped keep the Saudi leaders at least well informed about the Iranian thinking.¹⁴

Impact of Iranian Military Successes

Iraq's inability to hold back whatever territory it had occupied in Iran in the face of a sustained, determined and powerful Iranian push came as a big shock to the Saudi leaders. When Iraq attacked Iran in September 1980, Saudis had hoped that the Khomeini regime, riddled with chaotic conditions at home, would collapse under the Iraqi blows. But this did not happen and the Saudi's worst fears were confirmed. The Iraqis, unable to face the Iranian offensive, were forced to retreat; and this provided an opportunity to the Iranians to mount an offensive against the Iraqis. The Iranians could advance only a few miles inside Iraq but the fear of yet another Iranian attack still loomed large.

The exigencies of the war compelled Iraq to resort to heavy borrowings from the Gulf countries. Saudi Arabia

14. The Arab World, 18 February 1981.

took the lead in giving billions of dollars.¹⁵ It eagerly came to the rescue of Iraq in the belief that any investment in Iraqi war to contain Iran would insure their own security. Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan went to Baghdad to assess the situation and to take stock of the Iraqi needs.¹⁶ Saudi Arabia also used its influence on the Gulf Cooperation

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15. The Iranian ambassador to Kuwait Ali Shams Ardakair said the cost of war with Iraq was "tremendous". He criticized the Arab states, which in his words, "have not even sent a pair of socks" for the Iranian refugees from cities under Iraqi fire. The Arab World, 9 December 1981. According to The Economist (19 December 1981, p.43); Iraq has received \$ 9 billion from Saudi Arabia and \$ 6 billion from Kuwait. Other sources estimates loans to be as high as \$ 14-20 billion. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait gave Iraq more than \$ 10-billion in loans during the wars first year and also put their port facilities at Iraq's disposal. See the Washington Post, 21 December 1981.
19. The Arab World, 5 April 1982;
SWB/ME/6320/A/4, 16 June 1980;
SWB/ME/6542/A/2, 7 October 1980.

Council (GCC) members to enlist their support for Iraq in its ongoing war with Iran.¹⁷

Iran obviously could not maintain silence over these moves which were designed to arrest Iran's

17. Rafsanjani called upon the Gulf Arab states to stay out of the Iran-Iraq war and discontinue their support to Iraq. Tehran Times, 5 March 1983. See also Tehran Times, 24 February 1983.

Islamic Republic Party leader Hojjat al-Islam Muhammad Ali Khamenei in an Arabic language broadcast in early October 1980, stated:

We are determined to send Saddam to hell. His collaborators' turn will come later. I am referring to the Shaykhs in the Gulf region and some rulers in the Arab region.

He continued:

You know that many of your governments have supported unbelief against Islam. They have betrayed Islam and the Koran. The Shaykhs of the Persian Gulf — these greedy pigs which know nothing but satisfying their lust, these shaykhs who have spent their whole life plundering your wealth are supporting Saddam the unbeliever by their words and deeds.... We will destroy all the dwarfs if they continue to support falsehood against right. All of you must raise the flag of the Islamic Revolution everywhere".

Tehran International Service Radio, 3 October 1980, FBIS, Daily Report (SA), 2 October 1980. Cited in Barry Rubin, "Iran's Revolution and Persian Gulf Instability", in Shaheen Ayubi and Shirin Tahir Kheli, eds., The Iran-Iraq War : New Weapons, Old Conflict (New York: Praeger, 1983), p.139.

advance in the battlefield and to undermine its government.¹⁸ Iran warned the GCC countries, in a statement issued on the eve of the emergency meeting of the GCC foreign ministers, that "world arrogance, headed by America" was trying to provoke the countries of the region into an overall confrontation with Iran in order to legitimize its own presence in the area. The statement reiterated that Iran rejected any interference in the affairs of the countries in the region. The doomed Iraqi regime was to blame for the tension and "if those governments which have helped to prolong that regime and its crimes... by their overall support do not sever their links... and distance themselves from that regime as soon as possible, they will undoubtedly suffer". Iran's victories, the statement continued, were an indication of its power. In its relation with the Gulf countries, Iran would take into account every step taken by them showing greater understanding of Iran and its struggle against

18. SWB/ME/7093/1, 2 August 1982, and The Arab World, IDSANRWA, December 1981, no. 1233, p.413.

imperialism. Equally, it would act decisively as regards any "wrong move".¹⁹ A commentary broadcast by Tehran radio's Arabic service on 19 November criticised Saudi Arabia for its "unlimited support" for the Iraqi regime in the latter's aggression against Iran. Saudi Arabia, the radio said, had carried out US orders to provide money to Iraq for arms purchases and media support. Military equipment had been sent to Iraq through Saudi ports. The war would not have lasted so long but for the Saudi, French and British support for Saddam Hussayn.²⁰

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19. SWB/ME/7028/i, 17 May 1982. Foreign Minister Sadegh Qotbzadeh quoted Khomeini's warning to Gulf states to desist in their support to Iraq in a press conference on 7 April 1980:

We are giving our ultimatums to the Arab countries on the subject. If the Arab countries are not able to stop the crimes of Iraq in Iran, and if they (surrender to) Iraq propaganda, naturally we will give any assistance, at any price and by any means possible (to aid Baghdad's enemies).

This line was broadcast overseas in Arabic in even stronger terms:

We also issue a last warning to the Arab states. If the Arab states do not stop their provocations, we will repulse them with all means and with all our power.
Cited in Rubin, n.17, p.138.

20. SWB/ME/7189/A/i, 29 November 1982.

The Saudis felt confident about their policy towards the Iran-Iraq war after the formation of GCC as it assured them of automatic support from the other Gulf states. Riyadh responded the Iranian threats in a radio commentary by Hashim Abdu Hashimin on 18 May 1982, in which he said that Iran was showing open hostility towards GCC member countries, particularly Kuwait. He added that the Gulf countries knew the meaning of mutual cooperation when exposed to threat and that the excellent level of military coordination now reached enabled them "to teach every oppressive power a lesson it will never forget".²¹

The Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati visited the Gulf countries in April 1982. He expressed his country's desire to expand relations with other Gulf states and stated that "contrary to the imperialist propaganda which saw Iran as the main threat to the Muslim Arab brothers, Iran is not the main enemy; it had no enmity towards them and desires friendship and understanding". He said the main enemy of Muslims in the region was Israel.²²

21. SWB/ME/7032/i, 21 May 1982.

22. Tehran Radio, 4 April 1982; SWB/ME/6997/i, 6 April 1982.

The visit speaks of Iran's anxiety to convince the Gulf states that it did not harbour expansionist designs towards them and also to warn them against drawing too close to Saudi Arabia and forming a united front against Iran. Saudi Arabia viewed this as an attempt to drive a wedge between itself and the other GCC members.

The Saudis, in the meantime, kept up their pressure on Iran. The Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef Bin Abdel Aziz declared that the Arab Gulf security services had information on the existence in Iran of training camps for saboteurs. He said the aim of this training was to destabilize Saudi Arabia and other countries of the region. The Saudi press gave wide publicity to Prince Nayef's declaration which was broadcast on radio and TV in the kingdom.²³

When Saudi Arabia learnt that the Iraqis had suffered serious reverses in their war with Iran, it imposed military conscription in Saudi Arabia.

23. The Arab World, 2 April 1982. Saudi Arabia called for 'Jehad' against Iran's leadership under Khomeini. The call for holy war was broadcast over Riyadh radio. The Radio described the Khomeini regime as a "deadly enemy of Islam" and a "symbol of the devil", Morning News (Karachi), 29 May 1982.

Prince Fahd told the staff and students of the Dhahran University of Petroleum and Minerals that in order to safeguard the security of the kingdom, they would have to shoulder additional burden.²⁴

In effect, however, Saudi Arabia was following a two track policy. On the one hand, it was supporting Iraq in its war with Iran in coordination with GCC members; and on the other, it took conciliatory steps to mollify the Iranians. In an interview with the Lebanese magazine, Al-Hawadith, reported by Radio Riyadh on 4 February 1982, the Saudi Defence Minister Prince Sultan said among other things that the Arab Gulf States "considered the Iranian people as fraternal Muslim people and Iran as a fraternal Muslim country.... All that we hope is to see an end to the Iran-Iraq war and to see good relations restored between the Arab countries including those of the Gulf region and Iran, to the best level."²⁵

24. SWB/ME/6918/1, 4 January 1982; see also SWB/ME/6908/i, 17 December 1981.

25. SWB/ME/6947/i, 6 February 1982.

This brought about a prompt response from Iran. Tehran radio said Prince Sultan's call for an end to the war came:

at a time when the Saudi regime's American-made weapons are pouring into the Iraqi battle fronts...also when Saudi Arabia is extending millions of dollars worth of military and economic aid to Iraq, thereby encouraging and abetting Saddam in this aggression.²⁶

Renewed Iranian Calls for Overthrow
of Saudi Regime

After the Kaaba seizure Iranian calls for the overthrow of the Saudi dynasty had slowed down. But since early 1982, especially after Iran scored victories over Iraq and when Saudi support to Iraq intensified, the demand for the overthrow of the Saudi dynasty accelerated. Radio Teheran in a commentary on 4 February 1982 said: "Saudi government stepping up of plotting against the minor Gulf states increases our faith that the regime of the Saudi dynasty must be

26. Ibid., Financial Times (London), 25 March 1980; SWB/ME/7189/1, 22 November 1982.

abolished". The broadcast added that Iran had no claims on the Gulf states and it was ready to extend support to them when faced by outside aggression including "the Saudi pressure and threats on the small states of the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain who knew very well that the Saudi monarchy would not protect them as its own pillars were corroded.²⁷

27. The Arab World, 5 February 1982.

Perhaps the most authoritative statement of Iran's Gulf policy came from the President Hojatul-Islam Khomeine. This statement came in the course of an interview published in the newspaper Ittela'at. It deserves to be quoted in full not only because it comes from such an important leader but also because of its frankness and clarity:

Our policy towards our neighbours is clear. We do not wish any one of them to fall under American influence and we want the Persian Gulf particularly to be immune to growing American influence. Our regional policy is framed in accordance with this view. We have advised the Persian Gulf countries a number of times, even warned them, not to allow the US to penetrate the region further. Some of the Persian Gulf countries seem to have given serious consideration to our sympathetic message and verbally, at least, have reacted favourably. We actually follow this policy and will not content ourselves only with verbal declarations and warnings. We will use any possible and legitimate means of diplomacy to prevent these countries from falling into the hands of imperialists. In that case our relations with these governments

The open call for the overthrow of the Saudi government clearly showed that relations between the two States had touched the lowest ebb. In another commentary on 4 February 1982, Teheran Radio said that the pillars of the "Saudi regime" were not strong, the major part of the oil industry was run by foreign labour and most of the people lived in very poor circumstances. Revolutionary feeling had been demonstrated several times in eastern Saudi Arabia".²⁸

However, Iranian propaganda did not seem to evoke any serious response in Saudi Arabia. There were some

will be totally brotherly. Even now we do not follow a hostile policy towards them. In fact our relations with them are the relations of one who wants to reform them rather than those of an aggressor. Our of sympathy and compassion we want to prevent them going further into the arms of the Americans. Of course this does not apply only to America. We will not tolerate any Great Powers on our borders (Pusht-e-marzha-e-man) except those that have a natural border with us. Therefore, occupying countries, annexing territory, building military bases etc., for expansionist powers is unacceptable to us." Ittela'at (Tehran, Persian edition) 5 April 1982 (Translation is my own). See also Jomhuri-ye Islami (Tehran, Persian edition) 27 October 1982.

28. SWB/ME/6947/i, 6 February 1982.

demonstrations in the Shia majority Al-Hasa province of Saudi Arabia; but it was effectively contained by the Saudi Government. The Iranian threats also sounded hollow in face of Kurdish upsurge ~~at~~ home besides the assassination by Mujaheddin-e-Khalaq of some top government leaders. Iran ~~was~~ hardly in a position to destabilize Saudi Arabia.

The Islamic Summit in Taif

In an attempt to mobilize the support of Arab-Islamic world Saudi Arabia convened an Islamic summit at Taif in January 1981. The Taif summit also afforded an opportunity to shore up its credibility in the eyes of the Muslim world. Although Iran was invited it boycotted the meeting, taking objection to the expected Iraqi presence at the summit. This facilitated Saudi Arabia's job at Taif. At the summit, Arab radical states — Syria, Libya, South Yemen, Algeria and the PLO — supported Iran, but the majority did not.²⁹ The outcome at Taif was a clear victory for Saudi leadership. It would not be out of place

29. SWB/ME/6637/i, 31 January 1981.

here to mention the Saudi decision to break diplomatic ties with Libya partly because of Libya's open support to Iran. The Saudis also brought considerable political and economic pressure on Syria to reduce its support and encouragement of Iran. Moreover, the Saudis lent financial and diplomatic support to North Yemen in its quarrels with South Yemen, an outspoken supporter of Iran. The whole Saudi game was aimed at undercutting Iranian support and to make it feel friendless.³⁰

The Gulf Cooperation Council

Since the overthrow of the Shah, and the assumption of power by Khomeini, Saudi Arabia alongwith the other Gulf states started seriously thinking in terms of coming together in an alliance not only to face the

30. For Khomeini's comment on the Taif summit see his address on 29 January 1981, in which he said; that some of the leaders of the Islamic countries had decided at the conference in Ta'if to create division between the Shias and the Sunnis in Iran and do something to encourage some to kill others "so as to destroy the regime". The Shias and Sunnis should realize that "this is nothing but a plot by the conference". Broadcast by Tehran Radio, SWB/ME/6637/i, 31 January 1981.

challenge from the new regime in Iran but also to coordinate their efforts to maintain the status quo on the Arabian side of the Gulf. Consultations had been going on for a long time and after several summit meetings of the Gulf Arab States, they finally agreed on 10 March 1981 to form the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia. Interestingly enough, Iraq, the most powerful Gulf Arab state, was excluded.³¹ The GCC constitution would give the impression that it was basically a regional economic organization. But in reality, it was designed to coordinate the defence and foreign policies of these member-states. Since Saudi Arabia was the dominant member of the GCC and had taken the initiative in this regard, the GCC headquarters was based in the Saudi capital, Riyadh. It soon became

31. The lower Gulf Arab States considered Iraq to be still too powerful and too radical to be included voluntarily in GCC. Moreover Iraq through its Arab charter of February 1980 was aspiring for leadership in the Gulf. The Gulf states were determined not to antagonize Iran any further by inviting a potential trouble maker i.e., Iraq.

clear that coordination in the fields of foreign policy and internal security were to be the main functions of the Council.³²

The Saudi King Khaled declared that "the security and stability of the region is our own responsibility" and underscored the new role of GCC in safeguarding the Gulf security.³³ The Saudis looked upon the GCC as a practical local mechanism for dealing with the Iranian threat. The GCC thus reinforced the various measures contemplated by the Saudis to meet the Iranian challenge.

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32. For Iranian warning to Gulf Arab States - See Rafsanjani's comments made in a sermon at Friday prayers at Tehran University on 30 July 1982, broadcast by Tehran radio, he said that:

the small Arab countries should realize that Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Dubai and the rest of the Emirates put together were not as big as Khuzestan province in Iran, "We have no need for you or your money, your oil.... Don't get up to any mischief.... After that (Iraq) it will be Israel's turn. On that day if your governments do not wish to come and fight alongside us, the governments which will not join battle against Israel will be eliminated... SWB/ME/7093/A/i, 2 August 1982.

33. M.S. Agwani, "Gulf Cooperation Council: Joint Action Plan", World Focus (New Delhi), vol.3, no.9, September 1982, p.12.

The Bahrain Coup

Soon after the Iranian revolution numerous unofficial statements emanating from the Iranian Ayatollahs laid claims to the island-state of Bahrain. It may be briefly recalled that Bahrain was a Shia majority ruled by the Sunni Arab royal family of Khalifas. Earlier, the Shah had also laid claim on this island but eventually gave it up under combined Arab, British and UN pressure. As a compensation he occupied three tiny islands — Abu Musa and the Lesser and Greater Tunbs — belonging respectively to the Shaykhdoms of Sharjah and Ras al-Khayma. This happened soon after the British withdrawal from the Gulf in December 1971. Even though in the early days after the revolution, Iranian foreign minister, Ibrahim Yazdi, denied any claims on Bahrain, the Iranian media did not confirm this stand. Iranian ambivalence probably accounted for the Saudi move in October 1979 to send two army brigades to Bahrain at the request of the ruler, Sheikh Khalifa Issa.³⁴

34. Khyber Mail (Peshwar), IDSANRWA, October 1979, no.1638, pp.577-78.
In February 1979 Ayatollah Sadaq Rouhani a prominent leader in the Revolution reasserted Iran's claim to Bahrain as it: "fourteenth

In December 1981 a major coup attempt was uncovered in Manama, the capital of Bahrain. The Iranian charge d' affairs was found implicated in the plot which was aimed at toppling the Bahraini regime and replacing it by an Iran-like Islamic republic. It was alleged that the plotters had received military training in Iran. There were in all 60 persons including thirteen Saudis. Large quantities of arms and ammunition hidden in secret places were also discovered.³⁵

This was the most serious covert operation uncovered in an Arab Gulf State in which Iran's alleged involvement was given widest publicity. This event proved to be a turning point in Saudi-Iranian relations.

Saudi Arabia promptly responded by despatching its Interior Minister Prince Nayif Bin Abdal Aziz to

province". Ibrahim Yazdi, the then foreign minister declared that the Ayatollah's declarations did not represent to "official view of Iran and that he 'represents only himself'."

35. The Arab World, IDSANRWA, January 1982, p.429; SWB/ME/6144/A/5, 18 June 1979.
The Arab World, IDSANRWA, no.822, July 1979, p.286;
Egyptian Gazettee (Cairo), IDSANRWA, no.1063, August 1979, p.367.

Manama on 20 December 1981 and the two countries signed a Mutual Security Cooperation Agreement. In a press interview the Saudi Minister said that the plot had been directed against all Gulf Arab states. He said any transgression against any Gulf country was a transgression against the security of Saudi Arabia. He declared: "The sabotage plot, in which those implicated have been arrested in Bahrain, was engineered by the Iranian government and was directed against Saudi Arabia". He reaffirmed Saudi support to Bahrain in face of such plots. In his news conference the Minister did not exclude the possibility of recurrence of such operations in other parts of the Gulf. He said: "We do not say that the operation has ended. Indeed it may be repeated and may occur on a larger or smaller scale in any other Gulf country. The source of such an operation will be Iran; we should always remember that."

He laid the entire blame on Iran for the events in Bahrain. He asserted that it was in the interest of the Iranians as well as their duty to stop such actions. He expressed the hope that the Iranians would be more realistic and deal with the countries of the Gulf and region in a manner that inspired confidence. He also

urged them to refrain from actions that undermined the region's security.

Having said this, the Saudi Minister added in a conciliatory tone: "The countries in the area have constantly sought to establish a climate of understanding and cooperation with Iran. Arab Gulf countries are always prepared to meet Iranian officials to discuss issues that are of interest to Iran and the Gulf countries. However, we cannot keep opening doors if they keep closing them".³⁶

36. SWB/ME/6912/A, 22 December 1981.

In 1 April, Riyadh denounced the presence of sabotage training camps in Iran. This came in a declaration made by Interior Minister Prince Nayef Ben Abdel Aziz who said that the Arab Gulf state security services have information on the existence in Iran of trainings camps for saboteurs. He said the aim of this training was to destabilize Saudi Arabia and the countries of the region. He added that the presence of this camps revealed Iran's aggressive intentions towards these states and peoples of the region.

His declaration came in an interview with Saudi weekly magazine Al-Yammamah, which appeared on 2 April. In the same interview, Prince Najef said that the extradition of Saudi Arabia of thirteen Saudi members of a sabotage network dismantled in Bahrain last December thirteen is a concern of the Bahraini authorities. The Arab World, 2 April 1982.

The Saudi media also denounced the Iranian regime. The government controlled daily Al-Riyadh said under the caption "The religious Leaders of Tehran : Tyrants and Angels" that "training Gulf citizens and inciting them to spread disorder in the region illustrates beyond a shade of doubt the degree of disorder and shortsightedness in the foreign relations conducted by Tehran. Uncovering the plot strips the Imam in Tehran of the monk's under which they covered their ugly reality and would serve as a lesson for them to think a thousand times before recruiting simple people to carry out their plots against the Gulf regimes."³⁷

37. The Arab World, 18 December 1981.

On 21 February, Saudi Arabia signed two Security Agreements with the neighbouring Gulf states of Qatar and United Arab Emirates. Riyadh had signed earlier a similar agreement with Bahrain.

Security agreements were signed on the one of the emergency meeting of the Arab Interior Ministers convened in Riyadh by request of the Saudi government.

The Saudi Minister of Interior Prince Nayef Ben Abdel Aziz said his country is contemplating concluding similar agreements with the remaining Gulf States of Oman & Kuwait to link all countries member of the Gulf Cooperation Council with a regional security belt.

These agreements were signed aimed a growing Saudi campaign against Iran which Riyadh charges of exporting its Islamic revolution to the various

In yet another commentary broadcast by Riyadh radio on 17 November, Saudi Arabia referred to the clique in Tehran as raving like "a mentally retarded person, about an imaginary battle by which this ignorant and misguided band would liberate Muslim man". It went on to say that the trust of the Iranian people had been betrayed and, to protect the "collapsing fascist regime"

Gulf states. On this subject Prince Nayef declared to the London-based Arabic daily Al Sharg Alawsat that the Saudi nationals are banned from travelling to Iran:

"as there is nothing for them to gain while chances are that they will be maltreated one way or another"

The Saudi Minister, however added:

that his country nurses no bad intentions against Iran. On the contrary, Riyadh is keen on establishing cordial relations with Tehran he said. Yet the Saudi prince lamented that the Iranian government is bent on undermining the security of the various Gulf states. We are ready to cooperate with them if they abandon their destructive activities. However, if they insist in their activities we are determined not to remain fold-armed".

He was quoted as saying. The Arab World , 22 February 1982.

Al-Jazirah in an editorial entitled: "The Sad Ceremony in Iran" noted the absence of Ayatollah Khomeyni from the ceremonies organized by his regime to celebrate the third anniversary of Khomeyni's return from exile....

Al-Jazirah expressed its hope the Iranian people, suffering under the pains of this tragedy imposed

from the wrath of the people, the Government was now seeking help from "foreign experts and agents".³⁸

Stringent Saudi criticism did not deter Iran from hitting back. Radio Tehran commenting on the Saudi Minister's visit to Bahrain said on 19 December that the agreement between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain was aimed at arming the region's reactionaries against the Islamic revolution. Allegations of foreign intervention in Bahrain's internal affairs were meant to justify a US armed presence in the region; however, since the US did not dare to impose its own presence, it had delegated this task to its lackey, Saudi Arabia.³⁹

by the Ayatollahs on them, will shortly rise against this tyrannical regime and correct the path of their revolution for serving their national and foreign interests and once again return to good neighbourly relations with its bordering states. SWB/ME/6946/A/12, 5 February 1982.

38. SWB/ME/6884/i, 19 November 1981.

39. SWB/ME/6911/1, 21 December 1981.

The Bahrain incident was the last straw on the Saudi back. It was seen as an open challenge to Saudi leadership in the region. The timely discovery and prompt follow-up action prevented something serious taking place in which the Saudis would have been caught off guard as in the Ka'aba seizure episode.

To sum up, the Saudi support to Iraq in its war with Iran, the assistance it sought from the US in the form of AWACS and arms deals with other countries, its initiative to form the GCC and its prompt intervention in Bahrain clearly show that Saudi Arabia did not wish to be an idle spectator in the face of Iranian challenge to its national and regional security interests. Although there was a marked increase in hostility between the two countries, both sides considered it prudent to accept the reality of each other's existence.

Chapter IV

THE OIL FACTOR

Before the revolution, Iran was producing an average of just over 5.5 million barrels a day (mbd). The peak was reached in September 1978 when production rose to 6 mbd. It must be recalled that Iran's optimum capacity was estimated to be as high as 6.5 mbd during that period. During the revolution, the country's oil workers virtually paralysed its oil industry by a near total strike with the aim of bringing down the Shah's regime. Thus Iran's oil production came down 5.5 mbd in October 1978, 3.4 mbd in November and 2.4 mbd in December. By March 1979 Iran's oil production came to an all time low.¹ The following table gives a comparative view of Iranian and Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) production levels during the period 1978-80:

CRUDE OIL PRODUCTION IN IRAN

(in million barrels per day)

	1980	% change vs 1979	1979	% change vs 1978	1978	% change vs 1977
Iran	1.5	-53.1	3.2	-33.5	5.2	-3.8
Total OPEC	26.9	-13.2	31.0	+ 4.0	29.8	-4.5

Source: OPEC, Annual Statistical Bulletin, 1980
(Vienna:OPEC,1981).

1. See Bijan Mossavar Rahmani, Energy Policy in Iran: Domestic Choices and International Implications (New York: Pergamon Press, 1981).

The shortage of nearly 5 mbd to the world oil market created world-wide crisis and spot market prices skyrocketed. OPEC prices which stood at \$ 12.81 a barrel at the end of 1978 went upto \$ 18.73 a barrel by the end of 1979. By the middle of 1980 prices again shot up to \$ 31.42 and since early 1981 stabilized at \$ 34.94 per barrel.²

The enormous shortfall in oil production during and after the revolution was made up by increased oil production in Saudi Arabia. Being the largest OPEC producer with proven reserves of around 165 billion barrels, Saudi Arabia was in a comfortable position to increase its oil production from 6 mbd to more than 10.5 mbd. The Saudis flooded the world oil market with their relatively cheap oil and this put enormous pressure on the oil producers.

Though the revolutionary Iranian government resumed its oil production fairly quickly and set 4 mbd as its new production target (which translated

2. Sreedhar, The Gulf Scramble for Security (New Delhi: ABC, 1983), p.9.

into an export target of roughly 3.5 mbd), it was not interested in restoring the pre-revolution level of oil production of more than 5 mbd. The target fixed was itself never reached and production averaged only 3.2 mbd in 1979 (see table above). Tehran's argument was that Iran did not have to produce such high quantity of oil for its developmental needs.

Moreover due to the bad experience of seeing its assets frozen in the West (In November 1979 Iran's foreign exchange reserves totaled nearly \$ 15 billion, of which more than \$ 11 billion were held in US-controlled accounts). The US freeze on \$ 11 billion severely affected Iran. The US released less than \$ 3 billion and the balance was placed in special accounts to settle outstanding claims against Iran. Hence the new regime was extremely reluctant to deposit its surplus money in the Western banks where even otherwise it was likely to depreciate. The West being on the whole hostile to the Islamic regime, Iran was all the more wary to benefit the West by depositing its money there and helping it financially. Moreover,

according to some estimates Iranian oil reserves will run out by the end of the century. Iran, therefore, felt it necessary to produce only as much as it could absorb. It was against this backdrop. Iran had scrapped the ambitious and wasteful projects launched by the Shah. So the new regime needed much less revenues and hence needed to produce much less oil. At the same time, together with Libya and Algeria, Iran demanded higher oil prices in the OPEC meetings. ✓ All in all, Iran's new policy was to produce less oil but to seek a higher price for this limited output. ✓

The Saudis strongly opposed the Iranian demand for higher oil prices. They instead favoured controlled oil prices and higher oil production. From the very start of the Iranian revolution to the end of 1981 Saudi Arabia pegged its crude price at \$ 32 per barrel, even though the international prices fluctuated between \$ 36 to \$ 45 per barrel. Even when the majority demanded at two successive OPEC meetings, a price increase, the Saudis resisted it and saw to it that there was no shortage of supply in the international market.³

3. The Age (Melbourne), 2 November 1981.

The Saudi contention for controlled oil prices and higher oil production was that unless OPEC keeps its oil prices reasonably moderate, consumers would be forced to shift to alternative sources of energy before the kingdom's oil fields run dry. Saudi Arabia's oil Minister Sheikh Zaki Yamani clearly spelt out his country's oil strategy. He said:

We do not want to shorten the life span of oil as a source of energy before we complete the elements of our industrial and economic development, and before we build our country to be able to depend on sources of income other than oil. In this respect the Kingdom's interests might differ from those of its OPEC colleagues. In OPEC there are countries that will stop exporting oil toward the end of the eighties, for such countries' the life span of oil should not extend beyond that time. But if the life span of oil as a source of energy ends at the close of the present decade, this will spell disaster for Saudi Arabia. The line that separates the two situations in a matter of judgement. Our behaviour should be guided by what we perceive of future. What we ought to do now is stop this depletion as soon as possible

and go step by step in order to prolong the life span of oil for a period sufficient to put our economic and developmental house in order. As the coming century arrives, we will have diversified our sources of income, and we will still have enough oil, which we and the coming generations will utilize as a source of energy and as feedstock for the various industries we intend to establish.

Yamani further added:

If we force Western countries to invest heavily in finding alternative sources of energy, they will. This would take no more than seven to ten years and would result in reducing dependence on oil as a source of energy to a point that would jeopardize Saudi Arabia's interests. Saudi Arabia would then be unable to find markets to sell enough oil to meet its financial requirements.

Regarding the link between oil and gas, Yamani said:

Technical experts realize that the gas that will be used in fueling our industry

and running our desalination and power plants is an associated gas that can only be produced with oil.⁴

The Saudis had other compelling reasons to press for higher production at moderate prices. The Saudis had always worried about internal stability and external security. These worries had been greatly accentuated by the Iranian revolution. In the circumstances, the Saudis came to rely more than ever before on American support and goodwill for their survival. By standing for higher production and lower prices the Saudis could greatly benefit the US in particular and the West in general.⁵ This they did with the fond

4. William B. Quandt, Saudi Arabia in the 1980s : Foreign Policy, Security and Oil (Washington: Brookings, 1982), pp. 166-68.

5. For the United States as consumer, an assured supply of oil is the primary consideration. As the Defence Minister pointed out, selling weapons to Saudi Arabia would also ensure a "flow of oil from the world's largest producer to the world's largest consumer at reasonable rates. Currently Saudi Arabia provides about eleven percent of the oil consumed in the US and one-third of that consumed by NATO allies". Besides, "the US seems to be encouraging the simplistic barter arrangement of arms for oil. For example, within one week of the Saudi Government announced in July 1979, that

hope and expectation that the US would come to its rescue should the regime be imperilled by internal disorder or external threat. This is clear from the reported view expressed by Crown Prince Fahd and quoted by a Western diplomat in Newsweek:

Fahd says plainly that it is in Saudi Arabia's interest to keep the Western world afloat. It is a compelling argument. But when the Saudis were selling us oil for \$ 18 a barrel, while the average price was \$ 30, they were losing \$ 125 million a day.⁶

Elsewhere Prince Fahd said his country was opposed to any increase in the price of oil. He said:

oil production was to be increased, the US State Department recommended an additional \$ 1.2 billion programme for the modernization of the Saudi National Guard." Sreedhar, n.2, pp.14-15. See also Ramon Knauerhase, "Saudi Arabia: Our Conservative Muslim Ally", Current History (Philadelphia), vol.78, no.453, January 1980, pp.1621 & 35-37.

6. Special Report -- Saudi Arabia "A Shaky US Pillar of Security", Newsweek (New York), vol.95, no.9, 3 March 1980, p.19.

We do not want any increase in the price of oil because it would create a number of economic problems for Europe, Asia and Africa. Of course, this is a matter that concern OPEC, but Saudi Arabia's position is not to raise prices.

The United States appreciated the Saudi gesture and helping the West and this was reflected in the statement made by the Secretary of Defence, Casper Weinberger, in September 1981, to the Senate Armed Service Committee. He said: "Saudi Arabia has increased its oil production in order to make up the shortfall while continuing to maintain price lower than those of its OPEC colleagues. This is another example, one of many, of the aid Saudi Arabia provides for our national interests".⁷ More important was President Ronald Reagan's observation, the same month, that the US would not allow Saudi Arabia "to become another Iran". As long as the OPEC member-states, led by Saudi Arabia, continued to supply the bulk of

7. Cited in Eli Arom, "Saudi Arabia's Oil Policy", The Jerusalem Quarterly (Jerusalem), no.28, Summer 1983, p.127.

the energy required to turn the wheels of world industry, he said, "we will not be able to stand aside and watch how this is taken over by someone who will turn off that oil".⁸

In pursuing this policy the Saudis achieved the additional object of reducing the oil revenues of its potential adversary : revolutionary Iran. They realized that since Iran was so vastly dependent on oil revenues the best and most effective way to contain it was to squeeze its oil revenues. This Saudi attitude brought Riyadh in open conflict with Iran. The question of oil prices became a major irritant since Saudi decision to flood the world oil market with its relatively cheap oil had an adverse impact on Iran's oil revenues.

In a statement on 4 December 1979, the Iranian Oil Minister strongly criticised Saudi Arabia for not supporting Iran in its fight against the US. He said: "It is astonishing that Yammani can claim that there is no connection between politics and economics".

8. Ibid., p. 128.

He was referring to a statement the Saudi Oil Minister Yammani had made in Kuwait just before he stormed out of the conference of Arab oil ministers in protest after Libya and Syria tabled a resolution supporting Iran in its confrontation with the US. The Iranian minister also said that his country was "annoyed" at Saudi decision to increase oil production after Iran had announced a cutback. He went on to point out: "They (the Saudis) should support us in our clash with world imperialism....We Moslem people have the best weapon (oil) and we can help each other". As for Yammani's remarks he said that "by this reasoning may be he (Yammani) considers oil exports to Israel an economic issue". The deposed Shah, "who also claimed to have no political relations with Israel, was pumping oil to Israel".⁹

As the Saudis ignored Iranian pleas to reduce production in Tehran hardened its position. In an interview with a Tehran radio correspondent the speaker

9. INA, 17 December 1979; Arab World (Beirut), 6 December 1979; IDSANRWA, January 1980; nos. 2360, 2362, p. 870. SWB/ME/6292/A/7, 8 December 1979 and SWB/ME/6797/A/11, 10 August 1981.

of the Majlis, Hajjat al-Islam Rafsanjani, described the OPEC quota system as unjust in that countries such as Saudi Arabia, with a much smaller population than Iran, had a quota several times as large. He added, "Saudi Arabia resorts to bullying tactics in OPEC and one day we shall stop that bullying policy".¹⁰ On another occasion Rafsanjani vowed that Iran would defeat Saudi Arabia's plots in OPEC if it aimed at countering Iranian measures in the organization to the benefit of the Super Powers. He further added: "the House of Saud was commissioned by the US, who is the only party gaining from this turmoil, to try and perpetuate an oil glut, and increase its output to meet the demands of the world powers".¹¹

Iran, Saudi Arabia and OPEC

In the OPEC meeting, Iran and Saudi Arabia frequently clashed over prices and production ceilings. Both held diametrically opposing views on these two

10. SWB/ME/7215/i, 22 December 1982; Financial Express, IDSANRWA, no.3546, February 1979, p. 822.

11. Kayhan International (Tehran), 26 February 1983; SWB/ME/6817/A/9, 2 September 1981.

issues. Iran was supported by Libya, Nigeria, Venezuela and Algeria whereas Saudi Arabia was backed by the oil rich Arab Gulf states.

The short fall in world oil supply coupled with "panic" buying by consumers caused oil prices to shoot up in the wake of the Iranian revolution. Every producer tried to maximize his oil revenues. Several OPEC ministerial meetings were held to unify the oil prices. In the June 1979 meeting Saudi Arabia was holding up against too great an increase demanded by such OPEC radicals as Libya and Iran. Libya's oil Minister Mabruk said: "There was no agreement". He said a majority wanted a benchmark price of \$ 18.50 a barrel with a ceiling of \$ 23.50 including premiums. Saudi oil Minister Yammani said that any price above \$ 20 a barrel would be "abnormal".¹²

As the following table would show Saudi Arabia's revenues increased to 88 per cent in 1980

12. International Herald Tribune, 28 June 1979.

over 1979 figures. While Iran's revenues have come down substantially by 44 per cent in 1980 over 1979 figures.

REVENUES FROM CRUDE OIL EXPORTS

(\$ bn.)

	1978	1979	1980	% change 1979/80
Saudi Arabia	34.6	55.5	104.2	+ 88
Iran	20.9	20.8	11.6	- 44

Source: "'OPEC' 1980 Revenues",
Petroleum Economist, vol.48, no.6,
June 1981, p.232.

After much haggling OPEC ministers agreed on a two-tier price structure in June 1979. Sheikh Yammani the Saudi oil minister explained the basis of the new deal. He said:

The Kingdom conceded ground by bringing up the price for its Arabian Light "market" crude, the traditional reference for all others, to \$ 18 per barrel from \$ 14.55, rather than the \$ 17 that it earlier considered to be the maximum desirable for the world's economic health....¹³

13. Financial Times (London), 29 June 1979.

The price war between Iran and Saudi Arabia again surfaced in December 1979. Iran's oil Minister Ali Akbar Moinefar said on 22 December 1979 that Saudi Arabia had offered to boost the price of its oil by two dollars in an attempt to reach a compromise. The talks bogged down over the issue of how much members could charge over the Saudi price -- the traditional benchmark for OPEC.¹⁴

Both Iran and Saudi Arabia again clashed at an OPEC meeting in March 1980. A two-day meeting of the long-term strategy Committee was called in London to evolve a joint package. The OPEC meeting was chaired by Saudi oil Minister Sheikh Yammani. The Saudi's again came into clash with Iran on the question of altering the dollar-based price structure. Riyadh opposed it because of its own massive investment in America. Iran almost snubbed the meeting declaring that the long discussions were a waste of time when OPEC could not agree on short-term issues.¹⁵

Iran's position on oil prices hardened as the Saudis refused to concede its demand for higher prices. The Iranian oil Minister Ali Akbar Moinefar rejected the

14. Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 23 December 1979.

15. The Hindu (Madras), 1 March 1980.

oil pricing plan endorsed at the London meeting of OPEC in March 1980. He said:

The London meeting laid down a pricing system which primarily serves the economies of industrialised countries. We do not approve of such a system. We are prepared to approve the reunification of oil prices on condition that the new price would not be artificial.¹⁶

Impact of Iran-Iraq War

The war with Iraq brought additional problems to the revolutionary regime in Tehran. As it had barely stabilized its power, the war proved to be a heavy drain on its scarce economic resources. In the fall of 1980, Iran exported roughly about 1 mbd and these were primarily handled by the giant off-shore terminal at Kharg Island. The fighting badly affected Iran's oil sector, Iraq's main target in Iran being the giant refining center at Abadan. There were conflicting reports about the extent of destruction inflicted on this vital oil facility. Some reports speak of total destruction while others talk about destruction of several processing and storage units. In any case, the bombing of oil facilities slowed down Iran's oil refining capacity as evidenced by rationing of oil products in Iran.

16. Ibid.

Besides Abadan, Iraq also bombed inland refineries in places as far as Tabriz, Isfahan and Tehran but there were no reports of serious damage to the refining plants. These appear to have survived. But the pipelines carrying oil to these refineries suffered heavy damage.¹⁷ All this adversely affected Iran's oil exports and its oil revenues plummeted as shown in the following table.

Iranian and Iraqi Oil Production During the First
Year of War (in million barrels per day)

	IRAN	IRAQ	TOTAL OPEC
1980:			
August	1.3	3.4	26.8
September	1.1	2.9	25.4
October	0.4	0.2	23.3
November	0.7	0.3	23.9
December	1.2	0.6	24.9
1981:			
January	1.2	0.6	24.7
February	1.5	0.7	24.8
March	1.8	1.0	25.2
April	1.6	0.8	24.0
May	1.6	0.9	23.2
June	1.4	1.0	22.6
July	1.4	0.9	21.5
August	1.1	0.8	20.7
Percent change	-15.4	-76.4	-23.0

Source: Petroleum Intelligence Weekly

The Iran-Iraq war created further shortages in the world oil market. Saudi Arabia, the giant OPEC producer enhanced its oil production by 900,000 barrels a day to a new average peak of 10.4 mbd, mainly to keep the oil price low.¹⁸ The Saudi decision to flood the market with its cheap oil had a devastating impact on the Iranian sales. Iran's oil production now reached an all time low of less than 1 mbd and its revenue declined steeply.

As Saudi Arabia was determined to keep the price of oil at \$ 32 per barrel Iran's Oil Minister Mohammed Gharazi charged that the responsibility for the failure to reach an agreement on the pricing plan rested with "those who really support the interests of the West".¹⁹

Saudi Arabia not only produced more oil and flooded the world oil market but wanted to keep in price stable at \$ 32 per barrel. Prince Fahd said: "Our concern is for the world economy and for the

17. Shaheen Ayubi and Shirin Tahir Kheli, eds., The Iran-Iraq War : New Weapons, Old Conflicts (New York: Praeger, 1983), p.55.

18. The Times (London), 6 October 1980.

19. New York Times, 22 August 1981.

interests of mankind", adding that the price decline was sure to come because "I have put my name to it". He further declared, "I am concerned with the \$ 32 price and I will keep that".²⁰ At the same time the Saudis blamed the oil glut on OPEC militants who, it charged, had pushed through "unrestrained and ill-considered" price increases in the past.²¹

Besides the price question, the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia took a new turn on the issue of production quotas fixed by OPEC. The OPEC meeting in Vienna (July 1982) extended a production sharing agreement concluded in March 1982, fixing the total output at 17.5 mbd. The Iranian oil Minister Dr. Mohammad Gharazi, pointed out that Iran would need an output of 1.7 mbd to satisfy its revenue requirements. He assailed Riyadh for depriving Iran of its rightful markets and putting its financial survival in jeopardy. He claimed that Iran should enjoy a share of collective output similar to what it enjoyed before the Iranian

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 7 March 1982.

revolution when it produced some 6 mbd.²²

The OPEC ceiling was violated by most members as it severely restricted their incomes. OPEC meetings convened in the second half of 1982 to bring order in this chaotic situation failed and, in consequence, every OPEC member felt free to set his own price and output levels and compete in the international markets not only against non-OPEC producers but against each other.

22. The Hindu, 28 July 1982.

Chapter V

THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Soon after coming to power, one of the first thing the new regime in Iran did was to break diplomatic ties with Israel and recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and allow it to open an Embassy in Tehran. Iran also stopped oil supplies to Israel and the trade with a turnover of \$ 230 million came to an abrupt end. This sharp turn in PLO-Iran relations, although outwardly welcomed by Saudi Arabia, was also seen by it as part of an emerging alliance of the radicals in the area. Iran was already being openly supported by radical Arab states like Syria, Libya, South Yemen and Algeria.

Saudi Arabia and Camp David

It was during this period that the Camp David agreements were signed between Israel and Egypt. The first agreement, signed in September 1978, was a general framework for peace in the West Asia; the second was the Israel-Egypt peace treaty concluded in March 1979. President Sadat had neither consulted nor informed the Saudis who were apparently displeased over Egypt's unilateral act which also gave a severe

blow to Arab consensus. The Saudis felt greatly concerned at the negative implications of Sadat's act for Arab unity.

At first Saudi Arabia's reaction to the Camp David accords was guarded. The Saudis declared that "what has been reached at Camp David cannot be considered a final acceptable formula for peace" and charged that the treaty "did not make absolutely clear Israel's intention to withdraw from all the Arab territories it occupies including Jerusalem".¹ On the one hand, they criticised the Camp David accords for not taking into account the right of the Palestinians to form a State of their own and for ignoring the PLO; and on the other, they also maintained that they did not have the right to interfere with the efforts of any State to regain its territories whether through armed struggle or peaceful means unless this clashed with higher Arab interests. The Saudis were caught in a cruel dilemma — they were genuinely annoyed over what Sadat had done unilaterally; and they also did not want Sadat to be discredited because of his pro-Western leanings.

1. Anthony McDermott, "Sadat and the Arab", Middle East International (London), October 1978.

This tight-rope walking by the Saudis at supporting the PLO-radical Arab axis and also defending Sadat could not be carried on for long. Though the Saudis did not approve of the Camp David accords officially, they would have preferred to keep silent rather than take positions which evoke strong criticism from one side or the other. But the growing "honeymoon" between PLO and Iran and the proximity of both to radical Arab states left Saudi leaders vulnerable to combined radical opposition should they decide to keep quiet. So the Saudis reluctantly agreed to denounce the Camp David accords and to participate in the Baghdad summit which decided to break diplomatic and economic ties with Egypt.² They however, vetoed the PLO proposal to call an Islamic summit where Iran would inevitably be represented. On 15 March 1979, Saudi Arabia reacted angrily to the US role in promoting

2. At the Baghdad summit in early 1978, Saudi Arabia and its allies initially indicated that they would not condemn or isolate Egypt. But when Sadat refused to receive a delegation of high ranking emissaries from the conference or to accept a \$ 5 billion annual grant offer, Saudi opposition to Sadat hardened and Saudi Egyptian ties were broken. Washington Post, 5 November 1978.

the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement.³ Four days later, it declared its official opposition to the prospective treaty if it failed to provide for Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and guarantee self-determination and statehood for the Palestinians.⁴ By openly criticising the Camp David accords Saudi Arabia did not hide its anger at US support to the Camp David accords which had made their position precarious.⁵

The Saudi decision to openly support PLO, join the Baghdad summit and agree to sanctions against Egypt was evidently dictated by the Saudi concern to sustain its pretence of Arab leadership. Besides, the Saudis did not want to alienate the Palestinians who form 60-65 percent of the total work force of the ARAMCO. As the Saudi Oil Minister Yammani put it: "If war comes (i.e., and outbreak of Arab-Israeli war), we will have to shut off the oil. You know about the Palestinians

3. Washington Post, 16 March 1979.

4. Ibid., 20 March 1979.

5. Karen Elliott House, "The Anger in Saudi Arabia", Wall Street Journal (New York), 11 June 1979 and Washington Post, 15 May 1979.

and the other foreigners we have around us. Even if we deployed the entire Saudi army and national guard around the oil fields, we could not prevent sabotage by the handful of trained and determined saboteurs".⁶ As for PLO, its Foreign Minister Farouk Qaddumi had warned his Saudi counterpart about the vulnerability of the Saudi oil fields and also of the Islamic holy places in the event of general hostilities breaking out in the area.⁷

By visiting Jerusalem and by concluding the Camp David accords President Sadat of Egypt had brought about a shift in Arab balance of power. One major consequence was the emergence of the Iraqi-Saudi-Jordanian bloc. Riyadh's desire not to be at odds with the radical forces in the area was responsible for this dramatic

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6. John K. Cooley, "Iran, the Palestinians and the Gulf", Foreign Affairs (New York), vol.57, no.5, Summer 1979, p.1027. According to one highly placed Saudi source Yasser Arafat's behaviour at the Baghdad summit was very aggressive toward Saudi Arabia. He reportedly talked of the PLO's responsibility for protecting the Islamic holy places and the pipelines -- both within Saudi Arabia. See William B. Quandt, Saudi Arabia in the 1980s; Foreign Policy, Security and Oil (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1981), p.115.
 7. Ibid., p.1026.

shift in Saudi foreign policy. The Saudis may have calculated that they could offset the danger from the radical Arabs and PLO by putting themselves at the head of an anti-Sadat movement.⁸ In order to dispel any doubt about Saudi Arabia's stand on the Palestinian issue, foreign minister Saud al-Faisal made it clear on 4 October 1979 that "any interpretation of our position that says we do not support a Palestinian State is erroneous".⁹ Elsewhere he was more forthright when he said: "There is no limit to compromise and pragmatism. But once it reaches the stage of avoiding such issues as self-determination for the Palestinians it is no longer compromise and pragmatism, it is injustice".¹⁰ As William B. Quandt has observed:

The simple lesson of Baghdad seemed to be that the Saudis, when forced to choose between their Arab commitments and a controversial US policy such as the Camp David agreements would not hesitate to side with the Arab

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8. The Economist (London), 24 March 1979.
 9. Washington Post, 5 October 1979.
 10. Newsweek (New York), 18 February 1980, p.11.

position. American anger was of less concern than isolation in the Arab world over an issue as emotionally charged as the conflict with Israel.¹¹

Thus the Saudi decision to support the PLO on the Camp David issue should be seen in the context of Iranian-PLO-radical Arabs axis. The Saudis had unwillingly to identify themselves with the radical Arab states on this issue. They openly condemned the Camp David accords but privately worked to undermine the boycott of Egypt.¹²

11. Quandt, n.7, p.115.

12. Saudi Arabia, in particular, was behind the policy of not punishing Egypt too severely for having departed from the Arab mainstream position. As a result, deposits in Egyptian banks by Gulf states (estimated at \$ 4 billion in 1979) were not recalled; nor were the approximately one million Egyptians, who were working in oil-exporting Gulf countries and remitting more than \$ 2 billion annually, expelled from those countries. Arab disbursements for previously approved Egyptian and joint-venture projects were in most cases slowed down but not cut off completely. In fact, some projects — such as the Faisal Islamic Bank in Cairo (capital: \$ 40 million), which was inaugurated in July 1979 — were opened up after the signing of the treaty. Nazih N.M. Ayubi, "Arab Relation in the Gulf : The Future and Its Prologue", in Shaheen Ayubi and Shirin Tahir Kheli, eds., The Iran-Iraq War : New Weapons, Old Conflicts (New York: Praeger, 1983), p.161. See also The Statesman (New Delhi), 13 August 1978; and SWB/ME/6430/A/4, 28 May 1980.

The Fahd Peace Plan and Iran's Reaction

Ever since Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 and his subsequent policy of making a separate peace with Israel, it had become crystal clear to the Saudis that there was nothing the Arab could do to defeat Israel or to force it to withdraw from occupied territories. They recognized the inevitability of a general settlement with Israel sooner or later. Since Egypt, the most populous Arab country, was boycotted and ostracised by the rest of the Arabs, the mantle of Arab leadership fell on the Saudis. Crown Prince Fahd therefore, seized the initiative and came out with a peace plan to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. The most noteworthy feature of it was the recognition of the right of all states to live in peace. The plan thus contained an indirect offer to recognise Israel.¹³ The Saudis obviously could not come out openly with a call for recognition of Israel as that would mean playing straight

13. See Gulshan Dhanani, "West Asia : Perspectives on the Fahd Peace Plan", Economic and Political Weekly (Bombay), vol.17, no.4, 23 January 1982, pp.101-02. See also Patriot (New Delhi), 29 November 1981; SWB/ME/6884/i, 19 November 1981.

intō the hands of Iran and the Arab radical states. This peace initiative came to be known as the Fahd plan. The Fahd plan was the first concrete Arab initiative to resolve the long-standing Arab-Israeli conflict. The timing of the plan coincided with the stalemate on the Iran-Iraq front. By the middle of 1981 when the Fahd plan had been floated Iraq had demonstrated its inability to penetrate deep inside Iran to overthrow the Islamic regime. In this circumstances, the Saudi could not afford to confront a hostile Israel on the Western front and a hostile Iran on the eastern front. Hence they decided to resolve conflict with Israel.

The Fahd Plan was vehemently criticized by Iran and denounced as a betrayal of Arab-Palestinian interests. Khomeini declared the Saudi Plan was "inconsistent with Islam".¹⁴ The official Iranian news agency quoted

14. Asian Recorder (New Delhi), 10-16 December 1981, p.16361A. For Iran's official reaction see Kayhan International (Tehran), 4 November 1981; also Tehran Times, 4 November 1981. See also The Tribune (Chandigarh), 5 February 1982.

Khomeini as asserting that the Saudi plan put forward by Crown Prince Fahd would eventually establish Israel as the master of the Arab-Islamic world.¹⁵ Khomeini observed:

There could be nothing more infamous for Muslims, Arabs in particular, than bowing to this wicked plan which is hundred percent anti-Islam. Even if there are some good points in this plan if such a plan in some form entails the recognition of the regime that occupied Jerusalem it must be rejected.¹⁶

Tehran Radio reported that "millions" of Tehran citizens

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15. Ibid., "Voice of Palestine", Clandestine IDSANRWA, p.673, 1916, November 1979; SWB/ME/6076/1, 26 March 1979; SWB/ME/6293/A/4, 12 December 1979; SWB/ME/6805/A/10, 19 August 1981. Khomeini said: "There is no higher disgrace than this for an Arab to be forced to accept Israel's right to exist". He further said: "I am hereby warning the Arab that if they are not careful, Israel will grab Mecca and Medina out of your hands". National Herald (New Delhi), 18 November 1981.
16. Bangladesh Observer (Dhaka), 18 November 1981.

had marched on 20 November 1981 in protest against "the US-inspired Fahd Plan". The gathering obviously must have been organized by the Islamic leadership not only to oppose the plan but also as a show of support and solidarity to Khomeini. A crowd gathered at Tehran university where the Friday Imam, Hashemi Rafsanjani, delivered a sermon denouncing the plan. He is reported to have said: "This peace plan contradicts Islam and anyone who approves it is treacherous. There is nothing positive in it". The meeting adopted a resolution condemning the "shameful enslaving Fahd Plan".¹⁷

Tehran Radio also reported condemnation of the Plan by representatives of Islamic Liberation Movements in Iraq, the Afghan Islamic revolution, the Moro Liberation Front, the Islamic Liberation Organization of the Arabian Peninsula, the Islamic front of Bahrain and the Islamic Liberation Front for liberation of Oman.¹⁸

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17. SWB/ME/6886/1, 21 November 1981; SWB/ME/6886/1, 21 November 1981, p.359. Thousands of demonstrators in Tehran called for the execution of Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Fahd. The Statesman (New Delhi), 22 November 1981.
18. Ibid., SWB/ME/7039/i, 29 May 1982; SWB/ME/6866/i, 29 October 1981.

The Iranian criticism of the Fahd Plan exacerbated the frictions in Saudi-Iranian relations. The opposition of the Fahd Plan by Iran and its Arab allies, especially Syria, Libya and the PLO, scuttled any hopes that existed of the plan being endorsed by the Arab summit. The Arab summit held at Fez to discuss the plan by the end of 1981 virtually broke into disarray and the plan was pigeon-holed. It was a major set back for Saudi prestige in inter-Arab diplomacy and open slap on the face of Crown Prince Fahd.

Israeli Invasion of Lebanon

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon afforded yet another opportunity to Iran to expose Saudi pretensions to be the leader of the Arab world. No Arab, not even the Saudis dared to come to the rescue of the beleaguered Palestinian commandos in Beirut. The Saudis were evidently too preoccupied with the potential Iranian threat to save the Lebanese against the Israeli onslaught. Hence the Saudi silence even over the Shabra and Chatilla massacres. The Saudis, if they really wanted, could have done many things to impress

upon the US the necessity to control Israel's aggressive attacks. They choose not to do so because they needed the US support for the very survival of the Saudi regime.¹⁹

The Saudi inaction over the war in Lebanon offered a golden opportunity to Iran to demonstrate its own earnestness about the Palestinian cause. Iran sent hundreds of volunteers to the war front in Lebanon in a grand gesture of solidarity with the embattled Palestinians. They even boasted that once they had defeated Iraq their next goal would be to liberate Jerusalem from the Israel clutches. The commander in chief of the Sepah Pasdaran (Iran's revolutionary guards), Mohsen Razai, declared that the "war with Iraq is beginning the liberation of Karbala and Qods".²⁰ In a sermon at Friday prayers at Tehran university on 30 July 1982 speaker of the Majlis Rafsangani declared

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19. See Gulshan Dhanani, "West Asia: Waiting for an Arab Response", Economic and Political Weekly, vol.17, no.45, 6 November 1982, p.1810.
20. Payam-e-Inglab (Tehran) 2 Bahman 1361 (22 January 1983).

that after Iraq it would be Israel's turn, "on that day if your (Gulf) governments do not wish to come and fight alongside us, the governments which will not join battle against Israel will be eliminated...."²¹

In fact, Iran was the only non-Arab Muslim country to have sent volunteers to fight along with the Palestinians against the Zionists. Although the number was small the amount of publicity and propaganda it attracted the world over was a great victory for the Iranians.

In the meantime, the Iranians blasted the Saudi leaders for their impotence. The Iranian charge that Saudi Arabia was a lackey and stooge of US imperialism appeared to have been confirmed by Saudi inaction during the entire Lebanese crisis. The Iranian propaganda

21. SWB/ME/7093/A/i, 2 August 1982.

The Iranian radio reported the speaker of the Majlis as having told the Chamber on 18 July 1982 that one of Iran's main strategic aims was "to open road to Jerusalem".

stripped the Saudi leaders naked and paraded them in front of the entire Arab-Islamic world.

Coming very close on the heels of the Lebanese crisis was the Arab summit at Fez. The Fahd Plan as pointed out earlier was not even thoroughly discussed in the 1981 Fez summit. Now the Saudis after some modification presented their peace plan to the next Arab summit also held at Fez; and it was approved. Under King Fahd, the Saudis this time succeeded in persuading Syria and the PLO to fall in line by promising them liberal aid. Algeria and South Yemen did not openly oppose the plan. It was Libya alone which walked out in protest. The plan implicitly recognized the existence of the State of Israel through and its right to exist in peace side by side with a Palestinian State in West Bank and Gaza.

The Iranians denounced the Fez resolutions as a sell out and betrayal and a Saudi attempt to impose US hegemony on the area and bring about a new Camp David. They also accused the Saudi leaders of actually

helping the Israelis to perpetuate the occupation of the Arab lands. But Iranian criticism was much more muted this time because they were no longer supported by the radical Arab states except Libya. For the Iranians the Arab support to the Fez plan came as a big shock. They stood isolated in the region.

To conclude, the Saudis had their way in pushing through the Fahd Plan. But they could do so with great difficulty. Iran had a big hand in intensifying opposition to the Fahd Plan. But it could not stop it from being endorsed at the second Fez summit in September 1982. The Iranian failure was due to its own inability to make any difference to Arab-Israeli equation as evidence of by the outcome of the Lebanese War.

C O N C L U S I O N

The 1952 revolution in Egypt and the downfall of Dr. Mossedeq in 1953 prepared the ground for Saudi Arabia and Iran to follow a more active foreign policy. Subsequently, the 1962 revolution in Yemen and Egypt's military intervention there brought the two countries closer. Both felt concerned about the rapidly spreading influence of Nasser and his radical policies. The threat emanating from Nasser was neutralized by Egypt's crushing defeat in the 1967 war. Saudi Arabia now found a bigger role for itself in the region's politics. Owing to its growing financial power its influence spread fast. The Shah of Iran, who was even more ambitious, became much more assertive after the British announced the decision, in 1968, to withdraw from the Gulf. His desire to make Iran the most dominant and militarily the strongest power in the Gulf was looked upon with grave concern in Riyadh. Although both were rabidly anti-Communist and pro-West both distrusted each other. Iran and Saudi Arabia frequently clashed over oil prices and production and the Saudis were deeply suspicious of Iran's covert links with the Zionist State of Israel.

The issue of demarcation of the continental-shelf boundary and the Bahrain island issue caused some friction in their bilateral relations. Although these were ultimately resolved through negotiations, the Saudis never forgot the Shah's attempt to impose his will. Since both the countries derived huge revenues from oil they were keen to build up their respective countries and project their influence. In this Iran had a clear and decisive edge over Saudi Arabia because of its size. The American connection also helped Iran. Despite their differences the two states cooperated on several issues. The relationship was one of conflict and cooperation before the overthrow of the Shah.

The Iranian revolution of 1978-79 was a great event in the region's history and Saudi leaders felt deeply alarmed at this upheaval. The overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Iran was an eye-opener to the Saudi Royal family. Initially, the Saudi rulers supported the Shah; but once the extent of popular opposition to

the Shah became manifest, the Saudis quickly accepted the change. But this did not soften revolutionary Iran's threats to overthrow the monarchies which were dubbed as corrupt, un-Islamic and pro-West. The Iranian attitude prompted Saudi Arabia to seek US military assistance to safeguard its security. At times, the new Iranian leadership tried to reassure the nervous Saudi leadership about its desire to live in peace. But the November 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque at Kaaba by Islamic fanatics came as a very big jolt to the already terrified Saudi leadership. This incident coupled with the Shia uprising in eastern parts of the Kingdom convinced the Saudis more than anything else of the need to actively work for the containment of Khomeini's Iran.

Iraqi leadership was the most worried in the region over changes in Iran. Iranian attempts to destabilize the Baathist regime convinced Iraq that a quick lightning strike (blitzkrieg) at an early stage would put an end to all further troubles emanating from Iran. Hence Iraqi initiative to launch the war against Iran in late 1980. After initial

silence, the Saudis decided to support Iraq in its war with Iran — a turning point in Riyadh's approach to the problem posed by revolutionary Iran. Saudi Arabia also greatly strengthened its security ties with the US in order to beef up its military capability to meet the threat from Iran. As custodians of Islam's holiest places the Saudis also used the Islamic card to maximum advantage. Saudi Arabia made a bid to rally the Muslim states to his side at the Islamic summit convened at Taif and nearly succeeded in doing so but for the dissent aired by radical Arab states.

On a long term the Saudis took the initiative to bring together the smaller Gulf states into a regional alliance called the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The Iranian-inspired abortive coup in Bahrain convinced the smaller Gulf states to rally under the Saudi leadership. This incident brought about further strain in Saudi-Iranian relations. Though Saudi Arabia was primarily interested in safeguarding its

own security it could not remain an idle spectator to the Iranian threat to smaller Gulf states.

Perhaps the most effective weapon which the Saudi used to contain the Iranian revolution was the oil weapon. Soon after the Shah was overthrown, Iran virtually stopped producing oil and there was world-wide shortage of oil. Saudi Arabia stepped up its production causing a glut in the oil market. This obviously led to a fall in oil prices. The Iranians, who needed more cash following the freezing of their assets in US banks, were keen to produce as much oil as possible. The war with Iraq badly affected their plans to boost the oil revenues. But it was the Saudi decision to flood the world oil market with their oil which had the most disastrous impact on Iran. The oil weapon coupled with the long-drawn-out war with Iraq gradually diminished the Iranian potential for creating troubles for its neighbours.

The issue of Arab-Israeli conflict also bedevilled Saudi-Iranian relations. Soon after the revolution, Iran had severed its ties with Israel and invited the PLO to open an embassey in Tehran. During this period

the Camp David accords were signed and Iran denounced them strongly and broke its links with Egypt. The Saudis who had close links with Sadat were annoyed at his unilateral peace initiative though perhaps appreciating his intentions. The growing "honeymoon" between Iran and the radical Arabs compelled the Saudi leaders to join the majority of the Arabs to boycott Sadat. This they did reluctantly. If they had remained silent their status in the Muslim world stand seriously compromised. And Iran could be relied upon to exploit the situations.

After ostracizing Egypt the Saudis pushed through a peace plan for peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It came to be known as the Fahd Plan. Because it gave implicit recognition to Israel it evoked prompt denunciation from Iran. The plan could not be adopted at the Arab summit in Fez in 1981. The plan was vehemently criticised by Iran as a betrayal of Arab-Palestinian interests. The Iranian criticism of the Fahd plan exacerbated the frictions in Saudi-Iranian relations. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 and Saudi passivity bought additional criticism from Iran. But at the second Arab summit at Fez in

September 1982, the Arabs eventually approved the Fahd plan. This came as a big shock to the Iranians and underscored their growing isolation.

The Iranian leadership realized, after bitter experience, that it was not so easy to export a revolution. They began to work for a rapprochement and went about assuring the Saudis and the smaller Gulf states about their desire to live in peace and harmony. The Saudis felt more confident after Reagan came to power in the US in early 1981. Reagan assured to nervous Saudis that the US would not allow Saudi Arabia to become another Iran. The growing domestic problems within Iran like the intensified Mujaheddin threat, Kurdish problem, the protracted and ruinous war with Iraq, and the growing economic problems at home, compelled the Iranian regime to concentrate its attention more on the home front than towards creating trouble for the Gulf countries. The Saudis, on their part, had also become reconciled to the need to co-exist peacefully with the revolution next-door.

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