

# Clark and Subic: Projecting US Power into the Gulf

Stephen R. Shalom

The United States military bases in the Philippines are a grotesque symbol of the latter's dependency more than four decades after it achieved formal independence. Foreign bases anywhere are undesirable, but when these are operated by former colonial powers, the insult to sovereign nationhood is greater. The operations of all military bases involve considerable social costs: prostitution and the diversion of resources from productive use. When these bases support troops from one of the world's richest countries and are stationed in the territory of an extremely poor country, the social impact is all the more destructive.

Some countries choose to accept foreign military bases because they consider this the only way to ensure their own security in a dangerous world. But as an archipelago, the Philippines faces no adversary on its border nor any credible external threat by sea or air.

Despite the high cost and meager benefits of the bases to the Philippines, some argue that the facilities should remain. According to this view, the bases may not be necessary to protect the Philippines, but they do enable the US to protect peace and freedom in other lands. Thus, Filipinos should be willing to host the US bases for the greater good.

There are a number of problems with this argument. First, if the bases are so valuable to nations around the world, why

are they not willing to accept foreign bases in their own soil? Aside from Singapore, no country in Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, or the Persian Gulf is eager to welcome US bases. Second, if Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Bay serve the common good, then why has Washington so vehemently refused to give Manila veto powers over their operations? And third, if they enable the US to protect peace and freedom in other lands, then why have they been used precisely against those movements fighting for these principles? The sorry story of US intervention in Indochina -- with the logistic support of the bases in the Philippines -- is too well-known to repeat here. Likewise, the less widely known US intervention in the Persian Gulf, again supported by its bases in the Philippines, was no more beneficial to the cause of peace and freedom. In fact, US officials are hoping that the intervention in the Persian Gulf will dispel allegations of America's "reluctance to interpose [its] military forces in Third World conflicts when important issues are at stake". [1] According to the standard US view, these issues were 1) the threat to the oil supply essential to the US and its allies; and 2) the threat to peace caused by Iran's intransigence in its war with Iraq.

## Some Crude History

Much of the world's proven oil reserves are located in the limited area of the Persian Gulf (called the "Arabian Gulf" by Arab nations, and "the Gulf" by those who try to keep their gazetteers politically neutral).



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Less than four percent of US oil consumption comes from the Gulf, but, according to the official argument, Western Europe and Japan are extremely dependent on Gulf oil. Hence, if the region falls into the hands of a hostile power, US allies could be brought to their knees, and freedom would suffer a decisive blow. Protecting the oil interests of Western Europe and Japan, however, was never one of Washington's foremost goals.

As far back as the 1920s, the State Department sought to force Great Britain to give US companies a share of the lucrative Middle Eastern oil concessions. The US Ambassador in London – who just happened to be Andrew Mellon, the head of the Gulf Oil Corporation (named after the Mexican, not the Persian/Arabian, Gulf) – was instructed to pressure the British into giving Gulf Oil a stake in the Middle East. [2] At the end of World War II, when the immense petroleum deposits in Saudi Arabia became known, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal told Secretary of State Brynes, "I don't care which American company or companies develop the

Arabian reserves, but I think most emphatically that it should be *American*." [3] It was not Soviet Union that Forrestal was worried about. The US' main rival for the control of the area's oil was Britain. [4]

In 1928, Standard Oil of New Jersey and Mobil had joined British and French oil interests in signing the Red Line Agreement, under which each pledged not to develop Middle Eastern oil without the participation of the others. Nevertheless, after World War II, these two US firms (together with Texaco and Standard Oil of California) grabbed the Saudi concessions for themselves, freezing out the British and French companies. When the latter sued on the grounds that the Red Line Agreement had been violated, Mobil and Jersey told the court that the agreement was null and void because it was monopolistic. [5]

In the early 1950s, oil was used as a political weapon for the first time – by the US and Britain *against* Iran. Iran had nationalized the British-owned oil company which had refused to share its astronomical profits with the host government. In response, Washington and London or-



ganized a boycott of Iranian oil which brought Iran's economy to the brink of collapse. The CIA then instigated a coup, entrenching the Shah in power and effectively de-nationalizing the oil company, with US firms getting 40 percent of the formerly 100 percent British-owned company. This was, in the view of the *New York Times*, an "object lesson in the heavy cost that must be paid" when an oil-rich Third World nation "goes berserk with fanatical nationalism". [6]

In 1956, the oil weapon was used again, this time by the US against Britain and France. After the latter, along with Israel, invaded Egypt, Washington made clear that US oil would not be sent to Western Europe until Britain and France agreed to a rapid withdrawal schedule. [7] The US was not adverse to overthrowing Nasser, but the clumsy Anglo-French military operation threatened US interests in the region.

In October 1969, the Shah of Iran asked the US to purchase more Iranian oil as a way to boost his revenues. But the Shah's request was rejected because, as an assistant to then President Nixon explained, "a substantial portion of the profits from these purchases would go to non-American companies if Iranian oil were sought", while if Saudi oil were purchased, the US' share would be larger. [8]

By the end of the sixties, the international oil market was far different from what it had been two decades earlier. Oil supplies were tight, the number of oil firms had grown, and the oil-rich countries, joined together in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), were seeking to improve their financial position.

Crucial talks on oil prices began in 1970 between US companies and the government of Libya. Significantly, Washington did not weigh in on the side of the companies, and, in fact, the companies themselves did not put up much resistance to the price increase. For them, higher prices would be beneficial, making their growing investments in the developed nations (for example, in Alaska and the North Sea)

profitable. [9] And higher prices could be passed on to consumers. From 1972 to 1973 the companies raised their prices to an unwarranted level, even if one is to consider the crude costs alone. [10]

In 1972, the Nixon administration was advocating higher oil prices. [11] According to a study by V.H. Oppenheim, based on interviews with US officials: "The weight of the evidence suggests that the principal consideration behind the indulgent US government attitude (sic) towards higher oil prices was the belief that these would produce economic benefits for the US vis-a-vis its industrial competitors, Western Europe and Japan, and the key Middle Eastern states, Saudi Arabia, and Iran." [12] And Henry Kissinger has confirmed this: "The rise in the price of energy would affect primarily Europe and Japan, and probably improve America's competitive position." [13]

Amid growing warnings about a possible oil embargo, the industrialized Western countries met to decide their response. The US proposed that resources be shared, but on the basis of each country's sea-borne imports, rather than on the basis of total energy requirements. Since the US was much less dependent on imports than the other countries, this formula meant that, in the event of an embargo, US energy supplies would be cut by far less than those of its "allies". [14]

After the October 1973 Middle East War broke out, US oil company officials wrote to Nixon, warning that the "whole position of the US in the Middle East is on the way to being seriously impaired, with Japanese, European, and perhaps Soviet interests largely supplanting US presence in the area, to the detriment of both our economy and security". [15] Note that Soviet threat was considered only a possibility, the allied threat a certainty.

From late 1973 until 1974, Arab oil producers cut their production and imposed an embargo against the US and the Netherlands for their pro-Israel position. The US public has memories of long lines at the gas pump, rationing, and a crisis atmosphere. But, in fact, in Kissinger's



words, "the Arab embargo was a symbolic gesture of limited practical impact". [16] The international oil companies, which totally monopolized petroleum distribution and marketing, pooled their oil, so the shortfall of Saudi supplies to the US was made up for from other sources. Overall, the oil companies spread out production cutbacks to minimize suffering, and the country most supportive of Israel -- the US -- suffered the least. From January to March 1974, oil consumption went down by only five percent in the US, and by 15 percent in France and West Germany. [17]

Even these figures, however, overstate the hardship because, in fact, *"there was at no time a real shortage of petroleum on (sic) the European market.* Consumption simply responded to the increase in prices... Between October 1973 and April 1974, the reserves of oil products in the countries of the European Community never descended below the 80-day equivalent of consumption; and in Italy, the reserves, in fact, increased by 23 percent." [18] In Japan, there were about two million barrels of oil more than the government admitted, as the bureaucracy, the oil industry, and industrial oil users sought to exploit the crisis for their own advantage. [19]

In the aftermath of the embargo, US allies tried to negotiate their own bilateral petroleum purchase deals with the producing countries without going through the major international oil companies. Washington opposed these efforts. [20] In short, the well-being of US allies has never been the key consideration of US policy-makers.

Nor, for that matter, has the well-being of the average US citizen been their crucial concern. One former Defense Department official has estimated that Gulf-related military expenditures cost US taxpayers about 47 billion dollars in 1985 alone. [21] Former Secretary of the Navy John Lehman put the annual figure at 40 billion dollars. [22] What could be worth these staggering sums?

These expenditures have not been necessary for the survival of the West. In extremis, according to former CIA analyst Maj. Gen. Edward B. Atkeson, if all Gulf oil were cut off, the elimination of recreational driving (which in the US accounts for 10 percent of total oil consumption) would reduce Western petroleum needs to a level easily replaceable from non-Gulf sources. Even in wartime, Atkeson concluded, Gulf oil is not essential to Western needs. [23] And in a protracted global conflict, one can be sure that oil fields would not last very long in the face of missile attacks.

The expenditures, however, are a good investment for the oil companies, given that they are not the ones who pay the tab. To be sure, the multinationals no longer directly own majority of crude oil production in the Gulf. But they have buy-back deals with the producers, whereby they purchase, at bargain prices, oil from the fields they formerly owned. For example, according to former Senator Frank Church, US firms "have a 'sweetheart' arrangement with Saudi Arabia, notwithstanding the nominal nationalization of their properties..." [24] Radical regimes want to sell oil as much as conservative ones do, but a change of government in any Gulf state might eliminate the privileged position of the oil companies.

The internal security of regimes like Saudi Arabia depends heavily on outside, particularly US, support. Many Saudis believe that, in return, their country has been overproducing oil to please the US, to the detriment of their nation's long-term interests. Selling oil beyond the point at which the proceeds can be productively invested is economically irrational, particularly given the fact that oil in the ground appreciates in value. [25] More democratic or nationalistic governments will also be less willing to accommodate US military presence or to serve as US proxies for maintaining the regional status quo.

Thus, for more than 40 years, through many changed circumstances, there has been one constant feature of US policy in the Gulf: support for the most conservative



local forces in order to keep radical and popular movements from coming to power, no matter what the human cost, no matter how great the necessary manipulation or intervention. The US has not been invariably successful in achieving its objectives -- in 1979, it lost one of its major props with the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, who had policed the Gulf on Washington's behalf. But the basic pattern of US policy has not changed, and is well illustrated by its behavior during the war between Iran and Iraq.

### The Gulf War

The US did not have diplomatic relations with either belligerent in 1980, and announced its neutrality in the conflict. One typically humanitarian State Department official explained in 1983: "we don't give a damn as long as the Iran-Iraq carnage does not affect our allies in the region or alter the balance of power." [26] In fact, the US was not indifferent to the war, but saw a number of positive opportunities opened by its prolongation.

The need for arms and money would make Baghdad more dependent on the conservative Gulf states and Egypt, thereby moderating Iraq's policies and helping to repair ties between Cairo and the other Arab states. The war would make Iran -- whose weapons had all been US-supplied in the past -- desperate to obtain US equipment and spare parts. The exigencies of war might make both nations more willing to restore their relations with Washington. Alternatively, the dislocations of war might give the US greater ability to carry out covert operations in Iran or Iraq. And turmoil in the Gulf might make other states in the area more susceptible to US pressure for military cooperation.

Washington tried to carry out all these policies at once. In late 1986, however, the Reagan administration was caught secretly selling arms to Iran, and funneling the proceeds to aid the Contras. The Reagan administration was in the unenviable position of having alienated the Iranians and panicked all the Arabs who concluded that the US valued Iran's friendship over theirs. To salvage US relations with at least

one side, Washington now had to tilt -- and tilt heavily -- towards Iraq.

### The American Armada

The opportunity to demonstrate the tilt came soon. Kuwait had watched with growing nervousness Iran's battlefield successes, perhaps made possible by US arms sales and intelligence reports. Iran was now also attacking ships calling at Kuwaiti ports, and to protect itself, Kuwait tried to draw in the US. In September 1986 (before the Iran-Contra scandal broke out), it asked both Washington and Moscow if they would be interested in reflagging some Kuwaiti vessels -- that is, flying their own flags on Kuwaiti ships and then protecting them. The initial US reaction was lackadaisical. But when the US learned in March 1987 that the Soviet Union offered to reflag 11 tankers, it promptly offered to reflag the same 11 ships -- which would both keep Soviet influence out of the Gulf and give the US the opportunity to demonstrate its support for Iraq. [27]

The Kuwaitis accepted the US' offer and declined Moscow's, but chartered three Soviet vessels in order to provide some balance between the US and the USSR (as the Kuwaitis are less afraid of Soviet contamination than their American saviors are). [28] Undersecretary of Political Affairs Michael H. Armacost explained in June 1987 that if the USSR were permitted a larger role in protecting Gulf oil, the Gulf states would be under great pressure to make additional facilities available to Moscow. [29] The US view was that only one superpower was allowed to have facilities in the region, and that was the United States. Thus, when in December 1980 the Soviet Union proposed the neutralization of the Gulf, with no alliances, no bases, no intervention in the region, and no obstacles to free trade and the sea lanes, Washington showed no interest. [30] By August 1987, the US had an aircraft carrier, a battleship, six cruisers, three destroyers, seven frigates, and numerous supporting naval vessels in or near the Gulf, [31] in what a Congressional study termed "the largest single naval ar-



mada deployed since the height of the Vietnam war". [32]

The Reagan administration claimed that the reflagging was merely intended to protect the flow of oil. It warned that "any significant disruption in gulf oil supply would cause world oil prices for all to skyrocket", grimly recalling how events from 1973 to 1974, and from 1978 to 1979 demonstrated that "a small disruption - of less than five percent - can trigger a sharp escalation in oil prices". [33]

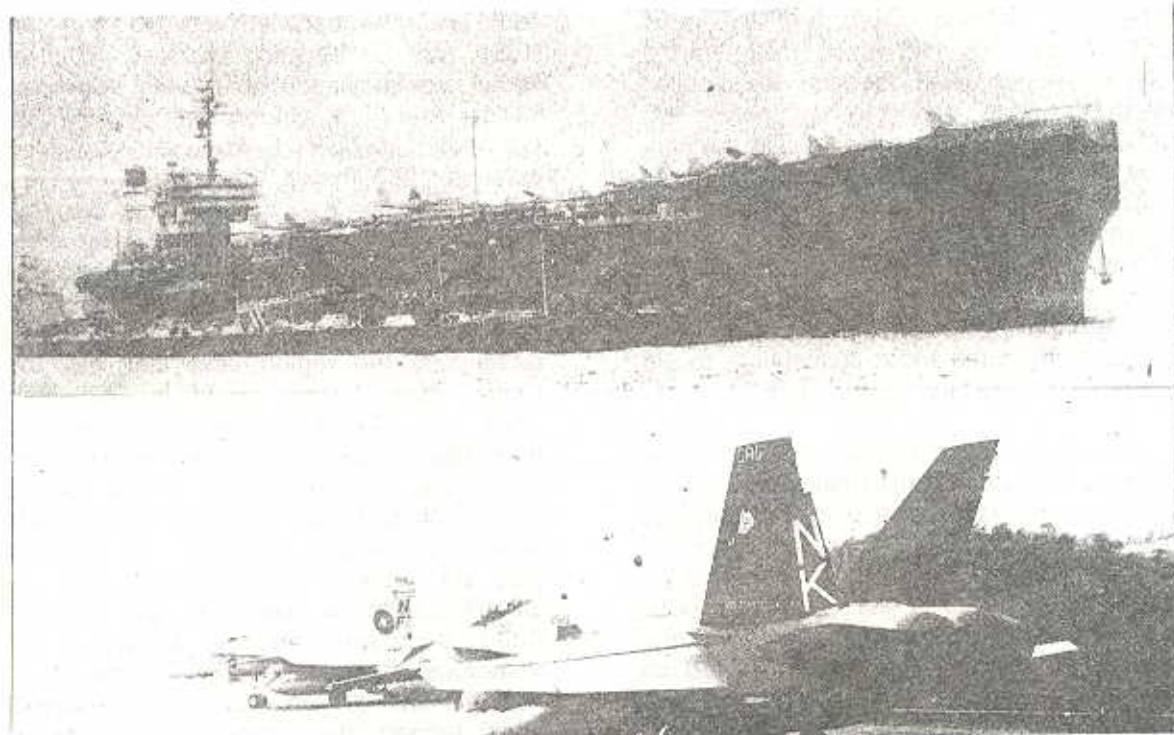
In fact, oil and, for that matter, oil prices were never threatened. There has been a worldwide oil glut since the early 1980s, with much underused production capacity in non-Gulf nations. Despite the horrendous human costs of the Iran-Iraq war, oil prices had actually fallen by 50 percent during the course of the conflict. [34] By the end of 1987, two-thirds of all the oil produced in the Gulf was carried by pipeline. The Congressional study noted that even in the unlikely event of an actual shutdown of the Gulf, the impact on oil supplies and prices would be minimal. [35] In no sense then could the Strait of Hormuz be viewed as the "jugular" of the Western economies. [36]

Fewer than two percent of the ships that did transit the Strait came under attack, and even this figure is misleading because many of the attacks inflicted relatively minor damage. [37] Only one Iranian attack in 10 caused serious damage. [38]

Significantly, Iran became more aggressive in attacking shipping because of US naval presence. [39] Between 1981 and April 1987, when US reflagging was announced, Iran struck 90 ships; in little over a year thereafter, Iran struck 126 ships. [40] As the Congressional study noted, "shipping in the Gulf now appears less safe than before the US naval build-up began". [41]

If the US were concerned with free navigation, it might have given some consideration to a Soviet proposal that the US Navy and all national navies withdraw from the Gulf, to be replaced by a United Nations force. [42] But Washington rejected this proposal.

It was Iraq that started the tanker war in the Gulf proper in 1981, and continued these attacks into 1984 without a parallel Iranian response at sea. In March 1984,



June 14, 1989 MIDWEEK

November 22, 1989 MIDWEEK



two months after Iraq stepped up the pace and scope of its attack, Iran finally began to respond. [43] Iraqi attacks, however, outnumbered those by Iran until after the US announced its reflagging. [44] The US Navy protected the reflagged vessels and, in April 1988, extended its protection to any neutral vessel coming under Iranian attack. [45] In practice, this meant that Iraq could strike at Iranian vessels with impunity, with the US Navy preventing retaliation by Teheran.

Washington justified its policy by noting that Iraq only attacked Iranian ships, while Iran targeted the ships of neutrals, particularly Kuwait. This was a dubious legal argument on two counts: First, Kuwait was a neutral engaged in a rather unneutral behavior. Among other things, it opened its ports to deliveries of war material that were then transported over land to Iraq. [46] Second, Iraq also hit neutral ships, even Saudi Arabian ships, when they called on Iran. [47] Iraq declared certain Iranian waters a "war exclusion zone", but as an international law expert has noted, Iraq's "method of enforcement has closely resembled German methods" in World War II, and "under any analysis, the Iraqi exclusion zone cannot be justified". The "at-

tacks on neutral merchant vessels by both sides must be condemned as violations of international law". [48] There was, thus, no legal justification for the US to take Iraq's side in the tanker war.

There was still less sense in referring to the US Navy as a "peacekeeping" force. Gary Sick, a former National Security Council officer in charge of Iranian affairs, asserted that American naval units "have been deployed aggressively and provocatively in the hottest parts of the Persian Gulf". "Our aggressive patrolling strategy," he observed, "tends to start fights, not end them. We behave at times as if our objective was to goad Iran into a war with us." [49] According to a Congressional report, officials in every Gulf country were critical of "the highly provocative way in which US forces are being deployed". [50] In April 1988, when the US turned a mining attack on a US ship into the biggest US Navy sea battle since World War II, [51] *Al Ittihad*, a newspaper often reflective of government thinking in the United Arab Emirates, criticized the US attacks, noting that they added "fuel to the Gulf tension". [52]



THE IMPOSED WAR



The aggressive posture of the US was in marked contrast to that of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, too, was escorting ships in the Gulf, particularly those carrying weapons to Kuwait for Iraq. On 6 May 1987, Iranian gunboats attacked a Soviet merchant vessel, [53] and two weeks later, one of the Soviet ships chartered by Kuwait was the first victim of a mine attack since 1984. [54] These facts are not widely known because the Soviet response was extremely mild.

Provocative US deployments took a heavy toll on innocent civilians. One night in November 1987, a US ship fired its machine guns with hostile intent at what was believed to be an Iranian speedboat, but which was, in fact, a fishing boat from the United Arab Emirates. One person was killed and three were wounded. [55] The most serious incident was the shooting down by the US cruiser *Vincennes* of an Iranian civil airliner, killing all 290 people aboard. The commander of another US ship in the Gulf noted that while "the conduct of Iranian military forces in the month preceding the incident was pointedly non-threatening", the actions of the *Vincennes* "appeared to be consistently aggressive", leading some Navy heads to refer to the ship as "Robo Cruiser". [56]

### Indifference and Diplomacy

The common view on the Gulf War, widely promoted by Washington, was that Iran was the sole obstacle to peace. A review of the handling of the war, however, shows that while the late Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini certainly bore tremendous responsibility for the bloodshed, the blame should not be entirely on him.

It was Iraq which began the war with an attack on Iran on 22 September 1980. The United Nations Security Council waited four days before convening, and it was not until 28 September 1980 that it passed Resolution 479 calling for an end to the fighting. Significantly, however, the resolution did not condemn (or even mention) the Iraqi aggression nor call for a return to internationally recognized boundaries. As Ralph King, who has studied the UN

response in detail, concluded, "the Council has more or less deliberately ignored Iraq's actions in September 1980". It did so because the Council, as a whole, had a negative view of Iran and was not concerned enough about Iran's predicament to come to its aid. The US delegate noted that Iran, which had itself violated Security Council resolutions on the US embassy hostages, could hardly complain about the Council's lackluster response.

Iran rejected Resolution 479 because it was one-sided. When Norway called for an internationally supervised withdrawal of forces, Iraq replied, accurately, that this violates Resolution 479. Iran refused to engage in any discussion as long as Iraqi forces remained in its soil. [57] In the meantime, State Department officials proposed "a joint US-Soviet effort to promote a settlement", but National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski argued that this "would legitimize the Soviet position in the Gulf, and this objectively undercut our vital interests". [58] No US initiative was forthcoming. A few more unfruitful Security Council meetings were held in October. Finally, no further formal meetings were held on the subject of the war, despite the carnage, until July 1982. [59]

There were a number of efforts to mediate by third parties. The first was under Olof Palme, representing the UN Secretary General. Palme proposed that, as an initial step, the two sides agree to have the disputed Shatt al-Arab waterway cleared. Iraq, however, would only agree if it could pay the full costs (thus legitimizing its claim to the entire river). No agreement could be reached. [60] Then, the Non-aligned Ministerial Committee proposed a cease-fire, subsequent withdrawal, and the creation of demilitarized zones in both sides. Iran accepted this and, for a while, Iraq did as well. But Baghdad soon changed its mind, hoping to win in the battlefield. In neither of these instances was Iraq pressured to enter a settlement. [61]

In early 1982, the government of Algeria, which had helped Iran and Iraq reach a border agreement in 1975, and had also served as a go-between for the



release of the US embassy hostages, offered to help. On 3 May 1982, however, an aircraft carrying the Algerian foreign minister and his team of experts was shot down in Iranian airspace by an Iraqi fighter plane. Five years later, a captured Iraqi pilot was said to have admitted that the attack was aimed at having Iran blamed for the action. [62] Whether this is true or not, the shootdown did eliminate from the scene the most experienced mediators.

By the end of May 1982, Iran had recovered nearly all its territory, and Iraq was looking for a way out of the war. The Islamic Conference Organization and the Gulf Cooperation Council tried to mediate a settlement. On 3 June, three men, led by an Iraqi intelligence officer, attempted to assassinate the Israeli ambassador to Britain, with the hope, according to one report, of provoking an Israeli invasion of Lebanon that would create the conditions for the Gulf combatants to end their fighting so they might face their common enemy -- Israel. [63] Israel needed no encouragement to march into Lebanon; it knew the provocation had nothing to do with the PLO or Lebanon, but it invaded, anyway. The Lebanon war, however, did not dissuade Iran from continuing the Gulf War, and might even have derailed the mediation efforts. [64]

Iraq offered to stop firing and withdraw its remaining forces from Iran. In Teheran, a vigorous debate ensued over whether to accept the offer or to continue with the war. The militant mullahs had seen their power grow during the war; though the Shah had originally been ousted by a wide range of political forces, the crusade against Iraq had enabled the right-wing clerics to mobilize the population and prevail over their domestic opponents. In addition, just as Iraq had erroneously assumed that Iran was on the verge of collapse in September 1980, so now it seemed to Iran as though Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was about to fall. Khomeini decided to go on with the war, declaring that Iran would not stop fighting until Saddam Hussein was overthrown, guilt for the war assigned to Iraq, and reparations paid.

The government of Iran, thus, bears major responsibility for the death and destruction that followed. But, significantly, no industrial country gave strong support to a peace settlement this time. [65] Within the United States, Secretary of State Alexander Haig proposed an international peace conference (though without US and, of course, Soviet participation). The proposal, Haig recalls, "failed to win the attention of the White House". Haig notes that the "war was then at a critical stage, an Iranian offensive having recovered nearly all of Iran's lost territory, and it is possible that a properly designed initiative could have succeeded in ending the hostilities". [66]

For the first time since 1980, the Security Council met on the issue of the war on 12 July 1982 and called for a withdrawal to the pre-war boundaries. Iran considered this further proof of the bias of the United Nations, since the call for withdrawal came when Iranian forces first held any Iraqi territory. [67]

Iraq responded to Iranian victory on the ground by making use of its technological advantage: it escalated the tanker war, employed chemical weapons, and launched attacks on civilian targets. Iran retaliated by striking Gulf shipping in 1984 and launching its own attacks on civilians, though on a lesser scale than Iraq's. Iran charged that the Security Council's handling of these issues reflected animosity against it.

In 1974, the Security Council passed a resolution on the tanker war that was directed primarily against Iran's actions and made no reference to Iraqi conduct, except to call for all states to respect the right to free navigation. [68]

The Security Council passed no resolution on chemical weapons. The United States condemned the use of chemical weapons, but declined to support any Council action against Iraq. [69] The Council did issue a much less significant "statement" in 1985, condemning the use of chemical weapons, but without naming Iraq. Then in March 1986, a Council state-



ment explicitly denounced Iraq for the first time. This came, however, two years after Iraq's conduct of chemical warfare had been confirmed by a UN team. [70]

In 1983, another UN team found that both sides had attacked civilian areas, but that Iran had suffered more extensive damage than Iraq. Teheran wanted the Security Council to pass a resolution that indicated Iraq's greater responsibility, but the Council refused to do so, and no statement was issued. [71] In June 1984, the Secretary General was able to get the two sides to agree to cease their attacks on civilians. Both sides soon charged each other of committing violations, but UN inspection teams found that while Iraq violated the agreement, Iran did not. By March 1985, the moratorium was over. [72]

At the same time, maintaining US presence in the 'Gulf vis-a-vis Moscow's low profile, was still crucial for the US. In a section of a draft National Security document that elicited no dissent, US long-term goals were said to include "an early end to the Iran-Iraq war without Soviet mediation". [73].

Iran remained committed to its maximum war aims, in spite of the fact that Oliver North, apparently without authorization, told Iranian officials that Reagan wanted the war ended on terms favorable to Iran, and that Saddam Hussein had to go. [74] But it was not just North's unauthorized information that encouraged Iranian intransigence; the authorized but clandestine dealings between Washington and Teheran, no doubt, had the same effect.

In late 1986, the Iran-Contra scandal broke out, forcing the US to go all-out in its support for Iraq in order to preserve some influence among the Arab states jolted by the evidence of Washington's double-dealing. In May 1987, US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy met with Saddam Hussein and promised him that the US would lead efforts at the UN for a mandatory arms embargo against Iran. A resolution, drafted by the US, called for a cease-fire and withdrawal by both sides, and imposed an embargo on

whoever did not comply, presumably Iran. The non-permanent members of the Security Council also called for the formation of an impartial commission to investigate the origins of the war, and for the elimination of the mandatory sanctions. On 20 July 1987, the document was passed unanimously as Security Council Resolution 598. [75]

Iraq promptly accepted Resolution 598, while Iran said it would accept the provisions on the cease-fire and the withdrawal of forces if an impartial commission was set up first. US and Iraq both rejected Iran's position, asserting that Iran had no right to select one provision out of many in the resolution and impose that as a pre-condition. [76]

The Secretary General then travelled to Teheran and Baghdad to work out a compromise. According to the leaked text of the Secretary General's private report to the Security Council, Iran agreed to accept an "undeclared cease-fire" while an independent commission was investigating the responsibility for the conflict; the cessation would become formal on the date that the commission issued its findings. Iraq, however, insisted that "under no circumstances" would it accept an undeclared cease-fire. [77]

Instead of seizing Iran's position as part of a first step towards a compromise, the US, in the words of Gary Sick, "pressed single-mindedly for an embargo on Iran, while resisting efforts by Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar to fashion a compromise cease-fire". [78]

"Could the war have been ended by a compromise in early 1988?" Sick has asked. "The answer will never be known, primarily because the US was unwilling to explore Iran's offer. The US position -- and sensitivities about even the perception of any sympathy (sic) towards Iran -- was a direct legacy of the Iran-Contra fiasco. They have contributed to prolonging the war for six unnecessary months." [79]

Finally, in the face of widespread anti-war sentiments in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini decided to bring the fighting to an end.



On 18 July 1988, Iran declared its full acceptance of Resolution 598. By this time, however, Iraq had turned the tide of the battle on land, having regained virtually all of its own territory. Saddam Hussein, therefore, refused to accept the cease-fire. Baghdad continued its offensive, using chemical weapons against both Iran and its (Iraq's) own Kurdish population. It was not until 6 August that international pressure got Iraq to agree to a cease-fire, which went into effect two weeks later. [80]

The underlying causes of the war have not been resolved, and both regimes have continued to kill their own citizens – Kurds in Iraq, and dissidents, especially leftists, in Iran. But the Gulf War, with its staggering human costs, was finally over.

## The Philippine Bases

The Pentagon is quite correct when it says that its bases in the Philippines enable the US to project military power to the Persian Gulf. But before one accepts this as a justification for the continued presence of Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Bay, one would want to ask whether such power projection is likely to benefit world peace or promote social justice. If previous US policy in the Gulf region is any guide, the answer to this question must be a resounding "NO". Peace and justice worldwide would be enhanced if the US' capacity to intervene in the Gulf is reduced. And one of the best ways to reduce this capacity would be to withdraw the US bases from the Philippines.

## Notes

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