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## SOVIET-IRANIAN RELATIONS SINCE THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

### Introduction

Iran's unique geostrategic location, its natural resources, manpower and military potentials have made her a focal point of superpower competition in the post-War period. Soon after the World War II, the US embarked upon a policy of "containing" communism through a chain of military bases around the USSR. In this regard, Iran became an obvious choice. On the other hand, a major Soviet concern about Iran has been to secure the USSR's southern border to guard, what was commonly known as her "soft underbelly". It had significant economic interest in Iran as well.

With the US-inspired *coup-d'etat* of 1953 the superpower race for influence in Iran had a recess marking an apparently overwhelming victory of the United States. Subsequently, the US brought Iran under the fold of Western alliance system and was able to exclude the USSR not only from Iran but also from the entire Persian Gulf region which, thanks primarily to its oil resources, became a sphere of "vital interest" to the US.

The Islamic Revolution of 1978 brought a radical change in Iran's foreign policy characterized by sharp anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism. Iran eliminated US presence in the country and withdrew from CENTO, causing subsequent collapse of the alliance. Furthermore, Iran posed a serious challenge to US preponderance and its allies all over the Middle East region. All these developments

heralding a definite set-back to the US opened some new opportunities to the USSR. Therefore, a major aspect of post-Revolution developments in Iran's foreign relations is the Soviet-Iranian relations.

As the Soviet Union became a truly global power, her interest in Iran—the only state contiguous with both the USSR and the Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean region—was increased. Since the Revolution she has been making continuous efforts to woo Iran in order to make the US set-back there irreversible and thus, improve her position. However, she has also been trying to gain some concessions from Iran on a number of issues like, Afghanistan, Iranian Government's attitude to communists and courting Iran's rival Iraq as well. On the other hand, Iran, in view of her deadlock with the US and her sustained war with Iraq showed some interest in improving bilateral relations with the USSR. Nevertheless, she continues to try to curb the Soviet influence in the region. Her opposition to the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan and severe treatment of Iranian communists are cases in point. At times, Iran even made efforts to propagate Islamic Revolution among the Soviet Muslims. All these made the post-Revolution Soviet-Iranian relations an issue of intense discussion, sharp debate and wide speculation among the academicians as well as diplomats all over the world.

The superpowers either rationally or irrationally have intended to view the changes in this region in terms of a zero-sum game—loss of influence by either of them is a gain to its opponent and *vice-versa*. In this regard, the Iranian foreign policy having a clearly stated anti-superpower bias and being quite active in the regional affairs would inevitably affect the interests and vulnerabilities of both the superpowers in the entire region. As a result, the relations between the USSR and Iran would be influenced not only by the mere bilateral issues but also by a wide number of regional issues of mutual concern. In this article an attempt would be made to study the Soviet-Iranian relations since the Islamic Revolution in bilateral as well as regional perspectives.

Part I begins with a brief survey of the earlier period, with a focus on the developments which served as a background to the current events, then it will make an attempt to assess Moscow's reaction to and expectations from the Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Iran's perception of and the approach to the Soviet Union. Part II will study exclusively bilateral issues such as economic relations between the two countries, Soviet policy towards the *Tudeh* Party and national minorities and Iran's policy towards the Soviet Muslims. Part III is an attempt to assess the influence of the regional issues of mutual concern, such as security in the Gulf region, superpower involvement in the regional affairs, Iran's controversial policy of exporting Islamic Revolution to its neighbours, Arab-Israeli conflict, Lebanon crisis, Intra-Arab relations, Afghan issue, Iran-Iraq war and others. Finally, an effort will be made to assess the present state of affairs in Soviet-Iranian relations and indicate their future directions.

## I

### Soviet Union and Shah's Regime

The *coup-d'etat* staged by General Fazlollah Zahedi with US assistance on 19 August 1953 which ousted the nationalist government headed by Muhammad Mossadeq and restored the power of Mohammad Reza Shah was a serious set-back for the Soviet efforts designed to keep Iran out of the Western alliance system and to maintain friendly or at least correct and stable state-to-state relations between the two countries. Shah's strategic and political thinking was diametrically opposed to the Soviet security policies. His basic assumption was that Iran's fate, her chances for survival as an independent nation and the maintenance of her territorial integrity were primarily connected with the fate of the Western alliance. The balance of power between the Russian empire on the one hand and Great Britain which controlled India and most of the Middle East, on the other hand permitted Iran for about a century and a half to follow a neutralist

policy and to survive as buffer between the Russian and British spheres of influence. In between the two World Wars this equilibrium was maintained. But the enormous gains in power, territory and military might by Soviet Union resulting from her victory in the World War II followed by the British withdrawal from India and most of the Middle East shifted the balance of power in the region in favour of the USSR. The Shah feared—probably irrationally—that this asymmetrical development will sooner or later, lead either to a Soviet conquest of parts of Iran or to the “Finlandization” of all or part of it.<sup>1</sup> But following the death of Stalin in March 1953 Soviet policy towards the Afro-Asian states underwent a substantial change. Stalin’s assumption that after the achievement of national independence the ruling national bourgeois class of the Afro-Asian countries lost their progressive anti-imperialist nature and turned into surrogates of imperialism, was replaced by the resurrection of Lenin’s “natural ally” theory. This theory means that the socialist countries and the national liberation struggle of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples and the newly-liberated nations are symbolically linked in one great historical struggle against imperialism and it made the Afro-Asian nations the natural ally of the socialist countries.<sup>2</sup> In practice, the former doctrinaire attitude of “whoever is not with us is against us” was replaced by a far more pragmatic approach of “whoever is not against us is with us”. It left Iran with sufficient room for the continuation of her policy of neutrality between the East and the West and the maintenance of normal state-to-state relations between Iran and the USSR. What was indeed in jeopardy was Shah’s own regime facing threats mainly from internal opposition. Shah’s conviction was that only the inclusion of Iran in the Western security system and massive American economic and military aid would enable his regime to survive.

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1. Yair P. Hirschfeld, “Moscow and Khomeini : Soviet-Iranian Relations in Historical Perspective,” *ORBIS*, Pennsylvania, (Vol. 24, No. 2, 1980), p. 221,
  2. See, Bhabani Sen Gupta, “India and the Super Powers”, in M.S. Rajan and Shivaji Ganguli (Ed.) *Great Power Relations and the Third World*, (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981), p. 132.

In practice, Shah's security concept became a permanent threat to the Soviet Union. Iran enthusiastically opted for "containment policy" and despite Soviet pressures, on November 1955 joined the US-sponsored Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and thus, integrated itself into the Western camp. CENTO evoked considerable anxiety in the USSR which felt that the treaty endangered the security of a vital part of its territory. Soviet policy towards the pact members in general and towards Iran, in particular, was designed to detach them from the Western camp both by threats and by offers of generous technical and other aid. In a parallel manner, the USSR also tried to circumvent the pact by its limited presence in the region. The Soviet-Egyptian arms deal of September 1955, was a step in that direction. This was soon followed by a similar Soviet-Syrian deal and after the July 1958 Revolution in Iraq by an Iraqi-Soviet deal which finally dissociated Iraq from the Western camp. But all these had no positive effect on Iran's attitude towards the Soviet Union and the former was more and more inclining towards the US. In 1959, the USSR, on learning of Iran's intention to sign a security pact with the US, took a new attempt to detach Iran from the anti-Soviet alliance systems. The Soviets advised Iran to withdraw from the CENTO and to refuse to sign a bilateral treaty with the US, offering in return a Soviet-Iranian non-aggression pact and considerable economic aid. They were even ready to renounce their right under the 1921 treaty to send troops to Iran.<sup>3</sup> Iran however, turned down all these offers. It was mainly due to the fact that Moscow in no way was capable of giving Iran the same economic and military assistance as the US could offer. Besides, Shah was convinced that only US patronage would enable his regime to survive in the long run. On 5 March, 1959, the American-Iranian treaty was signed followed by strong Soviet propaganda campaign against Iran worsening the already bitter relations between the two countries.

As the cold war eased in the early 1960s and the Kennedy Administration took office, a change in US policy towards Iran seemed to be

3. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *The Soviet Union and Revolution in Iran*, (Croom Helm, London, 1984). p. 26.

in the offing. The development of technology extending the range of missiles meant that their stationing in the peripheries of the USSR was no longer essential or likely. It diminished the strategic value of Iran for the US. The idea that support of any anti-communist regime meant that America was backing feudal rulers and dictators whose days are numbered began to gain ground in the US during the Kennedy Administration. In 1962 the US decided to reduce her aid particularly military aid to Iran.<sup>4</sup> Iran feared a possible US withdrawal from the region and her suspicion was reinforced by the withdrawal of US IRBM from Turkey by 1962. But there was little Iran could do to prevent it. The Shah, suspicious of the new US policy, found it expedient to improve his relations with the USSR. He tried to persuade the Soviets that the withdrawal had come about as a result of Iranian pressure and promised that he would never allow such missiles to be based in Iran.<sup>5</sup> Moscow encouraged Iran by showing equal interest in improving bilateral relations.

The *rapprochement* that followed brought an end to mutual polemics. Though political relations did not go beyond the formal declarations of friendship, trade, economic and technical cooperation

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between the two countries intensified. On certain points the Soviets tried to make the deals more advantageous for Iran in the hope that it would lessen her dependence on the US and increase her obligation to the USSR. Thus, in 1966 Iran signed a \$ 110 million arms agreement with the USSR on comparatively better terms than offered by the US.<sup>6</sup> Between 1966 and 1973 trade between the two countries expanded

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4. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

ten-fold.<sup>7</sup> Important technical aid agreements were signed in the Mid-1960s for a number of projects like the metallurgical complex in Isfahan, a machinery plant in Arak and the \$650 million gas pipeline to bring gas from Ahwaz to the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup> Soviet economic credits and grants totalling \$ 521 million were extended between 1966 and 1970, a period when the Iranian exchequer had yet to benefit from the large oil income.<sup>9</sup> For the Shah, development of Soviet-Iranian cooperation was a way of telling the US that Iran had other alternatives and was not entirely dependent on the US and thus increase her bargaining capability with the US. The Soviet political gains were also considerable which included the loosening of Iran's ties with the West, greater Iranian sensitivity to Soviet interests and the stabilization of the border situation.

These developments, however, could not bridge the widening gap between the willingness of the two countries to tactical adjustment and accommodation with each other's foreign policy on the one hand and the conflict of interests, divergent security perspectives and policy and the ever increasing assertiveness of the two countries in the West Asian politics on the other. Since the early 1970s balance in Iran's security policy moved away from accommodation towards military deterrence and a wider and more ambitious quest for predominance in the Gulf region. The Shah developed a strong sense of insecurity *vis-a-vis* the USSR and the Arab radical regimes resulting from a series of developments that evolved in proximity to Iran : Britain's evacuation of the Gulf and the independence of Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, the Soviet-Iraqi friendship treaty of 1972 and Iraqi claims to Kuwait ; leftist secessionist movement in Pakistani Baluchistan ; revolt in the Dhofar province of Oman backed by Soviet ally South

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7. Shahram Chubin, "Soviet Policy Towards Iran and the Gulf". *Adelphi Papers*, No. 157. (London, 1980), p. 18.

8. N. Mitra, "Iran and the Soviet Union", *IDSJ Journal*, New Delhi, (Vol. XIV. No. 4, 1982), p. 603.

9. Shahram Chubin, "Soviet Policy Towards Iran and the Gulf" *Adelphi Papers*, No. 157, (London, 1980). p. 19,

Yemen and others. It looked as if the Soviets were trying to replace Britain in the Gulf area. Meanwhile, the increasing oil prices gave Iran the means to increase its power and intervention capabilities. This coincided with the Nixon Administration's apprehension of the growing Soviet influence in the Mid-East politics and its search for a surrogate local power ready to perform the function of "regional policeman" against Soviet penetration and any revolutionary change in the Gulf region. While Saudi Arabia, without a navy and with only a small army, was incapable of playing such a role, Iran became the obvious American choice. In May 1972, President Nixon accompanied by Henry Kissinger, visited Tehran and the alliance relationship between the two countries was revived. It was also decided that the US would sell Iran "any conventional weapon system that it wanted",<sup>10</sup> During the early 1970s Iran emerged as a "regional policeman" in the Gulf area under the US umbrella with the aim of maintaining the *status quo* in the Gulf region by preventing changes due to external pressure or revolution. Her more activist policy on regional issues together with growing Soviet involvement in Asia, resulted in increased rivalry and disagreement on a wide number of issues. Iran embarked upon a massive arms buildup programme. Her arms purchases from the West reached an estimated value of \$ 60 billion during the 1970s, she also accepted a large number of US instructors.<sup>11</sup> American reconnaissance stations were also established near the Soviet border. From the Soviet perspective, all these made Iran closely integrated to and dependent on, the West and thus obstructed Soviet interests.

Iranian forces intervened in Oman to support the Sultan against a local revolt that was indirectly supported by the USSR. In Pakistani Baluchistan, they suppressed a tribal revolt that enjoyed communist support. Moreover, the Shah's declared intent to follow analogical policy throughout the Gulf area, wherever a radical leftist movement might arise, by itself discouraged communist political agitation. Similarly, Shah masterminded the so-called Tehran-Riyadh-Cairo axis

10. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

11. Yair P. Hirschfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 221.



directed against the USSR and the Arab radicals. Thus, Iran's diplomacy throughout the region became antithetical to both Soviet interests and those of her allies.

Despite sharp political differences, trade and economic relations between the two countries grew and the Soviets tried to attract Iran by economic inducements. Billateral trade in 1977 exceeded \$ 1 billion and Iran became the USSR's largest non-military trading partner in the Third World. Soviet assistance was extended to the construction of electrical generating stations in Ramin, Ahwaz and Ispahan and to a number of other projects.<sup>12</sup> In 1977, the number of Soviet technicians in Iran reached about 3000 people.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, during the last years of the rule of Shah, Soviet-Iranian relations were characterized by two parallel but opposing trends. On the one hand, there was an apparent improvement in bilateral relations manifest primarily by the strengthening of economic ties. On the other hand, foreign policy of both the countries were deeply antithetical to each other's interests and those of their allies. Though the latter trend prevailed over the former both the sides demonstrated on occasions eagerness to maintain certain degree of understanding.

### **Soviet Reaction to and the Assessment of Iranian Revolution**

The revolutionary crisis that erupted in Iran in mid-1978 took the USSR by surprise and it was initially uncertain about what policies to follow. It reflected the complexity of the relations between the two countries and the uncertainty and unpredictability of the development of events in Iran. The Soviets faced three choices, each involving dilemmas and risks, but also potential benefits. Firstly, they could support the opposition. Shah's close economic, political and military ties with the West, massive arms buildup programme and his assertive policy towards the Gulf region directed against the Soviet Union and her allies had severely threatened the Soviet quest for greater influence

12. Shahram Chubin, "Soviet Policy Towards Iran and the Gulf", *Adelphi, Papers*, No. 157 (London, 1980) p. 22.

13. *Strategic Survey-1978*, (London, 1979), p. 53.

in the region. In Soviet view, his replacement by the forces extremely anti-West and anti-US was very much desirable since it would have great potentials for the USSR to enhance her influence in the region at the cost of the West. On the other hand, uneasy though about the Shah's arms buildup and assertive policies, the USSR was not uncomfortable with the Shah. To support the opposition would have involved risking substantial hostility from the Shah if he survived. Secondly, they could support the Shah, thereby gaining his goodwill should he prevailed. But this would certainly alienate the opposition. And if the Revolution succeeded the USSR would be deprived of an opportunity to exploit a set-back for the West and to increase Soviet influence in the post-Revolution Iran. Finally, they could stay neutral, till the unfolding developments took a clear shape. While this would enable the USSR to avoid backing a potential loser, such a move could very well either alienate both sides or result in a forfeiture of Soviet initiative. Initially, the Soviets opted for the last one, considering it to be least risky. At the same time, they kept their other two options open.

It was not until October-November 1978 that Moscow took a public stand. The Soviet media began to express critical opinions concerning the situation in Iran. "The roots of the present crisis", argued a *Pravda* commentary—"lie in the serious economic and social difficulties Iran is experiencing." The commentary also criticized the "official propaganda" which tried to interpret the disorder as the intrigues of "communists" and "Islamic Marxists" and those who saw the cause of unrest in the clash of interest between the religious opposition and the ruling secular elite.<sup>14</sup> Another Soviet commentary criticized the Shah for his pro-imperialist policies.<sup>15</sup> This slight Soviet shift away from the Shah and implicit support to the opposition was more a manoeuvre to keep pace with the events in case Shah fell.

Nevertheless, the Soviets were decided on at least one issue, i.e. to prevent any US involvement in the Iranian embroglio designed to

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14. A. Filipov. "Iran : Days of Tension ", *Pravda*, November 3. 1978.

15. Zamlay Khalilzad, "Islamic Iran ; Soviet Dilemma," *Problems of Communism*, Washington, (January-February, 1984), p. 3.

influence the development of events in its own favour. As a number of sources suggest, the USSR deeply anticipated American intervention.<sup>16</sup> L.I. Brezhnev's statement of November 18, 1978 that any, particularly military interference in the affairs of Iran, a state directly bordering on the Soviet Union, would be regarded by the Soviet Union as affecting its security interests<sup>17</sup> was clearly designed at discouraging any US

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attempt to diminish the set-back for the West and directing the dissatisfaction and xenophobia existing in Iran against the Americans. In addition, it provided the basis for the latter's claims that the USSR deterred Western intervention and hence, defended the Revolution.

In course of time, when Islamic opposition led by Ayatollah Khomeini appeared irresistible and the victory of the Revolution became inevitable, the Soviet media started a new policy of directly attacking the Shah and supporting the Revolution. While most commentators emphasized its anti-imperialist character, the criticism of religious fanaticism also was not missed.<sup>18</sup> Finally, the Soviet media characterised the Revolution as "objectively progressive" in the prevailing situation in Iran.<sup>19</sup> In practice, it meant that the Soviets approved the anti-monarchic, anti-American and anti-imperialist nature of Iranian Revolution, while preserving their basic opposition to its Islamic and anti-communist nature. Nevertheless, on March, 1979, late Soviet President L.I. Brezhnev welcomed the victory of Iranian Revolution which put an end to "the despotic oppressive regime," and proposed cooperation with the new regime in Iran.<sup>20</sup>

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16. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op. ct.*, p. 52.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

18. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXVI, 1980), p. 30149.

19. Aryeh Y. Yodfat., p. 52.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Brezhnev's statement reflected the official Soviet policy towards Iran, which was designed to: firstly, encourage and intensify Iranian hostility to and dissociation from the United States and its allies and thereby, preventing an American come-back in Iran; secondly, establish good neighbourly or at least correct state-to-state relations between the USSR and Iran; thirdly, encourage Iran in pursuing a policy directed against the US allies in the Gulf region; fourthly, discourage Iranian economic relations with the West and encourage trade and economic cooperation with the USSR and other socialist countries; finally, weaken the position of those Iranians regarded as either anti-Soviet or friendly towards the US. Thus, in the long run it wanted to change the balance of interests in Iran in favour of the Soviet Union within the realm of possibility.

### Revolutionary Iran's Foreign Policy Doctrine and the USSR

Both the West and the East represent a whole set of socio-economic and cultural values that in the eyes of Khomeini and his followers, are equal to decadence and immorality and are seen as an imminent danger to any traditional Muslim society, particularly, that of Iran. It made new leadership of Iran suspicious of and hostile towards both the power blocs. Ayatollah Khomeini declared "Nearly the entire East and West" as "direct or indirect opponents" accusing them of interfering in the internal affairs of Iran.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the cornerstone of his foreign policy doctrine became the goal of belonging "neither to the West nor to the East." It was based on the principle of negative equilibrium (*movazen-e-manfi*), a concept originally propagated by Mohammed Mossadeq in the early 1950s wherein Iran would function as a buffer between the East and the West. It is argued that the US and the USSR would prevent each other from gaining control over a strategically important area. Despite their hostility, one of them could not afford to permit Iranian security be compromised vis-a-vis the other. It put Iran in a unique position which permits it to defy both super-powers with a degree of impunity. Hence, Iran's foreign policy based

21. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

on the principle of negative equilibrium should exploit the situation and prevent either superpower from gaining any influence in military, political, economic or even cultural affairs.<sup>22</sup>

The next characteristic feature of Iran's foreign policy is Pan-Islamism and the export of Islamic revolution. Principle 11 of the Iranian Constitution makes her duty-bound to pursue a Pan-Islamic objective for the political economic and cultural integration of Islamic nations.<sup>23</sup> Iran's pan-Islamism was designed to unite the Islamic world independent of and directed against the West and the East. Pan-Islamic slogans were followed by the call for the export of Islamic Revolution in other Muslim countries. Iranians claimed that their Revolution is just the starting point for a fundamental change into the region. Considering the *raison d'etre* of the Revolution, they became convinced that it could never remain within the geographical borders of Iran.<sup>24</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini himself also regarded Revolutionary Iran as a model for the rest of Islamic countries.<sup>25</sup>

Third aspect of Iranian foreign policy was identification with the Third World and the commitment to non-alignment. Being hostile to the superpowers, Iran tried to portray her foreign policy dictum "neither East nor West" as the culmination of a prolonged quest by the Third World countries for a solution to the domination of the superpowers.<sup>26</sup>

Soviet reaction to Revolutionary Iran's security and foreign policy concepts was mixed and cautious. It welcomed and encouraged Iran's anti-Americanism and anti-westernism while patiently endeavouring to dispel Iran's policy of struggling against both the superpowers by portraying itself as a true friend of Iranian people. A *de*

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22. See, Yair P. Hirschfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 222 ; N. Mitra, *op. cit.*, pp, 597 and *International Herald Tribune*. March, 22, 1980.

23. Sepehr Zabih, *Iran Since the Revolution*. (Croom Helm, London, 1982), p.36

24. *Message of Revolution*, (Publication of the Islamic Revolutionary Gurd Corps, Tehran, No. 1, May, 1981), pp, 46-50.

25. Sepehr Zabih, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

*facto* hands off West Asia policy pursued by the USSR made her less vulnerable to Iran's export of Islamic revolution and pan-Islamism except in Afghanistan. On the other side, it generated a deep sense of insecurity among the US conservative Arab allies and endangered the stability of the regimes in the Gulf region an eventuality—very much welcomed by the Soviet Union.

Thus, despite anti-Soviet rhetorics, Khomeini's foreign policy doctrine with its strident anti-Americanism, anti-feudalism and potential for genuine non-alignment was in many ways more amenable to Soviet interests than the Shah's policy of alignment with the West on the anti-communist basis.

## II

### Bilateral Economic Relations

The development of economic relations with Iran has always been of great importance to the Soviet Union. After the overthrow of Shah, Moscow has scrupulously avoided any major confrontation with Iran on political issues and made substantial efforts to expand Soviet-Iranian economic relations. The Soviets being aware that the Revolution and hostage crisis had undermined the Western, particularly, American economic relations with Iran were ready to make economic investments in order to support their political aims. Their policy was designed to decrease Iran's reliance from and dependence on the West and increase her obligation to the USSR which could not but influence political relations as well.

Iranian attitude toward economic relations with the Soviet Union is problematic. On the one hand, Iranian leaders, including Khomeini, repeatedly expressed a desire to promote bilateral economic relations.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, they embarked upon a policy of preserving Iran's natural resources as long as possible by reducing gas supplies to the

27. Yair P. Hirschfeld. *op. cit.*, p. 233.

USSR and of increasing the price of gas to the point that is unacceptable to the USSR.

Such contradictory approach of both the sides had a mixed effect on Soviet-Iranian economic relations. Iranian export to the Soviet Union for 1980, 1981 and 1982 have been at the same level as before the Shah's overthrow.<sup>28</sup> However, Iranian imports from the USSR increased, especially, since the hostage crisis, when the US and some

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of its allies imposed embargo on Iran. In 1981, the USSR became the fifth largest supplier of goods to Iran worth \$ 650 million<sup>29</sup> and the total trade turnover between the two countries reached the unprecedented mark of \$ 1.2 billion.<sup>30</sup> Trade with the USSR helped Iran to counter the US economic embargo.

On June 20, 1981 a trade protocol was signed between the USSR and Iran, providing for Soviet technical assistance in no less than 142 projects.<sup>31</sup> Another protocol signed by the two countries in February 1982, envisaged increased economic and technical cooperation involving accelerated completion of the 1360 MW power plant at Ahwaz, and the 800 MW power plant at Ispahan.<sup>32</sup> The Soviet Union has been cooperating with Iran on the construction of 135 projects, 104

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28. Z. Khalilzad, "Soviet Dilemmas in Khomeini's Iran," *Australian Outlook* Canberra, (Vol. 38 No. 1, 1984). p.14.

29. V.P. Vaidik, "Soviet-Iran Relations", *Strategic Analysis*, New Delhi, (Vol. VI. No. 12, 1983), p. 732.

30. N. Mitra, *op. cit.*, p.,604.

31. V.P. Vaidik, *op. cit.*, p. 722.

32. N. Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 605.

of which have already been commissioned.<sup>33</sup> At present about 1600 Soviet experts are working in Iran in the Soviet assisted projects.<sup>34</sup>

The closure of Iranian ports in the Persian Gulf as a result of the war with Iraq has increased Iran's use of overland routes through the Soviet Union, for trade with European countries, with Japan, and with the Soviet Union itself. After a hard bargain, the USSR signed an agreement with Iran on September, 1980, which envisaged transit facilities through each others territory by sea, rail and road. It boosted Iranian transit trade passing through Soviet territory. According to Soviet sources about one-third of Iranian imports are carried through Soviet territory.<sup>35</sup> The increase in transit trade had led to congestion at the Soviet-Iranian border because of difficulties in handling the cargo on the Iranian side. And the latter was compelled to seek Soviet assistance in improving her transportation network in the border areas and further southward. It included both Soviet equipments and technicians and in turn contributed to the further expansion of trade and technical cooperation. Until the end of the Gulf War Iran could hardly decrease her dependence on the Soviet Union as a transit route for her foreign trade.

Nevertheless, Soviet-Iranian economic relations during the post-Revolution period were also characterized by sharp contradiction of interests between the two states and serious set-backs for the Soviets. Soon after the Revolution conflict between the two countries developed over the price for gas supplied *via* Iran Natural Gas Trunkline—(IGAT-1). Iran asked for a five-fold increase in gas prices from 76 cent per 1000 cubic feet to \$ 3.80.<sup>36</sup> Following Moscow's refusal Iran cut its gas supplies completely in March, 1980. The USSR is not prepared to pay more than \$ 2.66 per 1000 cubic feet.<sup>37</sup> Till now there

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33. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

34. *ibid.*, p. 131.

35. *ibid.*

36. Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "The Soviet Union and Iran under Khomeini" *International Affairs*, London. (Autumn, 1981), p. 613.

37. V.P. Vaidik, *op. cit.*, p. 733.



are no reports of a firm settlement on the gas price. Presumably there is some interim barter arrangement.<sup>38</sup> Iran also cancelled the IGAT-2, which was to deliver more 13 billion cubic meters of gas annually to the USSR and the Soviets had agreed to a complex arrangement by which they would have delivered gas to West Germany, France and Austria.<sup>39</sup> The dispute over the price of gas and the cancellation of the IGAT-2 apart from the disruption caused to the heavy industry of the southern Soviet republics impinged upon the Soviet economic relations with those East and West European countries with whom it had entered into contracts for regular supply of gas in anticipation of Iranian gas supplies and in consequence, created serious economic strains between the two neighbours. It indeed, has threatened the prospect of long-term Soviet-Iranian economic cooperation.

The only comfort which the Soviets might take is in the fact that the economic losses inflicted on them by the Iranian Revolution were comparatively less heavier than those incurred by Western Europe, the United States and Japan. The Revolution was followed by the expulsion of 70000 Americans from the country. It has cancelled arms orders from the US in the amount of several billion dollars. Development projects granted to American companies under the Shah were also stopped.<sup>40</sup>

## The Tudeh Party and National Minorities in Soviet—Iranian Relations

### *i. Tudeh Party*

The communist *Tudeh* (mass) Party was formed in 1941. Ever since the *Tudeh* Party uninterruptedly enjoyed Soviet moral, material and ideological support and maintained close cooperation with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). During the Shah's reign, when the communists were suppressed and persecuted the USSR

38. *Ibid.*, p. 734.

39. Yair P. Hirschfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

40. For details see, Yair P. Hirschfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 234 ; Z. Kdalilzad, "Soviet Dilemmas in Khomeini's Iran" *Australian Outlook*, Canberra, (Vol. 38, No. 1, 1984), pp. 4-5.

provided them with material assistance and a clandestine radio station—National Voice of Iran (NVOI).<sup>41</sup> Since the Revolution the Soviets were inducing *Tudeh* leadership to support Khomeini. The USSR welcomed the replacement of Party Secretary General Iraj Iskanderi an opponent of Khomeinism, with Nureddin Kianuri—a supporter of the Moscow line.

Under the leadership of Kianuri, the *Tudeh* Party embarked upon a policy of tectical support to Khomeini. According to *Tudeh* and Soviet calculations, the Revolution in Iran had only just begun. Its first stage had come to an end but further stages were on the way in which opportunities for the *Tudeh* might appear.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, among all the groupings the Party was least prepared to engage in the power struggle that would ensue. The *Tudeh* calculated that in the current fluid situation it could influence the course of events better from within the Khomeini's camp than from without. Such policy would enable it to carry on its activities legally, organizing and strengthening itself until the new crisis arises. Initially, Khomeini decided to tolerate *Tudeh* activities. Because, the *Tudeh* was not Iran's only left-wing organization, not even the most dangerous one. Its support base was relatively narrow. Unlike the other radical groups, the *Tudeh* maintained no armed wing, nor it had made inroads in the Iranian Armed Forces which could intimidate the regime. By tolerating the official Communist Party, the regime could isolate it from other leftist groups, preventing their unification and get a free hand in its dealings with the militant leftist groups, like the *Mujahedin-e-Khalq* and *Fedayeen-e-Khalq*.

After gaining legitimacy, the *Tudeh* adopted a multi-pronged strategy in order to achieve its goals. At the domestic level, while expressing support for Khomeini, the Party emphasized on the anti-imperialist and anti-American nature of Iranian Revolution, ignoring its Islamic orientation.<sup>43</sup> The *Tudeh's* strategy towards the Islamic

41. Zamlay Khalilzad, "Islamic Iran : Soviet Dilemma", *Problems of Communism*, Washington, (January-February, 1984), p. 8.

42. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Republican Party (IRP) was to promote discord within the ruling elite and to discredit and eliminate most anti-Soviet and anti-communist elements. Thus, the *Hojatiyeh* faction of the IRP was being routinely denounced as a "pseudo-religious" organization serving American interests.<sup>44</sup> Another vital strategy of the *Tudeh* was to infiltrate important state and other organizations, such as the military, the Revolutionary Guard, the bureaucracy, the universities, press etc. At the international level the *Tudeh* sought to move Iran closer to the USSR and to weaken its ties with the West, particularly, with the US.

Initially, *Tudeh* policy did bear some fruits. The Party quickly regained a number of important footholds, particularly at the Tehran University and other campuses, among oil workers, minority groups and women organizations.<sup>45</sup> Its membership from a few hundred before the Revolution expanded to some 10,000 by 1983.<sup>46</sup> The *Tudeh* press included a daily *Mordom* (with a 60,000 print-run) a monthly periodical *Donya* and 20 other publications.<sup>47</sup> *Tudeh* members held top-posts in Iran's press, radio and television, the universities, the central bank, the oil company and in important ministries. Infiltration reached a point that Radio Tehran broadcast courses in Marxist economics based on work published by *Tudeh* member Abolhossein Agahi.<sup>48</sup> They also made inroads in the Armed Forces.<sup>49</sup>

After these initial success, however, *Tudeh* strategy did not work effectively. Toward Communism Khomeini has been hostile. Ideologically, there is no possible scope of compromise. Khomeini's political style and beliefs leave no room for strong and active opposition, not to speak about the left. His policy was to rid himself of all the

44. Zamlay Khalilzad, "Islamic Iran: Soviet Dilemma", *Problems of Communism* Washington, (January-February, 1984), pp. 8-9.

45. Yair P. Hirschfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

46. Zamlay Khalilzad, "Islamic Iran: Soviet Dilemma" *Problems of Communism* Washington, (January-February, 1984). p. 9.

47. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Zamlay Khalilzad, "Islamic Iran: Soviet Dilemma", *Problems of Communism*, Washington, (January-February, 1984), p. 9.

forces that had supported him, once they had played the rules expected of them. By 1983, the Islamic government got rid of all the strong opponents, except the *Tudeh* which was gaining more and more influence and strength. It seriously apprehended the government. The assertion of the Party that the revolution was "only the completion of the first step on the peoples road to a final victory"<sup>50</sup> generated deep suspicion among the ruling circles about its intention. Moreover, it appeared that in Soviet-view, the *Tudeh* has a very important role to play in post-Khomeini Iran. A renowned Soviet specialist on Third World affairs Prof. R. Ulyanovsky wrote that the Iranian Revolution was "full of conflicting potentialities" and held "the possibility of sharp

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*The Soviets wish to keep all their options open in order to be able to exploit the situation if it serves their interests or fits their objectives.*

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turns in the future".<sup>51</sup> Such perceptions on the part of Soviet influential circles also put the Iranian regime on sharp alert. All these factors *en bloc* coupled with a certain degree of deterioration in Soviet-Iranian relations mainly due to the resumption of former's arms supply to Iraq brought an end to the existing *status quo* between the Islamic regime and the *Tudeh*. On February 6, 1983, Nuraddin Kianuri and 30 other *Tudeh* members were arrested by the government on the charge of spying for the Soviet KGB.<sup>52</sup> This development brought a sharp deterioration in Soviet-Iranian relations. The official organ of the CPSU *Pravda* took up the defence of the arrested communists characterizing the accusations as "groundless and slanderous"<sup>53</sup> which was protested by Ali Akbar Velayati, the Iranian Foreign Minister.<sup>54</sup>

50. V.P. Vaidik, *op. cit.*, p. 735.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 737.

52. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

54. Christopher S. Raj, "The Gulf Region", *Strategic Analysis*. New Delhi. (Vol. VIII, No. 2-3, 1983), pp. 154-55.

In the last week of April 1983 more damaging developments occurred in Iran for the Soviet Union. Kianuri made a statement on the Iranian television that he had been sending the Soviet Union intelligence report on Iran.<sup>55</sup> Subsequently, on May 4, the *Tudeh* Party was banned and further arrests were reported reaching the number about 1000 people.<sup>56</sup> 18 Soviet diplomats accused of having links with the *Tudeh* were expelled from Iran. In response Soviet Government ordered the expulsion of three Iranian diplomats from Moscow. There were even reports of clashes between Iranian and Soviet troops on the border with Afghanistan.<sup>57</sup>

It seems that by now, the USSR consumed the shock of the repression of the *Tudeh* and the subsequent anti-Soviet campaign in Iran. The USSR also refrained from creating further pressure on Iran as it could push the later to a *rapprochement* with the West. The game is not over, however. The *Tudeh* may have disappeared underground and Soviet official policy may have given up trying to exert influence on Iran, but the USSR, with her long common border and a history of involvement in Iranian politics could not remain indifferent to the development of events there. At the same time, so long as Iran does not move back towards the West, it can tolerate the situation.

## ii. National Minorities

Traditionally the Soviet Union supported Iran's national minorities, and the prevailing Soviet slogan was to grant them national autonomy within the framework of the Iranian Republic. A *Tudeh* Party document on the ethnic groups issue, published in May 1983, reflecting much of Soviet thinking on the matter stated that Iran was a multi-national country in which various nationalities and other ethnic groups lived and advocated autonomy for the deprived nationalities.<sup>58</sup> Since

55. *Kessing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXX, 1984), p. 32690.

56. Z. Khallzad, "Soviet Dilemmas in Khomeini's Iran," *Australian Outlook*, Canberra (Vol. 38, No. 1, 1984), p. 1.

57. *Kessing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXX, 1984), p. 32692.

58. Aryeh Y. Yodfar, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

the Revolution no fundamental change occurred in either the *Tudeh* or Soviet position regarding the nationality issue.

Soon after the Revolution, Iran's minorities, especially the Kurds, Turkomans etc. began pressing Tehran for more autonomy. Lack of moderation from both sides led to sustained armed clashes in Iranian Kurdistan. It presented Moscow with a dilemma involving a substantial degree of risk. By supporting Kurdish demand for right to self-determination and by maintaining contacts with the Kurdish resistance groups active in different parts of West Asia the USSR committed herself at least to a limited extent to the Kurdish cause. A total withdrawal of her support from them would disprofit her emage among the Kurds and other minorities in the region and elsewhere and undermine her reliability as a partner. On the other side, Soviet support to the Kurdish resistance movement would severely deteriorate the Soviet-Iranian relations, posing the denger of driving Tehran towards a *rapprochement* with the West. Since both options were judged counterproductive, Kremlin has confined itself to urging moderation on all concerned without compromising its fundamental position on the issue.

It, of course, does not mean that the Soviet policy towards national minorities in Iran was a constant one, without fluctuation. During the first months of the Islamic regime the USSR apprehended that the ethnic cleavages could weaken the regime *vis-a-vis* internal dissidents and external pressure from the West. Such a situation was detrimental to her interests as the Soviet policy towards Iran envisaged neither the disintegration of the country nor the weakening of its regime. Thus, a Soviet commentary in early May 1979, while justifying the demands for autonomy by the Kurds, Baluchis, Turkomans and Arabs anticipated that they could be used by the reactionary forces in order to weaken the regime and restore the old order.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, it was a subtle criticism addressed mainly to Kurdish separatists. This position, however, underwent a gradual change in favour of the Kurds. In November 1979, Aleksandr Bovin, senior commentator for *Izvestia*

59. *Novoye Vremya*. Moscow, (No. 19, May 4, 1979), pp. 12-13.

sharply criticized "extremist elements operating on both poles" and called for a settlement of the Kurdish question satisfying the "just demands of the Kurdish people."<sup>60</sup>

The Soviet position on the problems of the Kurds and other national minorities in Iran was as well a function of their attitude to the Khomeini regime. When the Soviets saw a change to cooperate with the Iranian authorities, they sided with them. Thus, in the wake of Iran-Iraq war the Soviet media refrained from commenting on the Kurdish problem. This did not mean that the Soviets had abandoned the minorities—they simply gave them as low a profile as possible in order not to be seen to provide any open support to them. The Soviet media have so far refrained from supporting the Kurdish resistance, but a NVOI broadcast in January, 1983, blamed both the authorities and Kurdish "extreme elements" for the continuation of the fighting and repeated the call to meet Kurdish demand for self-rule or autonomy.<sup>61</sup> It appears that the Soviets are not ready either to break long-standing ties with the national minorities in Iran or to antagonize the Iranian government. They wish to keep all their options open in order to be able to exploit the situation if it serves their interests or fits their objectives.

#### **Iran's Policy Towards the Soviet Muslims.**

The revival of Islamic fundamentalism had an influence on the USSR and its policies, both foreign and domestic. She has the fifth largest Muslim population in the World, living principally in her southern republics bordering with a region where Islam is the dominant religion. From the very outset, Soviet policy towards her Muslim population was a mixture of tolerance and indoctrination. Islamic dimension was recognised as a potential foreign policy tool and consciously exploited in the USSR's relations with the Islamic countries. Although tolerance served their foreign policy aims, Soviet leaders never allowed this tolerance to be broadened in such a way as to under-

60. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op.cit.*, pp.86-87.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

mine the Marxist ideology or to weaken the fabric of a multi-national state. Islam, like other religions, has been assigned a well-defined and limited place in Soviet life. The October 1977 constitution gives all Soviet citizens the right to maintain either a religious or an atheistic orientation.<sup>62</sup> While anti-religious propaganda is sponsored by the state, religious propaganda is severely restricted. For more than six decades of Soviet rule religion has been pushed out of public life. According to Soviet claims, only about 10 per cent of once Muslim population are now religious.<sup>63</sup>

What apparently concerns the Soviets at present is the demographic rather than the strictly religious aspect of the problem. Soviet census figures show that the Muslim population grew by approximately 50 percent between 1959 and 1970—while the Russians increased by only 13 per cent.<sup>64</sup> This trend, in-the medium and long-range view, is pregnant with an array of socio-economic and political consequences affecting the existing relative national harmony in the USSR.

In this backdrop, Iran embarked upon a policy of exporting Islamic Revolution to its neighbours. Khomeini's regional policy is based on the premise of pan-Islamism, which is conceived with an idea of eliminating any atheist or non-Islamic rule in the areas populated by Muslims. Leading Iranian personalities expressed their concern over the fate of Soviet Muslims by calling for more religious freedom for them.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Iranian Ambassador to Moscow M. Mokri in an interview expressed his country's intention to "maintain spiritual connection" with the Soviet Muslims.<sup>66</sup> It was reported that Iranian broadcasts to Soviet Muslims were appealing to them to unite under the

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62. Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, (Novosti press Agency Publishing House, Moscow, 1982), p.34.
  63. Shahram Chubin, "Soviet Policy Towards Iran and the Gulf", *Adelphi Papers*, No, 157, (London, 1980), p. 38.
  64. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op. cit.*, p, 76.
  65. O.M. "Smolansky, Soviet Policy in Iran and Afghanistan," *Current History*, Philadelphia (October, 1981). p.322.
  66. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op.cit.*, p.75.



green banner of Islam.<sup>67</sup> Since the Revolution, the Iranians very often tried to use visits to the USSR to propagate Islam and Iran's Islamic Revolution. But all the Iranian attempts to influence the Soviet Muslims have so far yielded very limited, if any, success. It is unlikely, that the Soviet Muslims would pose a serious threat to either the social system or the integration of the country by making a common cause with Iran. It is precisely because of the fact that about 85 per cent of the Soviet Muslims are of Turkic origin against the 8 per cent of Iranian origin.<sup>68</sup> While some 90 percent of the present Soviet Muslims

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*The USSR remains confident that her capacity to exploit Muslim connection exceeds the risks that her southern population may be infected by religious zeal.*

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are Sunni, only 10 per cent of them are Shiite.<sup>69</sup> More than sixty years of Soviet rule, modernization and indoctrination have greatly decreased the influence of religion in public life. Soviet society achieved a significant degree of integration and the Muslims have been assimilated to the rest of the society. They are in a higher level of development and having a better standard of living than their counterpart in Iran or elsewhere in the region. In the recent years some Muslims in the USSR like Politbureau members D. Kunayev, G. Aliev achieved real power in the Soviet context.

Nevertheless, the USSR showed a considerable degree of sensitivity to Islamic resurgence and the Iranian attempts to export revolution. Her reaction was two-pronged : on the one hand, the USSR tried to discourage and prevent Iran from operating among Soviet Muslims. In 1980 the Soviet Union rejected an Iranian request to open a con-

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67. *Ibid*, p.106.

68. Dr. S. Akiner, "Islam in the Soviet Union", *News Letter*, An Information Bulletin of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Dhaka, Vol.4, No.14, May 25, 1983, p.9.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 11,

sulate in Dushanbe, the Tajik capital.<sup>70</sup> The Soviets expressed dissatisfaction over the Iranian Radio Broadcasts addressed to the Muslim population. Moscow has curtailed contacts between Iran and the Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus and has cancelled planned visits by Iranians to this region. In September, 1982, the Soviet embassy in Tehran refused to grant entry visas to an Iranian wrestling team scheduled to visit Soviet Dagestan.<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, the USSR has taken a comparatively flexible approach to Islam. The government has allowed the opening of some new mosques in deference to demographic pressures and the requirements of foreign policy, although controls on religious schools, literature and the pilgrimage to Mecca remained intact.<sup>72</sup> It, to certain extent, attracted the *ulemas*, who on their part were continuously pursuing a policy of accomodation with the authorities. Very often, the Soviet media describes the happy life of Soviet Muslims stressing on their freedom to observe religion. Comments on Islam are cautious and very careful usually trying to play down the contradictions between Islam and communism.

Whether "Khomeinism" is a danger to the Soviet Union or the Soviet Islam is a relic of the past and whether the sharp increase in Muslim population in the USSR is a manageable problem are the questions yet to be answered. The Soviet Union still remains confident that her capacity to exploit the Muslim connection exceeds the risks that her southern population may be infected by religious zeal. But, if the price of improved relations with Iran or other Muslim countries is heightened religious feeling within the USSR, it may well prove too high for her and Iranian attempts to operate among Muslims in the USSR will undoubtedly encounter a sharp Soviet reaction and adversely affect Soviet-Iranian relations.

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70. Aryh Y. Yodfat, *op.cit.*, p.136.

71. *Ibid.*,

72. Shahram Chubin, "Soviet Policy Towards Iran and the Gulf" *Adelphi Papers*, No. 157, (London, 1980), p.37.

## III

The Iranian Revolution had deep impacts upon the development of events in the West Asia region, both westward, where it appeared to challenge the U.S. presence and the rulers of the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq, opposed the U.S.-sponsored Camp David Accord between Egypt and Israel and the latter's invasion of Lebanon, rendered support to radical Arab states, and eastward, where it encouraged the Islamic forces opposing the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan. Interaction of Iranian and Soviet policy regarding these and other vital issues of the regional politics has immense effect on shaping the bilateral relations between the two countries. Hence, a detailed analysis of the regional issues will follow.

**The Gulf and the Middle East**

The Persian Gulf region due to its enormous oil resources, strategic location and existing volatile political environment became one of the focal points of East-West competition for influence. To the West, this region is of great significance as a source of oil. Seventy per cent of world's proven oil reserves are concentrated here, the region provides 40 per cent of oil production and 70 per cent of the oil export in the non-communist world.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, the U.S. remains the principal supplier of arms to the region. The US firms amass huge profits from their participation in development projects in the Gulf countries. These factors coupled with the Iranian Revolution, Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan and subsequent political developments in and around the region led the Carter Administration declare this region as a sphere of "vital interest of the US" and reaffirmed its decisiveness to defend it by "any means necessary including military force."<sup>74</sup> Its aims apparently were : to deter the USSR from exerting

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73. Ruben N. Andreasyan, "Oil and Soviet Policy in the Arabian Gulf-Indian Ocean Area", in Abdul Majid Farid (Ed.) *Oil and Security in the Arabian Gulf*, (Croom Helm, London, 1983), p.59.

74. Sonnenfeldt Helmut, "Implications of the Soviet Invesion of Afghanistan for East-West Relations", *NATO Review*, (No.3, 1980), p.185.

influence over the region ; prevent undesirable changes in regimes and in policy orientation and thus, maintain the existing US dominance over the region.

On the other hand, the Soviet interest in the region derived though primarily from those of the US, are of vital importance to Moscow both from the point of view of its global strategic concern and from the perspective of its relations with the individual countries of the region themselves. The immediate Soviet aims in the region are : to weaken the links of Persian Gulf states with the West, particularly with the US; to dissolve existing alliances and agreements; and to establish friendly or at least normal state-to-state relations on non-ideological basis. The Brezhnev plan for the Gulf was designed to achieve these objectives.

Policy of Iran—a state which in terms of territory, manpower, natural resources, stage of development and military potentials is relatively most important power in the Gulf—has always been of significant importance to the superpowers in their struggle for influence in the region. With the fall of Shah and subsequent chronic instability in the region, this importance was significantly heightened. Any loss or gain of influence upon Iran by either of the superpowers would have notable impact upon their respective influence on the rest of the region. To the Soviets, the greatest concern in Iran is to make the American setback in that country as well as in the region as a whole irreversible and this primarily determines the overall pattern of Soviet policy towards Revolutionary Iran.

While Iran's attitude to the superpowers was guided by the maxim "neither East nor West" it was also bound to be influenced by perceptions of their recent role in the country. In this regard, the United States' image suffered most as it was alleged by the Iranians to be the patron of Shah's tyrannical regime, the beneficiary of his policies and the plunderer of Iran's natural resources. That is why, notwithstanding the Ayatollah Khomeini's characterization of both the superpowers as "Satans of the present-day world",<sup>75</sup> the focus of Iranian

75. See, A.H.H. Abidi, "Iran—A Lumbering Presence", *World Focus*. New Delhi (September, 1982), p.18.

hostility became the US. Soon after the revolution, Iran defining her security as coterminous with her national territory decided to reorient her policy from alliance with the West towards a neutralist line. Accordingly, Iran has withdrawn from CENTO and it led to the collapse of the organization. In order to eliminate US influence in Iran, the new government put an end to the presence of 70,000 Americans in the country. It has also disrupted US military-intelligence work once carried out along the 2000-kilometer border between Iran and the USSR.<sup>76</sup> It has cancelled arms order from the United States and Britain worth \$ 7 billion respectively and decided to stop the Shah's \$ 30-\$ 40 billion nuclear programme.<sup>77</sup> Finally, the Iranian Government on November 5, 1979 abrogated the defence agreement of 1959 between Iran and the USA<sup>78</sup> and with this the formal alliance relationship between the two countries came to an end. Subsequently, Iran joined the Non-aligned Movement.

All these were immediate dividends for the USSR. Iran's withdrawal from Western alliance system and subsequent collapse of CENTO undermined the entire basis of western planning for security in the Persian Gulf and revealed the hollowness of the two-pillar concept of regional security. It also removed a serious obstacle in the way of the extension of Soviet influence over the region. The loss of monitoring facilities will complicate western intelligence-gathering, while the loss of bases in Iran will impair western access to the region. All these would significantly simplify Soviet security concern on her southern flank.

The Islamic Iran also decline to play the role of a gendarme in the Gulf region. It led to the collapse of Tehran-Riyad-Cairo axis directed against the radical Arab states and the revolutionary changes in the region as no Gulf country could replace Iran. With the removal of Iranian umbrella other Gulf states lost their military protector *vis-a-vis* internal opposition to the regime.

76. Yair H. HirsChfeld, *op. cit.*, p223.

77. *Keesings Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXV, 1979), p. 29946.

78. *Keesings Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXVI, 1980), p. 30206.

Thus, the security posture of Revolutionary Iran have had far reaching consequences. The security structure of the Gulf as envisaged in the Nixon Doctrine seem to be collapsing. Iran has ceased to play either of the two roles allotted to it under the Shah's agreements with the US. Now it is certainly not the part of western alliance system directed against the USSR and it is not willing to play a counter-revolutionary role in the Middle East at the behest of Washington. These Soviet gains are truly substantial ; they are not offset by any security disadvantages to the USSR. It made her more flexible to and accomodative with Iran on the security issues. When Iran in order to balance the renunciation of its formal ties with the West decided to abrogate Article V and VI of the 1921 treaty with the USSR obliging her to allow Soviet troops into the country should a third party enter Iran or attempt to use it as a base against Soviet territory the Soviet reaction was mild.<sup>79</sup> Her stand on the issue was that the treaty was mutually beneficial and Iran's repudiation is a unilateral cancellation without any legal validity.<sup>80</sup> But at the same time, the USSR in order to encourage Iran's anti-Americanism cautiously avoided an impasse in their mutual relations by giving the issue as low a profile as possible.

Iran also tried to damage US prestige, the culmination of which was the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran by the Iranian students and the taking hostage of its personnel on November 4, 1979. With Khomeini's support they demanded, *inter alia*, the return of deposed Shah, Iranian as well as Shah's property in the USA to Iran ; formal apology by the USA for wrongs done to Iran.<sup>81</sup> Moscow had done everything possible to encourage Tehran's anti-American policy. A *Pravda* article published on December 5, 1980, reflecting the official Soviet attitude to the conflict, while conceded that the taking of diplomatic personnel as hostages is contrary to international conventions, at the same time, accused the US of flouting international law with regard to Iran.<sup>82</sup> On

79. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op.cit.*, p,75.

80. N. Mitra, *op. cit.*, p.607.

81. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

82. *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXVI, 1980), p. 30210.

Jan. 13, 1983 the USSR vetoed the US-sponsored resolution in the Security Council imposing economic sanctions on Iran to obtain release of the hostages.<sup>83</sup> Besides, during the hostage crisis, the Soviets repeatedly had warned against an intervention either by the US along or in alliance with the regional powers. Moscow's intentions were clear. It wanted firstly, to encourage Iranian hostility towards the US in order to make the American set-back in Iran

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*The foreign policy of Revolutionary Iran in the West Asia region is deeply anti-thetical to the interests of the West and its conservative Arab allies. The only issue was Afghanistan where the USSR stood to loose.*

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irreversible ; secondly, to prevent a US diplomatic victory over Iran and the latter's isolation in international arena ; and finally, to discourage any US military action against Iran to obtain the release of the hostages.

The Iranian Revolution being a genuine mass movement against a system which was autocratic, repressive and subservient to foreign control had a tremendous appeal among the masses far and wide in the region where the social, political and economic conditions were identical to those in Iran. It was particularly evident among the Shiite population in the Gulf countries. Taking these factors into account Iran embarked upon a policy of exporting its revolution to other Islamic countries. In the speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini, in those of his subordinates and in the radio and press of the Islamic Republic, the call for a broader Islamic Revolution has been a recurrent theme.<sup>84</sup> In addition, Iran provided the different Islamic fundamentalist groups in the Gulf and the Middle East with moral and political support, military training and arms. All these had a spill-over effect

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83. *Ibid.*, p. 30211.

84. Fred Halliday, "The Iranian Revolution in International Affairs : Programme and Practice", in Abdul Majid Farid (ED), *Oil and Security in the Arabian Gulf*, (Croom Helm, London, 1983), pp. 24-25.

over the entire region. Saudi Arabia witnessed Shiite uprising in December 1979 and February 1980.<sup>85</sup> In December, 1981 Bahrain's security forces foiled an attempted *coup* by the Tehran-based Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. Bahrain authorities accused Iran of organizing the *coup*.<sup>86</sup> All these generated a deep sense of insecurity among the conservative Gulf regimes vis-a-vis internal dissent.

Iranian attempts to export the Islamic Revolution in the Gulf region is contrary to the interests of the Western powers as most of the regimes here are pro-Western and they are compelled to remain the same in the foreseeable future at least to secure their sustenance. That is why, the West would like to preserve the *status quo*. On the other hand, there are solid reasons to expect that violent change will upset previous pattern of government, displace ruling elites and divert policies in new and—for the USSR—advantageous directions. Therefore, the Soviets would be glad to see this oil-rich region, so vital to the Western economy, plunged into chaos, through no action of their own. Any direct move by them, on the other hand, could very well lead to Soviet-US confrontation, which the Soviets are too eager to avoid. Instead, they would prefer a local power to bring about the unrest, with the USA seemingly powerless to combat it.

The Iranian Revolution has also directly affected the balance of regional forces as far as the Palestine problem is concerned. On February 18, 1979, the Iranian Government severed its diplomatic relations with Israel, expelling all of the staff of the Israeli trade mission in Tehran. Also on February 18, PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat arrived in Tehran to receive a triumphant welcome and on the following day he opened a PLO office in the premises of the former Israeli trade mission.<sup>87</sup> Iran also seems to provide some financial support to the PLO. Thus, Iran a former quasi-ally of Israel, became firmly committed to the Palestinian cause. Soon after the Camp David

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85. Christopher S. Raj, "A Valuable Region", *World Focus*, New Delhi (September, 1982), p. 5.

86. *Keating's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXVIII, 1982), pp. 31353-54.

87. *Ibid.*, (Vol. XXVI, 1980), p. 30148.



Accord between Israel and Egypt was signed, Iran severed its diplomatic relations with Egypt as well and joined the radical Arab states in opposing the Israeli-Egyptian deed. Yet this support has been more circumscribed than expected by many. Particularly Iran-Iraq war has limited the former's ability to render any meaningful assistance to the Palestinians. However, Iran all along remained vocal in favour of the Palestinian cause and the Palestinians have felt that the Iranian Revolution is a moral boost to them, especially at a time when their overall situation has been subject to increasing pressure. Iran also vehemently opposed the Israeli invasion of Lebanon directed to eliminate the military presence of PLO in that country. During the Lebanese crisis Iranian leaders in their public statements as well as in international fora directed their attacks against both Israel and the US. Iran opposed the overall US approach to the crisis, including the May, 1983 Lebanese-Israeli agreement and the presence of the multinational "peacekeeping" forces in Lebanon.<sup>88</sup> During the Lebanese crisis Moscow, mainly because of its un-willingness to risk a military confrontation with the US, cautiously refrained from any sort of direct involvement in it and also advised its ally, Syria, to do the same. And the latter, without the Soviet umbrella was incapable of facing the challenge thrown by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. In this critical moment, Iran and its local allies emerged as an effective force in the Lebanese scenerio of Arab-Israeli conflict. Iran sent its Revolutionary Guards to Lebanon and rendered assistance to a number of Shiite organizations fighting Israeli as well as Western, above all, the US forces in Lebanon. There have been reports that Iranian Revolutionary Guards based in Lebanon's Bekka Valley and their local allies — the Islamic *Amal* and Islamic *Jihad* organizations — were responsible for the attacks against the US marines and the French miliary headquarters in Beirut in October, 1983,<sup>89</sup> which killed 260 US and 58 Franch troops.<sup>90</sup> These attacks had far reaching

88. Zamlay Khalilzad, "Islamic Iran : Soviet Dilemma" *Problems of Communism*, Washington, (January-February, 1983), p. 13.

89. *Ibid.*

90. *Keesting's Contemporary Archives*, (Vol. XXX, 1984), pp. 32646-47,

consequences culminating in the withdrawal of multinational forces from Lebanon which caused much of US embarrassment.

Thus, the foreign policy of Revolutionary Iran in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East region was diametrically opposed to the interests of the US and its conservative Arab allies. It made efforts to diminish the Western, particularly, the US influence over the region, undermine the stability of Gulf regimes by exporting Islamic Revolution, to invalidate the Camp David Accord, to prevent the return of Egypt to the Arab fold and to discredit the US policy in Lebanon. These were undoubtedly major gains for the Soviet Union. These gains, however, were not without concrete costs and attendant risks. Iranian leaders have made it abundantly clear that Iran's hostility towards the United States and its allies in the region does not mean a tilt towards the USSR. Iran opposed the Soviet Union with the same vigour as it did the US when its interests came into collision with those of the USSR. Suffice it to cite here the Afghan issue. Among other post-Revolution developments the Iran-Iraq war has also severely threatened to weaken the remaining Soviet influence in the region. A detailed analysis of these two issues in Soviet-Iranian relations would follow.

### **Afghan Issue**

More than any other single issue the Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan has thwarted the USSR's search for influence in Iran since the Revolution. It led to Soviet-Iranian differences, accusations and counter-accusations, mutual suspicion and deteriorating relations. The Khomeini regime from its very inception was opposed to Marxist regime in Afghanistan and the Iranian leaders warned Moscow against interference there. Notwithstanding the Soviet moral and diplomatic support to Iran during the hostage crisis the Iranian criticism of the USSR turned into outright condemnation as the Soviet troops moved into Afghanistan on December 27, 1979. Iranian leaders have taken it as a challenge to both their security and the Pan-Islamic zeal of the Revolution. Some of the top

functionaries of Iran openly accepted the theory of the Soviet "grand design" to reach the warm water of the Indian Ocean. Thus, Banisadr while demanding immediate and unconditional Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, charged Moscow with hostile designs against the entire region.<sup>91</sup> The government controlled media often discuss Afghan issue and portrayed the Soviets as an aggressive imperialist power. On March 1980, Imam Khomeini himself denounced the Soviets as "aggressive plunderers of the East."<sup>92</sup>

The Soviet efforts at assuaging the feelings in Tehran on the Afghan issue proved futile. Iran boycotted the Moscow Olympic and has taken a hard line against the Soviet Union in various international fora, including the Organisation of Islamic Conference, Non-aligned Movement and the UN. In the meetings of the Islamic Conference the Iranian Foreign Minister equated the Afghan issue with the Palestine problem and asked all the Muslim countries to break off their diplomatic relations with Afghanistan.<sup>93</sup>

Iran rejected all proposals for a political settlement of the Afghan problem which necessitated prior recognition of the Karmal government. It did not participate in Geneva talks on the Afghan problem under the auspices of the UN and has tried to discourage Pakistan from entering into agreements that might bestow legitimacy on the Kabul regime. Nevertheless, while loud and persistent in its condemnation of the Soviet move, Tehran has been cautious in actual policy. Iran has not provided substantial assistance to the main Afghan resistance groups. Tehran also did not let her territory to be used by Afghan guerrillas for launching attacks on Soviet and Afghan government forces and carefully avoided any sort of military confrontation with the USSR as well as Afghanistan.

Probably, that is why the Soviet statements to Iran concerning the Islamic Republic's policy on Afghan issue have not been as threatening

91. Z. Khalilzad, "Soviet Dilemmas in Khomeini's Iran", *Australian Outlook*, Canberra (Vol. 38, No. 1, 1984), p. 5.

92. V.P. Vaidik. *op. cit.*, p. 729.

93. *Ibid.*

and harsh as those to Pakistan and were intended to pacify Tehran or at least reduce its opposition to the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan. They have contended that Iran has misunderstood the Soviet move. The Soviet media repeatedly attacked "the Afghan counter-revolutionary groups" equating them with the "counter-revolutionaries in Iran who served the Shah."<sup>94</sup> The Afghan resistance is also charged with having worked together with Israel and the United States, both hated in Islamic Iran. At times, Soviet media have attacked IRP leaders for supporting the Afghan guerrillas.<sup>95</sup> By and large Soviet policy towards Iran concerning the later's stand on Afghan issue was calculated and cautious. It was designed to maintain the achieved level of state-to-state relations between the two countries by reducing their differences on or by-passing the Afghan issue.

In course of time, Iran, however, departed from her initial hard-line position. It was primarily because of the fact that Iran became bogged down in a protracted war with Iraq and it was in her interest to avoid any possible conflict with Soviet forces in Afghanistan, especially while the deadlock with Washington was continuing with no end in sight. Anti-Soviet campaign in Iran over the Afghan issue was toned down. The symbolic Iranian aid to the Afghan Islamic Party has also been stopped. Afghanistan did not feature in the talks held between Iranian Energy Minister, Hassan Gafurifard and his Soviet counterpart before the signing of the protocol for economic and technical cooperation in February 1982, and the Iranian Minister described the USSR as a "friendly country".<sup>96</sup> Tehran's change of heart toward Moscow was characterized by the *Newsweek* as a "tilt towards the East."<sup>97</sup> Iran did not however compromise its principle position on the Afghan issue. A Foreign Ministry statement of 26 December 1982 repeated Iran's call for an immediate and unconditional

94. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

95. Zamlay Khalilzad, "Islamic Iran : Soviet Dilemma", *Problems of Communism*, Washington, (January-February, 1984), p. 15.

96. N. Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 609.

97. *Newsweek*, (March, 8, 1982), pp. 12-16.

withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.<sup>98</sup> The Soviet military presence in Afghanistan still continues to effect adversely Soviet relations with Iran.

### Iran-Iraq War

Another regional crisis posing major dilemmas for the USSR in its relations with Iran is the Iran-Iraq war. It found the USSR in a mass of crosscurrents regarding its interests and vulnerabilities in a vast region of immense strategic, political and economic significance. It did not take Moscow long to realize that using any scenerio for the development or outcome of the war, the Soviet Union stood to gain little and risked losing much of its remaining influence. Overwhelming victory of neither side was desirable. An Iraqi victory might lead to Khomeini's replacement by a more pro-western leadership while cementing Iraq's Shift away from reliance on the Soviet Union. Such fear was expressed in an *Izvestia* editorial.<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, an Iranian victory could lead to the establishment of a pro-Iranian Islamic regime in Iraq with more anti-Soviet orientation. Such development would as well panic the West Asian conservative regimes leading them to seek more American protection and thus, demaging Soviet efforts to win wider acceptance in the Arab world. Moscow was also concerned about the western response to and role in the war. It was worried that the war will increase US military presence in the region and its security cooperation with some of the regional states. On the positive side, the Iran-Iraq war diverted world attention from the Afghan issue. Islamic countries in particular, invested much of time and energy in the Gulf conflict.

The complexity of the situation placed the USSR on the horns of a dilemma. If the Soviets supported Iraq, Iran might move back toward the West and pay in the same coin by increasing its support to the Afghan resistance. A support to Iran, however, could lead to

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98. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

99. *Izvestia*. September 23, 1980.

further deterioration in Soviet-Iraqi relations, even to a dramatic break down similar to what occurred in Moscow's relations with Egypt. There was, however, no compelling reason for the USSR to side with either of the belligerents. The euphoria generated in the Soviet-Iraqi relations during the early 1970s had long ago evaporated. Their relations had been strained by the Iraqi opposition to the Soviet policy toward Afghanistan and Ethiopia-Somalia dispute, the execution of twenty-one Iraqi communists, the Iraqi-Syrian conflict and a number of issues of mutual concern. It did not, however, mean that the USSR could ignore the importance of Iraqi factor in its West Asia

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*Moscow has no option but to continue its policy of courting both the countries, its overriding concern being to prevent a total shift by either one to the United States.*

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policy. Apart from being a major purchaser of Soviet arms, Iraq is also a major supplier of oil to the USSR and her East European allies. Iraq was a vocal opponent of the Camp David Accord and was designated as the next Chairman of the Non-aligned movement too.

On the other hand, despite Soviet efforts to woo the Islamic regime, Tehran had been including in a relentless anti-Soviet campaign which was intensified after the Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan and reached its peak in the eve of Iran-Iraq war. At the same time, Moscow also could not afford to antagonise Iran, particularly, in view of the geostrategic, economic and political importance of that country in its overall policy towards the region.

While the USSR's freedom of manouver was severely circumscribed, it took an official policy of neutrality in the Iran-Iraq War. In their public statements, the Soviets emphasized that the war should be stopped, especially since only the imperialists would benefit.<sup>100</sup> At the

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100. Z. Khlilzad, "Soviet Dilemmas in Khomeini's Iran", *Australian Outlook*, Canberra. (Vol. 38, No. 1, 1984), p. 5.

same time, Moscow was trying hard to maintain its influence in Iraq and gain greater influence in Iran.

Over time, Soviet policies began to favor Iran. Particularly during the initial stage of war which was marked by some Iraqi military successes over Iran, Moscow showed a visible tilt towards Iran. We have already discussed that an Iraqi victory was not in Moscow's interest. They believed, moreover, that it might lead to a *rapprochement* between the US and Iran, particularly in view of Iran's need for military spare parts to continue the war with Iraq. Prevention of such an eventuality was Moscow's prime concern. The Soviet leaders also took into account the fact that the Gulf War and the hostage crisis overlapped and Iran was in almost total isolation from the West which would induce Iran to turn to them for help. The Soviet calculations were not without foundations. By 1981 a less hostile Iranian attitude to the Soviet Union became evident. It showed itself in the fewer attacks on the Soviet policies. Particularly, anti-Soviet campaign over the Afghan issue was toned down. There was increased readiness to talk with Moscow, renew economic cooperation, accept technical and military aid. In Iran and around Khomeini, the position strengthened of those who advocated less opposition to the East ; improving relations with Moscow ; equipping the armed forces with Soviet arms ; and strengthening relations with radical Arab states.<sup>101</sup> All these factors *en bloc* led to relative improvement in Soviet-Iranian relations.

To demonstrate its goodwill toward Iran, Moscow went to the extent of permitting its Armed Forces Journal *Krasnaya Zvezda* to blame Iran publicly for launching the offensive<sup>102</sup>. The USSR also signed a treaty of friendship with Syria, Iraq's rival and Iran's ally. There are numerous reports on Soviet indirect or even direct arms supply to Iran. The USSR channelled most of its arms shipments *via* Libya, North Korea, Syria and East European allies.<sup>103</sup> Iran and

101. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

102. V.P. Vaidik, *op. cit.* p. 732

103. Christo Pher S. Raj, "The Gulf Region", *Strategic Analysis*, New Delhi (Vol. VIII, No. 2-3, 1983), p. 152-53,

the USSR also reportedly signed a three-years military agreement involving the training of Iranians in the USSR, the extension of technical assistance and the temporary dispatch of Soviet advisers.<sup>104</sup>

Soviet Union's courtship of Iran brought only limited success. Though, Iran toned down anti-Soviet propaganda, she had continued to speak of the USSR as one of "two threats" to her security.<sup>105</sup> While, procuring Soviet arms from her allies, Iran at the same time was buying US arms from the sources as far as Israel showing a distinct unwillingness to move close to the Soviets.

In the light of the Soviet failure to establish a closer link with Iran, Moscow has also kept its options open towards Iraq. Probably with tacit Soviet approval East European countries provided Iraq with Soviet-made weapons and spare parts and it helped the two sides to avoid a major impasse in their relations.<sup>106</sup> As Iran began to do better in the war, the USSR once again changed its policy, this time in favour of Iraq. According to reliable western sources by the end of 1982 Moscow resumed direct arms supplies to Iraq in large quantities which included Mig-27s, T-72 tanks and SAM-8s.<sup>107</sup>

Contacts between the USSR and Iran have not been broken off inspite of the resumption of Soviet arms supply to Iraq, Tehran's expulsion of Soviet diplomats, suppression of *Tudeh* Party and the accusations and counter accusations regarding a number of bilateral and regional issues. While tilting towards Iraq, the USSR is also trying harder to avoid an impasse in its relations with Iran.

Lacking Leverage with both combatants, the USSR has so far succeeded, by the use of caution and restraint, in avoiding irreparable damage to its relations with either side. It has worked out a middle

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104. Shahram Chubin, "The Soviet Union and Iran", *Foreign Affairs*, New York, (Spring, 1983), p. 934.

105. M.S. El Azhary, "The Attitude of the Superpowers Towards the Gulf War" *International Affairs*, London, (Vol. 59, No. 4, 1983), p. 619.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 619.

107. Christopher S. Raj, "The Gulf Region." *Strategic Analysis*, New Delhi, (Vol. VIII, No. 2-3, 1983), p. 152.



way, which permits itself to bring its influence to bear on both Iran and Iraq. How long it could continue with such a policy would depend upon what Iran and Iraq achieve in the battlefield. As long as the situation remains stalemated, Moscow has no option but to continue its policy of courting both the countries in order to hold the ring between two belligerents and stave off an overwhelming victory by either side, its overriding concern being to prevent a total shift by either one to the United States.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The complex and contradictory developments in Soviet-Iranian relations, the existence of conflicting interests, the apparent lack of cohesion within the Iranian ruling elite, numerous "imponderables" stemming from a highly volatile situation in Iran, as well as in the region, uncertainties in super power relations render the assessment of present and future policy options rather a difficult undertaking. Nonetheless, from the foregoing analysis some tentative observations may be made.

The Soviet approach to Iran thus far has apparently been based on a favourable reading of events and their future potential to serve the Soviet purpose, particularly, in terms of her competition with the US for influence in the Persian Gulf/Middle East region. These factors would continue to determine the overall pattern of Soviet policy towards the Islamic Iran in the foreseeable future. As the analysis of Soviet policy statements regarding Iran, Soviet reaction to the developments in Iran as well as in the Persian Gulf/Middle East region shows that the future Soviet strategy towards Iran would continue to be defensive, its primary concern being the prevention of the return of a pro-Western government with security ties to the US. This is because, such eventuality would inevitably reverse most of the important security gains to the USSR resulting from the Islamic Revolution and its aftermath viz. the downfall of a powerful opponent and an effective US proxy in the Persian Gulf region, the collapse

of CENTO, the end of huge US military presence in Iran, and the removal of US intelligence installations along the Soviet border.

Secondly, the USSR would encourage the anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism of Iran. The strident anti-Americanism is a strong factor which suits her. The Soviets in order to be able to make political or economic gains out of the breach in Iran-US relations would continue to either consume or response with flexibility to many Iranian assaults such as : anti-Soviet propaganda over Afghan issue, coercion against the Iranian communists, suppression of the Kurds, religious propaganda among the Soviet Muslims, to name a few. At the same time, they would neither compromise on the Afghan issue nor abandon the *Tudeh* and the Kurds. Particularly, in Soviet view, the *Tudeh* appears to have a very important role to play in post-Khomeini Iran.

Thirdly, the USSR would continue its efforts to protect the already achieved gains in terms of bilateral relations. Particularly, it would make attempts to maintain and enhance the present level of economic cooperation with Iran even when the country is opposing Soviet interests in some other strategic spheres.

Finally, the USSR would employ substantive efforts to change the relative balance of influence and interests in Iran in her favour thus bringing about a friendly Iran within the realm of possibility.

Whether the Soviet strategy would succeed depends on a number of factors, most of which are not within Soviet control. Foremost among them is Iran's domestic politics. Theoretically, Islamic regime in Tehran is hostile towards the super powers. But at the same time, there is a sheer lack of cohesion within the ruling IRP leadership regarding its practical policy towards the USSR. The *Hojatiyeh* faction is more hostile towards the Soviet Union, but some IRP leaders prefer expanded economic and military cooperation with the Soviets, particularly, in view of Iran-Iraq war. Internal IRP conflict might well intensify in post-Khomeini Iran. Besides, there are powerful actors in Iranian politics opposing the current regime. While, some

of them are friendly to the USSR, others are hostile to it. All these made future direction of Iranian politics, its foreign policy in particular, unpredictable. Should more radical changes occur in Iran, the state of Soviet-Iranian relations would depend upon the character of the new regime. In any case, most reasonable foreign policy option for Iran would be to synthesize the strident anti-Americanism, anti-communism and commitment to maintain Islamic and non-aligned posture of her foreign policy on the one hand, and the objective necessity of establishing, maintaining and developing normal state-to-state relations and fruitful economic cooperation with the outside world including her neighbours as well as the superpowers.

Among other factors likely to influence the Soviet-Iranian relations the development of events in Afganistan and in Iran-Iraq War, involvement of external actors in it, inter-state relations in and around the region, the role of the West, particularly, that of the US in the Iranian as well as in regional affairs and the overall environment in superpower relations are most important.

Given the existing xenophobia in Iran, directed particularly against the superpowers, given the sensitive strategic position Iran occupies, and given the western economic stakes in the Gulf region and the US decisiveness to take risk in order to defend her position in this region, the most prudent option for the USSR would be to play as small a role in Iran as possible. It would let her avoid a military confrontation in the region and would allow a greater flexibility of response as the situation develops.