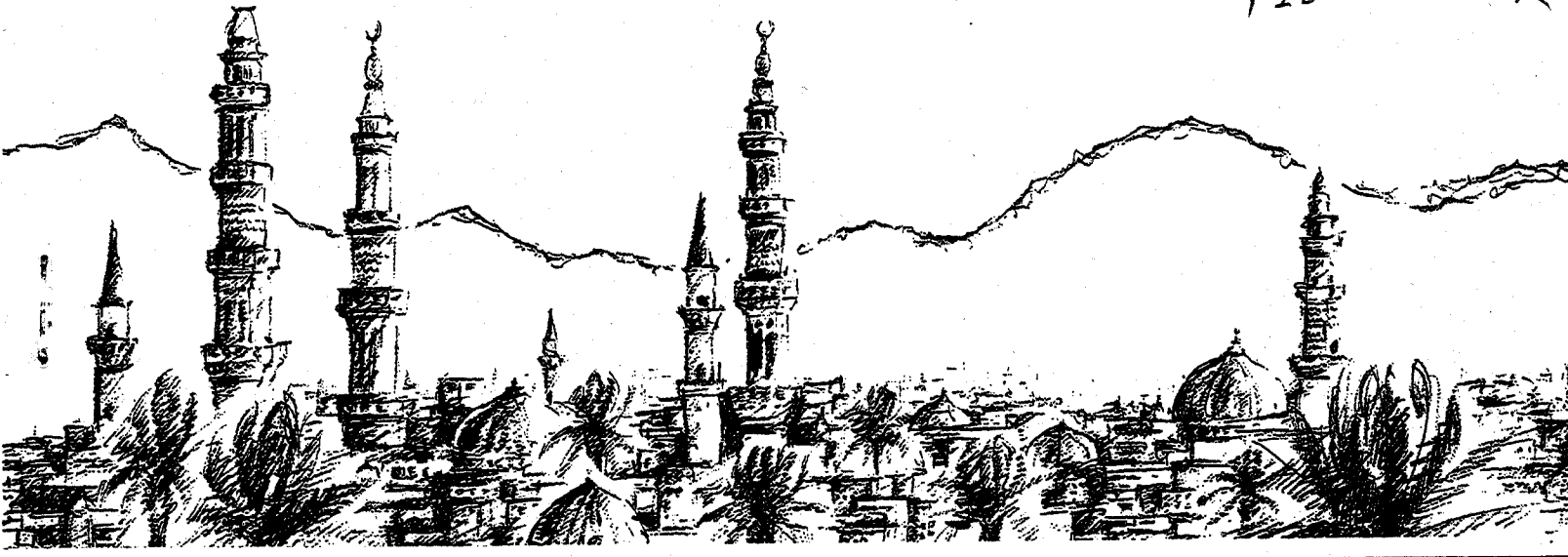


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The United States
Air Force in the
Persian Gulf War

Roots of Conflict

A Military Perspective on the
Middle East and Persian Gulf Crisis

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**Center for Air Force History
1993**

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INTRODUCTION

On August 2, 1990, the Republic of Iraq occupied the Emirate of Kuwait, extinguished its government and armed forces, and annexed it. This action followed an escalating dispute between the two countries. In brief, the Kuwaitis had refused three Iraqi demands: to forgive loans worth billions of dollars made to Iraq during its war with Iran in the 1980s; to adhere to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' lowered petroleum sales quotas; and to cease the alleged over-exploitation of the Rumelia oil field,¹ which extends across a portion of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border. Although the Iraqis may have prepared for their move far in advance,² the Kuwaitis' rejection of their demands provided the ostensible reason for the invasion. Iraq also had tenuous claims, unrecognized by the international community, to overall suzerainty of Kuwait, based on the administrative arrangements it claimed the British had established during their rule of the 1920s through the 1940s, the Ottoman Turks had established during their Empire of the 16th through 19th centuries, and the Baghdad caliphate had established even earlier. By substituting action for rhetoric, Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein, transformed a regional quarrel into a world crisis when he seized his neighbor, Kuwait.

By this action, Saddam doubled his proven petroleum reserves to approximately 200 billion barrels and gained control of about 20 percent of the world's total crude oil production. Within a week after Kuwait City

1. Caryle Murphy, "Persian Gulf Crisis Swells: Iraqi Is Given New Title," *The Washington Post*, Jul 20, 1990, p. A12.

2. James Blackwell, *Thunder in the Desert: The Strategy and Tactics of the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), p. 72. Blackwell refers to unnamed intelligence sources who claim that the Iraqis had trained since 1989 on one-to-one mock-ups of Kuwait in a base camp in southeastern Iraq.

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fell, hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers, sailors, and airmen began to arrive in Saudi Arabia, not only to protect the Saudi monarchy from Iraqi aggression but also to reverse the conquest of Kuwait. When U.S. and world economic sanctions, political pressure, and diplomatic negotiations all failed in the face of Saddam's unbending determination to retain his newly acquired nineteenth province, only two choices remained to the United States, Saudi Arabia, and their many allies: war or surrender. Surrender had unthinkable domestic political consequences for the alliance's leaders. It would guarantee international anarchy by allowing Iraq and other revisionist powers to act on their desire to rearrange the globe to their advantage, free from the threat of reprisal. Therefore, the President of the United States, George H. W. Bush; the King of Saudi Arabia, Fahd ibn Abd al Aziz Al Saud; and their allies chose war.

Early on the morning of January 17, 1991, the Persian Gulf War began. It consisted of massive allied air strikes on Iraq and Iraqi targets in Kuwait. The United States Air Force spearheaded the air offensive and furnished the bulk of the attacking aircraft. During forty-two days of fighting, the U.S. Air Force simultaneously conducted two closely coordinated air campaigns: one in support of allied ground forces; the other, attacking strategic targets. Planners of the strategic air campaign sought to isolate and incapacitate Saddam Hussein's government; gain and maintain air supremacy to permit unhindered air operations; destroy Iraq's nuclear, biological, and chemical capabilities; and eliminate Iraq's offensive military capability, which included its key military production facilities, their infrastructure, and the instruments it used to project its power—the Iraqi Air Force, the Republican Guard, and short-range ballistic missiles.³

This study develops background information to place the Persian Gulf War in its proper historical and cultural contexts, unfamiliar to and not easily understood by Americans. The first essay quickly summarizes the relationship between Arab culture and Islam, the history of Islam

3. Briefing Slide, "Air Campaign Plan & Targets," Reflections on DESERT STORM: The Air Campaign, Lt Gen Charles A. Horner, Commanding General, Ninth Air Force, n.d. [May 1991].

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and the Arab conquests, and the creation of one of the flash points in present-day Middle Eastern conflicts—the Arab-Jewish dispute over Palestine. The second essay provides a military analysis of the Arab-Israeli wars from 1948 to 1982. It describes the performance of the engaged armed forces, the performance of Western versus Soviet weapons systems, the development of the respective forces' military professionalization, and the ability of the warring parties to learn from their experiences. The final three essays describe the recent history of the three regional powers of the Persian Gulf—Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq. In addition to providing a detailed character analysis of Saddam Hussein and a military analysis of the Iran-Iraq War, these final sections examine the tension that arose in the three nations when the desire for modernization confronted the demands of Islamic conservatism.

Cultural and Historical Background

Muhammad, the Prophet of God, his revelations and teachings, and the people who first followed him, the Arabs, dominate life in the Middle East. The religion founded by Muhammad—Islam—and its associated traditions, culture, and judicial system pervade all aspects of daily life in the region that encompasses an area of northern Africa and southwest Asia, from Libya in the west to Afghanistan in the east. In countries like Turkey that have anticlerical traditions and in those like Syria and Iraq that have secular socialist governments, only with great difficulty can rulers force significant societal changes on their less radical, less religiously imbued subjects. Although the twentieth century has brought a thin veneer of western thought and western modernization to the Middle East, it has not erased thirteen and a half centuries of Islam. So it was that when tens of thousands of American military men and women arrived in the region, they faced a civilization as different from their own as any on earth—one stranger and even more difficult to comprehend than the one their compatriots encountered when they arrived in Vietnam.

Islam grew from roots planted firmly in Arab culture. The Arabs had a complex and ancient lifestyle originating at the end of the most recent ice age, which left the Arabian Peninsula a desert punctuated by a few oases. For thousands of years, the people of the peninsula adjusted to their harsh environment which permitted only a small margin for error and helped generate a culture both inflexible and tradition bound. (With the such emphasis on survival, little wonder the Arabic language contains 6,000 words for items and thoughts relating to camels.) Two closely related groups evolved from this society: nomads and oasis dwell-

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lers. The nomads' lifestyle discouraged fixed residences and the accumulation of weighty or bulky goods and wealth. It encouraged the accomplishments of the mind: religion, language, genealogy, and relationships. Of the three types of nomadic tribesmen, also known as Bedouins, camel herdsman had primacy over sheep herdsman or goat herdsman. The camel, not the horse which could not thrive in the harsh desert, conferred unparalleled mobility because it could cross large sections of the desert without needing water. For thousands of years, nomadic tribes ranged their seasonal pasturage, raiding and stealing from the herds of their neighbors, or seizing their pasturage. This engendered a warrior ethos, with an accompanying code of honor, and a fierce loyalty toward the tribe. More perniciously, it ingrained an enduring tradition of retaliation and blood feuds. As a group, the Arabs developed no overriding or universal law or authority to judge disputes. For the tribes, and even for a larger sect within a tribe, life consisted of war of all against all; no alliance or coalition survived the death or disenchantment of its makers. This led to a permanent mind-set that Americans in particular find difficult to comprehend: An Arab is less concerned with the right or wrong of another individual's case or the justice of his own complaint than he is with the honor of his tribe, which is measured by the strength and capability of his own tribe relative to the strength and capability of his opponent's tribe. As long as an Arab's tribe can protect a tribe member from retaliation, the individual may do as he wishes.⁴ In the modern Arab world, this phenomenon plays out time and again. In its least attractive form, it is seen in the treatment of both Palestinian Arabs and foreign workers and in the taking of hostages.

Although by the time of Muhammad, Arabian oasis dwellers may have outnumbered nomads, their political position was lower. Oasis dwellers—more often than not, closely related by blood and tribe to the nomads—prospered from their mercantile and agricultural endeavors. However, their dependence on a caravan-based commerce and on agriculture (in particular, their dependence on extensive date tree groves) made

4. Fred McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 40–41.

them vulnerable to raids and blackmail, euphemistically called taxation, demanded by the nomads. A few sessile tribes, such as that of Muhammad's birth, the Quraysh of Mecca, used a religious function to expand their influence. The Quraysh had long provided the priests and caretakers for the Kaaba, a shrine filled with idols dedicated to ancestor worship. Even before Muhammad cleansed the Kaaba, turning it into Islam's holiest site, large numbers of pilgrims had conducted an annual pilgrimage there. Like all tourists, they left a portion of their wealth behind, enriching the Quraysh and helping to finance its commercial efforts. By the end of the sixth century A.D., the Quraysh had graduated from being a tribe of simple merchants to one of merchant bankers, with extensive contacts in the Arabian Peninsula and in the entrepôts of the spice trade. These contacts also served as a primitive, but useful, intelligence system. Some Quraysh members also possessed extensive managerial and organizational skills.⁵

The Prophet Muhammad was an Arab. He never left the Arabian Peninsula; he never dealt with significant numbers of non-Arabs, save for the Jews of Medina, whom he eventually destroyed or exiled because they rejected his message. Like the most of his compatriots, he could neither read nor write. His teachings addressed the universal issues of good and evil, salvation and damnation, and the conduct of the believer in this world—these he addressed from the context and perceptions of a man who both ruled an Arab community and led Arabs in battle. By the time of his death in A.D. 632, he had succeeded in organizing the Arabs, then exclusively inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, into a unified polity.

Many factors aided Muhammad in his establishment of the first monolithic state in north and central Arabia. Although his God-given message and personal talents conferred on him unique advantages, so did the timing of his birth. The merchants of Mecca had at last developed the necessary administrative skills for empire. For reasons yet unclear, the tribe of Mecca seemed more receptive to a centralizing impulse and had almost reached a point of initiating a mass migration from the

5. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

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peninsula. Theories speculate that this readiness to migrate resulted from overpopulation (a lack of pasturage, for example) and from prolonged drought. In addition, the two great powers of the region, the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire—which occupied present-day North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Anatolia, Greece, and the Balkans—and the Sasanian Empire—comprised of the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys, Persia, and a portion of the Central Asian Steppes—had exhausted themselves in prolonged and ruinous warfare. Religious conflict in the form of popularly supported heresies against the official state orthodoxies further weakened the internal cohesion of the Christian Byzantine and Zoroastrian Sasanian states.

Muhammad did not merely produce the spark to ignite the already waiting tinder of circumstance, he did far more. He assembled the inert stone and mortar at hand into an enduring edifice of his own design. The Prophet's gift for political consolidation was first demonstrated by his speedy ascension to the dominant chiefdom of Medina. In his years on the caravan routes, before his revelations, he had become intimately familiar with the tribes and their peculiarities. He coupled his knowledge of tribal politics with the traditional means of alliance building: wives, gold, trade, and land. Above all he evinced an extraordinary judgment of his fellowman, favoring leniency and restraint over coercion, and winning over those who could be converted while ruthlessly crushing those who could not. Muhammad's attitude toward conversion and apostasy showed his pragmatism. Whereas anyone, even the enemy on the battlefield, could convert to Islam with a simple phrase acknowledging the primacy of Allah, and be accepted immediately into the community of believers, Muhammad decreed death for the apostate. Simple conversions increased the flock and weakened the will of enemy forces by offering them quarter. Once one became part of the community of believers, the advantages of membership in the group were to be seen as reason sufficient to seduce the individual into remaining. Death for apostasy discouraged members from recanting while assuring that apostates would neither receive nor ask for quarter in battle.

Muhammad, the Messenger of God, overshadowed Muhammad the

political leader. Like early Christianity, early Islam had a powerful leveling tendency that lessened social and economic distinctions among believers. Muhammad preached that all men were equal in the sight of God. This widened Islam's appeal and aided in the recruitment of new members. Islam supplied the higher universal law that had been lacking in Arabic culture. Instead of being caught up in the infinite variability of tribal power politics, a follower could now appeal to a fixed and standard set of divine rules. It was beyond the Prophet's power to eliminate the practice of retaliation; however, he put restrictions on it. Retaliation could occur only if an injured party retaliated for the breaking of Islamic code; retaliation was not to be used to settle a personal grudge. Muhammad forbade feuding within the community of believers. By eliminating the perpetual round of blood feuds, he increased the cohesion among believers. The community of believers, or *umma*, gave its members an institution above and beyond the tribe, one in which all authority could be centralized. Muhammad also expounded at length on the details of the day-to-day life of the members of the *umma*, including matters of their inheritance, marriage, and slavery. Believers could live a life free of the tribe, based on divine guidelines. By tamping down tribal and personal conflict, while simultaneously placing all believers under the control of a single man and one God, Islam supplied an element of cohesiveness and continuity heretofore missing in earlier Arabian Peninsula tribal confederations.⁶

Muhammad's last recorded speech in A.D. 632 at Mecca affirmed many of the above points: "Know that every Muslim is a Muslim's brother, and that the Muslims are brethren; fighting between them should be avoided, and the blood shed in pagan times should not be avenged; Muslims should fight all men until they say, 'There is no god but God'."⁷

Within thirty years of his death, Muhammad's followers had completely overthrown the Sasanian Empire, stripped the Byzantines

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-61.

7. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1991), p. 19.

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from North Africa, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, and codified his instructions in written form, the Qur'an. Not only did these conquests impose Arab rule and Islam, they imposed Arab culture. Study of the Qur'an, required of all believers, encouraged the use of Arabic as the religious and literary language of the new empire. While the Arab conquerors occupied the great cities of the East, they founded their own military cities, such as present-day Cairo, Egypt, in an attempt to separate themselves from the local population. Although the Arabs came from outside the existing civilizations, which by definition made them barbarians, they did not employ exceptionally vicious methods, such as the Mongols did in Eastern Europe and Asia or the Spanish did in the New World. In fact, the Muslims either developed or stumbled upon an elegant and subtle means of perpetuating their rule. Instead of forced mass conversion to Islam and the slaughtering of the upper and administrative classes (other than on the battlefield), the Muslims allowed the local populace to exercise their existing religion freely (something the old governments had not done) and to maintain but not to expand their religious sites. The Muslims retained Arabic as the language of their courts and merely required that their civil servants be believers in Islam and that all non-Muslims pay an extra, and not exorbitant, annual head tax. In short order, the Arabs also forbade non-Muslims from marrying Muslim women, prohibited the wearing of clothes of certain colors by non-Muslims, and refused to accept the testimony of non-Muslims in Muslim courts of law.⁸ The old governing families of the conquered Byzantine and Sasanian provinces converted within a generation, but the process took far longer in some areas of the outlying countryside. The Coptic Christians of present-day Egypt never converted, but, within a relatively short time, the vast majority of the conquered citizenry, like their overlords, would pray five times a day facing in the direction of the city of Muhammad's birth, Mecca.

The European world regarded the overthrow of the last of the Roman Empire and the occupation of the Christian Holy Lands as

8. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

unparalleled disasters. They resisted the Muslim conquest. Arabic raids throughout the Mediterranean Sea and the further conquest of much of the Iberian Peninsula reinforced the threat and the Europeans' fears. However, in time the Christians of Iberia would reconquer their land and number themselves among Islam's most implacable foes. Other peoples submitted: The Semitic Syrians and Palestinians had much in common with their equally Semitic Arab cousins, and the vast mass of the Egyptian population had a centuries-old tradition of phlegmatic service to whoever ruled them. Likewise, the Berbers of North Africa had a nomadic tribal society that, after some early resistance, found Islam well adapted to its needs.

Lands to the east also succumbed as the Islamic and Arabic tide rolled across Sasanian Persia, Afghanistan, the Indus River valley, and parts of central Asia. The eastern conquests proved more difficult to assimilate. The Persians, of course, formed the bulk of the peasantry in Persia proper, an area roughly analogous to present-day Iran, and they also comprised the ruling class of the Sasanian Empire. They continued many of their duties under the caliphs, in spite of the fact that they traditionally considered themselves both distinct from and superior to the Arabs. They absorbed Islam and the Qur'an, but they proceeded to add a twist in keeping with the far more mystical beliefs of their former religion. This shift, introduced in the East, created the largest and most enduring of the Muslim schisms, a heresy comparable in significance to the Reformation.

The heresy began with a dispute over the succession from Muhammad, and it developed into something more profound. Unlike the first three caliphs, the fourth—Ali ibn Abi Talib—shared the bloodline of the Prophet Muhammad. Ali was the Prophet's first cousin and had married his daughter, Fatima. Ali ruled indecisively from A.D. 656 to 661. He died at the hand of an assassin at Kufa, an Arab garrison city on the Euphrates River, south of present-day Baghdad. A new dynasty, the Umayyads, moved the Caliphate to Damascus, and Ali's second son by Fatima, Husayn, a direct descendent of the Prophet, revolted in A.D. 680. He raised a tiny band of followers, moved hesitantly, and died with his

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infant son (a threat because of his ancestry) near Karbala, a town between Kufa and Baghdad. A far larger enemy force had surprised him, riddled his camp with arrows, and put Husayn and many of his supporters to the sword. Despite these setbacks, a group of Muslims continued to see Ali and his direct heirs, who had the blood of the Prophet, as the legitimate heads of the community of believers, or Imams.

Ten Imams followed Ali and Husayn before the line ended with the disappearance of the last Imam, Muhammad, in A.D. 874. The adherents of Ali (in Arabic, the *shi'at Ali* or *Shi'is*; in English, Shias or devotees of Shia, also called "twelver" Shias to distinguish them from the lesser branches of Shia) endowed Ali and his line with almost divine, at least more than human, qualities, and thought that by transmission from the Prophet they had received a unique nobility of the soul and a special insight into the Qur'an. The Shias lived in the expectation of the day of the coming of the Mahdi, "him who is guided," when the twelfth Imam would arise and begin the rule of justice in the world.⁹ As noted, this messianic movement found its greatest support in the Persian portions of the Arab Empire. When that area regained its independence in the fourteenth century A.D., the Persian King of Kings made the Shia form of Islam the state religion. Persia as well as present-day Iran has remained a state with a majority Shia population. The sites of the tombs of Ali (Al Najaf), his son Husayn (Karbala), and six of their successor Imams in Iraq had become objects of veneration for all Shias by the tenth century A.D. Iraq now counts approximately 60 to 65 percent Shias among its population.

More orthodox Muslims, by no means a single sect that agreed on all points of doctrine and practice, continued to hold a more traditional and less mystical faith. They believed in the primacy of the words and deeds of the Prophet, as demonstrated in the Qur'an and in the daily practices of his life (together, known as *sunna*). They accepted the legitimacy of the first four caliphs as the rightful successors to Muhammad and became known as Sunnites, and their branch of Islam became

9. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

known as Sunni. Most Muslims adhere to some form of Sunnism.

In A.D. 762, Caliph Al Mansur began to build for the Arab Empire a new capital, Baghdad, possibly named after the Persian word for "the gift of God."¹⁰ Not until a hundred years later did the Arab Empire reach its zenith, but by then the caliphs and their government officials had lost control of the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula, whose members had more or less reverted to their former chaotic civilization and had ceased to send large numbers of warriors to outside regions. In A.D. 1258, after a life-span that exceeded by a hundred years the life-span of the Western Roman Empire, the Arab Empire fell. In that year, the Mongols killed the caliph, sacked Baghdad, and, with their usual insensitivity to collateral damage, slaughtered perhaps 800,000 of its residents.

Eventually most of the region passed into the control of another Islamic empire, that of the Ottoman Turks, where it stayed for at least another 600 years. In the last decades of the Ottoman Empire—those preceding World War I—North Africa, Egypt, and several ports and principalities in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf came under the colonial rule or protection of either the French or the British. With the defeat and breakup of the Turkish Empire in 1918–1919, the French acquired the League of Nations mandate for Lebanon and Syria in 1922, while the British received mandates both for Palestine (which included Palestine and Jordan) and for Iraq in 1920. The mandate for Palestine obliged the British to honor an undertaking that they had committed themselves to during the war. On November 2, 1917, in the Balfour Declaration (named for British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour), His Majesty's Government sponsored "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of that object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-

10. Robert Payne, *The Holy Sword: The Story of Islam from Muhammad to the Present* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1959), p. 157.

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Jewish communities in Palestine.¹¹ Also, during the war, the British had encouraged the Arabs in their hope for political independence, as evidenced in the correspondence between the British Political Officer for Egypt and the sharif of Mecca (the McMahon-Husayn correspondence of 1915-1916).¹²

These rather contradictory wartime undertakings quickly became not one, but two apples of discord. The British refused to grant the Arabs independence and alienated them, leading to a 1941 revolt in Iraq and to anti-British activities within the British-dominated Egyptian Army during the 1941-1942 Western Desert campaigns. British efforts at evenhandedness in implementing the Balfour Declaration barely kept the lid on a pot they themselves had brought to a boil. The Jews pushed for maximum immigration into Palestine. The rise of Hitler and of anti-Semitism in Europe created pressure for an even greater influx of Jews. British attempts to reduce the flow met with intense and emotional opposition from the Jews. For the Arabs, the imposition of additional Jews threatened their own stake in Palestine. The Western-oriented, relatively wealthy (by Middle Eastern standards), energetic, Jewish interlopers set up new communities and purchased old land. Thus any land transferred from Arab to Jewish hands meant more Jews and fewer Arabs in Palestine, a reality both sides accepted. By the end of the 1930s, both groups had resorted to terrorism and counterterrorism. British efforts to control the violence merely put them in the middle of a cross-fire. In fact, a Jewish-launched terrorist campaign ended the British occupation of Palestine. The Jews, in part, felt that the British had favored the Arabs in the dispute. They further reasoned that they would emerge victorious in any future conflict in Palestine if the British could not restrain them.

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted to partition Palestine, west of the River Jordan, into separate

11. William L. Langer, ed., *An Encyclopedia of World History*, 5th ed (Boston, Mass.: Houghton & Mifflin, 1972), p. 1091.

12. Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples*, p. 316.

Jewish and Arab states. Arab rejection and British foot-dragging delayed implementation of the resolution until the next year. In early 1948, Jewish underground armies intensified their terrorist attacks against both British and Arab, hoping to consolidate their position before partitioning occurred. Despite the open and somewhat understandable favoritism shown by the British toward the Arabs in this situation, tens of thousands of terrified Palestinian Arabs, encouraged by neighboring Arab states, fled their homes for the safety of surrounding Arab countries. On May 14, 1948, the British Mandate in Palestine ended, setting the stage for a series of wars between the new Jewish state and the surrounding Arab countries.¹³ Because of the great intensity of these wars and because several of them pitted arms designed and manufactured in Western Europe and America against arms designed and produced by the Soviet Union, a brief study of these events reveals some similarities and lessons applicable to the war in the Persian Gulf.

13. For a recent and balanced, but pro-Jewish, account of these events, see Howard M. Sacher, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time* (New York: Knopf, 1989), pp. 116-314. For a straightforward narrative of mildly Arabic leanings on the circumstances surrounding the partition, see Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples*, pp. 359-60.

The Arab-Israeli Wars

Israel became a state the day the British Mandate in Palestine ended. Both the United States and the Soviet Union recognized the new nation immediately, but within 24 hours the armies of the Arab League (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon) invaded it. Arab regular forces maintained two major advantages over their opponent: numbers and fire power. Although Israeli armed forces could never redress the problem of numbers, they soon acquired surplus World War II weaponry to equal anything in Arab hands. Although their weapons were inferior, the Israelis nevertheless possessed the innate advantages of cohesion, matchless motivation, and superb leadership. Furthermore, they fought on their own soil, a factor that lessened their logistics problems while it increased those of the enemy. In fifteen months and with 6,000 dead—this, from a population of 600,000—the state of Israel emerged victorious from its trial by fire and forced its enemies, save Iraq, to sign armistice agreements.¹⁴

As a result, Israel increased its area by 21 percent. Of the former Arab population, 70 percent fled beyond Israel's borders. Placed in camps in the Gaza Strip (a small portion of land on the Mediterranean Sea between Israel and Egypt), on the West Bank of the Jordan River, and in Lebanon, these unhappy people began lives of poverty, humiliation, and frustration. They became the poor relations of the Arab world—without resources, without skills, and without a state. Their refusal to assimilate into their new countries and their hosts' refusal to accept them turned the Palestinians into a bitter people, unwelcome in the land in which

14. Sacher, *History of Israel*, pp. 315–53.

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they lived and unwelcome in their homeland as well. From this miasma of despair would come an open wound of terrorism and blood for both Palestinian and Jew.

The Arab armies revealed several shortcomings. They lacked effective leadership at the both the commissioned and noncommissioned officer levels. The officer corps reflected its French and English training well enough, but Western-style training could not adequately offset the inherent Arab culture, which required too great a distance between the leaders and those led. Senior Arab officers showed little originality and initiative in operations. Save for the British-officered and British-led Jordanian Arab Legion—the smallest Arab force and one composed exclusively of desert Bedouin tribesman—the regular Arab forces lacked cohesion and sufficient training to properly employ the weapons they possessed. King Abdullah of Transjordan squandered the Arab Legion by engaging in city fighting in Jerusalem. As will be discussed briefly below, in subsequent wars between the Arabs and Israelis, the Jews retained their military superiority while the Arabs endeavored to remedy their deficiencies. Considering the Arabs' initial disadvantage when they entered the fray, they made great military progress, but not enough to overcome the Israelis' lead.

Since 1949, the Israelis have fought four wars against the Arabs. During October and November of 1956, in conjunction with the French and British, they defeated Egypt and occupied the Sinai Peninsula, a desert area between their country's southern border and the Suez Canal. The militarily overmatched Egyptians, however, managed to win the diplomatic battles. American President Dwight D. Eisenhower threatened to embargo British and French oil imports and forced British and French alike to withdraw and leave the regime of Gamal Abdal Nasser in place. Although the Israelis had done well militarily and had demonstrated their ability to conduct a lightning offensive campaign, they too had to withdraw. The Arabs did not forget the lesson that support from a superpower could wrest victory from defeat.

In a Six-Day War in June 1967, the Israelis preempted a joint Syrian-Egyptian surprise attack and also invaded and defeated Jordan.

Israel wrested the strategic Golan Heights from Syria; completely occupied the Egyptian Sinai, including the crowded Palestinian refugee camps in the Gaza Strip; and seized all former Palestinian territory on the West Bank of the Jordan River. The Israeli Air Force's devastatingly effective preemptive attack on the Egyptian and Syrian Air Forces in the first hours of the war had several consequences. It assured the Israelis air supremacy throughout the war. This they used to advantage to give their own ground forces relatively generous amounts of close air support, which added to the crushing defeat inflicted on the Arab ground forces. Israeli air attacks alone disrupted and demoralized portions of the Egyptian Army. From its first strikes, the Israeli Air Force established ascendancy over its opponents, not only in the physical sense of greater numbers and brute force, but also in the equally important senses of élan, confidence, and belief in the superiority of men, machines, and methods. For a generation after 1967, Israeli pilots would enter battle secure in victory while the enemy would find his responses slowed by doubt. This ascendancy was not without a negative impact on the Israelis. In neglecting to examine carefully the actual effectiveness of their performance, they became overconfident and failed to adapt to new air defense technologies, to acquire newer close air-support munitions and techniques, and to train realistically for missions other than air-to-air-combat. The humiliation suffered by the Arab air forces caused Arab leaders to work to prevent a repetition of the disaster. Not only did Arab air forces pursue ground dispersal procedures more thoroughly, they also embarked on expensive programs to construct hardened aircraft shelters. Iraq, fearing both Israeli and Iranian aircraft, built more than 500 such shelters by 1989.

In October 1973 Syria and Egypt attacked Israel and achieved a large measure of surprise. The Egyptians crossed the Suez Canal, eliminated Israeli defenses, and waited for a counterattack. The Syrians stormed the Golan Heights and nearly broke through to Israeli plains below. At the last moment, the Israelis halted them, pushed them back, and gained additional territory. On the Egyptian front, the Israelis penetrated across the Suez Canal and isolated a large segment of the Egyptian Army on the east bank of the canal. At that point, after twenty

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days of intense fighting, the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union, major arms suppliers to the warring parties—insisted on a cease-fire. The Israelis emerged victorious, but all parties suffered heavily in men and matériel.

To protect their armies from Israeli air power, both Syria and Egypt covered their ground forces with an advanced array of numerous surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), such as SA-2s, SA-3s, SA-6s, and SA-7s, and with anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), such as the four-barreled radar-directed ZSU-23-4—all of Soviet manufacture.¹⁵ These air defenses, which rivaled or surpassed those encountered by the U.S. Air Force over North Vietnam, seriously degraded the Israeli Air Force's ability to perform its close-air support and interdiction missions. The Israelis lost 25 aircraft to ground fire for each one lost in air-to-air combat. This is not to be taken as an indication that the Israelis suffered a high loss rate per sortie; in fact, their average loss rate appears to have been less than 1 percent. But the necessity of avoiding Arab defenses during penetration and withdrawal and during attack considerably reduced the Israelis' accuracy in battle. Like other air forces encountering intense low-level air defenses, the Israeli Air Force, to avoid unacceptable attrition, had little choice but to abandon its prewar emphasis on low-level attack tactics and to switch to medium altitudes, lessening accuracy. Israel paid a high price for its prewar decisions to neglect electronic warfare and to field a low-technology air force. Their flawed reasoning compromised their ability to perform effectively over the battlefield.

Necessity forced the Israeli Air Force to attack the SAM defenses directly, in hopes of destroying or disrupting them or of forcing their displacement. Israeli planes could not successfully fly other vital missions in the presence of heavy air defenses. Against the Syrians, whose battlefield air-defense system was only about 30 percent as large as the Egyptian system, attacks on the SAMs achieved some gains. The Syrians inadvertently helped the Israelis on October 9 when they launched

15. Most of these weapons, especially the larger SA-6s and SA-7s, were in fixed emplacements, which dictated a limited Egyptian strategy for the war. The ground forces stayed within the protective umbrella of the SAMs and were exposed to Israeli air strikes outside the cover of the missiles.

inaccurate and poorly aimed Soviet FROG (free rocket over ground) surface-to-surface missiles against military targets in northern Israel. The widely scattered fall of these rockets convinced the Israelis that the Syrians had intended to attack Israel's population centers, and they responded by attacking Syrian economic targets (power plants, factories, and fuel storage tanks) and rear-area military installations, including the Syrian Ministry of Defense. Thereupon, the Syrians displaced some of their forward air defenses to protect their rear areas. Not until Israeli ground attacks disrupted the Syrian air defense system, however, could the Israeli Air Force operate with a large measure of freedom.¹⁶ Against the Egyptians, Israeli air suppression of Egyptian battlefield air defenses made little progress. Only when the Israeli Army crossed the Suez Canal and either shelled or attacked Egypt's SAM batteries on the canal's west bank did the Egyptian air defenses lose their effectiveness.¹⁷

Israel's hard-fought victory in the October 1973 war led each of the three major participants to make significant decisions affecting their military strength. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, the general who had become head of state upon Nasser's death in 1971, revealed that rare combination of decisiveness, moral courage, and statesmanship that made him one of the premier peacemakers of the last half of the twentieth century. Although the Egyptians may have lost the war from a military perspective, they had obtained gained the grudging respect of their enemy. Trading on this, and on the desire of Egyptians and Israelis for peace, Sadat opened negotiations with his foes. In 1978, aided by American President James "Jimmy" E. Carter and with lavish American guarantees of military and civilian aid for the two countries, representatives from both Middle East countries signed a peace treaty. The Camp David Accords—named for the negotiation site, the Camp David rural retreat of American presidents—returned the Sinai to Egypt and estab-

16. Col Trevor N. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars, 1947-1974* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 549-55.

17. Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990), vol 1, *The Arab-Israeli Conflicts, 1973-1989*, pp. 73-100.

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lished full diplomatic recognition between Israel and Egypt. For being the first Arab power to sign a formal peace with Israel and to recognize Israel's right to exist, Egypt became a pariah in the Arab world.

The Camp David Accords completely transformed the strategic balance in the Middle East. Without Egypt and her large armed services forming a second front on one Israeli flank, no Arab military coalition could hope to succeed against Israel. Now, with little or no Egyptian threat, Israel could look beyond survival, possibly even to military adventurism. The new strategic configuration possessed almost as many dangers as the old.

In addition, in 1975 Sadat ended his arms relationship with the USSR. He expelled all Soviet advisors and switched his sources for arms supplies to the West. After 1978, the United States became Egypt's main arms supplier. The abrupt change had long-term and severe effects on the readiness and effectiveness of the Egyptian armed forces. Egyptians did not have the resources to effect anything approaching a speedy conversion of Soviet to Western equipment. Consequently, the bulk of their armor, artillery, air defenses, and air forces lost significant capability as the existing haphazard maintenance standards declined precipitously with the continuing decline in the supply of vital Soviet spare parts. In addition, Egyptian forces receiving new U.S. equipment could not adequately absorb and maintain it. No armed force can absorb large amounts of new equipment after a certain threshold is attained without losing significant readiness. This is why, since 1973, the Egyptian armed forces have experienced a steady decline in terms of relative combat power. They now possess only limited offensive capabilities. The Egyptian loss of military strength and political standing within the Arab world produced a leadership vacuum which other Arab states and leaders, such as Saddam of Iraq and Hafiz al-Assad, President of Syria and former Lieutenant General Commanding the Syrian Air Force, vied to fill.

Sadat of Egypt opted for peace; Assad of Syria, chose continued confrontation. Egypt's break with the Soviets and its subsequent peace with Israel had left the Syrians with no major front-line ally. Syria had already alienated the other front-line Arab state, Jordan, by backing the

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). To continue its policy of confrontation, Syria sought military parity with Israel. In the nine years after the October 1973 war, Syria force-fed \$10 billion of Soviet arms into its armed forces while increasing the strength of its active army from 120,000 to 179,000, its air force from 10,000 to 30,000, its tank force from 1,170 to 2,990, and its combat aircraft from 326 to 450.¹⁸ This modernization far outstripped the absorptive capacity of Assad's forces. The constant infusion of new equipment had negative impacts on readiness and training, and Assad's tight political control of his forces stunted the growth of professionalism necessary to ensure flexible battlefield leadership.

The October 1973 war produced a thoroughgoing military reform within the Israeli military. Heavy casualties; the initial surprises and intelligence failures; the effective Arab military performance, especially the air defenses; and the much larger than anticipated consumption of matériel demonstrated to the Israelis the weaknesses of the foundation on which they had based their victory. They set out to make their forces not only better, but larger as well. In addition to developing a more advanced command and control (C²) system, they expanded their standing army by 130 percent; enlarged their reserves by 60 percent, while providing them with more and more realistic training; doubled their tank force; vastly increased their artillery; improved and augmented their infantry, including boosting the number of their armored personnel carriers from 1,000 to 4,000; doubled their munitions stocks; shifted their logistics system from one based on supply-on-demand to one based on oversupply at the front; and radically improved their medical services and chemical protection gear. They also reversed their decisions on low technology. They acquired high-technology U.S. systems, such as the F-15, F-16, and E-2C Hawkeye Airborne Warning and Air Control System, and large numbers of smart munitions.¹⁹ Finally, peace with Egypt on its southern border allowed Israel to reorient its strategic

18. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

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emphasis to the north to meet the Syrian challenge.

In addition to its confrontation with the front-line Arab states, Israel has also had to deal with the problem of terrorism, conducted usually by Palestinians, with the discreet, or not so discreet, as the case may be, support of the Arab states. The Israelis had a long-established practice of replying to all incidents of terrorism or of attempted terrorism immediately and violently by attacking the sponsor or sponsors of the act. For several decades, the Israelis have followed this policy almost inflexibly. From their point of view, their method extracts vengeance, discourages repetition, and satisfies internal domestic political requirements. It further causes the front-line Arab states—Egypt, Syria, and Jordan—to closely control dissident elements, such as the PLO, in order to avoid retaliation for actions that they, the host nation, have not condoned. However, the danger remains that the Israelis may, at some point, miscalculate the appropriateness of their response and provoke a far larger confrontation. Unless controlled, this hair-trigger retaliatory reflex could possibly be manipulated by Israel's foes against its own best interests. The PLO, for instance, consistently trades on the Israeli policy of an eye (or two) for an eye to gain sympathy and support throughout the Arab world and the Third World. In the Persian Gulf War, Saddam Hussein, Dictator of Iraq, used this principle in hope of provoking retaliation when he fired missiles at the Jewish state. In any case, Israel's policy of retribution, although seemingly useful in the short run, represents a distinctly destabilizing factor in Middle Eastern politics.

In the mid-1970s, a civil war in Lebanon between Christians and Muslims gravely weakened the central government and created a power vacuum that drew in outside powers such as Syria and Israel. Lebanon's weakness allowed the PLO and other anti-Israeli groups to operate more openly and with far less control. The increasing PLO control of Lebanon presented Israel with a particularly complex problem in that the PLO now had a base in a state too weak to prevent it from acting against Israel. Israel's standard retaliatory strikes on Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and against PLO targets sited adjacent to civilian facilities produced civilian deaths. The resulting world condemnation far exceeded

the utility of these acts to Israel's cause, nor did they prevent future attacks. Although the PLO in Lebanon offered a political and terrorist threat, the military problem they posed was insignificant, due to their limited and embryonic armed forces. Likewise, the strife-torn and preoccupied Lebanese armed forces presented no obstacle. Only the Syrians, in the north of Lebanon, who had sent troops into the country to support their interests, could offer significant military opposition to the Israelis. Hence, the PLO, a serious irritant but one without major defenses in Lebanon, offered a tempting target for military action. In 1981, the Israelis began to plan for an invasion of southern Lebanon to knock out the largest PLO threats.

In June 1982, Israel and Syria came to blows over expanding Syrian and Palestinian influence in Lebanon. On June 5, 1982, two days after Syrian gunmen killed Israel's Ambassador to London, Schlomo Argov, with a shot to the head, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) invaded southern Lebanon. They intended to establish a 40-kilometer-wide zone, free of armed members of the PLO, to secure northern Israel from terrorist attacks. This limited operation rapidly expanded, in part with the connivance not only of the Israeli Minister of Defense, former IDF general and ultra-conservative politician, Ariel Sharon, but also of the IDF Chief of Staff, who had visions of imposing a friendly Christian-dominated government on the country. This objective, which seriously misread the realities of Lebanese internal politics, condemned the operation to ultimate failure by setting a goal that exceeded the Israelis' reach.

Within three days, the IDF had advanced to the Lebanese capital, Beirut. When Israeli forces threatened to cut the Beirut to Damascus road, a serious clash with Syrian forces that pitted tens of thousands of troops from each side developed. While on the defensive, the Syrians fought tenaciously, but the Israeli Air Force, demonstrating the conclusions drawn from the October 1973 war, virtually obliterated the Syrian SAM defenses and destroyed many AAA pieces, as well. On June 9, 1982, the Israelis attacked nineteen Syrian SAM batteries, consisting of SA-2s, SA-3s, and SA-6s, in the Bekaa Valley, east of Beirut. Using a carefully integrated combination of advance planning, aerial surveillance (some

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conducted by drones), precision attacks by highly trained pilots, sophisticated C², antiradar missiles, superior electronic countermeasures, and laser-guided bombs in coordination with long-range artillery and surface-to-surface missiles, Israeli F-4Es, A-4s, F-15s, and Kfirs destroyed 17 batteries within three hours. The Israeli Air Force also decimated the Syrian Air Force in a series of furious but one-sided air-to-air battles, shooting down twenty-nine Syrian aircraft on June 9 while losing none. In these battles and others, the Syrians virtually threw away their most modern combat aircraft; they lost eighty-seven in all.²⁰ Apparently, in this instance, the Syrians thought the political statement made by confronting Israel with all possible means of resistance would outweigh considerations of sound deployment. Their reasoning may also have been dictated in part by the dispersal and nonaggressive employment of the Iraqi Air Force in 1980, shortly after the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War. The apparently timid performance of the Iraqi Air Force in this instance earned Saddam unfavorable comment throughout the Arab world. Assad would rather lose aircraft than face. The Israeli ground forces, aided by the synergy between their new artillery and and infantry doctrines and aided by a large number of ground attack sorties flown by their air force, defeated the Syrians. Assad reinforced his troops heavily and retained a considerable presence in the country.

Next the Israelis fruitlessly besieged Beirut to drive out the PLO and establish conditions leading to a friendly government. Given the Israelis' extreme sensitivity to casualties, they relied on firepower rather than on infantry, and the siege dragged on until American and Soviet intervention forced a solution far from favorable to Israel. The PLO went into exile, free to fight another day. Israel believed it had no choice but to maintain a security zone, expensive in both currency and blood, in southern Lebanon. Israeli interference in Lebanon's disastrous civil war had little result except to ensure that no Lebanese government friendly to Israel would ever come to power. Israel's policy had failed because even a favorable military balance cannot retrieve overly ambitious

20. Trevor N. Dupuy and Paul Martell, *Flawed Victory: The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the 1982 War in Lebanon* (Fairfax, Va.: HERO Books, 1986), pp. 12-121, 142.

strategic goals based on unrealistic political assumptions.

In a postscript to the war in Lebanon, the United States also learned a humbling lesson in the danger of failing to sufficiently relate military means with diplomatic goals. On August 25, 1982, U.S. Marines landed in Beirut as part of a multinational force guaranteeing safe evacuation of the PLO. The Lebanese government asked the troops of the multinational force to remain in Beirut. The force's leaders complied, and its troops promptly became the targets of all enemies of the Lebanese government. The decision to remain in Lebanon changed the role of the U.S. Marines from peacekeeper to participant. In a country as strife torn and violent as Lebanon, the inevitable finally occurred; regrettably, it found the American government and its military unprepared. On October 23, 1983, an Islamic fanatic, driving an explosives-filled truck on a suicide mission, blew up the sleeping quarters of the U.S. Marine force in Beirut, killing 241 Marines and wounding over 100 more—the most costly instance of terrorism ever committed against American combat troops. The death toll in this single incident nearly doubled that of the U.S. effort in the war against Iraq in 1991. From November 10 through December 3, 1982, Syrian anti-aircraft gunners fired repeatedly and unsuccessfully at U.S. naval aircraft. On December 4, twenty-eight U.S. carrier-based aircraft attacked Syrian anti-aircraft guns at Hammana, in the mountains east of Beirut. The U.S. Navy lost two aircraft and suffered the humiliation of having one of its aircrew members fall into Syrian hands. President Assad held Lt. Robert O. Goodman captive until January 3, when he released him to U.S. presidential candidate Reverend Jesse Jackson. In the meantime, on December 14, 16-inch guns of the battleship USS *New Jersey* shelled Syrian and Druze militia positions near Beirut. The shelling apparently had little effect, but films of the ship firing its main battery provided a powerful, but negative, image of American willingness to shed Arab blood. Shortly after these incidents, the United States withdrew its forces, leaving the Arab world with an indelible impression that Uncle Sam had neither the will nor the competence to intervene in its affairs.

President Ronald Reagan partially reversed this impression of

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weakness three years later when he authorized a single U.S. air strike on Libya, in retaliation for Libyan-sponsored terrorism against Americans in the Federal Republic of Germany. This strike, consisting of F-111Fs using smart munitions, showed the United States' capacity to inflict significant political, if not material, damage on a lesser Arab power. It further demonstrated a new willingness on the part of the U.S. government, supported by the U.S. Air Force's precision guided munitions capability, to target the leadership of a hostile country. The U.S. ordnance may have landed close indeed to the leader of Libya, Muammer Quadaffi, but regardless of where the weapons fell, the loss of face inflicted on Quadaffi by the raid caused him far more injury than the actual injury incurred by the bomb.

Israel's invasion of Lebanon may have destroyed much of the rag-tag Palestinian army and expelled the PLO, but it did not solve the Israelis' problem with their Palestinian neighbors. In fact, the sense of isolation and betrayal among Palestinians in territory occupied by Israel—the Gaza Strip on the Egyptian border and the Jordanian West Bank—became even more desperate when Jordan renounced its sovereignty over the West Bank of the Jordan River. Nor did the PLO and other anti-Israeli organizations, such as the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, take long in either returning to or strengthening their positions in Lebanon. Within five years, the threat there had become at least as great as it had been in 1982. In late 1987, a series of anti-Israeli riots sparked a Palestinian uprising, or *intifada*, in the occupied territories. In one form or another, the uprising has continued since that time, and it continues still. Palestinians ruthlessly kill their own people when they suspect them of collaborating with the enemy, just as they attempt to stone or otherwise injure members of Israel's security forces. Israel has responded by sending in its elite Border Police, increasing the riot control training of its army, deporting troublemakers, destroying the dwellings of *intifada* participants, and attempting to control the riots with tear gas and various forms of rubber, plastic, and steel bullets. Because the Israelis cannot put out the fires of Palestinian resentment, their efforts have merely succeeded in keeping the lid on a rapidly boiling cauldron. Their

efforts have also cost them heavily in the morale of their troops and in training time for their reserve forces.²¹

The moral problem of how to deal with the uprising in Gaza and the West Bank, along with the obviously failed intervention in Lebanon, has helped to embitter Israel's internal politics and has, to some extent, cracked the national consensus on Israel's goals and the nature of its state. Peace with Egypt and its military decline, together with Israel's demonstrated superiority over Syria, has allowed Israel the luxury of divisive internal politics. Israel's parliamentary electoral system, which is proportional rather than winner-take-all, exacerbates the political tension; it permits fringe parties with extremist views to gain seats in the parliament, or *Knesset*. Because neither the Labor Party (which ruled Israel from 1947 to 1977) nor the conservative Likud Party (which has ruled much of the time since 1977) can consistently obtain a majority of the seats in the *Knesset* by an outright majority vote, the Israelis are forced to deal with splinter parties, which are largely ultraconservative. The advantage in negotiating with the splinter parties goes to the Likud, but in striking bargains, the splinter groups extract concessions entirely disproportionate to their electoral strength. The process drives the Likud further to the right and increases its vulnerability to the reactions of its coalition partners.

In the meantime, the IDF must not only cope with Lebanon and the *intifada*, they also must not lose their edge in advanced technology. Israel attempted to maintain its advantage in the air by developing its own jet fighter, the Lavi. But, before the project's cancellation, it absorbed such a large proportion of Israel's limited defense budget that training, research and development, and procurement funds for all other IDF programs suffered. Israel's large defense expenditures coupled with equally large demands for its social welfare system have weakened its economy and ignited a high rate of inflation, adding to domestic hardship and tension.

The liberalization of the Soviet Union provided a welcome, if

21. Cordesman and Wagner, *Arab-Israeli Conflicts*, pp. 263-65.

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complicating, final factor for the Israelis. Under Mikhail Gorbachev, the USSR reversed its policy on Jewish emigration and began to permit an ever-expanding stream of Jewish citizens to leave the Soviet Union. From 1989 through 1991, 340,000 former Soviet Jews immigrated to Israel,²² where they comprise between 7 and 10 percent of the population. These new citizens required housing, retraining, and support, all of which had to come from the overstrained Israeli economy or from foreign aid or donations. The assimilation of such large numbers of new families put pressure on the entire Jewish population. The previous Soviet policy of severely limiting Jewish emigration had favored the Arabs; the policy now directly threatens them. More Jews mean more pressure to populate Palestinian land within Israel. For the front-line Arab states, more well-educated Jews, especially those leaving jobs in the Soviet defense industry, make the military equation even more lopsided.

By 1990, the situation between Israel and front-line Arab states seemed stable, but internally, the situation within Israel seemed more volatile than ever. If left to their own devices, Egypt and Jordan had little desire to make war with Israel. Egypt had not completed modernizing its force with Western weapons, and it depended almost completely on American economic and military aid and credits. Jordan had its own Palestinian problem and, because of limited funds, had kept its army relatively small and starved of modern equipment. Syria had extremely bad relations with both Jordan and Iraq. It had supported Iran in the Iran-Iraq War and had closed its portion of Iraq's oil-exporting pipeline during the war. The decline of the Soviet Union and its reluctance to sell Assad large quantities of the very latest arms meant that Syria's military faced a position of permanent technological inferiority when compared to Israel's. In 1982, Syria had learned the difficulty of taking on Israel, unaccompanied by other Arab allies. Nonetheless, the Syrians consolidated their hold on Lebanon. The Israelis acquiesced to Syrian control in Lebanon, apparently because they recognized that they were unable to impose a Lebanese solution and that Syrian control would provide more

22. Jackson Diehl, "Israel's Immigration Slips, Jewish Newcomers Find Jobs, Housing Scarce," *The Washington Post*, Dec 29, 1991, p. A1.

internal order for Lebanon and safety for Israel than if Lebanon were controlled by the PLO or another radical group. The state of Israel confronted the largest challenge. If it did not find some satisfactory and humane resolution to the problem of how to deal with the Palestinians, it faced mounting domestic strife capable of poisoning its body politic and eventually destroying any hope of permanent peace.

Reverberations from the Arab-Israeli conflict impacted areas beyond the borders of the warring states. The Soviet Union and the United States sold billions of dollars worth of weapons systems in the region. By their purchases, the client states bought not just arms, but advisors, sympathy, and some support for their political objectives. For example, at the end of the October 1973 war, the superpowers found themselves facing each other at the highest nuclear alert level: The USSR was trying to avert total defeat and humiliation for the Egyptians while the United States was trying to restrain the Israelis. Other Muslim and Arab states have adopted anti-Israeli, anti-American policies and rhetoric. The governments of Libya and Iraq, although not immune from Israeli military action, were at a far enough remove to actively support terrorism and to incorporate anti-Israeli sentiment into their educational, political, and governmental systems. The conservative monarchies of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia, although rejecting terrorism, have, to a lesser extent, followed suit. Within the Middle East, anti-Israeli hatred feeds from the taproot of the region's Arabic-Muslim culture and creates a strong unifying factor that cuts across national boundaries and differing political systems. However, like many universal principles, local conditions affect the attraction that a principle holds for a populace and determine how much a populace is committed to it.

The Persian Gulf Powers

As the chain of circumstances leading to the Arab-Israeli Wars unfolded, an equally significant series of occurrences affected the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf. In Turkey, the fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I allowed Great Britain to assume a mandate over Iraq and impose protectorates on Kuwait, Oman, Aden, and Yemen. Britain retained a decisive voice in Persian affairs, as well.

In the interior of the Arabian Peninsula, Abd al Aziz of the House of Saud succeeded in duplicating the political triumph of the Prophet by unifying the Bedouin tribesmen. With his able administration and knowledge of his subjects, he earned their admiration; with his imposition of religious reform, he gained their minds and souls. Abd al Aziz revitalized his family's 150-year old alliance with the Wahhabis, a sect of fundamentalist, fanatically conservative Muslims. (The Wahhabi movement took its name from its founder, Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab, from the House of Al ash Shaykh.) Al Aziz called for a particularly literal and strict interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunna. He condemned the adoption of all Islamic practices and innovations not sanctioned by the Prophet or his followers earlier than the third century of Islam (that is, before A.D. 1000). He forbade the celebration of the Prophet's birthday or the invocation of the Prophet's or other saints' names in prayers of intercession. In 1744, the houses of Al ash Shaykh and Saud made a pact. The Sauds would adopt Wahhabism and propagate it throughout their current and future territories, while the Al ash Shaykhs would receive religious control of the Saud's dominions. In return, the House of Saud would wield political power. When the Sauds

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occupied Mecca and Medina in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Wahhabis ruthlessly removed all traces of the religious innovations they despised. However, the Saudis soon lost control of the two cities, and their foes drove them into the desert, where the Saudis remained powerful but isolated until the advent of Abd al Aziz in 1902.²³

For Abd al Aziz, as for the Prophet, Islam provided the glue of his earthly kingdom. Thanks to Wahhabism, he convinced his nomadic tribesmen that proper religious devotion required a sedentary way of life and that as tribal warriors they must be constantly prepared to wage the Jihad, or holy war, against unbelievers. (Wahhabis considered other Muslims unbelievers.) Abd al Aziz established 200 communities which combined the functions of religious mission, agricultural village, and military camp. The communities stressed religious indoctrination and military training. To loosen the bonds of tribalism, Abd al Aziz assigned portions of several tribes to each community. This served to emphasize the importance of faith over sect. The camps permitted the rapid mobilization of military forces, the maintenance of a ready reserve, and the attainment of a relatively high status of readiness and cohesion. Adherents of this system called themselves the *Ikhwan al Musilmin*, or Muslim Brethren. By 1912, Abd al Aziz numbered 11,000 Brethren among his followers. Four years later he ordered all tribesmen to participate in the system and to pay a religious tax (zakat) to support the Wahhabis. Abd al Aziz obligated the tribal chiefs to attend religious training in Riyadh and encouraged them to join his court in hopes of breaking the bond of loyalty between the chiefs and their tribes. He thereby hoped to transfer this affection to himself.

With the Brethren at his command, the leader of the House of Saud began to unify the peninsula. Although the Emir of Kuwait successfully maintained his independence in open battle, the Saudis gained control of the interior of the peninsula by 1926, when they triumphed in Mecca and Medina. In 1932, after negotiations with the British, who recognized most of the Saudi leader's conquests in return for his fixing

23. Richard F. Nyrop *et al.*, *Area Handbook for Saudi Arabia*, 3d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977), DA Pam 550-51, pp. 121-23.

the borders, Abd al Aziz proclaimed himself King of Saudi Arabia. By then, he had already displayed the gratitude of a king. The Brethren, a fanatical lot who after the conquest had not accepted a peaceable existence, especially a relegation to pastoral life, continually left their encampments for raids into Iraq. There they not only killed Iraqis, they destroyed any newfangled devices—such as motor cars, telegraphs, telephones, and airplanes—that offended their conservative religious beliefs. The Brethren objected to Abd al Aziz's attempts to control them and revolted. Al Aziz promptly raised an army of town Arabs and crushed the Brethren at the Battle of Sibila in 1929. Subsequently, many of the special encampments failed, and the King forcibly shifted a large number of Brethren veterans into the Royal Saudi Army. However, Abd al Aziz continued to honor his family pact with the House of Al ash Shaykh. He appointed its members to all the most significant and powerful religious posts in the Kingdom, a practice that continues in modern Saudi Arabia.²⁴

In 1938, Standard Oil Corporation of California discovered oil in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Every year since then, geologists have located more new Saudi oil than the country had produced in the previous year. By the mid-1980s, Saudi Arabia possessed, at a very conservative estimate, approximately 25 percent of the world's total known oil reserves (the United States had 4 percent, the USSR 9 percent). Even earlier than this discovery of Saudi oil, discoveries of oil in Persia, Iraq, Kuwait, and in the Persian Gulf attracted British attention. (As an example of the military importance of oil, in 1911 the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, decided to convert the British Fleet from coal to oil. He based his decision on the ready availability of Persian oil from the Anglo-Persian Oil Company.) By the mid-1980s, 57 percent of the world's total oil reserves lay under the countries surrounding the Persian Gulf. Excluding Saudi Arabia's portion, Iran held 7

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

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percent, Iraq 6.5 percent, Kuwait 13.5 percent, and Qatar 4.5 percent.²⁵ World War II slowed development in these non-Saudi fields, but in the fifty years since, their reserves have become increasingly important in the world's economy.

In 1973, the Arab countries of the Gulf showed the power of oil when they used it as an economic weapon. In support of Syria's and Egypt's efforts in the October 1973 war against Israel, the Gulf Arabs embargoed their oil, refusing to sell it to any nation that they perceived was encouraging or aiding Israel. This action resulted in skyrocketing oil prices which severely damaged the domestic economies of the world's industrial nations and greatly strained the international banking system. Furthermore, the increase in oil prices—which the Arabs and the other members of a worldwide oil producers' cartel known as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries managed to maintain after the end of the October war—resulted in a tremendous influx of dollars, the currency specified in oil agreements. This sudden and continuing escalation of purchasing power subjected all societies of the Gulf region, including the Iranians who did not participate in the embargo but nonetheless profited from the oil price run-up, to tremendous strain.

One result of the countries' additional buying power was a regional arms race. The three largest powers of the Gulf—Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia—spent vast sums in purchasing foreign-built armaments for their armed forces. These oil-producing countries used their new-found revenues in attempts to improve their primitive health, welfare, educational, and economic infrastructures, as well. They spent many billions of dollars on services that only foreign firms and workers had the expertise to provide. New money, new technology, and new ideas threatened to set the people of the Gulf adrift.

The governments of the three major Gulf powers pursued different recipes for purchasing arms and for developing social programs. Iran started quickly but then fell apart under the stress of modernization. Its

25. Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990), vol 2, *The Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 6-7, table 1.2, "World Oil Reserves."

leader, the Shah, or Emperor, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, embarked on a spending spree that bought the most sophisticated Western weapons that money could buy. The Shah had two major advantages over the other Gulf powers: the largest population in the region and favored status with Western arms manufacturers. In 1979, Iran's population of 37.4 million dwarfed Iraq's 12.9 million and Saudi Arabia's 9.3 million. All three countries, because of their Moslem faith and government policies, were among the countries with the highest birth rates on earth. If Iran could properly organize, educate, and train its people, it could dominate the Gulf region through sheer strength of numbers. The Shah had the easiest access to American arms, at once the most technologically superior and most difficult-to-maintain weapons available. If the Iranian armed forces could obtain enough Western and American arms, and if they could operate them effectively, they could become the preeminent country in the region. Beginning in 1972, the administration of President Richard M. Nixon courted the Shah and encouraged him in his ambition to become the policeman of the Persian Gulf. But the Shah purchased weapons systems neither wisely nor well, and he pushed his armed forces and his people beyond their willingness and ability to absorb Western products and concepts.

By forcing a too rapid purchase of complex weapons systems, the Iranian leader decreased the readiness of his armed forces. Seventy-seven F-14As and their accompanying Phoenix air-to-air missile weapons systems gave the Shah the most advanced aircraft in the Gulf. From 1970 to 1977, the Iranian Imperial Air Force increased the number of its personnel from 17,000 to 100,000 and of its combat aircraft from 175 to 341. The Shah's goal was in 1982 to have an air force among the finest in the world.²⁶ But for years the Iranian Air Force required that American technicians from Grumman Aviation, the F-14 manufacturer, be present to properly service the fighter's advanced avionics. The Iranian Air Force lacked a modern logistics system, necessary for its F-14s and its 190 American-built F-4D/Es and 166 F-5E/Fs. The F-4 Phantom, in

26. Maj Ronald E. Bergquist, *The Role of Airpower in the Iran-Iraq War* (Maxwell AFB, Ala: Air University Press, Dec 1988), p. 25.

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particular, had the reputation of requiring an inordinate number of ground maintenance hours for each flight hour. Such an aircraft loses operability rapidly under less than optimum conditions. The advantages of these American-built aircraft were superior range, payload, and performance, as compared to these attributes of the Soviet-built aircraft that Iraq was flying. The Shah also purchased tanker aircraft, which brought air-to-air refueling capability to some of his F-4s.

The other services also benefited: for his ground forces, the Shah purchased 400 American M-47s/M-48s, 460 American M60A1s, and 875 British Chieftain main battle tanks. In addition to being undercooled and underpowered for the climate and terrain, the Chieftains suffered from the recurrent service and reliability problems endemic to British-designed tanks.²⁷ From 1973 through 1978, Iran spent an average of approximately 15 percent of its gross national product on its military, and, in constant dollars, its total military expenditures tripled Iraq's over the same period.²⁸

Although the Shah lavished equipment and training on his armed forces, he held them to tight rein. His distrust of all potential competing centers of power and the necessity that he remain the center of the state and that all power and authority emanate from him led him to follow a policy of divide and rule. The heads of the services reported directly to him as the supreme commander of Iran's military forces; the chain of command excluded the minister of war and the supreme commander's staff. The Iranian armed services did not engage in joint planning. The Shah exercised direct operational control over the Iranian armed forces and served as his own operations officer. Loyalty to him constituted the primary basis of advancement, and several competing security organizations cross-checked and weighed the loyalty of all key military figures. Purportedly, the Shah personally reviewed an individual's service record for every promotion beyond the rank of major. Within the Iranian Air Force, the policy of loyalty to the Pahlavi dynasty even touched the lower

27. Cordesman and Wagner, *Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 63-64.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47, table 3.1, "Iranian and Iraqi Military Efforts: 1973-1988."

ranks, apparently because of their access to explosives. The aircraft ordnance-loading crews also experienced loyalty checks and security vetting. The Shah's methods squelched initiative and produced an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion within his military.²⁹

Thousands of Iranians traveled abroad to learn the requisite managerial and technical skills to operate the systems flooding their country. Likewise, thousands of Westerners, particularly Americans, arrived in the country to compete for the Shah's largesse and to instruct the Iranians in the operation and care of their purchases. The ideas and attitudes of the West collided with the conservative values of the Moslem clergy and most of the people. The Shah's father, Reza Khan, had attempted to completely secularize the state. He had adopted many of the methods of the founder of the modern Turkish state, Kemal Ataturk, who was another ruthless Westernizer. To discourage tribal particularism (each tribe affected a unique style of dress) and to encourage the entry of women into the labor force, Reza Khan had his rubber-stamp parliament, the majlis, pass laws which made the wearing of Western clothes mandatory for all and forbade the veiling of woman. He struck directly at the authority and position of the Moslem clergy when he introduced a modified French Code Napoleon, which established civil marriage and divorce, and ended the clergy's domination of civil law. He also regulated self-flagellation and the public behavior of religious fanatics, including dervishes, and put religious education under the control of the state schools.³⁰ Although accepted by Iranian society, these innovations had not grown deep roots.

In any case, old resentments compounded those caused by the Shah's headlong modernization. The Shah's swelling authoritarianism and his growing separation from his people added to the turmoil. He found it necessary to make increasingly arbitrary and unsound decisions. Finally, in 1979, his opposition coalesced around an elderly, fundamentalist Shia

29. Bergquist, *Role of Airpower in the Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 25-26, 47.

30. Richard F. Nyrop, ed., *Iran: A Country Study*, 3d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 1978), DA Pamphlet 550-68, pp. 53-54.

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Moslem leader exiled in France, Ruhollah Khomeini. (The Shias called the respected heads of their faith ayatollahs, which literally means "miracle of God.") The face of the Ayatollah Khomeini carried on posters shortly appeared on every television screen and front page of every newspaper on earth. A popular revolution spearheaded by Khomeini's supporters on the political right and the Iranian Communist Party and others on the left swept the Shah from power and into exile. Khomeini became the head of state. He proceeded to become embroiled in an long, violent struggle with the Iranian Communists and other secular and liberal elements of the Iranian political spectrum. Although Khomeini's followers triumphed in this struggle of car bombs, assassinations, and firing squads, their efforts consumed much energy, left the country weaker, and distracted Khomeini from other affairs. It did not weaken his resolve to reverse the Shah's reforms and to eliminate the Shah's men from positions of influence. As one would expect, Ayatollah Khomeini had an especial contempt for things Western that attacked his religion. The United States, which had the most visible presence in Iran and had played host to and educated (or as Khomeini contended, "contaminated") thousands of Iranians, became vilified as the "great Satan," bent on undermining traditional Moslem values. The seizure of the U.S. Embassy staff in Teheran and the Americans' prolonged captivity, as well as the flight or expulsion of all American advisors, technicians, and businessmen from Iran, completely severed the economic, diplomatic, and military ties between the two countries.

The military, the pride of the Shah, had profited, perhaps inordinately, from his spending and, in large part, had remained loyal to him until his fall. Not surprisingly, the Iranian revolutionaries thoroughly purged it at all levels, and starting in February 1979, the new regime repeatedly thinned its ranks. Arbitrary arrests and executions increased the terror and further lowered morale and, just before taking power, Khomeini had called for mass desertions of the enlisted personnel, many of whom responded. The army dropped to 150,000 members, losing half its strength. The air force declined from approximately 95,000 to 62,000 members. The loss of trained ground personnel to desertion and retire-

ment and the execution, imprisonment, or dismissal of many officer pilots—most, American trained—thoroughly devastated the service. Khomeini also reduced the term of conscription to twelve months, too short a period to train personnel for useful service, and he cut the defense budget by one-third. The new regime's alienation of the armed forces' Western arms suppliers, its cancellations of spare parts and maintenance contracts, and its attempt to sell spare parts stocks on hand ensured very low maintainability for its arms inventory, provided it could locate reliable maintenance technicians. For example, the Iranian Air Force had begun to set up a U.S.-designed computerized logistics system. It had computer coded and logged the stocks and had installed the computers, but it never received the software or deliveries of mission-essential spare parts.³¹

The Islamic Revolution's leadership also closely watched the military's day-to-day operations and made personal recommendations regarding promotions, discipline, and courses of action. This practice mirrored the Shah's own methods, but it assumed that anyone approved by the Shah threatened the revolution. The Revolutionary leadership appointed religious commissars down to at least the battalion level, empowering them to intervene in daily affairs. The leadership's attention to the ordinary workings of the armed forces made the services more politically responsive to the regime, at a ruinous cost to professionalism. The Islamic Revolution's leaders confronted the classic dilemma facing all leaders of regimes that differ radically from their predecessors': How can the new regime ensure the loyalty of its predecessor's armed services while keeping these forces militarily effective? A loyal general might be responsive to the state but incompetent to defend it; an effective general might overthrow the state rather than its enemies.

In mid-1979, when the Islamic Revolution's enervated armed forces appeared unable to quell Kurdish and Arab separatist movements, the government authorized the formation of a popular militia. The Revolutionary Guards appeared with a strength of 30,000. A coup attempt in

31. Cordesman and Wagner, *Iran-Iraq War*, p. 64.

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June 1980 by members of the armed forces led to more purges and an increased reliance by the regime on the ideologically trustworthy Revolutionary Guards. This force continued to expand and to receive favored treatment at the regular armed forces' expense. The Revolutionary Guards had the advantages of relatively high motivation and cohesion, fostered by their fanatical faith. Otherwise they suffered from the numerous disadvantages endemic to hastily raised ideological or party forces. They and, more importantly, their officers had no military training; the troops were short-service volunteers. They had no heavy weapons or organized communication facilities and equipment, they siphoned off high-quality manpower from the regular military, and they set up a competing procurement system. Their leaders also removed them from the regular chains of command and from regular logistics channels. The Revolutionary Guards believed that they could overcome their many technical deficiencies by transmuting their militant faith into battlefield effectiveness. Unfortunately, in combat as in alchemy, no philosophers' stone can instantly transform dross to gold. The Revolutionary Guards would suffer many unnecessary casualties and defeats in the upcoming war with Iraq before they learned that willpower cannot overcome firepower.

The ability of Iran to defend itself seemed dangerously weak. Its forces no longer had the Shah's access to modern weapons, nor could it field many of the weapons the Shah had acquired. It seemed ready to squander its large potential manpower advantage over that of its rivals by setting up an untrained force in competition with its regular troops. Furthermore, the aggressive fundamentalist Shia rhetoric of Khomeini and his fellow mullahs, or Moslem clerics, frightened the neighboring Gulf states. The Iranians accused the Saudis of profaning the shrines of Islam and of discriminating against Shia pilgrims. The small Gulf countries worried at any threat from Iran, and Iran's next-door neighbor, Iraq, had a majority Shia population ruled by a dictatorial Sunni minority. Iran thus simultaneously threatened all its neighbors while it reduced its ability to defend itself militarily, should its neighbors choose to respond with force. Iraq finally succumbed to both the provocations and the temptations offered by its rival. On September 22, 1980, preceded by

a preemptive air strike against the Iranian Air Force, Iraq invaded Iran.

The forces that led the Republic of Iraq into war with Iran differed greatly from the pressures that affected Iran. Beginning with the British withdrawal from Iraq in 1946, Iraq's domestic politics followed a violent course. In July 1958, General Abdul al-Karim Kassem led a group of nationalist military officers to overthrow and execute its pro-Western king. General Kassem purged the remaining Iraqi general officers and in the next four and one-half years executed, imprisoned, or removed 2,000 of Iraq's other 8,000 military officers.³² When Kuwait attained independence in June 1961, Kassem attempted to annex it. Prompt arrival of British troops forced his retreat. In February 1963, Iraqi Air Force officers spearheaded a Baathist coup by bombing the Defense Ministry in Baghdad until Kassem surrendered. The coup displaced Kassem, now the prime minister, and its leaders executed him.

The Baath (Resurrection) party, had begun in Syria. It appealed to the newly educated and predominantly self-made members of the emerging professional and middle classes, who came from the less dominant social classes and from communities outside the Sunni Moslem majority. Baathists believed that all Arabs formed a single Arab nation and had the right to live in a single Arab state. The Prophet Muhammad created the Arab nation by infusing Arab society with the religion of Islam. Therefore, all Arabs, not just Muslim Arabs, could belong to this nation and regard it as the basis of their claim to a special mission in the world and a right to independence and unity. Arabs could fulfill their mission and assure their rights first by transforming their intellects and their souls with the acceptance of the idea of the Arab nation, and then by transforming the political and social system to reflect the new nation and state. In the mid-1950s, the Baath Party amalgamated with a party that held more explicitly socialist ideals. In that form Baathism spread throughout the Arab world.³³ Its provision for non-Sunni Muslim members gave it a particularly strong attraction in countries like Syria and Iraq,

32. Bergquist, *Role of Airpower in the Iran-Iraq War*, p. 22.

33. Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples*, pp. 404-05.

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where diverse minorities abounded.

A bloodless coup removed the initial Iraqi Baathist regime after only nine months in power. Five years later, in July 1968, the Baath Party and non-Baathist army officers launched a successful coup against the government. The Baath quickly outmaneuvered its co-conspirators and gained complete control of the country, which it has retained. In the early 1970s, the Baathist Party underwent several typically bloody and public purges. At the same time, it struggled to suppress a Kurdish rebellion, which received aid from the Shah of Iran until March 1975, when Iraq and Iran signed the Algiers Accord. In the accord, Iran agreed to stop aiding the Kurds in return for Iraq's honoring earlier protocols that assigned the eastern bank of the Shatt-al-Arab waterway to Iran. (The Shatt-al-Arab flows approximately eighty miles from the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, passes the Port of Basra, and flows into the Persian Gulf. It constitutes Iraq's only access to the Gulf.) Iran and Iraq had sparred over ownership of this waterway for decades, and the Iraqis' resentment of their forced concession of it to Iran was one factor contributing to the Iran-Iraq War.

A strongman emerged to head the Baath and Iraq—Saddam Hussein al-Tikriti. Born in the village of Tikrit, Iraq, in April 1937, his father died soon after. At the age of eight, Saddam ran away to live with his maternal uncle in Baghdad. The period between his father's death and his taking up residence with his uncle may have had profound consequences in shaping his personality. Arab culture, even more than others, provides for the lionization of young boys by their mothers and female relatives until they are thrust into the world of adult males at the age of six or seven, when they come under their fathers' control. Depending on the amount of male influence supplied by Saddam's extended family, he may have suffered from the beginning of his life from a lack of male influence and from overadulation. In any case, his stay in his uncle's home exposed him to traditional and new ideas. His uncle had a gift for both rhetoric and hate. A widely read treatise, "Three Things God Should Not Have Made: Persians, Jews, and Flies," flowed from his pen. Young Saddam imbibed his uncle's prejudices in full

measure. He also studied more intellectual fare—the writings of the founder of the Baath Party, Michel Aflaq, which may have influenced him to join the party in 1957. Once in the party, Saddam was a ruthless and cold-blooded killer, if killing would advance his goals. In October 1959 he participated in an abortive assassination attempt on Prime Minister Kassem and fled to Egypt with a bullet wound in his leg. Two years later, he returned to Iraq and spent two years in jail until the Baath Coup of February 1963 released him. Many of the coup plotters, military men from the Tikriti area, came from Saddam's own home grounds.

The army-led countercoup of November 1963, which overthrew a Baath government paralyzed by party in-fighting between its radical and moderate branches, left an indelible impression on the Baath party and on Saddam. Neither would trust the army again. Nor did the Iraqi Air Force (IZAF) endear itself to the Baath. At one point in the November 1963 coup, the IZAF bombed the Presidential Palace, an action which Saddam Hussein, a man long on memory and short on trust, may never have forgiven. The IZAF also participated in an abortive 1965 coup. The possibility exists that Saddam may have kept the IZAF on a short tether after this attempt to reduce its capacity for meddling in internal politics.³⁴ In another example of party control of the IZAF, in 1971 the Baath moved the Iraqi Air Academy from a suburb of Baghdad to Tikrit, where the party could ensure the political correctness of the cadets. The Syrian Army coup of 1966, in which military officers replaced Baath activists, further hardened the Iraqi Baath against a professional military. In 1968, after regaining power, the Iraqi Baathists even considered disbanding the army but decided on a thorough purge instead.³⁵ A coup attempt in 1970 resulted in the deaths of an additional 300 Iraqi officers.

Saddam had served as deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council since the 1968 coup and had close ties with the

34. For some discussion of this point, see Norman Friedman, *Desert Victory: The War for Kuwait* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991), p. 371.

35. Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear: The Inside Story of Saddam's Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), p. 31.

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President of Iraq, Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr. As he consolidated his political power in the 1970s, he remained content to have Bakr serve as a figure-head. Saddam gradually supplanted the president and gained complete control of the Baath party. He placed his creatures—one could not call them confederates because that would imply some will of their own—in important party and government posts. Predictably, many of these minions belonged to Saddam's family or were Sunni Arabs from Tikrit, his native village and province. These cronies owed him everything, and their misdeeds on his behalf made their survival after his fall unlikely. They had made a typically Faustian bargain of absolute loyalty in return for position.

The Baath party imposed a relatively efficient totalitarian state on Iraq, complete with public executions, show trials, confession rituals, private torture, secret police, pervasive propaganda, and political indoctrination in all organizations and in the schools. The intended effect was to cow much of the population, shred any personal bonds of trust within the populace, and make one and all subject to informers. Once an individual informed, the state owned him. Some organizations still attempted to overthrow the party. In 1978, a failed military coup backed by the Iraqi Communist Party led to another purge of the high command, and, as a result, Baath control of the IZAF increased.³⁶

In July 1979, Saddam eliminated all internal opposition in the Baath and forced President Bakr to resign. As President of the Republic and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Saddam applied Baath principles to the upper echelons of his government. Shortly after he replaced Bakr, he eliminated his predecessor's supporters within the party. In fact, Saddam so intimidated the party that henceforth in Iraq, he *was* the party, which existed only as another tool of his control. In August 1979, he addressed the party congress. Already, he had taken hostage the families of many of its members, and some of those members stepped forward to "confess" their errors. Saddam, in a shaking voice with tears flowing down his face, proceeded to read off

36. Bergquist, *Role of Airpower in the Iran-Iraq War*, p. 22.

other individual's names. He terrified his audience by skipping around the list, reading a name, pausing, and then pronouncing guilt or innocence. Guards dragged those found guilty from the chambers. Saddam required that the country's top ministers and party leaders personally participate in the firing squads. Given the Arab and Baath party's penchant for blood feud and the patent inability of Saddam's confreres to say that they had not joined in, this act permanently sealed them to Saddam. Soon after taking sole power, Saddam cemented his hold over Iraq and instituted a thoroughgoing personality cult that glorified his every public thought and deed.³⁷

Any non-Iraqi history of the Persian Gulf in the last three decades of the twentieth century will assuredly present Saddam as an archvillain, totally indifferent to the suffering of his people, whose miscalculations led to years of bloody warfare and to catastrophic defeat, and who squandered decades of oil revenues on armaments and useless prestige projects. He shares with Hitler and Stalin their merciless treatment of domestic enemies and their remorseless attitude toward their compatriots. Characteristics of his authoritarian personality appear in other autocrats and dictators as well. He somewhat resembles Peter the Great in a single-minded determination to elevate his country and to modernize it. His career parallels Mohammed Ali's in Egypt as well. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Mohammed Ali used his French-trained armed forces to overrun the Sudan, Palestine, Syria, Medina, and Mecca, but he found himself unable to cope militarily with the European powers. During his regime, he used the most remorseless means to reform Egypt along Western lines, including establishing agricultural projects and introducing power equipment to the cotton industry. His attempts produced little of lasting value. Eventually, the Ottomans recognized his rule, and his dynasty continued until 1952. Many view Mohammed Ali as one of the precursors of Arab nationalism. Saddam also shares a few traits with Francisco Solano Lopez, dictator of Paraguay from 1862 to 1870. After attaining power, Lopez, who considered himself a military genius, concen-

37. Al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, pp. 70-71.

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trated the state's revenues on improving and expanding the army. Lopez used his German-trained, European-equipped soldiers to intervene in the Uruguayan civil war and to attempt to solve a Brazilian border dispute. A six-year war by Paraguay against Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina (whose neutrality Lopez violated) ensued. It resulted in the death of not only Lopez but also more than one-half of his countrymen, plus a long occupation by the victors. Clearly, Lopez, heir to an extremely insular, xenophobic tradition, grievously miscalculated the strength of his forces relative to the strength of his foes.

Saddam's faith in his role as a leader who was destined to enhance Iraq and all Arab states is the touchstone of his entire system of self-belief. It justifies his using any means to achieve his goals, while it supports him in vicissitude—the leader can never be permanently overcome, nor can he be fallible. Saddam knows that he will win eventually, whatever the cost to others.

Saddam has significant abilities and disabilities. He can rebound with vigor from temporary setbacks; he has a merciless, cold-blooded willingness to use any means, including genocide, to achieve his ends; he has the ability to make necessary tactical retreats, as demonstrated by his constant bargaining with his Kurdish minority. His view of the world as suspicious and unreliable compelled him to assume all power to himself and to personally make every key policy decision. He distrusts subordinates and colleagues, refuses to solicit their advice, and discourages them from offering it, relying instead on his own intuition and astuteness. When his minister of health suggested, at a cabinet meeting in 1982, that he resign in order to facilitate a peace with Iran, Saddam led the minister out of the room and personally executed him. Although Saddam has a sophisticated understanding of the Arab world and Middle Eastern politics, he knows little beyond that milieu. Aside from a trip to France in 1979, he has had no direct exposure to the West; during the decade of the 1980s, he refused to talk to Western reporters. His speeches indicate that he has absorbed and accepted the xenophobia of his uncle's household. He apparently believes that the West—the United States and the United Kingdom, in particular—dislikes Arabs and is

biased against them. Saddam has little understanding of the international system and the workings of the Western political process. This limited knowledge has probably caused him to accept many stereotypes about the West as true—Western television and Western-made movies do not emphasize the great strengths of their civilization. His sparse knowledge of the West, his own feelings of invincibility, and the centralization of all power in his hands could cause him to misjudge the implications or consequences of his actions.

Using information-processing theory, in the mid-1970s Norman F. Dixon prepared a provocative study of commanding generals of the British Army. He illustrated the processing styles with an example. Headquarters receives a message which states that the enemy is preparing for a counterattack. The message supplies detailed strength and disposition data and specifies a probable date and sector of attack. The facts of the message are indisputable, but the information it conveys to the generals varies considerably. The message gave only redundant information to General A, who had anticipated a counterattack and has already made preparations. The message came as a complete surprise to General B, who had not anticipated a counterattack. It reduced his ignorance and uncertainty and gave him much to do. General C found the message so unexpected that he chose to ignore it, with calamitous results. It conflicted with his perceptions and clashed with his wishes. It emanated, so he thought, from an "unreliable source." Since his mind was closed to the message's contents, he refused to believe it, much like General Grant did before the battle of Shiloh. In fact the message supplied more information than General C, with his limited capacity, could absorb. One should further note that, as a rule, older information, which has been accumulated to support the currently held conviction, tends to carry more weight than new information, which requires more thought, returns the individual to a previous state of uncertainty and doubt, and confronts the decision maker with the possibility of error.³⁸

38. Norman Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 30–31. This work offers far more valuable insight into the psychology of command than I can give in the short example cited here. This is a startling book that will cause any reader to stop and ponder, even if he cannot agree with it.

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Saddam falls into the third category of decision maker, one whose communication arteries are so clogged with prejudices and faulty information and whose receptor apparatus is so filtered by authoritarianism that fresh information cannot pass through to reach him. It seems that a lifetime in a position of absolute rule or authority almost invariably results in a Type C information-processing individual. Dictatorships, despotisms, and absolute monarchies seem to produce rulers of unbounded megalomania. The more control the leader has, the less feedback he or she seems to require or recognize. "Garbage in equals garbage out" may have unfortunate consequences for a computer operator; for a national leader, it is ruinous.

False assumptions about the viability of the opposition influenced Saddam's decision to go war with Iran on September 22, 1980, just as false assumptions affected his decision ten years later to invade Kuwait. Saddam acted on what he wished to be so, not on what actually was so. However, some of his miscalculations seem worse in retrospect than they did at the time. On paper, his armed forces appeared more than a match for the Iranians. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the many Iraqi regimes pursued a foreign policy consistently hostile to the existence of the State of Israel and to the conservative Arab monarchies it bordered. Such a policy made it impossible for the Iraqis to obtain American arms and difficult to purchase Western ones. The Iraqis turned to the Soviets, whose first delivery of military aircraft arrived in Iraq in November 1957. After the Israeli's 1967 victory in the Six-Day War and in response to increased pressure from Iran, the Iraqis moved closer to the Soviet Union. In April 1972 they signed a 15-year treaty of friendship. For the following three years, Soviet weapons of all types flowed into Iraq's military stores, while an answering stream of Western currencies, which the Iraqis had obtained for their oil, left the state treasury in Baghdad for the one in Moscow. However, the relationship between the two nations was not always smooth. Baath ideology rejected communism. After its first coup in February 1963, the Baath pulled all Iraqi students from Soviet training schools and sent them to Britain. In 1977, the Iraqis diversified their arms sources by purchasing from France 60 Mirage F-1s,

the first of which arrived in early 1981. Also in the 1970s the Iraqis contracted with India to provide some of their previously Soviet-supplied flight instruction programs. The Communist-backed 1978 military coup attempt in Iraq further dampened Soviet-Iraq relations. By 1980 it appears that neither the Soviets nor the Iraqis had reason to be completely satisfied with their liaison.

In September 1980 the Iraqi Army had 190,000 personnel plus 250,000 active reservists; 2,700 main battle tanks, 90 percent of them Soviet T-54s, T-55s, and T-62s; 2,500 infantry fighting vehicles; 800 artillery pieces; and 1,200 antiaircraft guns. Most of the reservists lacked training with modern weapons for an offensive campaign, and only one-third of its four armored and six mechanized divisions were reorganized for modern combat. The IZAF was approximately 28,000 strong, not counting a 10,000-member air defense organization. Established in 1931 as the air arm of the Iraqi Army, the IZAF remained subordinate to the ground forces. Its commander reported to the army's chief of staff. The British Royal Air Force had established, trained, and equipped the IZAF before 1946 and had, until 1958, retained close contact. The IZAF and the Iraqi Army, also British-founded, retained much of their colonial heritage, especially in planning methodology. (The Iraqis based their invasion plan of 1980 on work originally drawn up under British tutelage in 1941.)³⁹

In 1980 the IZAF had two formal missions: to provide the army with ground support, and to assist with air defense. It possessed 332 combat aircraft, almost all Soviet built, consisting of 15-20 obsolescent Soviet bombers plus 80 MiG-23Bs, 60 Su-20/22s, 40 Su-7Bs and 10 Hunters in its ground attack elements, and 115 MiG-21s in its interceptor squadrons. The interceptor units had poor air-to-air combat training and the highly limited, export versions of Soviet radar. The air-to-air missile inventory of the interceptor squadrons consisted of outdated Soviet AA-2s (Atolls).⁴⁰

39. Bergquist, *Role of Airpower in the Iran-Iraq War*, p. 23.

40. Cordesman and Wagner, *Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 69-70.

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The state of the interceptor force illustrates one disadvantage of purchasing Soviet arms. The USSR provided inadequate training in air combat and little training in air operations. Nor did it employ aggressor squadrons and advanced simulators. In addition, the Soviets failed to supply detailed operational data, as opposed to straight technical data, on their fighters and missiles. The Iraqis, in any case, lacked sufficient experience to interpret such information. Soviet personnel made almost no effort to go beyond their conventional ground-controlled intercept training and doctrine to provide for more fluid situations. They also failed to supply adequate training and capability in electronic warfare and countermeasures and in low-altitude combat. They provided virtually no training for air combat at altitudes below 5,000 feet.⁴¹

The Soviets did not short-change their Iraqi clients in all important areas. Whereas the Iranians received only incomplete portions of a complex, computer-driven, U.S. logistics system, which they could not maintain or support, the Iraqis received from the Soviets a far more practical and easy system. Instead of U.S. demand-pull logistics, a system that responds to requests for items already consumed, the Soviets, in accordance with their own doctrine, set up a demand-push logistics system which supplied Iraqi forces at the front with a massive oversupply of ammunition stocks and war reserves. In 1986, for example, Iraqi guns expended in excess of 400 rounds per day against the attempted Iranian breakout from the Al Faw Peninsula.⁴² The Iraqis also strengthened their mobility by purchasing large numbers of tank transporters, a move that saved maintenance on tanks, extended their service life, and increased their mobility and responsiveness.

Saddam Hussein himself constituted the weakest link of the Iraqi military. He placed his relatives and followers—most were Sunni Arabs like himself whose only military qualification was personal loyalty to their leader—in command of many of the major units. Saddam not only continued purges of the party and the military, he suppressed the Shias,

41. *Ibid.*, p. 479.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 452.

who formed 65 percent of the total population of Iraq, and the Kurds, a mostly Sunni Moslem ethnic group that constituted approximately 19 percent of the population. He created an atmosphere of terror, of uncertainty, and of arbitrary punishment that deadened the initiative of his bureaucrats and his soldiers. Rather than risk an error, his senior officers, time and again, paused and awaited instructions. Within the IZAF military, loyalty to Saddam and the Baath, rather than professional ability, was the prerequisite for advancement. Saddam's overcentralization of command and politicization of his armed forces prevented the exercise of effective professional judgment necessary for success.

The Iran-Iraq War

Given the character of the Iraqi government, only its leader, Saddam Hussein, could have made the decision to invade Iran. If nothing else, Saddam timed his decision well. Iran had alienated its major arms suppliers, substantially weakened its armed forces, and frightened its neighbors with its religious rhetoric. Iranian refugees and high-ranking defectors residing in Iraq even encouraged Saddam by exaggerating Iran's weaknesses for purposes of their own. The Soviet Union feared the effect of Islamic fundamentalism on its Moslem republics and also distrusted the Iranian Regime for its harsh suppression of the Tudeh (the Iranian Communist Party). Furthermore, Iran had sent military aid to the Moslem guerrillas in Afghanistan who were fighting the Soviet-imposed government in Kabul. A Soviet-Iranian rapprochement seemed unlikely. The remaining Gulf states, also targets of Khomeini's threats, seemed disposed to tacitly support and encourage Iraq. Although Saddam had selected an advantageous time for the invasion, his military botched the execution.

The Iraqi Invasion of Iran (1980)

On the night of September 22, 1980, two waves of Iraqi aircraft, comprising virtually every combat-ready fighter and fighter-bomber Iraq possessed, launched a surprise attack on two Iranian early-warning radar stations, six Iranian air bases, and four Iranian army bases. The attacks failed miserably. Iraqi bombing runs scattered ordnance so widely that the Iranians later found it difficult to even determine the original tar-

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gets; most of the bombs intended to hit the runways missed, the remainder caused only minor cratering. Many bombs failed to explode, possibly because of fuzing or arming problems, and long rows of transport aircraft, not sheltered like Iran's fighter planes, escaped injury. Attacks on the army bases damaged a few buildings but hit no important targets. Senior IZAF officers later stated that the pilots flying the missions had little practical experience other than bombing Kurdish villages. The officers noted the primitive Soviet avionics on their attack aircraft and attributed to them circular errors of probability in excess of 500 meters. They further acknowledged an absence of technical personnel familiar with weapons effects, a lack of operational research facilities, no ground crews with experience in arming or fuzing air munitions for demanding missions, and a dearth of photo interpreters or personnel experienced in bomb damage assessment. The IZAF grossly underestimated the number of missions it needed to complete its task, failed to conduct proper reconnaissance, and provided its units and pilots with hopelessly inadequate briefings and intelligence materials. So politicized was the IZAF chain of command that it sometimes took days to obtain approval for even important targets. In fact, IZAF raids left the Iranian Air Force intact, which immediately gave lie to the reports of its demise. Within a day, it mounted a 100-sortie counterattack. Throughout this period, the Iranians used their superior American aircraft, munitions, and training to win most of the air-to-air battles and to deliver low-level attacks on Iraqi targets. Their level of effort soon dropped to 50 sorties a day as they consumed irreplaceable aircraft and spare parts. The Iranian Air Force never repeated its earlier performance for the remainder of the war. As for the IZAF, it temporarily disappeared from the air. Despite a numerical superiority of 3 or 4 to 1, the IZAF dropped its sortie rate to a minimum and withdrew some of its units to bases in western Iraq, while dispersing others to Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, North Yemen, and Oman.⁴³

On the ground, twelve Iraqi divisions advanced across a 700-

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84. See also Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 40-41.

kilometer front into Iran. They had an initial advantage in manpower of 5 to 1. Despite minimal and disorganized resistance, their advance averaged only 10 kilometers a day. While Iraqi forces in the north and center struck glancing blows, the largest attack, by five divisions in the south, pushed into the Iranian province of Khuzestan. This province contained some of Iran's most lucrative oil fields and had a substantial Arab minority population which the Iraqis had convinced themselves would support their invasion. The southern force had two missions: to seize the cities of Khoramshahr and Abadan, which would place the Shatt-al-Arab completely in Iraqi hands, and to occupy the cities of Dezful and Ahvaz. The capture of Dezful, located on the western side of a key pass through the Zagros Mountains, would block the most direct surface route and railroad from Teheran to the plain between the mountains and the Tigris River. Ahvaz was a key road junction, halfway between Abadan and Dezful. Apparently the Iraqis lacked the strength, imagination, or logistics to order their forces to close up to and seal all the passes over the mountains and to occupy the major Iranian oil fields between Abadan and the mountains. Their initial plans proved to exceed their hesitant and fumbling reach. The forces outside Khoramshahr ran into slight resistance from popular revolutionary forces and sat down to wait for orders. Saddam dithered and seemed unwilling to accept the casualties involved in urban fighting. He may not have felt completely confident about his hold on Iraq at this point of his career. Possibly, he wished to avoid putting his control to the test by incurring casualties. As his personal hold on the state solidified, his fear of casualties decreased, but at the moment, his indecision guaranteed heavy Iraqi casualties when his forces finally attacked a much reinforced foe. Only when Khomeini refused to accept a United Nations cease-fire did Saddam order his troops into the city. When they moved in, the Iraqis had little trouble taking the port area, but they encountered fierce resistance in the city's center. They did not clear the area until October 24 and may have incurred as many as 9,000 casualties in doing so. By mid-November, they halted on all fronts. The failure of the Iranians to collapse immediately and the heavy casualties suffered by Saddam's troops led him to switch

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tactics. As the seasonal rains soaked the battlefield from November through February, he announced that Iraq had achieved all its objectives. He hunkered down to hold his newly captured territory and to wait either for Khomeini to negotiate or for the revolutionary regime to collapse. Yet another shock faced Saddam—his major arms supplier, the Soviet Union, imposed an arms embargo on him at the beginning of the conflict and did not lift it for two years in vain hopes of gaining influence in Teheran.⁴⁴ This proved a further incentive for Saddam to broaden his arms supply base: he turned to Western arms sellers, when available, and he increased Iraq's arms-manufacturing capability.

Iran Regains Its Territory (1981–1982)

In the spring of 1981 the Iranians commenced a series of counter-attacks intended to drive the Iraqis from Iran. Iranian mobilization had produced enough new troops, most going to the popular forces, to redress the manpower imbalance, changing it to 2 to 1 in Iran's favor. In addition, in January 1981 the U.S. government, under newly elected President Reagan, may have decided to aid Iranian resistance by ignoring restrictions on third-party sales of U.S. arms. The Israelis, always implacable foes of Saddam, and possibly others were said to have sold the Iranians billions of dollars worth of American spare parts and arms.⁴⁵ The Israelis, of course, refilled their stockpiles with newer American arms. In an early January 1981 attack at Susangerd, the Iranians provoked one of the largest tank battles in the war, and lost heavily. This discredited the regular army and led to an increased emphasis on the Revolutionary Guard and on the even more poorly armed and trained

44. Stephen C. Pelletiere and Douglas V. Johnson, *Lessons Learned: The Iran-Iraq War* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1991), pp. 8–9; Cordesman and Wagner, *Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 84–88, 92–98.

45. Seymour M. Hersh, "U.S. Secretly Gave Aid to Iraq Early in Its War Against Iran," *The New York Times*, Jan 26, 1992, p. 1.

people's militia, the Basij.⁴⁶ Henceforth, the Revolutionary Guard dominated the direction of operations. The victory of the regime's hard-line religious faction also meant that relations with the United States, which had just recovered its hostages, would not improve, to the detriment of the Iranian military's spare-parts position. In spite of their initial setback, the Iranians continued the counteroffensive. From September to December 1981 they regained considerable territory as Iraqi defenses crumbled under the pressure of "human wave attacks" launched by religiously inspired Revolutionary Guard units and effectively supported by regular artillery units and more heavily armed regular infantry units. Because the Iranians continued to employ variations of the human wave throughout out the conflict, the observations of Anthony Cordesman, coauthor of a balanced and informative work on the Iran-Iraq War, deserve consideration. He noted that this tactic "makes sound military sense as a means of countering fewer but better equipped forces," provided the attack is not pushed too hard; the attack takes advantage of night, or exploits some other form of tactical surprise; successful penetrations are followed up; unsuccessful attacks are halted; and the fighting has worthwhile and achievable objectives. Cordesman adds that the Iranians tended to become overinvolved with their own ideological beliefs—they consistently failed to control and properly organize their human wave tactics and assumed that religious fervor could overcome tactical deficiency.⁴⁷ However, in this early stage of the war, their tactics proved quite effective, especially when one realizes the all-too-human tendency of defeated troops from any nation to report overwhelming waves of enemy troops.

Internal political events distracted the Ayatollah's regime and directly affected his ability to wage war. Khomeini's chief minister, Abdul Hassan Bani-Sadr, wished to follow more moderate policies than those promoted by the conservative-religious factions that supported Khomeini. The mullahs regarded Bani-Sadr's support of the regular armed forces as

46. Pelletiere and Johnson, *Lessons Learned*, pp. 9-10.

47. Cordesman and Wagner, *Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 431-33.

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a cardinal shortcoming. In June 1981, Khomeini dismissed him, and Bani-Sadr fled the country, helped by some elements of the Iranian Air Force. The Khomeini regime promptly instituted an exhaustive purge. It re-arrested many of the American-trained regular officers that Bani-Sadr had allowed to return to duty and, in all, purged more than half its pilots and air crews; operational strength in the air force dropped to well below a hundred aircraft. In addition, the regime halted all training, required that religious officials approve all missions, and limited fuel to the minimum needed for a specific mission. The Iranian Air Force never fully recovered from this blow. Bani-Sadr's flight caused further mischief for the regime in that it finally pushed radical groups, such as the People's Mujahideen, into armed opposition. The Mujahideen launched an urban guerrilla warfare campaign with car bombings and assassinations that succeeded in killing two presidents of the Republic and one of its prime ministers. The government responded with an even more murderous campaign and executed perhaps 3,000 dissidents.⁴⁸ While these events caused permanent damage to the Iranian Air Force and obviously distracted the regime, in the long run the strengthening of the religious party meant more manpower and determination for the military effort at the front, albeit for the popular forces, because the mullahs fanatically believed that they would eventually be the victors.

In June 1981, the Iraqis received a blow from an unexpected direction. On the seventh of the month, Israeli Air Force F-16s bombed and destroyed the French-built Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak. Israeli intelligence credited the Iraqis with the capability to start the 70-mega-watt reactor by September 1981 and further gave them the capacity by 1985 to exploit the enriched uranium they had on hand to produce six 20-kiloton, plutonium-based atomic bombs, each approximately the same size as the Hiroshima bomb. The Israeli government found this prospect intolerable and decided to launch a preemptive air raid. (Israel claims it informed the United States of its decision beforehand.) The strike consisted of six F-15s flying escort and eight F-16s, four flying backup, that

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-18.

carried two 2,000-pound bombs each. The provision for 100 percent backup says much about the professionalism and seriousness of the Israeli planners. Before entering Iraq, the aircraft purportedly violated both Jordanian and Saudi Arabian airspace undetected. The Israelis took the Iraqis by surprise and successfully completed their mission. In fact, had the Israelis not publicly accepted responsibility for the raid, the Iraqis might well have blamed it on the Iranians.⁴⁹ Although the United Nations, the United States, and many other countries condemned the Israeli action despite Israel's preexisting state of war with Iraq, it appears that the Israelis effectively delayed the Iraqis' development of atomic weapons for a number of years to come. A nuclear-capable Iraq in 1990, a strong likelihood without the Osirak raid, would have complicated U.S. operations in the Gulf immensely.

In the fall of 1981, the Iranians cleared the Iraqis from most of Iran, save for the region around the Shatt-al-Arab. In November 1981, Saddam offered a one-month cease-fire. The Iranians summarily rejected his offer and replied that they would make no compromise and that the war would continue as long as Saddam remained in power. At the end of the rainy season, in March 1982, the Iranians resumed their offensive, and within ninety days they had almost completely ejected the Iraqis from their land. The Iraqis suffered heavy losses and seemed demoralized. For their part, the Iranians continued to exploit the advantages of their light-infantry tactics in the face of the road-bound Iraqi Army. The Iraqis failed to provide for defense in depth, left significant gaps between their units, and reacted too slowly to the threats they faced. They had also added new layers of command, all needing approval for seemingly every action, and they continued to micromanage the war from Baghdad. In these spring 1982 battles, the Iraqis suffered between 55,000 and 75,000 casualties, while the Iranians absorbed more than 100,000. In June, Saddam ordered the Iraqi Army to withdraw from all but of few key sectors of Iran, and he declared a unilateral cease-fire; the Iranians countered with unacceptable demands—for war guilt, reparations, and a

49. Dupuy and Martell, *Flawed Victory*, pp. 69-72.

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new regime in Baghdad. Apparently, the Iraqi defeat produced some dissatisfaction within the Iraqi government, for Saddam reduced the size of the Revolutionary Command Council from seventeen to nine members, cut the size of the Baath Party Council, dismissed part of the cabinet, and had twelve generals shot for their performance in battle. As previously mentioned, when the minister of health suggested at this point that Saddam resign in the service of peace, Saddam reportedly invited him to leave the cabinet meeting room and personally executed him. Saddam retained central authority over all major military decisions in the field.⁵⁰

Iran Invades Iraq (1982-1984)

The turn of the war in Iran's favor forced policy reappraisals in the capitals of the superpowers. Neither the USSR nor the United States wished to see Iraq defeated. In the spring of 1982, U.S. support tilted from Iran toward Iraq, and by summer 1982, Moscow had lifted its arms-sales ban on Iraq. As early as March 1982, U.S. intelligence sources had detected signs of the impending Iraqi debacle. On March 15, the United States removed Iraq from the State Department's list of nations aiding terrorism, which eased trade prohibitions. The United States quickly began to forward intelligence information based on satellite imagery, communications intercepts, and Central Intelligence Agency assessments to Baghdad. This intelligence relationship deepened as the war progressed. In November 1984 President Reagan purportedly signed a National Security Decision Directive calling for a direct intelligence liaison with Baghdad. By 1986, American intelligence began arriving almost in real time. This upgrading of the quality of the information sent may have included actual satellite imagery, precise down to vehicle size—1.5 to 2 meters in resolution. Radio intercepts included exact designations and, by inference, showed the effectiveness of radio silence and communications via buried land lines. This information not only

50. Cordesman and Wagner, *Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 122-43.

greatly aided Iraqi military operations, but provided an accurate insight into U.S. collection capabilities and methods. Americans also routinely ignored the sale of American arms to the Iraqis by Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Jordan sold or transferred small arms, mortars, and Huey helicopters; Saudi Arabia sent small arms, mortars, and other weapons; and Kuwait sold Iraq thousands of TOW (tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided) antitank missiles. As one senior administration official recalled, "we don't want Iraq to lose the war."⁵¹

The Iranian invasion of Iraq, a move encouraged by the momentum of Iranian successes and by the mullahs' desire to gain control of Iraq's Shia shrines and population, changed the nature of the war and the international response to it. Saddam and the Baath had no choice but to fight to the end. They could not permit the city of Basra, Iraq's second-largest city and the obvious target of any Iranian offensive, to fall. If Basra did change hands and its majority Shia population went over to the Iranians, the rest of Iraq might soon follow. In any case, with the preponderance of the Iraqi Army made up of Shias—perhaps as many as 85 percent—Saddam could not afford to wager too confidently on their loyalty. Fortunately for Saddam, the Iraqi Shias stayed remarkably loyal throughout the conflict, a fact that says much for the patriotism and commitment of the average Iraqi to his government. Although the international community had relaxed the arms embargo against each warring power enough to allow importation of hand-held weapons, mortars, shoulder-fired missiles, and the like, it had effectively withheld heavy weapons. The Iranian threat to radically change Iraq, and by extension the entire Persian Gulf, caused several Western powers to lean toward the Iraqis. In 1982, 82 percent of France's foreign arms sales went to Iraq. When the Ayatollah's regime came down hard on the Iranian Communist Party, the Soviets ceased their courtship of Khomeini and began to ship arms that had been back ordered to Iraq and to accept orders for new ones. From this time onward, the Iraqis had free access to the world's arms markets, while the Iranians had difficulty in obtaining

51. Hersh, *The New York Times*, Jan 26, 1992, p. 1; William Scott Malone, "Did the U.S. Teach Iraq to Hide Its Terror Arms?," *The Washington Post*, Nov 3, 1991, p. C1.

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heavy weapons. Only the United States, of all the world's major arms exporters, officially refused to ship heavy weapons to either side. Consequently, the Iranians had little choice but to rely on manpower-heavy solutions to tactical problems, thus playing into the hands of the religiously inspired popular forces at the expense of weapons and personnel training. The renewed access to heavy weapons led the casualty-adverse Iraqis to continue to rely on firepower, backed by their impressive combat engineering. Iraqi engineers built up a mammoth array of deeply fortified, interconnected positions strengthened by selective flooding and supported by extensive logistics facilities, and a large system of roads to facilitate the movement of reserves.⁵²

The initial Iranian offensive toward Basra, which the Iranians never captured, conformed to the pattern of almost all subsequent Iranian pushes. Using human-wave tactics, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards penetrated Iraqi positions and forced the Iraqis back for a few kilometers, before they themselves became disorganized and outran their supporting logistics and artillery. The Iraqis counterattacked the exposed Iranians and repulsed them to almost the starting point. Both sides lost heavily in equipment, a price the Iranians could not afford. The Iranians also lost heavily in manpower; their casualty rate nearly doubled that of Iraq's. They could replace their losses in terms of numbers but not in terms of quality, training, or experience. Furthermore, the Iranians experienced a far higher mortality rate among their casualties because they lacked medical resources and held such creature comforts as hospitals in great contempt. As this process continued over several years, it gradually reduced the Iranians to a lightly armed mob, extremely vulnerable to armor and mechanized counterattack. Throughout 1983, the Iranians continued to hurl themselves at the Iraqi defensive positions guarding Basra.

52. Pelletiere and Johnson, *Lessons Learned*, p. 11; Cordesman and Wagner, *Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 145-57.

A War of Attrition (1984–1986)

Heavy casualties in the first offensives against Iraq forced the Iranians to change their tactics. From April 1984 into 1986 they waged a war of attrition on land. They hoped, by means of attrition, to find a solution to the difficult tactical problem confronting them. How could they defeat a more heavily armed, more numerous, deeply entrenched foe, without ruinous losses? At this stage of the war, the Iranian armed forces consisted of 305,000 regulars, 250,000 Revolutionary Guards, and 200,000 Basij (available for part-time duty only). They disposed 1,050 main battle tanks and 95 operational combat aircraft. Their enemy numbered 675,000 regulars under arms, with 4,820 main battle tanks and 580 operational combat aircraft.⁵³ The Iraqis also had an advantage in artillery tubes, perhaps as great as 5 or 6 to 1. During this period, the Iranians attempted to conserve their matériel and human resources with carefully planned night or surprise attacks up and down the 750-mile front. They attacked important local features, confronting the Iraqis with the choice of taking casualties to regain what had been seized or of accepting a less favorable defensive terrain. During one of these attacks in 1985, the Iraqis first employed the Republican Guard, an elite unit charged with guarding the president, in a counterattack against an Iranian breakthrough. The Iraqis replied to the war of attrition by launching an air war against tankers carrying Iranian petroleum and ports holding Iranian oil. Although the Iraqis struck several tankers with French-built Exocet missiles, they accomplished little other than driving up shipping insurance rates in the Persian Gulf.

The Final Iranian Offensives (1986–1987)

From 1986–1987, the conflict entered a new phase—that of Iran's final offensives. In the first, which began in the middle of a rainstorm on

53. Cordesman and Wagner, *Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 192–93, table 7.1, "The Trends in Iranian and Iraqi Military Forces, 1979–1985."

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February 10, 1986, the Iranians delivered a hammerblow to the Al Faw Peninsula that found the complacent Iraqis unprepared. Much earlier in the war, the civilian population of the city of Al Faw had deserted, leaving only a few unreliable Popular Army units garrisoned in the peninsula, which juts into the northern Gulf between the Shatt-al-Arab and Bubiyan Island. Diversionary attacks in the north distracted Iraqi reserves, enabling the Iranians to secure the peninsula. Once ensconced, the Iranians not only gained the symbolic victory of cutting Iraq off from the sea, but they positioned themselves to attack Basra from the south and to attack Iraq's lines of communication with Kuwait. The Iranians threatened to surround Iraq's only naval base, Umm Qasr, on the Kuwaiti border, and they captured Iraq's main air control and warning center used to cover the Gulf. The Iranians' success reduced the Kuwaitis, the Saudis, and the rest of the Gulf populations to a state of near panic. Unable to determine their enemy's actual intentions, the Iraqis, and presumably Saddam, vacillated as to where they should send their reserves. The Iranians used the time they gained to send 20,000 reinforcements to the swampy, low-lying peninsula. On February 13, Saddam committed units of the elite Republican Guard. They found their tanks and mechanized equipment of little use in the marshy terrain. They literally bogged down and received a bad mauling at the hands of Iranian artillery. Apparently to calm the other Gulf powers, Saddam next sent in a massive counterattack, to which he assigned his best commanders. Hampered by strict orders to avoid casualties, by road-bound tactics, and a terrain that limited vehicular movement to paved surfaces on the peninsula, these units made slow progress, and still suffered unacceptable losses. The Iraqis consumed large quantities of munitions, firing up to 600 artillery rounds per day per gun. Both sides also committed their air forces; the Iraqis claimed to have mounted more than 18,500 sorties in the six weeks that followed the attack. The Iraqis even used poison gas on a large scale. The effort produced little but wastage of men and machines. By March 20, the fighting in Al Faw had died down.⁵⁴

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 219-25.

Khomeini responded by issuing a Fatawa, or religious proclamation, stating that more offensives would follow and that the war must end by the next Iranian New Year (March 21, 1987). He issued a call for 500,000 new volunteers, and the government toughened its enforcement of conscription. It closed the universities and subjected 30,000 teachers to the draft. New regulations allowed the Revolutionary Guards to stanch the recurring loss of experienced manpower by enabling them to recall men who had already served. For his part, and apparently for reasons of prestige, Saddam ordered the recapture of the militarily insignificant Iranian town of Mehran in the north. By May 12, Saddam's forces had overwhelmed the defenders, which gave him the opportunity to proclaim that he would trade Al Faw for Mehran, or else he would be forced to seize more Iranian cities. Instead, the Iranians retook Mehran on June 10, 1986, possibly persuading Saddam to reassess his management of the war.

In July 1986 the Baath held a party conference. The session naturally included not only the top civilian leadership but much of the military leadership as well—one did not attain a leading position in either the Iraqi government or its military without becoming a party member relatively early in one's rise. At this meeting, which may or may not have reinforced similar decisions reputedly taken in 1982 at the beginning of the Iranian invasion of Iraq, Saddam and his military⁵⁵ worked out a *modus vivendi*. Discussion centered on the key topics of the direction of the war and of future strategy. The generals apparently did not make the fatal mistake of directly challenging Saddam's authority, but they did persuade him to modify his method of command and his conduct of the war. Khomeini's promise to end the war soon and Iran's efforts to finally mobilize its 3 to 1 manpower advantage required a drastic Iraqi response. The Iranians would surely open their offensive in the rainy season, as they had in Al Faw, negating much of Iraq's advantage in aircraft and mechanized equipment. To respond effectively to these circumstances, the Iraqi Army had to field a sizable high-quality

55. See Sharam Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1988), pp. 116-17, who place this meeting in 1982.

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infantry force—the unreliable rabble of the Popular Army could not hope to perform the task. Therefore, Saddam's senior officers asked that he order a general call-up. They proposed to assign college students—heretofore exempt—and the sons of the most influential people in the country to newly formed infantry units of the Republican Guard. It probably did not escape Saddam's attention that the new infantry-heavy tactics implied massive casualties, but the generals had an answer to that as well. Unlike the Iranians, they would not throw untrained or partially trained men directly into the maelstrom. Instead, and as secretly as possible, the new units would receive thorough and prolonged training in aggressive warfare techniques. Their commanders would carefully and professionally plan their operations, even to the point of building full-scale mock-ups and running the troops through them.

Finally, the generals argued for decentralization of the war's direction. They hoped to persuade Saddam that he could no longer control the military's every move from the palace. They wanted him to realize that if he agreed to a large army and a complex training program, he could not hope to oversee it all, and if he implemented this new program, his soldiers could switch from the static defensive tactics they had clung to for four years to a mobile defense. Such a scheme would necessitate timely responses. In addition, the leaders undoubtedly anticipated a long campaign sprawling across the entire front which could last for weeks and pass through several phases. Saddam could not run such a campaign either from his palace or with his limited staff.⁵⁶

Although Saddam certainly marked the names of some of his officers for future ruin and disgrace, or worse, he agreed to their proposals. When faced with possible defeat, Saddam demonstrated the flexibility to loosen control of the professional military to preserve his rule. Despite the presence of a political officer in every major unit, Saddam's acceptance of the new strategy gave the generals the freedom to raise the standards of professionalism within the Iraqi Army to levels that far outclassed those within the Iranian services. Nonetheless, Saddam did

56. Pelletiere and Johnson, *Lessons Learned*, pp. 37–38.

not refrain from all interference in the internal affairs of his armed forces: he continued his partiality toward his favorites and punished those who failed.

The new call-up allowed the Iraqis to maintain an army equal in size to the Iranians'—820,000 regulars—and to quadruple the size of the Republican Guard—to 28 brigades. The upgrading of U.S. intelligence information, which occurred at this time, must also have greatly aided the Iraqi effort; it revealed some of Iran's most secret tactical moves. The Iraqis had superior equipment, logistics, intelligence, mobility, fortifications, firepower, and airpower, but they allowed the initiative to remain with the Iranians, who used their opportunity poorly. The Iranians remained fixed on taking Basra, and their inability to resolve the differences between their regular forces and the Revolutionary Guard committed them to human-wave tactics conducted by half-trained troops. A carefully prepared Iranian offensive against Basra, code-named KARBALA V, became the crucial battle in this phase of the conflict. On January 9, 1987, the Iranians—70 percent of them Revolutionary Guards and totally untrained Basij—attacked extremely strong Iraqi defenses consisting of minefields, multiple rings of fortifications, and extensive water defenses. The Iranians achieved tactical surprise and experienced some initial success, especially when the Iraqis were again slow to commit their reserves. Soon the offensive became a repeat of the Al Faw operation as both sides committed large forces. The Iranians sent at least 140,000 men into the fray. Saddam appears to have distanced himself from this fighting, either because of his agreements with the generals or because he had no wish to accept responsibility for any possible disaster. However, poor performances by the Iraqi Army Chief of Staff and the Commander of the Third Corps incurred Saddam's disfavor and prompted the dismissal of and possible execution of a number of officers in the Third and Seventh Corps. Eventually, the Iraqis shot the offensive into the ground. They suffered heavy casualties in doing so, but the Iranians suffered far more heavily, losing perhaps 30,000 killed and tens of thousands wounded.

KARBALA V marked a decisive turning-point in the war. It demon-

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strated to the Iranian armed forces, and probably to the Iranian political leadership as well, that even a well-prepared assault could not succeed. Since the Iranians did not have the same access to international arms that the Iraqis did, they could never match Iraqi firepower, nor were they willing to make their armed forces as professional as those of the Iraqis. Only a miracle could produce an outright victory, and the Ayatollahs and mullahs still believed in such events. The war would continue.⁵⁷

Renewed Attrition (1987)

The Iranians fell back on a strategy of attrition, which, given the relative strength of the two armies, further revealed their strategic bankruptcy. Instead of bashing themselves to bits against the Iraqi defenses, the Iranians preferred to bleed to death. From the start of the war, the Iranians had lost 600,000 to 700,000 dead, and twice that number wounded, a level of casualties comparable to those of France or Germany in World War I. In addition, the recruiting drives in 1986 had come up short. Since the regime would not completely put itself on a war footing (Iranians throughout the war devoted, on average, 21 percent of their gross national product to military spending, as opposed to twice that much in Iraq) and force the necessary manpower into the armed services with a thoroughgoing conscription, the Iranians struggled to maintain sufficient numbers of troops on the line. Their home front began to show signs of war weariness, and some Iranians even questioned why the mullahs had sent so many of their countrymen to their deaths.⁵⁸ In the spring of 1987 several small Iranian attacks produced lopsided casualties in favor of the Iraqis. In the meantime, the Iraqis has escalated attacks on Gulf shipping and on Iranian oil facilities and ports. Many of the raids produced useful, but temporary, results. Although the IZAF did not have enough aircraft to hit its targets repeatedly and to

57. Cordesman and Wagner, *Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 247-54.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

put them out of action permanently, it was during these missions that the IZAF revealed an air-to-air refueling capacity and a growing efficiency in the use of French aircraft, such as the Mirage F-1 which it had purchased to supplement its Soviet models. Iran, too, escalated its attacks on shipping in the Gulf, a move that brought it into a direct confrontation with warships of the U.S. Navy and several European powers. The two warring nations also resumed their war of the cities, peppering each other's capitals and major cities with short-range ballistic missiles and occasional hit-and-run air raids. As one would expect in any technological match-up, the Iranians got the worst of the war of the cities. The Iraqis' greater access to foreign missile suppliers and technicians enabled them to give more than they received. Iranian morale stretched thinner, but held.

The Final Iraqi Offensives and Western Intervention (1987-1989)

The Iran-Iraq War entered its final phase early in 1988 when the fruits of rising Iraqi military professionalism, increased recruitment of higher quality personnel, unlimited access to foreign arms markets, and careful training of elite and selected regular units had ripened. Fully equipped and confident Iraqi Army units rotated out of the line to receive intensive training in all terrains and in all weather. The Iraqi Army also attained peak size, estimated at between 900,000 and 1,000,000 men distributed among 77 division equivalents. In addition, the Iraqis reoriented the use of their helicopters. No longer did the helicopters perform strictly as gunships, they now performed in artillery spotting and reconnaissance. This reorientation improved the effectiveness of the field artillery, especially in its ability to fire beyond visual range and to rapidly shift fire. With respect to chemical warfare, the Iraqis made a significant improvement: they upgraded from the use of persistent agents, such as mustard gas, to the use of nonpersistent and highly lethal nerve gas. They could employ nerve gas, but not mustard gas, relatively near their own troops and during an initial assault. This insidious weapon

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caused heavy casualties and spread panic among the ranks of the ill-prepared Iranians. The IZAF had built new bases with hardened aircraft shelters and complete support facilities and equipment. The air force had also acquired late-model Soviet aircraft, such as Su-22s, Su-25s, MiG-29s, and MiG-25Rs. It added large numbers of surface-to-air missiles, cluster bombs, and chemical munitions to these aircraft.⁵⁹ The inability of the Iranians to conduct large-scale assaults in the last half of 1987 provided the Iraqis with the opportunity to put the finishing touches on their preparations and to put in motion their plans for a counteroffensive.

For every Iraqi strength, the Iranians had a corresponding weakness: a lack of professionalism, fewer heavy weapons, poor training and equipment for gas warfare, declining recruitment, fewer troops at the front, few defenses in depth, and divisions within their leadership on the direction of the war. For example, the Iranians had at best only one-half the number of artillery pieces that the Iraqis had, and the Iranians had only 600,000 full-time soldiers at the front, two-thirds the number of their foe. Iran's confrontation with the Western powers in the Gulf added a strategic distraction, while the Iranians compounded their problems with poor strategy on land. They decided to make their major ground effort in the north, which would aid the Kurds and threaten Iraqi oil production centers. However, the mountainous terrain offered major advantages to the defender, and the Iraqis had far better lines of communications to the area. Worst of all, a northern offensive tied up large numbers of troops and left the southern sector undermanned.

In the early months of 1988, the IZAF continued its attacks on dams, bridges, and refineries, and the war of the cities intensified. In March, provoked by an Iranian offensive in the north that destroyed the best part of an Iraqi division, the Iraqis loosed poison gas on Kurdish villages. The Iranians derived a substantial propaganda victory from this action, and it led to their continued attack. The Iraqis brought up reinforcements, whose enormous firepower and other advantages eventual-

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 353-55.

ly turned the offensive into a bloody ruin. Iranian publicity about Iraq's use of gas warfare may have done more to harm the morale of Iranian civilians, potential recruits, and front-line troops than it helped in the war against the enemy. After a month of deception operations, on the first day of the Moslem holy month of fasting, Ramadan, April 17, 1988, Iraq commenced its counteroffensive. It struck the Al Faw Peninsula and caught the Iranians in the midst of troop rotations and with badly prepared defenses. After having held the initiative for five years, the Iranians had tended to neglect their defenses. In thirty-five hours, with a force advantage of 6 to 1, the offensive recaptured the entire peninsula and drove the Iranian defenders across a single bridge, purposely left undamaged, spanning the Shatt-al-Arab. The Iranians left behind their supplies and their major items of equipment. They displayed none of the fanatical determination to fight to the death that had previously characterized their conduct.

Five weeks later, on May 25, the Iraqi Army attacked the Iranian lines along a fifteen-mile front, just south of Basra. In addition to having a 3 to 1 advantage in force, the Iraqis made heavy use of nerve gas and employed an immense artillery barrage. This time, well-designed defenses confronted their initial advance. The Iranians stuck to their guns and even counterattacked, but the Iraqis fed in reinforcements, which eventually broke the defenders. Within a day, five Iranian divisions began a swift and panicky retreat. Again, the Iraqis captured large stocks of equipment, including 90 tanks. In one day, Iran gave up territory that it had expended 50,000 dead to capture in 1987. In June, Iraqi attacks recaptured Mehran, and far more significantly, Iraqi forces recaptured the oil-rich Majnoon Island. Both attacks shattered the opposing Iranian units and captured vast amounts of equipment. The first four counterattacks ejected Iran from all it had gained since 1982.

On July 12, a final Iraqi attack demonstrated the futility of further resistance; on this date, the Iraqis immediately broke through Iranian lines and advanced unopposed for forty kilometers. On July 17, the Iranians accepted the United Nations cease-fire resolution. In an address to the Iranian people, Khomeini remarked, "Making this decision

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[to accept defeat] was more deadly than taking poison." Although he refused to accept the cease-fire because of Iran's "ambiguous" terms, Saddam halted forward movement, announced that he had no designs on Iranian territory, demanded that Iran accept face-to-face negotiations, and warned that he would not tolerate renewed Iranian mobilization. In the meantime, Saddam permitted his army to launch a series of raids farther into Iran and permitted his air force to continue raids on strategic targets in Iran. At last, the Iranians agreed to meet personally with the Iraqis shortly after the implementation of the cease-fire, and Saddam succumbed to the diplomatic pressure from his Gulf allies, the United States, and the European powers to cease operations. On August 8, 1988, the conflict ended.⁶⁰

To the more than casual observer, the Iran-Iraq War holds several valuable lessons. To dismiss the conflict as a clash between armed mobs would be fallacious, as European observers of the American Civil War learned many years ago. The Iran-Iraq War confirmed some age-old precepts, the most obvious being that a nation's strategy must be geared to its capabilities. Although Saddam timed his initiation of hostilities well, he gambled far too heavily on the perceived disorganization of his enemy and overestimated the efficiency of his own forces. He did not properly appreciate the basic strengths of the Islamic Republic, nor did he did properly prepare his own armed forces for the task at hand. Likewise, the Iranian decision to invade Iraq after freeing its own territory committed it to a task well beyond its reach. A simple decision to accept a negotiated peace at this time would have saved an untold number of lives. On the other hand, Saddam's decision at the end of the war to forego a campaign to conquer additional Iranian territory and to settle for a cease-fire showed a far more realistic appraisal of the difficulties involved in launching an extended campaign inside enemy territory. The war also serves as a case study in the value of the professionalization of the military. In freeing his soldiers and airmen to employ independent judgment and to devise their own means of achieving the goals

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 369-99.

of the state, rather than imposing strict political controls on their actions, Saddam gained a far more effective military. The increased professionalism of his officers may not have produced genius, but it did produce an organization capable of fielding a million men and of formulating a scheme of specialized training, which emphasized combined-arms operations. This enabled significant portions of the army to easily overcome the tactical problems presented by the enemy and to produce a command organization able to plan and conduct large-scale offensive actions. Much like General Bernard L. Montgomery, who commanded the British Army in the Egyptian Desert in 1942, the Iraqis mastered the complicated art of a set-piece battle. In contrast, the Iranian mullah's distrust of their regulars handicapped the Iranian war effort from start to finish.

On a lower level, the war demonstrates the disadvantages of an unbalanced force structure. Despite the Iraqis' constant superiority in armor and artillery, they often stumbled when they faced Iranian opposition in wet weather or in mountainous terrain. The Iraqis lacked sufficient infantry to protect their armor from man-portable, antitank weapons and to root out their enemy from his positions. Only when the Iraqis fielded masses of effective infantry, which actually reduced their casualties, did they find it possible to halt the Iranian attackers in their tracks and to mount a counterattack. For their part, the Iranians also worked with many severe shortcomings, not the least of which were their dependence on light infantry forces and their inability to obtain modern replacement aircraft or spare parts for the aircraft they possessed. The failure of the Iranians to perform maintenance because they lacked either trained personnel or spare parts cost them far more aircraft than accidents or combat did. However, the Iranians earned high marks for some of their actions. On occasion, they showed the ability to plan offensives carefully, and their basic infantry tactics of a thorough reconnaissance of the ground, infiltrating enemy positions, and initiating action at night or in the rain, as well as choosing favorable terrain such as wet lands and mountains, maximized the potential of their forces and imposed formidable restraints on their foe. For whatever reason, the Iranians held the initiative for five years, and with relative equality of numbers they did

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well against an enemy who had every advantage, save one—the Iraqis had an extreme sensitivity to casualties. An inherent weakness of infantry is its tendency to scatter and lose direction after the initial assaults. This problem the Iranians never solved, and for their failure they were obliged to continue in the offensive far beyond the point of diminishing returns. They faced the classic problems of World War I trench warfare against an enemy armed with modern weaponry, including nerve gas, while an arms embargo denied them any technological means to solve their dilemma. One can hardly condemn them because they did no better than most European armies and leaders from 1914 to 1918.

The two warring air forces presented sharply different performances, but they also shared two traits: the desire to conserve aircraft at all costs, and a consistent underestimation of the number of sorties and aircraft needed to accomplish the desired objective. As previously discussed, the Iranian Air Force, for reasons beyond its control, declined in numbers and readiness throughout the conflict. It began the conflict with 472 combat aircraft, but with at best only 200 combat-ready. This number includes its F-14s, which already suffered from partially sabotaged avionics. Until the Iranian Air Force depleted its supply of American-trained pilots, it showed air-to-air combat and munitions-delivery skills superior to those shown by its enemy. However, the Iranian Air Force's steadily declining effectiveness from attrition and maintenance problems meant that it had little impact on the course of the war, other than to provide a deterrent to hostile air operations. Although early in the war, the Iranians demonstrated the capacity to launch damaging air base and oil facility strikes, not one example of significant Iraqi battlefield casualties, delays in movement, logistics problems, or defeats is attributable to Iranian air action.

Overcentralization and rigid planning hampered IZAF command, control, and communications (C³) during every phase of the war. Primary mission planning took place in the IZAF Headquarters in Baghdad, with some tactical mission planning and decision making reportedly occurring in the central operations room of the Presidential Palace. Saddam personally directed several operations. In general, Iraqi air raids took too long

to plan, with the consequent neglect of both the immediate tactical situation and targets of opportunity. The Iraqi air defense network, which the Soviets had optimized for high- and medium-altitude defense, suffered because not only did its operators lack proficiency, it had inadequate data integration and transfer rates as well. As late as 1988, low-flying Iranian F-4s still easily penetrated Iraq.⁶¹ Once the Iranians forced the Iraqis to the defensive in 1982, the IZAF adopted a strict policy of conservation of aircraft. The air force intended to preserve its inventory while allowing time to acquire and familiarize itself with more modern aircraft. The IZAF could not afford an indefinite continuation of the higher loss rates it suffered during the first part of the war. Consequently, it employed very safe tactics for its combat missions. For example, Iraqi MiG-25s bombing Kharg Island, Iran's principal oil-loading facility, sacrificed accuracy in favor of safety. The MiGs dropped iron bombs from altitudes of 60,000 to 70,000 feet to avoid the performance envelopes of the Iranian Hawk surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft artillery located there. The IZAF made a similar trade-off in ground attack missions; during the Al Faw battle it conducted air strikes from 6,000 to 10,000 feet.

In spite of conservative tactics, the Iraqis pursued a two-pronged strategic attack against the Iranian economy. From the commencement of full-scale fighting, both sides engaged in the so-called oil war, which continued until the end of hostilities. Both nations needed to export oil, their only hard-currency commodity in the world market, to maintain their civilian economies and sustain their military efforts. The Iraqis sank several Iranian tankers in the Gulf, ineffectually attacked Kharg Island, and bombed Iranian refineries. By October 1981, the Iranians began to ration refined petroleum, as did the Iraqis who also had their refineries shelled and bombed. The Iranians, in fact, wiped out the Iraqi oil-exporting capability in the Gulf, forcing Iraqis to rely on pipelines. Because the IZAF did not follow up its raids quickly and because it scheduled too few strikes for each target, it never permanently knocked

61. *Ibid.*, p. 458.

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out an Iranian oil-exporting facility or completely halted the flow of Iranian crude to waiting ships. Still, considering the IZAF's relatively small investment in sorties, it derived a substantial dividend from the efforts it made. Its success in the oil war lowered Iranian morale, reduced the Iranian export of oil by possibly hundreds of thousands of barrels per day, caused the Iranians to waste energy on an expensive operation to shuttle oil to the south, and forced them to divert air defense assets and personnel from the front. Further, the oil war tempted the Iranians into retaliation, first by wasting aircraft in the bombing of Iraq's oil facilities, then by attacking third-party shipping in the Gulf, diverting its resources in a costly confrontation with the United States and European powers.

In the second prong of its attack, the IZAF took on Iranian bridges, power plants, and civilian population centers. This effort had little measurable impact, but IZAF attacks on population centers affected Iranian civilians' morale. Bombings and missile exchanges during the war of the cities did not in and of themselves break the Iranians' will to fight. In a more sophisticated sense, the war of the cities added a sense of unease, of underlying irritation and fear, and of uncertainty to daily life. This miasma had an unquantifiable, but nonetheless real, influence on the Iranian psyche that should not be discounted.

A final assessment of the performance of the IZAF in the war with Iran requires two differing standards of measurement: those of the Third World and those of industrialized nations. Despite the sheer size of its arms inventory, the sophistication of its modern weaponry, and its ability to overhaul and modify much of its equipment, the IZAF was a Third-World air force. Its pilots may have known what buttons to push, and when, but they had little understanding of the theoretical application of their actions. In addition to the scaled-down avionics in the export versions of the aircraft they flew, Third-World pilots got scaled-down flight training as well. IZAF maintenance crews might have had literacy in Arabic, but translations from Soviet or Western manuals, haphazardly translated lectures, or on-the-job experience supplied by foreign technicians could not overcome an abysmal ignorance of the aircraft's construc-

tion and care, or of the intricacies of sophisticated machinery. Nor could hardened aircraft shelters hide a Third-World work ethic, excessive differences between officer and enlisted status that interfered with daily work, a failure to allot funds for base maintenance, and the mind-set that assets (either logistical or aircraft) must never be consumed or risked because their loss would diminish the personal empire of the commander "owning" them. When compared to air forces in its own league, Iraq could field a large, modern, combat-experienced force, blessed with a new and excellent base system. Furthermore, it performed effectively and accomplished its mission in the conflict. When held to the standards of the air forces of the countries that manufacture Iraq's aircraft, the IZAF becomes far less formidable. Inferior aircraft, inferior pilots, poor service and maintenance, timidity in employment, and ineffective use of munitions mark it as force unable to compete against the world's more sophisticated foes.

Modern Saudi Arabia

During the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War, the third most powerful nation in the Gulf in terms of population and military strength invested heavily in every aspect of its military and more heavily in its civilian economy. Saudi Arabia attempted to avoid what it saw as the errors of its neighbors. The secular Pahlavi dynasty in Iran came to grief in large measure because its programs for modernizing the state had provoked intense internal opposition among conservative Shias and sparked an Islamic revival. The Shah's importation of large amounts of western technology, which required the presence of many western technicians to train Iranians and operate the equipment, as well as his policy of encouraging Iranians to study in the West aided in destabilizing his regime. The technicians and returning students circulated Western ideas of individual freedom and responsibility, representative government, and the seeming superiority of Western science and management techniques, concepts that undermined the corrupt and autocratic regime of the Shah and gave strength to its liberal opponents. These new ideas also threatened many of the religious tenets of the conservative opposition, making religious leaders more determined to oppose the Shah. When Iran's internal opposition became too strong, and the United States, under President Carter, refused to support a bloody crackdown, the Pahlavi dynasty fell. Iran came under the influence of Islamic fundamentalists. Meanwhile, Iraq became a thoroughly secular, police state. Its leader, Saddam, executed important Shia clerics and fought an endemic civil war against his Kurdish minority. Unveiled Iraqi women could stroll the streets of Baghdad without fear. The Saudis could observe as well the effect on both warring nations of having spent vast sums of money on

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weapons rather than internal development.

The Saudis wished to steer a course between the examples set by these two neighbors. They succeeded. When King Abd al Aziz died in 1953, he left a kingdom still administered as an enlarged version of a Bedouin tribe. In spite of the presence of any number of impressive-sounding ministries and bureaus, all tax and oil concession revenue went into his private purse, for disbursement as he saw fit. He distributed his money arbitrarily and unwisely, creating an atmosphere of corruption and greed. A contractor referred, one suspects with fondness, to the last days of his reign as "the good old days, when the old king didn't know the difference between a thousand and a million."⁶² Abd al Aziz's immediate successor and eldest son, the feckless and incompetent Saud, did little to improve upon his father's record. However, Prince Faisal, Saud's designated heir and another senior son of Abd al Aziz, eventually took power, and then the crown, from his half brother. Although by no means a progressive, Faisal had extensive travel in and knowledge of foreign and Western lands (he had served as a foreign minister); had practical knowledge of governmental administration and fiscal policy (gained as a working governor of a major province); was extremely pious and expertly trained in the Qur'an and Islamic oral traditions, making him acceptable to the ulama (the community of clerics who dominated Saudi religion); and, by the standards of time and place, had an admirable reputation for incorruptibility. Faisal's desire to modernize his kingdom was far greater than his predecessor's, and he seemed more interested in civil progress than in military expansion.

In April 1962, army officers overthrew the Imam of North Yemen, a kingdom on the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, and touched off a civil war. Egyptian President Gamal Abdal Nasser supported the rebels, and the Saudis supported the royalists. Because the Saudi monarchy might be in danger for supporting the neighboring royalty, Faisal, newly appointed the de facto regent for the House of Saud, obtained U.S. support from President John F. Kennedy in the event of an Egyptian

62. Richard F. Nyrop *et al.*, *Area Handbook for Saudi Arabia*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: GPO, March 1984), p. 32.

attack. He also obtained the U.S. president's encouragement for a series of internal reforms. On November 6, 1962, Faisal issued a ten-point reform program that promised a constitution, never issued; creation of a Ministry of Justice, delayed for a decade; and reform of the religious police, not vigorously pursued. As king, Faisal implemented some of the other promised reforms, such as public education and welfare programs; road, agricultural, and irrigation programs; regulation of commercial activities; development of the country's resources; and the abolition of slavery. Until his death in 1975, Faisal adroitly balanced his commitment to modernizing Saudi Arabia with his commitment to maintaining Wahhabi traditions both of his upbringing and of the ulama. The Wahhabi, whose principal article of faith was the condemnation of ten centuries of change in Islam, carried its world view to the secular state as well. At best, the Wahhabi regarded modernization with extreme skepticism. For example, when Faisal, after consulting with the ulama, decreed that television broadcasts could begin in Saudi Arabia, one of the princes led an armed mob against the station, and in the ensuing gun battle several people died. In 1963, when the first public school for girls opened (Saudi boys and girls attend separate facilities), some Saudis rioted, and a mob of 500 parents went to Riyadh to complain to Faisal. Police escorted the girls to school, and troops dispersed angry mobs, much like contemporaneous events in Alabama's Selma and Birmingham in the United States. However, Faisal held a unique advantage in his dealings with the ulama: among Abd al Aziz's thirty-six sons, he alone had a mother from the founding family of the Wahhabi movement—the Al Shaykhs. Just as Richard M. Nixon, a Republican president known for his strong anticommunism position, could go to the People's Republic of China when a Democratic president could not, Faisal, raised as a Wahhabi, could advocate modernization, while others could not. In 1970, Saudi Arabia had a literacy rate of only 15 percent; in 1987, it had two million children enrolled in school and claimed a literacy rate of 52 percent.

At the other extreme, a minority of Saudis wanted more rapid reform. In June of 1969 the royal government uncovered and obliterated a massive revolutionary conspiracy consisting of several radical groups.

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The plot included clerks; teachers; civil servants; Shias from the Eastern Province, which contains the oil fields; and many military personnel including the commandant of the Military Staff College and the commander of Dhahran's air base. The government executed more than 130 military personnel and imprisoned 305 for life, and 750 more for 15-year terms.⁶³

Large increases in the price of petroleum and in the volume of its production, especially after the October 1973 war, enabled Saudi Arabia to simultaneously invest in its economy, its society, and its military defense. The market price of oil shot up from \$1.80 a barrel in 1970 to \$32 in 1980. Saudi oil revenue mushroomed from \$4.3 billion in 1973 to \$22.6 billion in 1974, and to \$102 billion in 1981.⁶⁴ The ability of the Saudi people to absorb the new wealth, not revenue, limited modernization. Under successive five-year economic development plans initiated in the early 1970s, the Saudis used some of their oil wealth to change the face of their country. A frenzied construction boom began after 1973; it continued after the assassination of King Faisal in 1975 and the succession of his half brother King Khalid. Not as well educated nor as widely experienced as Faisal, Khalid nevertheless had the respect of his family. His simpler Bedouin ways and his life style made him more acceptable to the ulama. As king, Khalid followed Saudi custom and became his own prime minister. He carried on Faisal's policies—building seaports, power plants, international airports, huge military bases, thousands of school buildings and clinics, subsidized housing, grain silos, shopping centers, telephone and communications systems, and thousands of kilometers of roads and highways. Foreign and Saudi businessmen and "fixers" became wealthy, and thousands of Westerners arrived to work under contracts obtained from the Saudi government. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs, Palestinians, Yemenis, Egyptians, Pakistanis, Indians, South Koreans, and Filipinos flocked to the kingdom as well to work as laborers and servants.

63. Gene Lindsey, *Saudi Arabia* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1991), pp. 128–33, 281.

64. Nyrop, *Saudi Arabia*, 4th ed., p. 135.

The Saudi armed forces and National Guard benefited immensely from this spending. Although the House of Saud was intensely anti-Zionist, it was also fiercely anti-Communist. The atheism of Marxist-Leninist ideology as well as what many Saudis saw as the USSR's aggressive strategy to seize the oil fields of the Persian Gulf prevented them on principle from buying Soviet arms. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 supported their fears, and they eyed with suspicion the arms deals between Syria, Egypt, and Iraq and Eastern Bloc suppliers. In spite of Saudi Arabia's enmity toward Israel, the United States became the major Saudi arms supplier. Other Western countries sold them large quantities as well, and by the late 1980s the Saudis had become so worldly that they purchased intermediate-range ballistic missiles from the People's Republic of China, the only country willing to sell them such weapons. By the late 1980s, the Saudis had taken delivery of or had on order 63 F-15Cs, 24 Tornado F.3s, 36 Tornado GR.1s, 76 F-5E/Fs, 24 Hawk trainer/attack aircraft, 5 E-3s (AWACs), 79 C-130 transports, 12 air-to-air refueling tankers, 500 helicopters, 1,000 French AMX-30 and U.S. M60A3 tanks, 500 M-113 and AMX-10 personnel carriers, 1,500 field guns, 16 batteries of Hawk and Crotales surface-to-air missiles, nine corvettes, four guided-missile frigates, 13 missile attack boats, and hundreds of light patrol craft. The Saudis also purchased AIM-7 Sidewinder missiles, TV-guided missiles, and laser-guided bombs.⁶⁵ The Saudi Army had a strength of 35,000 to 40,000, the Air Force had approximately 15,000 personnel, and the Navy had 2,500. All three services recruited on a volunteer basis only.

Like the Iraqi and the Iranian armed forces, the Saudi armed forces had difficulty in absorbing these complex weapons systems. For instance, Pakistani and Moroccan troops manned the Saudi Army's American-equipped armored brigade (the 8th) throughout the 1980s, and a British firm maintained its Tornados.⁶⁶ As with the military services of the Iraqi Baath and the Iranian mullahs, the soldiers, sailors, and

65. Friedman, *Desert Victory*, pp. 288, 306; Lindsey, *Saudi Arabia*, p. 216.

66. Friedman, *Desert Victory*, pp. 288, 307.

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airmen of the House of Saud had given their master cause for unease. The Saudis adopted solutions to ensure loyalty among their military similar to those adopted by Iraq and Iran, but the Saudis did not have to purge as heavily as the other two powers did because the Saudi armed forces were, as a whole, more loyal, if for no other reason than that the Saudi forces had never served another regime. The air force proved the most unreliable among the Saudi armed forces, with its personnel involved since 1945 in five assassination or coup attempts against the king. However, the Saudi dynasty employed the time-honored principle of divide and rule. As the Baath and the mullahs had established popular militias as counterweights to their regular forces, the Saudis created the conservative National Guard, meant not as a force of reservists to reinforce the regular army, but as a force to parallel the army. From 25,000 to 30,000 strong, the National Guard had an entirely separate chain of command, direct to the King. It conscripted men from the desert Saudis, and half served as militia, subject to call-up only on mobilization. The two mechanized and two infantry brigades of the National Guard received American training, but they received fewer heavy weapons than the army did. Until the 1980s, the Saudis used the Guard as an internal security force. Since then, it has retained that task and also assumed a greater role in defending the nation's borders. As an organization, the Saudi National Guard sprang from the palace guards of the kings, known as the White Army for the white robes of its members. The palace guards originated from, of all sources, the Moslem Brethren that Abd al Aziz had suppressed. In spite of their heritage, these fanatical adherents to Wahhabism still serve their king as well as their God.

The House of Saud's internal family politics affected the position of the Saudi National Guard in the government. For more than 20 years, a senior and extremely conservative Saudi prince, Abd Allah ibn Abd al Aziz, a son of King Abd al Aziz born in 1921, has commanded the National Guard and served as its minister.⁶⁷ As the only son of King Abd

67. For a thorough description of the foibles of Saudi succession, see Alexander Bligh, *From Prince to King: Royal Succession in the House of Saud in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1984).

al Aziz and a desert tribeswoman whose forebears at one time competed with the Sauds, he not only has close ties to the ulama and the desert tribesmen, but he has the loyalty of the National Guard as well. Within the Saud family, his birth status made him a virtual outcast and denied him the internal family alliances that aided his half brothers. On the other hand, his status made him the focus of discontent and a rallying point for dissatisfied family members, including two of King Faisal's sons, Foreign Minister Sa'ud and General Intelligence Director Turki. Abd Allah consistently opposes the rapid pace of modernization; dislikes the United States, in part because its pro-Israeli policy radicalizes Arab politics; and has championed Arabic and Islamic causes. He favors holding oil production to a minimum.⁶⁸ With the death of King Kahlid on June 12, 1982, and the accession of King Fahd, the sixty-year old Abd Allah became Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister. Abd Allah and Fahd do not see eye to eye, but the balance they maintain keeps peace within the various factions of the House of Saud. Fahd, eldest among a powerful group of royal full brothers, known as the Sudairi Seven after the tribe of their mother, appointed his next eldest full brother, Prince Sultan, born in 1925, to be the Second Deputy Prime Minister, placing him second in line for the throne. During his reign, King Fahd has relied on Prince Sultan, who since 1962 held the portfolio of Minister of Defense and Aviation, rather than on Abd Allah, to help him administer his Kingdom. Fahd's reliance on Sultan deepened the intense rivalry between Sultan and Abd Allah, both as heirs to the throne and as leaders of military establishments that must compete for resources. Fahd threatened Abd Allah's other flank by appointing a second full brother, Prince Na'if, to the Ministry of the Interior, a position Fahd vacated when he became king. As minister, Na'if oversees internal security functions including the secret police and a secret, armed, reserve police force purportedly numbering upwards of 40,000.⁶⁹

68. Lindsey, *Saudi Arabia*, p. 141.

69. Douglas F. Graham, *Saudi Arabia Unveiled* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1991), p. 46.

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The administration of the Royal Guard Regiment, responsible for protecting the King's person at all times, further illustrates the Balkanization of the Saudi military. The Royal Regiment does not belong to the National Guard, the lineal descendant of the Saudi King's personal guards, nor does it belong to the Saudi Army; it belongs to the Ministry of the Interior, which also manages the secret police.⁷⁰ This capturing of different portions of the armed forces by different Royal factions may promote loyalty to the dynasty, but it also bears the potential for future conflict.

Other precautions taken by the House of Saud to prevent a military coup include dispersing the military and maintaining a small force structure. Saudi forces are stationed widely throughout the country in new and comfortable bases. The government can respond rapidly, with minimal military force, to almost any likely internal or external contingency, but its ability to concentrate the bulk of its military speedily in any one area is prevented. This inability to concentrate force may prevent the armed forces from overthrowing the government, but it risks leaving the government unable to use the mass of its armed forces quickly, if they are loyal, to suppress a larger scale rebellion or to fend off a powerful foreign foe. The Saudis have also kept the size of their armed forces small. Jordan, a country with a population 25 percent as large as Saudi Arabia's, has armed forces 30 percent larger. Syria, with a population only 80 percent the size of Saudi Arabia's, has six or seven times more armed forces. Iraq, whose population exceeds Saudi Arabia's by a little more than 20 percent, dwarfs the size of the Saudi armed forces with twelve to fifteen times more regular armed forces. It seems clear that the Saudis have had only one purpose for their armed forces—internal security—with the ability to deter foreign aggression a much lesser objective. Members of the House of Saud have reasoned, given the hard experience of reigning monarchs in the Arab world, that armed forces large enough to successfully oppose their nondomestic enemies would be more dangerous to their monarch than to their foe.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Such conduct limited the foreign policy options available to Saudi leaders. Either they could purchase friends and buy off enemies, a quite feasible proposition given their oil wealth, or they could acquiesce to a certain amount of intimidation and blackmail, provided the threat seemed less than permanent or not too costly. If bribery or accommodation failed, they were then faced with two less palatable alternatives: conquest by an external power, or protection from another outside power. These two options carried grave risks for the regime; long-term destabilization, loss of face and consequent loss of legitimacy, or destruction. The geography of the Saudis' oil fields contributes to the strategic vulnerability of their country. The Eastern Province, which extends approximately 260 miles along the Persian Gulf from the Kuwaiti border to the Qatar Peninsula, contains Saudi Arabia's working oil fields and a substantial Shia minority, which has good reason to resent its treatment at the hands of Wahabi-Sunnis, the dominant group in Saudi affairs. The Iraqis' direct land route to this province is through Kuwait; the Iranians are 120 miles, by air, across the Gulf. The economic prize of over 25 percent of the world's known petroleum reserves dangles invitingly for the power able to seize it from the weak grasp of its owner.

By the end of 1989, a classic strategic situation existed in the Persian Gulf. The two strongest Gulf powers had fought, with the Gulf's third-strongest power and its lesser states having aided the weaker of the two powers. Iran's near-total military defeat greatly reduced its strength in the short run, but its potential to someday dominate the Gulf remained. With no second front to fear and bedeviled by a weak economy, Iraq had few restraints on its actions and an urgent need to improve its situation before Iran regained a measure of its former power. As the major military power in the region controlling the international petroleum market, Iraq had but to reach out and grab the lever to sluice immense wealth into its own coffers. Saudi Arabia's well-equipped but tiny armed forces would not stand long against a serious expedition from Iraq. Only a *deus ex machina* in the form of intervention from beyond the region could prevent the fall of Saudi Arabia.

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