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POST-KHOMEINI IRAN : CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The Islamic revolution in Iran has been one of the greatest populist explosions in modern history. It has shaken the very roots of Iran's political and social structures, and changed entirely the political-economic and social landscape of the country.

The first decade of revolution, characterized by Khomeini's rule achieved few successes to Iran's credit. At the political front, the revolutionary leadership showed its unfaltering commitment to Islamic ideology, manifest in the new constitution adopted in 1979. The constitution envisaged a kind of political order embodying the spirituality and ethics of Islam as the basis for political, social and economic relations.¹ Beside this theoretical innovation, the regime has practically demonstrated its ability to neutralize the political instability in the country, withstand a long war of attrition and as well conduct its independent external relations under the guidance of Khomeini. At the economic front, a promise to benefit the masses while oil revenues was always on the platter. There has been a lessening of dependence on foreign aid with the readiness of the masses to undertake austerity measures in order to make Iran's economy a 'self-reliant' one. Much credit for all these successes, albeit with limitations, is

1. George Thomas Kurian, *Encyclopedia Of The Third World*, Vol. II, (Manshell Publishing Ltd., London, 1982), p. 838.

attributed to the leadership of Khomeini who as per the Velayt-e-Faghi system exercised unquestionable authority over the entire decision making apparatus of the state. As a result, his exit from the Iranian political scene led to a number of speculations about Iran's future political, economic and social life. Thus, 'Post-Khomeini Iran' seems to have become an issue demanding extensive study and research.

As it appears, post-Khomeini Iran has been able to cross over the first political hurdle caused by a controversy over the transfer of power. An initial speculation that political factionalism, inter-departmental disputes and discordant ambitions of the clerics would put the country in political disarray, has been proved either simplistic or misleading. Rather, there has been an orderly transition through national elections, a referendum and new appointments. After the death of Khomeini, the appointment of Ali Khomeini as Iran's spiritual leader by a vote of the assembly of experts and landslide victory of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in presidential election have been the two landmark domestic political developments in Iran. Beneath the surface of bitter power struggle and divergent political and economic views, the combined leadership of these influential leaders is believed to be moderate in nature. Both of them set in train a series of pragmatic policies aimed at bringing few changes in internal power hierarchy, giving priority to country's economic reconstruction and ending the country's international isolationism. However, such moderation is not to be taken as a compromise with the country's fundamental principles in keeping its religion based system intact. Meanwhile, the speculation that Iran would move towards a less rigid system downgrading the theocracy has also been proved wrong.

If Khomeini is judged as a radical and an extremist, while Rafsanjani as a moderate, then the policies and goals of these leaders are to be understood in the context of time and space. The

advent of Khomeini to power as the patriarch of the revolution was followed by a revolutionary upheaval that decimated Iran's political, economic and military power. The foremost task before the new clerical leadership was its consolidation of power in the new polity. During this transitional phase, the most unexpected phenomenon that Khomeini had to confront was the war with Iraq. It may be mentioned that his decisions and policy directives influenced the entire course of war from its start to the end. What the spiritual leader wanted was to address the entire spectrum of such pressing problems through the exercise of power vested in him by the new constitution. In Khomeini's calculation, his thought and ideas would act as the ultimate panacea for solving the immediate problems of Iran. But the fact remains that in doing so, challenges, contradictions and tensions eventually overwhelmed him and put into question the very goal of revolutionary Iran. Thus, to many one decade of experience with the Islamic revolution has been bitter as it failed to earn anything tangible for the Republic. On the other hand, the new leaders have appeared in Iranian political scene under a different set of circumstances. Their entry into Iranian politics has coincided with the Republic's entry into its second decade of revolution. Many of the critical issues like fragile cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq war, post-war reconstruction problem compounded further by Iran's political isolation in international arena could not have done anything more than perturb the new leadership from the beginning. Living in a legacy left over by Khomeini, the new leaders have been trying to grapple with the situation in a manner demanded by time. Their policy, viewed by most analysts as pragmatic or moderate, can better be understood as a rational and practical approach to serve Iran's interests with no compromise on the core ideals and values of the revolution.

This paper is an attempt to delve into such issues like (i) What are the changes brought about by the new leadership in Iran's social, political and economic structures so far? (ii) Is there a

fundamental change in the long-term foreign policy objectives as pursued by the present leadership in Iran's external relations. (iii) Are these changes in domestic and internal policy essentially continuation of the policies of the previous regime? (iv) If not, what points do mark their departure from the policies pursued earlier? These are some of the issues to be dealt with in this paper.

Domestic Politics—A mark of Stability

The peaceful manner in which domestic political transition took place in post-Khomeini Iran has lent credence to the institutionalized political system left over by Khomeini. The rapidity and success with which the elections of both Khomeini and Rafsanjani were held are the evidences to corroborate Iran's internal political stability as well as reflect the political consciousness of its masses.

Despite the fact that the Velayt-e-Faghi system requires the existence of a highly respected and senior clerical leader to rule in the absence of last Shiite Imam, no controversy did take place with respect to the appointment of a leader in the same slot. President Ali Khomeini was elected for the position despite his relatively junior religious standing as a Hojatoleslam. Khomeini's appointment had an implicit admission that the Velayat-e-Faghi system could still function with few modifications in the constitution. The modifications were mainly intended to meet the demand of time. For example, the requirement that the spiritual leader be a 'Marja' (a source of emulation) was abolished. The Assembly for deciding what is best (also known as the expediency council) was expanded and written, into the constitution. It had been created by Khomeini in 1988 to break the legislative deadlock between parliament and the 12-man council of guardians, the body responsible for vetting legislation to see that it complies with Islamic law. A national Security Council (NSC)

headed by the president was created, and centralization was introduced in the judiciary through the stipulation that one man, rather than 5 man supreme Judicial council should be at its head.² Perhaps, the most remarkable change in the constitution has been the elimination of Prime Minister's position—a step taken ostensibly to invest the President with wider power.

A complex web of factors seemed to have influenced the decision makers in investing enormous power in the office of the president. It may be mentioned that although the constitution of 1979 provided for a strong presidency—somewhat along US lines, Khomeini could override the decision of the President, and in many cases of the parliament and the judiciary by exercising absolute power vested in him. An important point to be borne in mind in this connection is the 'personality cult' that dominated Iranian politics since the revolution. During Khomeini's life time, the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of the state power were under his authority. Being the arbiter of last resort, he could successfully implement whatever policy he sought to adopt. As a result, (i) there was hardly an occasion that witnessed intra-governmental or intra-departmental disputes (ii) the differences of opinion on many of the crucial issues were reconcilable due to Khomeini's personality, charisma and demagoguery. But Khomeini lacking both religious and personal credentials like those of his predecessor could not be expected to yield such an authority. Thus, the office of the president needed enormous power to keep under control many of the unforeseen political development in Iran.

The new leadership had to confront a number of domestic and international political and economic challenges. The new regime's utmost pledge to the nation was to bring about long-awaited

2. "Iran after Khomeini", *Strategic Survey*, 1988-1990, IISS London.

socio-economic improvements repeatedly promised by the previous regime. Despite a cease-fire, the country remained on a war footing and apparently neither the state nor the private sectors was able to provide lasting improvements. More ominous to the new leadership was a factionalized Iranian society. The discernible factions in sight contradicting the moderate position of the new leadership were (i) the radical group led by leaders like Prime Minister Mir Hussein Musavi, Ali Akbar Mahteshemi and Mohammad Reshari and others, (ii) the opposition groups in exile including the monarchists led by few supporters of Shah and heavily armed rebels in Iraq³ while within Iran's military establishment, there continued much infighting and rivalry between the regular armed forces and the Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards Corps). These latter formed in effect parallel armies, air force and even navies, causing intense competition and wastage of resources.⁴ As a result, a speculation about their involvement in politics was there.

All the above problems drew Rafsanjani's immediate attention. An astute politician with command over law and jurisprudence, Rafsanjani showed his far-sightedness from the beginning. Soon after assumption of power as President, he tried to bring some dominant social forces under his control. He surrendered the post of Chief of armed forces in favour of Khomeini. The purpose was to deflect criticism of his extensive power as president.⁵ An attempt was made to merge together the Revolutionary Guards and the Regular Army. But a number of factors eventually barred the move. In particular this would generate dissension and dissatisfaction within the groups. The Revolutionary Guards has been the ideological arm of the military forming a crucial base of Government support from the time of

3. *The Bangladesh Observer*, June 7, 1989.

4. Anthony Hyman, "Iran", *Middle East Review* 1990.

5. "Iran after Khomeini", *Strategic Survey*, *op. cit.*

Khomeini. Since they have been a privileged section of the society, any containment of their material facilities was unacceptable to them. As a result, the government did not want to see erosion of support by the Revolutionary Guards for the new regime. By the same calculation, the army was also to be placated. Their support to the regime was very essential. Besides, the army required an augmentation both in qualitative and quantitative terms to deter Iraq from launching another invasion. The attempt to appease these fundamental forces has been out of a rational calculation that they would continue to remain as the pillars or support base of the new regime as had been in the previous years. "Both have intrinsic value to the government—the army for its professionalism and the Revolutionary Guards for its ideological support".⁶ Besides, taking into consideration the non-permissibility of absolute power in him or in the person of his compatriot, Khomeini, Rafsanjani felt his position vulnerable to the radical forces of the country. As a result his next move was to purge the most outspoken radical elements in the government. In place of Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, the cleric Abdullah Nouri was appointed as the interior minister. It may be mentioned here that Mohtashemi was regarded as one of the hardliners among Iran's anti-western radicals. Another hard-liner ousted was Mohammad Reyshari, ex-intelligence minister. Mir Hossain Mousavi lost his position as prime minister when the reorganization of government took place.⁷

Despite the above purging an important trend that has come to characterize the present leadership is their 'policy of glasnost' or more openness in Iranian politics. Post-Khomeini Iran seems to be in a transition towards a more open and democratic political system. The present leadership shows tolerance in digesting criticism of the government. "Ayatollah Montazari, Khomeini's

6. *Ibid.*

7. Anthony Hyman, "Iran", *op. cit.*

former designated heir does not sit back quietly in the holy city of Qum if he disagrees with policies."⁸

In post-Khomeini Iran, a cluster of social forces with divergent political opinions may appear to be a threat to the new regime. But this is not a new phenomenon in Iranian politics. Even during Khomeini's time political polarization process developed in the country quite conspicuously. From the beginning of the revolution, there was power asymmetry among the revolutionary leaderships.⁹ Besides, various political parties like Secular National Front, Religious Liberal Front and various leftist parties and social organizations were the platforms where dissent views and ideas could be expressed. However, charismatic leader in the person of A Khomeini coupled with his popularity among large sections of people dwarfed all others. There is also the contention that Khomeini on most occasions acted as an authoritarian ruler not permitting any individual or faction to gain pre-eminence within his government. "A persistent pattern of his leadership has been to intervene in favour of leaders or factions who are loyal to the regime and who appear to be losing in a struggle for control of the regime"¹⁰ In the final analysis, Khomeini's clarion call for unity among his followers helped suppress their personal rivalries and held the alliance during his life time. The entire nucleus of Khomeinized personnel agreed on few uncompromising points (i) commitment to political activism for the clergy, (ii) commitment to the principle of Velayat-e-Faghi, (iii) distrust of bureaucracy and the traditional manner of conducting international and domestic affairs, (iv) rejection of Iranian nationalism in favour of Pan-Islamic goals, (v) commitment for imposing, by force, if necessary, strict Islamic standards of

8. *Ibid.*

9. Richard Cottam, "Inside Revolutionary Iran", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 2, Spring 1989.

10. *Ibid.*

social behaviour, and (vi) a commitment to cultural revolution in the country.¹¹ In post-Khomeini Iran, divergent opinions and views of different sections of clerics on many such issue are a reflection of new freedom and openness guaranteed by the government. In this respect, some of the internal dynamics of Iranian politics, the clerical behaviour and their political outlooks need little elaboration.

Since the revolution in 1979, the clerics have been a powerful force in Iranian politics. They have succeeded in identifying themselves with the masses due to one important ideological reason—a pervasive appeal of Shiism. Many factors like shared religious objectives, common social background and outlook and close personal ties have enabled them to hold on to political power in Iran. Moreover, they have always remained concerned about the Iranian sensitivity to its self. For the Iranians, the revolution was a return to the self which could be better preserved by an ideology seeking massive reassertion of Iranian identity and pride, a rejection of years of foreign dominance. The clerics were taken as the genuine persons to translate the ideology into reality.

However, what is interesting to note is that the whole coterie of clergymen maintained a position which has been complex in nature. Their involvement in politics has been influenced by certain elements of Shiite doctrine as well as few accepted values of traditional Iranian political behaviour. The main feature of this mechanism has been the preoccupation with secrecy. The clerics deem it necessary to keep their activities, both public and private, in close circles. Moreover, their system of preservation system calls for keeping internal clerical affairs in seclusion. Mutually protective silence is also felt as a necessity to avoid or lessen strife in their organization. Besides, a consistent practice of *taqiyyeh and*

11. John W. Limbert, *Iran At War With History*, (Westview Press, London, 1987), pp. 131-132.

tanfiyeh by the clergymen as the tools to guide their political behaviour appears to be interesting.¹² Both these concepts have deep religious and philosophical underpinning sanctified by Shiism. "The doctrine of *taqiye* or *ketman* (literally religious dissimulation) is a traditionally vital code of behaviour for the Shia clerics, developed in the 18th century."¹³ The clerics are believed to resort to *taqiye* when danger to their lives or property is felt. "When provisions of *taqiye* come into play, a shia cleric is religiously justified in taking whatever public stands he prefers without worrying about possible contradictions with positions he has taken earlier and without feeling remorse later."¹⁴ On the other hand, the practice of *tanfiyeh*, "held to be a time-tested tactic for judiciously doing nothing" advises a cleric to maintain his position against all odds and ignore the tension around him. In such an event, the opponents are likely to lose energy, ultimately facilitating the 'opposed' to come out with several options. In particular, this has proved to be effective in defusing tension and bitterness during intense intra-personnel elite struggles.

Aside from utilizing these specific elements, the clerical establishment has taken due account of Iranian penchant for a 'charismatic leadership'. This aspiration is deeply ingrained in Iranian national psychosis. Existing as a country for several centuries with rich cultural heritage and tradition, the Iranians have always opted for a leader who would be able to uphold this heritage uprightly. The ruling clergymen availed this opportunity to present themselves as wise and pious strongmen with commitment to the ideals of Islam and the revolution, and to present the administration of justice as an integral part of its rule.

12. Nikota B. Schahgaldian, "Iran after Khomeini", *Current History*, February, 1990.

13. Hamid Enayet, *Modern Political Thought* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1982), cited in *Current History*, *op. cit.*

14. *Ibid.*

The network's internal logic, religious customs, historical experience although unified and kept the aims and objectives of the clerics more or less compatible with the country's Islamic values, nonetheless, there have been deep-seated personal and other divisions, elite factionalisms and discordant ambitions of the clerics. In Khomeini's time the dissension, however, failed to attain a high pitched velocity due to the nature of rule adopted by him. But then it has been a reality of the network's existence since the birth of revalutionary Iran.

In post Khomeini Iran, these forces despite their basic commitment to Islam and the revolution, have been very vocal in projecting their contradictory attitudes and opposing viewpoints. The fact that they are widely dispersed within government and revolutionary organs give, indeed, a little scope of either identity with them or their views.¹⁵ Despite this complexity in Iranian politics, analysts tend to hold the view that three broad political and ideological groups are now discernible in post-Khomeini Iran's domestic politics: conservative, extremist and pragmatist. In the context of Iranian politics, a conservative is believed to be one who subscribes fully to the shiite religious doctrines with willingness to tolerate other opinions on several social and economic issues. This group is again marked by asymmetrical preferences of its adherents. One group seeks secular education, social egalitarianism and women's right, whereas at the other end of the spectrum, there is the group who oppose these value preferences. Besides, they are opposed to government intervention in social and economic affairs. Perhaps, the unifying factor within this group is its opposition to communist ideology.¹⁶

The extremist group comprising a handful of leftists and ultra-shiites are extremely radical in nature. A strong government

15. *Current History*, *op. cit.*

16. *Ibid.*

control of economy and commerce, land expropriation and export of revolution have been the underlying themes of their platform. In between these, is the group of moderates or pragmatists. They are the individuals who are less ideologues and theoreticians seeking to retain political power and strengthen it by taking popular public positions. They justify their shifting political stands on the basis of a shiite principle that the leaders are expected to follow the wishes of the masses. As will be indicated below, the divergent and contradictory opinions of these groups are being reflected in all aspects of Iranian contemporary national life.

Economy—A Moderate and Flexible Approach

In post-Khomeini Iran, the management of the country's ailing economy has been a daunting task for the new leadership. While Khomeini can be credited with the success in institutionalizing a political system within an Islamic framework, his *jihad-i-Sazandagi*¹⁷ (campaign for reconstruction) launched in 1979 to eliminate poverty and deprivation through economic progress fell short of mass expectations. Mobilizing the people behind an austerity programme, the government no doubt succeeded in repaying all the foreign loans the Shah regime contracted. But the economy as a whole *remained* in a feeble condition largely due to the reason that Khomeini had to manage a *war economy*. The war drained the Iranian wealth with severe impact on its economy and the condition further worsened due to international oil prices that hit rock bottom in the eighties. Perhaps, a more rational factor behind the failure of Khomeini to envisage a definite economic system was the regime's inability to decide a pattern of economic policy.¹⁸ The controversy, whether the economy be centralized, state-run or left to the private sector,

17. *Dawn*, February, 12, 1989.

18. *The Bangladesh Observer*, June 7, 1989.

kept Khomeini in a dilemma from the beginning. While he could Islamize the political system, an Islamization of economic system was not possible in the complex circumstances of war. As a result, the Iranian economy was apparently controlled by the state with emphasis on the production of a wide range of armaments at a great cost to Iran's manufacturing industry.¹⁹ The foreign-trade relations also suffered a setback due to 'negativism' in Iran's new foreign policy. The economic difficulties were constantly felt in recurrent shortages of food and basic necessities of life. The real value of wages and salaries also eroded by high inflation as indicated by a fall in the value of Iranian Rial. It was being traded for foreign currency in the street at 15 to 20 times less than the official rate.²⁰

Unlike the political system, the economic system lacking any theoretical skeleton gave the new leadership a leeway to take few new measures to refurbish Iranian economy. High inflation, low productivity, lack of investment and soaring unemployment have been the problems that drew Rafsanjani's attention. The new President showed determination to implement plans for eradicating these problems. In this regard, three important measures appear to be the breakthroughs in post-Khomeini Iran's economic policy, e.g., (i) decentralized economic planning and lessening of state role in the economy, (ii) encouragement of private sector and investment on the one hand and foreign assistance and investment on the other, and (iii) improvement in foreign-trade relations.

Private sector and private investment have been given top-priority by the new leadership out of a fair calculation that Islam honours private property and that it is the government's duty to protect it. Besides, high productivity and productive investment

19. Anthony Hyman, "Iran", *op. cit.*

20. *Ibid.*

could not be insured unless Iranians with money were given the opportunities to invest in production oriented industries rather than in smuggling in the name of trade and commerce. As early as in November 1989 Rafsanjani detailed out the difficulties, "We are entangled with the problem of people who have gained money easily and are not prepared to invest their money in production. They want to profit through investing in the black market and hoarding, being middlemen and making profits by illegal means".²¹ An important factor in consideration has been the regime's attempt to satisfy the influential bazari class. This class remained deprived of their rights to do free business during Khomeini's time. They also have bitterness against few clerics who had a near-monopoly of commerce and trade during the war. They are looked upon as the war profiteers responsible for the regime's failure on the economic front.

Despite this open policy of the new regime, the Iranians remain skeptical about the unpredictability of government moves and inadequate legislative guarantees. Nonetheless, given political certainty, sincere guarantees for private entrepreneurs and loosening of state control, the prospect of growth in the sunken private sector appears reasonable to many economic observers in Iran.

Foreign capital investment which deemed ideologically unsound when Khomeini lived is now widely considered indispensable.²² Although unlike most Third World countries, Iran remains in an advantageous position as a debt free country, large-scale credits are judged vital. Economic reconstruction which has been given the top-most priority by the new regime can only go forward with the help of foreign assistance and foreign investment. The shattered economy needs outside assistance to

21. "Iran after Khomeini", *Strategic Survey*, *op. cit.*

22. Charles A. Kupchan, "And Ready To Talk", *Orbis*, Spring, 1990.

repair essential plant for its oil refinery, petro-chemicals, electricity industry, ports and infra-structures.²³ The oil income which was \$12 billion in 1989 was felt inadequate to meet the expenses in several sectors of the economy. Higher levels of investment have been felt necessary for greater productivity in all spheres of the economy. It may be mentioned that foreign investment amounting to \$27 billion was provided in the five-year plan taken up by the new regime.²⁴ The decision, indeed, had a stormy passage through the Iranian parliament.

In an effort to invite foreign investment the post-Khomeini Iranian leadership has also been trying to improve foreign relations with Iran's former trading partners. Although such relations with the West have not yet taken a final shape, Iran-USSR trading relations that flourished following Rafsanjani's visit to the USSR has been a favourable development for Iran's economy. There has been a resumption of Iran's natural gas exports to the USSR sealed off in 1979 after a price dispute. Besides, Iran sought to diversify its sources of supply and trading routes to and across the USSR. Simultaneous with this, the commercial relations between Iran and other east European countries like Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Romania have developed significantly.²⁵

The post-Khomeini Iran's economic plan aims to attain few objectives, the failure of which the new leaders feel would breakdown the economic system of Iran. The objectives are (i) to lessen regime's economic dependence on oil by diversifying other productive sources of revenue e.g., gas and manufactured products, (ii) to boost up industrial infra-structures with local and foreign investment, (iii) to stress on agriculture as one of the

23. Anthony Hyman, "Iran", *op. cit.*

24. "Iran after Khomeini", *Strategic Survey*, *op. cit.*

25. Anthony Hyman, "Iran", *op. cit.*

priorities in rebuilding Iran's war shattered economy which would attract the uprooted peasants to go to village, (iv) to guarantee basic necessities of life i.e., food and consumer goods for its citizens and to improve their living conditions drastically declined during the war, (v) to utilize minimum resources for defense, (vi) to solve the unemployment problem, and (vii) finally to improve Iran's foreign trade relations.

However, symptoms of the radical-moderate divide are discernible in the economic policy of Iran. The radicals still desire a tightly centralized economy and shunning of foreign assistance which defines the limitations faced by Rafsanjani.

A new Trajectory in Foreign Policy

In the conduct of foreign policy, the post-Khomeini leadership has staked out positions that smack of changes in Iranian foreign policy. It is being speculated that moderation and pragmatism would gradually replace the fervour of Khomeini era in the country's external relations.²⁶ The need for a change has been dictated, in particular, by an important consideration that Iran needs to reintegrate itself into the international community. Besides, as an autonomous and substantial force, Iran as well has an aspiration for an independent role in the regional politics.

It may be mentioned that the new leadership has taken the mantle of Khomeini at a moment of great transition internationally. At the regional level, developments like ceasefire with Iraq and Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan bore prospects for peace in the region. At the international level, the demise of cold war accompanied by few dramatic political developments in East Europe, resolution of various conflicts indicating a trend

26. *The Khaleej Times*, July 10, 1989.

towards dialogue rather than confrontation created a fresh dent in the political thinking of Iran's new leadership. A realization that Iran can no longer meet her national interests in isolation soon propelled the new leaders to depart from some of the basic foreign policy tenets of the Khomeini era.

In retrospect, the foreign policy of Iran under Khomeini may be viewed as a reflection of few dogmatic ideas that influenced his perception of the world at large. Despite the fact that the members of the victorious revolutionary coalition expressed divergent and often contradictory opinions on many foreign policy issues, Khomeini's all pervasive influence was an effective tool to offset all competing visions within this group. He hewed a foreign policy that reflected a philosophy of his own. While his predecessor, Shah nurtured an ambition to make Iran a preponderant Gulf power through augmentation of Iran's military power, Khomeini aspired to secure the same position for Iran through different means—Islamization of Iran's foreign policy. Under Khomeini Iran was believed to have attained Islamic hood and thus the country's foremost national interest was defined in terms of propagating Khomeini's vision of the *Nezam-e-Mohammadi*.²⁷ Khomeini believed in the universal validity of Islam which needed an export to the rest of the world from the new citadel of Iran. In his words, "Islam is not peculiar to a country.....even the Muslims. Islam comes for humanity.....Islam wishes to bring all humanity under the umbrella of justice....we hope this will gradually come aboutAs a corollary to this concept of an ideal Islamic world order, Iran as the only Faghi ruled Islamic republic should try hard to export its revolution to the world".²⁸ Although the republic's message of revolution appeared to be queer, nonetheless, it was

27. R. K. Ramzani, "Iran's Foreign Policy : Contending Orientations", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 2, Spring 1989.

28. *Ibid.*

appealing and potentially very powerful for reasons like (i) most countries have experienced misrule and political degradation in some form or other, (ii) the West and its client state Israel were blamed to have caused such misfortune to the Muslims, (iii) the failure of foreign ideologies like marxism, capitalism, nationalism and liberalism to improve the Islamic societies and (iv) as projected, Khomeini's Shiite brand of Islam was to be the ultimate panacea for the salvation of Muslims and an infallible guide to achieving freedom, self-respect and independence.²⁹

Beside the Islamic content in Khomeini's foreign policy, a new orientation in Iran's foreign policy as being "Neither East nor West" had been a factor that led Iran to subscribe to a position viewed by the clerics as a symbol of Iran's newly won freedom and prestige. Notwithstanding these new theoretical elements, there were few issues like the Gulf war, the Afghan crisis, the Palestinian problem, the Lebanese crisis and finally the Rushdie affair that influenced Khomeini's foreign policy in several ways. In particular, the Iraq-Iran war had a major influence in shaping Islamic Republic's foreign policy.

It is important to take note of the fall-out of Khomeini's ideology and views on Iran's foreign policy. Tehran's "neither East nor West policy" radically altered the balance of power in the region throwing Middle east into a state of instability worsened by the Iraq-Iran war. The Revolution's rhetoric, 'neither East nor West' could have been a constructive diplomatic move to project Iran as a world in itself. But what appeared to be indignant was an element of contradiction in its diplomatic policy towards the outside countries. Khomeini has always viewed his regime as a model of righteousness for the Muslims, whereas the Muslim nations to him were the places of disbelievers and sinful mankind. Thus at the regional level Iran's relation with her Sunni dominated

29. John W. Limbert, *Iran At War With History*, *op cit.*, pp. 138-139.

neighbouring Muslim countries turned out to be bitter. The bitterness was exacerbated by his continued threat of an export of Islamic fundamentalism (on Shiite line) to such countries like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Lebanon and Egypt where there are large Shiite populations.³⁰

At the international level, confounding and confronting the US and the USSR became a foreign policy goal in itself a goal that became more important than any economic or strategic consideration.³¹ In essence, her relations with the superpowers was an offshoot of violent diplomacy as evincible in the following words of Khomeini himself. "The superpowers are responsible for all world corruption, For this reason, Muslims should mobilize the oppressed and chained nations so that the superpowers can be pushed out of the scene and the governments can be handed over to the oppressed. But this must be done in a way that teaches the superpowers a lesson. They must both be humiliated and punished for the wrongs they have done to the Muslims. They must be slapped in the face or punched on the mouth. Through violence the satanic majority will be made to submit to the righteous few".³² With the middle powers like France and Britain, her relations were tense and hostile. The same was true in case of her relations with West Germany, Italy, Netherlands and other West European countries. Iran, thus, kept itself practically isolated internationally. Rafsanjani, then a speaker of the parliament admitted, "one of the many things we did in the revolutionary atmosphere was constantly to make enemies".³³ For Iran, the negative effects of her isolation began to creep up slowly as the war proceeded amid serious constraints and limitations faced by Iran. Finally

30. Abul Kalam Azad, "Iran and Iraq In Quest of Peace", *BISS Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1988.

31. John W. Limbert, *Iran At War With History*, *op cit.*, p. 140.

32. Alex Von Dornoch, "Iran's Violent Diplomacy", *Survival*, Vol. XXX, No. 3, May/June 1988.

33. *Time*, August 1, 1988.

under severe compulsions including the presence of Western naval armada in the Gulf, Iran accepted a cease-fire with Iraq, fearful that its own revolution might be in jeopardy if the war continued. The decision, however, to Khomeini was more deadly than drinking poison. As it appeared, the cease-fire only provided an uneasy and fragile peace as the crucial issues between the two antagonists remained unresolved. In post-cease-fire period, the relations between Iraq and Iran instead of being harmonious and friendly rather remained strained and tense exhibiting low level of animosity. Finally the Khomeini era ended with the political row over the Rushdie affair that proved to be a turning point in Iran's external relations. What the Iranian leader left for his successors was an international crisis between Iran and the West over the book, *the satanic verses*.

The foremost objective of Khomeini's successors was to make some kind of a move to break out of the diplomatic isolation into which it had fallen during the last regime. The question was in which direction would Tehran move? Rafsanjani and his associates did not have any ideological disposition or a pre-conceived notion for Iran's new policy. They rather sought a more rational and pragmatic policy to serve Iran's immediate as well as long term interests.

As there was no new issue in sight, Iran's preoccupation was with the issues left unresolved by Khomeini i.e., normalization of relations with Iraq, mending the fence with neighbours and restoration of normal relations with the West. In dealing with these pressing issues, extensive care has been taken by the new leaders so as not to make a wide gap between ideology and pragmatism. Thus in post-Khomeini period one notices few bold steps in certain areas, whereas in certain areas the legacy of Khomeini is found hard to dispense with. Although the current scenario of power disposition in Iran continues to stampede the moderating

tendencies of Rafsanjani, nonetheless, few changes in Iran's foreign policy are notable at the moment.

Regional Relations : On assumption of power, the new leadership seems to have taken due notice of the irritants in Iran's relations vis-a-vis her neighbours. Since the end of the Gulf war, Iran in her efforts to mend relations with the smaller Gulf states felt the need to leave old grudges behind. In particular, Rafsanjani explicitly renounced any Iranian territorial ambition as well as the country's commitment to spreading the Islamic revolution through military means. *Kahyan International*, a government publication of Iran upheld the idea in the following words, "the time for revolutionary adventurism for Iran has come to an end and that it is time realism and pragmatism prevail over to secure our threatened borders".³⁴

At the initial stage, Iran's best relations continued to be with Oman and the UAE, whereas an attempt to restore relations with Saudi Arabia did not succeed.³⁵ So far as Iran's relations with its arch enemy Iraq is concerned, no progress was made to implement the negotiating package incorporated in the UN Security Council Resolution 508. The sharp and diverse positions of both these countries on issues like exchange of POW's, withdrawal of troops from occupied territories, clearing of mines and sunken tonnage in the Strait of Hormuz and other related issues barred the possibility of any positive development in their inimical relations. Following the recent Gulf Crisis few unexpected developments took place in relations between these two arch rivals. This has been taken up for discussion in later section.

In normalizing relations with the neighbours, Iran has expressed its intention of not becoming a guardian of regional

34. *Dawn*, December 20, 1989.

35. "Iran after Khomeini", *Strategic Survey*, *op. cit.*

interests and also of not determining other's destiny. On the other hand, the new government sought to pursue peace and cooperation in the Gulf through diplomacy. But certain factors have been in calculation : (i) an economic imperative to reconstruct Iran's economy which needs a working relation with her oil rich neighbours. It may be mentioned that in early September of 1989 technical studies were underway for the export of Iranian natural gas to some of the southern littoral states.³⁶ (ii) It was necessary to enlist the support of the Gulf states in an eventual peace settlement with Iraq. (iii) Iran also needed to pursue a strategic plan for the region that would reintegrate Iran into the area and allow local problems to be solved within a regional framework. Behind this, perhaps, there was an insidious aim of Iran to reassert its dominant power in the Gulf.

Wider Relations : In opening Iran's relations with the outside world, in particular the West, Rafsanjani had to be cautious about the policy directives of the previous regime. As is known Khomeini's death edict on Rushdie with an eternal validity has been the main stumbling block in Iran's relations with the West. Rafsanjani had no authority to change or remove the edict. Even at one stage Rafsanjani's effort in this connection was seriously criticized by Khomeini. However, few of Rafsanjani's gestures do corroborate the new government's intention to mend fence with the West. **First**, Rafsanjani's opposition to Iran's support for terrorist activity and his government's commitment to recognized international norms based on humanitarian principles did attract the attention of the West. **Second** in the wake of deadly earthquake in 1990 the new leadership did not try to project Iran as being self-sufficient to stand on its own. The extent of destruction eventually forced Iran to seek assistance abroad. Rafsanjani appealed to the international community, "the catastrophe is so serious that international help is needed".³⁷ In

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Newsweek*, July 9, 1990.

response to this call, nations around the world quickly offered money, medicine and equipments and rescue teams. Some 171 foreign air crafts from 86 countries landed in Tehran to disgorge thousands of tons of relief supplies. Many came from Iran's enemies in the West including the two Swiss jets carrying \$630,000 worth of aid from the US government that severed diplomatic relations with Iran in 1980 in the midst of hostage crisis.³⁸ The official and private efforts by the British, who cut ties with Tehran over the Rushdie affair totaled \$2.6 million. From France came 195 civil-defense specialists and the USSR sent 200 medical workers.³⁹

However, such openness to aid was a little step toward detente with a world from which Iran has isolated itself. As the government struggles to cement ties with the West, the political sniping between the pragmatists headed by Rafsanjani and the radicals remains in sight. Rafsanjani who is hailed in Western countries as the great hope of moderation remains stymied by a powerful coalition of radicals in the parliament whose hatred of the US and the West in general has not abated. It may be mentioned that the radicals were even critical about western aid and assistance and ruled out the possibility of such assistance to make a breakthrough in Iran's relations vis-a-vis the West. Their slogan was 'our people even under the rubble chant death to America'.⁴⁰ Contrarily, Rafsanjani snubbed these radicals in a Friday prayer saying that 'we should be thankful to those foreigners'.⁴¹

By now it is clear that without resolution of few acrimonious issues, there can be no improvement in US-Iranian relations. The resolution requires reciprocity from both the sides. Iran wants the

38. *Time*, July 9, 1990.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

West to reduce its naval presence in the Gulf and refrain from future military intervention in the region. In its economic reconstruction programme, Iran also seeks the money out of the Iranian assets frozen by the US. Whereas the US wants Iran to release all American hostages in Lebanon in return of increased US political and economic cooperation with Iran.

There are indications that Rafsanjani wants to get rid of the hostage albatross and badly seeks access to Western markets and loans. But any deal for the hostages will have to be compelling enough to motivate Rafsanjani to crack down hard on his domestic opponents, mainly the hardliners who wield much more influence than Rafsanjani does over the hostage holders.⁴²

A palpable breakthrough in Iran's external relations has been its rapprochement with the Soviet Union, long regarded by Khomeini as a *satan* next to the US in degree. Outwardly it would seem that Rafsanjani paid his historic visit to Moscow to fulfill the death bed wish of Ayatollah Khomeini which he expressed in the following words, "try to improve relations with your big northern neighbour".⁴³ However, a critical note of this development would reveal the fact that there were political and economic considerations behind the initiatives of both the parties.

Gorbachev's reshaping of Soviet foreign policy—especially the withdrawal from Afghanistan meant that Tehran's long standing preoccupation with the Soviet menace would be on the wane. Through a possible rapprochement with Iran, it sought to influence the Iranian policy towards Afghanistan, particularly the political position of the Iranian based eight party alliance of the Mujahideen. The Soviet Union is also believed to have achieved Iranian assurance of not interfering in the affairs of its Muslim

42. Patrick Clawson, "Weakened And Weary", *Orbis*, op. cit.

43. *The Bangladesh Observer*, August 20, 1989.

republics bordering northern Iran. In this connection the restrained Iranian reaction to the January 1990 turmoil in Azerbaijan suggests that Iran no longer harbours ambitions of exporting the Islamic revolution to Muslim republics of the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the political calculations on the part of Iran had been wide. **First**, the diplomatic initiative was taken with the hope that pressure would be brought on Iraq by the Soviet Union to implement UN resolution 598. **Second**, in a contention for power and supremacy in the region between Iraq, Saudi Arabia and herself, Iran would be in an utterly disadvantageous position without the backing of a superpower. Thus, Iran under pragmatists opted to mend its fence with the Soviets hurriedly. **Third**, Iran was expected to use this relation to bargain with the West in general and the US in particular.

However, what loomed large in Iranian calculations were the economic interests. A wide-ranging series of economic and trade agreements including resumption of sales of Iranian gas to the USSR were to benefit Iran in its post-war reconstruction programme. Some of her requirements such as industrial plants, chemicals, raw materials etc., could now be imported from the Soviet Union in exchange of natural gas transported across the common border. Moscow also announced that it would aid Iran in strengthening defense capability under a friendly cooperation agreement of a type normally reserved for its close allies. The final communique reached between the two countries referred to overall economic, scientific and technological cooperation between Iran and the Soviet Union upto to the year 2000.⁴⁵

Rafsanjani has clearly demonstrated that pragmatism can pay well in his country's relations with the rest of the world. Thus, Gorbachev who is also a pragmatist did not prove to be a difficult

44. Charles A. Kupchan, "And Ready To Talk", *Orbis*, op. cit.

45. *Newsweek*, July 3, 1989.

customer. As a result, it was convenient for Iran to move towards a 'correct relations' with Moscow—a term which in international politics connotes friendly relations free from irritants and prejudices.

The foregoing discussion makes it evident that Rafsanjani in his endeavour to make a breakthrough in Iran's foreign policy has been constrained by many imponderables left over by the previous regime. Of special concern to him has been the ideological orthodoxy inherited by few of his opponents from Khomeini that time and again encroached upon many of his foreign policy decisions. As a result, he had little maneuverability to tackle few pressing foreign policy issues that have been lingering since the time of Khomeini. It was not until the Gulf crisis that Rafsanjani had an independent stance in pursuing a singularly principled policy towards an issue that originated during his time.

Gulf Crisis and Iran : The Gulf crisis arising over Iraq's annexation of Kuwait placed Iran in an advantageous political position. Soon it became a key player in the game reaping few benefits out of the incident through a cautious and balanced approach to the crisis. In this respect, Iran's policy towards the new crisis may be divided into three distinct phases, i. e. pre-war policy, war time policy and post war policy.

Pre-war policy : Soon after the crisis, an important political development, Iraq-Iran rapprochement provided a grist for understanding Iranian policy towards the crisis. For Iran, the big gain has been merely psychological rather than anything tangible. It was able to impose its own peace terms on her arch rival, securing a verbal recognition of the 1975 Algiers Treaty that recognizes Iran's sovereignty over eastern half of the Shatt-al-Arab waterway. On the other hand, the calculation of Saddam was based on some vital factors—both material and psychological.

First, a peace with Iran would bring both the countries under one banner united by a common enmity towards the US and Saudi Arabia and a desire to drive up oil prices in international market. **Second**, through a rapprochement with Iran, Iraq has had the chance to free upto 24 divisions totaling more than 300,000 troops deployed along the border with Iran. **Third**, in case of an international trade embargo, Iran would be the only back door through which the embargo could be breached.⁴⁶

Despite the fact that the new Iranian leadership with several challenges at home reaped few benefits out of the peace deal, on the core issue of Iraq's annexation of Kuwait, Iran's policy has been one of great caution. Although Iran did not ingratiate itself with the US-led multinational force arrayed against Iraq, nonetheless, it could not remain indifferent to Iraq's act of aggression. More frustrating to Saddam has been the Iranian gesture that it had no objection to the presence of foreign troops meant for pushing Iraq out of Kuwait. President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani himself said, "one possibility is that they could put a stop to aggression which we don't mind. Any sort of help from anyone is acceptable".⁴⁷ This indicated a tacit Iranian approval of Western presence in the Gulf to confront Iraq in all possible manner.

The reality that cannot be dispensed with is that the hostilities between these two traditional enemies are in-built in their national psychosis. It was undesirable on the Iranian part to see Iraq as a dominant land and maritime power in the Gulf. By the same token any change in Kuwait's geographical position was totally unacceptable to Iran. At the psychological front too, the Iranians were found unlikely to forget so soon the havoc wrought by Saddam's gas-missile complex during the war.

46. *Holiday*, September 28, 1990.

47. *Ibid.*

The pertinent question is why has there been the Iranian clamour for a holy war against the US in the region in consonance with Iraqi sentiment? This was, perhaps, a well calculated political game of Iran at initial stage. Khomeini's call for a holy war against the US did not have the underpinning of a similar call by late Khomeini for a number of reasons. **First**, Iran was acting more out of instinctive and ideological dispositions than a desire to support Iraq in any way. By terming the US presence in the region as satanic, the Iranian leadership appeared to be less militant in cultivating anti-West sentiment in the country. This is probably due to Rafsanjani's commitment to promoting domestic economic reconstruction and its new policy of bridge-building with the West. The loss of Iran's strategic card due to demise of cold war is a factor that Iran is well aware of. As a result, Iranian efforts were looked upon as maneuver to attract the West so that she could be used as a wild card by the US to play against Iraq. Many political analysts tend to believe that during the crisis many Western governments sent signals to Iran to draw her into their orbit. However, within the complicated web of current Iranian politics marked by conflicting political and ideological under currents of the conservative, extremist and pragmatist, the Iranian motive was not clear to many. **Second**, Iranian leaders may have recognized the fact that the US presence in the region would be for the time being in the interest of their country on two counts : (i) it would weaken its one-time enemy, Iraq, and (ii) it may induce internal disturbance in Saudi Arabia toward which Iran feels a deep antipathy. **Third**, Western presence in the region did not seem to irritate Iran much. Two of Iran's close allies, Pakistan and Syria joined the multinational force spearheaded by the US. Their move, instead of being criticized by Iran was rather supported.⁴⁸

Taking cognizance of the fact that the US presence had been the cardinal factor in dividing the Arab political house, Iran was

48. *Ibid.*

conveniently playing on both sides. This added to the political credence of Iran. Despite an apparent rapprochement with Iraq, Iran's policy was dictated by few realities : (i) with unlimited and indefinite ambition, Saddam was not well trusted in Iran. Analysts believed that sooner or later Rafsanjani would come up with the same pronouncement made during the Gulf war that "the removal of Saddam's regime is a strategic goal on which Iran will not compromise".⁴⁹ Iran's policy in post-Gulf war period reflects the similar intent of Rafsanjani, (ii) Iran wanted to see the crisis a prolonged one so that it saps Arab wealth and energy. Besides, an Arab solution to the problem failed to curry Iranian favour. Instead, a solution within a broad regional framework facilitating Iran's role was sought by the present leadership.

In all its manifestations, Iran's policy towards the Gulf crisis in its initial stage was dictated by its own interests. The new regime's commitment to Islam and the revolution remained firm in its place. To boost up its economy plagued by inflation, low productivity, lack of investment and insufficient oil revenues, Iran under Rafsanjani was looking for a quick opening to the West. As a result, Rafsanjani resorted to *neutrality* as the best possible way to keep Iran on safe footing. However, this did not necessarily confirm Iran's approval of Western presence in the region for an indefinite period of time. Rafsanjani calculated it well that despite Iran's loss of strategic clout to the West, economic opportunities at home may still influence the industrialized West and Japan to reckon her with great importance.

War time policy : The war in the Gulf has been a crucial test for Rafsanjani to maintain his country's neutrality in the crisis. It had its spill-over effect across the Iranian border that too was threatened by allied aerial bombardment against Iraq. Few initial war developments seem to have perturbed the Iranian leadership.

49. Quoted in J. M. Abdul Ghani, *Iraq and Iran : The Years of Crisis*, (Croom Helm Ltd., London, 1984), p. 207.

In particular, giving refuge to 10% of Iraqi planes put Iran's professed neutrality into question.⁵⁰ In this connection, a speculation rose high that a secret deal was made in August authorizing the 'strategic transfer' of Iraqi planes to Iran if the need arose. A Geneva based newspaper, *La Suisse* quoted a senior Iranian official as saying that "this was only the tip of an iceberg because the pact known in Iran as the Simorgh plan included other operational clauses. It was concluded out of Islamic solidarity".⁵¹ The scenario appeared to be further intriguing when a war propaganda that Saddam by sending the aircrafts across the frontier intended to draw Iran on its side was launched by the allied coalition. However, that strategy has not worked. President Rafsanjani, determined to milk the Gulf war for all it is worth has not deviated from his earlier policy stance, neither has he succumbed to the pressure of the radicals who wanted an alignment with Iraq in a new Islamic front against the Great satan and its accomplices. It may be mentioned that the Iranian radicals who have been worsted by Rafsanjani in Iran's endless power struggles saw the war as a chance to claw back some of their influence. Led by Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, the former interior minister, Mehdi Karrubi, the speaker of the Majlis, and Ahmed Khomeini, son of late Khomeini, the radicals exerted pressure on Rafsanjani to join Iraq in a jihad against the US.⁵² Finally Rafsanjani's assurance that the planes that landed in Iran would be impounded till the war is over appeased the allied forces and removed all doubts and suspicion that hovered around this issue.

However, the war by all calculations placed Iran in a predicament in setting its goals. It became apparent that Iran did not want a victorious Iraq out of the war to tip the regional balance. By the same token, a victory of the US too bore a sign of

50. *Asia Week*, February 15, 1991.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *The Economist*, February 2, 1991.

danger for Iran. It was perceived that continuation of US presence in the region might incense Iran's anti-West radicals and create the possibility of new turbulence in the region. This could be a hurdle on the way of Rafsanjani's endeavour to steer Iran away from the legacy of Khomeini. As a result, the Iranian leadership sought to follow a 'middle of the road' policy to placate both the warring sides.

By being a peace broker Rafsanjani intended to patch things up with the regional as well as Western countries. Iran's offer of a peace formula to Iraq and its intention to mediate between Iraq and the US have been the decisions taken independently by Rafsanjani. Towards this end, Rafsanjani went to the extent of saying that "if it is necessary for peace, then it is logical that we speak to the Americans".⁵³ Notwithstanding the fact that the Iranian diplomatic move was taken in conformity with the UN Security Council resolutions, such efforts met with no success as there were few to accept the Iranian initiative. Besides, as war developments indicated the Anglo-US war aims seemed to go well beyond the UN resolutions meant to drive Iraq out of Kuwait.

Despite this failure, Rafsanjani earned big diplomatic dividends for his country as President Bush said, "Iran is now a credible member of the international society and is behaving itself in a statesman like manner".⁵⁴ But such appreciation was not tangible enough to assure Iran about its future potential role in the Gulf.

The Post-war policy : The post-war developments have been both dismaying as well as heartwarming for Iran. Despite an early shrinking of Iraqi military muscle much to its satisfaction, Iran is not entirely easy about the future. Of particular concern to Iran

53. *Asia Week*, February 15, 1991.

54. *Dialogue*, February 22, 1991.

has been the open intention of the US to stay in the Gulf to safeguard the Gulf countries and their oil. This is felt to be a threat to its own security in the region. Besides, exclusion of Iran from the US sponsored post-war regional security arrangement in the Gulf was a further humiliation for Iran. The US move has been a jolt to Iran's own version of a 'new order in the Gulf'. Considering the basic follies in the efforts and means of his predecessors in projecting Iran's preponderant role in the Gulf, Rafsanjani has been more cautious and rational in his approach towards the same goal. He resorted to diplomacy to accomplish a constructive role for Iran in the region. Thus, Iran has been busy trying to persuade the Gulf countries that they would be better off within a local security pact devoid of outside interference.

These events despite being frustrating to Iran have not prevented the new leadership from undertaking few calculated moves to serve Iranian interests. On the whole Iran enjoyed a good war by the allies against Iraq. The destruction of Iraq's military machine has removed the biggest threat to Iran's security that might pave the way for Iran to usher in as the Gulf's main local power. Since Iraq's capitulation to the US-led multinational force, Iran has taken an adventurist move to unseat Saddam's regime by lending support to the Shiite rebellions in southern Iraq. This, however, is not an unexpected gesture. Iran has been looking for an opportunity to exploit the sentiments of Iraqi Shiites against Saddam for long. Thus, following the internal revolt in Iraq against Saddam by the Shiites and the Kurds, Iran has taken a ripe opportunity to topple the baathist government of Saddam by lending its open support to the dissident Shiites. In no time Iran turned into a centre of activities of such organizations like the Islamic Revolution in Iraq and the Iraqi Solidarity Group which have been opposing Saddam's rule for more than a decade. The recent meeting of a Shiite Iraqi opposition group in Lebanon is also reported to have been organized by Iran.⁵⁵

55. *Holiday*, March 22, 1991.

As it appears, the post-war development clearly divulged the underlying aim of Iranian policy towards Iraq. The rapprochement that it underwent with Iraq has been proved merely a marriage of convenience. The removal of Saddam still remains to be Iran's strategic goal as clearly indicated in one of Rafsanjani's recent pronouncements. This coupled with other factor that Iran would retain the aircrafts as a down-payment on the reparations it feels is owed by Iraq (for damage inflicted during their own eight year war) has once again brought the relation between these countries to its lowest ebb. Nonetheless, the pragmatists in Iran seem to be compensating for the failure of their recent adventure in Iraq through other means.

The post-war developments in the Gulf seem to have compelled Iran to make a fresh thinking about its foreign policy. In the light of present political realities, the Iranian leadership finds the entire region virtually falling a prey to Pax Americana. Its next door neighbour, Iraq, with or without Saddam would also come under the same influence. Under such circumstances, the Iranian leadership feels that without normal relations with the West many of her domestic and foreign policy objectives may remain far from being fulfilled. The realization became more apparent when the Iranian interference in Iraq's internal turbulence was thwarted by a US threat. As a result, the new dent in Iran's political thinking has led it to build correct relations with the countries remaining under exclusive Western sphere of influence. In this respect, the recent decision by Saudi Arabia and Iran to resume diplomatic relations after a break of three years heals a rift between the two prominent Gulf countries.⁵⁶ This diplomatic breakthrough has two important implications. **First**, there is now the prospect of Iran's involvement in the post-war arrangement to enhance Gulf security and stability. Besides, the restoration of ties would open the portal for greater political and economic coope-

56. *Khaleej Times*, March 22, 1991.

ration between Tehran and Arab Gulf states that are bound together by their oil exports and traditional trading links. **Second**, this move would set a great example for other neighbouring states to forge a concrete and well-meaning relationship in the wake of the Kuwait crisis.

Meanwhile, for Iran there have been other opportunities in the platter to cultivate relations with West afresh. The Iranian leadership has not been critical about the US proposal for creating a refugee zone in northern Iraq by driving out the Iraqi soldiers from the proposed zone. An outstanding breakthrough in Iranian policy to be reckoned with great significance is its granting of permission for stationing German troops in Iranian soil. Besides, a US aircraft carrying relief materials for the Shiite and Kurdish refugees has been permitted to land at Tehran airport—an incident not witnessed since the Iranian revolution in 1979. Although Iranian measures are believed to have been taken on a humanitarian ground, these gestures have deep underlying political connotations.

Concluding Remarks

The post-Khomeini Iran is still in a transitional phase facing several political, economic and social challenges at home. These challenges require the urgent policy decisions of the new leadership who have pledged to the Iranians that the price of revolution is not isolation and poverty, but economic, political and spiritual development. While to this end, the new leadership has made few breakthroughs in Iran's domestic and foreign policies, the fact remains that the pragmatists on most occasions have been compelled to accommodate the hardliners in their policy making. This goes to show the vulnerability of Rafsanjani's government to the radicalism of the hardliners. However, against all these odds the new leadership seems to have

fares well in its initial political and economic maneuvers to pull Iran out of its previous position.

As it appears there are now a number of opportunities for the pragmatists in Iran to take advantage of. The decimation of Iraq's military might has eliminated a potential threat to its security. This may add an impetus to its economic reconstruction programme by avoiding wastage of resources on armaments. Its relations with the neighbouring countries are improving and a positive relationship with the West is in sight. Besides, oil revenues are expected to rise in future.

However, much of the success of the Iranian leadership would depend on the extent to which it conforms to the new realities unleashed by the new political order both at the international and regional levels. In this respect, Iran is expected to come out with a vigorous foreign policy seeking an adjustment and accommodation with the countries it deems necessary. But all such measures would not necessarily amount to a compromise with Iran's Islamic values and an autonomous image. In all likelihood, Rafsanjani would continue to tread a careful line between the pragmatists and the hardliners. He may succeed so long as the latter are convinced that Rafsanjani's objectives are not to deprive Iran of its rightful place in the international community but rather to promote it.