

Rezina Ahmed

US AND THE GULF SECURITY SINCE THE REVOLUTION IN IRAN.

Introduction

The states that converge on the Gulf are endowed with 60% of world's oil wealth. President Eisenhower described the region as the "most strategically important area in the world."¹ In terms of sheer riches of petroleum resources, there is no group of countries that can match it. A petroleum export shut-off from this region would mean industrial paralysis and devastating economic collapse for the industrial nations. The conservative Gulf states combine strategic importance and vulnerability in an area that is comparatively near the USSR, but at the furthest global limit from US military power. They are among the most tempting strategic targets in the world, with the possible exception of those African nations that provide the West with its supplies of strategic minerals. The Gulf states need Western military assistance as much as the West needs Gulf oil. Vulnerability alone, however, may not be sufficient motive to drive the Gulf states toward collective security or partnership with the West. The oil deposits transformed the Gulf into a chessboard for superpower competition. The Gulf scene is also not free from military crises, where the states have been at war with one another for the last thousand years. Few Gulf states have had the opportunity to change rulers peacefully or without some form of military

1. See the Introduction of the book, *The Security of the Persian Gulf*, edited by Hossein Amirsadeghi, (Croom Helm, London), 1981.

intervention.² Even the present confrontation between the superpowers in the Gulf has many historical precedents.

The West has been strategically involved in the area for nearly four centuries, and for most of that time it has been in a position of confrontation with Russia. The announcement of British withdrawal from the Gulf in the late 1960s gave a further impetus to the superpower rivalry. The withdrawal deprived the Gulf of a major stabilizing force, helped trigger an even broader regional struggle for power, and accelerated the regional competition between the US and the USSR. Iranian revolution of 1979 further escalated the situation. Despite President Carter's declaration that the US would defend its interests in the region, and President Reagan's even stronger promise to protect its allies, US military deployment capabilities remain uncertain and US ability to act as a reliable source of arms and military assistance is questionable. It appears that the US forces and military policy are not likely to deal with the complex regional and internal security threats in the Gulf or to stage large-scale combat half a world away from current US deployments. The US still lacks credibility in the eyes of the Arab states, and there is little current understanding of or sympathy for the complexities of Gulf and Arab nationalism. The Shah's fall in 1979 removed the major regional military "pillar" that US policy depended upon for stability, and the resulting power vacuum has forced the US to greatly increase their capabilities for power projection in the region. But the subsequent US failure in Lebanon made the Arabs more suspicious about the US peace-keeping capability in the region. While the escalation of the Gulf war and growing spread of fundamentalism made the US administration more concerned and vulnerable about their interest in the region. US apparently failed to draw even her closest allies into a security orbit as the Arab Gulf countries preferred to develop their own security arrangements keeping distance from the US.

2. Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Gulf and the Search for Strategic Stability*. (Westview Press, USA), 1984, p. 54.

In the light of this complex scenario of the Gulf, the present article is an attempt to focus primarily on the security perceptions of the region vis-a-vis the US involvement to safeguard its economic and strategic interest. The paper is divided into mainly four sections. Section I begins with a focus on the growing political, economic and strategic significance of the Gulf which serves the vital interest of the West particularly the US and also plays an important role for the world at large. In Section II the attempt is to examine the underlying causes of regional instability and threats, both internal and external perceived by the Gulf states. Section III reveals the impact and implications of the Iranian revolution for the security of the Gulf both from regional and global perspectives. Finally, in Section IV an effort will be made to explore the possible security options available for the Gulf states and the US.

I

Gulf and the US Interests

The Persian Gulf and the countries surrounding it are increasingly seen as a single regional entity.³ Around this appendix to the Indian Ocean are situated the most important known reserves of oil and other natural resources. It is through the Gulf and its outlet, the Strait of Hormuz, the whole of oil exports leaves the region. It lay athwart major routes from Europe to the Far East and from Asia to Africa. The global setting of the affairs of the Gulf are likely to be economic and political. The oil revolution of early 1970s had important effects on political, economic, military strategy, the balance of power and the security ties of the Gulf states in relation to outside powers.

3. Mohammad Reza Djalili and Dietrich Kappeler "Persian Gulf : Contrast and Similarities." *Aussen Politik, German Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol.29. 2nd Quarter, 1978, p. 228

For the USSR, it is an area, through Iran, directly contiguous to it which is assuming greater importance every day both for Soviet (and Eastern bloc) energy needs in the 1980s, and for its growing value to NATO and Japan, which might lend itself to political exploitation. In the global setting of today, both in security matters and in economic prospect, the Gulf region finds itself more and more at the centre of world politics. US officials have ranked it with Europe and the Far East as an area of "vital" interest. The Soviet leaders have consistently described the region as of primary security importance and their move into Afghanistan was dramatic proof of that conviction. The latter brought Soviet forces several hundred miles close to the Gulf, a significant advance in terms of its strategic, economic and political goals. The difference as between Western and Gulf strategic concerns, and the vulnerabilities of the West and Gulf states, furnish powerful mechanisms for asserting Soviet strategic interests which include: expansion of Soviet military presence in the region; creation of alliances with friendly Gulf regimes; increase in Soviet capability to control or threaten Western oil supplies: transformation of the Gulf states into Marxist or revolutionary states conforming to Soviet ideology; building up Soviet military power and its projection capabilities in the region; using the Arab-Israeli dissensions: wars in the Horn of Africa; Indo-Pakistan conflict: and every other opportunity to create a broad influence over the entire Middle East and Southwest Asia. These interests almost ensure that the Soviet struggle with the West and the Gulf nations will result in a constant series of probes and tests. Soviet actions in the Gulf have high political and strategic visibility in the West, hostile action can threaten Soviet bloc trade with the West, and Soviet ability to capitalize on detente. It pursues an overt approach to military threats or attacks, only as long as the West and the Gulf states can respond with a reasonable degree of military capability and political unity. Thus it is likely that Soviet Union will generally move cautiously in responding to events like the revo-

lution in Iran and act slowly and methodically in exploiting the areas where the Gulf states find USSR as valuable ally for political and economic support and as a source of arms supply.

Western dependency on Persian Gulf oil will continue to increase, not diminish in the 1980s. As a result the region assumes importance as a point for exercising political (and psychological) pressure against NATO and Japan and perhaps for stimulating inter-alliance feuds. Provoked by the invasion of Afghanistan, the US saw the need for creating a stronger capability for military action in the region. It was to consist of greater naval power in the Indian Ocean, the building up of a "Rapid Deployment Force" in case of crisis, and the use of naval and air facilities in nearby states willing to co-operate.⁴ This capability was not yet in being at the time of President Carter's declaration in January, 1983 that the US would resist with all appropriate means, including military force, any Soviet move presumably

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in the direction of the oilfields, the Gulf or the Indian Ocean representing an assault on the "vital" interests of the United States. The aim of the declaratory policy was "deterrence" figuratively drawing a line on the map and letting the Kremlin know that crossing it would mean conflict with the United States, whether or not the latter was ready to contest every metre of Middle East territory. Limiting arms deliveries is a big factor for the US. Both the Carter Administration and Congress professed to see the need for checking the flow of arms into the Gulf region as it reached flood proportions in the late 1970s. But it has become difficult, since arms sales are an integral part of the complex military and economic relationships, the

4. Hossein Amirsadeghi, *op. cit.* p. 9.

United States has developed with its friends in the region, those relationships they do not wish to put in jeopardy. It was an extraneous factor, the revolution in Iran, put an end to the largest of the arms sales programmes, but deliveries to Saudi Arabia continued at a high level, and other countries in the region were added to the list of recipients. But the question is whether the United States will be able to ensure her security interests in the region by providing most sophisticated weapons to the regimes of the area many of whom are not even capable to utilize them properly. The regional factors which have considerably influenced the Gulf states to increase their arms build-up are mainly regional security, regional dominance and deterrance of external threats. Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia became three regional contestants who vied with one another to assume the role of "protector" of the Gulf region following the British withdrawal from the area. Each one of them had its own claims, but in each case political incentives differed in accordance with the interests of external powers. Particularly the United States exploited and manipulated the situation and foistered the late Shah of Iran as the surrogate "par excellence" to take care of US interest in the area. In order to buildup a new relationship with the Gulf region, in the spirit of the Nixon Doctrine the US at Guam in 1969 called for a reliance on strong regional allies and to strengthen regional powers to safeguard American and Western interest in peripheral regions instead of direct involvement as in Vietnam.⁵ A senior US official articulated the principle: "we are willing to assist the Gulf states but we look to them to bear the main responsibility for their own defense and to cooperate among themselves to ensure regional peace and stability, we specially look to the leading states of the area, Iran and Saudi Arabia to cooperate for this purpose"⁶. It pertains

5. John Muttam, *Arms and Insecurity in the Persian Gulf*. (Radiant Publishers, India), 1984, p. 76.

6. Hossein Amirsadeghi, *op. cit.* p. 152.

to the "Twin Pillars" of the Persian Gulf—Iran and Saudi Arabia which made the former a pro-western ally of the US and to check any action of Soviet influence in the region. Although Saudi Arabia continues to be its main source of oil, the US efforts for strengthening the Saudi military forces was confronted with opposition not only from Israel but also from powerful pro-Israeli lobbies in the USA.

Since the fall of the Shah of Iran in January, 1979, the US has manoeuvred to find a new set of relationships in the Gulf. It has sought to establish a reasonable degree of strategic stability, to protect its allies in the area, and to safeguard the West's supplies of imported oil. The policy relied on four elements: US ability to strengthen Saudi Arabia as a nation capable of defending itself against most regional threats and of guarding the other Gulf states, US ability to strengthen Egypt both militarily and economically, US ability to find some solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict that will both meet Arab needs and ensure the security of Israel; and US ability to improve its power projection capabilities in the Gulf. Regardless of fluctuations in the demand for imported oil, US relations with the Gulf states have become pivotal to Western security.

It is reasonable at this stage to examine the US stakes involved in this region. The Arabian Gulf provides about 30 percent of the United States oil supply. President Carter underscored the need of Gulf oil as he said "we can get along without oil from Iran and Iraq, but we cannot get along without oil, ourselves or the rest of the Persian Gulf region. The other states ship about 12 million barrels of oil every day out of the Straits of Hormuz and we will use whatever means is required to keep the Straits of Hormuz open."⁷ American monopolies possess 49 percent of the the ARA-MCO capital: this is the biggest oil-producing property outside American boundaries. After Iran the US has turned to Saudi-Arabia which is the key to securing the West's energy supplies.

Saudi Arabia alone has 25% of the world's proven oil reserves and roughly 30% of the sustained production capacity of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).⁸

Thus Saudi Arabia is left as one of the major Gulf oil producer aligned with the West. Equally important, its geography, its influence within OPEC, and its wealth have made it the only regional power that can catalyze an effective collective security effort to protect all the conservative Gulf states and the West's primary source of oil imports. While all the Arab countries have large investment of petrodollars in the US, Saudi Arabia alone had more than 70 percent of her entire overseas investment concentrated in the US in 1981.⁹ As regards trade between US and the Gulf states the former alongwith other western countries have been flourishing lucrative markets in the region, both for essential commodities and luxury goods, while the Gulf states need western expertise for their development programmes. US interest is greatly influenced by the purchasing capacity of the Gulf states of sophisticated weapons. A huge market for arms sale is located in this region, US military equipment complements US foreign policy objectives in the area. The Reagan administration for example, seeking to improve ties with anti-Soviet Saudi Arabia approved of Riyadh's efforts to enhance the strength to deter the spread of communism and Soviet influence which complements US policy in the area. Another reason for arms supply to the region is that it greatly improves the US balance of payments.¹⁰

Thus the Gulf countries are an object of interest not only of the US oil monopolies but also the companies producing armaments, as well as the Pentagon, since military equipment, billions of dollars

8. Anthony H. Cordesman, *op. cit.* p. 1.

9. Abdel Majid Farid, *Oil and Security in the Arabian Gulf*, (Arab Research Centre, Croom Helm), London, 1983 p. 28

10. Abdel Majid Farid, *op. cit.* p. 61.

worth, is accumulated there annually.¹¹ American firms also take part in construction projects in those countries and amass huge profits from these operations. A river of petrodollars is flowing from the Gulf shores to the United States in the form of loan capital export. This flow not only makes up for gaps in the US balance of payments and enriches its financial circles, but also enhances dependence of the exporters of capital on the country it is exported to. The region also provides 70 percent of Europe's and 85 percent of Japan's oil supply. The US has also the obligation to ensure steady supply of these oil addressed to its key allies.

The requirement of securing continuing access to vital Persian Gulf oil resources involves at least four security problems: (a) ensuring the security and stability of the oil-producing countries (b) ensuring the security of oil fields and facilities, (c) ensuring the security of the oil loading terminals in the Gulf, and (d) protecting the sea lanes of communications (SLOCs).¹² Accomplishing these tasks is no easy mission. It is complicated politically by US support of Israel that often overshadows the positive dimensions of US relations with key Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia and also the growth of US-Soviet naval competition in Indian Ocean.

II

Forces and Factors of Instability in the Region

The Persian Gulf has always been riven by violence and political turmoil.¹² The history of the Gulf states divides each nation from the other and limits their capacity for collective action. These divisions are reinforced by the pressures of rapid change. The massive volume of arms transferred to the Gulf over the last decade symbolizes

11. Alvin J. Cottrell and Michael L. Moodie *The United States and The Persian Gulf: Past Mistakes, Present Needs*, (National Strategy Information Centre Inc, USA), 1984, p. 8.

12. *ibid*, p. X

the transformation of the Gulf states from a relatively quiet colonial backwater into an area of continuing strategic crisis. This military buildup is, however, only one of the structural shifts that now threaten Gulf strategic stability. The massive political, economic, and cultural changes in the Gulf invariably interact with this military build-up. The events of the last decade have also transformed relatively low level US and Soviet struggle for influence in the Gulf area into an intense and potentially decisive one. The risk of direct military confrontation between the superpowers has grown steadily, and the Gulf is so vital to the west that it is one of the few areas whose potential loss could trigger a third world war. This makes the military buildup of the Gulf states, and the various internal security threats to each Gulf nation critical to all the powers concerned.

The political interaction among the states has historically been a complex mixture of economic and political rivalries, undergirded by long-standing dynastic, national and territorial conflicts with distinct ethnic, religious and tribal overtones.¹³ With the arrival of the

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British in the Gulf, these conflicts subsided but did not disappear, since then tensions have remained major factors in the political processes of the area. In 1950s and 1960s strong anti-communist stand was taken in the region and Soviet policy in the Middle East was strongly criticised. As King Faisal of Saudi Arabia believed, the creation of Israel in the heartland of the Arab world was a communist-zionist imperialist conspiracy against Islam.¹⁴ It was perceived

13. Hossein Amirsadeghi, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

14. V.L. Bodianski and M.S. Lazarev, *Saudovskaya Arabia Posle Saud* (Saudi Arabia After Saud), Moscow 1967, p. 37.

to characterise the growing Soviet infiltration in the Arab world as disastrous to the security of the region. To counter the spread of communism and to deter the Soviet influence in the area, Saudi Arabia continued anti-Soviet policy and sought help from the like-minded Arab nations and from the US. However, subsequent events including the total US support to the Zionist state proved the simple anti-Soviet policy inconsistent and incomprehensive. Thus in the backdrop of changing pattern of policy orientation of the Gulf states in the dynamic context of geopolitics there are at least four categories of shared interests which transcend the dynastic rivalries and competition for influence in the area: the perpetuation of their respective conservative monarchical regimes; the prevention of radical groups from gaining a foothold in the area; the continuation of an uninterrupted flow of the Gulf's oil resources to markets outside the region; and the procurement of the maximum revenue in exchange for their oil.¹⁵

Territorial disputes between Iran and Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, UAE and Iran are well-known issues which can influence the structure of regional security framework. Inter-dynastic rivalries between the states centre also on ancestral lineage as Abu Dhabi and Dubai, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia which can at times influence the conservative states of the Gulf in matters of mutual concern. Moreover, the competition to have influence and position in the Gulf also exists among the states. And how these states relate both as a group, and as individual states underscore the point that this particular sub-region of the Gulf is one in which an uneasy equilibrium persists between competing forces. These forces of territorial rivalries or dynastic rivalries underscore the complexity of the area in terms of regional and interational politics and serves a foundation conditioning how these states relate to one another politically. Another pronounced factor are the differences arising periodically under the rubric of

15. Hossein Amirsadeghi, *op. cit.* p. 179,

conservatives ("reactionaries") pitted against radicals ("revolutionaries") as in Iraq. Some conservative states are ruled by dynasts whose policies are friendly to the West, and the so-called "moderate" forces of political and socio-economic change in the Middle East and elsewhere. The domestic policies are heavily weighed against the small minority of their citizens (Shiite in Iraq, and Sunni in Iran) and non-national residents who harbour revolutionary sentiments.

Thus the radical ideology espoused by the Ba'thist leadership in Baghdad has been rejected in "toto" from the beginning by all the other Gulf states. Iraqi attempts to fashion a "Gulf policy" acceptable to the Gulf states based on "realpolitik" consideration of coexistence would even encounter bitter opposition within the Iraqi Ba'th party. This policy is also inhibited by the distraction of the recurrent ideological cleavage with the Ba'thist in Syria. Iran's regional role to encourage subversive activities has diminished in recent years. South Yemen stood opposed to the conservative governments in the region and rendered practical support to the Marxist guerrillas in Oman to overthrow the Sultan and institute a socialist government. The Dofari revolution had been suppressed in Oman, and Sultan's power was strengthened with Saudi and Iranian support. The two basic types of ideological conflict stemming from ethnic and religious sources have also been demonstrated in Iran.

Although the fear of left-wing radical regimes is a major source of concern throughout the Gulf today, radical threats come from both extreme "left" and extreme "right".¹⁶ Revolutionary Iran's foreign policy doctrine includes two basic features (i) "negative equilibrium" implying affiliation to none—"neither to the West nor to the East", thus opposing the pro-western policies of the Gulf states, (ii) the next feature is "Pan Islamism" and the export of Islamic Revolution to other Muslim countries. It generated a deep sense of insecurity among the conservative Arab allies of USA and

16. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

endangered the stability of the regimes in the Gulf region an eventuality very much welcomed by the Soviet Union, The Soviet Union tried to influence events in Iran through the communist "Tudeh" (mass) party adopting a multi-pronged strategy internally while expressing support for Khomeini. It also emphasized on the imperialist and anti-American nature of Iranian Revolution, ignoring its Islamic orientation.

The Kurds, Turkoman and other minorities, demand for greater autonomy aroused the consciousness of minorities in other Gulf states. The Iranian revolution had also appeal in the region where the social, political and economic conditions were identical to those in Iran, It further provided the different Islamic fundamentalist groups in the Gulf with moral and political support, military training and arms. All these had a spill-over effect over the entire region. Examples are: Shiite uprising of Saudi Arabia in 1979-80, attempted coup in Bahrain in 1981 by the Tehran-based Islamic Front. Absence of trust, personal hatred and "fear psychosis" compounded the existing turbulent situation of the region alongwith other factors.

The fratricidal war between Iran and Iraq already in its sixth year has claimed large number of casualties, and has cost the participants billions of dollars. It ranks as one of the most serious of the 150-plus armed conflicts since World War II.¹⁸ It is the longest war between the two Third World countries not only threatening the security of the region but also increasing international tension by precipitating new alliances and a rearrangement of forces in the already turbulent area. The eruption of the Iran-Iraq war polarized the Arab world into two opposing camps.¹⁹ A new realignment of powers

17. Aryeh Y. Yodfat, *The Soviet Union and Revolution in Iran*, (Croom Helm, London), 1984. p. 105.

18. Jasjit Singh, "Iran-Iraq war", *Strategic Analysis*, (Institute for Defence and Strategic Analyses), New Delhi, Vol. IX No. 5, 1985, p. 457.

19. Jasim M. Abdulghani, *Iraq and Iran: The Years of Crisis* (Croom Helm, London and Sidney), 1984, p. 212.

consequently emerged in the Arab world, signalled by boycotting of the Arab Summit Conference of December 1980 by some states.²⁰ Further it led to greater Iranian involvement in inter-Arab politics. The war destroyed the Iraqi-led Arab coalition against Sadat's Egypt and eroded the consensus in favour of Sadat's ostracism in the Arab world.

The financial and military exhaustion of the parties enhanced Saudi Arabia's political role and gave tremendous leverage over the Gulf states. Consequently Iraq's emergent leadership in the Arab world was substantially weakened and became dependent on the support of the Gulf states. Iraq's debilitation weakened the eastern front against Israel and had adverse effects on the Arab-Israeli balance of power. Further, the war and the concomitant exhaustion of Iran's military checked her revolutionary ideological momentum in the area.

Finally one of the major spin-offs of the war was the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981,²¹ which was initially an economic cooperation forum within the region. The war led to a growing naval build-up on the part of the superpowers, particularly US in the Arabian Sea/Gulf region. Fear of the spill-over effects of the war, coupled with Iran's repeated threats to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz further intensified US presence in the area. Moreover, both US and USSR saw Iran, rather than Iraq, as the "strategic zone" and hence sought to assure Iran of their neutrality in the conflict.²² Moreover the splits caused by the fratricidal war running deep through the Arab and Muslim world have not only weakened their collective strength but also occurred as a source of enormous windfall gain for Israel.

However, the most alarming of all the sources of instability is the mounting "arms race" in the Gulf. The buyers are competing among themselves to purchase the most sophisticated weapons. The

20. *ibid* 212.

21. *ibid*, p. 214.

22. *ibid*, p. 115.

growth of Soviet military power is an independent and concrete source of concern for many littoral states. Soviet naval power and mobility—an ability to shrink the “effective distance” from the southern USSR to the Gulf—endow the USSR with a new military capability.

The Soviet Union established footholds on its peripheries through signing friendship treaty with Iran (1972), Afghanistan (December 1978), and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (October 1978), which paved the way for its presence in Ethiopia, and in the Red Sea opposite Aden. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan expanded Soviet land and air strength and their base facilities and logistic capabilities in the North Caucasus, Trans-caucasus and Turkestan military districts. This buildup threatens Iran and Pakistan and has steadily increased Soviet capability to project power into the southern Gulf.²³

On the other hand, US failure in Ethiopia-Somalian war created strategic impact which linked the new Soviet initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa with the Soviet presence in South Yemen; threatened the southern Red Sea, the Suez canal, and Israel's access to the

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Indian Ocean and the Pacific; and helped force Israel's expulsion from Ethiopia. South Yemen's internal disturbed condition made it dependent on Soviet support. The former's support of the Dhofar rebels in Oman, its creation of large terrorist and revolutionary warfare training and the invasion of North Yemen in 1979 have made it one of the most destabilizing influences in the Gulf and

23. John Muttam, *op. cit.* p. 131.

the Red Sea area. South Yemen's pressure on North Yemen forced the US and Saudi Arabia into direct competition with the USSR in providing military assistance to North Yemen. South Yemen threaten Saudi Arabia's principal supplier of foreign labour and is a source of continuing tension in the Gulf.

The inability of the United States to reach a common understanding with the Gulf states for the protection of mutual interests have stimulated the security concern of the region. Success in resolving the Arab-Israeli dilemma remains "elusive" and "deceptive" as gains on one side become losses on the other. The United States continues to misinterpret or ignore Arab perceptions of the basic peace and security issues, and rhetorics on both sides obscure the intent of US and Arab security goals.²⁴ Both Israel and the Arab states perceive the US political and military commitments to each of them as self-contradictory, and they register doubt and concern over the intent and validity of US security assurances. The US also perceives the Arab world as reluctant to cooperate militarily in the protection of "vital" US interests in the Persian Gulf. Thus US strategic interests in the region remain hostage to the Arab view of the threat to those interests and to the overriding Arab-Israeli problem.

In the backdrop of this scenario the US designed to expand its foothold in the region. President Carter's commitment to use force in the defense of the Gulf has resulted in the formation of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force to counter the Soviet expansion in the Gulf. Mahmoud Riad, former Egyptian Foreign Minister, remarked that "the Arab policies have no control over such a force; it serves US policy objectives and not Arab ones. These are simply to gain position in the area and to enjoy the benefits of political influence in those countries which agree to

24. Anthony H. Cordesman, *op. cit.* p. 60.

accept the presence of the force."²⁵ The unified US Central Command (USCENTCOM) also was perceived by some of the Gulf states as intervention force and as threat to political stability of the area.

With past experience, none of the Arab countries seems willing to allow the US presence of her forces on its soil. The US presence may destabilize rather than add stability to the region. But Oman is the only Arab country to have signed a formal access agreement with the United States as she felt a real threat from South Yemen and sought US assistance in shoring up its military forces. Following on the heels of the Iranian revolution and the US abandonment of the Shah and the deep questioning of US will, intent and capability far outweighed Arab concern over the new Soviet presence in Afghanistan. Thus the region has become arena for the conflict of the superpowers to secure their own interests.

III

Revolution in Iran and the Gulf Security

The Iranian Revolution of 1978-79, is a remarkable event whose echo will continue to reverberate down the corridors of history. Its impact is already visible in contemporary Gulf politics. On the one hand, it has brought into stark relief the dangers of too close an identification with the West and has led the fragile regimes in the Gulf to reassess their policies and maintain a posture of distance from the United States.²⁶ On the other, it has sparked off a series of tumultuous events—the "War" between North Yemen and South Yemen, the seizure of the Ka'bah at Mecca and the war between Iran and Iraq—which have profoundly affected the security perception of the region.

Today, the Gulf is the cynosure of world attention. In this volatile and highly inflammable region, any change in Iran is likely to

25. Robert G. Lawrence *US Policy in Southwest Asia : A Failure in Perspective*, (National Defence University Press, Washington, D.C.), 1984, p. XI.

26. Abdel Majid Farid. *op. cit.*, introduction

influence the future shape of politics in the region. The crisis unnerved the ruling elites in the Gulf. In their obsession to secure their thrones, a number of compromises were made. At first the West was dependent on the Gulf: by the late 1970s western diplomacy converted this into interdependence. And after the revolution the Gulf Sheikdoms have become dependent on the West for their survival. The two major consequences were the subtraction of Iran from the pro-Western alliance system and the diffuse ideological encouragement that Iran gave to some other radical Islamic movements in the region.²⁷ The Islamic tone of Iran's foreign policy to promote Muslim universalism in Arab countries encountered strong reaction in the area. Its appeal for a religiously sectarian Shiite revolution fostered divisions between Muslims. This politicization of religion as a destabilizing factor accentuated uncertainty and uneasiness all over the Gulf. It provided both a model and an incentive for dissidents throughout the region. It also altered the political balance of power in the Gulf undermining moderate pro-western governments, giving them the choice between political isolation and a tactful adjustment of policy. Iran's upheaval also demonstrated the intractable problem of containing or "managing" change of powers within the region. Quite apart from the palpable defeat for Western (particularly United States) policy, and the inevitable costs for their interests, the revolution also provided enough reasons for reorientation in West's strategy in future handling of similar events in other countries.

The hasty withdrawal of US support, combined with public equivocation and attempts to accommodate Iran's new leaders, who despise the West, only succeeded in undermining and alienating Washington's other allies in the region. One of the most spectacular repercussions of Iran's revolution was to accentuate doubts in the Persian Gulf about US willingness to stand by her allies. Saudi Arabia in particular

27. *ibid*, p. 19

responded by lowering her pro-Western profile and hinting at possible relations with the USSR. It has served to break the continuity of of US-Iranian relations not simply because the Shah has departed, but because the revolution is a rejection of the value system that the United States represents and which the Shah used as a yardstick of Iranian development. Keeping Iran from "going neutral" or "going communist" will inevitably dominate future US policy in Iran as it has done in the past.²⁸ The sour-after-taste of the revolution will linger for some time in both Iran itself and in the United States. While it may have been able to tell the United States how to conduct future diplomacy with future Iranian governments, it has also perhaps saved the United States from some mistakes for a second time.

The overthrow of the Shah of Iran has not fundamentally changed the prospects for the spread of nuclear weapons to the Persian Gulf. According to nuclear experts, many countries of that region, including Iran will avail in the future of the technology for rudimentary nuclear

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weapon capability. At the same time in the periphery of the Gulf the nuclear competition may have implications for the security of the area. More important, the change of regime has removed only one possible political impetus to widespread proliferation in the Gulf an Iranian nuclear weapon programme driven by the Shah's pursuit of regional hegemony and global prestige. Two other triggers—an expanding nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan and Iraq's acquisition of nuclear weapons in an attempt to upset the Middle East "status quo"—remain.²⁹ The not improbable result could be the

28. Hossain Amirsadeghi, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

29. *Ibid* p. 26.

dangerous entry of nuclear weapons into some or even many Gulf countries' arsenals by the late 1980s.

The impact of Iran's upheaval on the region will be similarly important. A number of religious and nationalist revivals will challenge existing boundaries and more generally the authority of existing governments. The demonstration effect of its revolution may contribute to such challenges elsewhere. Perhaps a weakened and internally preoccupied Iran will be in no position to exert direct influence outside its borders. Although Iraq will achieve a degree of local primacy, the post-Shah vacuum in the Gulf is and will be far more noticeable than the post-British one. For at least the next decade the control of the Persian Gulf will be a key factor in calculations about the relative global balance of power between the western industrial countries and Soviet Union. As a result of the revolution, the Western countries (particularly the US) have lost great political, economic and military leverage over the local countries of the Gulf and the adjacent regions. It provided major changes in US policy, each of which affected other states of the region.

IV

Security Options for the Gulf States and the US

There is probably no way of preventing all conflict among Gulf states, in view of the many historical territorial disputes which can flare up even though some have been temporarily settled by negotiations. The resumption of guerrilla war in Oman's Dhofar province or the outbreak of revolt by ethnic minorities such as the Kurds in Iran or Iraq can bring intervention from outside.

The interlocking of regional conflicts with the superpower competition maximises the dangers for all concerned: it encourages local states to look outside the region for support against their neighbours, it encourages outside powers to play up local disputes in order to gain advantage over rival powers, it tends to blow up local conflicts into larger ones by the operation of prior commitments and the fear of

losing friends and allies. All those dangers would be reduced if the states of the region could move purposefully and in concert to assert non-alignment in relation to the superpowers and to organise their own system of security ; and if the superpowers, would respect those decisions and would not seek bases or special security ties within the region.³⁰ Local conflicts would not disappear, but they might have a greater chance of being settled or contained by collective procedures or by the operation of a regional balance of power, with a good chance that outside powers would see their own interests better served by remaining aloof than by intervention. For those in the Gulf or the West who think of a revived CENTO or for those in Moscow or among the radical groups of the region who see emerging a new socialist order under Soviet leadership, the idea of a non-aligned regional system is not compatible with their own. For the local states the issues are complex and not always presented in clearest form. None wishes to cut outside ties when a reliable regional system does not exist. Actually, both these trends, that of interlocking and that of regional non-alignment, are present in the thinking of political leaders and others in the leading Gulf countries, and they will be contending, probably without sharp and definitive resolution, for some time into the future. The Gulf states do not wish to be labelled as being in any power's sphere of influence, formally or *de facto*. The superpower can reduce the risk of war by moderating their competition, but not, at the expense of the states of the region. If spheres of influence are unacceptable and the present open competition for the alignment or realignment of local states is uncertain and dangerous there remain two possibilities of achieving greater stability through agreement of the superpowers. One is the recognition by both powers of the non-alignment of the entire group of Gulf states, thus making it unnecessary for either powers to seek allies there as a means of denying the area to the other. The other point is the limitation of arms levels, their own and those of the local states. The

30. *ibid* p. 18

bilateral negotiations on the naval deployment of the two powers in the Indian Ocean are a case in point. UN resolutions for the denuclearisation of the Indian Ocean or for declaring it a "zone of peace" have no practical effect.³¹ Serious negotiations between Moscow and Washington to freeze or eventually reduce their naval presence could conceivably produce results. But those talks virtually broke down even before the Soviet move into Afghanistan, and after that they

Security in the Gulf can be achieved if the area is left free from foreign interference and stronger regional co-operation is developed in economic, political and military arena.

could hardly be resurrected, as a build-up of naval power in the Indian Ocean was a central part of the American response. Despite the flicker of hopes generated by the recent Geneva Summit the fact remains that Soviet American "detente" has demonstrated its fragility and its limitations. It has not yet been extended to the Middle East or to the Gulf region except in the most elementary sense.

Considering the awesome power arrayed on both sides of the global balance, the Gulf states might appear to be wholly without influence on the maintenance of security in their area. That is not the case. They have to adjust to the facts of power, but the balance between the superpowers and the recognised rights of sovereignty give them the opportunity to make choices. Each state's main concern is the preservation of its own independence and security.

Riyadh sought to establish an effective Arab Gulf Commonwealth to defend region's resources, growing industrial base and security. Thus on 25 May 1981, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) established the Gulf Cooperation Council (Majlis al-Taawunli—Duwal al—Khalij al—Arabiyah).³²

31. *ibid* p. 12

32. Joseph A. Rechian, "The Gulf Co-operation Council: Search for Security" *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 7, no. 4, 1985 p. 853

The immediate concern behind GCC formulation has been awareness of national security and the "jugular" of their economic well-being. Thus a more credible and effective means to deal with the pressing problem of security was indeed one of the most compelling reasons for GCC at the backdrop of the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war. Cultural, sectarian, ideological and demographic issues are also at stake. Yet, despite numerous political and military agreements between the six member states, there are still significant differences which prevent complete coordination and integration. What are the prospects, if any, for the establishment of a permanent regional security system? Can the organisation function effectively?

The Search for Regional Security

Despite the heavy toll of the Gulf war between Iran and Iraq, both countries remain more powerful than the GCC states, as demonstrated by events in Oman (Dhofar war, 1970s), Saudi Arabia (Mecca uprising 1976), Bahrain (coup attempt, 1981) and Kuwait (bombings, 1983), among others. The available capabilities in GCC states indicate the limited resources against perceived internal as well as external sources of threats emanating primarily from Iran, Iraq, Israel and the Soviet Union.

(a) Military options : Military cooperation between member-states has become a pressing matter for the GCC (i) internal and (ii) external regional security. GCC's primary concern is with external security, and it is through the "Joint Defence Arrangement" that organisation seeks to face challenges to its politico-military stability. According to the London based *Middle East Economic Digest*, the GCC had agreed in 1982 to invest \$ 1.8 billion in military purchases for Oman to acquire advanced fighter aircraft from Washington.³³ The decision of the GCC to boost the military positions of its two weakest members may also be noted. In March 1982,

33. *ibid.*, p. 857

the six GCC countries agreed for joint "Gulf Force". The reason would be to avoid any reliance on foreign states for support during a crisis. For the first time in the twentieth century, forces from all six states participated in a cooperative activity aimed at defending their territories. Further GCC had been preventing blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

(b) Political Options : A number of economic plans were adopted and are in the process of implementation. The following may be mentioned as examples : GCC states today enjoy a common tariff arrangement on imports and increasingly seem to present a common oil-policy within OPEC. Economic and political integration under the GCC is intended to eliminate customs duties in intra-GCC trade; establish common tariffs on imports, coordinate imports-export policies and create a "collective negotiating force" to strengthen the GCC's overall position in dealing with suppliers; permit the free movement of labour and capital; coordinate oil policies; coordinate industrial activities and adopt standardised industrial laws; coordinate technology, training and labour policies; coordinate land, sea and air transport policies; adopt a unified investment strategy. In the beginning the GCC states shared the feeling to form an economic forum without Iran and Iraq among themselves. But it exposed weaknesses of internal instability which might offer opportunity or external threat, as the total force of the GCC is less than either of Iran or Iraq. Admittedly, GCC states cannot claim to have achieved regional security without "neutralising" Iraq and Iran, and the Yemens, which could threaten stability in the lower flank of the Arabian Peninsula.

The restoration of diplomatic relations between Oman and the PDRY in 1983 is a remarkable progress of GCC. Further efforts are needed to enhance their capacities effectively to integrate their military strength and reduce their reliance on foreign military technicians and advisers. Only then can the conservative GCC states preserve their

"Khalij" identity and guarantee their stability and security without jeopardising the region's socio-political development.

The stability of the Gulf is linked to the future stability of Europe and Japan, since threats to one area pose threat to the others. Certainly a major change in the balance of power in Europe would have profound effects upon the Persian Gulf countries themselves; in particular Saudi Arabia and other "conservative" regimes. These countries, therefore have a long term interest in maintaining a strong western commitment to a favourable balance of global power. Equally the Europeans have a major vested interest in the Gulf. Their mutually reinforcing interdependencies suggest that a new concept of western security should be formulated. In reconsidering the global map of western interests, to take greater account of the Gulf, a new area of responsibility has been added to western military commitments at the time when the overall presence and projection capability of the United States and her allies have been weakened.

It will be necessary especially for the US, to demonstrate the capability to project military forces into the region that are capable of fighting Soviet conventional forces and those of its surrogates. In the aftermath of the Iranian revolution and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the US policy has admittedly been to bolster US and regional military capabilities to protect against the Soviet threat. A new and most immediate concern for US naval and military strategy is the north-west quadrant of the Indian Ocean. The littoral includes the Persian Gulf, South Asia and the Horn of Africa. The response has been the major US naval presence in the region, development of Rapid Deployment Force capabilities, including the prepositioning of ships and material of Diego Garcia. The loss of credibility on the part of the US in the area clearly undermines US military reputation which they intend to redress.

US efforts toward the defence of the Persian Gulf area, especially Saudi Arabia, can be carried out on the broadest possible geographical

basis. Some analysts feel that the US may try to secure basing facilities in Pakistan, and Karachi's port and airfield could be of great use to US carrier task forces operating in the Arabian Sea. The gradual US movement toward closer direct military association with Saudi Arabia could be balanced by the broadening of the geographic base of US military cooperation in the Indian Ocean area. In order to redress these security dilemmas in the region, the only credible and attainable policy can be followed by the West (US particularly) according to this view, consists of an enhanced sea-based presence in the Indian Ocean, capable of projecting power ashore in a timely and efficacious manner. Therefore, at least two immediate actions are proposed to be taken: the establishment of a unified command for US forces in the region can ensure greater degree of rationalization and efficiency, and will bolster and reassure US friends in the region. It needs to deter a conventional thrust from Iran or Iraq against Saudi Arabia, but moved little to deter a determined Soviet drive southwards. "Deterrence" requires US global strength and maneuverability, in the likely theatre of initial operations. An RDF would thus fulfill deterrance of all hostilities, political support for US friends in the area; the ability to protect and defend the territorial sovereignty of friendly states; and the continued ensured access of the West to the vital natural resources upon which depend the vitality of the industrial nations.

The solution of the Gulf security in the ultimate analysis, however, lies in establishing stronger relations among the states based on common understanding of the necessity of cooperation at the defense, political and economic levels. It is impossible to have true security and independence without a true and comprehensive cooperation. And finally this area cannot enjoy stability unless the internal situations have been organised in such a way as to permit local rule shared by the majority. Hence security in the Gulf can only be achieved if the area is left free from foreign interference. This will help the people to prepare development plans for improving economic and human powers leading gradually to collective self-reliance.