IRAN'S PERSIAN GULF POLICY

This book discusses the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the states of the Persian Gulf from 1979 to 1998. It covers the perceptions Iranians and Arabs have of each other, Islamic revolutionary ideology, the Iran–Iraq war, the Gulf Crisis, the election of President Khatami and finally the role of external powers, such as the United States, in the region.

Iran's foreign policy has been more ideology based in the past but has become increasingly pragmatic. Today, Iran's Persian Gulf policy does not differ greatly from that under the Shah. By tracing the policy over the past two decades, including a large number of interviews, the book helps to anticipate the relationship between Iran and the Gulf states.

Christin Marschall completed her MPhil in Modern Middle Eastern Studies at St Antony's College, Oxford, and received her PhD in History and Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University. She lives in London and travels frequently to Iran and the Arab world.

The mightiest of the princes of the world
Came to the least considered of his courtiers;
Sat down upon the fountain's marble edge,
One hand amid the goldfish in the pool;
And thereupon a colloquy took place
That I commend to all the chroniclers
To show how violent great hearts can lose
Their bitterness and find the honeycomb.

'The Gift of Harun al-Rashid', W.B. Yeats

IRAN'S PERSIAN GULF POLICY

From Khomeini to Khatami

Christin Marschall

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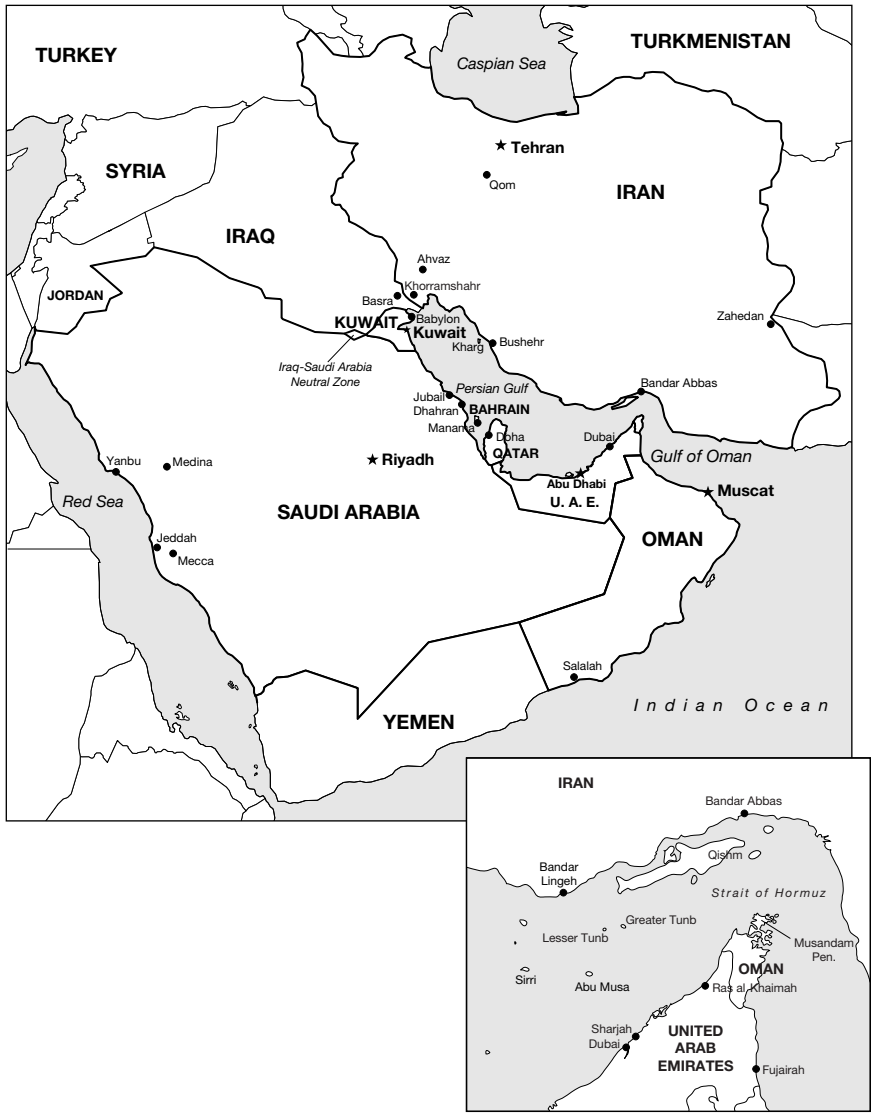
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The system of transliteration in this study is a modified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* format. I have deleted all diacritical marks, and I use (ʿ) for the letter ʿ*ayn* and (ʾ) for *hamza*. For the Persian, 'e' and 'o' are replaced by 'i' and 'u'. This system is used for the titles of publications and technical terms. Names of places or well-known personalities are presented as they commonly appear in the English literature and newspapers. The names of people I interviewed are generally spelled as displayed on their business cards or their correspondence to me.



The Persian Gulf (Harvard Map Collection 1997)

INTRODUCTION

The election of President Muhammad Khatami in May 1997 marked the beginning of a new era in Iran's foreign relations. His call to establish trust was more than welcomed, in particular by Iran's neighbours in the Persian Gulf. The warm reception offered to them at the Islamic Conference Organisation summit in Tehran in December 1997, and the equally friendly welcome granted to former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani by Saudi Arabia in early 1998, were milestones in the slow process of rapprochement. Although this had been under way since the end of the Iran–Iraq war and the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in the past it had tended to be overshadowed by distrust. Now both sides were making increased efforts and Khatami defined good relations with Iran's Gulf neighbours as a top foreign policy priority. Like his predecessor he realised that the security and stability of the Persian Gulf region is vital for Iran's national interest and its domestic well-being. The waterway is Iran's economic lifeline through which almost all of its imports and exports, including oil, are being handled.

The twenty-year period of relations between Iran and the Gulf states since the Islamic revolution of 1979 until 1998 can best be characterised as turbulent and unstable since it included major changes such as the revolution, the Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988), the Gulf Crisis (1990–1991), as well as regional conflicts such as the dispute over Abu Musa and Tunb islands, and the problems at the annual hajj pilgrimage. The complex relationship was inevitably influenced by these factors as well as the fear of the export of revolution on behalf of Iran, and other external considerations, such as the presence of the United States in the region. This study shows the evolution of a foreign policy under Khomeini, Rafsanjani and Khatami. Whilst focusing on official Iranian policy, the viewpoints of the six Gulf states and the effects of the Iranian revolution on their foreign and domestic policies will also be considered.

The key questions are: (1) What is the historical background of the relationship and how has it shaped mutual perceptions and policies? (2) How have Iran's national interest and religious, revolutionary ideology influenced its policy towards the Gulf states; and did this influence evolve over the

twenty years under consideration? (3) How have external factors, in particular the presence of the United States in the region, affected the relationship? Three central arguments follow: first, Iranian relations with the Gulf states were largely restrained by distrust and the Arab rulers' fears of Iranian domination which were founded on their view of the Shah and the possible impact of the Islamic revolution on their own people. Second, Iranian policy in the Persian Gulf evolved over time from being more ideologically driven towards a policy based almost exclusively on national interest. This was due to the realisation that security and peace in the region were vital to Iranian domestic stability and economic recovery. This policy shows strong signs of continuity with the Shah's policy. The shift began in the mid-1980s, but was clear in the 1990s, after the Iran–Iraq war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. And finally, Iran's relationship with its neighbours was constrained by American Persian Gulf policy. This started in the 1980s, when the Gulf Arab states and the US shared the fear of Soviet intervention and the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the region. It became more pronounced in the 1990s, with a growing US military presence since the Gulf Crisis and President Clinton's policy of dual containment.

The contemporary nature of the subject and the fact that we are witnessing history in the making, has called for the use of personal interviews with policy makers, diplomats, journalists and academics in Iran, the Gulf states and the West in 1995 and 1996. Bearing in mind that the interviews quoted are explanations by different political actors that were given in retrospect about various policies in the past, all were surprisingly open and candid which allowed me to complete a picture as close as possible to reality.* Although the process of rapprochement between Iran and its neighbours is still continuing, and the gulf between them has not been completely overcome, the hope is that by tracing the development of Iran's Persian Gulf policy over twenty years, this book can help the reader in anticipating the future of Iranian–Gulf Arab relations.

1

FOUNDATIONS OF IRAN'S PERSIAN GULF POLICY

The Persian Gulf policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has to be seen in the light of its historical and geopolitical context. Since the revolution in 1979, and the war with Iraq, policy towards the Arab states has evolved from a policy mainly driven by revolutionary Islamic ideology, to one predominantly influenced by national interest, economic and strategic considerations. In the 1990s, with the important exception of the former dependence on the United States, the Iranian policy towards the Gulf states seemed to be in many ways a direct continuation of Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi's policies of the 1970s.

Underlying ideological and geopolitical concerns, nationalism and the perceptions Persians and Arabs have of themselves and of each other have to be borne in mind as a behavioural determinant for the process of policy making. Persians base their role in the Persian Gulf on their long history as a powerful nation state, which they trace back over 2,500 years to Achaemenid times. The Arabs, on the other hand, are more directly concerned with threat perceptions emanating from the period of the Shah and the fear of the export of revolution.

This chapter will explain the historical background which influences the relationship. It will then examine the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic and its ideological, strategic and domestic determinants. Iran's Persian Gulf policy is a product of these two aspects as well as of external factors, such as the military presence of the United States in the region which will be dealt with in later chapters.

Iran's history in the Persian Gulf

Mutual perceptions

A main feature in Arab perceptions of their Iranian neighbour has been deep distrust and fear. Apart from the sectarian and ethnic divides of Sunni–Shi'a and Arab–Persian, this is based on concrete fears small countries often have of a large neighbour. It is founded on their view of Iranian

expansionism leading back to the time of the Shah as well as dislike of Shi'a Islam and the threat of an export of the Islamic revolution which could result in the overthrow of their regimes.

Tehran's foreign policy makers on the other hand have been aware of but widely disregarded the Arabs' fears. It was only in the mid-1990s that Iranian politicians and analysts came to realise that the prevailing distrust had to be overcome. This may be due to Iran's view of the world which, according to Graham Fuller, is 'intensely Irano-centric'. The country's vast geography and ancient glorious history to some extent delimit its political thinking.[1] Iranians derive a sense of pride and glory from the knowledge of their past which they trace back to the sixth century BC, when Cyrus the Great founded the Achaemenid Empire. With this knowledge comes a sense of cultural superiority towards their neighbours. In addition, as explained by Mahmood Sariolghalam, Associate Professor at the School of Economics and Political Science, National University of Iran: 'The Iranian people have a philosophical way of looking at things. They think Iran is a superpower. They think in terms of thousands of years.'[2]

As for the Iranian perception of the importance of geopolitics for Iran's regional role, Davoud Bavand, Professor of International Law at Imam Sadeq University, explained:

> It is Iran's natural mission to have the dominant position in the Persian Gulf. Besides its long history and the importance of political and military power during the Shah's era, Iran is a big country with a large population and a major coastal power. Its shores span half the Persian Gulf [*c.* 1,050 miles], Iran has numerous islands, and is an exclusive economic zone.[3]

The 'Persian' Gulf

The importance of the Persian Gulf was particularly apparent in the dispute about the term 'Persian' Gulf. The Arabs decided to call the Gulf 'Arab' or 'Arabian' during the height of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s. Ever since, the term has been a reason for serious disagreement and a widened 'gulf' between the two peoples. As expressed by an Arab newspaper:

> There is a big Gulf, but the biggest gulf that separates us from the Iranians is that they insist and will remain calling it Persian, and that it is our victory that the seven Arab Gulf states and the other fourteen Arab states call it Arab.[4]

Iran under the Shah as well as under the Islamic Republic has taken deep dislike toward this renaming of the historic term recognised by the United

Nations.[5] Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, the President of the Islamic Republic, described the feeling in Iran:

> It is not at all wise for a group of countries to gather and then decide on their own to change the name of what has been historically known as the Persian Gulf to the 'Arabian Gulf.' What purpose does it serve, when your honorable neighbor is offended or a sense of insecurity is created in the region?[6]

Iran's claim to the name of the Gulf is an ancient one and has been explained numerous times by contemporary Iranian historians.[7] They assert that the Persian Gulf was called the Persian Sea 2,500 years ago, when Darius, the Achaemenid king, called it 'a sea which comes out of Persia – *draya tya hacha Parsa aity*'.[8]

The Persian historical memory and national consciousness make it irrelevant to what extent Iran in its past was a seafaring nation or maritime power. The national myth and the conviction that this Gulf is a Persian lake in which the Persians have always played a leading role as well as the awareness of the long coastal line and large population have been important factors in Iran's foreign policy since the time of the Shah.

Iranian involvement in the Persian Gulf before the revolution

The Iranian belief that the Persian Gulf is a Persian lake, which means Iran is the main littoral power, stems from the time of Achaemenid hegemony over the Middle East. In the third century AD, according to the Iranian historic memory, the Sassanid king Ardeshir restored the Persian Gulf and its shores, which in the meantime had been raided by Arab tribes, to Iranian sovereignty. He also sent an army into Bahrain and left his son Shahpur I as regent.[9] The Portuguese entered the Persian Gulf in 1507 and occupied many Persian islands and cities. Under Shah Abbas (1587–1629), the Portuguese were expelled and Bahrain, Bandar Abbas, Qishm and Hormuz restored to Persian sovereignty. Shah Abbas' successors were unable to hold Persian power over the region. Bahrain and several Iranian islands were seized by the ruler of Oman. It was only under Nader Shah in 1736–1737, that Iran re-established control over Bahrain and the entire coast from Basra to Makran. Nader Shah designed the first Iranian navy. The plan, however, was abandoned when he was assassinated in 1747. Iran's power yet again lessened, when British dominance in the Persian Gulf rose. In 1783, Iran lost Bahrain to the Utubi Arabs who occupied the island.

Around the same time, Wahhabi Arabs extended their control over the southern shore of the Gulf. The Wahhabis were challenged by the viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, who established control over the Najd (1835–1838) and occupied various Gulf ports. Further Egyptian designs were

halted by the British who, in 1820, had signed the General Treaty of Peace with the Trucial Coast and Bahrain. By 1861, Bahrain was under British protection, and in 1892, Bahrain and the Trucial sheikhs were placed under the control of the British resident in Bushehr.[10]

In 1865, Nasser ud-Din Shah attempted to establish a navy. This was foiled by the British. Reza Shah reasserted Iran's control over the Persian Gulf in the 1920s. He – unsuccessfully – protested against British sovereignty over Bahrain on historic grounds and challenged the Iraqi position over the Shatt al-Arab. He brought the oil-rich province of Khuzistan under the authority of the central government in Tehran, when the Arab chief Khaz'al instigated a rebellion. The sheikh had ruled the province in near autonomy, despite the fact that, in 1847, the Ottomans had recognised Iranian sovereignty over Abadan, Muhammarah (Khorramshahr) and the Eastern banks of the Shatt al-Arab.

In the mid-1930s, Reza Shah, without success, laid claim over Abu Musa and the Tunb islands. These had been part of Persian territory in the nineteenth century, but were brought under British control in 1903 by hoisting Sharjah's flag on them.[11] The Tunbs were later given to Ras al-Khaimah when it split off from Sharjah. Reza Shah also attempted to build up a navy, but this attempt came to an end with his forced abdication in 1941, when British and Russian forces occupied Iran.[12] His son, Muhammad Reza Shah, needed the next twenty years to consolidate his power domestically before he could turn his attention to the Persian Gulf.

Once Muhammad Reza Shah had consolidated his power inside Iran in the early 1960s, his objective became to rid the Persian Gulf of foreign interference and to establish an independent national policy (*siyasat-i mustaqill-i milli*). This aim is in a way similar to the 'neither East nor West' policy of the Islamic Republic, although the latter was much more combative and ideologically fiercely independent. The Shah's idea was a normalisation of relations with the Soviet Union and the development of an equal partnership with the United States.

The Iraqi coup of 1958, led to common fears amongst Iran and the conservative Arab regimes of the Persian Gulf, which were enhanced by Iraq's consequent rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Iran at that time began to befriend its neighbours. In 1961, it denounced Iraq's claim over Kuwait, just as the Islamic Republic did thirty years later in 1990. It then tried to expand trade as its most important policy instrument. This included various trade promotion measures, such as the sponsorship of trade conferences with smaller Gulf states, exchange of merchants and visits of rulers and top officials.[13] The Islamic Republic has been following the same policy after the Iran–Iraq war in order to establish better relations with the Gulf countries. Iran further settled continental shelf disputes with Kuwait in 1965, Saudi Arabia in 1968 and Qatar in 1969.[14] Iran's great concern was Arab nationalism which not only led to the renaming of the Gulf to

'Arabian', but in 1964, a conference of Arab jurists declared Khuzistan as an 'integral part of the Arab Homeland'.[15] The main threat emanated from Egypt, which played on the Gulf's anti-Iranian sentiment. In 1964–1965, Egypt wrongly charged that Iran had occupied the island of Abu Musa, and told Arab rulers in the Persian Gulf that Iran wished to colonise the sheikhdoms.[16] After Muhammad Ali, this was a renewed Egyptian attempt at taking influence in the Persian Gulf, a behaviour which became apparent again during the Gulf Crisis in 1990–1991.

In 1968, the British announced their impending withdrawal East of Suez. In 1969, Iraq declared that the 'Shatt al-Arab was an integral part of Iraqi territory',[17] and the regime which had taken power in Aden in 1967, announced its conversion to Marxism. Iran now sought closer links with the United States but without their direct interference in the region. In 1969, the Shah gave an interview to the *New York Times* in which he warned the Americans, who had a temporary base in Bahrain, not to replace the British as Bahrain's protectors. He later disclosed to his Minister of Court, Alam: 'the Americans should take careful note of our opposition to foreign intervention in the Gulf. America must be made to realize that we are an independent sovereign power and will make way for no one.'[18]

It was not America's strategy to substitute the British. However, with the strategic importance of oil, the threat of Arab radicals and the Soviet navy appearing in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, they developed the Nixon Doctrine in 1969. It stated that Asian nations would have to accept greater responsibility for their own defence. The United States called for close ties with the countries in the Persian Gulf, in particular Iran, and with Saudi Arabia as a junior partner. This became later known as the 'twin pillar' policy. The Shah considered this as US acceptance of an existing regional reality,[19] that is Iran's leading role in securing the Persian Gulf. The Nixon Doctrine accommodated the Shah's idea of independence, i.e. to protect the interests of the United States to keep the Soviets out of the Gulf, as long as he was the one to ensure this policy without direct US interference. In 1968, Prime Minister Hoveida had asserted:

> As 'the most powerful' state in the entire Persian Gulf, 'naturally' Iran was greatly interested in the stability and security of the Gulf area, and to that end Iran was prepared to cooperate with any littoral state that desired cooperation. But it must be made clear, that this matter did not concern non-Persian Gulf powers . . . 'There is no doubt' that Iran could protect its own interests and 'rights' in the Persian Gulf with all its might and would not allow any outside power to interfere in the Persian Gulf.[20]

The Shah and his government did not ignore the fact that Iran would be dependent on the United States as a supplier of military hardware and

advisors, which would inevitably give them important influence in Iran's affairs. However, the Shah knew that being the guardian of US interests, he would be rewarded with political and military support.

By 1967, Iran had four major objectives in the Persian Gulf. These were shared by the West. First, 'to protect the safety of the Shah's regime against internal subversion sponsored by radical Arab regimes or the Soviet Union';[21] second, to prevent radicalism dominating any other Gulf state; third, to protect Iranian oil resources and installations; and fourth, to preserve freedom of navigation. The last two points underlined the importance of the Persian Gulf as Iran's economic lifeline. The export of oil had to be secured, since the Iranian economy mainly depended on this commodity since the 1960s. The acquisition of American military equipment would help to establish the necessary force, including a navy, to support these goals and to preserve Iran's national security – the primary concern of the Shah's foreign policy and any Iranian government.

The British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in 1971 marked the actual beginning of Iranian power in the region. Iranian foreign policy concentrated on the Gulf and its security. Iran was worried that a hostile power could block the Straits of Hormuz, the main outlet for Iranian oil exports, and that another revolutionary regime could be set up in the south of the Persian Gulf.[22] The Shah therefore reclaimed the three strategic islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs in order to facilitate the defence of the Persian Gulf. He realised that he needed the co-operation of the Arab states, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in particular, to maintain the security of the region. To gain their acquiescence in the islands question, he was willing to give up Iran's claim over Bahrain.

On 4 January 1969, the Shah called for a United Nations administered plebiscite in Bahrain. On 30 April 1970, the Security Council endorsed the results of the referendum and declared that 'the people of Bahrain wished to gain recognition of their identity in a fully independent and sovereign state'.[23] Iran accepted.

Iran, the British and the sheikhs of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah then began discussions about Abu Musa and the Tunbs. The sheikhs of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah sought Saudi Arabian support, but Saudi Arabia apparently did not want to get directly involved.[24] The negotiations led to an agreement with Sharjah about the administration of Abu Musa under which both sides maintained their claims to sovereignty of the whole island.[25] As for the Tunbs, the British Ambassador, Sir Denis Wright, in confidence told the Iranians that the islands were easy to recover, as they lay on Iran's side of the median line, and that Iran could simply take them by force, if no agreement was reached.[26] Iran landed its forces on the three islands on 30 November 1971, that is before the British withdrawal. Britain did not complain. Radical Arab governments, like Iraq, condemned the move, whereas the response in the Persian Gulf apart from Ras al-Khaimah was

more muted. Iran thus demonstrated its new power, brought about with the British withdrawal. The response of the Gulf Arab countries to this new Iranian role varied. Some, like Saudi Arabia, were worried by Iran's arms acquisitions and its ambitions to dominate the Gulf militarily.[27] Those countries which were geographically closer to the Marxist threat seemed to welcome Iran's military power. The Shah had already assisted Yemeni royalists in the civil war in 1964, by training Yemeni troops in Iranian military camps. After the creation of a Marxist regime in Yemen in 1969 Omani Marxist rebels were based in Aden and supported by the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and other Eastern bloc countries. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman, which aimed to establish revolutionary regimes in all the countries of the Persian Gulf, started a rebellion in Omani Dhofar.

Therefore in 1973, the Shah sent 30,000–35,000 troops[28] to Oman in support of Sultan Qabus and helped him defeat the rebels. This preserved the status quo. It gave a signal to Marxist regimes that the Shah would not allow any radical movements to take over the Persian Gulf and demonstrated his power in the region. Oman was grateful to the Shah, and so was the new Union of Arab Emirates, which feared the spread of the rebellion and kept friendly relations with Iran despite the islands.[29] The experience in Dhofar was important for the Shah as it corroborated his position in the Persian Gulf. In fact, according to Davoud Bavand of Imam Sadeq University and a diplomat under the Shah, the involvement in Dhofar was the only issue which substantiated the accusation of being the 'gendarme' in the Persian Gulf.[30] It was of importance that the Iranians co-operated with British officers stationed in Oman. As explained by a British diplomat:

> In the Dhofar rebellion, the British–Iranian relationship is of interest. Britain did not provide any troops but officers who worked together with the Iranian military. Iran being involved as an equal partner with Britain was important for the Shah, as it confirmed his view of Iran's position as a global power.[31]

The Shah did not intend to control the other Gulf states, yet he expected them to acknowledge Iran's dominant position, an attitude which had not changed in Iran by the 1990s. In order to show that Iran was not a threat to the Arabs, he resolved some further continental shelf disputes with Bahrain in 1971, and with Oman and the UAE in 1974.[32]

Iran's policy in the 1970s was to keep the United States and the Soviet Union physically out of the Persian Gulf, to reach a level of military armament that would enable Iran to defend itself and to establish a regional security system with those Arab states interested in maintaining the status quo. The Shah's policy to keep both the Soviet Union and the US out of the Gulf does not imply an equidistance to the two superpowers – it has to be borne in mind that Iran was the pillar of US policy in the region.

As for the idea of regional security co-operation, it had been put forward since the late 1960s. It was envisioned that Iran should have a leading role to play in this, comparable to that of the outgoing British.[33] In view of Iran's occupation of the three islands and its continued military presence in Oman, most of the Arab states were not interested in this plan. Saudi Arabia certainly did not agree with Iran's leading position. The Arabs on the whole preferred bilateral defence agreements.[34] In 1974, Iran and Oman concluded an agreement on the subject.[35] Oman was mainly worried about a threat from Iraq. Muscat had realised that after the British withdrawal, Iran with US support was the most powerful state and Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states were very weak. With this constellation, an isolated Iraq looked for the opportunity to become the regional power. Oman was thus the only country which supported the idea of a regional security agreement, which it advanced since 1975. Many meetings between Iran and the Arabs were held, but the last one, in Muscat in 1976, failed.[36] The proposal of a regional security agreement was addressed again by the Islamic Republic of Iran after its war with Iraq. The war had proved Oman's fears to be well founded.

It has been demonstrated that the self-perception of Iran is an important factor in its policy towards the Arab states in the Persian Gulf. The Arabs fear military domination by Iran which they base on their experience with the Shah,[37] as well as the export of revolution, which could lead to the overthrow of their regimes. The Iranians indeed have a claim to be the regional power, yet without interference into the internal affairs of their neighbours. Under the Shah this claim was based on the historical memory of being the only powerful nation state in the region. It was equally based on geopolitics and the fact that Iran is a vast country with a long coastline and a location which has always been important strategically for outside powers. Iran's dependency on oil since the 1960s made it imperative for the Shah to secure the safety of the Persian Gulf. None of these factors changed after the revolution in 1979, and we will see how the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic tried to combine religion and ideology with nationalism and geopolitics.

The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The geopolitical and strategic importance of the Persian Gulf renders Iran's policy in this region a major component of its foreign policy. It is therefore important to describe the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The foreign policy of the revolutionary state has been influenced to varying degrees by revolutionary and religious ideology as well as by geopolitics and national interest. Between 1979 and 1998, it evolved from a policy mainly driven by Islamic ideology to one mainly asserting the country's national interest. Both components, however, co-existed and sometimes overlapped ever since the revolution, their extent relating to the geographical regions

and issues involved. It is a difficult and controversial task to determine the exact composition of ideology and national interest in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic, in particular after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. As foreign policy was intertwined with both domestic policy and revolutionary legitimacy, it is often problematic to understand the real meaning of foreign policy pronouncements both by President Rafsanjani and President Khatami and their opponents in the system.

In general, ideology, in particular since the mid-1980s, seemed more salient in places further distanced, like Lebanon, or issues that are not directly the concern of power politics, as for example, the hajj. In both Lebanon and the hajj religious factors were also more obvious. In areas such as oil or relations with the Gulf states, however, it seems too dangerous to Iranian national interest to lead a policy mainly driven by ideology. It has to be added that ideology in the Iranian – as for instance the Soviet – case can be an important component of national power. For example, the idea of exporting the revolution has not only got a religious aim, but it can also improve Iran's power in the region, as it has in Lebanon.

Before explaining the general shift from ideology to national interest, it is necessary to try and define first, the ideology and national interest and second, the process of policy making in the Islamic Republic, i.e. who and what factors decide which policy option will be taken. This is not an easy task, as Iranian academics, clergy and politicians themselves differ about definitions and interpretations of the former, and most can only give educated guesses about the latter.

Revolutionary and religious ideology or national interest?

The fundamental ideology which any leader of the Islamic Republic has to base his policies on was developed by Ayatollah Khomeini and laid down in the Constitution. His main theme was that the world is divided into oppressors (*mustakbarin*) and oppressed (*mustaẓafin*). In Khomeini's view the oppressors are trying to maintain the oppressed world in a raw material producing subservience, a theme similar to the one developed by Lenin.[38] Therefore, Khomeini thought that Iran, as the only truly Islamic and nonaligned country, had the duty to assume the vanguard of an Islamic revolutionary movement and help Muslim and other oppressed nations to reach true independence. Thus, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic states:

> The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is founded on the basis of ending any type of domination, safeguarding the complete independence and integrity of the territory, defending the rights of all Muslims, practicing nonalignment with respect to the dominating powers and maintaining mutual peaceful relationships with nonbelligerent countries (Art. 152) . . . While practicing

> complete self-restraint from any kind of influence in the internal affairs of other nations, [the Islamic Republic] will protect the struggles of the weak against the arrogant, in any part of the world (Art. 154).[39]

A major aim was Muslim unity[40] (*tawhid*) in order to be strong in the face of the oppressor nations and to gain Muslim sovereignty. Khomeini was opposed to any kind of state nationalism. These pan-Islamic motifs were developed by Khomeini in the late 1960s, when he started to define himself as a Muslim and not an Iranian. It must be mentioned that these views were not necessarily shared by most Ayatollahs, like for instance Kazem Shariʿatmadari,[41] who did not see themselves as pan-Islamists the way it was defined by Khomeini. Khomeini's ideas, however, prevailed. At the beginning of the revolution, he maintained that nationalism stood for corruption and Westernisation. Rather than talking about the Iranian nation, he would address the 'Muslim people of Iran'.[42] He saw nationalism as the cause for disunity amongst Muslims. The war with Iraq was an even greater problem, as it caused dissension between Sunnis and Shiʿa. In his message to the hajj pilgrims in September 1980, he declared:

> Nationalism that results in the creation of enmity between Muslims and splits the ranks of the believers, is against Islam and the interests of the Muslims. It is a stratagem concocted by the foreigners who are disturbed by the spread of Islam . . . More saddening and dangerous than nationalism is the creation of dissension between Sunnis and Shiʿis and diffusion of mischievous propaganda amongst brother Muslims.[43]

Khomeini called upon the Muslims to rely on Islamic culture, to resist Western influence and to be independent.[44] The main oppressors for Khomeini were Britain, the United States, Israel, sometimes seen merely as a device of the US and the Soviet Union. This foreign policy orientation was a reaction to the pre-revolutionary period, when the Shah co-operated with the United States, which Khomeini considered corrupt, with Israel, which occupied Arab lands, and with the Soviet Union, which was oppressing its Muslim population.[45] After the revolution, Khomeini added the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as a major reason for enmity. The hostility towards the Soviet Union was also based on a long history of animosity between the two countries: 'La confrontation entre l'Iran et l'URSS est inscrite dans toute l'histoire de la percée russe vers les mers chaudes. L'Iran est le dernier obstacle et le sait.'[46]

However, Khomeini's motto of Iran's foreign policy, 'neither East nor West, only the Islamic Republic' (*nah sharq nah gharb, faqat Jumhuri-yi Islami*), was mainly directed against American dominance and Israeli

Zionism. Khomeini had developed his enmity to both in the 1960s. The Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic, Ali Akbar Velayati, declared at the United Nations General Assembly in October 1982:

> Four years ago, there was a revolution in Iran. This revolution was based on Islamic principles. The Islamic Revolution has made us strong enough to stand against oppression and help those who have suffered, especially in the developing countries, and at the same time not to rely on foreign powers. One of the most important mottos of the Islamic Republic is 'neither East nor West.' With reliance on this motto we have been able to free ourselves from American dominance. The battle with American imperialism and Zionism is a difficult and long one. Among the latest crimes of imperialist America and Zionist Israel is the killing of thousands of innocent children and elderly in the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Chatila in Lebanon.[47]

In the face of these enemies, Khomeini and his followers believed that Muslims should not only unite in one country, but that they should also rid themselves of the oppressors. According to Mahmood Sariolghalam of the National University, the Islamic concept of *taklif* was widely responsible for this attitude:

> the concept of obligation (takleef) has had an immensely overpowering impact on Iran's revolutionary elite. This concept spells out the necessary and unquestionable duties of a Muslim in conditions where he or she is dominated by alien culture and political will. The obligation is to be assertive and exert as much influence as possible to openly substantiate Islamic principles and goals. The significant point here is that the concept of obligation is not concerned with the consequences . . . The duty is to be challenging and defy powers of materialist content.[48]

Taklif may also have had some influence on Khomeini's belief that the export of revolution (*sudur-i inqilab*) was obligatory. He asserted that the superpowers had risen to destroy the Muslim countries, and that Iran therefore had to export the revolution to unite with the Islamic world in order to be able to counter the threat.[49]

The means by which the revolution should be exported are unclear. Despite renewed statements by Khomeini and his allies that force should not be used, and that the revolution should be spread by example and by the word,[50] and although Article 154 of the Constitution talks about non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations, the preamble of the same Constitution spells out the opposite:

> the Islamic Republican Army and the Revolutionary Guards Corps will be responsible not only for defending the borders, but also for the mission stated in the Book, of holy war in the way of God and fighting to expand the rule of God's law in the world.

Ayatollah Khomeini developed his ideas in a theoretical and philosophical manner without considering if they were practical to implement given the external circumstances of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This caused various problems for policy makers, as these ideas were tied to the legitimacy of the revolution and could not easily be dispensed with, even if they were detrimental to Iranian national interest. It is therefore often problematic to determine and explain the difference between the ideological and the national interest; the more so as, after 1981, Iran had become a theocracy in which all the leading political actors were clerics who had to couch their arguments in a religious language, even when they were advocating the most pragmatic kinds of policies. This became particularly apparent after Khomeini's death in 1989. His successors had to legitimise their own position by not deviating – at least officially – from the 'line of the Imam'. A certain dualism of Islamic and nationalist tendencies was considered in the 1979 Constitution. Whilst the President of the Republic had to be Iranian (Art. 115), the religious Leader only needed to have Islamic credentials (Art. 109). This suggests that the President was responsible for the interests of the nation whereas the Leader was concerned with the Islamic *umma* as a whole. This was changed in the amended 1989 Constitution which laid down that the Leader, too, had to be Iranian. The nationalist element was now more important. Many very senior Shi'a clerics are Lebanese or Iraqi. The risk of losing control of the state ideology to a non-Iranian was not something Iran could face.

Since Rafsanjani took over as President in 1989, the emphasis was laid on building a secure domestic and external environment for rebuilding the country after the eight-year-long war with Iraq, with a special emphasis on securing the Persian Gulf and establishing Iran as a leading power in order to secure the vital flow of oil in the region. With this pronounced policy, the overall national interests of Iran are easier to define in the 1990s than in the 1980s.

One Iranian Foreign Ministry official explained the dualism in Iranian foreign policy of what he termed 'religious interest' and 'national interest'. What follows is an explanation of his thoughts: the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic has short-term, middle-term and long-term interests. The short- and middle-term interests are national interests, whereas the long-term interests are religious principles, such as helping the oppressed. The religious interest is eternal and cannot be bargained away by changing governments or different political factions. National interests are a country's needs and ideals, such as independence. In order to achieve these ideals the

government can obtain help from the international community, for example high technology from the West. A problem arises if the President wishes to implement pragmatic policies which cannot be justified as religious. After Rafsanjani took over the presidency, he tried to overcome this issue by contending that, to solve such a problem, religion can be consulted at a minimum level and science, technical know-how and practical thinking at a maximum level. According to this contention, it is not necessary to refer to Islam on every domestic and foreign problem, because the fact of being a Muslim will affect the thinking of the decision maker who will not do anything against Islam. This minimalist posture, however, has been criticised by maximalists who hold that Islam should be consulted in a maximum way and only rarely should scientific knowledge be used to solve problems.[51]

Different actors in the political system had different ideas about what was important for Iran's national interest, but most included security and economic well-being. An emphasis on national security and the security of the oil resources as well as the well-being of Iran's neighbours was underlined by Muhammad Javad Larijani, the conservative Deputy Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee.[52] Said Hajjarian from the Center for Strategic Studies, which was close to the Rafsanjani presidency, stated that the two main national interests – security and Iran's development – were interlinked. In order to obtain domestic, regional and international investment to develop the economy, Iran needed a secure environment. This is not guaranteed as long as the United States and European forces are in the Persian Gulf region.[53] Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Maleki stated that the Constitution provided the foreign policy priorities. That is to have good relations first, with Iran's neighbours; second, with Islamic countries; third, with the non-aligned developing countries; and fourth, with those countries which can fulfil the economic and social needs of the Islamic Republic. He mentioned that the Gulf states were the only region to fall into all four categories, and Iran therefore wanted good relations especially with its Arab neighbours, including co-operation in the economic and security fields.[54]

As for the social aspects of national interest, Jalil Roshandel added the fight against illiteracy and improvements in the health sector.[55] Other sources asserted regime survival as an important factor of national interest. On the whole, the ideas of independence, territorial integrity and status in the region were similar to the time of the Shah.

The process of foreign policy making

As mentioned earlier, a general shift from a foreign policy based on ideology to one mainly based on national interest can be observed. In order to determine how, when and why decisions were taken on the basis of ideology or

national interest, it is necessary to examine the members of the political elite involved in taking the decisions, their beliefs as well as the domestic and external factors which drove them to certain decisions. This section will examine the actors and their beliefs involved in the policy-making process.

It is very difficult to explore the policy-making process in the Islamic Republic, as nobody apart from very few politicians at the top of the government pyramid knows the mechanisms and personalities involved in taking specific decisions. It is, nevertheless, possible to make some overall observations. Power is highly personalised. In general, the personalities involved fall roughly into three periods: pre-war/beginning of war, Iran–Iraq war and post-war/post-Khomeini.

The Constitution lays down that the Foreign Ministry, the Office of the President, the Office of the Leader, the Supreme National Security Council (before the amendment of the Constitution in October 1989: the Supreme Defence Council) and the Majlis should be involved in foreign policy making. The role of the Majlis is limited to legislative oversight. From the beginning of the Iran–Iraq war, however, decision making seems to have depended on religious personalities in political positions rather than on institutions.

The Iran–Iraq war

At the beginning of the revolution, the country was in a state of revolutionary chaos. No clear foreign policy line existed and different voices could be heard from Iran. As stated by Jalil Roshandel at IPIS, Khomeini or the clergy were not the main source for foreign policy. At first secular politicians like President Bazargan and Foreign Minister Sanjabi, then Foreign Minister Yazdi and finally President Bani Sadr and Foreign Minister Qutbzadeh, discussed foreign policy with the Revolutionary Council which was headed by Khomeini. In some cases, the Ayatollah would end the discussions and take his own decision.[56] Even if foreign policy was discussed formally with the Revolutionary Council, the Council only concerned itself with ideological matters, whereas the government had to deal with day-to-day politics.

In addition, many unofficial voices had an impact on Iran's foreign policy. As explained by former Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations in New York, Said Rejai Khorassani, religious slogans and values determined many aspects of policy making, since the ideological foundation of the revolution was Islamic and the Leader came from the clergy. Rejai Khorassani stated that ideological fervour and sentiment was very high and in addition to the administration, i.e. those who were officially in charge, anybody from the new authorities, who included unofficial elements, such as Friday Prayer Leaders, would make comments on foreign policy matters. The audience, for instance in the Persian Gulf, would be confused and take these statements for the official government position. The slogans may not have had

any practical purpose, but they expressed the desires of the people who pronounced them. The clergy and the media were very proud of Iran's progressive ideology, and reproached others for their regressive Islam. Even if these slogans were mainly meant for a domestic constituency, the neighbours could not ignore them and took them seriously. According to Rejai Khorassani: 'We always expected that our neighbours would understand that we were in a revolutionary chaos, but they did not because of their own internal problems and fears.'[57]

With the fall of the Bazargan government in November 1979, the clergy started officially to participate in government. During Bani Sadr's presidency, militant Khomeinists took over the foreign policy apparatus, which combined the idea of war with Iraq with the idea of exporting the revolution and consequently purged the more liberal officials.[58] Ideology became much more prominent in foreign policy priorities than national interest as clerical politicians prevailed over secular ones. The rhetoric of this time was messianic and the message of the Islamic Republic was meant for the whole Muslim world. Those who were close obviously heard it louder, but the Arab governments probably felt more threatened by the revolutionary situation itself than by the rhetoric.

With the beginning of the war in September 1980, in general, decisions were discussed by the Leader, the Foreign Minister, the Majlis and the executive branch of the Supreme Defence Council. The latter included the President, the Prime Minister, the Commander of the Armed Forces, Ahmad Khomeini, Khomeini's son and the Speaker of the Majlis. The Foreign Ministry did the research, the Foreign Minister presented the results to the Majlis for consultation and finally for executive order to the Supreme Defence Council. In the final analysis, Khomeini decided himself on critical decisions, but it is difficult to determine in which particular cases.[59] It can also be assumed that the members of this inner circle would only pronounce ideas which they thought Khomeini would accept. It is highly likely, therefore, that until his death, the Ayatollah had supreme influence over significant issues in foreign policy making.

Given the background of the ruling clerical elite, who mainly came from lower middle-class backgrounds and were educated in theological seminaries, their view of the outside world was influenced by Shi'a themes and therefore limited.[60] In their sermons they made ideological pronouncements without consulting the Foreign Minister about the actual policy. The Foreign Minister could not criticise these important members of the clergy. As former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani explains, most of the Foreign Ministry officials were young people who had to revere their elders and the clergy, and could not tell the Imam or others that their sermons caused trouble for Iran's foreign relations.[61]

Until the mid-1980s, all elite members were radical. Foreign policy was driven by ideology. Rose examined general trends amongst the clergy in

the Islamic Republican Party during this time, one being the Maktabi group, which included President Ali Khamenei and Prime Minister Mir Hussein Musavi. They rejected nationalism of any sort and advocated a pan-Islamic ideology, including the export of the revolution both in terms of propaganda, as well as armed force. Another group was headed by Majlis Speaker Rafsanjani. Their main interest was the preservation of the political power of the clergy.[62]

Besides the government and the Friday Prayer Leaders, there were other sources of foreign policy input. For example, the Office of Liberation Movements, which belonged to the Foreign Ministry, co-existed with several other similar formal and informal offices which had the aim of exporting the revolution, such as the Office for Co-ordination of Revolutionary Movements, based in Qom and headed by Mehdi Hashemi.[63]

During the course of the war, however, a more moderate faction began to emerge. According to IPIS researcher Farideh Farhi, the debate in Iran about stopping the export of revolution began in 1984. Iran then realised that it had to take care of its own problems first,[64] Islam in one country, so to speak. By 1986, two factions existed in Iran, the leftists, who supported nationalisation of most industries and isolationism, and the rightists who supported the private sector[65] as well as a more pragmatic approach to foreign policy. This change was due to the fact that the war had shown Iran that the Arabs were not interested in Islamic unity and sovereignty, but that they supported the Iraqi aggressor. Said Hajjarian of the Center for Strategic Studies explains:

> Our experience after the revolution and especially during the Iran–Iraq war, proved that we were wrong. We realised that there was no unification between us and the Arabs. We found that all Persian Gulf countries stood behind Iraq and forgot that we were Muslims. They preferred pan-Arabism to pan-Islam. So we concentrated more on national interests.[66]

However, Abbas Haghighat, Head of the Persian Gulf Department at IPIS, thought that ideological interest was only sacrificed for national interest when the very existence of the Islamic Republic was threatened. This was the case, for instance, when Ayatollah Khomeini accepted UNSCR 598 in August 1988.[67]

The post-war period

The war left Iran in a disastrous domestic situation, and all its effort was needed to develop the economy and reconstruct the country. Therefore, Speaker Rafsanjani said in November 1988 that Iran should stop its 'crude diplomacy to avoid making enemies'.[68] This was the clear mark for

the beginning of the primacy of national interest in Iranian foreign relations. This shift towards pragmatism which was now openly stated could not be justified by Rafsanjani without considerable difficulties due to the nature of the regime. As mentioned earlier, the government of the Islamic Republic was tied to the legitimacy of the revolution and Khomeini's leadership. Foreign policy was thus linked very closely to the domestic situation. Various factions in the government were opposed to Rafsanjani's policies and attacked any lapse in Islamic enthusiasm. Rafsanjani, therefore, needed to pretend that there was more continuity than really existed. This explains why the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic sounded more radical than it actually was.

Following the death of Khomeini in June 1989, the amendment of the Constitution in July 1989 did away with the post of Prime Minister and gave President Rafsanjani greater powers. He could now lay more emphasis on national interest. Nevertheless, he could not dispense with religious ideology completely, as he had to please the various constituencies. According to Bakhash, for instance: 'The regime views its support for a variety of Islamic movements as contributing to its legitimacy amongst important constituencies both at home and abroad'.[69]

Mahmood Sariolghalam of the National University contends that as far as issues of foreign policy and economy are concerned, pragmatism will dominate, but foreign policy issues relating to the spread of Islamic culture will have an ideological underpinning.[70] Even if some policy makers may at heart be nationalists, they take an ideological line on certain issues in order to stay in power. Problems occurred between President Rafsanjani and the new Leader, Khamenei. Rafsanjani and Khamenei had different responsibilities. Rafsanjani as President was responsible for pragmatic politics, for instance the reconstruction of the country. Khamenei, on the other hand, stands for maintaining the Islamic revolutionary credentials of the Republic and Islamic purity. However, like the President, he was responsible for foreign policy and security matters, as he had to sign the decisions of the Supreme National Security Council whose chief was Rafsanjani. This created conflicts between the two. As an Iranian Foreign Ministry official explains:

> Our problem is that we are still living in a revolutionary climate. Politics does not always seem rational. There are challenges between the President and the Leader because the Leader maintains that we must keep alive our main revolutionary messages. Rafsanjani thinks we are living in this world, we have to have relations with other countries. Nobody will accept our ideology and have a relationship with us – we will have to accept their reality. Khamenei, on the other hand, believes that there is a real world but it doesn't mean that we can forget our revolutionary message. We have to follow this revolutionary message and try to have relationships with others

based on our ideology. Religion and politics are one field and we have to think about our relations in terms of Islam.[71]

It is not quite clear who had more influence over foreign policy making, Rafsanjani or Khamenei. Former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani states:

After Khomeini's death, there were no differences between President Rafsanjani and Leader Khamenei. Rafsanjani himself believed that he should accept the Leader's decisions for the consolidation of his new administration.

It is difficult to say whether there are real differences between the two, or whether Khomeini's system was maintained. Khomeini left a model of administration by which the Leader was pre-occupied with the broader scope of politics and cultural issues which went beyond national borders, whereas the government was concerned with national matters. While Khomeini addressed Muslims at large, he expected the government, for example Prime Minister Raja'i, to take practical views. When Rafsanjani came to power the population expected change, for instance an opening to Europe and the United States.

Khamenei seemed to be interested in the same policy orientation. However, many extremist groups accused Khamenei and Rafsanjani of diverting from the 'line of the Imam.' Khamenei had to maintain his legitimacy as Leader and therefore took a more ideological line than Rafsanjani.[72]

Khamenei slowly became associated with the radical right, as his institutional legitimacy was tied to the legitimacy of the revolution. The radical right claims to support the oppressed, is very anti-Western and anti-Israel as well as pro-export of revolution. They finance groups, such as Hizballah in Lebanon.[73] By 1994, Rafsanjani as a pragmatist who favoured an open door policy and open relations with the outside world, in particular the West, had not managed to improve the economic situation. He was increasingly exposed to criticism by the radicals, led by Khamenei. To justify his position, Rafsanjani pronounced that he had always been a revolutionary and that his pragmatic policies lay within the framework of revolutionary ideology:

These terms – moderate and extremist – are your [the West's] words. I believe I've been consistent from the very beginning. I'm a revolutionary figure; I was involved in the struggle and spent almost all young years of my life in prison. I've been one of the theoreticians of this system, and my views have been and are important in it . . . Whenever I say that we would like to have peaceful coexistence with the West, the interpretation is that Iran would like

> to get rid of revolutionary values, but for us it's possible to have both. When I defend the revolution, you say I'm a hard-liner. When I say we would like to have cooperation with the West, you say I'm being moderate. That's because you don't know Iran. As far as we're concerned, they go together.[74]

Sariolghalam explains this posturing in the following way:

> While much of Iran's political and economic conduct is based on national interests, for reasons related to the psychological needs of a revolutionary state, Iran's posturing is ideological, challenging and defiant . . . For domestic audiences, radical language is more significant than what actually is carried out in practice. These intricate changes in Iran's foreign policy are unnoticed since official language carries more weight and makes an immediate impact.[75]

Having said this, the Rafsanjani administration kept sending clear signals to the world of its intention to live peacefully with its neighbours. Foreign Minister Velayati declared that Iran's diplomacy aimed at building friendly relations with all neighbouring countries. He maintained that Iran wanted to have relations with other countries on the basis of legal norms and mutual interest and respect.[76] In 1997, he openly stated the importance of national security through regional co-operation and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries for Iranian foreign policy when considering the situation at the country's borders:

> Any incident in any one of these neighbouring countries inevitably affects our national security situation. Therefore . . . one of the important objectives in our foreign policy is to help towards the ensuring of national security. The other is the expansion of regional co-operation . . . Regional co-operation . . . dictates that possible crises be overcome . . . On this basis . . . we are active in Afghanistan, in Tajikistan, in the Caucasus, in Karabakh and Northern Iraq . . . We are prepared to do anything to help these people up to the point which will not be interpreted as intervention in the domestic affairs of others.[77]

Khatami's presidency

In May 1997 a new President was elected. The 54-year-old cleric Muhammad Khatami gained a landslide victory of 70 per cent. His major aims were to seek the rule of law and the people's participation in the political, social and cultural fields. He held that the Islamic government was the servant of the people, not their master, and was always accountable to them.[78] On the

international front, Khatami stated shortly after taking office in August, that the Islamic Republic needed an 'active and fresh presence' in its foreign relations, to defuse tensions and to seek friendship in the international arena. He was aware that positive relations especially with the West were needed to help Iran's ailing economy and obtain the much needed foreign investment and transfer of high technology. His inaugural speech laid clear emphasis on national pride and the importance of Iranian national interest and the dialogue between nations:

> The presence of a proud, cultivated and independent Iran at the heart of the world community is the dream of all noble and responsible Iranians. Therefore, it is particularly important for the government to defend the national interests; try to promote the integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran according to its historical, cultural, geographic and economic status . . .
>
> The government believes that in the contemporary world dialogue between civilizations is necessary, and the government will refrain from any behaviour or activity that could create tension. We will have relations with any government which respects our independence, in the sense of decision-making within the boundaries of national interests. But we shall stand up to those powers who want to rule us as master or chief.[79]

Khatami's cabinet was composed out of nineteen technocrats and only three clergy. He kept many individuals close to Rafsanjani and selected a few compromise candidates to appease the conservatives led by Majlis Speaker Nateq-Nouri and close to Khamenei. He made these concessions in order to employ his own key allies, Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Ataollah Mohajerani, and Interior Minister Abdollah Nuri. His choice was important for both domestic and foreign policy. Kamal Kharrazi explained that: '[The] people he selected believe in dialogue. They believe in freedom of expression and they believe to have contacts with people and opening the rooms for different ideas and thoughts.'[80] The emphasis on improving foreign relations and international dialogue was a continuation of a trend begun under Rafsanjani. Only Khatami and his Foreign Minister were much more outspoken and proactive in pursuing these goals, not only with Iran's neighbours but also with Europe and notably the United States. This again met with strong opposition by Leader Khamenei, Speaker Nateq-Nouri and the conservative members in the Majlis. In addition, former President Rafsanjani and former Foreign Minister Velayati now seemed to move closer to Khamenei than when they were in power. Rafsanjani became Chairman of the Expediency Council, an influential advisory body to the Leader. Khamenei appointed Velayati as his adviser on international affairs.[81] This in effect made him more

influential than the new Foreign Minister Kharrazi, an open-minded moderate who before the elections had been Ambassador to the UN in New York. Khatami encountered another obstacle after he successfully replaced the Commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Mohsen Reza'i, who had been in charge and responsible for the export of revolution since 1981, with Brigadier General Safavi: Khamenei subsequently named Reza'i as secretary of the Expediency Council, replacing Hassan Habibi, a more pragmatic Rafsanjani loyalist.

A power struggle between followers of Khatami and Khamenei had been under way ever since Khatami's inauguration, which extended into the foreign policy domain. Khatami since taking office seemed to be succeeding as long as the West went along with him. The conservatives realised that to counter foreign investment and stop rapprochement with the West would harm the economy further and make them even more unpopular. Nevertheless, at this stage it was not quite clear how far they would go in their opposition to the President. Khatami still had to tread carefully, as the conservatives continued to hold power over the main security institutions: the Leader is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and the police, he heads national radio and television, sets the general direction in policy, including foreign relations, and controls the judicial system and the intelligence services. Nevertheless, the call to curtail the Leader's powers and increase the President's has been repeated from various corners. A debate about the very position of the *velayat-i faqih* has been under way. All these are clear signs that Iran is moving ever further away from the ideologically founded policies of the early years after the revolution, despite continuing heavy opposition by the conservatives.

Five foreign policy phases

It is possible to determine five phases since the beginning of the revolution which describe the general shift from ideology to national interest in Iranian foreign policy actions. The first phase from February to November 1979 was the time of the Provisional Government under the leadership of Mehdi Bazargan who led a coalition between the liberal Islamic Freedom Movement and the secular National Front. The idea of 'neither East nor West' was that Iran would be an independent political entity as Ayatollah Khomeini wished, but it would also be more receptive to the West to be able to check the threat from the East.[82] The second phase was one of isolation and showed a major emphasis on Islamic ideology. It lasted from the beginning of the US hostage crisis in Tehran in November 1979 until around mid-1984, when heavy Iranian losses started to occur in the war with Iraq and the government realised that the Arabs would not side with Iran on the sole basis of being Muslims. The third phase – 1984 onwards – ended with the death of Khomeini in 1989, and marked the slow

ascendance of the so-called pragmatists, or politicians who put national interest first. The fourth phase from 1989 onwards was the period of reconstruction and development under the leadership of President Rafsanjani, distinct by the prevailing of national interest over religious ideology. The last phase began with the presidency of Khatami in 1997. It is characterised by an even stronger emphasis on national interest and Iranian nationalism as well as dialogue between Iran and the world and a positive response by the international community despite internal conservative opposition.

During these five phases ideology and national interest existed side by side in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The emphasis given to either, however, varied over time. The main long-term goals of Iranian foreign policy until the death of Khomeini were to export the revolution and to establish Muslim unity. Since 1989, the long-term goals shifted to establishing regional security without the presence of foreign forces in the area, good neighbourly relations, rapprochement with the West and containment of Iraq. The general theme of Iran's foreign policy from the beginning was independence from the superpowers, or Islam as a third way between Marxism and capitalism, expressed by the dictum 'neither East nor West, only the Islamic Republic'. The meaning of this slogan evolved with the development of the policy. After the war with Iraq, it changed from balanced hostility to balanced neutrality, although the US presence in the region and US policy towards Iran remained a major problem.

Conclusion

This chapter showed the continuity of Iranian Persian Gulf policy since the 1960s, which is based on the country's geopolitical situation and the importance of the Persian Gulf for the Iranian economy. It also explained the basis of Arab distrust and fear of their neighbour. Both the Shah and the leaders of the Islamic Republic – in times of peace – tried to establish Iran as a regional power with an emphasis on co-operation with its neighbours without external interference in the security and economic fields. Even if religious and revolutionary ideology is an important basis of the Islamic Republic, in the final analysis it had to accept geopolitics and pursue a policy mainly based on its national interest.

2

IMPACT OF THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

At the beginning of the Islamic revolution, the leaders in Iran held that the Islamic Republic was a model for other states until such time as the whole Muslim world was united. This meant that monarchies, like the Shah's Iran, had to be overthrown. The governments which felt most threatened were those geographically closest to Iran: the Arab states in the Persian Gulf.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, revolutionary fervour lessened after the first few years, and the Iranian government modified its radical views to concentrate on developing its own state, especially after the Iran–Iraq war. The emphasis on national interest became generally more prevalent than ideology, and the Islamic Republic was keen to establish better relations with its neighbours. Nevertheless, both aspects continued to be clearly visible due to factionalism inside the Iranian regime and the inevitable tension between the ideological sources of foreign policy and the constraints of the international system, like the regional balance of power and the presence of the superpowers.

The revolution failed to be exported to the Gulf, but the governments were still afraid because of the response to the revolution in the wider Islamic world. It seemed as though the Iranian revolution was only the first of many such Islamic revolutions. In general, Iran was more serious in its official attempts to export the revolution to Iraq and the Lebanon, where Shi'a connections were stronger, than to the Gulf. Nevertheless, the Gulf states deeply distrusted Islamic Iran after a number of coup attempts, bomb explosions, sabotage acts and assassination attempts. These happened mainly in the early 1980s, but were clearly still in the minds of the ruling elites a decade later, which has made any rapprochement difficult. The degree of influence the revolution had on its Arab neighbours in the Gulf depended to a large extent on the number and the living conditions of the Shi'a population. Whilst Khomeini had set out to appeal to Sunni and Shi'a alike as Muslims, the Shi'a in the Gulf were politically and socio-economically deprived and therefore receptive to a revolutionary message. Bahrain and Kuwait in particular suffered from attacks and violence. Iran was always

directly blamed and continuously denied the charges. The country which felt most threatened was Saudi Arabia which had its own Shi'a minority. There were also clashes at the hajj ceremonies between Iranian pilgrims and Saudi security forces, and Iranian religious leaders repeatedly questioned the Al Saud's religious legitimacy to rule the Holy Places. Iran's policy toward Saudi Arabia was highly influenced by ideology and revolutionary rhetoric which only began to change slowly in 1997.

This chapter attempts to explain first, what was meant by exporting the revolution, who tried to export it, how it was to be exported and what real impact it had on the Gulf states. It will then investigate Iran's relationship with Saudi Arabia, concentrating on the clashes at the hajj, particularly in 1987, and the rivalry between the Iranian theocratic elite and the Al Saud. It sets out to differentiate Iranian national interest and ideology in a field in which, due to its revolutionary and religious nature, ideology might be expected to be dominant. It constitutes the area where the struggle between those advocating pragmatism and those supporting the revolutionary cause was most obvious.

Both aspects are very difficult to assess. The only sources available are the media and interviews as well as secondary sources. They nearly always consist of Arab and Western allegations of Iranian involvement on the one hand, and Iranian denials on the other; either without much proof.

Export of revolution

Ideology and propaganda

Orthodox Shi'ism is not only a branch of Islam but also a socio-political movement against oppression which it sees as a consequence of the failure of Islamic rulers after Mohammad to follow the true path of Islam. In the Persian Gulf, Khomeini's ideology was more influential amongst the Shi'a. But he had in fact developed a broader, 'universalist' approach to all Muslims, in calling the oppressed masses (*mustaz'afin*) in general to rise against social injustice. Khomeini called for the establishment of Islamic governments free of superpower domination. He saw the liberation of mankind as a divine obligation on Iran and expected Arab acknowledgement of Iran's spiritual propriety and political primacy.[1] To reach these aims, however, direct interference in the affairs of other states and holy war (*jihad*) were rejected, war being permitted only for self-defence.[2]

Based on this ideology, Ayatollah Khomeini made the export of revolution obligatory. He repeatedly made statements to this effect:

> We must endeavour to export our Revolution to the world. We should set aside the thought that we do not export our revolution, because Islam does not regard various Islamic countries differently

> and is the supporter of all the oppressed peoples of the world. On the other hand, all the superpowers and the (great) powers have risen to destroy us. If we remain in isolation, we shall undoubtedly face defeat.[3]

The meaning of 'export of revolution' (*sudur-i inqilab*) is not very clear. The government line was that Iran should be an example for other countries and that it should spread its message only by the word. But some groups were involved in armed attacks and subversion. As proclaimed by the Revolutionary Guards' publication *Message of Revolution*:

> [The] presence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the international struggles of the oppressed is more with respect to the ideological and cultural dimension of these struggles than their military side, although pursuit and continuation of military measures, when inspired by the infra-structure of belief and faith, is an Islamic duty.[4]

The same publication, however, stated that Khomeini in a gathering of envoys from Islamic countries had explicitly rejected armed measures or military conquest for the export of the revolution. Khomeini's aim was to inform Muslims of their rights, that is their liberation from superpower domination and government oppression.[5] It is difficult to ascertain to what extent Khomeini actually sanctioned the use of violence by the Revolutionary Guards, or whether they disobeyed or misinterpreted his instructions.

In general, it is problematic to determine who was responsible for the export of revolution by military means. Khomeini himself rarely intervened directly in the daily function of the organs of the revolutionary state. Chapter 1 discussed the existence of various factions and the split in the organisation of Iranian political life. Some religious leaders and revolutionary establishments, such as the Ministry of Revolutionary Guards, who supported violent means on the one hand, were opposed by those institutions which dealt directly with foreign governments, such as the Foreign Ministry, which always opposed the aggressive export of revolution. The situation was most polarised during the time of the Provisional Government in 1979, when revolutionary tempers were highest. There were constant differences between the government and the Revolutionary Council. A further problem was that some religious figures, who were not part of the official policy-making establishment, felt entitled to pronounce their ideas of spreading the revolution to the Persian Gulf countries. One such example is Ayatollah Sadeq Rouhani who in June 1979 denounced the 1970 agreement on the status of Bahrain and claimed that Bahrain was an Iranian province. Official Iranian policy looked for good neighbourly relations and denounced any territorial ambitions. It is nevertheless possible that political leaders like

Khomeini or Rafsanjani said one thing whilst unofficially supporting another. This, however, cannot be proved.

The emphasis in exporting the revolution was laid on propaganda (*tabligħat*) and the cultural example. As explained by Said Hajjarian at the Center for Strategic Studies:

> The West tried to show that Iran attempted to export its revolution by force. The Iranian revolution was a cultural revolution in the sense that it tried to emancipate the oppressed people and to put an end to domination. No one can stop it. You can't put a Chinese wall between Iran and other countries because it is a cultural movement. There is official propaganda and activity in the cultural sphere. Every country tries to teach its culture to other countries. Germany and France, for instance, have cultural institutes abroad. We do not have high technology like the US – CNN, the Internet. We use small media based on individuals who teach the Quran and so on. We have to teach our culture, else we lose our identity.[6]

The primary means for spreading the revolutionary message were radio and television broadcasts, sermons, conferences and seminars for clergy, as well as the Iranian embassies and the example of Islamic behaviour of visiting Iranian officials in the Gulf states. Arabic language programmes were broadcast from Tehran, Ahvaz, Abadan NIOC (National Iranian Oil Company),[7] Chah Bahar, Bandar Torkaman and Kish island.[8] They consisted *inter alia* of broadcasts denouncing the Gulf governments' harsh treatment of opposition groups and attacking the United States. They aired not only Islamic Republic government statements or sermons but also announcements by Iranian students or Arab opposition groups, such as the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain. It is not clear who decided which programmes would be broadcast. In the 1990s, the government of the Islamic Republic denied any responsibility. For example, in a meeting with the Amir of Bahrain in March 1996, an official Iranian delegation declared it had no influence over the factions who controlled the radio.[9]

As for the role of the clergy, it was not only the Iranian ʿulama who were to use their sermons to export the revolution, but also the Arab clerics – Shiʿa and Sunni alike – who were to import it. For that purpose, seminars were organised to establish an international network of activist clerics, for instance in March 1982, by the Association of Militant Clerics and the Revolutionary Guards in Tehran, drawing ʿulama from Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Lebanon and elsewhere[10]; in January 1983, the Congress of Friday Imams and Prayer Leaders in Tehran; and in February 1984, the Revolutionary Islamic International, which was a response to the Casablanca meeting of the Islamic Conference Organisation.[11] Furthermore, at the

beginning of the revolution, Khomeini appointed Friday Prayer Leaders in some Gulf countries. As the Friday sermon is traditionally spoken in the name of the ruler, this was seen by the Arab governments as interference into their internal affairs. This reproach was rebuffed by Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi, who held that Khomeini's appointments of Friday Imams in other countries was an acceptable practice internationally, since the Christian world as well sent envoys to various countries.[12] The hope in Tehran was that the people in other countries, once aware of the social and political problems they were facing and seeing the Iranian example, would rise up themselves. They would not need any practical Iranian interference for this. As stated by Ali Shams Ardakani, Iran's Ambassador to Kuwait, in 1982:

> The Islamic revolution will reproduce itself in places where oppression and social injustice can be found and at a time when conditions are ripe for change. If someone thinks that revolution is exportable like an ordinary consumer product, he has no idea about politics. Likewise, it would be stupid to believe that revolutionary ideas stop at state boundaries.[13]

Iran also attempted to spread its message through Quran schools in the Gulf. When in January 1986, Kuwait closed several Quran schools 'for financial reasons', Iran offered to reopen the schools if the Kuwaiti government were to agree.[14] Given the situation in the Iran–Iraq war and various bomb attacks in Kuwait, it is likely to have rejected the offer for fear of subversion.

The Foreign Ministry and Iran's representatives abroad were singled out by Khomeini and the Speaker of the Majlis, Hashemi Rafsanjani, to 'voice Iran's views to the world' and to 'convey the message of the Islamic revolution'.[15] Iran's Arab neighbours maintained that Iranian embassies also distributed propaganda material which was directed against the ruling families in the Gulf.[16] To counter this image, in 1989, a statement by Rafsanjani signalled a change in Iranian foreign policy. Iranians by their successful presence and exemplary conduct in all international fields would be emissaries of the revolution. It was an act of moderation and of channelling revolutionary energy into internationally accepted, legitimate fields: 'Instead of being portrayed as "ignorant, adventurist terrorists," Iranians should export the revolution by taking part in every international arena, from the United Nations to the Olympics.'[17]

Export of revolution by force

The groups involved

Despite the ideal of exporting the revolution by word, there were some in Iran who preferred the use of force. Whether or not they were linked to the

government itself is a matter of dispute. It is likely that they were operating independently of the Foreign Ministry, but they probably were linked to one faction or another somewhere within the regime. It is not clear how much leading figures like Khomeini or Rafsanjani knew about and perhaps even sponsored certain operations. The groups involved were both Iranian and Gulf Arab. The main Iranian body committed to the export of revolution was the Revolutionary Guards, which had been officially active in this field in the Lebanon since 1982. The Guards' agents and units responsible for covert action in the Persian Gulf worked with a changing network of hardliners in the Iranian government and abroad.[18] Abdallah Bishara, Secretary General of the GCC 1981–1993, held that the Iranian Foreign Ministry was directly involved:

> Iran wanted to export its ideology and they thought they could sweep away the political entity of the GCC countries. The Iranian revolution came to change the system . . . and to clean the world of Western imperialism. Iran – and that is the mainstream in the government, including the Foreign Ministry – is the voice, arming factor, and political support of Shi'a groups in the Gulf.[19]

Ahmad al-Jassim, who was Kuwaiti Ambassador to Iran from June 1979 to October 1981, had a slightly different perspective:

> If the Iranians say they want to export the revolution, it does not mean that there is an institution formed for such a purpose. At one time, there was an organisation to help the liberation movements abroad, run by Ayatollah Montazeri [Khomeini's designated heir apparent as religious Leader] and the brother of his son-in-law. It was linked to the government but not the Foreign Ministry. Every country in this world wants to have influence across its borders![20]

The Guards' Office of Liberation Movements was in charge of subverting the Arab states in the Persian Gulf. It was headed by Mehdi Hashemi, the brother of Ayatollah Montazeri's son-in-law. In 1983, Hashemi and the Office of Liberation Movements were separated from the Guards.[21] As described by Dunn, the Office had been set up by Ayatollah Montazeri's son, Sheikh Muhammad Montazeri, who died in 1981.[22] When Mehdi Hashemi's faction kidnapped the Syrian Chargé d'Affaires in October 1986, Hashemi was arrested and executed, and the Office was closed down.[23] His relationship to Montazeri, Khomeini's heir apparent, is a clear link to the regime. According to Davoud Bavand of Imam Sadeq University, Hashemi was 'somehow linked to the government, but worked independently'. He maintained:

> When the war broke out, the government tried to appease the Arab neighbours. It attempted somehow to control Hashemi and others but wasn't very successful . . . Some individuals expressed the need to export the revolution, for instance al-Muhri from Kuwait [Khomeini's brother-in-law and his personal representative since 1979], but I do not think that the government tried to export the revolution. It was very much involved in its own difficulties – the wars etc.[24]

Iran's UN Ambassador, Kamal Kharrazi, denied any connection between the government and these groups, and stated that whilst there were Shi'a opposition movements in the Persian Gulf, and there were groups in Iran which supported them, the Iranian government was not involved because it did not want to interfere in the internal affairs of other states. He held that some people talked about the export of revolution at the beginning of the revolution, but the government always distanced itself. Imam Khomeini took the position of the spiritual Leader when recommending the Muslims to export the revolution. According to Kharrazi, this was not official government policy; the government was always opposed to it.[25]

Another Iranian source linked some individuals who were in charge of exporting the revolution to the government, for instance the Ambassador to Syria, Mohtashami, or Muhammad Taqi Modaressi who was involved in activities in the Gulf.[26] Dunn asserted the link with the government by explaining that the Revolutionary Guards had to report to the Ministry of the Revolutionary Guards, which was founded in 1982 and led by Mohsen Rafiqdust, and to their commander, Mohsen Reza'i.[27] Dunn also claimed that the Revolutionary Guards in their operations worked with Velayati, Reyshahri, Mohtashami, and the State Prosecutor, Musavi Kho'einiha, who was in charge of operations in Saudi Arabia.[28] One Iranian source compared the Islamic Republic with the Soviet Union. As the Soviet Union used Communist parties abroad to export its revolution, he speculated that Iran may have used Islamic parties in other countries as tools to export theirs.[29]

It is difficult to ascertain who exactly was in charge of what group and how many groups existed. However, parts of the Revolutionary Guards seem to have played an important role. They not only trained Iranians but also Arabs from the Persian Gulf linked to opposition movements. In addition, Dunn described the 'Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in the World' as an umbrella organisation and co-ordinating body for groups such as the 'Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq' (SAIRI). The Iranian Supreme Assembly was created in September 1981, was chaired by Muhammad Taqi Modaressi and reported to Montazeri. A 'Gulf Office' allegedly supervised such movements as the 'Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain' (IFLB).[30] Robin Wright reports a group similar to the Supreme Assembly under a different name, 'Council for the Islamic Revolution',

which was also supervised by Ayatollah Montazeri. It can be assumed that this was the same group.

It was based in a multistorey building in downtown Tehran, nicknamed Taleghani Centre by foreign intelligence agencies. It housed the IFLB, SAIRI, as well as Kuwaiti, Saudi and other countries' movements' offices. In 1980 and 1981, several thousand youths from the Persian Gulf came to Taleghani and were sent to paramilitary training camps in Tehran, Ahvaz, Isfahan, Qom, Shiraz, Mashad and Bushehr, run by the Revolutionary Guards. Afterwards, they were dispatched abroad.[31] Montazeri would receive Arab opposition members, such as Bahraini theology students who studied in Qom's seminary, to discuss the situation in their country.[32] In 1992, press reports mentioned a Training Directorate which recruited foreigners for the Imam Ali University in Qom, where courses supposedly included the study of demolition, shooting from moving vehicles, pursuit and surveillance.[33]

Arab opposition movements in the Gulf were most active in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. They were mainly Shi'a and co-operated with the Iraqi Da'wa (Shi'a opposition group) movement, a part of SAIRI, as well as with groups in Beirut.[34] The fact that the groups based in Iran were mainly Shi'a was helped by the existing network of radical Shi'a clerics who had studied in Najaf. No such pre-existing network was in place with Sunni 'ulama. Another factor was Khomeini's position as *marja'-i taqlid* (source of imitation: one of the high Shi'a authorities whose teachings believers can choose to follow in religious matters). This allowed him to send a number of representatives to the Gulf countries.

The IFLB was established in Iran and led by Muhammad Taqi Modaressi's brother, Ayatollah Hadi Modaressi, an Iranian–Iraqi cleric. He had founded his own Amal Islami opposition group and described the liberation of Bahrain as a sacred duty.[35] In 1979, he was appointed Khomeini's personal representative in Bahrain and was assisted for two months by an Iranian cleric, Ayatollah Sadeq Rouhani.[36] Both were expelled from Bahrain in 1979 after having called for demonstrations.[37] The IFLB held the United States responsible for the human rights violations of the regime in Bahrain and called for an 'uprising of all Muslims under Imam Khomeini' in order to establish an Islamic government and liberate Islamic lands.[38] The Front's pamphlets and tracts displayed a mixture of left-wing vocabulary and Islam, asserting the rights of the *mustaz'afin* (oppressed) against their exploitation by multinationals linked to imperialism, and the establishment of an elected parliamentary system, which they called *shura*,[39] quite similar to Khomeini's teachings. After the second Gulf war, the Lebanon based Hizballah apparently started organising the Bahraini Hizballah. Bahraini officials linked them to Iran. According to an Arab journalist in Bahrain they received their instructions from the Lebanese Shi'a leader Fadlallah ('via mobile phone') in Lebanon.[40] The Iranian Revolutionary Guards have close links with the Lebanese Hizballah, but Fadlallah's relationship with Iran is ambiguous.

In Kuwait, one major opposition group was called the Arab Revolutionary Brigades and was led by the Kuwaiti citizen Abbas al-Muhri, Khomeini's brother-in-law and personal representative in Kuwait since 1979. He had his citizenship withdrawn and was expelled together with his family the same year. As stated by Said Hajjarian of the Center for Strategic Studies in Tehran, Muhri after his expulsion went to Qom where he was not involved in any political activities.[41] According to the Kuwaiti Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, Sulaiman Majed al-Shaheen, the Gulf countries were worried because Iran invited many young Shi'a to Qom to carry Khomeini's ideas of Muslim leadership to the Gulf. The problem of Muhri, he asserted, was not important for Iranian–Kuwaiti relations. In the 1990s, most of the Muhri family returned to Kuwait.[42]

Another opposition leader was the Iranian cleric Muhammad Shirazi, who was also expelled from Kuwait and, according to Wright, became one of the top co-ordinators of Arab Shi'a movements based at Taleghani.[43] He used his position in Tehran to launch propaganda attacks against Arab governments like, for instance, the Bahraini one.[44] Saudi Arabia seemed to have a variety of Islamic opposition groups under different names. Many Da'wa members were in Saudi Arabia,[45] probably linked to the group based in Tehran. In 1979, a group in Saudi Arabia called Mujahidin sent a message in support of Khomeini's revolution to US experts working for Saudi oil companies:

> The Muslims in this country will not stand idle. You must know that the US interests and installations will be destroyed. You and your government must end your threats against the Islamic revolution in Iran; otherwise, it will be your end . . . Long live the Islamic revolution; long live Imam Khomeyni; down with US imperialism; down with the CIA and down with Carter![46]

The group was clearly inspired by the revolution, but a direct link with Iran remains questionable. In 1994, Prince Nayif ibn Abd al-Aziz, Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia, maintained: 'Many Saudi Shi'a returned from Iran and confessed that they had been trained to use various weapons. In this way, Iran tried to bring about a situation in Saudi Arabia which is comparable to Egypt and Algeria.'[47]

Press reports in 1997 claimed that two Saudi movements, the 'Organisation of the Islamic Revolution of the Arabian Peninsula' (OIRAP) and the 'Hizballah of the Hijaz', were based in Tehran and used the Imam Ali training camp in East Tehran.[48] Hizballah again was probably linked primarily to Beirut from where it issued statements against the Al Saud.[49] In October 1992, *Kayhan* published an interview with the leader of OIRAP, Sheikh Hassan Safar. Safar mainly complained about Shi'a unemployment and discrimination in Saudi Arabia. He suggested that, were political and

social conditions to change, OIRAP could change its revolutionary attitudes, but would always call for the exact implementation of all Islamic laws and values. He stated that his organisation was co-operating with Hizballah. As for his view on Iran, he concluded: 'We want the Iranian nation to be a model for Muslim nations in the religious, secular, economic, social, moral and all other fields. We want the Iranian nation to be an example in progress of technology and steadfastness.'[50]

The actions

Active attempts to carry the revolution to the countries in the Persian Gulf went through three stages. The first stage was the time before the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq war in September 1980. It consisted of Iran-inspired mass demonstrations, mainly in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, but also in Qatar and the UAE. The second phase lasted until Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. The first half was marked by violent attacks, in particular in Bahrain and Kuwait. After that, there were sporadic acts of sabotage. This phase can also be seen in the light of opposition to those countries' support of Iraq in its war with Iran. During the third phase, there was relative quiet until the popular uprising began in Bahrain in December 1994. The developments in this last period corresponded with Iran's attempts at establishing better relations with its neighbours due to its deteriorating situation during and after the war and the general drive towards moderation in its foreign policy.

In August 1979, due to Ayatollah Hadi Modaressi's preaching, two demonstrations of about 500 people took place in Bahrain. Some were arrested and Modaressi expelled. The second demonstration was a result of the arrest of a Shi'a leader who had returned from a visit to Iran where he had seen Ayatollah Sadeq Rouhani,[51] who had called for the annexation of Bahrain. The Iranian Foreign Ministry strongly dismissed these claims as being Rouhani's personal feelings.[52] In September, Rouhani repeated his demands, speaking in Qom in Khomeini's presence and addressing members of the provisional government, including Ibrahim Yazdi, who had tried to lessen the effects of his earlier statements:

> Since the ruler of Bahrain oppresses the nation, does not abide by Islamic laws and confiscates the public wealth, we wrote to him and told him 'If you do not want to stop oppressing the people and restore Islamic laws, we will call on the people to demand annexation to the Islamic government of Iran' . . . Some of the authorities say that I have no post. But I tell them . . . my post has been given to me by God and the Prophet. I had and still have a divine responsibility.[53]

The Iranian authorities, including Deputy Prime Minister Sadeq Tabataba'i and Iran's Ambassador to Kuwait, stated that Iran had no

territorial ambitions on Bahrain and that Rouhani's remarks were his personal opinion.[54] Seyyed Morteza Nabavi, a conservative MP and Director General of *Risalat* newspaper, explained: 'Ayatollah Rouhani acted against the revolution. We do not accept this. The export of revolution is only to be achieved through propaganda, not through war or annexation.'[55]

Former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani added that Ayatollah Rouhani's claims about Bahrain being Iran's fourteenth province were irresponsible. During this early period many people who were not officials pronounced slogans which ran counter to Iran's national interest.[56] The effects, as expressed in a Kuwaiti newspaper, were that the Gulf states thought Tehran wanted to establish a Persian empire in the name of Islam and split Sunnis and Shi'a[57]; consequently Bahrain forbid Iranian ships to land in its port.[58] In April 1980, there were further demonstrations against the use of Bahrain as a base for US operations to free the hostages in Tehran.[59]

In November 1979, 2,000 people demonstrated in front of the US Embassy in Kuwait. Fifteen Iranian workers were sentenced for having organised the demonstration.[60]

In Saudi Arabia, throughout 1979, leaflets were circulated in the Shi'a Eastern Province Hasa, which echoed Iran's propaganda and called on the Shi'a not to co-operate with the Al Saud.[61] The first Shi'a uprising began at the end of November 1979. Ninety thousand demonstrators, in defiance of the government ban, celebrated *'ashura* (religious Shi'a holiday to commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein). They called upon the government to stop supplying the US with oil, to support Khomeini's Islamic revolution and to end discrimination against the Shi'a. Iranian 'Students of the Imam's Line' called upon Saudi oilworkers to rise against American domination. In ensuing riots in December, many Shi'a and some National Guard soldiers were killed. Tehran radio condemned the violence of the security forces.[62] More unrest took place in February 1980, when demonstrators carrying Khomeini's photographs repeated their demands for better living conditions and the release of those arrested in December.[63] In both cases, the demonstrators were inspired and incited by the Iranian revolution, but direct Iranian involvement was not reported.

The year 1981 marked the beginning of violent attacks. The reasons were twofold. On the one hand, demonstrations had not succeeded in bringing down the governments and extreme Shi'a groups now attempted to topple the regimes by acts of sabotage. On the other hand, the Gulf states had begun to support Iraq in the war and the Iranian government wanted to send warnings to stop this support.

During the spring, various bomb attacks occurred at industrial plants in Kuwait. These were probably not only linked to Iran but also to radical Palestinian forces.[64] In June, a rocket landed in the grounds of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Beirut and a pro-Iranian group called Mujahidin Saff claimed responsibility in retaliation for 'the conspiracy of the Gulf nations against

Iran'. In August, another rocket hit the Saudi Embassy in Beirut for the same reason.[65]

In December 1981, the Bahrainis discovered a coup plot which horrified the whole region. The Bahraini government arrested seventy-three saboteurs said to be IFLB members. They included sixty Bahraini, eleven Saudi, one Omani and one Kuwaiti national. No Iranians were amongst those arrested. Allegedly, they intended to launch attacks on government establishments and take over the radio and television networks. The group confessed to having been trained in Iran. The Bahraini paper *Akhbar al-Khalij*, on 30 December, named Hadi Modaressi as the chief organizer of the coup. The Iranian Foreign Ministry denied any government complicity. Evidence was presented by the Bahraini prosecutor that most of the weapons had entered Bahrain from Iran, that the Iranian Chargé d'Affaires had imported dozens of two-way radio sets to be used and that the accused had expected to receive military assistance from Iran within three days of the coup, apparently landing by sea. As a result, Bahrain recalled its Ambassador, and the Iranian Chargé d'Affaires was declared *persona non grata*.[66] As stated by a senior official in Bahrain's Prime Minister's Office, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa: 'I am not saying that the coup attempt was government-backed but it was shown that Iran was involved and that arms were smuggled from Iran.'[67]

Davoud Bavand of Imam Sadeq University believed that Mehdi Hashemi was involved in the plot but that he worked independently of the government.[68] Another Iranian source explained:

> In 1981, some Iranians went to Bahrain. They had no link with the government at all. In the early 1980s, many people said what they felt; their rhetoric was their true conviction. Everybody was really excited. They thought they could change the world. Some people who had guns – guns had been distributed during the revolution – took the decision to support the Arabs by themselves and went to Bahrain. They had Bahraini connections from before the revolution when they belonged to the anti-Shah opposition there.[69]

If this statement is true, it would mean that there were more people – in particular Iranians – directly involved than the seventy-three convicted Gulf Arabs.[70] An Arab journalist held that the son of a Shi'a advisor to the Amir, al-Alawi, was involved in the coup. The advisor was dismissed as a result.[71] Saudi Arabia, which saw the affair as a plot against all GCC states, concluded bilateral defence agreements with Bahrain in December and with the UAE, Qatar and Oman in February 1982.[72]

In February 1983, the press reported Saudi security forces had arrested hundreds of people, mainly middle-class officials, professionals and teachers, being suspected of having organised an allegedly Iranian-backed coup against

King Fahd. They were mainly Sunni Muslims, but Iranian infiltrators were also believed to have entered Saudi Arabia in small groups.[73] In December, several explosions in Kuwait killed five people and injured many more. They hit the American Embassy, an American company, the French Embassy, the airport control tower, the Ministry of Electricity and Water, the Passport Control Office and a major petrochemical and refining complex in Shuaiba. Islamic Jihad, which was involved in the October attacks on the US Marines and French paratroopers in Lebanon, claimed responsibility. It was alleged that the plotters had entered Kuwait by boat from Iran, carrying stocks of weapons and explosives.[74] The Iranian Foreign Ministry and President Khamenei denied any Iranian involvement and called it a US plot.[75] Besides Islamic Jihad members, the people convicted included Iranian-trained Iraqi, Iranian and Kuwaiti members of Da'wa. They were executed in 1987.[76] As a result of the bombings, Kuwait deported thousands of Iranian expatriate workers.[77] This had begun in 1982, following the Bahraini incident, and continued for several years, reaching tens of thousands. In June 1984, President Khamenei stated that if Saudi Arabia and Kuwait wished to help Iraq, 'we shall not remain indifferent'.[78] In December 1984, a Kuwaiti airliner was hijacked to Tehran by Shi'a hijackers demanding the release of the prisoners of the US Embassy bombings in Kuwait. Two American passengers were shot dead. The Iranians finally stormed the plane and overpowered the hijackers. The US charged Iran with complicity. This was denied by the authorities, and the British pilot said he never felt the Iranians were in collaboration with the hijackers.[79] In May 1985, the Amir's motorcade was attacked. He escaped with minor cuts. Again, Da'wa and Islamic Jihad members were implicated.[80] Iran blamed the attack on Iraq, which had wanted to occupy Kuwait and, when this failed, blamed Iran.[81] Shams Ardakani, an advisor to the Iranian Foreign Minister, toured the Gulf states in order to assure them that Iran was opposed to terrorism and wanted friendly relations with them.[82] In July 1985, two seaside cafés in Kuwait were bombed which left nine killed and eighty-nine wounded. The Arab Revolutionary Brigades claimed responsibility. Iran denied any involvement.[83] According to Abdul Mohsen Jamal, Member of the Kuwaiti National Assembly:

> As for the attack on the Amir and the café bombings, there was no evidence of Iranian involvement. These accusations were American and Iraqi propaganda. After the Iraqi invasion, we acknowledge that it was Iraq, not Iran. This is my view. Officially, we don't announce anything.[84]

A further car-bomb attack was launched on the head of Kuwait Airways in May 1986, for which four Kuwaiti Shi'a were charged.[85]

After heavy losses in the war Iran looked for a rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and invited Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal to Tehran in May 1985.

Just before his visit, a bomb exploded in Riyadh, for which the Shi'a group, Islamic Jihad, professed responsibility and which claimed one life. It can be assumed that this was organized by hardliners in Iran who opposed the desired rapprochement.[86]

In 1987, the situation between Iran and the Gulf states worsened considerably after the Kuwaiti reflagging operation and after the deaths of over 400 hajj pilgrims at the end of July. This incident will be examined in detail in the second part of this chapter. Within twenty-four hours of the hajj tragedy, fire broke out in one of Kuwait's oil refineries. Officially, this was put down to a 'technical fault' but, unofficially, Iran was blamed.[87]

In August, the Kuwaiti and Saudi Embassies in Tehran were stormed by demonstrators protesting about the clashes in Mecca.[88] In Saudi Arabia, a huge explosion hit an ARAMCO liquefied petroleum gas plant, after Parliamentary Speaker Rafsanjani had called on Muslims throughout the world to overthrow the Saudi government earlier in the month. The Saudi Hizballah claimed responsibility.[89] In March 1988, a series of bombings took place at overseas offices of Saudia Airline in Tokyo, Frankfurt and Karachi and at petrochemical and oil installations in Saudi Arabia, for instance in Jubail. There was no proof of Iranian involvement. In September, four Saudi Shi'a were executed for having collaborated with Iran in the bombings. This was denied by Tehran. It was later alleged that some members of Hizballah were responsible.[90] In December 1989, Hizballah was involved in an aborted plot to blow up a Saudia plane on its flight from Islamabad to Riyadh. Pakistani police arrested six Iranians and five others.[91] In December 1988, one Iranian and two Bahraini nationals belonging to IFLB were arrested for an attempted sabotage plot in Bahrain. They apparently planned to shell oil installations, the airport, radio and television buildings, restaurants, hotels, markets and homes of senior officials.[92] During the early 1990s, not many acts of exporting the revolution by force were reported. In December 1994, leaflets circulated in Riyadh with the text: 'Remember the example of the heretic Shah of Iran. Kings are evil.'[93] In June 1996, a bomb exploded at a US military housing complex at al-Khubar, Dhahran. Washington alleged Iranian involvement which was adamantly denied by Tehran. Proof of the allegations could not be found. The Saudi government did not share its findings with Washington and it can be assumed that the culprits were Saudis opposed to the US presence on their soil. Riyadh clearly did not want this issue to affect its already strained, but slowly improving relations with Iran. As expressed by Defence Minister Prince Sultan shortly before his trip to America in early 1997:

> Iran is a neighbouring Islamic state and we are interested in having the best possible relations with it . . . As for the explosion at al-Khubar, the Saudi security authorities are still investigating . . . It would not be right to talk about the results of the investigation before it is completed and all facts are clear.[94]

December 1994 marked the beginning of the popular uprising in Bahrain, which started off with mass demonstrations and was to continue with sabotage attacks and bomb explosions as well as mass arrests in the mid-1990s. Sunnis and Shi'a called for democracy and the reinstatement of the suspended parliament and constitution. Shi'a, in particular, demanded better living conditions and political participation. Groups involved were Hizballah and IFLB. The Bahraini and Saudi authorities held Iran responsible, and Saudi Interior Minister Nayif bin Abd al-Aziz renewed his statement that the maintenance of security in all member states was a top priority of the GCC.[95] The situation worsened in early 1996. According to Sheikh Khalid al-Khalifa, Vice President of Bahrain University, Iran gave financial support for the uprising, and one of the opposition leaders, Mansour al-Jamri, was sending messages on Iranian television and radio.[96] Bahrain's Foreign Minister stated that the Iranian government was responsible and could stop the disturbances.[97] Foreign Minister Velayati rejected any news reports alleging Iranian backing of the troubles in Bahrain. He maintained that Tehran held 'the best intentions towards its neighbours and Islamic states'. When the Iranian Embassy in Kuwait issued a statement accusing the Bahraini government of discriminating against its citizens, Sheikh Fahin bin Sultan al-Qasimi, the Secretary General of the GCC, demanded that the Islamic Republic refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of the Gulf states. In June the Bahraini authorities arrested members of Hizballah on charges of planning to topple the regime by force and install a regime loyal to Iran. The confessions implicated Iran for financing the operation and equipping and training the accused in camps in Iran. Bahrain as a result withdrew its Ambassador from Tehran and maintained diplomatic relations at the level of Chargé d'Affaires. Iran denied all accusations and strongly underlined that it was not interfering in Bahrain.[98] According to an Arab journalist, the Bahraini government used the rhetoric of 'foreign involvement' to drive a wedge between Sunnis and Shi'a.[99] A high official in the Omani Foreign Ministry added: 'Iran is not interfering in Bahrain. There is no evidence that the government in Iran supports the uprising. It is a local problem of the Shi'a being second class citizens.'[100]

As relations between Iran and Bahrain deteriorated, the Syrian Foreign Minister al-Shara' began to shuttle between Tehran and Manama to mediate an end to the crisis. As a result, they agreed to halt media campaigns.[101] Despite ongoing disturbances and arrests in Bahrain, the Iranian and Bahraini Foreign Ministers met in September 1996 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly and discussed new grounds for co-operation and strengthening ties. Iran was very keen not to let this issue spoil its general attempts at improving relations with its neighbours. It was only in December 1997, however, after Khatami had taken over the presidency and Kharrazi had embarked on his confidence-building tour, that Manama decided to raise its diplomatic relations back to ambassadorial level. The Bahraini

government may still have been wary of Iranian intentions but was certainly encouraged by the new administration and also by the positive Saudi response to changes in Iran. Tehran made further efforts at reconciliation, and former President Rafsanjani interrupted his February/March 1998 visit to Saudi Arabia for one day to see the Amir of Bahrain.[102]

The Shi'a communities in the Gulf

Despite a few mass demonstrations and numerous violent acts, the export of revolution did not succeed. One key question is whether it was only an attempt by Iran to export its revolution and an instrument of political pressure on those states which supported Iraq in the war. To what extent was it also an endeavour to import the revolution by Arab opposition forces, inspired by the revolution and aided by Iranian groups? In order to answer this question, it has to be explored whether there were valid local grievances which only made these demonstrations and attacks possible or whether Iran simply tried to impose its will. Other questions are, why there was no mass Iranian style revolution in the GCC states and why the opposition groups were mainly Shi'a. As Olivier Roy put it, Shi'ism became the 'ghetto of the revolution'.[103]

In all the GCC states, apart from Bahrain, the majority of the population was Sunni. Due to the oil wealth, they were mostly well off and felt adequately represented by their Sunni rulers. Even if some had grievances, a Shi'a minority was unlikely to lead a united Sunni–Shi'a revolution.[104] Furthermore, secular Sunni intellectuals as well as Sunni Islamic groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, criticised the human rights abuses committed by the clergy in the Islamic Republic as well as the Shi'a nature of the revolution.[105] The Gulf Shi'a seemed to see the Islamic Republic of Iran as an example of the deprived gaining more rights. Even if most of them did not wish to emulate the political model, it inspired them to demand better living conditions. The evidence suggests that large mass movements did not develop as the Shi'a themselves were divided along class lines between some prominent wealthy business families not favouring an Islamic revolution and poor workers. Khomeini's appeal to the oppressed masses was most likely to be heard amongst the Shi'a of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, who were more socio-economically disadvantaged than their co-religionists in Qatar, the UAE or Oman. The Kuwaiti Shi'a were geographically close to Iran, and many family and educational links existed amongst the clerics.

Figures about the exact percentage of Shi'a in the GCC states vary, especially as there are large numbers of Iranian migrant workers in some countries. Shi'a citizens in Bahrain make up between 65 and 70 per cent of the population, 30 per cent in Kuwait, 15 per cent in Qatar, 10 per cent in the UAE and 7 per cent in Saudi Arabia. There are about 10,000 Shi'a in Oman.[106] The Iranian expatriate workers were usually not involved in

subversive activities. They seemed more interested in keeping their employment than supporting a revolution in their host countries.

In countries where the Shi'a were a minority, it was relatively easy for the governments to allay broader opposition by giving in to some of the demands without undermining their own position. In Saudi Arabia, most of the Shi'a live in the oil-rich Eastern Province Hasa, where they constitute 40 to 60 per cent of the workforce in the oil industry.[107] The 1979 and 1980 disturbances expressed protest against their historical socio-economic and political discrimination. Religiously, the Wahhabis had classified the Shi'a as *mushrikun* (idolaters) and *kuffar* (unbelievers). Since 1930, they were allowed to observe their religious customs but only in privacy. They lived in poor conditions, particularly in Qatif, could only join the lowest ranks in the armed forces and the bureaucracy and were restricted from entering the universities. Politically, they had no cabinet-level position in the government.[108]

As a result of the disturbances, the Saudi government improved the infrastructure of the Eastern Province and built new schools, hospitals and homes. In November 1980, King Khalid visited Hasa, spoke to Shi'a leaders and heard their complaints. In 1985, Muhammad bin Fahd, the King's son, replaced the ageing hardliner, Abdul Mohsin bin Jaluwi, as governor. This further improved the atmosphere in the Eastern Province. He released significant numbers of Shi'a prisoners and attempted to find them jobs.[109] These developments stopped any further uprisings, in particular as the Saudi Shi'a had no institutional links with the clerics in Iran. In 1993, a dialogue began between the Saudi government and the Shi'a Reform Movement, which was reported to include Hizballah, mainly about improving job prospects and putting an end to the discrimination in education. The government released Shi'a political prisoners and allowed exiles to return.[110]

In Kuwait, the Iranian revolution seemed to find a considerable number of followers amongst both Shi'a and Sunnis in the early 1980s. The student unions at the University of Kuwait were gradually taken over by Islamists and Tehran Radio was listened to all over the souks.[111] According to Adnan Abdul Samad, a Shi'a Member of the National Assembly, there were many Sunnis in Kuwait who supported the revolution. On the other hand, many Shi'a opposed it.[112] Some wealthy Kuwaiti Shi'a gave large amounts of money for the export of revolution. Wright describes one example of a young Shi'a businessman who claimed to channel vast sums of money through the Iranian Embassy and Syrian connections to the training camps in Iran.[113] Those for whom Khomeini was *marja-i taqlid* would direct their Islamic taxes at his discretion. This, however, seems to have been more the exception than the rule. As stated by another wealthy Kuwaiti Shi'a: 'I am first and foremost Kuwaiti. I hope the Iranians topple Saddam. But I am happy with Kuwait the way it is. I have no desire to lose what I have.'[114]

Major complaints amongst the Kuwaiti population at the time of the Iranian revolution were the weakening of public morals and the lack of political participation. In 1981, the government held elections and reconvened the National Assembly which had been closed in 1976. This placated the Sunni opposition. The Shi'a won only four seats and only one Shi'a politician held a cabinet post. They were excluded from the higher echelons in the army, the security forces and foreign policy making. However, many Shi'a were economically well off and had close ties to the ruling Sunnis. In 1986, a drop in oil prices led to economic problems which caused a reinforced sense of political exclusion. After the bombings in 1986, Sheikh Jaber dissolved Parliament and ruled by decree. It was only reopened after the liberation of Kuwait, in 1992. In the meantime, the vast majority of Kuwait's Sunni and Shi'a population opposed revolution, being appalled by the use of force by Shi'a activists. In fact, it seemed that Kuwaiti Shi'a largely preferred Arab or Kuwaiti nationalism over Persian Shi'a ideology.[115] This was true in the political realm. As for religion, Abdul Mohsen Jamal, a Shi'a Member of the National Assembly, explained:

> The Iranian and Kuwaiti Shi'a understand each other. Many Kuwaitis visited the shrines of Imam Reza in Mashad and his sister in Qom, even during the Iran–Iraq war. During the war, there were about 100,000 Iranians working in Kuwait and Iranian mullahs came for the *hussainiya* during Muharram, and gave their sermons in the mosques. Therefore, we wanted to separate religion from politics and succeeded.[116]

In Qatar, the government was not worried about the export of revolution because there were not many Shi'a in Qatar.[117] Qatari Wahhabi society, despite rapid modernization, had kept Islamic values and the shari'a law.[118] Both Sunnis and Shi'a were generally well off and thus not receptive to the Iranian revolution and the appeal to the *mustaźafin*. In Oman, the small number of Ismaili Shi'a came originally from India and were mainly traders. They were well integrated and an important part of the Muscat establishment. In general, there was hardly any opposition to the Sultan who was admired by his people. Sultan Qabus himself, however, was worried by the fall of the Shah. He proposed a regional security agreement against Soviet expansion at the time of the occupation of Afghanistan.[119] But it is not clear whether he was more fearful of an Islamic revolution. From private talks with intellectuals in Oman I got the impression that the Shi'a felt the government was suspicious about their political leanings, even if there really seemed to exist no Shi'a support of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In the UAE, the Shi'a citizens were an important part of the business community and their interests were tied to the ruling establishment. The revolution had some followers amongst the poorer Iranian and Iraqi Shi'a

migrant workers as well as some Palestinians, but their demonstrations were not very large and at no point in time a threat to the government. According to Khalifa Shaheen al-Merree of the UAE's Foreign Ministry:

> The Iranians and Shiʿa in the UAE do not form a unified body, there is no mobilization. At the beginning of the revolution we were more worried about the general effects and the tension in the region. We did not see an imminent threat of an export of revolution. More realistically, Iran was in a lot of chaos at that time.[120]

The only GCC state with a Shiʿa majority was Bahrain, ruled by a Sunni minority. The Constitution of 1972 had led to elections for a National Assembly in 1973. Due to its left-wing and allegedly Shiʿa tendencies, the ruling family dissolved the Assembly in 1975. In it, however, Shiʿa had only received five minor cabinet seats out of fourteen and held no important positions in the foreign policy and defence establishments. Many Shiʿa families were compensated by business opportunities, but the best economic opportunities were given to members of the ruling Khalifa family.[121] The Shiʿa in the villages had the highest illiteracy rate and were poor, and since 1977, differences between wealthy business people and the destitute were increasing.[122]

The Shiʿa used to gather in *maʿtams*, funeral homes, or sports and political clubs where they could discuss their grievances. These were used by Hadi Modaressi in 1979, to call for an export of the Islamic revolution. Most of his followers were Arab Shiʿa. The minority of Bahrainis of Persian descent remained politically inactive.[123] After the initial demonstrations and the crack-down on opposition groups in 1982, in December 1994 Shiʿa and some Sunnis began to call for political participation and the reinstatement of parliament and the constitution. This movement seemed to be a coalition between Shiʿa opposition groups, such as the IFLB and Hizballah, and secular democrats. In addition to political participation, they desired more civil rights and better living conditions – for instance, since the 1981 coup plot, Shiʿa were not allowed to join the police, the armed forces, or the Ministry of Defence.[124] Much of the uprising took place in the poor Shiʿa villages with small bomb explosions and arson attacks also in Manama.

Given the living conditions and the discrimination against them, the Shiʿa opposition seemed to be a genuine indigenous Bahraini popular movement. Furthermore, the participants in the movement did not call for the overthrow of the ruling family and the secular members at least were not interested in an Islamic Republic of Bahrain. This was seen differently by the Sunnis and the movement was forcefully opposed by the government. According to an influential Sunni journalist, after the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Shiʿa in the Gulf felt for the first time that they had the ideological backing of a Shiʿa state. He declared:

> The problem is the Shiʿa concept of *marjaʿiyya*. The Shiʿa in Bahrain have to refer to their leading *marjaʿ* in Iran, Iraq, or Fadlallah in Lebanon. They do not consult with their Bahraini elders. Therefore, we cannot set up a Shiʿa party as they would consult people abroad and not the Bahraini government.[125]

The failure – or relative success? – of the export of revolution

Various reasons contributed to the fact that the Islamic revolution was not exported to the Gulf. First, most of the population in the GCC states was not receptive to the Shiʿa appeal of Iran's revolution. The greatest threat to the governments had been Khomeini's emphasis on the poor masses and the call for social justice and political participation. The countries most affected were Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. Saudi Arabia calmed mass discontent by improving the living conditions in the poorer Shiʿa Hasa province and kept a watchful eye on the Shiʿa community. The Kuwaiti Shiʿa were taken aback by the violence expounded by Shiʿa groups and were satisfied when they gained political participation in the reinstalled National Assembly. The situation in Bahrain seemed to have calmed down after the opposition was quietened in the early 1980s, but large-scale opposition erupted again in the mid-1990s.

Although the export of the revolution failed technically, it was not without implications for the Gulf states. The GCC governments tried to follow calls for broader political participation – which would not endanger their own rule. They established consultative assemblies in Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE. There has been a general trend back to Islam which seemed more of a cultural nature directed against Western influence than support for a political Islamic entity. The governments followed this trend by introducing more Islamic components into the educational systems or into daily life like the prohibition of alcohol. Most clearly, this could be seen in the judicial systems which were mainly based on the *shariʿa*. Whilst one can argue that these changes prohibited the practical export of revolution, Mohiaddin Mesbahi of Florida International University considers these developments to be consequences and successes of the revolution. In this sense, the export of revolution has not been a complete failure.[126]

The other major reason for the failure of the export of revolution was the declining interest inside Iran in overthrowing governments and establishing other Islamic states. The trend towards favouring a merely cultural export of the revolution began in the mid-1980s, when attention focused on the war with Iraq, and Iran realised that its neighbours supported an Arab aggressor against the Persian enemy, not showing any interest in emulating the Iranian model. By 1984, Iran was looking for better diplomatic and economic relations, and Foreign Minister Velayati reportedly removed radical elements connected with the Revolutionary Guards from the embassies,

ordering Iran's diplomats to confine themselves to propaganda.[127] This trend increased after the war, and in particular after the liberation of Kuwait when there were signs of rapprochement between the two sides. In 1992, President Rafsanjani wrote a letter to the European Community, declaring: 'Iranian policy opposes employing any kind of force in international relations, categorically denounces terrorism in all aspects, does not intervene in internal affairs and respects both international law and domestic regulations governing countries.'[128]

His successor Khatami took the same position. Even if political groups which supported the export of revolution still existed in the 1990s, the point is that they were not representative of the aim of Iranian foreign policy, which by then laid emphasis on good neighbourly relations in order to develop the Iranian economy. This was in keeping with the general trend in Iran's foreign policy which stressed the importance of national interest. It should not be forgotten, however, that the government of the Islamic Republic was run by revolutionaries, pragmatic or radical. Even if most of them had learned that they could not bring about Islamic republics in the Persian Gulf or elsewhere, they were still convinced of their culture and ideals and the necessity to export those by way of propaganda. This was well presented by one Iranian source:

> The export of revolution has not stopped. In the beginning, it was very open. We wanted to change every government in the region. But once the Iran–Iraq war started, we had a real war and started to learn that we should have good relations with the world – at the same time, we had to follow our values. The first thing we had to change was our policy. We realized that we can't topple King Fahd and the other governments. The first two years we attempted an export of the revolution. Then, nobody believed anymore that we should send operatives, or troops – not even secretly. There was a tactical change under President Rafsanjani. He was more concerned with reconstruction. Under President Rafsanjani, the export of revolution is more the projection of a desire. The idea now is more of Iran being the *umm al-qura*.
>
> Iran still wants to export the revolution but not by devising an operational policy. It has to be achieved through better communications technology. We have to make Iran the best model in the region.[129]

The hajj and ideological rivalry with Saudi Arabia

The relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia was for a long time marked by ideological rhetoric and often violent clashes at the annual hajj pilgrimage. Due to the fact that the two holiest places in Islam

– Mecca and Medina – are situated in Saudi Arabia, Iranian policy toward the Saudi government was the only issue in Iran's relations with the Gulf states which was – at least officially – dominated by ideology and where factionalism inside the Iranian government made it difficult for any more moderate line to emerge or to be maintained over some period of time.

This became particularly evident after the incident at the 1987 hajj, when 402 pilgrims and security forces were killed. This episode left deep psychological scars in the minds of the Iranian and Saudi Arabian people and had an impact on bilateral relations in both the religious and the political realms. Before that date, the degree of dispute and conflict between both states depended to a large extent on the situation in the Iran–Iraq war. Whenever there were signs of diplomatic rapprochement between the Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia and both sides tried to overlook ideological differences, clashes at the hajj seemed to be avoided, despite the hostile rhetoric by Iran's religious leaders. In that sense, the Iranian revolutionary stance towards Saudi Arabia seemed to be more rhetoric than real ideological policy. But after 1987, it became more difficult for the Iranian government to adopt a pragmatic line. It seemed for many years that whenever the government attempted to establish better relations, radical factions used the hajj as a means to worsen the relationship. It was clear that if Iran wanted to overcome its difficulties in dealing with Saudi Arabia, it had to put ideology aside and rise above its factionalism. Mahmood Sariolghalam of the National University in Tehran suggested: 'If Iran wants to solve its problems with Saudi Arabia, it needs to place higher priority on regional co-operation which will only materialise with greater trust and increased political contacts.'[130]

Signs of thaw only became evident when Khatami took over power and former President Rafsanjani visited Saudi Arabia for the first time in February/March 1998.

Religious and ideological differences

Khomeini's main rival for the leadership of the Islamic world was Saudi Arabia. Differences between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia occurred since the fall of the Bazargan government in November 1979, when the clerics officially began to participate in government. This date coincided with the *'ashura* demonstrations in Saudi Arabia and the taking of hostages in the US Embassy in Tehran. The divergence between Iran and Saudi Arabia mainly expressed itself in Khomeini's claim that the hajj was not only a religious but also a political occasion, and the ideal place to export the revolution by propaganda. He thus made the holding of large demonstrations obligatory. Since the Saudi rulers did not agree with this point of view, Khomeini and his regime repeatedly charged that Wahhabism was not truly Islamic and that the Al Saud were unfit to rule the Holy Places, being slaves to US interests.

The current Saudi government has a 250-year-old history in the peninsula. The Islamic world accepted their supervision of the Holy Places in 1926. The Saudi–Wahhabi state has its origins in the eighteenth century alliance between Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab who was a strict follower of the Hanbali school of Islam and the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya, and the Najdi ruler, Muhammad ibn Saud. They extended their control all over the Najd and took Mecca in 1765, and Medina in the Hijaz in 1767. In 1814, they had to cede control of the Holy Places to the Ottoman Sultan, but in 1912, Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud together with the religious Ikhwan movement, or *muwahidun*, began to spread his power in the name of Wahhabi Islam from the Najd to the Hijaz, retaking Mecca and Medina between 1924 and 1926. During the hajj in 1926, the first Islamic Conference was held in Mecca, and King Abd al-Aziz accepted the financial responsibility of maintaining the shrines. According to the Saudi view, it was plain from this first Islamic Conference that the Islamic world had given its *bayʿa* (oath of allegiance) to King Abd al-Aziz to supervise the Holy Places.[131] Khomeini questioned this right by attacking the ideological underpinnings of the Saudi state, that is the very legitimacy of the Saudi rulers. Consequently, the Islamic Republic called Saudi Arabia 'Hijaz'.

As elaborated by Ramazani, the conservative, elitist Saudi Wahhabi Islam clashed with Khomeini's *mustaẓafin* Islam (when it was translated into political action). The difference became an issue when the two schools opposed each other due to a combination of factors, which included 'clericalism versus monarchism; populism versus elitism; regionalism versus peninsularism; Shiʿism versus Sunnism; and anti-Westernism versus pro-Western non-alignmentism'.[132] One of Khomeini's main ideological reasons for denying Saudi Arabia the legitimacy to rule the Holy Places, according to Jalil Roshandel of IPIS, was his reproach of their being 'puppets of America'.[133] Iran claimed that Islamic international organisations, such as the Islamic Conference Organisation and the Muslim World League, based in Saudi Arabia, were reactionary tools of Western imperialism and subversive instruments of the Al Saud, consisting of 'lackeys with connections to US schemes'. The Islamic Republic organised its own Islamic conferences, inviting members of liberation movements and radical clerics, which called Khomeini the leader of all Muslims.[134]

In addition to his criticism of the Saudi link with the US, Khomeini used religious rhetoric to discredit the Saudi rulers. He maintained that Wahhabi Islam was un-Islamic, attacked Wahhabi ʿulama as 'court-clerics', held that monarchy and Islam were mutually exclusive and compared King Fahd to the Shah. In his testament, written in 1983, he stated:

> We all saw the Qur'an which Mohammad Riza Khan Pahlavi published and thereby led many astray whilst some Akhunds [clerics], who were ignorant of Islamic ideals, praised him. We are now

> witnessing that malik Fahd spends enormous sums of people's wealth on publishing the Holy Qur'an and propagating an anti-Qur'anic religion, that is this totally baseless and superstitious religion of Wahhabism, and leads the uninformed and unaware peoples to the superpowers whilst they exploit the beloved Islam and the Holy Qur'an to destroy both Islam and the Qur'an.

His hatred of the House of Saud was clearly expressed:

> In this age which is the age of tyrannization [sic] and oppression of the Muslim world at the hands of the US and Russia and their puppets including Ale Saud, these traitors to the greatest Divine Sanctuary, upon whom be the maledictions of Allah and His Angels, their crimes must be forcefully . . . mentioned, [and] cursed.[135]

Saudi Arabia felt threatened by Khomeini's ideology because it undermined the legitimacy and authority of the regime. As a result of Khomeini's powerful attack on his kingship being un-Islamic and in an attempt to show that his country was truly Islamic, King Fahd declared that Saudi Arabia, unlike the Iran under the Shah, adhered to the Quran as its constitution. In 1984, he adopted a new, more Islamic, national anthem, and in 1986, he gave up the title 'His Majesty' for 'Guardian of the Two Holy Places'. He called for greater public respect of the ʿulama and Islamic morality and restricted the excessive lifestyles of royal family members and other prosperous Saudis. On the international Islamic scene, Saudi Arabia used the ICO and the Muslim World League to spread its religious message through published material and missionaries.[136] As expressed by one Saudi official:

> Iran's biggest struggle is with Saudi Arabia, not with the United States. Iran wants to challenge the Saudi version of Islam, that is the division of politics and religion. Saudi Arabia wants to help Muslims by sending scholars, for instance to China, and by inviting students. We educate them about religion without political propaganda. In Senegal, for example, Saudi Arabia invests money in order to improve the living conditions of the people without influencing them politically. Iran, on the other hand, pays imams to reach the masses. They want to turn the people into fanatics and preach how evil Saudi Arabia and the United States are.[137]

The greatest and most direct confrontation between Iran and Saudi Arabia was the dispute over political demonstrations at the hajj. The Saudis, like most Muslims, see the hajj as a strictly religious ceremony.[138] Being responsible for the security arrangements, they are further worried about problems

large demonstrations can cause at a gathering of one to two million people. Khomeini saw the hajj as a means to awaken the umma. As part of the hajj rituals, the pilgrims have to confirm their faith in monotheism and renounce Satan. Khomeini interpreted this politically, calling on them to declare their opposition to all manifestations of disbelief and oppression. This included the 'Great Satan' America, the 'Lesser Satan' Soviet Union, Zionist Israel, the 'Mini Satans' Britain and France and the American puppets Saudi Arabia and Iraq. As expressed by Tehran Radio:

> The ideal place to discuss the all-round campaign strategy against the domination of the superpowers is the glorious hajj conference, as it is the only center at which Muslims may inform each other of their real fate and confer about coordinated decisions. The great God gives hajj special importance, as He commands in Baqarah: God Almighty has founded that holy house for peoples to rise and move.[139]

The uprisings in the Shi'a province in Saudi Arabia in 1979 and 1980 had exposed the Saudi government to the real security implications of such calls, therefore they attempted to prohibit demonstrations. Iran believed that Saudi Arabia was under US pressure not to allow the rallies.[140] The reason, however, was probably more direct fear of being toppled. Iran repeatedly stated that the Holy Places (not Saudi Arabia) should be ruled by consensus of all Muslim states, given that the Al Saud were unfit to that rule. As explained by Morteza Nabavi, Director General of *Risalat*:

> The ruler must be a wise and just man, a learned man, a *vilayat-i faqih* [guardianship of the jurisconsult]. This is why Khomeini said the Al Saud could not rule the Holy Places. Especially, because the ruler of Saudi Arabia must allow the Muslims to declare their problems. Mecca and Medina belong to all Muslims, we must be free to exercise our religious and political acts. We think hajj is a political and religious obligation, whereas Saudi Arabia says it is only religious. The hajj demonstrations are the biggest in Islam. We tell the Muslims who is our friend and who is our enemy. Iranian and Palestinian and other Muslims want to declare their opinion about the US government and Israel. The Saudi government does not want us to demonstrate against the US and Israel. Therefore they attacked the pilgrims in 1987, and killed them. Imam Hussein stopped his pilgrimage in the middle of the hajj. This was a political act because he did not accept Yazid as a Muslim ruler. If the ruler is not a good Muslim, hajj, *namaz* [prayers], etc. cannot be profitable. They are only profitable if the ruler is a *vilayat-i faqih*. This must be brought about by propaganda.[141]

Based on these contradictory attitudes, clashes occurred almost annually between demonstrating Iranian pilgrims and Saudi security forces.

The years before 1987

During 1979 and 1980, Iranian opposition to Saudi Arabia was exhibited by hajj demonstrations and revolutionary rhetoric calling the people to rise against the House of Saud and US domination, as was examined in the first part of this chapter. Direct confrontation – at the hajj – only began in 1981. According to Kazimi, clashes at the hajj were directly linked to developments in the Iran–Iraq war. He stated that until 1981, Saudi Arabia was carefully watching developments in Iran. When Iran put more emphasis on exporting the revolution in 1981, Saudi Arabia started to support Iraq in its war effort and founded the Gulf Co-operation Council. At the same time, Saudi police clashed with Iranian pilgrims during the hajj.[142] Despite Saudi warnings, Iranian pilgrims demonstrated inside the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina. There are conflicting reports of what actually happened. According to the Iranian newsagency, the Iranians staged a demonstration against the arrest of two Iranians who had been kissing the shrine, a devotion alien to Sunni Muslims.[143]

Saudi Arabia denied this and Interior Minister Prince Nayif said that Iranian pilgrims had been beating Saudi security men inside the mosque.[144] There were further demonstrations in Mecca, with pilgrims chanting 'Khomeini is the Leader', 'death to America', 'death to Zionism', which led to the arrest of forty-six pilgrims.[145] King Khaled sent a letter to Khomeini complaining about the behaviour of the Iranian pilgrims. Khomeini replied that Mecca and Medina were political–religious centres and that the 'fault' of these Muslims had been their shouting slogans against the US and Israel: 'Had the government of Hejaz made political–Islamic use of this politico-religious assembly . . . it would not have been in need of the US and its AWACS aircraft . . . and the Muslims' problems would have been solved.'[146]

In November, demonstrators marched through Tehran, criticising the Fahd peace plan to settle the Palestinian–Israeli dispute. As asserted by the Revolutionary Guards, the Fahd plan 'clarified how America patiently tames and trains its puppets . . . so that one day they can play a vital role on behalf of their master'.[147]

In 1982, in spite of King Khaled's letter, Iranian pilgrims demonstrated twice in Medina, which led to clashes with the security forces and the expulsion of at first twenty, and then sixty-nine people. Saudi Arabia reported that Revolutionary Guards had attempted to smuggle arms into the country, but the weapons were seized.[148] In 1983, the Iranian Minister for Islamic Guidance (and since August 1997 President of the Islamic Republic), Khatami, stated that Mecca and Medina belonged to all Muslims and that

they viewed the hajj the best forum for political discussion. Despite Saudi opposition the Iranians decided that two large demonstrations were to be held each year, one in Medina under the slogan 'Unity of Muslim Society' (*vahdat-i muslimin*), and one in Mecca calling for 'Liberation from Infidels' (*bara'at az mushrikin*). Hostile propaganda against Saudi Arabia was not allowed. Participation in these demonstrations apparently was not obligatory, but most Iranian pilgrims took part.[149] Iran charged that Saudi Arabia tried to restrict the number of Iranian pilgrims by not issuing entry visas. This was denied by Saudi Arabia. Riyadh in turn reported that the security forces had confiscated small weapons, knives and propaganda material of Khomeini's speeches against the Saudi government.[150]

The situation improved in 1984. This was probably partly a result of Iran's attempt to enhance relations with its neighbours in the Persian Gulf due to setbacks in the war. Another reason was the acceptance of 150,000 Iranian pilgrims by the Saudi authorities. This was the largest contingent after 85,000 in 1982, and 100,000 in 1983.[151] Perhaps the second reason was also linked to the first. The Iranian government was pleased about the number of pilgrims and Speaker Rafsanjani, in spite of maintaining that all international issues should be raised at the hajj, asserted:

> We have no intention of controlling Ka'ba and Mecca. Ka'ba and Mecca are located in your country and it is up to you to run them. But if you are not capable, then invite scholars and ulema of other Islamic countries to assist you in your planning.[152]

As a result of the positive overtures, King Fahd invited Rafsanjani to attend the hajj, which was rejected by Khomeini.[153] There was only a small incident when Iranian pilgrims demonstrated in Medina, shouting 'death to America', 'death to Saddam', after an Iranian pilgrim had been killed by a group of Iraqis.[154]

In May 1985, Prince Saud, the Saudi Foreign Minister, visited Tehran. This was the first high-level visit since the revolution and was a further step in improving relations and an attempt – albeit unsuccessful – to end the war. King Fahd, after some discussion, again allowed 150,000 Iranian pilgrims to participate in the hajj, and Iran showed its gratitude by praising the assistance and facilities provided by Saudi Arabia to its country's pilgrims.[155] The 1986 hajj season coincided with the Iran–Contra negotiations and was equally quiet. Iran sent over 150,000 pilgrims, and, in spite of Khomeini's diatribe against 'bought agents and their mercenaries and envious, materialist and royal-court Muslim clerics' in his message to the pilgrims, Iranian officials expressed appreciation to the Saudi authorities for their efforts to serve the pilgrims, after King Fahd had ordered the release of a group of Iranian pilgrims arrested at the annual demonstrations in Mecca and Medina.[156] It was only after the 1987 incident that Saudi Arabia

presented a video tape taken in 1986 which showed Iranian pilgrims trying to smuggle plastic explosives to interrupt the hajj.[157]

The 1987 hajj incident

Whatever had been achieved in improving relations was destroyed in one afternoon on 31 July 1987. There are differing accounts of what exactly happened, but 402 people were killed and several thousand injured during a hajj demonstration. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia saw the incident as the biggest provocation ever by their neighbour. It led to renewed hostility and a long break in diplomatic relations. The Iranian scholar Kazimi called it a 'period of darkness'.[158]

The 1987 hajj season coincided with the internationalisation of the war through the US reflagging operation, which made political pronouncements more urgent for the Iranian leadership. It started off like any other hajj. One hundred and fifty thousand Iranian pilgrims were sent to Saudi Arabia. In Medina, tens of thousands of them joined the unity march.[159] As for Mecca, the Amir of Mecca told Iran repeatedly that Saudi Arabia could not permit a political demonstration, but only a sit-in meeting.[160] But Khomeini, in his hajj message a few days before the incident, called on the pilgrims to hold the 'Liberation from Infidels' demonstration. He declared that hypocritical 'court akhund' (clerics supporting the Al Saud) forbid the oppressed people to regain their legitimate rights, but urged the pilgrims to 'avoid clashes, insults and disputes'.[161]

The Saudi version of events

Following Khomeini's call, 100,000 pilgrims staged the demonstration. The cause of the ensuing deaths was claimed by Iran to have been the use of guns by Saudi security forces. This was vehemently denied by Saudi Arabia. According to a documentary book published by the Saudi paper *al-Muslimun*, the Iranian authorities had instigated the riots in order to take over the Great Mosque. It had been long planned by the Revolutionary Guards as well as members of the Iranian regime in order later to send thousands of Iranian troops to Saudi Arabia.[162] The Saudis believed that the pilgrims wanted to announce Khomeini as the sole legitimate ruler of Islam. They claimed that the security forces had not used any weapons and that the Iranians had later shot the victims themselves. Various eye witnesses from Egypt, Jordan and Turkey supported this view.[163] The director of the Saudi security forces stated that the pilgrims were trying to surround the security forces and neutralise them. However, the forces managed to control them and had the situation under control within half an hour.[164] According to the Interior Ministry, security forces which happened to be near the demonstration had tried to prevent clashes between the marchers and other

pilgrims who had wanted to get past. The Iranians, however, had hidden sticks, knives and stones under their clothes and attacked the security forces. He said the security forces tried to establish order and whilst retreating, the Iranians started to panic which caused a stampede in which women, old people and people in wheelchairs got killed. The Iranians then started attacking the police and security forces and set cars on fire. Saudi Arabia later showed in a video that there was no shooting. They declared that 402 people had died – 275 Iranians, 85 Saudis, including security forces, and 42 pilgrims of other nationalities. Six hundred and forty-nine people were injured.[165] Most governments and groups in the Islamic world – including al-Azhar, the PLO, Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Tunisia, Morocco – sent condolences to Saudi Arabia and condemned Iran. Syria and Libya sent their regrets.[166] The Sunnis viewed the incident as a Sunni-Shi'a clash.[167] Abdul Mohsen Jamal, a Kuwaiti Shi'a Member of Parliament, however, declared: 'Kuwait officially supported Saudi Arabia but the people did not like that they used force against guests of Allah.'[168]

The Iranian version of events

The Iranian version differed greatly. Iran held that the incident was a pre-planned plot by the Saudi government.[169] According to the Iranian government, the route of the march had been discussed between Iran's representative, Mehdi Karrubi, and the Saudi authorities. Karrubi reported later that Saudi police and civilians had started throwing stones and bottles at the demonstrators. These did not react as many women and people in wheelchairs were at the front of the demonstration. The police then began to beat them with sticks, and then people were shot. Escape was not possible as the side roads as well as the main road to the Great Mosque were blocked by security forces. Karrubi said that: 'It was a premeditated plan to kill people for if they had wanted to disperse them, they could have sprayed them with water or beat them with batons.'[170] An Iranian doctor in Mecca said that most people died from being struck on the head, and others from gun shots, gas, or stampede. Most victims were women. Hundreds got killed and several thousand people were injured.[171] Khomeini's wife was amongst the injured women.[172] A German judicial court doctor, Wolfgang Bonte, visited Tehran to examine the bodies. He declared at a press conference that many of the dead had been shot in Mecca.[173]

As explained by Koszinowski, it is difficult to determine who started the violence. He stated that the video films produced by Saudi Arabia probably were not proof enough. According to neutral observers, arguments started when the pilgrims met with the police 500 metres before the agreed limit of the march. The police called for help by the National Guard who then used rubber sticks, electro shocks, tear gas, water tanks and machine guns. Various pilgrims, especially from Western Europe, confirmed the use of

arms. Saudi Arabia delayed the return of the bodies to Iran, did not allow any international delegation to inspect the victims and denied entry to an Iranian investigative commission on 1 August.[174]

The Iranian version of events was substantiated by Zafar Bangash and various other pilgrims who had participated in the hajj. He stated that the Iranian pilgrims had been unarmed and that they had been shot at by National Guard units and soldiers who had arrived on 30 July. On 31 July at 1.30 pm, the streets were blocked by trucks with soldiers carrying guns and tear gas trucks which were used in the afternoon.[175] Said Hajjarian was amongst the demonstrators. He recounted:

> The Iranian and other pilgrims in the demonstration were attacked by Saudi police who tried to fragment the pilgrims. They started shooting and used tear gas. When they began to shoot, many in the front line attempted to go back which led to a stampede and many women and old people who were at the front died. I was in the first row. We tried to stand arm-in-arm to secure the women and the others. We were not successful.[176]

The whole episode caused an unprecedented war of words. Khomeini declared:

> The Moslems will not remain silent in the face of this action. Saudi King Fahd and his like will come to understand what they have brought upon themselves . . . If this massacre had taken place in Taif, it would have been tolerated, but it can by no means be tolerated as it took place in the Haram that Allah Almighty has made a sanctuary from the very beginning.[177]

In his message to the pilgrims, which was a diatribe against the Al Saud, he continued by stating that the Al Saud were not worthy of being in charge of the hajj and Kaʿba affairs and that the ʿulama and the Muslims should think of an alternative.[178] Montazeri exclaimed that the two shrines should be freed from their domination, and Rafsanjani added: 'We will avenge ourselves from America which is the main cause of this crime, but the Saudis will not be forgotten either.' He called for the uprooting of the Saudi rulers in the region. Prime Minister Musavi announced three days of mourning, and millions marched throughout Iran shouting 'death to America', 'death to Saudi Arabia'. The Foreign Ministry connected the incident with the US and the Iraqi regime as a premeditated measure to bring the demonstrations to an end and distract attention from the war.[179] Nevertheless, Deputy Foreign Minister Besharati criticised the attack on the Saudi Embassy which following the incident was occupied by angry Iranians on 1 August.[180] In September, Sultan Qabus of Oman invited both Prince Saud and Ali Akbar

Velayati. As reported by Muscat Radio, both met separately with the Sultan, conveying messages from King Fahd and President Khamenei.[181] H.H. Sayyid Haitham, Secretary General of the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, recounted that Iran had asked Oman to mediate and Saud al-Faisal agreed to meet Velayati in Muscat.[182] According to the Omani Ambassador to Wasington, al-Dhahab, they reached an agreement.[183]

Whatever the two foreign ministers agreed upon, it did not last. In November, Iran organised a 'Conference to Review the Sanctity and Security of the Holy Shrines', and Rafsanjani stated that his country was prepared to fight to liberate Mecca and set up an Islamic international government. The congress concluded that it regarded the Islamic Republic of Iran as the only legitimate spiritual representative of the umma and Khomeini the only leader of the Islamic world.[184] Saudi Arabia responded in kind, and Prince Nayif called for the overthrow of the Islamic regime, declaring that Saudi Arabia 'hoped to remove from Iran the authority which sends the people of Iran to their deaths'. The Saudi population was reported to support its government completely in the affair.[185]

The hajj and Saudi–Iranian relations after 1987

The propaganda war escalated, and in March 1988, Saudi Arabia had the ICO pass a quota system which allowed one pilgrim per 1,000 people from each Muslim country.[186] According to the new system, Iran could send 55,000 people. Khomeini ignored this and maintained that Iran should send 150,000 pilgrims and organise more demonstrations against the US and Israel. Saudi Arabia responded by breaking diplomatic relations in April and maintained the quota system. Consequently, Iran decided to boycott the hajj.[187]

After Iran had accepted the ceasefire with Iraq in July 1988, the Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia moved towards improving relations. In October, King Fahd halted media attacks against Iran, and Tehran asked Riyadh to put pressure on Iraq to implement UNSCR 598. In February 1989, Rafsanjani said that Iran and Saudi Arabia were holding indirect talks to resume relations.[188] Relations were strained soon after over the issue of Khomeini's *fatwa* against the British author Salman Rushdie, declaring the death sentence for blasphemy in his book *The Satanic Verses*. Saudi Arabia saw this hardline stance as an attempt to reassert Iran's extra-territorial role as champion of Muslim causes and as a further example of Saudi–Iranian rivalry on the international scene, as for instance in Afghanistan.[189] Consequently, Saudi Arabia held a conference of Islamic scholars who agreed that Rushdie had to appear before an Islamic tribunal before he could be sentenced to death.[190]

In 1989, Iran still boycotted the hajj as the quota had not been removed. Khamenei sent a message to the pilgrims stating that Iran's memory would

not forget the 1987 massacre at the hands of the rulers of the Hijaz, and the Head of the Hajj and Religious Endowment Organisation, Jamarani, urged Muslims to liberate the Holy Shrines.[191] Relations were so bad that Saudi Arabia was the only GCC country which did not send condolences or an emissary to Khomeini's funeral in June. Nevertheless, secret negotiations were conducted between Iran and Saudi Arabia in London.[192] The propaganda war, which had been stopped by King Fahd six months earlier, restarted when two bombs exploded near the Great Mosque in Mecca on 10 July. Iran accused US agents and the Saudi government to be behind the bombings. Western diplomats did not discount the fact that a radical Iranian faction which disagreed with the country's pragmatic course was responsible. In September, Saudi Arabia beheaded sixteen Kuwaiti Shi'a Muslims for the attack, an action which was widely condemned in Iran. The Saudis charged the Iranian Embassy in Kuwait with involvement; the latter denied the accusation.[193]

In April 1990, a group of Iranian representatives of Parliament in a letter to the Saudi government requested blood money for the 1987 victims as well as admission for 150,000 pilgrims to that year's hajj.[194] In May, Iran held 'direct and indirect' talks with Saudi Arabia about the hajj, and Deputy Foreign Minister Besharati met with Saud al-Faisal to request the removal of the quota and the staging of demonstrations.[195] This was not permitted and Iran announced that it would continue to boycott the hajj. In June, King Fahd declared his willingness to improve relations and sent his condolences for earthquake victims in the north of Iran, offering assistance. Prince Nayif declared that the Kingdom had always welcomed Iranian pilgrims. Rafsanjani responded by saying that he hoped the dispute which had kept Iranian pilgrims away for three years could be resolved before the 1991 hajj season.[196]

These signs of thaw disappeared during the hajj in July. One thousand four hundred and twenty-six people died in a stampede in a Mina tunnel. Rafsanjani charged that the Al Saud were incapable of administering the Holy Places, and the Islamic Republic repeatedly called for the formation of a committee of representatives from all Muslim countries to supervise the shrines.[197] Matters, however, improved again after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August. On 30 September, the Foreign Ministers Velayati and Prince Saud met in New York. In February 1991, Rafsanjani stated that the late Ayatollah Khomeini had thought Iran should open the way for people to fulfil their Islamic duty to perform the hajj and that the Foreign Ministry was now active in this regard.[198] In March, Prince Saud and Velayati again met in Muscat and reached 'an understanding in principle' on the hajj issue. On 26 March, Iran and Saudi Arabia restored diplomatic relations. Riyadh had accepted a quota of 115,000 pilgrims and given permission for rallies to be held in certain places.[199] In June, Prince Saud visited Tehran, and Velayati participated in the hajj ceremony. Both countries co-operated in the security measures taken at the demonstration in Mecca, and Khamenei,

in his message to the pilgrims, warned them not to shout anti-Al Saud slogans.[200]

The 1992 hajj was equally quiet. In May, Khamenei reportedly issued a *fatwa* forbidding Shi'a pilgrims to kiss the shrines of the Prophet and Shi'a imams, which had been criticised by Sunnis on earlier occasions.[201] In June, Rafsanjani assured Saudi Arabia that the Iranian pilgrims would not disturb the country's security and praised the Saudi authorities co-operation in managing the Mecca demonstration. He declared:

> our eyes are not on Saudi Arabia's internal system and . . . we do not wish to bother them . . . Our press and media must not magnify the situation to make trouble between Saudi Arabia and Iran but prevent this from happening. They must consider overriding issues. We cannot impose all our views on all countries.[202]

Rafsanjani reacted to articles in radical papers, such as *Jumhuri-yi Islami*, which had warned against adopting an amicable attitude toward Saudi Arabia, criticising a recent statement of the Iranian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Ali Hadi, who referred to Iran and Saudi Arabia as 'the two wings of Islam without which it could not fly'.[203]

Disagreement between the pragmatic Rafsanjani government and hard-liners in the Majlis led to conflict in 1993. In May, Velayati went on a tour of the GCC states beginning with an audience with King Fahd. Iranian papers suggested rapprochement and a visit of the King to Iran. At the same time, the Speaker of the Majlis, Nateq Nouri, gave a fiercely anti-Saudi speech. As a result, the Saudis prevented the Iranian demonstration in Mecca and expelled the Iranian hajj representative, Reyshahri, after they had allowed 120,000 pilgrims to attend the hajj and to hold a gathering, but not a march.[204]

The 1994 hajj was similarly overshadowed by tension. Saudi Arabia decided to restrict the number of Iranian pilgrims to its quota of 55,000, which was strongly criticised by Tehran. Iran suspected that Riyadh had related a renewed dispute over oil prices to the number of Iranian pilgrims.[205] Like the previous year, Saudi Arabia prevented the Mecca demonstration and the Iranian Foreign Ministry charged the Saudis with disregarding the 1991 agreement reached in Oman about the 'Liberation from Infidels' march. The war of words escalated when Khamenei, in a statement to the pilgrims, attacked the 'pseudo-theologians affiliated to and in the pay of the governments-made-of-straw' and 'the traitorous and corrupt leaders [who] have not allowed the nations to find their way'. After 270 pilgrims from other countries were killed in another stampede in Mina, Iran accused the Saudi authorities of negligence. Saudi Arabia reciprocated by yet again barring the Iranian representative, Reyshahri, from Medina.[206]

The 1995 hajj was less eventful. Considering the insistence of the Saudi military and security forces that the 'Liberation from Infidels' march should not take place in Mecca, an anti-US demonstration without any violence was held in the final stage of the hajj in Arafat, which apparently took the police by surprise. The same was repeated in 1996, after the Saudi government deployed tanks in front of the Iranian hajj representative's mission in Mecca.[207] By the end of 1996 there were signs of more willingness to improve relations between the two governments. This might have been linked to the increasing trouble in the Middle East Peace Process following the election of Netanyahu as Prime Minister of Israel. Saudi Arabia agreed to increase the weekly quota of Iranian pilgrims for the minor hajj from 3,000 to 5,000. Iran responded positively to this offer, saying it would do its best further to consolidate ties with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states. Subsequently, during the 1997 hajj the pilgrims held the 'Liberation from Infidels' ceremony at the Ka'ba in Mecca in spite of a heavy presence of Saudi police.[208] In February and March 1998 Rafsanjani in his capacity as Head of the Expediency Council went on an official visit to Saudi Arabia to improve relations. At the same time President Khatami stated that the 'Liberation from Infidels' rally in Mecca at the upcoming hajj was a religious duty, but that he hoped that the improved relations would mean a smooth pilgrimage. This did not deter the Saudi authorities from increasing the quota for Iranian pilgrims to 85,000. The rally, as during the preceding years, went ahead without problems in the final stages of the hajj in April 1998 in Arafat. Thousands of pilgrims denounced Israel and the United States, but not Saudi Arabia. The Iranian Interior Minister Abdollah Nuri went on the pilgrimage and took the opportunity to hold talks with King Fahd and Defence Minister Prince Sultan, commenting on the 'excellent level' of Saudi–Iranian relations.[209]

Iran's relationship with Saudi Arabia had two sides. On the one hand, it was a relationship of power politics, hence it was in Iran's interest to try to establish good relations with its neighbour. On the other hand, due to their rivalry for Islamic leadership, it was dominated by ideology. On some occasions, the two converged. For instance, discussions between ministerial delegations of Iranian hajj representatives and the Saudi authorities before and during the annual ceremonies also addressed political matters, such as the Iran–Iraq war.[210] Furthermore, as explained by one Iranian source, the revolutionary policy towards Saudi Arabia has always been more rhetorical than an actual substantive position. The clerics in Qom act as pressure groups on the government to have pragmatic relations with Saudi Arabia because Iranian Muslims, in particular old people before they die, have to go on the pilgrimage.[211]

The one issue where ideological interest prevailed, according to the Director of the Persian Gulf Research Center at IPIS, Abbas Haghighat,

were the demonstrations. It would have been in Iran's national interest to stop the demonstrations and have talks with Saudi Arabia in order to have good relations.[212] After 1987, it became more difficult for both sides to establish a better relationship, despite the fact that Iran officially had given up its export of revolution and the Iran–Iraq war was soon afterwards over. Said Hajjarian of the Center for Strategic Studies explained:

> During the Iran–Iraq war, Saudi Arabia supported Iraq and we did not have good relations. Their AWACS planes gathered a lot of information for the Iraqi regime. But this was forgivable. However, after the 1987 crisis, Imam Khomeini said that we could forgive Saddam Hussein but we could not forgive the King of Saudi Arabia because they killed many innocent pilgrims who had nothing against the Saudi regime. The 1987 events caused psychological damage. Until now [1996], we can't have a clear and high level relationship with Saudi Arabia.[213]

Another Iranian source illustrated that:

> Our analysis about the 1987 incident was that Saudi Arabia wanted to push us to end the war. The result was that relations collapsed. In those years, rhetoric froze politics. Even now, 1987 is still in the back of the policy-makers' minds. It is a domestic issue because it touched every Muslim. In order to improve relations we would need some justification for our people which can only be given after King Fahd's death. When our government took steps to improve ties, it had to do it secretly for domestic reasons because of the public pressure here. There would be lots of letters in the newspapers by the families of the dead.[214]

There were other officials in Iran, however, like the conservative Deputy Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee, Muhammad Javad Larijani, who thought that Iran and Saudi Arabia gradually had to put the incident behind them. He blamed the US and Egypt for maintaining the tensions which justified their presence in the Persian Gulf. He held that: 'We have to think of the future. We can't sacrifice it for the past.'[215]

A dramatic change took place after the election of President Khatami in 1997. His efforts to bring about a new phase in the relationship, the concurrent building of an Israeli–Turkish military alliance, the deterioration of the Middle East Peace Process, as well as tumbling oil prices seemed to be strong arguments for the Saudi government to put ideological differences aside and strengthen a political and economic alliance. In February and March 1998 former President and now Head of the Expediency Council went on his first official visit to Saudi Arabia. The Saudi daily *al-Riyadh*

exclaimed on 24 February 1998: 'The two countries are amongst the world's biggest oil and gas producers. They are regional and Islamic pillars of power. Based on this reality, all excuses impeding understanding and co-operation should collapse.'

Khatami's and Rafsanjani's efforts were clearly driven by the need to get Iran out of its international isolation, get influence on OPEC oil policy and improve Iran's economy. These efforts must have been sanctioned by Leader Khamenei as Rafsanjani could not have visited the Kingdom without his consent. This demonstrates that finally, more than ten years after the 1987 incident, national interest could overcome the importance of ideology even in Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia – at least in the official relationship.

Conclusion

The relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Gulf states was mostly affected by Iran's revolutionary foundations. The Arab states feared the export of the Islamic revolution which had an impact on all other fields of relations. In the early years of the revolution, Iran's foreign policy was heavily influenced by ideology and the perceived duty to export the revolution to the Islamic world. As for exporting it to the Gulf, it was not only used ideologically, but also as an instrument of pursuing Iran's national interest by putting political pressure on those states which acted against Iran in supporting Iraq in its war effort. In these cases, a symbiosis of ideology and national interest was established.

On the whole, Iran seemed more serious about exporting its revolution to Lebanon through direct financial support and training camps. These measures were not taken in the Persian Gulf. Nevertheless, the Gulf countries were frightened as they suddenly found themselves in the much broader context of an Islamic world in which Islamic groups and segments of populations were responding to the Iranian revolution. To the governments in the Gulf it seemed as though Iran was only the starting point of a global Islamic revival. In this respect, the export of revolution cannot be considered as a total failure.

Furthermore, the response of the GCC governments in their attempts at widening popular participation and moving towards a more equal distribution of wealth can be seen as a relative success for the revolution. Equally, the general trend back to Islam, away from secularism, which the Gulf governments introduced into their educational and judicial systems, as well as into daily life, can be interpreted indirectly as a sign of the success of the Islamic Republic's rhetoric and revolution. This can be observed particularly in Saudi Arabia, where the King changed his title and called for greater respect for the ʿulama and Islamic morality.

As was seen in this chapter, from the mid-1980s onwards the Iranian government tried to establish better links with its neighbours and to limit

the export of revolution only to the cultural message. This was successful to a great extent in relations with the smaller Gulf states, despite the fact that distrust continued to prevail. As for the relationship with Saudi Arabia, however, factionalism in the regime made the adoption of better relations difficult. In general, the competition for religious leadership in the Islamic world, which was a result of the revolution, put Iran's relations with that country on a different plain altogether. In particular, after the 1987 hajj incident, it was not easy for the pragmatists to legitimise closer relations with the Saudi regime. The mutual trauma was only overcome officially ten years later when it became obvious for both countries that for economic and political reasons they needed to forge a good relationship which was more important that ideological rivalry.

3

THE 1980S

Impact of the Iran–Iraq war

The relationship of the Islamic Republic with its Arab neighbours went through five phases, as was mentioned in Chapter 1. This chapter traces the first three. The first phase lasted from 1979 to 1980. The Gulf states initially felt uneasy about the revolutionary situation at their doorstep, but at the same time welcomed the Islamic government and the ousting of the Shah. The new Iran asserted its desire for friendly ties. As was seen in Chapter 2, relations soon got strained by the threat of an export of the revolution. During the second phase, from 1980 to 1984, the Iran–Iraq war further polarised matters. It split the Gulf states into two groups. In general terms, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and, to some extent Bahrain, feared the export of revolution and therefore the spread of the war to their territory most and actively supported Iraq; Oman, the UAE and Qatar were geographically further distanced from Tehran and the war front, and the UAE in particular had good trade relations: they were thus more neutral. Iran's relationships with these states developed accordingly with often openly hostile policies toward the former and a more conciliatory attitude toward the latter. During the third phase, which lasted until the end of the war in 1988 and Khomeini's death, a slow move towards a more pragmatic foreign policy and attempts at improving relations with its neighbours can be observed as Iran's situation in the Iran–Iraq war worsened.

From the Provisional Government to the outbreak of war, 1979–1980

At the beginning of the revolution, both the Islamic Republic and the governments in the Gulf stated their desire for good relations. The increasing revolutionary rhetoric, however, which was directed against the ruling families, changed their attitude and they began supporting Saddam Hussein who promised to counter the revolution. The Iranian government, caught up in revolutionary chaos, in factional infighting and the US hostage crisis, had

neither the time nor the capacity to control this rhetoric, to develop a Persian Gulf policy and to court the Arabs. Although they distrusted Saddam Hussein, at the time of the invasion, all six Gulf countries supported Iraq to varying degrees.

Initial rapprochement

The revolution and the collapse of the Shah in early 1979 caused divided feelings amongst the Gulf states. The Arab rulers were alarmed by the fall of the powerful Shah and felt threatened for their own safety. On the one hand, they were pleased that the 'gendarme of the Gulf' was gone and that Iran had lost its dominant position in the region. On the other, they had at least initial worries about Iraqi aspirations to play a more assertive role as well as Soviet intervention – their greatest fear.

Officially, as stated by the Kuwaiti Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, the Gulf states held that the events in Iran were merely domestic developments which would not lead to any power vacuum. Iran would remain one of the main opponents of any foreign presence in the Gulf. It was reported in January 1979, however, that a number of 'prominent figures' from the Gulf had met Khomeini in Paris, conveying their anxiety of a 'Communist march' on the region, if and when Khomeini came to power in Iran.[1]

In February, Oman called on the Gulf countries to sign a joint security treaty against possible Soviet intervention. Muscat held that whilst the Gulf region contained major oil reserves, the Gulf countries were very weak, especially after the Iranian revolution. Oman suggested that all Gulf countries, including Iran and Iraq, and the West should have a common security agreement. This proposal, however, was refused by Iraq and Kuwait, and 'received with coolness' by Saudi Arabia.[2] In late September, Oman renewed its call for a security agreement which included Iran, Iraq, the Gulf states, the United States and Western Europe, in particular the United Kingdom and West Germany. This was again rejected by Iran, Iraq and the other littoral states, which feared that the presence of America and other Western powers would lead to a superpower confrontation in the region.[3]

During the time of the Provisional Government from February to November 1979, Iran officially attempted to have good relations not only with its neighbours, but also with the West, even if it rejected a direct Western presence. Karim Sanjabi, the Provisional Government's first Foreign Minister, underlined that the Persian Gulf was one of the most sensitive regions of the world and a 'vital route' for Iran, the littoral states, the West and Japan, and that Iran would not tolerate any foreign interference.[4]

In addition to Khomeini's declared hatred of Communism and the Soviet Union, the new Iranian authorities were quick to reassure the Gulf states that they had nothing to fear from Iran. Khomeini declared that Iran had no design of playing the gendarme, that it wished to have good neighbourly

relations and that Iran had no intention to export its revolution.[5] One practical step to support this position was the withdrawal of Iranian troops from Oman in March, who had been stationed there since 1973 to put down the Dhofari rebellion and who had then remained as a police force.[6] Khomeini assured Muscat that Tehran would honour all agreements signed under the Shah and that it would 'work closely with Oman to ensure regional security'.[7] Relations between the two countries, however, deteriorated in July, when a delegation of the 'Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman' visited Tehran and Moscow and when Sultan Qabus, afraid of Communist infiltration, turned to the US giving port facilities to the US Navy and landing rights to US aircraft.[8] Nevertheless, in November Oman and Iran signed an agreement ensuring free passage of tankers in the Straits of Hormuz and their respective territorial waters.

The Iranian government tried to reassure its neighbours of its desire for co-operation and good neighbourly relations. Due to the revolutionary chaos which led to different voices coming from Iran, as described in Chapters 1 and 2, and the fact that Iran had no formulated, collective policy towards the Persian Gulf,[9] this was no easy task. According to former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani, 'ideological inclinations ruled over foreign policy in general, and the Persian Gulf was no exception'.[10] On the one hand, Ayatollah Rouhani's calls in June and September for the annexation of Bahrain, for instance, caused major problems for the government, as was shown in Chapter 2. On the other, leading politicians like President Bazargan repeatedly stated that Iran had no territorial ambitions in the Persian Gulf,[11] and when Iran's Minister of National Guidance and Pilgrimage, Nasser Minachi, visited Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Fahd, both confirmed their desire for complete co-operation between the two countries.[12]

The Arab states on their part tried to establish good relations with their new neighbour. Former Secretary General of the GCC Abdallah Bishara explained that the Gulf countries in the beginning accepted the revolution, as it was for the people of Iran to decide their own fate and the Arabs thought the new Iran would be more willing to co-operate; this later proved to be wrong.[13] They sent their congratulations on the installation of the Provisional Government. Even Sultan Qabus, who was close to the Shah, sent a message to Bazargan declaring that the brotherly relations between the two countries, which were based on friendship and co-operation, would continue to develop. In April, King Khaled and the ICO sent cables congratulating Khomeini on the formation of the Islamic Republic.[14] In June, Prince Nayif called for the close co-operation between the Gulf states and the Islamic Republic in their fight against Communism.

In July, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, was the first Gulf dignitary to visit the Islamic Republic. Kuwait had to consider its national interest in preserving a regional counterweight to Iraq. According to the Kuwaiti Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, Sulaiman Majed

al-Shaheen, Kuwait intended to show that it considered the revolution an internal Iranian matter which did not affect its relations with other states.[15] Sheikh Sabah met with Khomeini, Bazargan and Foreign Minister Yazdi. Ahmad al-Jassim, who was Kuwaiti Ambassador in Iran from June 1979 until October 1981 (when his government withdrew him due to Iranian bombings of a Kuwaiti oil complex), explained the Iranian factionalism surrounding the meeting:

> When Sheikh Sabah visited Tehran, we met everybody. There was Muhammad Ali Montazeri – the Iranians called him Ringo – he tried to convince me not to meet Yazdi and Bazargan. He said they were pro-American. We did not listen and talked to them. We also went to Qom to visit Khomeini. We met with him for one hour. It was a good meeting. Our relations started well with the new regime.[16]

Yazdi declared that a new phase of relations had begun, a phase built on Islamic brotherhood and co-operation. Sheikh Sabah lauded the revolution and claimed that the United States wanted to create trouble in the region. In a joint communiqué, they stressed that the security of the Persian Gulf should only be taken care of by the regional countries. They further condemned Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories, its attacks on the south of Lebanon and Sadat's peace agreement with Israel.[17] Upon his return to Kuwait, the Foreign Minister informed Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Iraq of the visit and reportedly planned to lay down a formula for collective security between the Arab countries in the Gulf and Iran.[18] As stated by the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States, Muhammad al-Sabah:

> Sheikh Sabah was the first Arab Foreign Minister to visit Iran after the revolution and to pay his respects to Ayatollah Khomeini. Kuwait wanted to establish good relations. We realised quickly that Iran wanted to export its revolution, but we were confident that the revolution would pass and that they would want good relations with Kuwait. They benefited from our bad relations with the Shah. Kuwait called him the 'bad cop'.[19]

In March 1979, a referendum called for the establishment of an 'Islamic Republic of Iran'. In November, the Iranian 'Students of the Imam's Line' occupied the US Embassy. Bazargan and his Provisional Government resigned as a result, which led to the active participation of radical clerics in government through a direct takeover by the clerically dominated Revolutionary Council. This, however, did not automatically lead to a deterioration in Iran's relationship with the Gulf states. When in early February 1980, the

first President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Abolhassan Bani Sadr, was elected, King Khaled and Crown Prince Fahd sent cables of congratulations,[20] despite the Shi'a demonstrations which had taken place in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Both sides attempted to maintain stability.

Factional infighting continued in Iran between the President and forces aligned with him on the one hand, and the clerical elements in the Revolutionary Council on the other, which only came to an end when the President was impeached by Parliament in June 1981. This led to increasingly mixed signals coming from Iran. Immediately after taking office, Bani Sadr urged the Gulf states to unite in safeguarding their oil wealth and in ridding themselves of possible superpower conflict. Referring to the tense situation between the Gulf populations and their governments, he declared that Iran would not attempt any action against their regimes.[21] Given the pro-Iranian mass demonstrations in the Gulf, Iran's neighbours found this difficult to believe.

Tensions between Iran and the Gulf states encouraged by Iraq

Since the revolution, the Gulf states had attempted to maintain a balance of power within the region which, on the one hand, would avoid any one state (i.e. Iran or Iraq) becoming too powerful, and, on the other, would forestall foreign interference in the region. The increased threat of the export of revolution, however, prepared the way for war and their growing leaning away from Iran towards Iraq and the United States.

After the occupation of the US Embassy in November 1979, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan one month later, the Carter Doctrine of January 1980 led to a large US military deployment in the Persian Gulf. The US like the Arab governments feared both an export of revolution and the spread of Communism, which would have toppled friendly regimes and blocked Western access to the oil reserves. The US highlighted the perceived Iranian threat and therefore increased the Gulf states' fear of their neighbour. Iraq – which, ironically, was bound to the Soviet Union through a friendship treaty – had most resented Iranian regional hegemony and took advantage of the situation. As explained by an Omani official:

> With the success of the revolution, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf panicked – in view of the revolutionary slogans, revolutionary ideas, and the West telling them that the revolution would spread. At that time, the Gulf countries needed a regional power to counter Iran. It was a good opportunity for Iraq to take that role.[22]

In April 1979, Iraq violated Iranian airspace and conducted artillery attacks on the border town of Qasr-i Shirin. In May, Iraqi artillery and air

strikes and Iranian retaliation were repeated at Mehran and other places along the border. The situation intensified when Saddam Hussein took over the presidency in July. In October, Iraq threatened to abrogate the 1975 Algiers accord, which had set the borderline between Iran and Iraq at the thalweg of the Shatt al-Arab, dividing the waterway between the two countries. Constant border clashes occurred during the first half of 1980.[23] The Gulf states were aware that Iran was not interested in war, and at this point in time they did not really seem to perceive Iran as threatening. Ahmad Abdulaziz al-Jassim of the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry asserted:

> In April 1980, an attempt was made on Tariq Aziz' [Iraqi Foreign Minister] life and there were some clashes along the Iran–Iraq border. At that time, Iran offered us to sell their Phantom airplanes to Kuwait. When we told them we were not interested, they asked us to relay the offer to the Saudis. They were not interested either. This showed us that Iran was not thinking of entering a war.[24]

Saddam Hussein declared himself champion of the Arab cause, presenting himself as the only one who could save them from Islamic Iran. In February and October 1979, Iraq offered to send troops to Bahrain and Kuwait which would defend them in case of an Iranian attack. They accepted reluctantly, but on Saudi advice.[25] The Gulf states thus tried to establish good relations with both countries, at the same time perhaps hoping to be able to play one against the other in case one became too dangerous to them. In October 1979, Saddam Hussein issued a declaration, demanding the abrogation of the 1975 Algiers accord, autonomy for the Baluchi, Kurdish and Arab minorities in Iran and the return of Abu Musa and the Tunbs to the UAE.[26] Iran repeatedly asserted that it would not return the three islands which it considered Iranian territory, and in March 1980, Bani Sadr stated that giving the islands to the Arabs would mean that the Straits of Hormuz would be dominated by the United States.[27]

In February 1980, Iraq in its National Charter implicitly demanded political and economic integration of the Gulf and stated that Arab regional unity meant joint confrontation against Iran.[28] Tehran tried to counter the Iraqi attempts at alienating the Gulf Arabs from Iran, and Foreign Minister Qutbzadeh visited Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain in April and May. He did not travel to Saudi Arabia and Iraq. After that, various visits between Saddam Hussein and members of the Kuwaiti and Saudi ruling families took place in May and August, and further contacts were pursued with Oman and Ras al-Khaimah in order to build an anti-Iranian axis. In August, Iraq concentrated its troops along the border with Iran, intensifying skirmishes. On 17 September, Saddam Hussein formally abrogated the Algiers accord and claimed the entire Shatt al-Arab as Iraqi territory.[29]

The question becomes whether by that stage the Gulf states supported an Iraqi attack on Iran. According to earlier statements, they were opposed to any interference into Iran's internal affairs as they wished to use Iran as a buffer against Communism. As the year 1980 progressed, however, they seemed to become more frightened of Iran's revolution and the possibility that their own populations might rise against them. In late August the Arab Foreign Ministers at a meeting in Saudi Arabia 'agreed to formalize security co-operation and adopted a precautionary security plan', put forth by Saudi Arabia.[30] Saddam Hussein's unannounced visit to King Khaled at Ta'if on 5 August 1980, led to speculations whether Saudi Arabia and by extension its close ally, the United States, encouraged Iraq to attack Iran. This view was held by Iran.[31] Saudi Arabia denied any role in the outbreak of the war. On the contrary, one Saudi source pronounced, Crown Prince Fahd had told Saddam not to attack Iran as this would sustain the revolution.[32] As for the United States, it has been suggested that Saddam Hussein believed he was given a green light, just as he believed he got from US Ambassador April Glaspie before his invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Nevertheless, three days before the outbreak of war, on 19 September 1980, according to a Kuwaiti newspaper, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE agreed to lend Iraq about $14 billion to support the military attack.[33] The Iranian government had not been able to reassure its neighbours in the long run, who were fearful of the revolution and the possible impact on their own people and rule. This fear was reinforced by the revolutionary rhetoric of the religious leaders of the country. On 22 September, Iraq launched a full-scale offensive and took Iran by surprise, which is astonishing given the Iraqi border skirmishes and troop movements in the preceding one and a half years. As stated by Ahmad al-Jassim of the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry:

> At the beginning of the war, I was in Kuwait. I had to return to Iran, but all flights were cancelled. I went to Pakistan and Zia ul-Haqq gave me a small plane to fly to Iran. We went to Zahedan [close to the border with Pakistan] airport where we were met by the governor. He explained that all the airplanes in Zahedan were the Iranian military fleet. Saddam tried to destroy them in Tehran but did not succeed. So they brought them to Zahedan until they knew how to retaliate. They had no strategy – they had wanted to sell the planes shortly beforehand. When the Iraqis claim that they were attacked by Iran, they are lying. Iran did not cross anybody's border, Iraq did.[34]

The Iranian regime had been so occupied with its domestic situation that it did not pay any real attention to its neighbours. It did not watch Iraq and neither did it develop a clear policy to maintain good relations with the

Gulf states. Tehran merely reacted to the formation of an anti-Iranian Arab front by sending the Foreign Minister on a Gulf tour that did not include Saudi Arabia and Iraq, which might have averted an escalation of the situation. This passive reactive policy towards the Gulf states became even more pronounced once the war had started.

Relations during the Iran–Iraq war, 1980–1988

Throughout the eight-year long war with Iraq, Iran hardly initiated any policy opening towards its Persian Gulf neighbours. The leadership was totally pre-occupied with the war and domestic politics. The Gulf countries behaved in one way or another, and Iran's reaction – apart from its revolutionary policy of aggressive rhetoric, sabotage acts and its military retaliation through bombings of tankers and economic installations – was relatively moderate, given their support of the Iraqi war effort. It never declared war on its neighbours. Iran's relationship with the Gulf states was shaped for eight years by two factors: first, the Gulf states' varying support of Iraq or neutrality in the war, and second, Iranian successes or losses in the war. As the war continued, Iran increasingly realised that it needed friends in the region and that its revolutionary rhetoric only alienated its neighbours. The war time can therefore be divided into two periods: the years 1980 to 1984, when Iranian policy was driven by ideological zeal and there was no clear foreign policy line until the war reached a stalemate; and 1984 to 1988, when the ruling elite slowly began to understand that they had to place more importance on national interest and on actively establishing better relations, in particular as the Arabs preferred to support Arab Iraq rather than Islamic Iran. However, moves to improve relations suffered considerable challenges in the last two years with the internationalisation of the war and the hajj incident in 1987.

This part of the chapter on the war period will focus on Arab and Iranian behaviour with regard to the most important turning points and events in the war: the first phase of war when Iraq was occupying Iranian land, 1980 to 1982; the situation after Iran retook Khorramshahr and entered Iraq in 1982; the stalemate of the war and the beginning of the tanker war in 1984; Iran's success at Fao and the Iran–Contra affair in 1986; the internationalisation of the war and the hajj incident in 1987; the Iranian acceptance of UN Resolution 598 in 1988 and its aftermath. There was a difference between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as actively supporting Iraq on the one hand and the UAE and Oman as being actively neutral on the other. Iran's different behaviour towards these two groups became increasingly evident after Khorramshahr had been recaptured.

The first phase in the war, 1980–1982

The Arab reaction to the war, 1980–1982

The pre-war period showed that the gradual preponderance of the revolutionary line inside Iran had come to shape the mind of the Gulf rulers. They drew closer to the United States and supported the Iraqi war effort. Iran thus viewed the war as counter-revolutionary and as an 'imposed war' (*jang-i tahmil*), i.e. a war imposed by the global oppressors. It was also seen as an opportunity to export the revolution to Iraq. In the beginning, the Iranian government was preoccupied with both the war and the US hostage crisis. It was only after the hostage crisis was resolved in January 1981, that the whole emphasis of Iranian foreign policy shifted to the war.

It was at this time that Iranian policy towards the Gulf countries began to develop. It responded to the different degrees of support the various countries showed for Iraq: Saudi Arabia and Kuwait openly supported Iran's enemy, Oman and the UAE remained more neutral, Qatar and Bahrain did not play an important role. This meant that Iranian policy towards these states was mostly reactive rather than proactive.

At the very beginning of the war, all Gulf countries in practice supported Iraq despite the fact that they had declared themselves neutral. In late September 1980, Iraqi helicopters flew via the UAE to Oman, intending either to seize control of Abu Musa and the Tunbs or to attack the Iranian naval base at Bandar Abbas from Oman. Sultan Qabus had given his permission for these operations. Under pressure from Britain and the United States, which wanted to avoid an escalation of the war, he had to cancel the plan. At the time of the incident, Iraqi planes were also stationed in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and other Arab states.[35] As for Oman, after its navy nearly clashed with the Iranian navy in an accident in late 1980, and an Iranian helicopter flew undetected into Omani territory, Muscat authorised the US Seventh Fleet to use its facilities on Masirah island. Omani–Iranian relations deteriorated steadily until 1984. As stated by former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani:

> In the early days the relations with Oman were not very good. We looked at Oman as a collaborator with the Shah. There was no co-operation of any sort. Later, when political relations were established and ambassadorial links were resumed, we had good neighbourly relations, but no unique relationship compared with the other countries in the region.[36]

An Omani official put forward his country's position:

> The other Gulf countries were happy when Iraq started the war. Oman for geopolitical and historical reasons was not keen to see

> this conflict in the region. At the same time, it had to deal with it . . . The Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, supported and financed Iraq in the war with Western support because the West wanted to contain Iraq and Iran, and sell arms.[37]

Apart from allowing Iraq to use their air bases, the Gulf states widely financed the Iraqi war effort. For instance, in 1981 Gulf funding of Iraq amounted to $24 billion, and by the end of 1982, direct financial aid was estimated between $30 and $40 billion, with Saudi Arabia contributing $20 billion, Kuwait $6 billion, the UAE $2 to $4 billion, Qatar $1 billion and Oman, despite its opposition to the war, $10 billion.[38] In theory, this assistance was given in the form of loans. MP Abdul Mohsen Y. Jamal described the discussions in the National Assembly about Kuwaiti support for Iraq:

> In 1981, the National Assembly discussed giving $6 billion to Iraq. There were only three votes against it – me, Adnan Abdul Samad, and Dr Nasser Sorkho. Everybody else agreed. We sent a lot of arms. We opened our ports and shipped them directly to Iraq. Now we regret it.[39]

Both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait offered trans-shipment facilities for military and civilian goods which were brought to Iraq by trucks. The reasons for their support were that Saudi Arabia most feared a spread of the revolution, and Kuwait felt challenged by its large Shi'a population, but was also afraid of Iraqi reactions and influenced by Arab nationalist tendencies amongst its Palestinian community. The Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US, Muhammad al-Sabah, expounded his country's position:

> The reaction inside Kuwait to supporting Iraq was mixed. The conservative Sunni tribal section was acquiescent. The Shi'a and the leftists were unhappy. Some Arab nationalists thought we should use Iran in the fight against Israel. When the Iranian rhetoric became more anti-Kuwaiti, the Kuwaiti population became more pro-Iraqi. Historically, we have been more suspicious of Iraq than Iran, but when the West and most Arab countries supported Iraq, and we felt threatened by the Iranian rhetoric, we also had to support Iraq. We had to choose the lesser evil. Had we not supported Iraq, Iraq would have invaded Kuwait. Iran understood that we were in a dilemma. They punished us, but not too heavily.[40]

These remarks imply that Kuwait was at least as fearful of Iraq as of Iran, and that they suspected that Iran was not going to harm them seriously.

Saif Abbas of Kuwait University added that there was a strong public opinion against the Islamic Republic, in particular amongst the Sunni population that the Kuwaiti government could not have acted against, and that the general Arab trend was anti-Persian and anti-Islamic fundamentalism. Furthermore, the government knew that Iraq was more capable of harming Kuwait than Iran. Kuwait's support for Iraq should not be taken as a true political position, but just as 'swinging with the winds'. Kuwaiti foreign policy in general was careful and calculating, as historically Kuwaiti survival rested on a balance of power amongst its neighbours.[41]

Iran retaliated against Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for their support of Iraq. Fearful of Iranian reprisals on its oil installations, Saudi Arabia received American AWACS planes in late September 1980, and more military equipment in the years to come. The US position towards the Islamic Republic was vital for Saudi and Kuwaiti policy towards Iran. MP Abdul Mohsen Jamal held that the Kuwaiti or GCC relationship towards Iran depended on US–GCC and US–Iranian relations.[42] According to an Arab journalist, this also worked the other way, with Saudi Arabia forcing the US to help Iraq, as they were scared of Iran.[43]

In November 1980 and June 1981, Kuwait suffered from Iranian air attacks. When in October 1981, Iranian planes bombed the oil refinery at Umm al-ʿAish, Ambassador al-Jassim was withdrawn from Tehran and Kuwait henceforth was represented by a Chargé d'Affaires,[44] whereas the Iranian Ambassador remained in Kuwait for longer. By hitting Kuwaiti targets, Iran hoped to convince Kuwait and the other Gulf states to stop supporting Iraq in the war. It was also easier for Iran to bomb Kuwaiti oil installations than Iraqi ones, which were further inland.

In 1981, Saudi Arabia offered to pay France to rebuild the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Usirak, which had been destroyed in an Israeli attack in June.[45] Iranian retaliation for this active Saudi and Kuwaiti support of Iraq was not too fierce, as was mentioned above by the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US. As confirmed by former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani:

> We would attack military caravans on their way from Kuwait to Iraq. But that was very rare because we were very cautious not to aggravate our neighbours. We did not attack any Kuwaiti ships until Iraq extended the war by attacking our tankers.[46]

That was perhaps the reason why the Gulf states in the beginning did not seem to put any pressure on the belligerents to end the war. As the war dragged on and the Iraqi offensive remained successful, they again became alarmed of a too powerful Iraq. This perceived threat of both Iran and Iraq finally led to the creation of the Gulf Co-operation Council in May 1981, which Iran viewed as an anti-Iranian Arab club, designed to set the stage for American presence in the region. Rejai Khorassani explained:

> The GCC was not seen as favourable to Iran. It was an Arab and not a cross-cultural regional entity. We thought that the GCC was directly influenced by Saddam Hussein and that it would play a role which would serve him. Their role as mediator was often viewed by Iran as siding with Saddam Hussein. They only proposed peace plans when our territory was under Iraqi occupation and Iran could not accept.[47]

It was reported that on 6 September 1981, two Saudi and UAE diplomats secretly visited Iran and met the Foreign Minister. The visit came as a result of a meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers at Ta'if. Consequently, the chief of the Saudi secret service, Muhammad Hussein, and his Iranian counterpart, Mustafa Taharani, agreed that Iran would not launch any air attacks on the Saudi Red Sea ports of Qadimah and Yanbu and the Persian Gulf port Jubail, where military equipment was unloaded for shipment to Iraq. Iran reportedly also agreed not to attack Kuwait and to stop inciting the Shi'a populations of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. In return, Saudi Arabia promised to give Iran information about military supplies for Iraq which were being shipped via Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and about Iraqi military plans and troops. Besides Syrian and Libyan military support, the Saudi information reportedly was the main help in the successful Iranian offensive at Abadan[48] in September, when the Iraqi siege of the city was lifted.

If the agreement was real, it did not hold long. In October, Iran attacked a Kuwaiti oil installation, and the Iranian Foreign Ministry criticised the Fahd peace plan.[49] In December, an Iranian backed coup attempt was foiled in Bahrain, after which the GCC laid emphasis on defence and concluded various bilateral security agreements, as was discussed in Chapter 2. In March 1982, Iraq lost Dezful. The GCC got increasingly alarmed. Abdallah Bishara, the then GCC Secretary General, explained:

> At the beginning of the war, the Gulf countries were not happy with Iraq. When the balance shifted towards Iran, the GCC moved towards Iraq which constituted a bulwark against Iran. The status quo is the essence of the GCC. The shift in the GCC came when they realised that Iraq was a status quo power. Iran was anti-status quo. With Iraq beleaguered, the GCC had to support Iraq with arms etc.[50]

The turning point in their position and the call for an end to the war came in May 1982, when Iran retook Khorramshahr and managed to push the Iraqi troops back to the border.[51] The fear that the war might spread to their countries was heightened when Iran entered Iraqi territory in July, and insisted on punishing Saddam Hussein for his aggression. As stated by Na'imi Arfa':

> In general, until the recapture of Khorramshahr by Iranian forces in May 1982, the countries of the Council [GCC] did not show any serious interest in bringing an end to the aggression and bringing about the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces . . . After that date, and with the beginning of the second phase of the war – which from the Iranian perspective was based on the pursuit of the aggressor forces into Iraqi territory – the Council in its communiqués and in international and regional gatherings and also when establishing direct relations with the Islamic Republic . . . called to bring an end to the war.[52]

An Iranian Foreign Ministry official added that from now on, the Gulf states supported Iraq even more with money, weapons and propaganda, which exacerbated Iranian–Arab relations further.[53]

Arab mediation attempts, 1980–1982

As mentioned, the Gulf countries got worried that Iran might advance on their territory. Several attempts to find a settlement had been made since March 1981, in particular by the UN, the ICO and the Non-Aligned Movement. Iran always rejected the mediation offers. The then Iranian Ambassador to the UN, Rejai Khorassani, explained:

> The delegations would come and were received in Tehran. They produced a peace proposal which was usually a ceasefire proposal. It could not be accepted because they had to condemn Saddam Hussein. We were not prepared to negotiate with the enemy when our land was under occupation. No proposal included immediate withdrawal from our territory. Some of the proposals came to myself at the UN. I did not negotiate on them, just sent them to the higher authorities in Tehran.[54]

In December 1981, Syria – Iran's ally – and Kuwait launched a mediation attempt to bring about an end to the war. This was rejected by Iraq due to Syria's backing of Iran, and by Iran as an attempt to prevent the collapse of the Iraqi army.[55] The Syrian role was important. An Iranian Foreign Ministry official explained that the Gulf countries used Syria when they could not talk to Iran or when they considered Iran not to be listening to them. Saudi Arabia used Syria only to a certain extent, but the smaller states relied on Damascus to relay their messages.[56] As opposed to that view, according to former GCC Secretary General Abdallah Bishara:

> Syrian mediation mostly came as a Syrian initiative. They realised how important GCC assistance for Iraq was and how it could be abused by Iraq. I think they were right.

> There was no Kuwaiti initiative at all during the Iran–Iraq war. They were touring the world to explain Iraq. The Gulf initiatives came mainly from the UAE and Oman.[57]

The Syro-Kuwaiti mediation attempt also coincided with open political support for Iraq by Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states after the discovery of the Bahraini plot. Notwithstanding, in March 1982, Kuwait agreed to be a stopover point for families visiting Iranian and Iraqi PoWs.[58]

After Iran recaptured Khorramshahr, Gulf Foreign Ministers met in emergency session in Kuwait on 15 May. The UAE took the initiative to bring about peace between Iran and Iraq: when the GCC Foreign Ministers met two weeks after the Kuwait session in Riyadh, they issued a conciliatory statement calling for peace and urging Iran to respond. Iraq, losing ground, expressed its readiness to halt the fighting.

Iranian behaviour, 1980–1982

In this first phase of the war, the Gulf states had taken the initiative against Iran by supporting the Iraqi war effort. The actual Iranian response to Arab support of Iraq was muted. Endless rhetorical attacks were unleashed on the leaders of the Gulf states. In September 1980, Prime Minister Muhammad Ali Raja'i warned that 'should they fail to declare their view directly, then we shall consider them as being in a state of war', and the commander of the Iranian navy threatened to strike at Iraqi warships in Persian Gulf ports. In July 1981, Iran warned Kuwait not to lease Bubiyan island to Iraq for military purposes. Otherwise, Iran would confront Kuwait militarily.[59]

In 1982, Khamenei declared that Iran was still the strongest power in the region. Iran reportedly warned Kuwait that it would search Kuwait-bound commercial vessels to make sure that Kuwaiti businessmen used the term 'Persian Gulf' in their shipping documents.[60] In July, that is after Iran had entered Iraq, Speaker Rafsanjani warned Kuwait to stop shipping goods to Iraq. This was ignored by Kuwait. Khomeini accused the Gulf states of betraying Islam, threatened that 'Islam's verdict (against them) will be executed' and called for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the liberation of Jerusalem.[61] Iran needed Gulf neutrality to win the war, but this kind of rhetoric had the opposite effect. Former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani described the use of revolutionary rhetoric during this period:

> Sometimes the speaker realised he should not have provoked the foreign audience and driven them to support Saddam Hussein. But generally, revolutionary values were important for mobilising the popular army. When Khorramshahr was liberated, the people became more confident and the slogans could be turned down, placing more emphasis on national interest. Some Friday Prayer

> Leaders still used slogans for domestic consumption. They did not really mean to threaten our neighbours. The more the war continued, the more thoughtful the administration became. But they were not always consistent. Sometimes they said we have to have good neighbourly relations, etc. But as soon as they remembered that the Arabs supported Saddam Hussein, they began threatening them again.[62]

In practice, Iran did not follow up on its threats. It had launched a few 'accidental' air attacks on Kuwaiti border posts in November 1980 and in June 1981, and on the Umm al-ʿAish oil installation in October 1981, after Iraq had bombed the Iranian oil terminal at Kharg island.[63]

At the same time, Iran undertook diplomatic steps to reassure its neighbours that it wanted peaceful and friendly relations. In March 1982, various Foreign Ministry representatives were sent to the Gulf countries, in particular Kuwait and the UAE, to convey a message of the Iranian desire for good relations.[64] After Iran recaptured Dezful, Foreign Minister Velayati toured the UAE and Kuwait, trying to reassure them that Iran would not spread the war, in order to lessen the impact of President Khamenei's earlier statement that 'any victory . . . brings us nearer to our goal, which is to export this revolution'.[65]

Relations after Iran entered Iraq, 1983–1984

Arab–Iranian confrontation, 1983–1984

After Iranian forces entered Iraqi soil, Saudi and Kuwaiti support of Iraq became more pronounced. In 1983, they agreed to give the oil revenues from Khafji in the Neutral Zone to Iraq. In April, Iran charged that Iraqi attacks on Iranian oil fields in the Persian Gulf, including the Nowruz oil field, had been launched from Kuwaiti territorial waters with Kuwaiti navy support and warned Kuwait to stay out of the war.[66]

In the summer, the Iranian–Gulf states confrontation worsened. The Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait, Shams Ardakani, sharply criticised Kuwait's confrontational attitude in the war. In July, after Iranian threats, Oman warned Iran not to close the Straits of Hormuz. Rafsanjani repeated his threat to close the Straits in September, but in November, the Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait announced that Iran would rather bomb Saudi oil installations than close the Straits. This probably came as a result of Saudi support for the delivery of French Super Etendards to Iraq in an attempt to force an end to the war.[67]

In October, the GCC held its first joint Peninsula Shield military exercises in the UAE. In December, a series of bombs exploded in Kuwait, hitting mainly American targets, as described in Chapter 2. Kuwait and Saudi

Arabia took the threat very seriously, and their air forces staged joint manoeuvres in Kuwait in February 1984.[68]

Arab–Iranian contacts, 1983–1984

Iran and the Gulf states kept talking. In 1983, the UAE continued to play the main role as a mediator to bring about an end to the war. The country had profited economically from trade with Iran.[69] According to the Director of the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, Jamal al-Suwaidi, there was no general understanding that Iran would not threaten the UAE, but a lot of meetings were held.[70] In May, the Foreign Ministers of Kuwait and the UAE visited Tehran to discuss the means of combating a large oil slick, which was a result of Iraq's bombardment of the Iranian off-shore Nowruz oil field in March, and to suggest another GCC peace plan.[71] In August, Velayati reiterated Iran's peace terms as: the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Iranian territory, the payment of reparations by Iraq and the punishment of the Iraqi regime. Nevertheless, Tehran sought good bilateral relations with the GCC states, and shortly after Velayati's rejection of the mediation offer, he visited the UAE to meet with the President, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, in order to discuss greater political and economic co-operation.[72] In November 1983, without Iranian approval, the GCC heads of state endorsed UNSCR 540, which 'call(ed) for an end to all military activities in the Gulf and for refraining from attacking cities, economic installations and ports, and for an immediate end to all hostilities in the Gulf area, including all sea routes and waterways'.[73]

Tanker war and efforts of rapprochement, 1984–1985

Iranian retaliation during the tanker war

The year 1984 saw a deterioration in the war. In February, the land war had reached a stalemate. Iraq, after it had started to attack Iran's main oil export terminal Kharg the preceding year, declared a total exclusion zone around the island and, hoping for international pressure on Iran, began to attack Iran-bound oil tankers with its newly acquired Super-Etendard planes carrying Exocet air-to-surface missiles. The result was that Iran for the first time initiated a policy toward the Gulf states to which they had to respond. Beginning in May, Iran retaliated by striking tankers serving Iraq's Gulf allies, mainly Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, hoping that they in turn would stop their assistance to Iraq and support an end to the war on Iran's above-mentioned terms. Rejai Khorassani presented Iran's case:

> As for the tanker war, we made mistakes because the French had approached us beforehand to mediate an end to the war, but we

> did not appreciate the offer. Only then did they give the Super Etendard planes and Exocets to Iraq.
>
> We had to defend ourselves against Iraq. Iraq pushed us to attack Kuwaiti tankers because if Kuwait could sell oil and give the revenues to Iraq, we had to do something. If everyone can sell oil but us, we have to take action. It would also have been bad in terms of international politics, if people had seen our tankers get hit and we had not done anything.[74]

Foreign Minister Velayati, in a speech at a gathering of Tehran's Diplomatic Corps, declared:

> The Islamic Republic of Iran, first of all because of her own interests, and secondly due to her belief in the necessity to maintain the security of this waterway for the stabilization of the growth of the world economy, has, since the beginning of the war, made her best efforts to prevent this fire from spreading to the region. She has also fought back frequent Iraqi aggressions in order to create the necessary conditions for the safe passage of mercantile shipping and economic activities and cooperation of Muslim countries in the region.
>
> In return . . . the Iraqi regime has taken any opportunity to spread the war to the Persian Gulf . . . Repeated Iraqi attacks on mercantile shipping, especially the tankers, are undoubtedly aimed at internationalization of the war . . . ready to set the whole region on fire.
>
> The Islamic Republic of Iran . . . is determined to safeguard the security of this waterway . . . But at the same time it warns that countries that are extending financial, political and arms support to Iraq, should know that they are also responsible for Iraqi adventurism and the crisis created in this region, and should naturally bear its consequences.[75]

The US administration announced that it would supply Saudi Arabia with 400 Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and one KC-10 aircraft. US warships began escorting US tankers in the Gulf, and the administration prepared for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with Iraq.[76] Furthermore, it was substantiated by a Saudi source that the US had been sending intelligence about Iran to Iraq via Saudi Arabia since 1984.[77] A limited internationalisation of the war had begun.

In June, Saudi F-15s directed by American-manned AWACS, apparently acting against Saudi policy inclinations not to get directly involved in the war, shot down one or two Iranian F-4s near a Saudi-owned island in international waters. Riyadh tried to play down the incident, but the Iranian

President described the Saudi action as turning the war into an Arab–Iranian conflict. Iran retaliated by hitting another Saudi tanker five days later.[78]

From the summer of 1984 onwards, Iraq stepped up its attacks on foreign shipping travelling to and from Iran, and Iran responded with increased attacks on traffic to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE, which resulted in joint Kuwaiti and Saudi air defence patrols.[79] According to H.H. Sayyid Haitham, Secretary General of the Omani Foreign Ministry, there were also numerous problems between Iran and Oman in the Straits of Hormuz during the tanker war, but both sides dealt with it 'firmly but in a gentlemanly way' which brought about a sense of respect between the two countries.[80]

Iran tried to de-escalate the situation. The Iranian Chargé to Kuwait stated in July that Iran wanted to improve relations with Kuwait and its neighbours on the condition that they stop supporting Iraq. But he also complained about the ill treatment of Iranian residents in Kuwait and the provocative atmosphere the Kuwaiti press had created against the Islamic Republic.[81]

Since the battle of Majnoon – at which Iraq for the first time may have used chemical weapons – and the Iranian shelling of Basra in February 1984, the war had reached a costly stalemate and led to Iran's foreign policy becoming increasingly pragmatic. The Iranian political elite slowly realised that in order to win the war and to prevent the further death of large numbers of Iranians, Iran had to approach the West to buy arms. Khomeini was even prepared to put ideology aside and sanction indirect dealings with the United States to obtain the weapons needed from the black market to protect Iran.[82] Iran's policy now was an attempt to secure a halt to GCC support for Iraq in return for non-escalation of the tanker war. The first signs of this policy and a toning down of revolutionary rhetoric became apparent in September 1984. The GCC Foreign Ministers for the first time had called for respecting the 'legitimate rights' of Iran in ending the war, and Speaker Rafsanjani invited members of the GCC to visit Tehran, declaring that Iran's policy from the beginning had been to convince the Persian Gulf countries that Iran did not want to cause them any problems.[83] Nevertheless, the GCC held their second joint military exercises Peninsula Shield II in October.

In early 1985, the situation worsened as Iraq and Iran began the 'war of the cities', including attacks on Tehran and Baghdad. In May 1985, the Iranian government moved further towards pragmatism by approaching outside powers for help. France was now ruled out because of its arms deals with Iraq, as was the Soviet Union which was bound to Iraq through its friendship treaty. The choice fell on Saudi Arabia. Tehran invited Prince Saud in order to obtain Arab and, indirectly, American support. He visited Iran in May, but according to an Iranian source, as soon as he returned to Saudi Arabia he proclaimed that his country stood on the Iraqi

side. (Independently, Iran entered into secret negotiations with the US in order to buy American arms and decided to invite former US National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane to Tehran. This visit took place in May 1986 and marked the beginning of the Iran–Contra Affair).[84] In addition, Tehran stated that it was keen on establishing friendly relations with Kuwait. After Iran was implicated in the attack on the Amir of Kuwait, the Foreign Ministry categorically denied any involvement and tried to reassure the Gulf countries that Iran had attempted to keep them out of the war. Tehran offered Bahrain co-operation in various fields and protection against foreign threats, and the Ambassador to the UAE, Ha'eri Fumani, stated that Iran considered the UAE as a friendly country which had helped Iran, allowing it to use the ports of Dubai and Sharjah and as being against foreign involvement in the region.[85]

In the meantime, Iran continued its retaliation against support for Iraq. It detained UAE vessels shipping food to Iraq, and an *Ittila'at* editorial contended that Kuwait's collaboration with Baghdad in hitting Iranian oil installations could be interpreted as a declaration of war.[86] As a result, in October 1985, the GCC decided to establish a rapid deployment force. However, despite continued Gulf support for Iraq, and the fact that twenty-four Iraqi air strikes against Kharg oil terminal by October 1985 had knocked out much of Iran's oil exporting capacity,[87] the Iranians remained restrained in areas where they could have seriously impaired the Gulf states. This was contrary to Iranian popular opinion which called for retaliation: Iran in that sense sometimes hit tankers for domestic reasons. The searching of Kuwait-bound cargo ships for Iraqi war supplies only had nuisance value, there was no large-scale resumption of attacks on Kuwaiti and Saudi tankers, and after the café bombings in July, the Iraqi Kharg attacks did not result in further retaliatory sabotage acts or bombings by pro-Iranian groups in Kuwait.

Arab mediation attempts, 1984–1985

When the war escalated into the so-called tanker war in May 1984, the GCC Foreign Ministers drafted a UN Resolution calling for a political solution to bring about an end to the fighting. It was rejected by Iran. The Iranian Ambassador to the UN, Rejai Khorassani, declared that Iran would not accept a resolution which did not condemn Iraq for its attacks on shipping.[88] In the same month, Saudi Arabia sought Syrian mediation in order to prevent a widening of hostilities. Syrian Vice President Khaddam visited Tehran, and President Khamenei in view of the Iraqi attacks on Kharg agreed that an escalation had to be avoided. In August, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister met with the Iranian Minister of Revolutionary Guards in Damascus, who gave assurances that Iran would not attack any Gulf states or more oil tankers.[89] The UAE kept up the most prominent role within

the GCC in talking directly to Tehran. Various Iranian delegations visited the UAE during 1984 and 1985, discussing the situation in the war as well as the expansion of economic, industrial, agricultural ties and their common opposition to any foreign interference in the region.[90]

Iran's more conciliatory attitude led to increased GCC mediation attempts in 1985. In February, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia launched a further peace initiative enlisting Syrian, Algerian and French support. Iran rejected the plan.[91] In June, by now Head of the International Section in the Foreign Ministry, Shams Ardakani, went on a tour to the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. He was keen to reassure them that Iran was not involved in the May attack on the Amir of Kuwait, and that it condemned all terrorist actions. The tour followed Prince Saud's visit to Tehran in May, and Shams Ardakani held that the improvement of Iranian–Saudi relations was 'just a matter of time'.[92] In July, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Besharati, on a visit to Dubai, expressed Iran's willingness to respond to any credible mediation effort, including the ICO or the NAM. By October, Iran's economy was increasingly suffering from the Iraqi attacks on its oil installations. Iran sought Gulf support and Besharati visited Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE to discuss the widening of the conflict by Iraq.[93]

In November, a consensus on the need to improve relations with Iran to allow constructive mediation seemed to have emerged. The GCC summit in Muscat in early November issued a communiqué accusing Iran of not respecting UN Resolutions on free navigation, but did not identify Iraq as the party that wanted peace. Senior Iranian politicians saw this indirect critique of Iraq as a positive shift in the GCC position. As a result of the summit, Sultan Qabus headed a new mediation effort, and Oman's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Yusuf bin Alawi, went to Baghdad and planned a visit to Tehran.[94] The initiative, however, did not produce any results, and Iran did not receive Alawi. In December, when Velayati visited Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, Prince Saud and Sheikh Zayed did not detect any change in the Iranian stand. Sultan Qabus stated that Iran continued the war for fear of the consequences if it did not achieve victory.[95] That is, he attributed the failure of mediation to internal considerations and factional politics in Iran.

Rejecting mediation in the war, Iran did not give up its readiness to improve bilateral ties with its neighbours and to keep talking. At a meeting with Kuwait's Foreign Minister at the UN in New York, Velayati accepted an invitation to Kuwait and showed a clear understanding of Kuwait's stand in the war.[96] Generally, as asserted by former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani:

> [Kuwait's] UN Ambassador Abdul Hassan was in direct contact with me. Their embassy in Tehran was active, our embassy in Kuwait was active. We had contacts at the ICO.

> And there were normal relations with the Kuwaiti citizens of Iranian descent who came to visit their relatives. This was true for all countries. On this level, we had very good relations with the UAE, good relations with Oman, normal relations with the other Persian Gulf countries. Only Saudi Arabia differed.[97]

Saudi–Iranian rapprochement, 1984–1985

The most outstanding initiative taken by Iran in attempting to improve ties with the Gulf states was its rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, the state with which the Islamic leadership had entered into a severe ideological conflict and propaganda war, as was demonstrated in Chapter 2. First signs of a thaw appeared in 1984. According to Charles Caret, Speaker Rafsanjani issued a secret peace plan in order to reassure the Gulf states and to remove their anxieties after the latest Iranian military successes. He forwarded this plan to Asad, who passed it on to Riyadh, which then informed Washington. The plan set forth that Iran would not favour an Islamic successor regime in Iraq and that it would make peace with the new government 'whatever its composition and colour', provided the Gulf states would stop their support for Saddam and would contribute to his downfall. Consequently, a more friendly dialogue ensued between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and secret contacts developed between Rafsanjani and the White House.[98] Perhaps as a result, in July, King Fahd invited Rafsanjani to visit Saudi Arabia, initially to attend the hajj, and reportedly Rafsanjani accepted, asserting:

> [The Saudis] might be fearful of our revolution. Maybe our talks would improve this unhealthy atmosphere and would make the Saudi Arabians assured of the possibility of having good relations with us. It would give them more assurance of their future and as a result they could stop their support [for Iraq].[99]

But as discussed in Chapter 2, for unknown reasons Khomeini vetoed the visit.

In May 1985, as described earlier, Tehran invited the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud, in an effort to secure Arab and indirectly American support in the war.[100] Prince Saud accepted and went to Tehran for the first in a series of meetings. This indicates that Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states were less and less keen on supporting Iraq and pursued a more aggressive diplomatic policy to bring about an end to the war. Prince Saud met with Foreign Minister Velayati, Prime Minister Musavi, President Khamenei and Speaker Rafsanjani. They discussed the war and regional security as well as bilateral relations. Rafsanjani declared that the Islamic countries should unite and remove the cause of tension, i.e. the Iraqi regime. He further suggested co-operation in the oil sector. Musavi underlined their shared faith and

culture and indirectly apologised that the new language of revolutionary Iran had led to misinterpretations abroad of the principles of Iranian foreign policy. Velayati stated that the Islamic Republic would continue its 'just resistance' against the Baghdad government. They also discussed the hajj and the conditions of the Saudi Shi'a minority.[101] According to Saudi sources in Cairo, Prince Saud asked Velayati to stop attacks by Shi'a opposition groups in Saudi Arabia, after a bomb attack in Riyadh had preceded the visit.[102]

The main Iranian aim was to persuade Saudi Arabia to discontinue its support for Iraq. The main Saudi goal was to influence Iran to stop the fighting. Both sides were disappointed. Saudi Arabia reportedly did, however, agree to ship refined petroleum products to Iran whose refineries were suffering from Iraqi attacks.[103]

The German newspaper *Die Welt* reported in May that Prince Saud might have left a cheque to make Iran halt attacks on Arab oil tankers in the Gulf, as Saudi Arabia allegedly had paid Tehran millions of dollars for that purpose before.[104] The paper, which is based in Hamburg, may well have confused this matter with another meeting which was held in May between Iranian and Saudi diplomats in Hamburg. This meeting must have preceded Saud's visit. *Le Monde* quoted a Saudi official who took part in the meeting as saying that secret negotiations had been conducted in West Germany in May, followed by meetings in Tehran and Riyadh (probably the Saud and Velayati visits). Apparently, when the Saudis asked whether Iran would accept peace negotiations in case Saddam Hussein were to disappear, the Iranians answered 'let him disappear first, then we'll see', which angered the Saudis.[105] The talks have been substantiated to me by Iranian sources. The meeting took place in a hotel in Hamburg and was attended by the Saudi Ambassador to France. They discussed the tanker war and, in particular, a ceasefire. Saudi Arabia offered money to stop the war. In the end, they never paid, as they could not give guarantees and were not able to put enough pressure on Saddam Hussein.

When Velayati visited Riyadh in December, the same topics and points of view as in Tehran were presented. Velayati told Prince Saud that the Iraqi-imposed war had to be continued until the final victory of the Iranian forces.[106] The Iranian position may have been due to domestic politics. A few days before Velayati went on his visit, Ayatollah Montazeri had launched a fierce attack against the House of Saud, calling them non-Muslims and 'tools in the hands of Zionism and world-imperialism', being under the impression that the Saudis were behind an anti-Shi'a campaign in Lebanon and Pakistan. Velayati thus, before leaving Tehran for Riyadh, warned that Iran would only accept mediation if Saddam Hussein was officially recognised and condemned as the aggressor.[107]

The relationship in view of Fao and the Iran–Contra affair, 1986

The consequences of taking Fao, 1986

In January 1986, Iran continued with its efforts to break out of its international isolation. For the first time, the Islamic Republic participated in the ICO meeting held in Morocco. The rapprochement, however, suffered a major setback in February when Iran was able to surprise Iraqi forces and occupy Fao. Khamenei warned Kuwait not to let the Iraqi forces use Bubiyan island. He stated that Iran did not intend to annex Iraq, and only wanted to punish Saddam Hussein; and that Iran had friendly feelings towards the Persian Gulf countries.[108] As presented by Rejai Khorassani:

> When Fao was occupied, we were in a good position. We now had the power to negotiate. The officials realised that the more Iran would use revolutionary slogans, the more our neighbours would be afraid and driven towards Saddam Hussein. We had to think of our national interest.[109]

In spite of Rejai Khorassani's suggestion of a move towards national interest, Tehran did not use the opportunity to negotiate an end to the war. Therefore, the Gulf states' fear of Iraq's collapse was heightened. They increased their support for Saddam Hussein, and the negotiations stopped. The GCC Foreign Ministers called upon Iran to withdraw from Fao, announcing that they would move their deterrent force from Saudi Arabia into Kuwait. Riyadh made clear that it would consider any attack on Kuwait as an attack on itself,[110] and the Gulf states began financing a massive arms transfer from the Soviet Union and the West to Iraq, which lasted until 1988.[111]

Since the capture of Fao, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait increasingly used oil as a weapon against Iran, a policy suggested by Israel and the United States. They insisted on keeping oil output high, driving prices down and making it increasingly difficult for Iran to finance the war. In retaliation, saboteurs blew up several Kuwaiti oil installations in June. In their communiqué after the meeting in Ta'if, the GCC Foreign Ministers condemned Iran's insistence on continuing the war and said the attacks on tankers should stop, without naming Iraq as the aggressor.[112] This was a clear change from the Muscat communiqué.

In August, Iraq badly damaged Iran's Sirri oil terminal. Iran charged that the Iraqi jets had used the facilities of unnamed Arab countries in the region for refuelling. This caused renewed warnings by Khamenei that Iran would retaliate if they did not stop their support for Iraq, and Iran stepped up its attacks on Kuwaiti oil tankers.[113] The situation worsened in September, despite the fact that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had reversed the OPEC oil

policy and cut back on production, a fact which had led to speculation about a deal involving de-escalation in exchange for reduced Gulf support for Iraq. This coincided with high-level visits by US officials and military planners to the region, worried about a recent Iranian–Soviet rapprochement.[114]

In October, the GCC Defence Ministers discussed naval patrols and an air umbrella linked to the AWACS planes. The patrols would sail close to tankers and freighters to discourage Iranian attacks. The US, British and French were planning similar protection for commercial shipping of their respective countries.[115] Furthermore, Saudi Arabia had tried to reconcile Iraq and Syria in June and again in October, in order to bring about a united front against Iran, which Iran was able to prevent.[116]

After Sirri had been damaged in August, Iraqi Mirage bombers hit Iran's last export facility in the Persian Gulf, Larak, in November, refuelling in Dhahran on their way back. This was denied by the Saudi government.[117] A Saudi source, however, admitted that Iraqi planes used to refuel in Dhahran on their way back from attacking targets in the lower Gulf.[118]

A few hours before the Iraqi strike on Larak, Iran attacked the Abu Bakush oilfield in Abu Dhabi's territorial waters. This was a deliberate strike against a friendly country, probably an attempt to increase the pressure on the Gulf countries by widening the war. On 1 December, the Iranian Prime Minister, Musavi, threatened to bomb Gulf cities. At the same time, Iran denied the attack on Abu Bakush and offered Abu Dhabi to assist with the repair of the platform in order to maintain good relations. A visiting Iranian delegation announced Iran's support for the UAE and other Gulf states, and the ruler of Sharjah emphasised the need to increase Irano-UAE political ties.[119] It seemed, the attack alarmed the other states more than the victim UAE.

The Iran–Contra affair and its effects on Saudi–Iranian relations, 1986

The year 1986 initially saw better relations between Iran and the United States. In May, former National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane visited Tehran, but this initiative fell apart and in fact led to a worsening relationship between the two.

The exact connection of Saudi Arabia to the Iran–Contra deal is not clear, and the lack of information can only be speculated upon, it will, therefore, only be touched upon in passing. It is known that the Saudi arms dealer Adnan Kashoggi and Ali bin Musallam, who was close to King Fahd, mediated the deal between Iran, the US and Israel.[120] In September 1986, Tehran Radio reported a CBS television broadcast in which the Saudi government was said to be giving financial support to the Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua at the request of the US.[121] Perhaps in exchange for this Saudi support, McFarlane, in return for American arms, demanded not only help from Iran in releasing American hostages in Lebanon, but also that it stopped

destabilising the Gulf states. This was reported in the Lebanese magazine *al-Shira'a*.[122] The Saudi role apparently was multilayered. The Saudi businessman Kashoggi acted as a middleman and financier in concert with top Saudi officials, though there were disagreements within the Saudi Royal family on the issue. The Saudi confidant of King Fahd, bin Musallam, had contacts with Khomeini. An *International Herald Tribune* article implicated the Saudi Ambassador to the US, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, who held numerous discussions with the main American players, Colonel Oliver North and Major General Richard V. Secord. Saudi aid was particularly useful, since Congress in 1984 had banned US military aid for the Nicaraguan insurgents. A dissident Saudi, Farid Ghadry, claimed that the Saudis wanted to placate Iran, which had been demanding that Riyadh intercede with Washington to obtain spare parts for their F-14 jets. He alleged that the Saudi government, at the direction of Fahd, actually paid for the US arms purchased by Iran. Other sources said Saudi government funds were not directly used, but that Fahd and others had encouraged private banks to give the money to Kashoggi.[123] An Arab journalist claimed that Prince Bandar had got permission from King Fahd to get involved in the deal and to negotiate with President Reagan. Apart from the King, nobody in Saudi Arabia knew about the involvement.[124] The Saudi government denied any involvement in the deal.[125] But whilst Kuwait and other Arab states criticised the Iran–Contra affair, the Saudis remained silent.

Whatever Saudi Arabia's involvement, it did co-ordinate its OPEC oil policy with Iran. This increased the price, and King Fahd dismissed his Oil Minister, Ahmad Zaki Yamani, reportedly when he refused to carry out the newly adopted price policy.[126] It was further reported that large quantities of refined petroleum products were shipped from Saudi Arabia through US traders to Iran, after Iraq had destroyed Iranian oil facilities. This was denied by Riyadh.[127] An Iranian source also asserted that this was untrue: 'Iran did not need Saudi Arabia. We could get these products from Oman and South Yemen'.[128]

The Saudi–Iranian rapprochement was pursued at the end of November, when a high-ranking Iranian delegation visited Crown Prince Abdullah, one day after Iraqi planes hit Larak, refuelling at Saudi bases.[129] Nevertheless, given the above-mentioned problems at the hajj, Saudi–Kuwaiti military patrols and Saudi attempts at splitting the Syro–Iranian alliance, Saudi-Iranian distrust prevailed.

From the internationalisation of war to ceasefire, 1987–1988

The fragile relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait deteriorated in the last two years of the war. The 1987 hajj incident and the Kuwaiti reflagging operation, which brought about an internationalisation of the war, led to an all-time low in Iran's relations with these two

countries. On the other hand, Tehran improved its ties with the UAE, Oman and Qatar further, all of which were opposed to foreign intervention and increased their role as mediators.

Iran, as throughout the war, reacted to increased Iraqi attacks and the foreign military presence by yet again stepping up its rhetoric and warnings against the Gulf states. It attacked more tankers, oil installations and US warships, having been unable to prevent Kuwait from asking for US and Soviet support.

The tanker war: Kuwaiti and Saudi opposition towards Iran, 1987–1988

On 8 January 1987, Iran launched its Kerbela Five offensive south of Basra. Around 40,000 Revolutionary Guards died during the offensive, and Basra did not fall, but the battle demoralised Iraq and terrified Kuwait.[130] The same month, a shell was fired at an island near the Kuwaiti coast, and three small bombs exploded at Kuwaiti oil installations.[131] Iran denied responsibility. Saif Abbas of Kuwait University held:

> As for the bombings of Kuwaiti targets in the 1980s, there was a general feeling that Iran dropped the bombs in order to pressure Kuwait into changing sides. But it could also have been Iraq to upset the situation and make Kuwait even more frightened of Iran.[132]

In March, Iran seemed to change its strategy of retaliating mainly against Kuwait and hit two tankers carrying Saudi crude oil. The Saudis, however, in keeping with their rapprochement with Iran, played down the incidents. The Defence Minister, Prince Sultan, stated that there was no animosity between Iran and the Gulf states and that there were no American guarantees for stopping the attacks on tankers.[133]

The increasing attacks on Kuwait-bound ships had led Kuwait in November to approach the USSR and the US for help. By April, with Iran's warning that it would install Silkworm missiles near the Straits of Hormuz, the superpowers seemed ready to get directly involved. At this threat, the Iranian Prime Minister declared that 'the Persian Gulf will be secure for all, including Iran, or for no one'. The Foreign Ministry condemned any effort to internationalise the war, which should be a regional issue, declaring that superpower interference would also be detrimental to those countries who requested protection.[134] Iran then moved Silkworm missiles to Fao. The USSR meanwhilst confirmed that it would lease three tankers to Kuwait which could then be protected by the Soviet navy.[135] In May, Iraq hit the *USS Stark*, in an attempt to internationalise the war and to bring the US and the GCC to impose a ceasefire. The US, instead of blaming Iraq, threatened Iran.

Iran's response was to step up its threats and attacks on Kuwait. In the month of May, it seized Kuwaiti fishing boats on charges of spying and attacked seven ships trading with Kuwait or the Kuwaiti–Saudi Neutral Zone, including a Soviet freighter. Tehran did not admit this attack, a fact which could reflect differences within the leadership about confronting the superpowers. Sabotage acts in Kuwait were another response, including a bomb blast in Kuwait City and a fire at the country's main liquefied petroleum gas plant.[136] Said Hajjarian of the Center for Strategic Studies described the Iranian position towards Kuwait:

> During the tanker war, we were in a cold war with Kuwait because of their support for Iraq. At that time, Kuwait in addition to its military support, also gave Bubiyan and Warba islands to Iraq. We did not have any high-level official relationship then, no ambassadors. But our problem was the Iraqi regime, not the Kuwaiti government.[137]

The United States were not only reacting to the Soviet presence in the Gulf, when they agreed to reflag Kuwaiti tankers. The reflagging operation also indicated a major US policy shift in the Gulf, in aligning itself officially and militarily with the Gulf states against Iran. It was the beginning of toughening their policy towards Tehran, strengthening relations with Iraq and moving towards ending the war. Rafsanjani warned Kuwait of retaliation, including the closure of the Straits, but was ambiguous about attacking US forces:

> On Kuwaiti use of US and other flags in the Persian Gulf: This may happen and if Iraq does not embark on mischief it would not cause any problem . . . But if Iraq makes mischief there would be retaliatory moves . . . On the Straits of Hormuz . . . if one day we fail to use it we will not let others use it either . . . if Iraq attacks our ships in the Persian Gulf, a ship belonging to Iraq's backers must be hit. If American ships enter Kuwaiti ports and our ship is attacked that day, the American ship too may be hit.[138]

As the US reflagging operation approached, Iran stepped up its warnings to Kuwait. In June, Hosseyntash, the Revolutionary Guards Naval Forces Deputy Commander, tied the fate of Kuwait's rulers to Saddam Hussein, declaring 'when the Saddam regime falls, the Kuwaiti regime will fall, too'.[139] In July, the situation turned for the worse. The Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US, Sheikh Saʿud Nasir al-Sabah, claimed that Iran had laid mines in the port of al-Ahmadi,[140] where the country's oil loading facilities are located.

The Iranians had repeatedly offered a ceasefire in the tanker war whilst rejecting a ceasefire on land.[141] This was turned down by Iraq, but the US,

in consultation with the GCC, played a major role in drafting a UN resolution for a complete ceasefire.[142] On 20 July, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 598, calling for an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of all forces to internationally recognised boundaries. On 22 July, the American reflagging and escorting of eleven Kuwaiti tankers began. This did not, however, lead to an end of war but to a whole new dimension of warfare, a change from a regional to a truly internationalised crisis. The timing of the adoption of the resolution and the US reflagging seemed well planned; they coincided to put more pressure on Iran to end the war. Kuwait felt relieved. It permitted the US to use a floating base off its coast, which was eventually attacked by Iran.[143] Sheikh Sa'ad, the Crown Prince, now openly stated that the Kuwaiti attitude toward the war was total support for Iraq, in particular after the withdrawal of its forces from Iran.[144]

Saudi Arabia seemed more cautious and displeased about the Kuwaiti decision to involve the superpowers more directly, fearing further Iranian retaliation.[145] Nevertheless, Saudi military support for the US operation was very direct. According to Undersecretary Armitage, the Saudis granted US forces permission to use Jubail Naval Base Hospital and their facilities and instructed the Saudi National Guard, the Civil Defence and the SAR helicopters to work with the US military.[146]

In response to the new situation, President Khamenei threatened to attack more Kuwaiti oil installations.[147] The hajj incident on 31 July, when more than 400 people were killed, increased the Iranians' wrath towards Saudi Arabia and put an abrupt end to the cautious rapprochement, as was discussed in Chapter 2. Iranians occupied the Saudi and Kuwaiti Embassies in Tehran. Explosions followed at a Kuwaiti oil refinery and a Saudi liquefied petroleum gas plant. It seemed even more unlikely at this point that Iran would end the war. On the contrary, it laid more mines and threatened to strike Iraq's pipelines through Turkey and to Saudi Arabia's Red Sea port Yanbu.[148]

By laying mines, Iran showed that it could penetrate the protected tanker convoys. On 24 July, the American-flagged supertanker *Bridgeton* hit an Iranian mine. Bahrain, vulnerable to Iranian threats, declined to repair the American ship in its dry dock, but Dubai, which had close relations with Iran, accepted.[149] The Gulf states, apart from Oman and Bahrain, were generally reluctant to give air or naval bases to the US, not least because of its support for Israel.

In August, another US tanker hit a mine off Fujaira. Iran offered to sweep mines off the UAE, alleging that the US was laying the mines, but the UAE declined.[150] More mines turned up in Kuwaiti and Saudi waters. It was reported that Iran offered Kuwait to stop attacking its ships and installations if Kuwait asked the Americans to leave and stopped supporting Iraq. Iran's mining policy, however, only led to a further US military buildup and the despatch of minesweepers by Britain and France, who had initially

rejected US requests, as well as Saudi participation in minesweeping operations.

In the meantime, Iran, careful not to confront the US Navy directly, did not attack escorted ships. Instead, another Saudi oil complex was fire damaged at Jubail in mid-August. In September, responding to a fierce round of Iraqi attacks on shipping, Iran initially responded by targeting ships trading with Kuwait and then fired three surface-to-surface Silkworm missiles at Kuwait. Khamenei issued more threats to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.[151] Iran also sent around thirty to sixty speedboats against the Saudi offshore oil terminal at Khafji near the Neutral Zone, which were rebuffed by Saudi fighter jets after having been traced by Saudi–US AWACS planes. This was officially denied by Saudi Arabia,[152] but a Saudi source asserted that the Iranian speedboats left after Saudi warnings.[153]

When, in October, the US Navy attacked the Iranian Rostam oil platform punishing Iranian mine-laying activities and an attack on a reflagged US tanker in Kuwaiti waters, Iran retaliated by firing Silkworm missiles from Fao at Kuwait's oil loading terminal at Mina al-Ahmadi. Davoud Bavand of Imam Sadeq University argued that the missile must have landed in the wrong place as at a time when the US was trying to internationalise the conflict, Iran was conscious not to alienate the Arabs too much.[154] An official Iranian source, however, reckoned that: 'The Kuwaitis must have done something silly, for instance sending a big caravan of military supplies to Iraq. Iran decided to remind them not to do that. But no Iranian authority will confess to that'.[155]

It is thus not clear whether Iran retaliated for the US move or for a more direct Kuwaiti action. In any case, Rafsanjani yet again declared that Iran would halt its attacks, if Kuwait told the Americans to leave.[156]

In 1988, Iran's position in the war and its domestic economic situation became increasingly untenable. In late March, Iranian and Kuwaiti forces clashed for the first time. Iranian gunboats attacked Bubiyan island, possibly to put pressure on Iraq to stop the war of the cities, as Iran's supplies of Scud-B missiles were drying up. Kuwaiti artillery defended the island.[157] In April, Saudi Arabia broke diplomatic relations with Iran after the war of words had escalated, and Iran had bought Chinese medium range missiles.[158] A Saudi source described how Saudi Arabian officials with US knowledge went to China and asked the Chinese to stop selling arms to Iran. Instead, Saudi Arabia bought those arms and sent them to Iraq.[159]

The day after the Saudis broke diplomatic relations, the US administration decided to sell arms worth $850 million to Riyadh.[160] Shortly afterwards, Iraqi troops retook Fao – perhaps with US support[161] – which constituted a major defeat for Iran. In retaliation, Iran fired a Scud-B missile at the Kuwaiti al-Wafra oil field, maintaining that Kuwait had allowed the Iraqi forces to use Bubiyan, from where they had launched several attacks on Fao which helped in retaking the peninsula.[162]

In June, Iraq retook Majnoon, and the US shot down an Iranian civilian airbus. Iran, exhausted from an eight-year long war, accepted UNSCR 598 on 18 July. Iraq followed on 6 August, and the ceasefire was put into effect on 20 August 1988.

Irano-Arab diplomacy, 1987–1988

The deteriorating situation in the war and the Iraqi attacks on Iranian oil installations, which crippled the Iranian economy, linked with the great internationalisation of the crisis, led the Iranian leadership to believe that the war had to be brought to an end, albeit on Iranian conditions. Iran seemed to engage more positively in the increasingly frequent mediation attempts initiated by the GCC states, especially by the UAE and Oman, and the UN during the last two years of fighting. Until the last moment, however, Iran called for the condemnation of the aggressor. The engagement of foreign troops, in particular, produced a firmer Iranian policy strategy on the Persian Gulf. Like the Shah, and as it had done occasionally since the start of the tanker war, the government more emphatically pronounced the idea of regional security without foreign interference.

In the wake of its Kerbela Five operation, the Iranian government tried – in vain – to prevent the ICO summit which was to be held in Kuwait in January 1987. As the summit went ahead, the Islamic Republic refused to attend because of Kuwait's support for Iraq in the war.[163] At the meeting, King Fahd appealed to Iran to stop the war, and the summit resolution stated that 'Iraq has agreed to peace proposals which were rejected by Tehran'; the resolution was even signed by President Asad of Syria.[164]

In April, responding to the Kuwaiti request to the superpowers for escorting and reflagging its tankers, Iran made clear that only the countries of the Persian Gulf were responsible for regional matters and security.[165] In the wake of the US reflagging operation, the Iranian Foreign Ministry engaged in a series of talks with UAE, Omani and Qatari officials in May and June. Iran now actively tried to isolate Kuwait from the GCC for its association with the superpowers. In May, the Omani Foreign Minister was invited to visit Tehran. Alawi maintained that his country sought 'constructive and positive' relations with Iran and that Iran had a vital role to play in the region.[166] Oman like the UAE was in an ideal position to negotiate with Iran, as it had stayed actively neutral throughout the war. This neutral position was also used by the United States. An Omani official explained:

> Oman always played a dual role. Oman dealt with the war according to its point of view that we should not be drawn into the conflict because Oman will be there, Iran will be there, no matter what government, so the only solution is to keep talking to them.

> At the same time, Oman did not isolate itself from the region, it was a part of the GCC. This dual policy was encouraged by the West – the US and Britain used Oman. Washington asked Muscat many times to mediate with Iran, especially when there were US casualties in the Gulf. Even Iraq did not object to this Omani role.
>
> Saudi Arabia was not happy because it did not want to see anybody take the initiative. They wanted to be the leaders of the GCC, all decisions should be taken from Riyadh. But Oman had the influence to stop the deterioration of the relationship between the Gulf and Oman. Oman defused the tension many times.[167]

H.H. Sayyid Haitham, Secretary General of the Omani Foreign Ministry, elaborated:

> The war produced some negative reactions from our neighbours towards Iran. During the first year, it was not clear for Oman what direction the war would take. We did not want to be allied to either party. We were neutral, we had no interest in continuing this war. This was very much appreciated by Iran, but it made a number of neighbours very unhappy.
>
> We looked far ahead and saw that the GCC had no strength against Iran and Iraq. Also, being Iran's neighbour, it was not wise making an enemy. In the beginning of the 1980s, Iran kept its distance from Oman. They were not sure because the rest of the GCC was different. Our approach began in 1985. In 1986, the visits started, first junior officials, then senior officials. From then on they increased steadily. There were always visits by both Foreign Ministers and the Embassies played a great role as well. But we only mediated if we could see the way to success.[168]

Former Iranian UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani agreed with this approach to mediation:

> None of the Persian Gulf states had an advantage from mediating because generally we did not like it as we saw it as pro-Saddam Hussein. Oman was cautious because they did not want any negative answers from us. To make sure that there was no misunderstanding, they mediated not too often and not too unnecessarily.[169]

The other main GCC mediator was the UAE. Foreign Minister Velayati declared in Abu Dhabi that Iran, being the strongest force in the Gulf, did not permit the superpowers or other foreign forces to enter the Gulf. He also rejected any UN plans to safeguard the security of the Gulf, as some members of the Organisation had taken side against Iran.[170]

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, Besharati, who went to the UAE after Iranian forces had attacked a Soviet vessel, stated that Tehran wanted to expand ties with the Gulf states. He praised the UAE's policy towards Iran and thought it could serve as an example for the other GCC countries. He held that the Persian Gulf was of strategic importance and therefore all countries of the region had to maintain its security. He stated: 'They all share the same fate, so they must consult each other in making decisions.' Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, the President, confirmed everything Besharati said and replied that any disadvantage to Iran was also a disadvantage to the UAE.[171] Both the UAE and Qatar subsequently issued statements opposing foreign intervention, and Oman advocated a regional solution to the safety of shipping.[172]

In early August, secret talks between Iranian officials and Kuwaiti leaders were reported, in which Iran offered to stop its attacks on Kuwaiti vessels and its anti-Kuwaiti propaganda in return for Kuwait agreeing to abandon the reflagging operation.[173] This came to nothing.

Later in the month, prior to the Arab League meeting in Tunis, and after the adoption of UN Resolution 598 and the subsequent US reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers as well as after the hajj incident, Velayati went to Muscat to meet his Omani counterpart. Both underlined the expansion of bilateral ties and emphasised that regional countries were responsible for the security of the Gulf. They also discussed problems related to the US presence in the region.[174] Iran had pressed for regional security since the internationalisation of the tanker war. During the last year of the war, then Deputy Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Larijani was sent by Ayatollah Khomeini as an envoy to King Fahd to suggest a collective security agreement. Apparently under US pressure, Saudi Arabia rejected the idea.[175]

Velayati declared that a visit from the UN Secretary General to Iran would be welcome. Iran further toned down its anti-Soviet rhetoric and accepted Soviet mediation with Iraq.[176] The Arab League held an emergency meeting in Tunis at the end of August 1987, to discuss the dangers of the war for the Gulf states. It opened with a bitter attack by the Saudi Foreign Minister on Iran, but the final resolution, due mainly to Syrian and UAE reluctance to be antagonistic to Iran, was not too hostile. It was critical of Iran for not responding to mediation initiatives, but did not decide on any retaliatory measures. It further called on Iran to respond to the UN's peace-making efforts.[177] The Saudi-owned magazine *al-Majalla* stated that it was clear from the results of the meeting that there was an Arab movement toward severing ties with Iran, in case it did not accept UNSCR 598 and a peaceful resolution to the war.[178]

In support of UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar's peace mission to Tehran and Baghdad in September, which came after the Iranian Silkworm attack on Kuwait, the GCC expressed its readiness to support the mission and condemned Iran for its threats against Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, whilst

praising Iraq for its positive response to the UN efforts. Velayati had invited de Cuellar, stating that Iran was ready to discuss the terms of the peace plan. Iran neither rejected nor endorsed the resolution, but sent its Deputy Foreign Ministers to Dubai, Oman and Qatar to discuss the international peace efforts and find a solution to the war acceptable to both parties.[179] It seems that Iran was increasingly interested in ending the costly war. It succeeded in convincing de Cuellar to put an amendment to Resolution 598 which provided for a commission to investigate and establish the aggressor.

Tehran pursued its efforts at improving relations with its smaller neighbours even after its relations with Saudi Arabia had deteriorated. In November, the Head of the Iranian Mission in Manama met the Amir of Bahrain. They discussed the war, regional security and improved co-operation between Iran and the Gulf states. The Bahraini Foreign Minister, Sheikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, stated that the war had put a lot of pressure on Bahrain, but 'it was not our war' and they had diplomatic relations throughout.[180]

Velayati discussed in Abu Dhabi how UNSCR 598 could be implemented and in Muscat most likely reviewed the same subjects, after Sultan Qabus decided in October to mediate an end to the war. Velayati was in any case able to strengthen bilateral relations with Oman by supporting expanded economic co-operation.[181] Perhaps as a result of these talks, the GCC summit at the end of December decided to negotiate with Iran and delegated the UAE as mediator because of its good ties with Iran. Despite the fact that Prince Saud declared that the GCC wanted the UN to impose sanctions, if Iran did not agree to the ceasefire, he said 'the door to dialogue' with Iran remained open. Prime Minister Musavi declared that Iran was ready to receive the GCC envoy.[182] In view of the fact that most GCC countries tended towards dialogue with Iran by then, even the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister admitted in January 1988 that contacts with Tehran had never ceased.[183] Abdallah Bishara described the Saudi and Kuwaiti position:

> With the escalation of the war, the situation deteriorated especially with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. But we never cut off contacts with Iran. They were always maintained at a minimum level through envoys, meetings at the UN, embassies, Islamic groups.[184]

The results of the GCC summit came in the midst of Syrian mediation. In November, when Khomeini had announced mobilisation for a new big land offensive, Farouk al-Shara', the Syrian Foreign Minister, started his shuttle-diplomacy between Tehran and Saudi Arabia. In January 1988, al-Shara' and 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam, the Syrian Vice President, visited several GCC countries and Iran. As a result, Iran delayed its offensive, Arab leaders toned down their condemnation of Iran and the GCC states persuaded Iraq

to curb its airstrikes against Iranian tankers.[185] Nevertheless, as declared by an Iranian Foreign Ministry official, the Syrian mediation did not lead to an end to the war, as the confrontation between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait was too serious and US forces were in the Gulf.[186]

Consequently, the UAE Representative, Saif Said, went to Tehran, declaring that co-operation between the GCC and Iran would curb the influence of foreign powers. Velayati said that Tehran was prepared to co-operate with the GCC to end the war.[187]

In April, Saudi Arabia broke diplomatic relations with Tehran, the US Navy was involved in military clashes with Iran and Iraq retook Fao. The situation for Iran steadily deteriorated. The following months showed intense diplomacy by the Iranian Foreign Minister and other high ranking Iranian officials, travelling to the UAE, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain in order to work towards an acceptable settlement. Whilst the GCC put much emphasis on UAE mediation, Washington sent high-level delegations to see Sultan Qabus, hoping that he could break the stalemate.[188]

After the *USS Vincennes* shot down an Iranian airbus on 3 July, the GCC members, including Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, sent their condolences, which opened the way for a gradual rapprochement. Khomeini finally accepted the ceasefire on 18 July. Immediately afterwards, Deputy Foreign Minister Besharati went to Doha and Abu Dhabi to discuss developments following the acceptance of UNSCR 598.[189] King Fahd put pressure on Saddam Hussein to accept the immediate ceasefire, and the Saudis were involved in the UN negotiations before and after the Iraqi decision on 6 August.[190]

It is not clear to what extent GCC mediation actually contributed to Khomeini's decision. It was probably a combination of factors, such as his realisation that Iran could not win the war and that there was no support at home as the population was war-weary, given the economic situation and the senseless killing; Iraq's massive use of chemical weapons; and the shock of the US downing of the airbus, the muted response to which underlined Iran's isolation in the international community. The ongoing negotiations with the GCC as well as the Soviet Union and the United Nations may also have paved the way for the final acceptance of the ceasefire. Given these circumstances, the trend toward reconciliation and breaking out of isolation seemed to have gained the upper hand towards the summer. Two weeks before Khomeini accepted the UN resolution, Speaker Rafsanjani contended:

> One of the things we did in the revolutionary atmosphere was to constantly make enemies. We pushed those who could be neutral into hostility and did not do anything to attract those who could become friends. It is part of the new plan that in foreign policy we should behave in a way not to needlessly leave ground to the enemy.[191]

It is not clear, however, that even if Iran had changed its rhetoric during the war, the Gulf states would have altered their policy towards Iran, as the war itself was such a fundamental threat. Rafsanjani did perhaps not realise that the biggest problem for Iran had been the decision to continue the war after 1982, which was seen by the other countries in the Gulf as evidence of long-term Iranian intentions to dominate the region.

Rapid rapprochement after the ceasefire

Throughout the war, it seemed that despite the hostility both sides never wanted to break off links completely. Iran's government, as explained, was cautious throughout and especially after 1984, attempted to explain that it wanted good neighbourly relations and only expected neutrality in return. One of the main problems was caused by its radical leaders, who saw the war as a means to export their revolution. Relations were severed by the frontline states Kuwait and Saudi Arabia as they openly supported Iraq for fear of this export of revolution. Iran reacted by punishing them through military and sabotage attacks. Another argument that has been put forward is that Saudi Arabia in particular supported the Iraqi war effort as long as possible in order to keep Iraq and Iran engaged, whilst it could develop its military arsenal and its position amongst the GCC states to become the leading military and political power in the region. The apparent threat allowed the supply of US weapons to Saudi Arabia that might otherwise have been blocked because of Israeli concerns.

Nevertheless, talks between Iran and its neighbours never ceased. It was important for the smaller states to keep the historical balance of power between Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The UAE and Oman in particular had only to gain by remaining neutral or even tilting more towards Iran. The UAE emirates of Dubai and Sharjah were major entrepôts of trade and providers of services. Dubai also became the main Gulf port for servicing and repairing international shipping. For Sharjah, good relations were important to secure the continuation of the agreement about the shared oil resources of Abu Musa island.[192] Oman had historically much closer ties with Iran than Iraq. It was not interested in a crisis in the region. Sultan Qabus maintained an independent foreign policy and was thus able to increase the international importance of his country. This could be seen when the United States used Omani neutrality at various times to negotiate with Iran.

Therefore, when the war ended, the region was ready to improve relations immediately. Iran needed its neighbours' help for its reconstruction effort and to break out of its international isolation. The Arab states profited from dialogue as it decreased the chance of subversion. Nevertheless, as presented by Abdallah Bishara, even if the relationship became better with the ceasefire, Arab support for Iraq and hard feelings towards Iran remained.[193] An Omani official added that the regional situation was in no

way different after the war than at the beginning and that the Arabs had not gained anything by supporting Iraq:

> After eight years they could not contain the revolution, but the war stopped. But did the ceasefire create a balance in the region? No. Iraq was even stronger, the Iranian revolution continued with its slogans and momentum, the GCC continued to be weak. The imbalance was still there.[194]

In any case, consultations started with Iran making every effort to meet with its neighbours. It finally seemed to take the initiative. Rafsanjani's main policy aim now was to develop and reconstruct the country, putting emphasis on co-operation in the oil and security sectors. He declared that Iran should stop quarrelling with the Gulf states and co-operate with them to shore up oil prices, stating: 'We can live with our neighbouring Muslim countries in a way that problems are not created and we do not squander our country's wealth for the sake of childish slogans. We are determined to act this way.'[195]

The Gulf states responded to the new situation. In September, Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi visited Tehran and met with Rafsanjani, conveying the message that the GCC believed that close co-operation with Iran was vital for regional security.[196] The Kuwaitis responded to Iranian initiatives to improve relations and reinstated diplomatic relations on 29 September. In November, Deputy Foreign Minister Besharati went on a tour to Oman, Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain – all of which had by now upgraded their diplomatic relations – discussing the Iran–Iraq peace talks and means to implement UNSCR 598, regional security without foreign interference, co-ordination in OPEC and emphasising Iran's desire to improve relations with Saudi Arabia. To underline the sincerity of the new position, Rafsanjani at the same time regretted that Iran had previously antagonised such countries as Kuwait and France, and had Tehran demonstrated tact in its dealings with them, they would not have supported Iraq in the war. But Iran was 'now in a position to make good on her previously crude diplomacy'.[197]

Iran's most important aim was to improve its relationship with Saudi Arabia in the hope that Riyadh could put pressure on Iraq to come to a quick implementation of UNSCR 598. Tehran claimed that the Saudi Ambassador to the US was holding consultations with Iran and Iraq in Geneva; this was denied by Riyadh.[198] In October 1988, however, King Fahd stopped the Saudi propaganda war. By December, he was said to be spearheading the move to improve relations between Iran and the GCC countries, apparently pressed by the UAE and Oman. At the GCC summit in Manama, he appealed for an international reconstruction campaign for both Iraq and Iran and to support UN efforts to secure a lasting peace.[199] Better relations between both sides of the Persian Gulf were on their way.

Conclusion

Iran's relationship with the Gulf states evolved during the first three years of the revolution. In the beginning, the Gulf rulers welcomed the overthrow of the much disliked Shah. Very soon, however, Iraq became the pacesetter of events. Saddam Hussein convinced the Arab governments of the threat of the export of revolution and mustered support for his war with Iran. The Gulf rulers encouraged by the US became increasingly fearful of the possibility that the revolution could have an impact on their own people, who might rise against them. Thus, some, more reluctantly than others, they gave Saddam Hussein financial support.

Iran was preoccupied with its own domestic situation and the US hostage crisis and did not develop any clear policy towards the Gulf states. When invaded by Iraq in September 1980, it was taken by surprise and reacted only passively to Gulf Arab support for Iraq. It threatened those countries which most supported Saddam Hussein, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and tried to have friendly relations with the others. Its major preoccupation at that time was the war and again it did not have the time to develop any policy strategy towards the Persian Gulf countries.

At this point in time, the Arab countries being fearful of the export of revolution, were nonetheless aware that Iran was not interested in territorial conquest. The situation changed in 1982, however, when Iran retook Khorramshahr and drove Iraq back into its own territory. Now the fear of the Arab states, in particular Saudi Arabia and Kuwait which were geographically closer to the front, evolved to include the threat of an actual military invasion, and so they increased their financial and logistical aid to Iraq. This stance was maintained even when they attempted to reach a negotiated settlement and realised that Iran was not punishing them too severely for their support of Iraq, thus reducing the territorial threat.

Iran was worried about GCC support for Iraq which increased when the United States entered the tanker war in 1987, openly siding with the Gulf states. Nevertheless, Tehran did not punish its neighbours seriously apart from minor attacks on tankers, oil installations, or acts of sabotage. Throughout the war, it retained its reactive policy, being vocally aggressive against those states which openly supported the enemy and being on good terms with those, like the UAE and Oman, which were actively neutral. Neither its emphasis on ideology in the early years nor its slow shift towards a more national interest-driven foreign policy, which can be observed since 1984, made any substantial difference for its dealings with its neighbours.

As soon as the war ended, however, Iran realised that it needed these countries to build a safe environment in which to rebuild the country and that it was clearly in its national interest to scale down its revolutionary rhetoric to make friends. Tehran tried to mend fences with all its GCC neighbours, in particular with Saudi Arabia which might be able to influence

Iraq during the post-war negotiations and also had the greatest influence in OPEC. Good relations were therefore vital for Iran's reconstruction efforts. The Gulf states maintained their distrust of their bigger neighbour, but were willing to establish better relations. This will be investigated further in the following chapter about the post-war period of the 1990s.

4

THE 1990S

Gulf Crisis, islands dispute and President Khatami

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait signalled a clear change in the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Gulf states. As discussed above, the atmosphere had already improved since Iran's acceptance of the ceasefire. After the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in June 1989, relations could be improved further. Newly elected President Hashemi Rafsanjani concentrated on his policy on economic development which needed better ties with Iran's neighbours and the West. The Rafsanjani administration, which to a great extent consisted of technocrats, realised that the security of the Persian Gulf was the most important issue in Iran's foreign policy. Both the free flow of oil which was Iran's main source of foreign currency earnings and an OPEC policy favourable to Iran, demanded good relations with the Arab littoral states, and a contained Iraq. Rafsanjani was also keen to secure Arab investment and Arab markets for Iranian products. Given the history of subversion and attempts at exporting the revolution during the Iran–Iraq war, however, the Arab rulers were careful in their rapprochement.

The breakthrough for Rafsanjani came with the Gulf Crisis and the second Gulf war. Iran immediately called for Iraq's withdrawal and remained neutral throughout. Tehran even attempted to mediate an end to the Crisis. In response, the Gulf states were more willing to co-operate with Iran and for a while considered including Iran in a regional security agreement. Iran had been calling for such regional co-operation since the Iran–Iraq war. A regional security system without foreign interference had always been Iran's main long-term aim in the region. Since the massive arrival of foreign, in particular American, forces in the area during the Crisis, Iran wanted to see their departure.

This chapter traces the fourth and fifth phases in the relationship between Iran and the Gulf states, as set out in Chapter 1, describing Presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami's drive for better relations with the outside world. It emphasises the clear shift in Iranian foreign policy towards national

interest and away from revolutionary ideology. The first part examines the Gulf Crisis, demonstrating an increase in ties due to Iran's new pragmatic line. This steady improvement was later impaired through the Abu Musa crisis and the American presence in the region which will be studied in the second part of this chapter. The third part discusses the relationship under President Khatami since August 1997. Due to the President's outspoken desire to create a new phase in the relationship and a conducive regional political and economic environment, a sudden and reinforced urgency to improve ties emerged on both sides. It culminated in a fifteen-day visit by former President Rafsanjani and a follow-up visit by Foreign Minister Kharrazi to Saudi Arabia which opened the way to co-operation and more serious attempts at overcoming distrust.

Relations in view of the Gulf Crisis, 1989–1992

Rafsanjani's attempts at confidence-building

In early 1989, Speaker Rafsanjani declared that the Islamic Republic was ready to improve relations with the littoral states of the Persian Gulf in various fields in order to repair the economic damage of the war. As a practical gesture, Iran offered to help clear mines off their coasts.[1]

Before Khomeini's death in June 1989, Iran managed to improve relations with all GCC states except Saudi Arabia. The road to further improvement was open after Khomeini's death and the changes to the Constitution in July, which gave more power to the President. Once Rafsanjani was elected President at the end of July, he put his policy emphasis on economic development and reconstruction. His first five-year plan (1989–1994) depended on attracting foreign capital, increasing oil revenues, importing modern technologies and borrowing $27 billion on the international market. He therefore had to improve relations with the West and Iran's neighbours. By improving relations with the Gulf countries Rafsanjani hoped Iran could regain its leadership in OPEC and thus increase its oil revenues,[2] badly needed for his reforms. A rapprochement with the West would lead to foreign investment. The security of the Persian Gulf, and thus good relations with the littoral states, was also vital for Iran as the waterway was its main economic lifeline. All major Iranian commercial ports, through which more than 90 per cent of Iran's international trade, including oil exports, flow, are situated on the Gulf.[3]

Another major Iranian concern in the aftermath of the Iran–Iraq war was the containment of Iraq and the re-establishment of the territorial *status quo ante bellum*. It was therefore necessary to improve relations with the GCC countries which could put pressure on Saddam Hussein to implement UNSCR 598. He had so far remained on occupied lands, denied the acceptance of the Algiers accord and postponed the exchange of PoWs.

Moreover, Iran feared that Iraq would emerge as the leading power in the Gulf. As expressed by former Deputy Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Larijani: 'Iraq wants to impose itself as gendarme of the region. If that happens, peace does not mean anything.'[4]

President Rafsanjani's policy of good neighbourly relations was thus linked to Iran's national interest and not much different from the Shah's. He did away with revolutionary Islamic slogans in order not to alienate his neighbours and the West but to build confidence and thereby improve the devastated economic situation of his country. This meant a departure from Khomeini's isolationist motto 'neither East, nor West', even if independence was still at the core of the policy. However, Rafsanjani placed more importance on national independence and nationalism than Khomeini's pan-Islamic ideals.

Iran, Saudi Arabia and Oman

In order to realise his aims, the most important step was to improve relations with Saudi Arabia, the most powerful GCC state and OPEC member. The psychological damage of the 1987 hajj incident and the continuing struggle over hajj quotas and demonstrations led to a renewed escalation in the war of words between Tehran and Riyadh in May 1989, and to continued distrust of Iran's intentions in the region.[5] In this situation, Oman emerged as the main mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the GCC in general, taking over in this role from the UAE. Sultan Qabus believed that Iran was truly interested in regional peace and security;[6] and after Khomeini's death, he actively attempted to bring about rapprochement between the Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia. In their first encounter since Saudi Arabia broke off relations with Iran in April 1988, Foreign Ministers Velayati and Prince Saud secretly met in Muscat in May 1989, at the height of tensions.[7] In September, Velayati stated that Iran would welcome moves by the Gulf states and the GCC to improve relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and Oman yet again offered to mediate in the dispute over the hajj, after in a meeting in Jeddah the GCC had opted to improve ties with the Islamic Republic.[8]

Official opinion about improving relations with Saudi Arabia was split inside Iran, and radical factions opposed the government policy. During September, Said Rejai Khorassani, Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee, repeatedly urged the Foreign Ministry to improve relations with Saudi Arabia. He argued that:

> One reason to have ties with other countries is to convey our views to them, to have some effect on their decision-making. There is no reason why Saudi Arabia should be under Iraqi influence alone . . . We have serious problems with Saudi Arabia, including political

> issues following the disaster in Mecca, the hajj quotas and the demonstrations. We must reach agreement. Can we solve these problems by breaking off relations with a country? . . . How long should our people be denied to visit the Holy Places? . . . Saudi Arabia is one of our natural markets. We must have relations with them and the other Persian Gulf countries to preserve the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region.[9]

For these remarks he was strongly criticised in the Majlis and by the Iranian press, including *Kayhan*, *Ittilaʿat* and *Jumhuri-yi Islami*, citing the Mecca incident and Saudi executions of Kuwaiti Shiʿa pilgrims for an explosion in Mecca: 'Whenever I said we have to have better relations with Saudi Arabia, Parliament and the press attacked me badly. It was an emotionalisation of the policy I was proposing.'[10]

The 1987 hajj incident had caused such divisions inside Iran that the government was unable to improve relations, even if it wished to do so. Indeed, when Saudi Arabia sent emergency help and goods for the earthquake victims in Iran in June 1990, the country was attacked for its hajj policies by radicals, such as the Majlis Speaker Mehdi Karrubi.[11]

Iran, Oman and Iraq

Oman was also active in promoting the implementation of UNSCR 598. During 1989 and 1990, various visits by Velayati and the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Yusuf bin Alawi, to Muscat and Tehran took place. Iran, unlike during the war, now welcomed these efforts. Alawi stated that 'nobody could expect Iran to give up its right' of implementation of the Algiers accord and called for a settlement of the ongoing dispute between Iran and Iraq in accordance with Resolution 598. He hoped that the GCC states and the UN Secretary General would help secure an agreement. This was also stressed in a resolution of the December GCC summit in Muscat, when the GCC commissioned Oman officially to mediate between Iran and Iraq. In June 1990, Oman announced its readiness to host a summit meeting between Rafsanjani and Saddam Hussein.[12] The Omani position about the peace talks and Iranian policy was described by the Undersecretary of the GCC, the Omani Saif al-Maskery:

> All Gulf attempts [to bring about peace talks] should concentrate on backing the UN Secretary General's efforts . . . The Iranian government's general approach has changed since Rafsanjani came to power. We always hear positive statements. But it depends on his ability to carry out in practice what he says . . . I think that if Iran wishes to develop relations with the GCC states, it must be convinced of the need to improve relations with Saudi Arabia.[13]

Iran, Kuwait and the other Gulf states

The Iranian government was busy improving relations with its neighbours, hoping to increase economic ties and to gain support in its rift with Saudi Arabia and in its stalled peace talks with Iraq. In January, the UAE Minister of Oil stated that his country's mediation between Iran and Iraq was carried on after the end of hostilities and that the UAE was still ready to conduct mediation. In April 1990, Deputy Foreign Minister Besharati went on a tour to Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Bahrain; and in July, Velayati toured the GCC states to strengthen bilateral ties and regional co-operation, particularly in the fields of oil and regional security.[14]

Iran paid special attention to its relations with Kuwait. After Velayati's July visit, his first since the revolution, he stated that all causes for misunderstanding had been removed. Amongst the steps taken to improve relations was the resumption of direct flights to Kuwait.[15] The Iranian Chargé d'Affaires, Javad Tork Abadi, stated that 'Kuwait discovered that their past policies have not been successful. We are now concerned about the future.' He asserted that Kuwait's economy and its active participation in international organisations, such as the ICO, the NAM, OPEC, the Arab League and the GCC, were important for Iran, meaning that Kuwait could use its influence to convince the other members to put pressure on Iraq.[16] The Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait, Hossein Sadeghi, explained that if a united effort in these international forums were made to convince the Iraqi regime, a durable peace could be achieved.[17] Kuwait and the other Gulf countries generally responded positively to the Iranian overtures. They sent aid for the earthquake victims in June and a *Kuwait Times* editorial before Velayati's July visit was entitled 'Welcome Velayati'.[18] Both sides quickly got over their enmity during the Iran–Iraq war and returned to peace time realpolitik.

Iran and Iraq before the invasion of Kuwait

Despite a certain rapprochement, however, the Gulf states were not particularly successful in mediating between Saddam Hussein and Tehran. They seemed preoccupied with disputes amongst themselves about how to maintain a balance of power and to contain Iraq after the war. The situation in the Gulf began to get tense in mid-July 1990, when Tariq Aziz accused Kuwait of having stolen $2,400 million worth of Iraqi oil and having built military installations on Iraqi territory.[19] There was disagreement within the GCC about how to deal with Iraq. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait disagreed with the other member states, in particular Oman. The division was illustrated by an Omani official:

> What happened on 2 August 1990, could have been avoided or made less dangerous. After the Iran–Iraq war, Iran was weak, the

> GCC stayed weak, the only major power in the Gulf was Iraq. So what could the region do? There were two schools in the Secretariat General of the GCC:
>
> The first: not to give Iraq a chance to play a major role in the region by isolating ourselves from Iraq – Secretary General Abdallah Bishara [Kuwait] supported this view. At that time, Iraq presented a bill to the GCC, saying that Iraq had conducted the war on behalf of the GCC for eight years, and now the GCC should pay the bill. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, reflected by the Secretary-General of the GCC, wanted to ignore Iraq.
>
> The second: we cannot ignore Iraq in the region but at the same time, it is not necessary to give Baghdad a major role or accept Iraq as a member of the GCC. We have to create a mechanism to adopt and contain Iraq, which would be a strong point for us. At the same time, we had several specialised agencies in the Gulf (Arab Gulf Ministers of Health, Education, Information; Gulf University in Bahrain) which included Iraq. Through these agencies we already had a means to make Iraq feel part of the region. This was Undersecretary Saif al-Maskery's position [Oman]; it was rejected by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

He argued that the consequence was the invasion:

> The tensions started in the Gulf, and Iraq presented the bill to solve its economic problems. Unfortunately Saudi Arabia and Kuwait did not want to pay, but tried to isolate Iraq. One million Iraqi soldiers wanted food, the country had economic problems, and its leader put the idea into the minds of the Iraqis that their economic problems were created by Kuwait. Kuwait put a condition: if you want any support, you have to solve the Kuwaiti–Iraqi border issues. The result was the invasion.[20]

A Saudi source presented a different view. According to this, after the Iran–Iraq war the US and Saudi Arabia wanted to contain Iraq, whereas the other GCC members wanted to include it in the regional political system. According to the source, they did not isolate Iraq, which was a mistake as it ended in the invasion of Kuwait.[21]

Whatever the view about the extent of dealings with Iraq, the GCC states seem to agree with hindsight that the invasion could have been avoided one way or another. In the meantime, there were signs – perhaps faint – of Saddam Hussein's plans of invading Kuwait from April 1990 onwards. Whether encouraged by Oman's above-mentioned peace initiatives or not, Saddam Hussein after having been obstinate for almost two years, suddenly, on 21 April 1990, sent a letter to Rafsanjani, proposing a direct meeting in

Saudi Arabia under the auspices of King Fahd in order to attain a 'speedy peace'.[22] He was perhaps then already hoping to free his troops from the Iran–Iraq border and use them for his invasion. Rafsanjani was not interested as long as Iraqi troops were still on Iranian territory. He demanded the strict implementation of UNSCR 598, and rejected meeting in a country with which Iran had no friendly relations.[23] Given the above-quoted Saudi position of wanting to isolate Iraq, Saddam Hussein's suggestion of meeting in Saudi Arabia sounds surprising.

Saddam Hussein, however, in further correspondence kept urging Rafsanjani to meet 'promptly' in order to attain peace 'as quickly as possible'. He agreed to the withdrawal and the final exchange of PoWs, as set out in UNSCR 598, but maintained complete Iraqi sovereignty of the Shatt al-Arab and demanded the deletion of Paragraph 6 of Resolution 598 (which called for an impartial body to establish the aggressor).[24] This was unacceptable to Iran and Rafsanjani did not care to reply. That these letters may have been signs of an impending military attack on Kuwait can probably only be suggested after the invasion. It does not seem to have occurred to the Iranian government at the time. They, as much as the GCC states and the rest of the world, were taken by surprise when Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990, three days after Saddam's last letter.[25]

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Iranian diplomacy before the war

On the evening of 2 August, Tehran's Foreign Ministry instantly issued a statement condemning the invasion and calling for the immediate withdrawal of Iraqi troops, the same demands as included in UN Resolution 660:

> With regard to Iraq's military invasion of Kuwait, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran rejects any form of resorting to force as a solution to regional problems. It considers Iraq's military action against Kuwait contrary to stability and security in the sensitive Persian Gulf region and condemns it.
>
> Although the recent developments are the consequences of past collaboration with the aggressor, which Iran has repeatedly pointed out to the regional countries, Iran considers respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries and noninterference in their internal affairs as an absolute principle of intergovernmental relations. Since Iraq's military action contravenes the above principles, and such actions will have serious effects on national and regional security and global peace and will pave the way for the increased presence of hegemonistic foreign powers in the region, Iran calls for the immediate withdrawal of Iraqi troops to recog-

> nized international borders and for a peaceful solution to the dispute.
>
> Iran declares that, as the largest country in the region with the highest degree of interest in the Persian Gulf region, she cannot remain indifferent to developments that could endanger her national security and regional stability.[26]

As in the last paragraph of the statement, Iran displayed its sense of importance and nationalism throughout the Crisis. On 6 August, UN Resolution 661 imposed economic sanctions on Iraq and on 7 August, US troops were committed to the Gulf, followed by French naval forces the next day. Being aware of its role in the region and seizing the opportunity, Iran immediately began its diplomatic activity. The Iranian policy of active neutrality was threefold: the condemnation of the Iraqi invasion, opposition to foreign forces in the region and the call for regional co-operation in solving the Crisis and establishing stability.

In the first half of August, Velayati went to Oman, Qatar, the UAE and Syria, where he declared that Iran would not accept any change in Kuwaiti borders and that the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait had provided the pretext for the presence of foreign powers in the Persian Gulf. Sultan Qabus called for regional co-operation, including Iran, to establish security in the region.[27] Iran immediately gained from its position. Saddam Hussein, probably in a bid to avoid confrontation with Iran and to free his troops from the border and send them to Kuwait, wrote a final letter to Rafsanjani on 14 August, accepting all of Iran's conditions in implementing Resolution 598, including Paragraph 6, the recognition of the Algiers accord and the exchange of PoWs, starting on 17 August.[28] Rafsanjani accepted. This in addition to meeting Iran's conditions put him in a position to mediate between Iraq and the GCC as well as the international community and to play a more prominent role in the region. Tehran suddenly became a stage for diplomatic visits from Syria, Oman and the Kuwaiti government in exile. Sheikh Sabah, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, on his visit thanked Iran for its stance towards the Iraqi aggression and expressed his desire for greater co-operation between the two countries. He congratulated Iran for having regained the territory lost during the Iran–Iraq war and apologised for Kuwait's attitude then. After Sheikh Nasser, the Kuwaiti Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, visited Iran in early October, he was convinced that Iran completely supported all UN resolutions.[29] The Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States, Muhammad al-Sabah, described the talks: 'During the Gulf Crisis, Kuwait needed to strengthen the alliance against Iraq. Kuwait talked to Iran, mainly about maintaining the sanctions against Iraq. We explained why we had invited the US forces. Iran accepted this.'[30]

According to the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Iran, Kuwait had asked the US, the Soviet Union, the UN and the Arab League, to send troops, but only

the US accepted,[31] followed by the other allied troops. In fact, Rafsanjani, who condemned Iraq, held back fierce attacks on the Western forces, merely pronouncing concern: 'The presence of foreign forces has created a crisis in the region and turned it into a powderkeg. There is some concern over the future.'[32]

The US approached Iran soon after the invasion through Turkey and Switzerland to get support for the allied position. In return, they offered to help obtain World Bank and IMF funding for the reconstruction of Iran. In September, it was announced that the US was to return part of the Iranian assets frozen at the time of the revolution.[33] Iran also re-established diplomatic relations with the UK, regardless of the fact that British ground forces had been committed to the Gulf on 11 September. Rafsanjani did, however, declare that foreign troops stationed in the Gulf were only there because of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and had to leave as soon as Kuwait had been liberated. He warned that if they did not leave, Iran would take measures to force them to.[34] On 8 November, the US forces were doubled.

There was strong criticism inside Iran of Rafsanjani's policies. Some wanted to support Iraq.[35] Ahmad Khomeini pronounced that if the US wished to build up its troops with the idea of dominating the region, Iran's revolutionary troops would counter that device.[36] Ayatollah Musavi Ardabili in a Friday prayer sermon, whilst supporting the condemnation of the invasion, attacked the US and the ruling families of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia:

> Would his withdrawal mean the return of the al-Sabah family? I do not believe that. The al-Sabah family was also a usurper family; they were the lackeys of the United States . . . Are the Muslims all dead? . . . The United States comes and takes over their region, divides their oil, wreaks all kinds of havoc . . . The Muslims just watch . . . The American soldiers have come to Saudi Arabia. Then various kinds of drinks are brought to them from Jordan as gifts – living close to the sanctuary of the Prophet and the House of God, they indulge in drinking . . . The US troops are busy engaged in debauchery, as half-naked dancers are imported to Saudi Arabia for them . . . If the Americans go on to stay a little while longer, then these governments can be overthrown by the hands of their own peoples.[37]

Former Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashami called for a *jihad* against the United States, and so did the Leader of the Islamic Republic, Khamenei.[38] Khamenei's opposition to the US could be interpreted as a weapon to deprive the radicals of reasons to attack the government for not taking a strong enough stance against Washington. It seems more likely at this stage, though, that Khamenei wanted to demonstrate his own hardline

posture to legitimise his position as spiritual Leader in front of the radical followers of the late Khomeini.

The Rafsanjani administration won the October elections for the Assembly of Experts, which coincided with higher oil revenues as a result of the Crisis. The government had been able to accelerate the pace of economic reforms and had benefited from its improved international relations as mentioned above. Rafsanjani was thus strengthened and able to silence the radical wing.[39]

The Iranian government continued its diplomacy to bring about an end to the Crisis. The Foreign Ministers and other politicians of Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, the UAE and Syria visited Tehran, and Velayati and other Iranian diplomats frequented the Gulf capitals. They did not only discuss the Crisis but also bilateral relations and economic co-operation.[40] At the end of October, even the Saudi Deputy Foreign Minister went to Iran, discussing the Crisis, regional security and the hajj.[41] According to former Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee, Rejai Khorassani, however, Saudi–Iranian consultation remained at a minimum:

> I do not think that there was much private consultation between Iran and Saudi Arabia because Saudi Arabia relied on the US. There might also have been the Saudi misconception that Saddam Hussein had consulted us before invading because it would have been understandable for us wanting to take revenge [after the war and 1987].[42]

At the UN General Assembly in New York at the end of September, Velayati met with all six GCC Foreign Ministers and the Secretary General of the GCC, Abdallah Bishara. In his meeting with Prince Saud, Velayati again stressed that the region should co-operate to ensure regional security without the presence of foreign troops and to liberate Kuwait, and he also mentioned the hajj. Prince Saud declared that Saudi Arabia was ready to discuss normalisation of diplomatic ties.[43] The Director General of the Persian Gulf Department of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Hossein Sadeghi, described the meeting and its consequences in a slightly different light:

> In the meeting at the UN in September 1990, we offered them our help in solving the Crisis and in securing the region, but after Kuwait was freed we saw that they did not want our support. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the others in the meeting said they would help us reconstructing our economy, but after Kuwait was liberated they forgot.[44]

As well as talking to the GCC, Tehran supported the Soviet peace initiative, since Moscow also opposed the massing of Western military forces in

the Persian Gulf. More directly, Iran negotiated with Iraq, calling for its immediate withdrawal from Kuwait. In September, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz visited Rafsanjani for the first time since the revolution, discussing bilateral relations and the Gulf Crisis, and Velayati went to Baghdad in November.[45]

On 29 November, the UN issued Resolution 678 calling for Iraqi withdrawal before 15 January 1991, and authorising all necessary means to implement Resolution 660. Velayati again supported the UN call for liberating Kuwait, but opposed the possible use of force by the US. In mid-December, Velayati visited Qatar, Oman, the UAE and Sweden, and Rafsanjani received the Algerian and Sudanese leaders in a bid to prevent the outbreak of war.[46]

Iranian diplomatic efforts led the GCC, at their summit in Doha on 22 to 24 December, to seek closer ties with Iran, in order to counter the military threat from Iraq. Iran was also discussed as a possible participant in a wider regional security framework. The Qatari Foreign Minister held that Iran should be included in a regional security arrangement 'by virtue of its geographical location', but Saudi Arabia and Kuwait felt such thinking was premature. Nevertheless, Iran welcomed the positive position.[47] Reportedly, for the first time an Iranian representative was invited to the summit.[48]

Until the very last moment, Iran attempted to prevent the outbreak of fighting. Rafsanjani realised that in case of war Iran could not afford to be drawn into the hostilities, neither economically nor militarily. At the beginning of January, Foreign Minister Velayati met his Turkish and Pakistani counterparts and called for an emergency summit of the ICO to find a peaceful solution to the Crisis. He also received a member of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council, Sa'doun Hammadi, in Tehran and stressed that whilst opposing the presence of alien forces, the Islamic Republic was against both territorial ambition and military action.[49] He urged Iraq to withdraw by the UN deadline to avoid war.

Velayati declared that chances of a peaceful settlement outweighed the prospects for war. He added that Iran was the 'pivot of regional security' and that no developments could take place in the region without taking into account Iran's role. He did, however, state that: 'Iran will remain neutral in case a war breaks out, and will not enter the war in favour of either side', and that if the parties to the crisis decided to start shooting, Iran would not allow them the use of its land, sea or air space.[50]

Iranian diplomacy during Desert Storm

Iraq did not withdraw by the UN deadline, and the allied military campaign Desert Storm began shortly before midnight GMT on 16 January. Contrary to Velayati's above-mentioned statement, Abdul Mohsen Jamal, a member of Kuwait's National Assembly, recounted:

> During the invasion, the Iranian policy was very wise. They allowed allied ships and airplanes to use their space, but said that the foreign forces had to leave after the end of the war. We appreciate this very important support at that time.[51]

Iran's main initiative, however, was diplomatic. On 17 January, the Supreme National Security Council chaired by President Rafsanjani, and members of the Majlis issued a statement describing the shelling of Iraqi Muslims by the Western alliance as 'painful', and calling for an immediate ceasefire and the swift departure of the foreign forces from the region.[52] Rafsanjani stated:

> The Persian Gulf region, which after the end of the Iraqi war wanted to see security and stability, has now reached the bottom of insecurity and bloodshed. The military forces, which had imposed themselves on the region during the last war, have now, in order to continue their domination of the region, used the unjustified aggression of Iraq against Kuwait as a pretext for their presence in the region.[53]

Velayati underlined Iran's belief that the crisis should be solved only by the regional countries:

> The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that the Persian Gulf belongs to the littoral states alone. The Islamic Republic of Iran, which is interested in the protection of international peace, is asking for the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces from Kuwait and for the withdrawal of the foreign forces from the Persian Gulf. Common sense shows that the security of the Persian Gulf can only be guaranteed in a safe manner through the co-operation of the littoral states.[54]

Iran emphasised its neutrality throughout the war, and declared its commitment to Iraq's territorial integrity and its opposition to any geographical change. Tehran was keen to find an 'Islamic solution' to the Crisis. It was working towards co-operation between Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, the GCC, the ICO and the Arab League.[55] Tehran again saw a flurry of visits by GCC officials, including the Foreign Ministers of Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar.

At the same time, Rafsanjani came under growing pressure by the radicals. Mohtashami and Khalkhali called for a *jihad* against the United States, but Rafsanjani warned them against their denunciation of the US, describing the suggestion of allying Iran with Iraq as 'suicide', since the US military buildup could be turned against Iran.[56]

On 27 January, Iran announced that twelve Iraqi aircraft had been flown to Iran. By the end of January, the number reached more than 100, which

led to US fears that Iran's neutrality was under strain. But the Supreme National Security Council assured the allies of Iran's neutrality unless Iran's national security was endangered.[57] Without informing Tehran, Saddam Hussein had flown the aircraft to Iran in order to save them from allied attack. Iran has not since returned them and kept them as part of its war reparations. Davoud Bavand of Imam Sadeq University expressed the Iranian attitude during the war with regards to Iraq and the planes:

> Had Iraq kept Kuwait, it would have posed a major problem for Iran. Iraq would have owned the main oil fields and would have had a dominant position in the Persian Gulf. There were three points of view in the Iranian administration: firstly, the radical view to support Iraq against the US, secondly, to support UN and US involvement because it served Iran's interests, and thirdly, to remain neutral. The third view was accepted, but basically the majority of Iranians were happy about the punishment of Iraq and its expulsion from Kuwait.
>
> The best policy at the time was to support the UN position. Iran could raise the question of compensation for the Iran–Iraq war, and when the Iraqi fighter planes came to Iran, they seized them as war reparation. Giving these planes back would have violated the UN resolution and it would also have strengthened Iraq militarily against Iran.
>
> But there was no large active Iranian involvement in ending the Crisis; and Iran had no benefits from its efforts.[58]

The arrival of the planes led to an intensification of Iran's diplomatic efforts to bring about a ceasefire. Various talks included the Kuwaiti government in exile, Iraq, Algeria, Yemen, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Turkey and France.[59] The Speaker of the Majlis, Mehdi Karrubi, proposed a five-point plan suggesting an Islamic solution to the Crisis.[60] On 4 February, Rafsanjani, having sent 'an idea' for peace to Saddam Hussein, announced that he was prepared to mediate between the US and Iraq. This was rejected by both, but welcomed by Perez de Cuellar and the Soviet Union.[61] Despite the rejection of Rafsanjani's offer, Saddam Hussein responded on 15 February by offering a conditional withdrawal. This was not accepted by the allies.

With the dismissal of the Iranian initiative, attention focused on the Soviet Union, which had been in close contact with Tehran. Both hoped to be able to prevent a ground war, and from the beginning, Iran supported Gorbachev's peace plan. Iraqi foreign Minister Tariq Aziz after his visit to Moscow on 18 February, met with Velayati in Iran on his way to Baghdad. Velayati expressed his optimism that Iraq would withdraw unconditionally.[62] He kept campaigning for a regional, political solution to the Crisis when he

went on a tour of Europe, including Bonn, Paris, Rome and Moscow.[63] But neither Moscow nor Tehran could prevent the land war from beginning on 24 February. They had no influence over the allied attack, until Washington decided to halt the fighting on 28 February, having expelled the Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

Most Western analysts hailed Iran as the regional powerbroker, but Barr contended that 'the absence of any meaningful involvement of the United States, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in Iran's diplomatic efforts . . . reduced the chances of an Iranian diplomatic success to a minimum'.[64] Nevertheless, he thought that Iran was a major diplomatic player. Iranian specialists on the other hand, saw their government's role as less important. Like the above-cited Bavand, Said Hajjarian of the Center for Strategic Studies asserted this view:

> During the invasion of Kuwait, we tried to mediate between Iraq and Kuwait. But Iraq preferred the Soviet Union and tried to bypass us. We could not do anything. There was mistrust between us and the Iraqi regime, but the only way for them to the Soviet Union was to go from Kermanshah airport. Sometimes, Tariq Aziz unofficially met some Iranian ministers or officials, but it was not an active mediating role. Even the Soviet Union could not do anything because the US had the upper hand.
>
> We could use the situation for propaganda purposes which had some benefits for us. We could show that Iran was a secure place and that we tried to solve regional conflicts and wanted to establish secure relationships with the Persian Gulf states. During the invasion, many members of the Kuwaiti elite, including the royal family, fled to Iran.[65]

Iran's humanitarian support

In addition to its diplomatic efforts, Iran also gave humanitarian help to the victims of the conflict. Abiding by all UN resolutions and sanctions, and in accordance with Resolution 666, which allowed humanitarian foodstuff and medical supplies into Iraq and Kuwait, with UN assistance Iran sent truckloads of food and medicine to Iraq, helping the Muslim population.[66] In addition, thousands of Kuwaiti refugees were given shelter in Iran. Ahmad al-Jassim of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed Kuwait's gratitude: 'Iran was against the Kuwaiti invasion and they gave our citizens shelter – we won't forget. Iran is a Muslim country like us, a neighbour. We want Iran to be strong and we will continue to co-operate.'[67] Adnan Abdul Samad, a Member of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, added:

> From the beginning of the revolution until the invasion there was *tanafur* (mutual aversion), especially because of the Gulf countries'

> position during the war. After the invasion everything changed. The Iranian action during the invasion was politically very wise. Relations between Iran and the Gulf were promoted. The Gulf now discovered that the danger did not come from Iran but from Iraq. Iran benefited from both sides, the Gulf and Iraq.
>
> The majority of Shi'a and Kuwaitis of Iranian descent stayed in Kuwait and fought the Iraqis. The people who went to Iran during the invasion were Sunni Kuwaitis. The West had tried to show that the Shi'a and the Kuwaitis of Iranian descent were pro-Iranian; this view tumbled after the invasion.[68]

Abdul Mohsen Jamal, another Member of the National Assembly explained: 'During the occupation, more than 100,000 Kuwaitis went to Iran. The Iranian Embassy in Kuwait gave them false passports so they could get to Iran past the Iraqis; some of them were from the Al Sabah family.'[69]

In addition, Iran attempted to help the Gulf states whose trade was suffering from the war. Tehran offered to store merchandise of local and foreign merchants as safe custody in Chah Bahar, Kish island and other ports outside the potential war zone.[70]

Iran's relations with the Gulf states after the Gulf Crisis

The Iranian stance of neutrality and the efforts to bring about a solution to the Gulf Crisis lifted Iran out of its international isolation. For a short while it looked as though Iran had taken up a leading role in Persian Gulf affairs. In addition to regaining its lost territory from Iraq and an increase in oil revenues, it was able to re-establish diplomatic relations with many Arab and Western countries. In December 1991, Perez de Cuellar openly named Iraq as the aggressor in the Iran–Iraq war. Iran certainly improved its position amongst its Gulf neighbours. GCC co-existence with Iran was now friendlier, although the fact that the radical factions in Iran had criticised the Saudi and Kuwaiti ruling families during the Crisis and had called for *jihad* against the US, let Arab distrust remain.

On a bilateral level, Iran was able to improve its relations with all six states. Building on the already established good relationship with Oman, that country remained Iran's main mediator and supporter in the GCC. In March 1991, Iran and Saudi Arabia restored full diplomatic ties after a meeting in Muscat between Velayati and Prince Saud.[71] H.H. Sayyid Haitham, Secretary General of the Omani Foreign Ministry, stated:

> Iran tried to improve relations with the Gulf and the former Soviet Union as much as possible. It was a victory for the pragmatists. It has been Oman's policy to help the pragmatists. If you accuse them, they will not answer, but if you have good relations, it is easier for

> us to influence them. We can ask them: is it true what they say, that you are arming, supporting terrorists?[72]

The Iranian government appreciated the Omani position, as expressed by Abbas Haghighat of IPIS:

> Our relationship with Oman was better than with the other countries in the region. Nowadays, it is the best. We have different co-operation agreements, for instance in trade. After the Gulf Crisis we have been holding joint military manoeuvres; the Iranian Defense Minister visits Oman almost every year. Omani mediation has always been welcomed by Iran, the Foreign Ministers have a good relationship.[73]

Due to Iran's direct help to Kuwaiti citizens during the Gulf Crisis, Iran further developed its links with Kuwait which had already been improving since the end of the Iran–Iraq war. Iran offered aid and technical services to help Kuwait recover from the occupation, and in May, National Iranian Oil Company experts began to help cap the burning oil wells set ablaze by Saddam Hussein. Tehran further offered to supply Kuwait with crude oil whilst the emirate repaired its oil production facilities.[74] In November, Tehran declared that it would return six Kuwaiti airplanes which the Iraqi regime had flown to Iran during the invasion.[75] The Kuwaiti Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, Sulaiman Majed al-Shaheen, declared that Kuwait after the Crisis had a better relationship with Iran than the other GCC countries:

> Iranian ministers and assistant undersecretaries of foreign affairs come to Kuwait about once a month; Kuwaiti officials go there less. Kuwait now helps Iraqi refugees who fled from Saddam Hussein to Iran. Iran is a big neighbour, we try to have good relations.[76]

The Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US, Muhammad al-Sabah, explained that Kuwait's relationship with Iran after the Crisis was 'correct, not overly warm, and not hostile. It is objective and goal-driven, the aim is to contain Iraq'.[77] MP Abdul Mohsen Jamal added that, apart from many commercial and cultural links, Iran and Kuwait co-operated in international forums such as the UN, the ICO or the International Parliamentary Union, in particular on Bosnia, Afghanistan, Chechenia, the Lebanon and the Palestine issue.[78] Former GCC Secretary General Abdallah Bishara gave a more sceptical view of the relations:

> Relations became better after Khomeini's death. There was more pragmatism. During the invasion, Iran took a very forceful position against Iraq and was instrumental. Despite courting the Iraqi

> government, they refused to relax their restrictive measures against Iraq. After the invasion, relations between the GCC and Iran improved, but they are still strained by suspicion and scepticism. Relations with Kuwait improved, as it realised how much influence Iran has on the future Iraqi situation – Iran is the base of Iraqi opposition and refugees.[79]

This scepticism within Kuwait and the Gulf states in general was criticised by two Kuwait University professors. Abdallah Shayji held that the countries of the region were ignorant of Iran, an example being that Kuwait University did not offer any courses on Iran. This confirmed that the Gulf thought Iran had a lesser role to play. Saif Abbas called to forget the past ten years during which Iran was suffering from problems and contended:

> We need to ask how many Iranian soldiers in the past 75 years crossed the desert on their way to the Gulf countries . . . The problems between Iran and Kuwait don't exceed any problems between other neighbouring countries, such as for example the US and Mexico.[80]

Iran also improved relations with Qatar, the UAE and Bahrain, and various ministerial delegations tried to expand co-operation in different fields. One such attempt was Deputy Foreign Minister Besharati's tour in November 1991. The visits were reciprocated, for instance by the Crown Prince of Qatar in November and the UAE Minister of Defence in February 1992.[81]

Iran finally managed to re-establish diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia in March 1991, and to increase co-operation to a limited degree. Despite the fact that the radical elements in Iran, like Mohtashami, still criticised the forging of ties,[82] Velayati and Prince Saud in their meeting in Muscat agreed on a quota of 100,000 Iranian pilgrims, which opened the way for the first Iranian participation in the pilgrimage since 1987. They also agreed to put more political pressure on Saddam Hussein and to ask rival Iraqi opposition groups financed and supported by Iran and Saudi Arabia respectively to co-ordinate their actions against the Iraqi regime.[83] In April, Velayati went to Saudi Arabia where he met King Fahd who welcomed economic co-operation and declared that Iran and Saudi Arabia played a key role in Asia, the Middle East and the Gulf. Velayati stated that the two countries had decided to maintain close co-operation in ensuring regional security.[84] In June, Prince Saud visited Tehran and invited President Rafsanjani to Riyadh. Rafsanjani maintained that political and economic co-operation between the two countries would have 'important consequences for the whole Islamic umma'. Prince Saud also met with Sayyid Bakr al-Hakim, the Head of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq based in Iran, and

discussed the situation in Afghanistan with Velayati.[85] In the same month, Velayati went to Saudi Arabia to perform the hajj. With Prince Saud, he discussed further the expansion of relations with the GCC and the situation of the Muslims in southern Iraq. They also decided to raise their ties to ambassadorial level. The series of meetings was continued in December when Prince Saud yet again went to Tehran, and Rafsanjani met with Crown Prince Abdallah at the ICO summit in Dakar.[86]

This does not signify that they were agreeing, it only means they were talking. They had differences *inter alia* about Afghanistan, where they supported opposing factions, and the Palestinian–Israeli peace process, especially after the Madrid conference in October 1991, which was tolerated by Riyadh but contested by Tehran. The Palestine issue, however, was not a significant concern of the relationship. Bilateral problems were more important than third party conflicts.

Regional security

The positive stance of the Gulf states towards Iran during the Crisis, and the talk about including Iran in future regional security agreements during the GCC summit in Doha, had raised Iran's hopes of becoming an active part of Persian Gulf security. These hopes, however, were soon dampened, as most of the GCC states in fact preferred the permanent presence of foreign forces.

Even before the end of hostilities, GCC, Syrian and Egyptian representatives met in Cairo in mid-February 1991, and considered the establishment of a 'body for co-operation and co-ordination amongst themselves in the economic, political and security fields'.[87] In March, the 'six-plus-two' signed the Damascus Declaration under which Syrian and Egyptian troops were to be stationed in the Gulf in return for $10 billion.[88] Cairo opposed an Iranian role and insisted that the main movers in post-war security should be Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt.[89] Syrian President Asad, however, assured Velayati that Iran would have a significant role in a post-war Gulf security order and even President Bush, seeking limited rapprochement with Tehran, stated that Iran 'as a big country' should not be forever treated as an enemy by the countries in the region.[90] Sultan Qabus, who headed the GCC committee for regional security arrangements, explained to Velayati that he hoped to create a collective security system in the first phase amongst the GCC members, and later in principle amongst all the Gulf countries. He stated that Egypt and Syria could not act as guardians of the GCC.[91]

Sultan Qabus was only partly right. The Damascus Declaration was soon dead, and in May, Egypt began to withdraw its troops from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The GCC, instead of relying on its own forces and wary of Iranian motives, preferred Western protection. Saif Abbas of Kuwait University commented that: 'The sad thing about Iranian foreign policy is

that they were not able to benefit from their good stand during the Iraqi invasion. The problem lies in the rhetoric of the mullahs.'[92]

Iran's UN representative, Kamal Kharrazi, demanded the withdrawal of foreign forces and the implementation of Paragraph 8 of Resolution 598, which called for maintaining regional security by the littoral states, whilst Ayatollah Khamenei insulted the US and criticised the Gulf leaders for having invited the foreigners.[93] As stated by Said Hajjarian, the fact that the GCC invited the US to the region created major problems for Iran.[94] Muhammad Javad Larijani, Deputy Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee, pronounced that:

> After the invasion of Kuwait, there has been a new turn in the politics of the region. The Arab flank of the Persian Gulf is militarily conquered by the US. Besides their military presence, the United States is involved in their day-to-day affairs. The whole area is unsettled because of the Iraqi regime. The US had an excuse to stay.[95]

In September 1991, Kuwait and the United States signed a ten-year defence co-operation agreement which covered joint exercises, the use of Kuwaiti ports by US forces and the placement of US military hardware in the emirate. In order to allay Iranian fears, Kuwait declared before signing that no one could ignore Iran's role in any future security arrangement. Iran condemned the agreement. At the same time, it does not seem to have wanted to spoil its otherwise improving relations with the GCC states over the US. Velayati stated that Iran was ready to broaden its relations with Kuwait in all domains, and Iran offered to sign a non-aggression pact with the GCC.[96]

There was nothing Iran could do against the Western presence but protest and keep calling for regional arrangements. The scenario repeated itself when Kuwait signed a similar defence agreement with Britain in February 1992. The Kuwaiti Defence Minister declared that Iran could not be ignored in any regional security arrangement, but maintained that security should not only be conceived in its military but also its 'economic, social and humanitarian dimension'.[97] Deputy Foreign Minister Besharati asserted that Iran was not opposed to the fact that the Gulf countries bought arms from the West and that Western military advisors were present in these countries. He stated that Iran did not interfere in the internal affairs of other nations and their military co-operation with other countries.[98] This was confirmed by Abbas Haghighat of IPIS when discussing Oman: 'Oman's ties with the US do not hurt us. What hurts us is the US domination of this region. We do not say whoever deals with the US is bad.'[99]

Oman, in fact, unlike Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, seriously envisaged a Persian Gulf regional security arrangement which included Iran, perhaps as a counterweight to Saudi Arabia. In March 1992, Foreign Minister Alawi

on a visit to Tehran raised the possibility of Iran having a consultative role in the formation of future regional security arrangements.[100]

The 'de-Arabisation' of Iranian foreign policy

The deterioration of Iran's relationship with the Gulf Arabs in 1992 coincided with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. This led to a more diversified Iranian foreign policy. According to Ramazani, 'neither East nor West' was increasingly overshadowed by what he calls 'both North and South'.[101] This was mainly based on Iranian national interest. Tehran's ideas of regional security and economic co-operation now included both the Persian Gulf and the former Soviet Muslim republics, Iran's new hinterland. In the North, for instance in the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Tajikistan, Iran took on the role of a regional mediator for peace, as it was concerned about security on its borders. It also sought to develop an active role for the Economic Co-operation Organisation.

The disintegration of the Eastern bloc further led to an enhanced Iranian role in the international arena. Iran attempted to extend its influence in Afghanistan. In the war in Bosnia, Iran could increase its international influence by abiding by its ideological principle of helping oppressed Muslims everywhere. As stated by Velayati at the United Nations General Assembly in 1992:

> We are also concerned with the situation of Muslims being massacred by the Serbs in Bosnia. We expect the UN Security Council to protect the rights of the Muslims and lift the arms embargo so that the Muslims can protect themselves ... We were also concerned about the situation in Afghanistan, but we are pleased to see that the Mujahidin have triumphed and have tried to create an Islamic government.[102]

If the emphasis of Iranian foreign policy lay still on the Persian Gulf due to its strategic importance mainly because of oil, policy makers increasingly thought that Iran was wasting its time trying to make its Arab neighbours understand they should turn away the Americans. Iran should not completely abandon the Persian Gulf, but it should stress relations with India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia and China, where it would find more sympathy.[103] Iran particularly increased its links with Central Asia, mainly in the economic field. It discussed oil and pipeline deals and in May 1996 opened a rail link between the Iranian city of Mashad, the border town of Sarakhs and Tedzhen in Turkmenistan.[104]

The pragmatic principle of a 'de-Arabisation of Iranian foreign policy' was developed after the second Gulf war, in response to US Persian Gulf policy and the Arab–Israeli peace process which began in October 1991. This idea

was held by some intellectuals, and by technocrats in the Foreign Ministry. President Rafsanjani was probably in favour of it. Leader Khamenei, on the other hand, supported an opposing trend within the Iranian administration which called for a stronger Arabisation of Iranian foreign policy. According to Davoud Bavand of Imam Sadeq University, this trend was mainly promoted by the *mufawidis*, those Iraqis of Iranian descent who were expelled by Saddam Hussein during the Iran–Iraq war, and by the conservative *hujjatiyyun*. These groups were in favour of a clearly Arab-focused and Islamic foreign policy.[105] The Rafsanjani government tried to find a balance between the two directions and presented Iran as an economic bridge between the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

The Iranian government under President Rafsanjani managed to improve the general atmosphere and its relations with the Gulf countries during and after the Gulf Crisis. There was even talk of including Iran in regional security arrangements. But the Gulf rulers were still wary of Iranian domination and possible effects of the revolution on their countries. These factors turned the Gulf states to the West for military support. The increased American military presence in the region and the Clinton administration's perception of a threat from Iran led to increased pressure on the Gulf states to exclude Iran from regional co-operation and to be cautious in their rapprochement with Tehran.

The Iranian policy of seeking inclusion into a regional security system after the Gulf Crisis was further undermined by active Egyptian diplomacy in the Persian Gulf. President Mubarak wanted to secure a role for the Egyptian military in the Gulf through the Damascus Declaration, an attempt which eventually failed. He was further keen on gaining an economic foothold in the region and kept reminding the Gulf rulers of the potential Iranian threat.

Furthermore, the support of the Gulf states for the Palestinian–Israeli peace process and their economic rapprochement with Israel before the Netanyahu government, led to a shift in their major threat perception and enmity away from Israel to concentrate on Iran which opposed the peace process. In turn, this shift also brought the Gulf states more clearly into the Western economic and security system and left Iran isolated.

It has thus been a combination of factors which undermined Rafsanjani's attempts at rapprochement with the Gulf states despite moderation of Iranian foreign policy since the Gulf Crisis. This led to a certain extent of de-Arabisation in his policy. The ensuing islands dispute was just one more issue that impaired his efforts, as will be seen in the following section.

The Abu Musa crisis and its impact on Iranian–Gulf relations

The steadily improving atmosphere in the relations between the Islamic Republic and its Persian Gulf neighbours was suddenly tainted in 1992, when a crisis broke out over three small but strategically important islands overlooking the Straits of Hormuz. A barrage of accusations, claims and counterclaims between Iran and the UAE over the ownership of Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunb began between the two sides of the Gulf, after Iran expelled and denied entry to non-UAE citizens working on the jointly administered Abu Musa island in April and August 1992. The conflict over the islands had been laying dormant since 1971, when the British left the Persian Gulf. Reports of what actually happened in these two incidents as well as historical claims about ownership of the islands are highly contradictory. This section will describe the various interpretations by Iranians, Arabs and the Western media. It will attempt to lay open what happened in 1992 and then briefly outline the historical dispute. The importance of the matter for the Iranian–Gulf states relationship will be discussed in the final section. It will be shown that whilst the dispute has been kept alive as an issue of contention between the UAE, the GCC, the wider Arab world on the one hand and Iran on the other, both sides have tried to isolate it from their general relationship. It strengthened the Gulf states' reliance on security agreements with outside powers, particularly the US, as they feared Iranian expansionism to a greater or lesser degree. But notwithstanding the conflict, the relationship improved further in the economic and political fields. Both sides clearly tried to avoid tension in the region and seemed to wish the islands dispute had never flared up.

The events of 1992

The growing American presence in the region since the Gulf Crisis caused the Islamic Republic to pay more attention to the security of its strategically important territories in the Persian Gulf. In February 1992, President Rafsanjani went on a tour of Iranian islands. He linked strategic importance to his post-war policy of economic development in an attempt to broaden the presence of Iranian citizens in this area. When he visited the Iranian side of Abu Musa island, he ordered the opening up of a slaughter house and an industrial fishing fleet and stated: 'Because of its special location the island is of high importance to us and in our view you people here are the guardsmen of a sensitive point of the country.'[106]

Tehran, alarmed by the bilateral security agreements the Gulf states had been signing with outside powers, had been worried for a while that the UAE might plan to take over the island by sending increasing numbers of non-UAE nationals from other Arab and Asian countries there. When the Shah had built a port on Iran's side in the mid-1970s, he allowed Sharjah,

which had no deep water facilities, to use it. This exposed Sharjah's residents and visitors to Iranian entry procedures.[107] According to Richard Schofield, Iran had complained already in 1983 that there were too many foreigners on jointly administered Abu Musa.[108] Since then, in response to the growing visits by non-Sharjah nationals to the island, Iranian patrols into the southern side under Sharjah's administration became increasingly regular. In 1989, Iran agreed that the patrols would not enter the Arab village. After the Iran–Iraq war, Iran built a runway which encroached on Sharjah's part of the island. When in late 1991 or early 1992, Iran apparently arrested a Dutch sailor 'armed' with a flaregun in the territorial waters of Abu Musa, Iran suggested that it should issue security passes to non-Sharjah nationals. The UAE refused to agree to that. These circumstances led to the two incidents which suddenly blew the issue of territoriality between Iran and the Gulf states out of all proportions. There had otherwise been no problems since 1971, when Iran and Sharjah signed an agreement about joint administration of Abu Musa and Iran retook the Tunb islands from Ras al-Khaimah.[109] When Saddam Hussein, shortly before he started the Iran–Iraq war, called on Iran to return Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb to the Arabs, the UAE Foreign Minister joined him in his call, but the Gulf states avoided turning the issue into a conflict.

Accounts of what happened exactly in either case are contradictory. The first incident occurred on or around 15 April 1992. Some media sources claimed that the Iranian forces stationed on the northern Iranian side, moved into the UAE side to take control of or close down its school, police station and desalination plant; this was denied by Iran. Other reports suggested that Indian and Arab expatriate workers from non-UAE countries had been expelled.[110] The UAE complained to the GCC that its resident nationals had been evicted and that the island had been taken over completely and annexed by Iran. These allegations were denied by Tehran, and according to Richard Schofield, Iran never annexed the Arab side of Abu Musa.[111] Subsequent reports suggested that the expulsion was indirect, as the Iranian authorities deported the expatriate workers who ran the island's basic services, after they refused to exchange their UAE residency papers for Iranian ones. The shutdown of essential utilities apparently prompted many islanders to leave.[112] Kamal Kharrazi asserted that the UAE nationals on the island had no problems, but that foreigners had no right to stay there.[113] It was further reported that after the expulsions, Tehran declared Abu Musa a full province of Iran, rather than a district of the mainland province of Bandar Abbas, as it had been previously.[114]

Whatever exactly happened, the Iranian moves received little notice until Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Emirates directed their official press to give it attention.[115] Nevertheless, the UAE reacted in a low key manner at a time when the Gulf states were hoping to improve relations with Iran and were trying not to upset the Iranian pragmatists. Oman yet again offered to

mediate in the issue. Foreign Minister Velayati played down the incident as 'baseless rumours' and asserted that Iran did not want to play the superpower in the region but live with the smaller states on the basis of mutual respect.[116] Neither side at this point wanted to aggravate the situation, and when the UAE Foreign Minister went to Tehran to discuss the issue the following week, he called for the increasing expansion of co-operation between the two countries. Iranian officials declared that Iran was abiding by the 1971 agreement, and informed Sharjah that non-UAE citizens wishing to travel to Abu Musa should obtain an entry card from the Iranian authorities.[117] Even if the UAE did not want to escalate the problem, the wider Arab press reported signs of a renewed Iranian threat, as expressed by Raghid al-Solh in al-Hayat:

> The military manoeuvres together with the steps Tehran took on the island of Abu Musa were striking for the strong tendency in Tehran to wave the stick at the faces of the others and once again wear the uniform of the policeman in the Gulf.[118]

The issue had become one of clashing nationalisms, and, as stated by Mahmood Sariolghalam of the National University, the Iranian approach to the islands was very nationalistic, as opposed to the relationship with Saudi Arabia, for example, which was greatly influenced by ideology.[119] Tehran maintained that Abu Musa was an integral part of Iran, whereas the UAE government – which decided to act on behalf of Sharjah shortly after the incident – and the Arab and Western press claimed Abu Musa and the nearby Tunbs as belonging to the UAE and occupied by Iran since 1971.[120]

Whilst this first incident was played down, it probably contributed to the fact that a second dispute following shortly afterwards in August led to a long drawn out regional problem and bad feelings on both sides. In neither case was it quite clear whether the Iranian actions were directed from Tehran or resulted from local initiatives.[121] It is likely that both incidents were local initiatives to begin with, which had to be taken over by the Iranian government once the international media got involved. It was reported that Velayati ascribed the August dispute over Abu Musa to the misjudgements of junior Iranian officials and that Iran's local naval commander was sacked, after a senior investigating team from the Iranian Foreign Ministry visited the island in September 1992 to review both incidents.[122] This would confirm the theory of local initiatives. It is very probable that an officer on Abu Musa acted independently and Tehran had to deal with the consequences, given that the moves came at the time of increased rapprochement and were entirely counterproductive to Iran's new pragmatic diplomacy. It is also possible that the problem was a result of the domestic power struggle in Iran, which led to orders given by a faction differing with the President about foreign policy priorities.

On 22 August 1992, the Iranian authorities on Abu Musa turned away 104 people, denying entry to their boat, the *Khatir*, and demanding that the foreigners obtain visitors' or resident permits from Iran. This was unacceptable to Sharjah which held that Abu Musa was UAE territory. The ship spent three days at sea trying to enter the island, before it returned to Sharjah. According to a UAE officer, it was the first time that the Iranians took such action. The passengers included about ten UAE nationals, the rest were mainly Egyptians and some Palestinians, Syrians and Jordanians, mostly teachers and their families who had apparently lived on the island for several years. The result was that most resident women and children of the 700 inhabitants of the Sharjah side also left the island as the schools were kept closed.[123] Like the question of whether Iran wanted to allow only Sharjah or all UAE nationals to reside on the island, it is never quite clear from the reports, if the 700 inhabitants were Sharjah and UAE nationals or, as is more likely, included foreign workers as well.

It was yet again wrongly reported that Iran had annexed Abu Musa.[124] After the incident, Kamal Kharrazi made clear that residents of the UAE lived on Abu Musa on the basis of the 1971 agreement, and that Iran was responsible for the security of the whole island.[125] Speculations as to why Iran took this drastic action – if it was not a local initiative – varied. One diplomat in the Gulf thought that Iran wanted to boost its prestige in the area by tightening its grip on the Straits, and that Iran might be engaged in military projects on Abu Musa which it did not want foreigners to know about. Iranian diplomatic sources stated that Iran wanted to counter the growing US influence in the region after military agreements were signed with Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. The Iranian move therefore was to preclude the UAE from providing any facilities to the US on the island.[126] This intent was denied by Sheikh Zayed, the President of the UAE,[127] but also suspected by Jalil Roshandel of IPIS: 'The islands are strategically important. We cannot have a US missile site next door.'[128]

Muhammad Ali Emami of IPIS explained the incident in light of the former argument of bringing in too many foreigners:

> The beginning of the misunderstanding – not conflict – was that the UAE sent other Arabs from Egypt to Abu Musa. This changed the composition of the population on the island. It is a small island which cannot sustain many people from different Arab countries.[129]

The second incident received full media coverage in the Arab world and the West and started a long dispute with Iran. The press reported that Iran had begun to build a huge military airfield on the island, in addition to a naval and air observation station, and was planning to set up bases for Silkworm missiles. It was also believed that Iran would use Abu Musa as a base for three submarines which it had obtained recently from Russia.

The military use went back to the Iran–Iraq war, when Iran had stationed surface-to-air missiles and used the island as a base for speedboat attacks on shipping and oil installations.[130] It was, however, stipulated in the 1971 MOU that Iran would station its military on the island, and a garrison had been present ever since. Given the strategic position of the island, it is reasonable to believe that Iran indeed intended to use Abu Musa for military surveillance purposes and that the Iranian authorities therefore wanted to subject residents and visitors to tougher security vetting. Tehran did not expect the international outcry, however, and after the teachers and their families had been allowed back on the island on 11 November 1992, everything returned back to normal. Former Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee, Rejai Khorassani, expressed the Iranian point of view:

> Abu Musa is a part of Iranian territory and can be used for any purpose Iran wants. There do not have to be agreements with Sharjah about this. We do not have any military stationed where the Arabs are living . . . We have the feeling that the Arabs claim our land, but we will never use military means against them. The solution will be political. We want to have extremely good relations with the Persian Gulf countries. But based on the experience with the war and the pre-revolutionary Iran–Iraq balance of power, they are afraid.[131]

Arab international forums expressed their full support for the UAE in the matter. On 9 September, the GCC criticised Iran for the incident and called on Iran to respect the 1971 Memorandum of Understanding, stressing that Abu Musa was the responsibility of the UAE since its establishment. The GCC further linked the issue to the Tunb islands and rejected the 'continued occupation by the Islamic Republic of Iran of the islands of Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb which belong to the UAE'.[132] Iran rejected the GCC statement and reiterated its claim of sovereignty over the three islands. On 14 September, the Arab League Council met in Cairo, condemned Iran's 'aggression' and decided to forward the case to the UN. The Damascus Declaration member states including Syria also expressed their support of the UAE and joint Arab action under the aegis of the Arab League.[133]

Iran's Supreme National Security Council again stressed Iran's undeniable responsibility for the security of Abu Musa and the Tunbs and stated that so far, apart from Baghdad, no foreign power or regional government had seriously doubted Iran's sovereignty over the islands. The reason for this change must therefore have been that the Gulf states were influenced by the United States and Western forces. Leader Khamenei accused the US and Britain of sowing discord between Iran and its neighbours to justify their illegitimate presence in the region. President Rafsanjani criticised the media campaign against Iran, and the SNSC declared that Iran

had no intention of aggression against any country and wanted to solve the problem through co-operation between Iran and Sharjah.[134]

When the UAE threatened to take the dispute to the International Court of Justice, Iran agreed to meet with the UAE in Abu Dhabi at the end of September. The talks were soon suspended when the UAE wanted to discuss the Tunb islands as well as Abu Musa.[135] A Foreign Ministry spokesman later contended that Iran was ready to continue the discussions with the Emirates without any conditions and that it respected national sovereignty, territorial integrity and good neighbourliness. The Iranian negotiator stated:

> The two islands of Tonb-e Bozorg and Tonb-e Kuchek belong to Iran and no Iranian would allow himself to negotiate with others on the sovereignty of his own land . . . The case of Abu Musa is different. There exists an agreement between Iran and al-Shariqah on the island.[136]

An Iranian source asserted that the government of the Islamic Republic could not give away something the Shah had not given away.[137] Said Hajjarian of the Center for Strategic Studies explained that especially in the case of Abu Musa and the Tunbs, Iran thought that the West, i.e. the US and Britain, supported the UAE against Iran. The result was that the political elite in Tehran tried to concentrate on national interest rather than Islam, in particular at a time of economic and political crisis.[138] Muhammad Ali Emami of IPIS added:

> The UAE officials began to talk about sovereignty of the islands, despite the fact that they knew that before the revolution, these islands belonged to Iran and no claims were made then. In 1971, Iran accepted that there was a small Arab population on Abu Musa and that the Arabs have some concessions in this area. But sovereignty was with Iran, and the UAE officials accepted that these islands belonged to Iran. Even when Saddam Hussein before starting the war with Iran claimed these islands were Arab, the UAE government did not talk about it further. At the September talks in Abu Dhabi, they started with Abu Musa and then extended their claims to the two Tunbs because they had support from the other Arab countries and the US. They thought they were in a good position for bargaining.[139]

According to Richard Schofield, there were rumours that Sharjah wanted to settle the dispute quietly and was unhappy that the UAE government linked the issue to the Tunb islands. Consequently, there was confusion as to why exactly the talks broke down,[140] as it might have also been due to these disagreements between Sharjah and Abu Dhabi. In general, the

condemnation of Iran in the Gulf was harsh but not unanimous. As expressed by Muhan Abdu Yamani, the Saudi Minister of Information:

> I wish the crisis would be resolved without developing into a sectarian *fitna* [strife]. I was pained by the way our writers and intellectuals turned the conflict and accused Iran of Persian sectarianism. We should remember that the Iranians are our brothers in Islam and we should not look at the conflict from a narrow point of view and add ignorance to it and return to ancient battles. We should rise above these fabrications and work with our brothers in Iran on the basis of Islamic brotherhood.[141]

Whilst Iran maintained that it was ready for bilateral talks about Abu Musa, after Iran rejected ICJ arbitration, the UAE announced that it would take the dispute to the UN. It was reported in the Arab press that the United Nations Security Council was fully prepared to discuss the crisis between the UAE and Iran and would begin negotiations about the 'internationalisation' of the islands. Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa announced that the case would be brought to the Security Council, as all communication with Iran on the issue had failed.[142] Abu Dhabi stressed that the historical and geographical documents and facts confirmed that sovereignty over all three islands belonged to the UAE and that the Iranian military occupation in 1971 had not changed their legal status.[143] The Iranian Foreign Ministry, for its part, also insisted that existing historical and legal documents proved that the three islands were exclusively Iranian territory[144] and refused to discuss the matter within the United Nations forum.

Geography and historical claims to Abu Musa and the Tunbs

Abu Musa is a 35 square mile island situated in the Persian Gulf overlooking the Straits of Hormuz. It lies some 35 miles off the Sharjah coast and some 43 miles off the Iranian coast, within the waters of the UAE side of the Iran–UAE median line. Some 24 miles northwest of Abu Musa within the Iranian side of the median line lies the island of Lesser Tunb and further on in the same direction, Greater Tunb.[145] In the 1990s, the number of inhabitants on the southern Arab side of Abu Musa island was usually quoted as 700, and it is unclear whether this number included non-UAE workers. The number of inhabitants on the northern Iranian side, which takes up roughly two thirds of the island, varied between 2,000 and 3,000, including military personnel.[146] Schofield believed that the Tunbs were effectively uninhabited in 1971.[147] Sistani, however, put the number of inhabitants on Greater Tunb in 1971 at 200. By 1976, they had fallen to 81, but in 1992, they reached 350.[148] If these figures are correct, it can be assumed that after the Iranian military retook the Tunbs, the Arab population left or was

expelled and that Iran, perhaps after the Gulf Crisis, began to resettle the island. The Iranian journalist Ahmad Sajidi visited Abu Musa in 1992, and described it as follows:

> Much of the livelihood of the people of Abu Musa [on the Iranian side] depends on Bandar Abbas from where they get their food. Abu Musa consists of three residential areas, two are called Farmandari and Sayyadan and consist of Iranians, the third is known as Shahrak-i ʿArabha and has Arab residents. In order to enter the Arab section, there needs to be co-ordination with the Iranian section, i.e. Iranians without permission cannot enter the Arab section. Farmandari is the place of residence of the navy and the army, consisting of some 25 families, but a lot of building work is taking place to facilitate a larger number in the future. Then there is a cinema, a square, a park as well as a petrol station. Sayyadan has a bank, a swimming pool, a bakery, a grocery, an ice-cream shop, a hair dresser, a club, a boutique, a parking lot, a shop selling decoration, a mosque, a primary school, a secondary school, a kindergarten and a half-built park. A quarter of the population are Arabs. The Arab part of the island is very small. There is a mosque, a power station, a desalination plant, a bank. However, control of the area is responsibility of the Iranians in all respects, even in the observance of Islamic dress . . . Everything is calm and the Arabs and Iranians on the island treat each other like brothers.[149]

The importance of these islands is purely geopolitical. As discussed in Chapter 1, with the British withdrawal from the region in 1971, the Shah was worried that a Communist power could block the Straits of Hormuz, the main outlet for Iranian and Persian Gulf oil exports. In order to facilitate the defence of this strategic waterway, he reclaimed the three islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs. In the 1980s and 1990s, the United States were worried that the Islamic Republic of Iran might close the Straits, using Abu Musa and the Tunbs as a basis for such an undertaking. Iran in turn wanted to avoid the establishment of a US base on the islands.

The legal dispute about ownership and sovereignty of the three islands, which was revived in 1992, is based on rival historical claims by both sides. Iran affirms that it owned the islands before the British occupied them briefly in the 1820s, to maintain security in view of widespread piracy along the southern Gulf coast. According to Schofield, evidence for ownership of the islands, in particular the Tunbs, before the nineteenth century 'is far from conclusive'. During the mid-1840s, Persia claimed all of the waters and the islands of the Gulf as Persian. In 1877, a Persian claim to the Tunbs and in 1888 to Abu Musa was first entered in the British records. The British Residency at Bushehr until 1882 believed that the Tunbs belonged to Persia

because of their close connection to Lingeh on the Persian coast. But after Britain had received documents from the Qasimi ruler of Ras al-Khaimah in 1882, Britain was of the opinion that he held title over the Tunbs.[150] The Iranian claim is based on the fact that the section of the Arab Qasimi tribe in Lingeh which ruled the Tunbs and Abu Musa until 1887, when Tehran expelled them, had migrated there in the mid-eighteenth century from Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah and became Persian subjects before their administration of the islands. This was confirmed by British records.[151] Iran also lays much emphasis on various British maps of the nineteenth century, for instance a British War Office map of 1886 which clearly shows the three islands in Iranian colours.[152]

Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah claim that the Qasimi in Lingeh were acting on their behalf and not as Iranian subjects when administering the islands. Sharjah claims a prescriptive title back to 1872, pointing out that Britain actively defended its claims since then and that historical documents at the British Residency show that Britain recognised Sharjah's exclusive right to Abu Musa from the end of the eighteenth century. It concedes that the Tunbs were jointly administered between the Qasimi sheikhs of Lingeh and Ras al-Khaimah during 1878–1887, but maintains that Abu Musa was always directly administered from Sharjah.[153]

Persia maintained its claims to the islands during the 1890s, and when in the early 1900s Britain feared Russian and German rivalry in the Gulf, it occupied the islands in 1903 by advising Sharjah, which was a British protectorate, to place its flags on Abu Musa and the Tunbs. Iran regards the British act as illegal, since the islands were under the administration of the district of Lingeh, which was part of the province of Fars, and therefore was not *terra nullius*, i.e. territory which did not belong to any state and could according to international law be occupied. Iran further held that Britain or the sheikh of Sharjah could not legally occupy the islands, as Sharjah was not a state and therefore could not acquire territory under international law.[154]

The 1971 Memorandum of Understanding

In the years until the British withdrawal in 1971, Britain guaranteed Sharjah's and Ras al-Khaimah's control of the islands. Iran continuously protested against the occupation. As described in Chapter 1, in anticipation of the British withdrawal, Iran entered into negotiations with the British government which acted on behalf of the rulers of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah. On 18 November 1971, the ruler of Sharjah accepted the Memorandum of Understanding about Abu Musa,[155] which came into effect on 29 November. He agreed reluctantly, being told that the island would otherwise be taken by force. The ruler of Ras al-Khaimah was supposed to give up full sovereignty over the Tunbs to Iran in return for Iranian military and

humanitarian support. However, he did not agree and reportedly demanded an unacceptably high sum of money instead.[156] The result was that Iran, without having reached an agreement and with unofficial British encouragement for taking the Tunbs, occupied all three islands on 30 November 1971, one day before the British withdrawal.[157] The Iranian view of the negotiations was expressed by Davoud Bavand of Imam Sadeq University:

> After the islands were occupied in 1903, any discussions between Iran and the UK about the three islands were always linked to Bahrain. When the British declared they would leave East of Suez, there was a new round of talks. The Iranian position was that the islands were *occupied illegally* by Britain in the name of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah, whereas Britain always classified the islands as *disputed islands*. As far as Iran was concerned, these were colonial machinations to occupy them in the name of the emirates. So when Britain left, Iran wanted to return to the *status quo ante*. The understanding at the time was that Iran would have to take over the new security role in the Persian Gulf. This could only be realised if the conflicting issue were to be solved. The British intention to leave caused problems for the small states, and Iran wanted to appease them as it was about to adopt the security role. As a result, a package deal was negotiated with Britain which linked the islands to Iran's acceptance of the referendum in Bahrain about self-determination.

Bavand continued by describing the outcome of the talks:

> As for Abu Musa, a sort of condominium was accepted: neither accepted the sovereignty of the other and each maintained its own claim to sovereignty. They agreed that the northern part was under the full jurisdiction of Iran, which was to place military bases there, and that the south would be under the full jurisdiction of Sharjah. The territorial waters of the island were 12 nautical miles like Iranian territorial waters, whilst Sharjah's at the time were 3 nautical miles. Both would share the continental shelf hydrocarbon revenues and could use the fisheries. But Iran had the security responsibility for the whole island.
>
> The Tunbs were given to Iran. Lesser Tunb was uninhabited. Greater Tunb lies 17 miles outside Iran. They are located within Iran's exclusive economic zone. When the islands were occupied in 1903, Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah were united under Sharjah. There was later an oral understanding between Britain and Ras al-Khaimah that the Tunbs were given to Ras al-Khaimah. When the Iranian forces went into the Tunbs in 1971, the British who were

> still responsible for their defense did not fulfill this responsibility because the understanding was only oral. Iran is now under no circumstances willing to negotiate about the Tunbs.[158]

The Iranian view that Iran is fully responsible for the security of the whole island of Abu Musa is based on a letter of 25 November 1971 from the Iranian Foreign Minister, Abbas Ali Khalatbary, to the British Foreign Secretary, in which he wrote that Iran's acceptance of the MOU was:

> given on the understanding that nothing in the said arrangements shall be taken as restricting the freedom of Iran to take any measures in the Island of Abu Musa . . . necessary to safeguard the security of the Island or of the Iranian forces. I would be grateful for confirmation that this understanding has been conveyed to the Ruler of Sharjah.[159]

Whilst the ruler of Sharjah thought that the agreement was temporary, Iranian Prime Minister Hoveida declared on 30 November that Iran would never relinquish its sovereign rights over the whole island. Consequently, several radical Arab countries, including Iraq, Libya and the Democratic Republic of Yemen, lodged a complaint with the UNSC about Iran's occupation of Abu Musa and the Tunbs. After the Iranian representative made clear that Iran would never leave its islands and apparently insisted that all maps, including those of the UN, showed that the islands had always belonged to Iran, the Security Council shelved the complaint.[160]

The UAE views the Iranian capture of the three islands in 1971 as well as their action in 1992 as acts of aggression. According to al-Alkim, Iran had no legal or historical justification except for its desire to play the policeman of the Gulf.[161] The UAE holds that the 1971 MOU is invalid and non-binding, as it was imposed upon Sharjah under duress and the ruler of Sharjah only signed reluctantly. Gargash maintained that the dispute in 1971 was not settled successfully and that Iran occupied the Tunbs, imposing a *fait accompli*. He insisted that the 1992 Iranian claims that they were responsible for the security of Abu Musa under the 1971 MOU were wrong, as the agreement did not give an exclusive right on security to either party and did not address the presence of foreigners on the island.[162]

The ongoing dispute after the September meeting

In October 1992, the dispute died down and the situation on Abu Musa appeared to have returned to normal apart from the fact that the island's school remained closed.[163] Arab attention shifted to the newly flared-up Saudi–Qatari border dispute (in which Iran outspokenly supported Qatar). Arab press reports that Iran had allegedly installed eight missile launching

pads for Silkworm missiles and North Korean Scud-Bs, as well as renewed speculation that Tehran wanted to build a naval base on Abu Musa,[164] did not have any negative effects on the relationship. On 12 November, when the Arab teachers and their families returned and the school was reopened, the UAE Foreign Minister underlined the GCC's desire to maintain good relations with Iran. Nevertheless, on 15 November, the GCC Defence Ministers issued a communiqué condemning Iran's actions and reaffirming that any threat to a member state would be considered a threat to all. At the end of November, the UAE took the dispute to the UN.[165]

The GCC summit statement in Abu Dhabi on 21 December 1992 incited a fierce Iranian response. The GCC affirmed its absolute support for the UAE and called on Iran to 'cancel and abolish all measures taken on Abu Musa island and to terminate its occupation of the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands, which belong to the UAE'.[166] President Rafsanjani responded in his Friday prayer sermon by declaring: 'You yourselves know that Iran is stronger than the likes of you . . . To reach those islands one would have to cross a sea of blood.'[167]

In February 1993, both sides tried to ease tensions. Under Syrian influence, the Gulf states saw the need to keep alive Tehran's opposition to Saddam Hussein in view of longer-term regional stability. Damascus persuaded Cairo to ease its war of words with Iran, and Kuwaiti and Saudi ministers visited Tehran. Iran invited Sharjah to resume negotiations about Abu Musa in Tehran on the basis of the 1971 agreement, but maintained that it would never compromise on its national sovereignty and territorial integrity.[168] In March, Iran reportedly imposed security measures on Abu Musa, yet again closing down the school. This led to renewed GCC support for the UAE, which Iran termed divisive. However, in April the measures were lifted and the situation returned to normal. Ongoing quiet bilateral contacts between the Iranian and UAE Embassies and Foreign Ministries helped ease the tensions.[169]

In May, Egypt's President Mubarak visited the Gulf, and tried to convince the Gulf Arabs that Iran was fomenting Islamist unrest abroad. Following this, Velayati went on a tour of the GCC countries, including the UAE and Saudi Arabia, in order allay their fears. The GCC leaders seemed to be receptive, holding that befriending a potential threat was the best way to neutralise it; and both Iran and the UAE announced their readiness for talks about the island issue.[170]

The critique of the Iranian occupation of the three islands, as well as support for the UAE position, was continuously pronounced at every meeting of the GCC, the Arab League and the Damascus Declaration countries for the following years. The Arab side called for international arbitration, whereas Iran maintained that it was willing to hold bilateral talks in Tehran but that it would never concede its territorial integrity.[171] The islands issue demonstrated that in the 1990s, the US factor seems to have

played a significant role in Iranian foreign policy thinking. Abbas Haghighat from IPIS held that the US was behind the continued problem:

> We try to keep the negotiations active. We have the Memorandum of Understanding with Sharjah from 1971, which is a good basis to continue the discussions. (Under that memorandum, Sharjah gave us the right to have military bases to secure Abu Musa. Since then, we have had army bases on the island). But the UAE is under pressure from the US and other countries which is the problem. If we did not have this problem with the UAE, we would have another problem in the region. These are just the side effects of the main problem. We have to work on the main problem, then we can deal better with this one.[172]

In September 1993, Iran changed its tone and Velayati warned that Iran would use military force to defend its national territory, of which the three islands were an integral part, against any attack of a foreign power. The UAE subsequently cancelled a ministerial visit to Iran, but Foreign Minister al-Nuaimi met Velayati at a meeting of the UN General Assembly, where Velayati stated once again that the islands belonged to Iran.[173] In November, Iran appointed a new governor for Abu Musa, after the last one had been removed in connection with the 1992 crisis. This was criticised in the Gulf press, but the UAE remained silent.[174]

In April 1994, Iran welcomed the UAE's willingness to solve the problem through international mediation by the ICJ, but reiterated that it still preferred direct talks. In July, however, the tone changed again and Iranian Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hassan Rouhani, stressed that Iran would defend the three islands 'like the capital'.[175] In September, Tehran rejected GCC calls to discuss its sovereignty of the three islands and made a point by reportedly setting up a desalination plant and starting scheduled flights to Abu Musa, measures which were criticised by the UAE.[176] The worsened situation in the islands dispute in 1994 may well have been connected with a general deterioration in Iran's relationship with Saudi Arabia due to disagreements over oil price policy, as will be discussed later.[177]

In early 1995 the Head of the Iranian Judiciary opened an Office of the Justice Ministry on Abu Musa. Shortly thereafter, Velayati stated that the three islands belonged to Iran and the issue would be resolved through negotiations.[178] In November Iran and the UAE held talks about the islands in Doha. The Iranian delegation was headed by the Director General of Persian Gulf Affairs of the Foreign Ministry, Hossein Sadeghi, whilst the UAE delegation was led by Khalifa Shaheen al-Merree, the Director of the Foreign Ministry's Department of GCC and Gulf Affairs. They intended to fix a timetable for a meeting between the two Foreign Ministers, but failed to agree on an agenda. The UAE proposed a schedule which should include

an end to the military occupation of the Tunbs, abiding by the 1971 MOU and referring the dispute to the ICJ in the event of failure to reach a negotiated settlement within a specified period of time. This was rejected by the Iranian Foreign Ministry and Iran called for a further round of talks in Tehran.[179] Shortly after the meeting, Iran finished construction projects for a new airport and harbour on Abu Musa. The airport was opened in March 1996 with the aim of developing Abu Musa into an active commercial and tourist area. It could handle 700 passengers daily going to and from the island. In April, Iran opened a new power station on Greater Tunb which was criticised by the UAE as a violation of UAE sovereignty.[180] In August, Gulf military sources confirmed that Iranian missiles, believed to be Silkworms, had been moved to Abu Musa.[181] This can be interpreted as Tehran's increasing worry about a US strike against its territory, after US fighter planes had violated Iranian airspace over Bushehr and the island. In September, Hossein Sadeghi was made Ambassador to the UAE. Velayati stated that Iran was determined to improve relations with the UAE and that the appointment of a senior diplomat as Ambassador was strong evidence of that determination. This came in response to the UAE Foreign Minister's remark that Iran was arming itself to threaten the UAE and the other Gulf countries.[182] The GCC Foreign Ministers at their meeting in Riyadh in March 1997 criticised the Iranian government for continuing to carry out measures to consolidate its occupation of the three islands and called for an end of the occupation and referring the case to the ICJ. The GCC summit in Kuwait in December and the GCC Foreign Ministers meeting in Riyadh after Rafsanjani's visit to Saudi Arabia in March 1998 repeated the call. Both Rafsanjani's and Khatami's administrations reiterated that Abu Musa and the Tunbs were inseparable parts of Iran, but that they were prepared to hold bilateral talks with the UAE.[183] It became clear again that the islands issue was a matter of Iranian national interest and nationalism and that no government would give up the territory or its rights to use it.

Impact of the dispute on the relationship between Iran and the Gulf states

In general, both Iran and the Gulf states kept the islands issue apart from their other political and economic relations. Whenever problems occurred in these fields, Abu Musa and the Tunbs were played up rhetorically. Likewise, there seems to have been more willingness to solve the dispute whenever the relationship was smooth. The dispute, however, did not have any direct bearing on the general relations.

The UAE

This was particularly clear in the case of the UAE itself. The Director of the UAE Foreign Ministry's Department of GCC and Gulf States Affairs, Khalifa

Shaheen al-Merree, explained the UAE position, clearly stating the US pressure on Abu Dhabi to connect the dispute with the overall relationship:

> Our policy towards Iran has two aspects: first, the dispute about the three islands, and second, our overall bilateral relations with Iran. The main feature of our policy is to try and isolate as much as possible the detrimental effects of the dispute from the economic and political relations, because Iran is our neighbour and we cannot have only a confrontational approach in our relations with Iran. In certain ways, we would lean towards containing Iran more or less as put by the US, but we cannot be the frontrunners of such a policy. Of course, the US is trying to promote its policies in various ways, but we distinguish between our overall policies and try to contain this dispute within certain limits.

He maintained that there was no military threat from Iran:

> Iran causes an acute problem because, from our point of view, Iran has occupied the islands and declared sovereignty. The problem with Iran is that they do not acknowledge that there is a problem. They are not willing to negotiate. The Shah occupied the islands, but he was very cautious not to aggravate the situation. Matters changed with the Iran–Iraq war, when Iran used the islands for military purposes. Nevertheless, there was no threat during the war that Iran would attack the UAE, even now Iran will not attack us. But we see that their hostile rhetoric complicates the issue. The problem in Iran is that they have to meet internal demands of different groups. They want to mobilise the people for the revolution, so they mobilise them behind an external threat. It is not the islands which are concerned but the revolution. Iran caused itself more problems by building the airstrip on Abu Musa and the power station on Greater Tunb. This makes it more difficult to withdraw and negotiate. They are complicating the situation more by building these facilities. Nevertheless, we are pushing for negotiations. But we are not pushing too hard because the situation might get out of control.[184]

During Velayati's Gulf tour in May 1993, this attitude was confirmed when the UAE Foreign Minister stressed the need to hold fundamental talks with Iran towards removing the existing ambiguities, and Velayati afterwards declared that the visit to Abu Dhabi was of special importance because it eliminated the tension that had occurred.[185] In February 1993, Iranian Defence Minister Ahmad Torkan discussed bilateral ties and regional stability with his UAE counterpart, when he visited Abu Dhabi to attend Idex 93, an international defence fair.[186]

The various UAE emirates differed in attitude toward Iran. Dubai and Sharjah did not desire any confrontation as they profited from their economic ties, whereas the forces more inclined to confront Iran seemed to be based in Abu Dhabi and Ras al-Khaimah. As explained by a European diplomat:

> The ruler of Sharjah gets his share in oil revenues from Mubarak oil field and keeps out of the dispute. I think the UAE would like to come to a compromise over Abu Musa. As far as the Tunbs are concerned, the UAE is no longer interested. The problem is that the Tunbs belonged to Ras al-Khaimah which is a very poor emirate. I heard that Sheikh Saqr, the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah, would like to receive the largest possible territorial compensation. He wants an area of Fujaira which lies between two parts of Ras al-Khaimah. He therefore does not want to give up his claim to the Tunbs.[187]

In fact, despite the political row over Abu Musa island, no dispute arose over the oil sharing arrangements between Iran and Sharjah at any time, and from 1 January to 30 September 1992, Iran-bound cargo from Sharjah or from other points of origin with a stopover in Sharjah was worth about $100 million.[188] Dubai's trade with Iran did not suffer either from the dispute. Dubai was Tehran's main commercial partner in the Gulf. Shortly after the August 1992 incident, it was reported that an Iranian trade delegation was to visit Dubai, and the Director of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce announced that he would work to ensure the success of the mission.[189] In 1993, after the incidents, Dubai's exports to Iran were $21 million, up by 114 per cent on 1992.[190] The trade links were supported by political contacts. In December 1996, now Interior Minister Besharati went to Abu Dhabi for the UAE's silver jubilee celebrations. He discussed security matters with the UAE government and they agreed on the need to open a constant channel of dialogue.[191] A European diplomat gave the following view on the UAE's relations with Iran with regards to the islands crisis:

> Iran in 1991 began to enlarge its military bases on the islands, which alarmed the UAE and the US because the main tanker route runs between Abu Musa and the Tunbs. The US accused Iran of bringing Scud missiles to Abu Musa. This has not been confirmed but together with the Iranian military exercises led the UAE to turn the conflict into an international issue. Since then, every GCC, Arab League, Damascus Declaration statement deals with Abu Musa and calls to bring the issue to The Hague. We diplomats here do not believe that it will become a serious issue. I don't think that Abu Musa itself is an important issue, but it can be used by certain parties. Nobody wants war or a big problem. But many parties want

> some tension in order to keep their military here, bring more troops, sell arms.

Implying the role of the US and Saudi Arabia, he continued:

> I do not believe that any faction in Iran wants war or to take over part of the southern Gulf. But they play up this issue for domestic politics, they want to stress Iran's role in the Gulf. Dubai is not interested in politics. The UAE is formally in charge of foreign policy, but it is really run by Abu Dhabi. Dubai's and Sharjah's interests are not always the same as Abu Dhabi's; because of their trade and oil links they do not want to upset Iran. Abu Dhabi itself is not interested in Abu Musa as it does not get any financial benefits from it. So if Abu Dhabi makes an issue out of it, it must be forced by parties from outside the UAE.
>
> The UAE's position changed radically after the invasion of Kuwait. The UAE was frightened that Saddam Hussein would attack them next, and they became more pro-Western and particularly pro-US. They also always follow Saudi Arabia in important matters. If Saudi–Iranian relations improve or deteriorate, UAE–Iranian relations will improve or deteriorate.[192]

The latter point was supported by an Arab journalist who held that 'Saudi Arabia does not care about Abu Musa, so no one cares'.[193]

Saudi Arabia

Notwithstanding the islands crisis, Iran's relationship with Saudi Arabia improved throughout 1992 and 1993. Riyadh wanted to befriend Tehran in order to lessen the perceived Iranian threat and thus be less dependent on Egyptian security support and American influence. Iran ignored domestic opposition to Saudi Arabia and cultivated better ties, mostly because of Saudi influence on oil prices. The breakthrough came in May, when Saudi Arabia agreed to keep crude oil output down to support stable prices. In June 1992, the Iranian demonstrations at the hajj went smoothly. In July and August, there was talk about a future meeting of King Fahd and Rafsanjani.[194]

In February 1993, the Saudi Minister of Education visited Tehran and was warmly welcomed by President Rafsanjani, both hoping to expand their relations and co-ordinate their policies in OPEC.[195] At the beginning of May, Prince Sultan, the Saudi Defence Minister, declared that Iran did not pose any threat to his country or the region and that allegations of Iran's involvement in terrorism were 'unfounded fabrications'.[196] King Fahd, too, in a meeting with Velayati, stressed the importance of expanding relations and again expressed the hope of meeting Rafsanjani in Tehran. In response

to demonstrations by Iranian students of Tehran University against their government's invitation of King Fahd and the Saudi ban on an anti-US rally at Mecca, the visit had to be cancelled, but was again discussed in October. In September, Rafsanjani was even reported to have telephoned King Fahd to obtain his support for higher oil prices, a request to which the King agreed.[197]

In 1994, relations suddenly worsened due to oil and hajj politics which were probably linked. In January, Riyadh halved the quota for Iranian pilgrims. At the end of February, after a lengthy period during which Iran refrained from attacking Saudi oil policies despite falling prices, Rafsanjani and the Foreign Ministry started to accuse Saudi Arabia of glutting the oil market. They charged that this had caused prices to fall from $18 to $12 a barrel in 1993, and warned that OPEC had to reach an agreement at its meeting in Geneva in March. The Iranian press also sharply criticised the hajj quota. OPEC did not reduce its production ceilings in its Geneva session.[198] In view of this dispute, Abu Musa suddenly became an issue in June, when King Fahd called on Iran to hand over the three islands to the UAE.[199] Half a year later, however, the dispute seemed forgotten. Despite the fact that Iran opened an office of the Ministry of Justice on Abu Musa, in January 1995 the Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayif stated that he looked forward to a normal relationship with Iran; and *Arab News* denounced American and Israeli propaganda against the Iranian nuclear programme.[200] Iran only responded a year later when Velayati in January 1996 expressed Iran's desire to strengthen relations and establish a permanent dialogue. This was welcomed by Prince Sultan.[201]

In 1996, Iran was implicated in the uprising in Bahrain and the Khubar bombing in Saudi Arabia at a time when it was trying to improve relations with its neighbours. The US violated Iranian airspace and seriously worried Tehran. Saudi Arabia started to get anxious about the peace process after the election in June of Netanyahu as Prime Minister of Israel. *Tehran Times* called for closer relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia which would facilitate closer ties amongst regional countries and would increase the power of manoeuvre of Muslim states vis-à-vis the 'Zionist regime'. Crown Prince Abdullah at the GCC summit in Doha in December stated that he fully understood 'the religious ties, the historical backgrounds, and the geographical location which link Arabia to . . . Iran'.[202]

In March 1997, Velayati went on a tour to the Gulf capitals to invite the leaders to the ICO summit in Tehran in December. He commented that he had held highly important talks with King Fahd which could serve as a turning point in the relations, and that a new chapter had been opened in the relations between Tehran and the Gulf states based on mutual understanding, confidence and collective efforts with an aim to maintain security in the region.[203] This process of fence-mending, which was mediated by Syria, was accelerated at the July meeting of OPEC, at which Saudi

Arabia and Iran launched a joint effort to convince other member states to rein in overproduction. Shortly afterwards, a meeting of the Damascus Declaration countries called for a new start in Arab–Iranian relations.[204] Fears of a possible popular backlash against the Gulf regimes after the deterioration of the peace process, the new alliance of Israel and Turkey, concern about a re-emerging Iraq and the belief that the election of President Khatami could open a new phase in the relationship, set Saudi Arabia's ties with Iran on the path to improvement. They also shared a fear that overproduction by some OPEC countries could weaken oil markets and cut the relatively high oil revenues they had enjoyed since the beginning of 1996. Had oil policy stopped a rapprochement in 1994, it now contributed to bringing them closer together. Abu Musa was not a serious issue in these calculations.

Kuwait

Despite Iranian opposition to security agreements with the West, Iran also improved its relations with Kuwait further. Kuwait saw Iran as a counterbalance to the Iraqi threat. When Velayati visited Kuwait in April 1992, he was assured that the defence agreements with the US and Britain were only for the purpose of self-defence.[205] In July, Iran returned the Kuwaiti airplanes which had been flown to Iran during the invasion. Kuwait's Interior Minister, on his visit to Tehran in August, called for closer ties between Iran and its Gulf neighbours in view of the common Iraqi enemy. They agreed to co-operate on regional issues; and in the economic, industrial and cultural fields as well as the fight against drug trafficking. In December, Iran offered to assist in freeing the Kuwaitis still held prisoner in Iraq.[206]

On his visit to Tehran in February 1993, which coincided with the one by the Saudi Minister of Education, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister stressed Iran's regional importance and offered to co-operate in OPEC. Kuwait's Parliament Speaker Ahmad al-Saʿadun maintained that Kuwait should strengthen its relations with Iran. In August, Saʿadun visited Iran at the invitation of Parliament Speaker Nateq-Nouri, taking the opportunity to express his gratitude for Iran's support during the Iraqi invasion.[207] Abdallah Bishara, despite the fact that he believed the islands problem would always be a thorn in the relations between Iran and the Gulf states,[208] one month before he stepped down as the Secretary General of the GCC, declared in Washington: 'We want the relations with Iran to get moving . . . Iraq still presents a nightmare to the Gulf states . . . The relations with Iran are now good, but we want them to be even better.'[209]

Iran responded positively to all overtures, even if it cautioned Kuwait when it signed a security agreement with Russia in November 1993.[210] In January 1995 Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Muhammad Hashemi went to Kuwait and met with Undersecretary Majed al-Shaheen as part of the

regular visits. They agreed to activate the role of the Kuwaiti–Iranian political committee which should convene every six months to agree on common policies towards regional and bilateral issues.[211] In April Nateq-Nouri returned Saʿadun's visit and the two men signed a Memorandum of Understanding, confirming the deep cultural, social and ideological ties, and the importance of regional security and the necessity of solving conflicts through peaceful means.[212] The islands problem was not a serious issue in the relationship, but Kuwaiti MP Adnan Abdul Samad stressed the US pressure on Kuwait's relations with Iran:

> As a result of the Iraqi invasion, Kuwaiti–Iranian relations were promoted. Now the Kuwaiti administration wants to strengthen the relations, but because of the US who tries to isolate Iran there is a lot of pressure on this government not to go too far. The governments in the Gulf do not want to make Abu Musa a big issue or a problem between Iran and the Gulf. But the US forces the governments here to enlarge the problem and not to have good relations with Iran. Abu Musa is a strange thing. On the one hand, the US wants us to make peace with Israel. Israel can bomb Lebanon and it does not matter. But if Iran does not return Abu Musa, they threaten with war.[213]

Oman

Relations with Oman remained good. When Foreign Minister Velayati as part of his Gulf tour visited Muscat in May 1993, Sultan Qabus offered to mediate between Cairo and Tehran.[214] Velayati and Yusuf bin Alawi regularly exchanged visits. After Iran had been unwilling to discuss the islands issue any further earlier in the year, Velayati used a visit to Oman in September 1994 to call for renewed talks with the UAE.[215] In June 1996 Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Maleki visited Muscat. The Sultan's Deputy Fahd bin Mahmud told him that his government was fully convinced that Iran was no threat to Oman and that the Islamic Republic advocated peace in the region.[216] As expressed by Amer al-Higry of the Omani Foreign Ministry, despite Muscat's strong support for the UAE, the Abu Musa issue did not affect the Omani–Iranian relationship.[217] Oman's Ambassador to the US, Abdullah al-Dhahab, explained that Oman was telling both sides not to escalate the problem and advised the UAE to keep on good terms with Iran in order not to jeopardise trade relations.[218] H.H. Sayyid Haitham, Secretary General of the Omani Foreign Ministry, stated: 'The Abu Musa issue erupted recently. It has been there since the Shah's time. It is an unfortunate affair because it sours relations between the GCC and Iran.'[219]

Bahrain

Relations with Bahrain also improved until the end of 1994, when the population began to rise against the Bahraini government. The situation deteriorated in 1996 when Bahrain outspokenly implicated Iran in the uprising and withdrew its Ambassador from Tehran. It was only in March 1997 when Velayati visited the Gulf states and when Saudi Arabia had taken up its rapprochement with Iran, that Bahrain showed more serious willingness to improve relations.[220] By December they announced that they would upgrade diplomatic relations back to ambassadorial level, encouraged by President Khatami's reform policies. In March 1998, the Amir welcomed former President Rafsanjani on a one-day visit, which had possibly been arranged with Saudi assistance during his stay in Saudi Arabia the same month. As for the Abu Musa issue, a Bahraini journalist maintained that it was upheld mainly for Iranian domestic consumption. He did not think that Iran caused a military threat to the Gulf.[221]

Qatar

Iran's relationship with Qatar improved steadily since early 1992, with regular visits by Qatari politicians to Tehran. In June, the same day Doha ratified a draft defence agreement with the US, Qatar called for including Iran in Gulf security arrangements. With the escalation of the Qatari–Saudi border dispute in October, Qatar asked Iran for protection against Saudi threats, which coincided with an economic agreement for Iran to build ports, jetties and roads in Qatar.[222] In April 1994, at the time of deteriorating relations with Saudi Arabia, Rafsanjani called the increasing co-operation with Qatar a good model for the other Gulf states.[223] Amongst the many visits, the one by the Iranian Minister of Defense to his counterpart in May 1996 is particularly interesting as they discussed strengthening relations, especially in the defense sector.[224] It may not have amounted to much, but indicated that Qatar did not really consider Iran's stand on the islands as a threat to Gulf security.

As has been demonstrated, the islands problem had no direct effect on Iran's economic and political relations with its Persian Gulf neighbours. Rather, it seemed to be a nuisance for both sides. The fact that it was kept alive as an issue was linked to outside, mainly US, pressure by both Gulf Arab officials and journalists as well as European diplomats. The Iranians agreed with this view. Muhammad Javad Larijani, Deputy Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee, held that to reach such a degree of tension, external elements had to be at work.[225] UN Ambassador Kamal Kharrazi added that Iran had tried its best to build confidence, but the Islamic Republic was suspicious of outside Arab parties which were opposed to Iran's rapprochement with

the Gulf states, such as Iraq and Egypt. Together with the US they provoked the smaller Gulf states. The fact that the UAE maintained good economic relations with Iran demonstrated that it was a political issue which had been forced from outside.[226] The Director of the Persian Gulf Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran, Hossein Sadeghi, explained the Iranian view:

> During the Iran–Iraq war, the UAE was very close to us. We have been having problems since the Abu Musa crisis arose. Before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the countries in the region did not have good relations with us. That changed after the invasion. The US and Britain did not like this and created the Abu Musa crisis. We never had any problems with the UAE before.[227]

The dispute over Abu Musa and the Tunb islands began as a conflict between Iran and the UAE. It cannot be ascertained whether it started due to local initiatives. However, soon the international media were involved and it turned into a long drawn out conflict. Despite the fact that both sides isolated the conflict from their other relations, it remained and did not die down as many other smaller incidents like this would. It is curious that the conflict erupted after the Gulf Crisis, when relations between Iran and its neighbours were improving and Iran's inclusion into a regional security agreement was discussed. This is the main issue which has suffered from the dispute. The physical presence of a large number of US troops in the Persian Gulf since the Gulf Crisis and the collapse of the Soviet Union gave rise to speculations of outside interest in the Abu Musa crisis. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the various UAE emirates, apart from perhaps the small and poor Ras al-Khaimah, have no interest in a continued dispute with Iran.

Developments in the relationship under President Khatami

President Khatami came to power in August 1997 following a landslide election victory. He immediately set about improving ties with Iran's neighbours in the Gulf. He, like his predecessor, realised the need for a good relationship, in particular, with Saudi Arabia to assure peace and stability in the region, to have a common policy in OPEC, to ensure Gulf investment in Iran, to keep Iraq in check and to improve relations with the West. The new Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi stated that one of the priorities of Iranian foreign policy was to turn over a new leaf in the relations with the GCC states. He expressed Tehran's keenness to build bridges of trust and good will. The Iranian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia declared that:

> Iran is keen to reassure the brothers in the Gulf, stress its readiness to begin a new phase aimed at restoring trust and reaffirm the strong and solid relations between Tehran and its neighbours in order to reinforce the stability and security of the region.[228]

The new voices coming out of Tehran, void of any antagonistic rhetoric and calling for a new phase in the relationship, were welcomed by the Arab states. This came at a time when the Gulf Arab governments were facing increasing popular pressures and an Islamic challenge due to the deterioration of the Arab–Israeli peace process, the continued building of settlements in the Occupied Territories and East Jerusalem, the Israeli refusal to trade land for peace and the new Israeli–Turkish military alliance. The Gulf states thus turned to a new stage in their relations with Iran as a counterbalance to the Israeli–Turkish alliance as well as Iraq. After Khatami's election victory in May, Saudi Arabia was the first to congratulate him. This was followed up with a high-profile visit by an emissary of King Fahd to Tehran in July. Tangible signs of improved ties were the resumption of scheduled Iran Air flights to Jeddah and the display of Iranian products at a trade fair for the first time in eighteen years. The Saudi official who headed the GCC, Jamil al-Hujailan, was quoted as saying the Gulf states were encouraged by new signs of a possible thaw in relations with Iran under Khatami:

> We welcome the new signs coming from Iran which take a new trend in relations. We hope these signs are in harmony with our belief that our relations with Iran should be the strongest relations . . . Iran is a big and strong neighbour . . . Agreeing with Iran and deepening its conviction on the need to cooperate with the GCC is important to stability in the region.[229]

Relations with Saudi Arabia

Iran's relations with the smaller GCC states apart from Bahrain had been continuously improving in the 1990s. Accordingly, the Omani and Qatari Foreign Ministers visited Iran in September 1997 to greet the new government. Iran's relationship with Saudi Arabia which it considered the most important and influential neighbouring state had suffered a setback in 1994, as discussed above. Saudi Arabia was thus the first stop of Foreign Minister Kharrazi's November 1997 Persian Gulf tour. He was received by King Fahd, and stressed the necessity to expand relations.[230] Further headway was made during the ICO summit which was held at the end of December in Tehran. On the Saudi side, it was attended by Crown Prince Abdullah and Foreign Minister Prince Saud. The summit was a great success for the new Iranian government. It lifted Iran out of its isolation in the Islamic world and was visited by senior members of royal families,

vice-presidents and other high-ranking politicians. It was a contrast to the Middle East and North African Economic Summit held in Doha in November, which was attended by only seven out of twenty-two Arab countries; the rest boycotted it because of Israel's attendance and the deteriorating peace process. King Fahd donated a piece of cloth from the Kaʿba for use at the Tehran summit.[231] This was a clear sign that the past problems at the hajj should be overcome. On the sidelines of the summit both Leader Khamenei and President Khatami met Crown Prince Abdullah and called for expanded relations. Prince Abdullah who had offered to mediate between Iran and the US stated 'in our bilateral ties we should look to the future, not the past'.[232]

The summit led to an acceleration in the improvement of the relationship. In February and March 1998 Rafsanjani, now Head of Iran's Expediency Council, took up the invitation to visit Saudi Arabia, extended to him by Crown Prince Abdullah at the Islamic summit in Pakistan a year earlier. Accompanied by a high-level government delegation, he went on a fifteen-day trip and was received by the King and the Crown Prince – an honour denied to US Secretary of State Madelaine Albright two weeks earlier when she tried to summon support for a military strike against Iraq. Tehran Radio exclaimed on 24 February 'the relations between the two countries are entering a new stage in which mutual co-operation will increase dramatically'. Prince Saud believed the visit would 'lead to big developments not only in bilateral relations but also in economic and political cooperation on all regional and international levels'. When asked if a new era in relations was about to start, he stated 'I think it has in fact started'.[233] Saudi Arabia again discussed the fact that it wished to improve American relations with Iran. It was reported that Rafsanjani had extended his stay from initially ten days to meet the Shiʿa in the Eastern Province. He intended to ask the Saudi government to improve their plight and to free hundreds of Shiʿa jailed in June 1996 after the Khubar attack which killed nineteen US servicemen and other people.[234] Rafsanjani hoped for Gulf investment in Iran and suggested that Iran could become the biggest market for Saudi industrial products as well as a bridge for Saudi goods to Central Asia. Their main common concern, however, besides Iraq and Israel, was the stabilisation of the oil price. Saudi Arabia and Iran together own one third of global oil reserves and one fifth of gas reserves. The visit had come in the wake of increased economic problems for both sides due to a slump in the oil price to below $14. This had caused Iran to review its budget twice and was related to an excess output by some OPEC states, notably Venezuela, a mild winter in the northern hemisphere, lower demand in Asia because of a grave economic crisis, and the return of sanctions-hit Iraq to the oil market with a larger oil-for-food deal after UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's visit to Baghdad the same month. Iran and Saudi Arabia thus held talks about a deal to stabilise oil markets and discussed an agreement related to oil

production and output. They hoped that co-operation in OPEC could lead to a decrease in the negative effects of fluctuations in oil prices.

The visit was not going to lead to a regional security treaty but certainly had a very positive effect on the bilateral relationship. Rafsanjani had been the centre of attention on this visit, which showed that he still intended to play an important role in shaping Iran's politics even if he was no longer President. Nevertheless, the success must be regarded as a victory for Khatami's new approach to Iranian diplomacy, which was clearly acknowledged by the Saudi government. Three days before Rafsanjani's trip, Khatami sent Deputy Foreign Minister Muhammad Sadr to Saudi Arabia who was received by King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah. During Rafsanjani's visit, Khatami's government was represented by the Ministers of Oil, Agriculture, Social Security as well as several Deputy Ministers from the Ministries of Trade and Industry, Foreign Affairs, Finance and Islamic Guidance. They all held discussions with the King and Crown Prince.[235] Shortly after this visit, Khatami sent Foreign Minister Kharrazi to follow-up the results. He held talks with Crown Prince Abdullah, Prince Saud and Prince Sultan. As a result, Prince Saud planned to visit Iran after the hajj in April. Despite this official thaw, there were still many sceptics in Saudi Arabia. The country's traditional Sunni Wahhabi hierarchy was suspicious of the Iranian Shi'a and the Grand Mufti in Medina publicly insulted Rafsanjani during his visit. This in turn provoked a hardening in Iran's attitude to Saudi Arabia's opposition to the political hajj rallies.[236] The 1998 hajj nevertheless showed that the Saudi government did not forcefully object to the demonstrations and that the Iranians avoided holding them in Mecca. Both sides seemed to have come to a *modus vivendi* allowing them not to fuel Wahhabi anger.

The crisis over Iraq

During the Gulf Crisis in 1990 and the ensuing war, Iran had remained neutral and called for Iraq's compliance with UN resolutions. It also called for the withdrawal of foreign troops from the region and a peaceful solution to the crisis. The new administration acted in exactly the same way in a renewed crisis involving Iraq in late 1997 and early 1998. In November 1997, Saddam Hussein created a stand-off with UNSCOM weapons inspectors, preventing them from visiting certain sites and criticising the composition of the teams as being too American. Kharrazi during his Gulf tour in Riyadh called on Iraq to comply with the UN resolutions.[237] Due to American pressure, Iraq gave in. However, at the end of January 1998 the crisis erupted again when the Iraqi President hindered UNSCOM visiting presidential sites and called for the lifting of sanctions. The US and its British ally threatened the use of force and the US amassed its military in the Persian Gulf once again. In contrast to 1990 the US did not find any

support amongst the other members of the UN Security Council or the regional Arab states for a military strike. Saudi Arabia refused the use of US bases to launch airstrikes, only Kuwait assisted the US. In the end, Kofi Annan resolved the crisis by diplomatic means. Iran again was not instrumental but did demonstrate its commitment to international law. The crisis was an opportunity for Khatami's government to enhance its standing in the international community and the region. Throughout, Iran did not side with Iraq, but in its role as ICO chairman assisted in finding a diplomatic solution. Kharrazi stated again that Iran was against the use of force by the US and Britain. He tried to mediate in telephone conversations with Iraqi Foreign Minister Muhammad Sa'id al-Sahhaf and Prince Saud, always emphasising the necessity of Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions. He was further in contact with Kofi Annan. Khatami himself called on Iraq to abide by international resolutions but strongly condemned any aggression against Iran's neighbour. He declared 'I call on all countries and international organisations to make every effort to prevent a great human tragedy in Iraq', and called on the countries of the region 'to work together to ensure the security of the Persian Gulf without foreign interference'. He held that foreign naval forces were a factor behind the tension in the Gulf and their presence was an insult to the peoples of the region. A US military strike on Iraq would be 'unacceptable'. When the Iraqi Foreign Minister visited Tehran and held talks with Khatami and Kharrazi, they told him to co-operate with the UN inspectors.[238] The Iranian hardliners and Khamenei in the meantime launched fierce attacks against the United States.

The crisis came to an end through Kofi Annan's diplomatic efforts and the threat of force. It is not clear how far Iranian mediation played a role. It did show the Iraqis, however, that Iran stood firm on the side of the international community and would not ally itself with Saddam Hussein in case an attack were to take place. Throughout the crisis Tehran was in constant touch with the UN Secretary General, the Secretary General of the ICO and the Saudi government and thus demonstrated its willingness to co-operate and play a constructive role in solving regional conflicts.

The islands dispute

The UAE like the other GCC countries welcomed the new Iranian government and rapidly expanded bilateral relations. The islands dispute, however, remained an issue which was repeatedly brought up. Abu Dhabi perhaps hoped that a new administration in Tehran would take a different view on the matter. This was not the case. In September 1997 the Iranian Foreign Ministry stated that Abu Musa and the Tunb islands belonged to Iran, but that Tehran was ready to hold bilateral negotiations on the misunderstanding. The Saudi Foreign Minister speaking before the UN General Assembly in October urged Iran to enter into serious negotiations with the

UAE to reach a peaceful solution in line with international law, including referring the case to the ICJ.[239] At the December GCC summit in Kuwait, the leaders called on Iran to end peacefully its occupation of the three islands. Kuwait's Amir nevertheless stated: 'I felt that a new era has begun to emerge in our neighbouring relations, based on brotherhood, mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs, and the rejection of the use of force or its threatened use.'[240]

During his visit to Saudi Arabia in February 1998, Rafsanjani announced that the problem with the UAE could be solved through bilateral meetings, stressing that Iran was waiting for the UAE to send an envoy. Consequently, the UAE stated that it was ready to send a delegation to Tehran. Nevertheless in March 1998, the UAE's news agency stated that despite Iran's new openness there had been no worthwhile developments in its policy concerning the islands.[241]

Despite the continued problem, Iran and the UAE kept improving links and separated it from their overall relationship. In October 1997, the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah, Sheikh Saqr bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, discussed trade and commercial ties between the UAE and Iran with the Iranian Consul General in Dubai. He stated that the UAE wished to upgrade relations, especially in trade, and pointed out the religious, cultural and historical bonds. The same ruler was said earlier to have a stake in a continued dispute about the Tunbs.[242] In the same vein, the UAE Defence Minister Sheikh Muhammad bin Rashid Al Maktum told Iran's Ambassador Sadeghi that Iran and the UAE were members of a single community in view of their historical and cultural commonalities. Both obviously disregarded their dispute about the historical ownership of the islands. In December on the sidelines of the ICO summit, Khatami met the UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah al-Nuaimi who stated that the link between the two countries was so strong that no power could undermine it, to which Khatami replied that there were no basic problems between Iran and the UAE which could not be resolved.[243]

Khatami's presidency and his call for a new chapter in Iran's relationship with the Gulf states, the avoidance of antagonistic rhetoric and his government's charm offensive during Kharrazi's Gulf tour and the ICO summit were received more than favourably by the GCC leaders. A new accelerated rapprochement between the two sides took place. It was in a way a continuation of a trend started by President Rafsanjani after Ayatollah Khomeini's death, only much more forcefully pursued. Like Rafsanjani after the Gulf Crisis, Khatami laid major emphasis on good relations with Saudi Arabia. In 1994, oil policies brought a tentative rapprochement to a halt. In 1997 and 1998, they helped to speed up the coming closer of both governments. The understanding that both sides needed each other to overcome domestic problems and international crises led to serious efforts to build trust.

Iran and the Gulf states were not yet ready to sign a regional security agreement, but relations have definitely improved since Khatami's election.

Conclusion

Like the Gulf Crisis, the dispute about the islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs illustrated Iran's growing emphasis on its national interest. Despite continued UAE and GCC calls to return the Tunb islands and to withdraw from the Sharjah side of Abu Musa, the governments of Presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami were not willing to let go what the Shah had regarded of vital strategic interest to the country. In the dispute, both sides clearly believed that the islands were theirs and acted upon this belief. This seems more important than the legal issue of ownership.

Despite the conflict, Iran maintained its pragmatic course of attempting to improve relations with its neighbours which had begun after the Iran–Iraq war, but especially since Rafsanjani became President in 1989. This policy was facilitated by Iran's stance in the Gulf Crisis and suffered a slight setback through the Abu Musa crisis. It was accelerated through President Khatami's call to build a new relationship and trust and through his generally pragmatic tone and policies. What this chapter has shown is the clear change of Iran's regional foreign policy, which was widely driven by ideological imperatives in the 1980s as long as Khomeini was alive. The Iran–Iraq war taught Tehran a lesson. It realised that its Arab neighbours were afraid of Iran's radical Islamic rhetoric and were willing to support a radical secular Arab state to prevent the export of revolution. After the war, Iran understood that it needed to build a good relationship with its neighbours in order to improve its own domestic and economic situation.

This was impaired by the presence of the United States in the Gulf after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The US was a major factor of consideration in Iranian Gulf policy in the 1990s. As in the 1980s during the Iran–Iraq war, Iran tried to separate its attitude to the Gulf states from its view of the US, by not judging them too severely for their policy towards Iran and acknowledging their dependence on Washington. For instance, Tehran did not completely blame the Abu Musa crisis on the UAE, but tried to maintain generally good relations, whilst accusing the US of keeping up the conflict.

The changed realities of the 1990s had an impact on Iran's idea of regional security, which turned out to be not much different from the Shah's plans. This will be investigated in the next chapter.

5

REGIONAL SECURITY CO-OPERATION

The idea of collective security without the presence of foreign forces in the region became the focus of Iranian Persian Gulf policy in the 1990s, and in particular after the Gulf Crisis. The policy of the Islamic Republic was in fact very similar to that of the Shah in the 1960s and 1970s. The need for security and stability of the vital waterway through which Iran's main commodity is exported shows how any Iranian government, no matter of what ideological colour, in the end has to act according to Iran's national interest and geopolitical situation. As explained by Davoud Bavand of Imam Sadeq University:

> It lies in the logic of the geopolitical location of Iran: whatever government comes to power, little by little they reach the same position as the previous government which they condemned in the beginning. The only difference now is the position of the United States.[1]

Chapter 1 discussed the Shah's policies: his success in ridding the Gulf of foreign interference, his leading role in securing the Gulf, the emphasis on protecting oil resources and installations and preserving the freedom of navigation. It was also shown that the Shah did not aim to control the Gulf states, but that he expected them to acknowledge his dominant position. In the 1960s, after the Iraqi coup, he began to befriend his neighbours, mainly through trade promotion measures and regular visits of rulers and officials. In the 1970s, Iran strove to reach a level of armament to be able to defend its interests in the region without recourse to foreign support, and the Shah emphasised the need for regional security co-operation without foreign interference. In the 1970s, as in the 1980s and 1990s, Oman was the main Gulf state to agree to any extent with this idea.

The Islamic Republic adopted the same policies in the 1990s. The main difference now was Iran's opposition to the United States, but otherwise Tehran presented the same concepts of Gulf security. During the war with Iraq, it realised that its ideology was not attractive to its neighbours.

After the war, Iran needed their support and investment for its economy. It also had to secure its oil exports both by making the Gulf safe and by co-operation in OPEC. The massive foreign, in particular US, presence which had been in the Gulf since Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and which remained, was seen as threatening to Iran's vital interests in the area. Since then, Tehran more emphatically pronounced its concept of collective security without outside support. After initial positive responses from the Gulf states, it soon became clear that they were not really interested in regional co-operation at least for the immediate future, and that they preferred bilateral Western protection. It also became obvious that the United States was not going to leave the area in the near future. Iran realised that its Arab neighbours still deeply distrusted Iranian intentions and feared Iranian regional dominance. Now as under the Shah, they disliked Iran's ambitions as a regional power, its nationalism and sense of superiority and its Persian–Shi'a characteristics. The Iranian government therefore shifted its emphasis and like the Shah in the 1960s, proposed to begin with confidence-building measures through bilateral political, economic and cultural exchanges, hoping that, eventually, this would pave the way for its ideal of collective security.

This chapter sets out Iran's proposals for regional security co-operation, explains the problems which prevented such co-operation, and investigates the compromise of starting with bilateral, mainly trade, co-operation.

The Iranian idea of collective security in the Persian Gulf

The entry of foreign forces into the Persian Gulf in 1987 and 1990, and again in 1998, heightened Iran's feeling of insecurity. Tehran after the Gulf Crisis and the collapse of the Soviet Union saw an arc of crisis stretching from Iraq through Kurdistan to the Transcaucasus, Tajikistan and Afghanistan in the North, in addition to the US military presence in the South.[2] Iran's primary aim became to establish a secure and stable environment in which it would become possible to reconstruct the country. Despite the fact that stability in the unstable North took immediate priority in Iranian regional foreign policy,[3] the security of the Persian Gulf was historically of vital interest to Iran, as expressed by an Iranian Foreign Ministry official in 1990: 'The Persian Gulf is our backyard and its security is of vital interest to us . . . This has been so for centuries, before the war with Iraq and today, and will not change in the future.'[4]

UN Ambassador Kamal Kharrazi demonstrated the importance of security for Iran and the Gulf countries:

> From a strategic point of view, peace and security in the Persian Gulf are indivisible, a perspective which became clear in the course of the Iran–Iraq war . . . Iran continues to promote the concept of

> indivisibility of peace and security among its neighbors . . . All the littoral states of the Persian Gulf . . . depend on safety and security . . . to maintain their single-product [oil] export and their large volume of imports. Therefore, the prosperity of these countries depends on maintaining peace, security and stability in the Persian Gulf, and by logical extension, peace with one another. Thus, cooperation amongst regional states can only enhance peace and security in the region. The establishment of a mechanism by the states in the Persian Gulf region for dealing with security issues, threat perceptions, and other concerns will be a positive first step in this important endeavor.[5]

The Islamic Republic had always opposed any foreign presence in the Gulf and supported regional security co-operation. During the tanker war, after the US took the decision to reflag Kuwaiti tankers, the Iranian government had warned that there was no need for the presence of external military powers.[6] After the end of the war in November 1988, it proposed that all Gulf states hold talks on regional peace[7] and repeatedly raised the idea of a collective security system, primarily in the military realm.

Tehran did not give any detailed programme of how it envisaged this system, and from interviews with officials it seems that there was no clear policy outline. This could mean that the policy makers did not believe this system would materialise in the near future and therefore did not yet think of the technicalities. A Senior Advisor to the Foreign Minister, Ali Khorram, stressed, however, that Iran believed that a regional security agreement meant that all eight countries should protect the security of the region together, that is the free flow of oil, the respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states and the non-interference in the internal affairs of the others.[8] It seemed clear that whatever form the system would take, if it came into being, Iran, based on its history, location and size, would play a leading role in it. As expressed by Muhammad Javad Larijani, Deputy Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee:

> Our vital interests are resources and security. These will be maintained through durable stability in the area. To achieve stability, we gradually developed the doctrine of collective security arrangements in the Persian Gulf. Every country should be accepted as it is, as the status quo. We do not have to change any regime. Every state will be a full member . . . [but] the bigger country should have a greater say.[9]

This view was corroborated by a Foreign Ministry official, who held that every country should have the role and position which befitted it in a regional security agreement. Since Iran's population was 60 million and the

country had the longest coast line and constituted a strategic bridge between the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, the Caucasus, Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan, it should have a special role to play in the security arrangement. 'Officially, Iran would perhaps have one vote, but unofficially, every country should have its real vote.'[10] Foreign Minister Velayati added that: 'Consistent with its national and strategic interests and cognizant of its grave responsibility in this region, the Islamic Republic of Iran has historically acted as the force for stability in the Persian Gulf region.'[11]

Nevertheless, President Rafsanjani underlined in 1989 that Iran did not want to be the gendarme of the Persian Gulf again, stating:

> The Islamic revolution has upset the method of assigning a gendarme to the Persian Gulf. We are not ready, in any way, to be the guardian and protector of others . . . and yet we will not allow anyone to adopt the title of guardianship and gendarme of the Persian Gulf.[12]

It seems that the Islamic Republic did not want to be identified with any concepts associated with the Shah. In reality, however, like the Shah, it was aware of its strategic importance and expected to play a leading role in regional security.

Iran eventually intended to include all eight Gulf countries into the collective agreement. As stated by Deputy Foreign Minister Javad Zarif: 'All eight countries of the Persian Gulf region, including Iraq, must ultimately be included in the security and cooperation arrangements of the Persian Gulf area. Any exclusion will be the seed of future mistrust, tension, and crisis.'[13]

It was, however, out of the question to include Iraq for the time being. Rafsanjani's above-mentioned remark that Iran would not allow anyone else to become the gendarme was mainly addressed at Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Kharrazi explained that Iraq in the aftermath of the invasion of Kuwait would have difficulties entering a regional security agreement.[14] Former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani, went one step further and proclaimed that a regional security agreement was not feasible because of Saddam Hussein:

> We want an arrangement between the Persian Gulf states whereby they commit themselves to respect the security of the others. We realise this cannot be materialised with the existence of Saddam Hussein. His signature has no value; therefore such an agreement is practically impossible because of Saddam Hussein.[15]

This meant that the preconditions for collective security were the disappearance of foreign forces from the region and also the demise of Saddam Hussein. It seems, however, that in the second half of the 1990s these two issues were slowly becoming positions Iran was willing to negotiate on.

The basis for the collective arrangement was found in UNSCR 598, Paragraph 8, which was introduced by the Iranian UN Representative.[16] Oman supported the idea of regional security on the basis of that Resolution. An Omani official explained:

> We could have used Resolution 598 after the Iran–Iraq war. Item 8 calls on the United Nations Secretary General to arrange consultations between the two belligerent parties and the other countries in the region to create stability in the region. Consequently, the GCC Political Department organised a working group which produced a White Paper: The Secretariat led by GCC Undersecretary Saif al-Maskery, Oman, proposed to use this Resolution as an instrument either to have an international agreement between the eight countries in the region for security and stability in the region; or to hold an international conference and issue a regional declaration to keep the Gulf countries stable and secured by all countries together. A declaration has a moral and political obligation. If one party does not fulfill the obligation, it won't affect the others, unlike an agreement. Unfortunately, nothing happened, the suggestions were not accepted by the GCC.[17]

Iran put increasing emphasis on the implementation of UNSCR 598 after the Gulf Crisis, when it was confronted with the continued presence of Western forces. In March 1991, Velayati stated that security could not be brought into the Persian Gulf region from the outside and that it was the task of the littoral states to safeguard security, which would return to the Persian Gulf, if Paragraph 8 of UNSCR 598 was being implemented. When UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar visited Iran in September 1991, Rafsanjani underlined the necessity of full enforcement of Resolution 598 and added that the UN had an important role in stabilising security and peace in the Persian Gulf by enforcing the Resolution.[18]

As was discussed in Chapter 4, the GCC rulers initially were grateful to Iran for its stance during the Gulf Crisis and supported the inclusion of Iran into regional security arrangements. Soon, however, they changed their minds and preferred Western protection and continued to exclude Iran due to various factors which will be discussed in the following section.

Impediments for collective security including Iran

Arab fear and lack of trust

Most of the Gulf states in 1990 and 1991, shortly after the Gulf Crisis, seemed to be serious in considering Iran as a valid partner in future security co-operation. With the passing of time and the occurrence of the Abu

Musa crisis in 1992, they changed their attitude. Reasons which have been mentioned in the Gulf and the West for this change were mainly the Iranian arms build-up after the Iran–Iraq war and continued fear of subversion and terrorism. In addition, deep historical and sectarian distrust prevailed and could not be overcome overnight by the Gulf Crisis. As the first shock wore off, old prejudices took over, enhanced by the American presence which underlined an alleged Iranian threat.

At the same time, the Gulf states feared the re-emergence of a powerful Iraq. They briefly considered an Arab defence alliance including Egypt and Syria, their allies in the Gulf Crisis, but then turned to the West, signing bilateral defence agreements with the United States and European powers, not even seriously considering collective GCC security co-operation. Furthermore, they began to arm heavily in order to counter any possible threat from the Northern Gulf, drifting even further away from regional security co-operation.

The most serious obstacle to a collective security arrangement, besides US opposition to it, was the lack of trust and Gulf Arab fear of Iranian hegemony and domination. Davoud Bavand of Imam Sadeq University asserted:

> Under the Shah, Iran was a status quo power like the other Persian Gulf states. Even then they did not want a collective security arrangement with Iran in a leading position. Now they don't want it either. They say it is because of Iran's opposition to the peace process, the islands, support of terrorism. But really they are against Iran's leading role.[19]

Jamal al-Suwaidi, Director of the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies, who stated that the Islamic Republic was a major concern for the stability and security in the Gulf, based this assertion on subversion, the islands dispute, ongoing Iranian weapons programmes, Iranian opposition to the peace process and, finally, 'Iran's nationalist quest to expand Persian influence and its attempt to dominate the Gulf region as the sole hegemonic power'.[20] A UAE paper added:

> Iran with its 'king-of-kings' [*shahinshahiyya*] attitude has not abandoned its dream of being the regional power as policeman and of setting down conditions in the area. The revolution did not change these priorities . . . After the second Gulf war, Iran started to re-emerge as the regional power.[21]

The Foreign Minister of Bahrain, Sheikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, maintained that Iran needed to build confidence,[22] and the Bahraini Ambassador to the United States, Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar, expressed Arab distrust of Iran's intentions, giving Iran's involvement in terrorism as

the main reason. This view was influenced by the broader context of the Bahraini uprising in the mid-1990s:[23]

> With Iran's involvement in terrorism, we cannot include Iran in a regional security agreement. Countries need to build confidence, which is not possible under the current regime in Tehran. During Desert Storm, the GCC thought Iran might change, but Iran saw Iraq devastated and thought the same could happen to them. So they began to rearm which scared the Gulf. The Crisis was a very good opportunity to establish good relations. Tehran missed many good opportunities. They can't deliver, they have too many factions.[24]

The Director of the Department of GCC and Gulf States Affairs in the UAE Foreign Ministry, Khalifa Shaheen al-Merree, supported the same view, but based it on the islands dispute and Iranian opposition to foreign forces:

> We cannot have a regional security agreement because of Iran. To have a reliable security arrangement, the first thing you need is trust. That's why we see the solving of the islands dispute with Iran, as well as boundary problems within the GCC as a pre-requisite. Since 1991, we detected some intention by Iran to establish itself as the regional power after Iraq's defeat. They wanted to exercise their influence. Iran opposed the Damascus Declaration. When we held the six-plus-one talks with Iran in 1991, Iran very much opposed the participation of foreign forces in Gulf security. This is where the gap between Iran and the UAE lies.[25]

Besides the underlying distrust of the Shi'a Persian neighbours and the fear of subversion, Iranian domination of the Gulf was the greatest worry. Iran's military armament has been frequently mentioned as proof for its hostile intentions. Although, as discussed in Chapter 4, the Gulf states did not really seem to believe that Iran would invade or attack them militarily, and their own arming was directed more against the Iraqi threat, some diplomats and politicians officially said that Iran was more dangerous. In any case, the Iranian armament programme, as well as large-scale military exercises in the Persian Gulf, could be used by the Gulf states and the US as a pretext to keep Iran out of any security arrangements. Al-Suwaidi, for instance, stated the collapse of the Soviet Union led to continued Russian military sales to Iran, including the transfer of advanced technology and military hardware. He argued that the Iranian leadership was preparing to assert military superiority over one or several GCC states. The acquisition of non-conventional weapons would facilitate such assertion, enable the Islamic Republic to become the regional superpower in the Gulf, gain leverage over

the United States and use its power to blackmail the GCC states into increasing oil quotas.[26]

In November 1992, Iran received its first Russian-made submarine and became the first Gulf state with underwater warfare capability, which increased the fears of the Arab states. They were even more concerned about Iran's plan to rebuild its armed forces, its signing of $12 billion worth of arms contracts with Russia, China and North Korea since 1990, as well as the signing in November 1992 of a nuclear co-operation protocol with Russia, committing Moscow to build a nuclear power plant and research centre. All these developments led to Egyptian warnings to the Gulf of an imminent Iranian threat.[27] Opinions in the Gulf about a real Iranian menace were split. The Saudi view was probably the most important one influencing the decision to keep Iran excluded, as Saudi Arabia had the most sway amongst the smaller Gulf states. It was influenced by the historical and religious rivalry between the two states and expressed by a Saudi source before a thaw in relations came about in 1997:

> Today, Iran is a much bigger threat to the Gulf than Iraq. Iraq is now contained. Iran in the long run is much more dangerous. Its arms build-up signals hostile intentions. If Iran acquires nuclear weapons, it would lead to a major disaster. This is why the US must stay in the region. Iran cannot be part of a security agreement. In the beginning, Saudi Arabia said we needed to include Iran in a regional security agreement, but that was just rhetoric. We string them along. We say: 'Let's talk in six months, let's discuss it further.' We do not want to provoke them. At the same time, we bring in the US. Saudi Arabia never had any intentions of including Iran, but we speak softly.[28]

The same attitude was still maintained in early 1998, when former President Rafsanjani went on his successful visit to the Kingdom. Iran wanted to discuss a regional security treaty, but a Saudi analyst explained 'we are a conservative and cautious people, and prefer to give careful study to proposals of that kind'.[29] Nevertheless, when Foreign Minister Kharrazi went on his follow-up visit in March, Prince Saud said closer relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia were important to underpin regional security. He held that the current rapprochement between the GCC states and Iran was a basic component in mutual understanding on security in the region. This attitude was underlined in practice when an Iranian warship carrying members of the Revolutionary Guards and students and professors from the Iranian navy docked in the port of Jeddah on a friendly visit and was met by Saudi military officials.[30] This should demonstrate that by 1998 Saudi Arabia was interested in building a limited bilateral military relationship.

A senior official in the Prime Minister's Office of Bahrain, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, held that Iran definitely had to be included in a regional security agreement, once the region was assured by Iran of its non-aggressive intentions. But this could not happen as long as Iran pursued the acquisition of nuclear arms, created problems in Abu Musa etc. As of yet, positive signs which could have led to an inclusion of Iran did not exist.[31] The Bahraini Foreign Minister, Sheikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, compared the situation with the time of the Shah and added that:

> We started discussing regional security in the late 1960s with the Shah. But you can't have a joint security arrangement when you feel threatened by the other. Iran is more dangerous than Iraq because Iraq is down and Iran is rebuilding its arsenal.[32]

There were explicit voices in the other states, however, who did not think that Iran was a military threat. Kuwait, in particular, after having been invaded by Iraq, thought Iraq was far more dangerous than Iran. As expressed by the Kuwaiti Ambassador in Washington, Muhammad al-Sabah:

> Kuwait is not concerned about Iran's nuclear programme. We think that Iran is on the verge of an internal explosion. It will explode much earlier than it can develop a nuclear bomb. The power base of the regime is eroding.[33]

Saif Abbas from Kuwait University explained that Iran needed nuclear energy for domestic use and that, due to its problem of communication, it could not convince the US of this:

> We need a comprehensive Nuclear Proliferation Treaty to ensure that Iran won't produce nuclear arms. We know that Iran needs nuclear energy for domestic use. Either they can develop it or we will have to help them with oil. By the early twenty-first century, Iran will probably not have enough oil for domestic use and to sell it to earn hard currency. They will have to use nuclear electricity domestically and sell the oil. They have gas, but that does not travel as well. Iran has to convince the US of this, but it has a problem of communication.[34]

After President Khatami's inauguration, the Kuwaiti Minister for Security, Sheikh Saud Nasir Saud al-Sabah, stated that Kuwait did not trust the Iraqi regime at all; and that Iran and the GCC must co-operate on security in the Gulf.[35]

Oman, like Kuwait, did not feel threatened by the Iranian military. H.H. Sayyid Haitham, Secretary General of the Omani Foreign Ministry, asserted:

> Iran after its war with Iraq feels very weak. They think that the US forces in the Gulf are directed against them. So they have a reason to arm. It is an internal Iranian affair. There are no grounds for us to feel threatened. We are not in confrontation with them.[36]

To defend its armament, Iran argued that it was surrounded by threats and needed to build up its defensive capacity. It maintained that it was not interested in territorial conquest and that its arms were not directed against its Persian Gulf neighbours or to block the Straits of Hormuz, as suggested by US officials. As stated by Kamal Kharrazi:

> We are surrounded by turmoil. In the west, we have Iraq, which has attacked its neighbours twice . . . In the east, we have Afghanistan; in the south, the Persian Gulf, we have the presence of foreign troops; in the north, we have republics with their own problems . . . It is very easy to make the case that we need to keep our military capacity and buy some arms for defensive purposes. If the Americans claim that this military expenditure is to threaten the states in the Persian Gulf, that is a baseless accusation. I think they make this claim to sell more arms.[37]

Iran felt particularly threatened when the Gulf states signed defence agreements with Western powers. Deputy Foreign Minister Besharati argued: 'Our neighbours, one after the other, are signing defence agreements with Western countries. So why should we not buy military hardware?'[38]

According to Kharrazi, however, Iran's priority had been reconstruction and not military build-up[39] and Iran's arms acquisition was modest compared to some programmes of the GCC states. In 1991, for example, Iran's estimated military expenditures were $4.27 billion, as opposed to Iraq's $7.49 billion and Saudi Arabia's $35.44 billion. In 1996, Iran's expenditures were estimated at $3.30 billion, whilst Saudi Arabia spent nearly $17 billion.[40]

In January 1994, the GCC Defence Ministers approved plans to double their rapid deployment force and purchase more AWACS surveillance aircraft.[41] In 1992 the CIA estimated Iran's expenditures at $2 billion, and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) set Iran's expenditures on conventional weapons at $867 million in 1993. Kemp argued that Iran's arms build-up did not necessarily imply aggressive intentions and that it had a 'long way to go to be militarily effective'. He added that Iran at the time did not pose any military threat to its Persian Gulf neighbours, but that it could pose dangers for US or GCC navy operations, if its sea-denial capabilities improved.[42] As for the Russian submarines, according to a French naval commander, they did not pose any immediate threat to Gulf security, and it would take between five to ten years to train

the personnel.[43] Cordesman maintained that Iran could not be expected to accept the force levels it had at the end of the Iran–Iraq war, as it faced a major threat from Iraq with a large number of Iraqi forces still deployed along the Iranian border.[44]

As for nuclear arms, there was no known secret facility in Iran building components for nuclear weapons in 1994.[45] Chubin assumed that if Iran was seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, this might be directed against a future Iraqi re-emergence or to deter US intervention. Coercive uses of possible nuclear weapons were not pre-eminent in Iran's thinking.[46] By 1995 the US seemed quietly to admit that there was no immediate threat of an Iranian nuclear arms programme. As reported in the *International Herald Tribune* on 9 December 1997:

> The Iranian weapons program became a major headache for the White House last winter when intelligence reporting – much of it Israeli, but confirmed in large part by US agencies – disclosed a sharp acceleration in Iranian covert weapons research. The threat was not nuclear weapons. Tehran seems to have shelved that program two years ago after Mr Yeltsin, under US pressure, vetoed a Russian sale of weapons-related equipment. This time concern focused on ballistic missiles.

It seems clear that the Iranian military did not pose a real threat to its neighbours who were much better equipped than Iran, and that they did not actually believe that Iran was going to attack them militarily. Nevertheless, still afraid of possible effects of the revolution on their own rule and of subversion and Iranian domination, as well as fearing the re-emergence of Iraq, they were open to American warnings of an Iranian military threat and turned to Western protection. This led to the practical impossibility of a collective security agreement including Iran and excluding foreign forces in the near future.

By early 1997 the GCC as a whole was more willing to build trust, perhaps in view of the deterioration of the Middle East peace process and an interest in Iran as a counterweight to a revanchist Iraq. After Foreign Minister Velayati's Gulf tour in March the GCC Ministerial Council meeting in Riyadh stated that it welcomed the new trends expressed by Velayati and underlined the preparedness of the member states to respond positively and take serious action for building trust and putting relations on the correct course politically.[47] This trend was reinforced and taken further under the new Khatami government. After Foreign Minister Kharrazi's Gulf tour in November 1997, he declared:

> During my recent visit to the Gulf region I found a common desire on both sides to improve relations. That is why I believe that the

> first thing that we have to do and which I have tried to do, is to build mutual trust through dialogue and mutual understanding and to change wrong impressions. I believe that to some extent I have succeeded . . . The new government has new ways of dealing with the issues and relies on sowing trust. That is the change. I believe that the two sides are looking at a new era in their relations and that both welcome it.[48]

Indeed, as a result, the GCC December summit in Kuwait called for the expansion of ties, aimed at creating mutual trust for the realisation of security in the region. Kuwait went as far as calling the participation of the Islamic Republic in a regional security arrangement vital, since the bilateral defence treaties between the GCC states and their allies would not last forever. This came after the rejection by the Gulf Arab defence chiefs in October of an Iranian offer of joint war games. They said they would continue to depend on the West to guarantee their defence for the foreseeable future. The GCC's top military official, Kuwaiti Major-General Faleh Abdullah al-Shatti, described the offer as good but impracticable because of the territorial dispute between Iran and the UAE over the three Gulf islands.[49] This shows a certain confusion prevailing in the GCC of how to deal with Iran. The idea of an Iranian military threat, however, did not seem to play a real part, even if cited by some. It also demonstrated that the new Khatami government was able to instill greater trust amongst Iran's neighbours than achieved previously. Towards the late 1990s, the Gulf states increasingly questioned US military protection and its warning of an Iranian threat.

The presence of the United States in the Persian Gulf

In August 1990, 10,000 US troops were deployed in the Gulf in the wake of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. This figure increased rapidly and by mid-August 1992, stood at 24,000.[50] During the renewed crisis over Iraq in early 1998, up to 35,000 US troops were in the Gulf. In addition, there were British and French troops stationed in the region as part of the multi-national effort enforcing sanctions on Iraq. Ever since the Gulf Crisis, Iran had been concerned about a permanent presence of the United States.

In January 1993, Richard Murphy, former US Assistant Secretary of State, asserted that the US did not want to see any nation dominate the Persian Gulf, but for better or worse, there was one which dominated the Gulf, and that was the US.[51] The United States was opposed to any inclusion of Iran in Gulf security arrangements and after the Gulf Crisis established itself not only militarily but also increasingly economically in the region. It was therefore not interested in leaving, and as stated by a Western diplomat, was serious about its military threats against Iran.[52] The US was mainly

worried about Iran's position in the Middle East peace process and possible interference in Iraqi affairs after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Officials in the Arab states of the Gulf held differing views about the US presence and its policy towards Iran. On the whole, they seemed to think that the Western presence was necessary to keep peace and stability in the Persian Gulf. They were worried about the Iraqi threat, but differed about the US policy of isolating Iran. Bahrain's Foreign Minister held that his country's association with the US and its presence in the Gulf was very important for keeping stability and freedom of navigation and trade.[53] This view was supported by another Bahraini official, Abdallah Yateem, who stated that the US was 'our great ally' and that it had the responsibility to support the security of the Gulf.[54]

The Vice President of Bahrain University, Sheikh Khalid al-Khalifa, however, asserted that it was in the US' interests to have trouble in the Gulf as it wanted to sell arms;[55] and a Bahraini journalist hoped that the US would not strike against Iran, as Iran would retaliate against the Gulf states.[56] The Kuwaiti policy was explained by Saif Abbas of Kuwait University:

> Kuwait tells the US that we have to have relations with Iran in spite of our friendship with America. We tell Iran that we have to have relations with the US despite our friendship with Tehran. It is extremely important that Kuwait be the bridge between Iran and the rest of the Gulf and between Iran and the US. We know that burning bridges is not good. Both Iran and the US respect the Kuwaiti position.[57]

An Arab journalist explained the general position of the Gulf states as not wanting to isolate Iran completely because they knew the US would not be there forever, implying that it would leave once the oil had run out.[58]

Despite this ambivalence in the Arab position, they were too much under US influence to be able to lead a completely independent policy towards Iran. Former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani criticised the Rafsanjani government for seriously addressing the Gulf states on regional security co-operation without taking their dependence on the US into account:

> Sometimes the expectations of the Islamic Republic of Iran go beyond the size and the capacity of these small Arab states. When we address them as a relevant element in the security equation of the Persian Gulf, we often address them as independent, normal states. This may not be the self-perception of the leaders. We overestimate their independence. In our media, we address them as puppets, etc. without appreciating their size and population. Iran is to be blamed because Iran is the big state, it is expected to be

> tolerant and understanding. You cannot expect them to behave otherwise. How can these countries have regional security agreements with us and without the US? They cannot take big strategic decisions by themselves. How can the Iranian President put this forward and mean it?[59]

Policy makers in Tehran eventually realised that they had to take the co-operation of the Arab states with the West seriously, after they had initially believed regional security co-operation was possible following the Gulf Crisis. As stated by UN Ambassador Kharrazi:

> We have tried our best to convince these southern states of the Persian Gulf that eventually we have to get together and come up with a security plan. But it seems that they are under pressure from outside powers, especially the US . . . We are showing patience . . . because it takes time.[60]

He added that he was suspicious that the US played a very important role in the politics of the region's governments. The US had economic interests in the area. There was no reason for the Gulf countries to buy so many arms if they had good relations with Iran. The US therefore had the policy of dividing Iran and the Persian Gulf countries. He contended that the Gulf states listened because they were small and dependent. Privately, they said they were interested in better relations with Iran.[61] Once Foreign Minister, Kharrazi maintained:

> Iran could not force countries in the region to cancel their relations with the United States or to cancel military cooperation with it . . . [Instead] an atmosphere of trust must be established in the region so these countries would not see a need to seek help from foreign countries.[62]

Davoud Bavand of Imam Sadeq University agreed with the view that, besides the Arab fear of domination, the US was the main problem for Iran in establishing regional security:

> The US has an impact on Saudi Arabia not to approach Iran too closely. In this atmosphere, rapprochement cannot be achieved. The US propaganda about Iranian military and territorial ambitions has made the Arab states alert. The US is the main obstacle for regional security. In particular, since the Gulf Crisis it has committed itself to maintaining security in the area through bilateral arrangements.[63]

It became clear immediately after the liberation of Kuwait that the GCC states would turn West rather than East for security co-operation. In March 1991, they concluded the Damascus Declaration with Egypt and Syria that resulted in fierce criticism from Iran. The United States placed priority on integrating Egypt into Gulf security. The agreement soon failed. Reports suggested that one reason was the disagreement between Egypt and the GCC over including Iran in the arrangements,[64] but it seems more likely that the Gulf states distrusted Egypt and Syria and feared interference into their internal affairs. In July 1991, the Damascus Declaration Foreign Ministers at their meeting in Kuwait, failed to reach agreement on the formation of a joint security force, but agreed that individual countries could seek military help from their allies if necessary. Oman suggested an Arab force drawn exclusively from GCC countries.[65] The idea was shelved because Saudi Arabia feared a loss of its dominance within the GCC.[66] In 1992 Sultan Qabus proposed to form an army of 100,000 soldiers from the Gulf littoral countries to strengthen regional security through regional co-operation. Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi on a visit to Iran in September 1995 referred to that proposal.[67] Oman generally preferred a regional Gulf security agreement which included both Iran and, after Saddam Hussein's exit from government, Iraq as the only way to secure Gulf stability in the long run.[68] In March 1997, Oman's air force commander al-Aridi visited Iran to discuss ways to elaborate a practical formula for joint regional security arrangements to establish security in the shared Gulf waters. He stated:

> Iran is an influential neighbouring state. We and Iran share the coasts of the Strait of Hormuz, which is vital to both countries, the region, the world. Thus it is our duty to protect it. The establishment of peace and security there is a joint responsibility, so efforts must be coordinated between us and our brothers.

Oman's Ambassador to Iran added:

> Muscat and Tehran can complement each other in coordinating stances on regional security and exchanging expertise in modernising the armed forces and military industrialisation. It is our right as neighbours to co-operate and not be content with importing expertise from abroad, when there are great opportunities to develop our regional expertise through bilateral and multilateral co-operation.[69]

The Gulf countries in the early 1990s had turned exclusively to outside assistance and signed bilateral security agreements or renewed old ones. In September 1991, Kuwait signed an agreement with the United States.

Tehran criticised the pact as being 'bound to encourage more military intervention from the US in the region' and laying 'the foundations of insecurity and instability'. Tehran repeatedly called for a collective security arrangement.[70] Kuwait eventually signed bilateral agreements with all five permanent members of the UN Security Council. The Kuwaiti Ambassador to the US, Muhammad al-Sabah, explained his country's rationale:

> We cannot discuss regional Gulf security as long as Saddam Hussein is in power. He is the primary reason why the US forces are in Kuwait. Theoretically, this means that if Saddam Hussein goes – depending on the following Iraqi regime, it takes considerable checking to see, if Iraq can live peacefully –, there will be no need to maintain a large US military presence in the Gulf. There should be a small military presence to protect the oil.
>
> Kuwait assured Iran that as long as they don't attack Kuwait, the US cannot use the Kuwaiti bases as a launching pad to attack Iran. You can use military power to change the regime in Iraq, but not in Iran. Military power is a deterrence against Iran. Against Iraq, it is instrumental for change.[71]

Between 1991 and 1994, all GCC states apart from Saudi Arabia signed security agreements with the US. These included joint exercises, access to ports and facilities and prepositioning of equipment. Riyadh, however, allowed allied aircraft to be based in Saudi Arabia to enforce the Iraqi no-fly zone, and as mentioned above, signed massive arms deals with the US. The UAE after initial reluctance signed an agreement in July 1994.[72] The GCC states with the exception of Kuwait opposed a permanent US presence on their soil, but wanted the US to remain directly engaged in the region, being able to intervene in case of future crises.[73] Khalifa Shaheen al-Merree of the UAE Foreign Ministry illuminated the UAE approach to Persian Gulf security:

> Our approach to security in the Gulf has four levels: first, security within the country; second, regional, a) within the GCC, b) including Iran, Iraq, and Yemen; third, inter-Arab, including Egypt and Syria; and fourth, international, including Europe, the US, Japan. All four levels should be integrated to provide stability in the region. We have been discussing this within the GCC since 1991. Whatever we can achieve on any of these levels, we take it step by step. Within this framework we do not oppose any bilateral agreements.[74]

It can be demonstrated that the Gulf countries, even if they differed slightly in their approach and emphasis on Gulf security and the eventual inclusion of Iran, all agreed on the importance of the presence of Western

forces in the region. It seems that to them, apart from Saudi Arabia, this did not necessarily exclude Iran from future arrangements.

For the US, however, the inclusion of Iran was completely inconceivable. One of the main reasons was Iran's opposition to the Middle East peace process. This, *inter alia*, led to a further rift in the initial Iranian–GCC rapprochement. After the second Gulf war, the Arab–Israeli peace process and Gulf support of it allowed for closer relations between the GCC states and the US. On the other hand, according to Jamal al-Suwaidi, the peace process increased the possibility of hostilities in the Gulf due to strong Iranian opposition to the process and criticism of the Arab 'partners at peace with Israel'.[75] This opposition initially caused new tensions between Iran and the Gulf states and worsened Iranian–US relations. It came after President Bush had been willing to open a dialogue with Iran after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Rafsanjani's support in freeing Western hostages in the Lebanon.

The GCC states supported the peace process which began with the Madrid Conference in October 1991, all the way through the Oslo Accord between Israel and the Palestinians in September 1993, and the Israeli peace treaty with Jordan in October 1994. Gulf support resulted in increased relations with the US in the economic and military realms. This in turn alienated the GCC further from Iran. First, their support allowed the Arab rulers to develop their regional economies within the general process of globalisation oriented westward towards the Mediterranean and the European Union. Iran risked being excluded from this process. Second, the impact of the general US–Arab rapprochement resulted in an increased flow of US arms to the Gulf and an increased strategic American presence in the Middle East, which was likely to escalate tensions between the Arabs and Iran, and not as before, between the Arabs and Israel.[76] Iran had replaced Israel as the main enemy of the Arabs. The situation changed when Binyamin Netanyahu formed a new government in June 1996. It soon became clear that Israel was not willing to trade land for peace and continued to build new settlements. It also entered into a military alliance with Turkey. The fear of a popular backlash against Arab governments close to Washington combined with the election of President Khatami, led to an increased rapprochement between the GCC and Iran. The Secretary General of the GCC, Jamil al-Hujailan, in August 1997 rejected the claim that the Islamic Republic was a threat to the region. He viewed the Iranian role in a collective regional security arrangement as 'essential'.[77] For the time being this may just have been rhetoric. It was perhaps supported by some states, such as Oman or Kuwait, but still rejected by others, notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Nevertheless, it was a landmark statement showing that change in the relationship was now definitely under way.

In the 1990s it had become increasingly unrealistic after the Gulf Crisis that the Gulf countries could consider Iranian suggestions of a collective

security arrangement which included Iran and excluded the United States in the near future. The two main reasons were distrust of Iranian intentions of dominating the area and active US opposition to including Iran. In addition, there were internal problems, which prevented the GCC countries from establishing a collective security system amongst themselves even without Iran; these included issues such as border disputes and Saudi leadership, all of which are beyond the scope of this work. Only in 1997 voices within the GCC increasingly called for an Iranian role in collective regional security arrangements, but they still met with opposition and scepticism.

The compromise solution: confidence-building and bilateral co-operation in all fields with eventual security co-operation

The Iranian government slowly realised that it had to overcome the existing distrust and work towards co-operation in other fields than the military one, before being able to achieve a collective security agreement which might eventually even exclude the United States. Politicians and academics – perhaps for the first time in the 1990s – were in the process of developing an Iranian Persian Gulf strategy. They worked towards multilateral co-operation and reinforcement of mutual trust by appealing to an alleged common religious, cultural, historical and commercial heritage, as well as geographic proximity.[78] As expressed by Mahmood Sariolghalam at a 1995 conference on Arab–Iranian relations in Qatar: 'We are neither divorced, nor separated. We need to revitalise the forgotten historic affection. We are destined to co-operate due to geographic proximity, Islamic heritage and plain economic realities.'[79]

Ja'fari Valdani placed emphasis on existing ethnic links as an important basis for co-operation:

> There are cultural particularities and historical and geographical conditions which can potentially lay the groundwork for any kind of co-operation. There are common cultural and geographic characteristics between the people of the Southern provinces of Iran and the inhabitants of the other side of the Persian Gulf. This fact created deep links between the two peoples. The deep common interests between the inhabitants of both sides of the Persian Gulf can help expand co-operation.[80]

In an interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsat* in 1996, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Maleki lamented the poor picture the Arabs were painting of Iran as the main reason for the continuing misunderstanding between Iran and its neighbours:

> Whereas we give a very noble picture of the Arabs in our books and encourage the learning of the Arab language, the picture the Arabs paint of Iran is very distorted, and this is a great travesty for future generations. We and the Arabs are neighbours, indeed we are brothers. It is imperative that we understand each other. Is there a better friend for the Arabs than Iran?![81]

Iran realised that the most important task was to build confidence and trust. Sariolghalam agreed with Maleki's view of existing Arab prejudice. In comparison to Maleki's quote, however, he openly expressed the underlying Iranian attitude that Iran could very well live without its Arab neighbours, but that because of the common heritage co-operation was inevitable:

> To build trust, we need to deal with and tackle misperceptions and misconceptions. In the intellectual community of Iran, the scope of Arab misperception of Iran and Iranians is regarded with great astonishment. This is due to those who shape these perceptions since they make judgments without observations and draw conclusions without providing evidence . . . Although Iran may do well without its neighbors, geographic, historical and cultural bonds dictate understanding, interaction and tolerance particularly with its Arab neighbors.[82]

Jalil Roshandel admitted that the Iranians distrusted the Arabs, too. He held that because of the existing 'mutual' suspicion and lack of trust regional co-operation in politics in the short run was idealistic. Co-operation had to be started at the microlevel to make regional co-operation gradually possible. He thought a good example was the European experience in the development from the European Coal and Steel Community to the European Union.[83] Foreign Minister Velayati asserted: 'The major difficulty is in setting off the process and not in the process itself. Skepticism must begin to give way to confidence in order to achieve real stability in this region.'[84]

Approaching the mid-1990s, Iran consequently developed a more detailed policy towards the Persian Gulf. The newly formulated policy was to promote security and stability in the region, which would eliminate the need for foreign presence. The way to build the required confidence was through talks and dialogue and bilateral co-operation in various fields. The basic points of this policy were articulated by Velayati in his address at the Fifth Seminar on the Persian Gulf at IPIS in Tehran in December 1994:

> We are interested in providing the essential background for co-operation in order to eliminate turmoil in the Persian Gulf and in taking successful steps to bring calm and security to the region. The best factors which in future can provide the peace and stability we want

> in the region are the following: First, the necessity to develop contacts and talks; second, development of trade links; third, scientific and cultural co-operation; fourth, control of the arms race; and fifth, co-operation in the protection of the environment.[85]

The Director General of the Persian Gulf Department in the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Hossein Sadeghi, explained that it would take time to build trust. He suggested that the attempts so far, that is in 1996, had been fruitless and held that Iran and its neighbours should begin co-operation in the economic field:

> We have to build confidence. Unfortunately it does not exist now. We need dialogue, at the moment there is very little. We have to find common points which is difficult. We have to start with economic co-operation, trade, industrial projects, for instance petrochemicals. At present, not much co-operation exists. After that, we can build political relations; it will take some time. Only when this is achieved, can we have regional security. Before regional security, we can try to establish bilateral security agreements, for instance with Kuwait or the UAE, whose security is important to us.[86]

Abbas Haghighat of IPIS supported this argument and added the importance of popular exchanges:

> The best model for security within a region is without the presence of a superpower. The communication within the region can be easier than with outside powers. We should mature this region to operate as a united region. I have been trying for three years to argue that collective security is good, but it is not practicable. It is not the case that President Rafsanjani and the Amirs are talking on the telephone – that is wishful thinking. We should start with other things: tourism, trade, the economy, dialogue between people on different levels – professors, artists, etc. This will create a secure atmosphere. Then the region could find a solution for maintaining security. I present this view whenever I visit the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf.[87]

Another Iranian source stated that the idea of having bilateral relationships with each Persian Gulf state would maintain the power relationship between a big and a small country.[88] This meant that the aspired leading position of Iran would not be lost in the meantime.

Velayati held that Iran's policy during the Gulf Crisis and its attempts to secure peaceful settlements in the Caucasus, Afghanistan and Tajikistan were proof of the Iranian policy of strengthening stability and preventing tension

in the region.[89] It was Iran's priority to establish good bilateral relations first with Saudi Arabia as a prerequisite for being able to enter into a collective security arrangement. It proved, however, easier to establish bilateral co-operation with the smaller countries than with Saudi Arabia which in general distrusted Iran more.

At his meeting with the GCC Foreign Ministers in New York in September 1991, Velayati discussed plans for co-operation that had been worked out during several meetings of experts from both sides in the course of the previous year. The Foreign Ministers agreed that practical steps should be taken with an initial emphasis on the economic and commercial arena.[90] The GCC states agreed with the new approach. As expressed by Ahmad Abdulaziz al-Jassim of the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry: 'If there is dialogue, co-operation and good will on both sides, there won't be any threat or danger for any side.'[91]

The Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Yusuf bin Alawi, declared that all GCC countries believed in the importance of relations with Iran. The GCC countries were working bilaterally to develop their relations with Iran. Oman viewed this as necessary to reach a collective agreement in the future. Economic and trade interests would bind the two countries together so that security concerns would disappear eventually.[92]

In November 1991, Rafsanjani proposed to establish a joint regional market for economic and technical co-operation that would pave the way for a comprehensive security agreement. This was similar to what the Shah had suggested in the 1960s. Roshandel recommended common production and common free trade zones.[93]

The Islamic Republic, however, did not dispense with a plan for immediate security co-operation completely, even if it had to postpone the idea of a collective military agreement. In November 1991, the Crown Prince of Qatar visited Iran to discuss the technical side of sending drinking water from the Karun river through a pipeline to Qatar. As part of the visit, the Iranian government invited the delegation to visit Nowshahr, giving the Qataris the opportunity to examine the training of the Iranian naval forces.[94] This was perhaps part of a newly developing scheme of transparency in the military field to allow for confidence-building in the security field. Roshandel suggested that the Gulf littoral states could benefit from consulting other countries in the region about military matters and accepting them as observers. This would produce an oversight and control mechanism which could reduce the possibility of crisis.[95] In April 1994, Iran called for joint military exercises with its Persian Gulf neighbours.[96] As mentioned earlier, it repeated these calls, but they were still rejected in 1997.

Emphasis was laid on collective measures to stop the arms race in the Persian Gulf. Iran was intent on reaching agreements within the UN framework. Already in July 1988, that is at the end of the Iran–Iraq war, Velayati declared at the United Nations Disarmament Commission:

> As our President, Mr Rafsanjani, stated, the only way to end the arms race, is when all nations agree on a mutual solution that will ensure their security. This solution has to be elaborated within the framework of the United Nations . . . A commission should be formed to ban the production and storage of chemical weapons as well.[97]

In February 1994, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif suggested to the GCC that a joint security forum be set up to ease the existing tension. He proposed that this forum could eventually become the centre for a security alliance. At a later stage this forum should also include Iraq. It would enable the region's states to discuss their problems and threats to their security.[98] Velayati reiterated the same proposal at the UN General Assembly in September. He added that the forum would allow to discuss confidence-building measures. He called on foreign governments, which often had been the source of insecurity in the region, to support collective regional initiatives for co-operation.[99]

At the UN Conference on Disarmament, he underlined that the concept of defensive security could contribute to the long-term security and stability of the region. The first step would be the establishment of the forum. Velayati stated that based on UNSCR 598, the UN should play an active role in initiating and pursuing this scheme.[100] Zarif suggested that the institutional framework of the United Nations for the arrangements would prevent the domination by any single country and would furnish the necessary international umbrella.[101] Sirous Nasseri, the Iranian UN Representative in Geneva, stated that he had promoted the idea of a UN umbrella presented by Velayati, at the United Nations.[102] There was, however, some opposition inside Iran to the idea of a United Nations umbrella. As expressed by Firouz Dolatabadi of IPIS: 'It is not true that Iran wants regional security under a UN umbrella. The term completely contradicts our policy of regional security.'[103]

An Iranian source held that what Nasseri said was not necessarily representative of Iranian politics, as he was very UN oriented and put forward what the UN would like to hear.[104] In that case, the question becomes whether Velayati's statements were also only made for foreign consumption and whether no one in the Iranian political elite really believed in the UN umbrella concept – or whether it was simply a matter of different opinions existing within the Iranian political elite.

Former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani cautioned that there was already a US umbrella in the Gulf security arrangements, and that the US would not accept a UN umbrella replacing it.[105] Muhammad Javad Larijani, Deputy Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee, however, envisaged an arrangement which in the beginning would incorporate an outside guarantor for the smaller states so that they could feel secure. He expressed the view

that this guarantor could be the UN, European states or even the US. He based this argument on the fact that for the time being, the smaller states consulted with the US on their policies. They needed this consultation until confidence and trust were built with Iran.[106] The fact that the role of the US in future security arrangements was being discussed within higher Iranian foreign policy circles, of which the conservative MP Larijani was a part, is important. It indicates that the inclusion of the US may have been considered by Iran as a later negotiating position for a regional security agreement in Tehran's talks with the GCC states. Khatami's government made improving ties with its Gulf neighbours its top foreign policy goal in a bid to halt the regional arms race. Foreign Minister Kharrazi in September 1997 declared that the Islamic Republic was:

> ready to engage in a serious dialogue with its Persian Gulf neighbours to free the area of weapons of mass destruction and establish peace and security. The regional states can further co-operate through confidence-building measures such as reducing arms expenditure and increasing transparency in military programs.

It is important to note that this policy was supported by all factions. Even the commander of the Revolutionary Guards, Mohsen Reza'i, stated: 'It should have been proved to our Arab brothers by now that we seek truly friendly relations with them. There are now more people in favor of stronger ties with Arab countries.'[107]

Kharrazi suggested the signing of a non-intervention pact after confidence had been built.[108] During his trip to Saudi Arabia in November he expounded:

> Security co-operation between Iran and the regional countries is an important long-term goal of Iran which will take effect once mutual trust between the regional [countries] is strengthened. Once there is an atmosphere of mutual trust between regional countries without their feeling a need for the presence in the Persian Gulf of foreign troops, they will then spend their resources for their own national economic development rather than on military hardware.[109]

After Iran gave more assurances during the ICO summit in December over its intentions to co-operate with its neighbours, the Saudi paper *al-Riyadh* called on the Gulf states, including Iran, to draw up a non-aggression pact to ease the arms race.[110] Iran's efforts had brought about a change in thinking on the other side of the Gulf.

It can be shown that the Islamic Republic of Iran had been seriously thinking of Persian Gulf stability and security. The continued but slowly lessening opposition of the Arab states to the inclusion of Iran into a

collective security arrangement made Tehran aware of the existing fears and distrust which had to be overcome. It suggested dialogue on various levels, including a forum to discuss security matters, which had not been accepted by the GCC by 1998. Iran was persistent in pursuing the matter and in the meantime turned to the development of trade and economic links. This served both to get to know each other and to support, even if at a very low level, the reconstruction effort and development of Iran.

The practical side of confidence-building: economic and cultural links

Iran began to improve trade links with the Gulf states immediately after the Iran–Iraq war. Between 1988 and 1991, Iran restored air and sea links with the six states which helped the exchange of goods and visitors. Trade increased to a large extent during and after the Gulf Crisis. Economic delegations travelled back and forth, and Iran signed bilateral agreements in the fields of trade; transport and communication; cultural, scientific and educational co-operation; and oil and gas. Tehran further held talks about agriculture, fisheries and labour matters. Iran was also actively represented at Gulf trade fairs.

Most trade was conducted with or through Dubai, which had been Iran's biggest trading partner in the Gulf in the 1970s and had traded with Iran throughout the Iran–Iraq war.[111] Between 1991 and 1994, Dubai's imports from Iran rose from AED (UAE Dirhams) 720 million to AED 872 million (Table 5.1), and Dubai's re-exports to Iran rose from AED 2,073 million to AED 4,186 million[112] (Table 5.2). Iran remained Dubai's and Sharjah's leading trading partner through the 1990s.[113]

UAE investment and joint ventures in Iran were part of the increased economic co-operation. In February 1990, for instance, Iran's Ministry of Mines and Metals and the Dubai-based International Development Corporation agreed to build a $1.35 billion aluminium plant at Bandar Abbas.[114] Other joint ventures took advantage of Iran's free trade zones. An Emirati businessman set up a private office on Qishm island to oversee the building of another aluminium plant of which he owned 20 per cent, the Iranian government owned 60 per cent and Dubai Aluminium Company (Dubal) owned 20 per cent. The products were to be marketed through Dubai's Jebel Ali free trade zone. The President of Jebel Ali stated that the free trade zone in Qishm would benefit Dubai because it attracted trade to the area. He thought that Qishm would entice further investment from UAE businessmen. Qishm produced gas, which was an important aspect for attracting industry.[115] Already in 1991, a direct flight connection linked Dubai with Iran's future free trade zone on Kish island.[116]

Other countries which apparently did not have much trade with Iran, like Oman, conducted it mainly through Jebel Ali.[117] The other UAE emirate

Table 5.1 Dubai's imports from Iran and Saudi Arabia, 1991–1995, in AED m

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Iran	720	741	785	872	849
Saudi Arabia	373	519	597	754	735

Source: Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Dubai (Non-Oil) Foreign Trade Statistics During the Years 1991–1995.*

Table 5.2 Dubai's re-exports to Gulf countries, 1991–1995, in AED m

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Iran	2,073	2,678	3,294	4,186	3,232
Saudi Arabia	675	758	633	677	682
Qatar	556	562	469	409	422
Kuwait	1,161	757	873	399	318
Bahrain	219	239	407	234	255
Oman	59	46	60	89	252

Source: Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Dubai (Non-Oil) Foreign Trade Statistics During the Years 1991–1995.*

which profited from trade with Iran was Sharjah. In 1990, more than 100 Iranian companies led the participation at EXPO'90, an international trade fair. In 1993, despite the Abu Musa dispute, Iran and Sharjah discussed ways of enhancing trade relations.[118]

Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Sheikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, compared the Gulf to Europe. He hoped for a Gulf of co-operation, free trade and joint ventures which would one day also include Iran and Iraq.[119] For the time being, economic co-operation between Bahrain and Iran was very limited. A Bahraini businessman explained that the Bahrainis did not use the Iranian free trade zones, as they were geographically too far away. They bought some Iranian vegetables, fruit, carpets and furniture directly from Iran when the shipping lines were open, otherwise they obtained them in Dubai.[120] In 1991, Iran and Bahrain reviewed Iran's entry into the Saudi Arabian market via Bahrain. They also discussed the expansion of industrial and commercial co-operation, as well as investment in free trade zones.[121] Nothing resulted from the talks and Bahrain, being strongly affected economically by the Gulf Crisis, did not invest in or give any financial help to Iran.[122] A Bahraini journalist, however, suggested that Iran could become a greater exporter to the Gulf if it changed the design and quality of its products. He maintained that under these conditions, the people in the Gulf would buy the Iranian Paykan car or shoes as they were cheaper than Western goods.[123] As for the trade with Saudi Arabia, it was reported to have risen from $1.5 million in 1990 to about $600 million in 1992.

It was not conducted through Bahrain, but mainly directly during the hajj when Iranian merchants sold their goods at the markets in Mecca and Medina.[124] General trade with Saudi Arabia only picked up under President Khatami. In December 1997 Foreign Minister Kharrazi stated that the two countries should plan to improve trade, economic and political relations. As for now, they had trade exchanges and fairs in some Saudi cities and there was a flow of Iranian goods towards the Saudi border.[125] Rafsanjani's trip to Saudi Arabia in February 1998 further promoted co-operation in this field.

Trade with Qatar and Kuwait also increased. In May 1992, Iran and Qatar signed six agreements, including on air traffic, customs, the exchange of news and the plan to build a fresh water pipeline. In 1994, the volume of trade between Iran and Qatar increased by 50 per cent as compared to 1993.[126] In 1997 Iran and Qatar decided to set up trade centres in Bushehr and Doha to promote bilateral trade.[127] Trade with Kuwait increased especially after the Gulf Crisis. MP Abdul Mohsen Jamal stated:

> We buy fish, fruit, housewares, carpets, nuts, caviar, refrigerators from Iran. We buy a lot. In particular after the liberation for about two years, we had nothing and we allowed the Iranian ships to come to the beach and sell things directly to the people. It was very cheap.[128]

Between March 1994 and March 1995 exports from Khorramshahr port to the Gulf states increased threefold over the previous year. The goods included cattle, building materials, hygienic equipment, fruit and vegetables. Iran imported rice, tea, cooking oils, sugar and spare parts through its neighbours.[129]

One way to facilitate trade and popular exchanges was by reopening the air and shipping connections with all GCC capitals and other cities. Immediately after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, for instance, Iran announced the establishment of direct air links between Tehran and Muscat and the Bushehr shipping line to Qatar. In August 1997 after Khatami took office, Saudi Arabia allowed Iran Air to resume Tehran–Jeddah flights, the first scheduled flight in eighteen years.[130]

Iran laid emphasis on the expansion of tourism. Tourists came mainly from Kuwait and included Gulf nationals of Persian origin. An Iranian diplomat explained that because of limitations through the *hijab* enforcement and the conditions of hotels, Kuwaitis preferred to travel to other places: 'We think that if we prepare better facilities, more tourists will come.'[131] This view was supported by a Bahraini journalist who declared that Iran had great opportunities in the Gulf, if it opened up its tourism services and offered five-star hotels.[132] In 1991, Iran was steadily drawing Saudi tourist traffic, and more than 40,000 Qatari tourists visited Iran in 1992.[133]

Another field in which Iran tried to co-operate with its neighbours was oil and gas exploration, though without large-scale success. In 1989, Iran approached the UAE and Oman for help to revive its offshore and onshore oil drilling activity. In 1990, Tehran and Muscat set up a ministerial oil co-operation committee to co-ordinate the exploitation of their joint Hengam or North oil and gas field in the Straits of Hormuz. Co-operation, however, was still under negotiation in 1995, when they stated that the exploitation of the joint field would begin in less than three years.[134] Co-operation, however, had not yet started by 1998. In 1992, at the occasion of an exclusive Iranian trade fair with 200 Iranian companies, Iran and Qatar agreed to make joint investments in the oil and gas sector. In 1993, Kuwait, in appreciation of Iran's co-operation in capping the oil wells set afire by Iraq, expressed readiness for exchange of oil products, the transfer of new oil technology and the exchange of experts. In 1996 Abu Dhabi and Iran entered into a joint venture to exploit the Salman gas field.[135] During their 1998 trip to Saudi Arabia, Rafsanjani and Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh promoted co-operation in the oil sector as well as in OPEC. Co-operation with Saudi Arabia in this field was most important to the Iranian economy which needed to avoid a slump in oil prices.

Possibly in order to secure co-operation, Iran signed several bilateral co-operation agreements in different fields. Already in December 1988, Iran and Oman had signed a trade accord and agreed to set up a joint co-operation commission to boost trade links. As mentioned above, not much trade materialised. In August 1992, Iran and Kuwait agreed to set up a friendship committee to boost co-operation in all fields. Similar agreements included a joint business communiqué and a cultural protocol with Kuwait. In 1997 they signed an MOU on all aspects of economic and trade co-operation.[136] The actual usefulness of these agreements in bringing the countries closer politically and ensuring stability and security is questionable. As expressed by Firouz Dolatabadi of IPIS:

> These agreements do not play any important political role. If a state decides to take any political measure, it can do so without the agreements. Economically and culturally, they may be important, but they do not have any real influence. They only show willingness to improve relations.[137]

The Bahraini Ambassador to the US, Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar, shared a similar view:

> Economic relations started to improve after the Iran–Iraq war. Iran does not use this as well as it could. It has not put trade into a political framework. This can only be done, when the GCC is sure that Iran will not interfere in its internal affairs.[138]

It seems as though the Iranian idea of building confidence through economic links had not overcome distrust by the mid-1990s and that distrust prevailed. Furthermore, the economic exchanges remained on a relatively low scale. These two reasons contributed to the fact that Iran turned at least some of its attention to the new markets in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Kamal Kharrazi stated:

> the newly independent states of the Caucasus and Central Asia have offered Iran new opportunities to turn part of its attention from the Arab states of the South, where a lack of confidence makes the pace of progress in economic cooperation and security for the Persian Gulf slow, to the North, where the Central Asian Republics eagerly look for new partners like Iran, Turkey and Pakistan.[139]

This view was part of the de-Arabisation trend in Iranian foreign policy visible since 1991, when many Iranian politicians and political analysts became increasingly disillusioned with GCC politics as a result of unkept initial promises after the Gulf Crisis. Tehran thus turned to the more welcoming North and East, as was explained in Chapter 4.

Nevertheless, the Persian Gulf remained strategically vital, and so Iran put emphasis on the image of being the bridge between North and South. In May 1992, Iran planned to build a railway line between the Gulf and Central Asia and asked the GCC to help fund the project. Tehran suggested that the GCC would benefit commercially and economically from exports to Central Asia. The GCC commented on the great importance of opening up new markets for its industrial products, including food and clothes, not only in Central Asia, but also in Iran itself. Shortly beforehand, the GCC had supported the opening of regular sea links with Iran for the same reasons.[140] In July, Iran appealed directly to Saudi Arabia for co-operation in building the railway, maintaining that co-operation would sustain stability in the region. When the rail link between Mashad in Iran, the border town of Sarakhs and Tedzhen in Turkmenistan opened in May 1996, a senior Kuwaiti delegation attended the opening ceremony.[141] Iran also approached Oman on the issue of pipelines between Central Asia and the Gulf, as Oman had some investments in Kazakhstan's oil and gas sector.[142] This was similar to an idea the Shah had in 1969. He had thought to open negotiations with the Gulf states for the construction of a pipeline which would pump Arab oil from the Gulf to Russia across Iran. Accordingly, a company would be established in which Iran had some shares, but the Arab countries would hold the majority. Since the pipeline would lie within Iranian territory, Iran would have a permanent lever against both Russia and the Gulf states and eventually it could also expect substantial income from royalties and transport fees.[143] It was perhaps for those reasons that the GCC or its individual member states in the 1990s did not come to any conclusion about financing

the projects, as they may have feared that this could lead to Iranian dominance in the region. Another reason was US pressure on the Gulf states to avoid linking the Gulf and Central Asia economically and through pipelines via Iranian territory. Nevertheless, with the new Khatami government Iranian co-operation with the Gulf states increased. In July 1997, the Ambassadors of the Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia in Almaty called for further promotion of co-operation in Central Asia, for instance in joint investment projects. In December, the Secretary of the Council of Iranian Free Trade Zones visited the UAE free trade zones to improve co-operation between the zones, in particular concerning imports, exports and re-exports to and from Central Asia, including projects for transit facilities.[144]

Iran managed to a certain extent to improve economic links with its Persian Gulf neighbours. This led to increased exchanges both on the political and private levels through delegations, private enterprise and tourism. But all this was not yet enough to build sufficient trust for the Arab countries to consider a political framework in which to place these exchanges or even more a joint forum in which to discuss security matters. In addition, the cultural and economic exchanges did not happen on a large scale. But it was a step forward after the deep divisions prevalent during the Iran–Iraq war. Khatami's government successfully placed renewed emphasis on developing these exchanges in order to speed up the general rapprochement between Iran and the Gulf states.

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that with the increase of foreign, in particular US, troops in the Persian Gulf, the main Iranian foreign policy aim in the region became the setting up of collective security arrangements with the Gulf states, excluding the United States and other foreign powers. It was of paramount importance to Iranian security and the safety of its oil exports through the strategic waterway to ensure stability in the area. What this chapter has argued is that in the 1990s official Iranian foreign policy in the Persian Gulf had passed beyond the revolutionary era. It was based on improving relations in order to maintain a secure environment in which to develop the country. If there were still groups in Iran which put emphasis on an export of the revolution by other than cultural means, they had no influence on this government policy. However, the fact that Iran had changed its behaviour had no real effect on the Gulf states' policy towards Iran. Iran's expectations of being included in a regional security system were not met, in spite of the discourse in Iranian foreign policy about Persian Gulf security which had become exclusively pragmatic and based on national interest. In the 1990s, the Islamic Republic, in particular after the Gulf Crisis, returned to the same security concepts as Iran under the Shah in the 1960s and 1970s, although now with US opposition rather than

approbation. The policy was determined by geopolitics and was void of any ideology.

The Islamic Republic did not develop any clear policy outline of the envisaged collective arrangement. This was perhaps due to the fact that it soon realised that the Gulf countries after initial talk about co-operation were not prepared to include Iran and dispense with US protection in the near future. This was particularly the case in view of a continued threat from Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Nevertheless, the idea of collective security was considered much more seriously in Tehran than in most Gulf capitals. The Gulf countries distrusted Iranian intentions and feared it becoming once again the region's policeman. They did, however, with the exception of Saudi Arabia and with particular support of Oman, express the possibility of future Iranian inclusion into regional security agreements. For the time being, security co-operation was held back by traditional suspicion of the Shi'a Persian neighbour, as well as US pressure and fear of their own people rising against them under influence of the revolution and subversion rather than the fear of military conquest.

Iran thus developed the strategy of building trust and confidence mainly through economic and trade measures. These at the same time were tied in with Iran's reconstruction effort. It was a slow process and did not have the expected political impact. Perhaps losing patience, Iran kept on pursuing the idea of security co-operation on a lower level than a direct military alliance. Since 1994, it had been suggesting a forum in which to discuss Persian Gulf security. This also did not meet with any concrete response, but the positive reception Khatami's government received from its neighbours may lead to a change in due course. At the same time, Iran took advantage of the newly opening markets to its north and hoped to become an economic bridge between Central Asia and the GCC states. The Shah in his time had a similar idea. This yet again proved a similarity of approach by the Islamic Republic of Iran towards geopolitics and national interest. Iran wanted to improve its economic standing and at the same time secure the region, in order to become once again the regional power positioned strategically between north and south.

6

EXTERNAL FACTORS

The Persian Gulf policy of the Islamic Republic and its relations with its Arab neighbours were highly influenced by outside powers. The strategic importance of its large oil resources turned the Persian Gulf into one of the most internationalised regions in the world. The United States had always seen it as a Cold War arena and was intent on keeping the Soviet Union out. After the Gulf Crisis in 1990–1991 and the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States saw the threat as emanating from Iran and Iraq and expanded its military presence in the region. The Arab states became increasingly dependent on this one remaining superpower. The Europeans as well were interested in maintaining the security of the region, as their dependence on Persian Gulf oil was far higher than that of the Americans. They also competed for trade and arms sales.

These outside forces have restricted Iranian influence and relations in the region. The Islamic Republic of Iran saw the United States as its principal enemy and the main source of friction in the region. This was based on the US military presence in the Persian Gulf in the 1980s, and in particular in the 1990s, but stemmed originally from Khomeini's opposition to the Shah's alliance with the United States and his view of the 'Great Satan'. He maintained that both the United States and the Soviet Union wanted to dominate the Middle East and that Islamic Iran had to lead the oppressed masses against these 'arrogant powers'. During the Iran–Iraq war, Iran attempted to find an equilibrium between the two superpowers. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Iran tried to counterbalance American pressure with Russia and the Europeans. This chapter examines the United States – and with it the Soviet Union – and European influence in the Persian Gulf. Finally, it investigates whether the outside influence on the GCC states in turn had any effect on Iranian policy towards the Gulf countries.

The United States in the 1980s: from Carter to Reagan and Bush

In the 1980s, the United States managed to establish itself in the Persian Gulf. It created a US security umbrella reaching from Oman to Saudi Arabia.

In 1980, Oman signed a facilities arrangement for contingency bases with the United States. As stated by the Secretary General of the Omani Foreign Ministry, H.H. Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Bu Sa'id:

> We have very good relations with the United States. We signed the facilities arrangement in 1980 because we saw the structural weakness of the region. At that time the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan and was reaching for the region.[1]

The US Middle East Force was home ported in Bahrain where it had been based since 1949. Kuwait allowed the US to deploy an offshore base in its territorial waters in late 1987. Saudi bases like Dhahran and Hafr al-Batin were offered for American use in emergencies. The Saudis deployed E-3A AWACS planes and other American forces on their soil during the war. Further, the Saudi reliance on US equipment led to joint operations with US forces.[2] This military strategy of expanding influence in the region was underlined by security assistance and massive arms sales to the Arab governments. In 1987, President Ronald Reagan stated:

> The use of the vital sea lanes of the Persian Gulf will not be dictated by the Iranians. These lanes will not be allowed to come under control of the Soviet Union. I will not permit the Middle East to become a choke point for freedom nor a tinderbox of international conflict.[3]

Iran perceived all this as a major threat to its security. The fear of the Soviet Union gaining influence in the Persian Gulf was the main driving force behind American Gulf policy in the 1980s, as was the fight against communism on a global scale. This policy, as stated by a US State Department official, was linked to 'securing the free flow of oil at reasonable prices, freedom of navigation and the support of the friendly Arab regimes in the area'. He added that the main regional threat was Iran because of the 'policy of its government, Iranian society, and the pride that comes with being Iranian'.[4] The fear of export of the revolution which would lead to unfriendly regimes ruling over the oil resources, possibly opening these countries to Soviet domination, was a major concern of the US administration as it would mean the end of the American presence in the region, as well as a possible threat to the state of Israel. As the former US official James Noyes put it:

> The Saudi position in Islam as guardian of the holy places . . . is important within the longer perception of Islam as a basic ally of the West against Soviet expansion. Iranian efforts to topple the Saudi regime during the pilgrimage of 1987 by riots reveals the

> potential importance of these holy places in a political context. Imagine the impact of a Saudi government which instead of arresting pilgrims carrying weapons and subversive propaganda, exploited the pilgrimage institution by sending weapons and subversion back home with the million-plus Muslim visitors each year.[5]

Many American officials, like Noyes, out of fear of unfriendly regimes taking over the region, misinterpreted the 1987 hajj incident as an attempt to topple the Saudi regime.

The rise of American influence began towards the end of the first year of the revolution, in 1979. In October, the United States admitted the Shah for medical treatment. James Bill calls this 'the most catastrophic miscalculation' which 'led directly to a new era in Iranian–American relations – an era dominated by extremism, distrust, hatred and violence'.[6] In November, the US Embassy was occupied by the 'Students of the Imam's Line'. The US Ambassador and staff had been taken captive previously in February, but Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi and other members of Khomeini's entourage had intervened and released them within twenty-four hours.[7] In November, Khomeini personally endorsed the move, as he accepted it as the divine will against the oppressor nation,[8] and they remained hostage for 444 days. The psychological effect of the whole episode has influenced US policy towards Iran ever since. Many Democrats blamed it for the loss of the presidential election that year.

In December 1979, the Soviet Union moved troops into Afghanistan, which was seen in Washington as a first step towards the warm waters of the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf oil. The American reaction, which was in line with the idea of setting up Rapid Deployment Forces in the Middle East, was announced on 23 January 1980, with the Carter Doctrine:

> Let our position be absolutely clear. An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.[9]

Carter had already deployed a small force in Saudi Arabia and the Indian Ocean in January and March 1979, and had sent the US navy ship *Kitty Hawk* to the Arabian Sea after the hostage taking in November. By January 1980, the US had deployed a more powerful force than later during the tanker war in 1987–1988. Besides AWACS stationed in Saudi Arabia and B-52 bombers which overflew the Arabian Sea, the navy had sent twenty-five ships, including three aircraft carriers to the Indian Ocean.[10] By October, the figure had gone up to thirty-two.[11] This was the beginning of the direct American presence in the region. The Soviet reaction was the repetition of

earlier proposals to demilitarise the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. In December 1980, Brezhnev rejected the justification of an alleged Soviet threat to the region's oil wealth for the US military build up. But he declared: 'We are not indifferent to what takes place in this region, which is so close to our borders.'[12] This stance only reinforced the American attitude.

Whilst in April 1980, the West was considering trade sanctions and a naval blockade to bring the hostage crisis to an end, the Soviet Union concluded a new economic co-operation agreement with Iran. Iran threatened the United States and the West with retaliation should economic sanctions or anything else keep Iranian oil from leaving the Gulf.[13] In September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran and started an eight-year long war. The Arab states in the Persian Gulf feeling threatened by the export of revolution as well as a spill-over of the war, moved closer to the United States, which expanded military and economic relations. Khomeini believed that the Iraqi invasion was inspired by the United States.[14] Iran therefore, despite its anti-Soviet and anti-communist rhetoric, in particular against the invasion of Afghanistan,[15] tilted towards the Soviet Union.

The Soviets stopped direct arms shipments to Iraq in a bid to gain Iranian support against the United States in the Gulf. The Soviet position was also a consequence of strong opposition to Iraq's invasion of Iran. The United States, which saw Iran as a threat to security, did not really wish to confront that country directly which would have risked pushing it further towards the Soviet Union. The Reagan administration considered Iran as the 'strategic centrepiece of the region'.[16] In 1982, in order to establish contacts with Tehran and to avoid its complete subjugation to Soviet influence, the US gave intelligence on Soviet activities to Iran, which amongst other things led to the eradication of the communist Tudeh party in 1983.[17] In the spring of 1982, however, the Reagan administration also gave permission for the sale of American arms to Baghdad and provided highly classified intelligence to Iraq. Furthermore, starting in 1983, private American arms dealers began selling Soviet arms purchased in Eastern Europe to Iraq.[18]

This was probably a reaction to Iran's recapturing of Khorramshahr in May 1982, and the Iranian decision to continue the war into Iraq. This military operation and the fear of an Iranian victory led both superpowers to turn away from Iran and support Iraq actively in its war effort. In 1983, the State Department initiated Operation Staunch to stop third countries from selling arms to Iran.[19] Washington also moved closer to the Gulf countries by establishing the United States Central Command, CENTCOM, on 1 January 1983, in order to integrate the American 'military and security interests with those of nations of the region and our allies'.[20] The first direct effect was the downing of an Iranian F-4 plane by a Saudi F-15 in May 1984, after the outbreak of the tanker war. The F-15 pilot had received his information through the AWACS planes stationed in Saudi Arabia.[21] Consequently, the Saudis requested further US weapons. The Reagan

administration approved the sale of 400 Stinger missiles, 200 Stinger launchers and the deployment of a CENTCOM KC-10 tanker aircraft.[22] It also began escorting US-flagged tankers against possible attacks.

One year later, disregarding Operation Staunch, some members of the US administration entered into secret negotiations with Iran about the release of American hostages in the Lebanon in return for the sale of US military equipment. Besides attempting to release the hostages, the undertaking had deeper underlying reasons. The US felt that they needed to re-establish influence in Iran to counter Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf, to protect the stability of the oil rich Arab countries, in particular Saudi Arabia, and to protect economic, mainly oil price, interests, which in 1985 and 1986 converged between the US and Iran.[23] The shipment of arms to both Iran and Iraq preventing the victory of either side was part of the balancing policy which was the key objective of the US and Israeli policy in the Persian Gulf. US foreign policy at this time was also dominated by the war in Nicaragua.

US covert arms sales with Israeli assistance consisted of six shipments of more than 2,000 TOW anti-tank missiles, 235 Hawk anti-aircraft missiles and extensive spare parts. The value was estimated at about $64 million.[24] The Israeli connection is particularly interesting because of the Iranian regime's opposition to Israel. Israel had been shipping arms and spare parts to Iran since shortly after the Shah's fall. Tel Aviv was instrumental in the US negotiations with Iran.[25] According to *Middle East International*, Israel's November 1985 shipment included obsolescent Hawk parts, which infuriated the Iranians, who sent them back.[26]

In the meantime, the situation in the war had deteriorated for Iraq since the Iranians occupied the Fao Peninsula in February 1986. If one can believe press reports, the White House had instructed the CIA to give intelligence on Iraq to Manuchehr Ghorbanifar, the Iranian middleman in the US arms sales, shortly before Iran staged the Fao offensive.[27] At the same time, the US kept supplying Iraq with military intelligence from its satellites and AWACS planes. After the Iraqis unleashed their intensive bombing campaign against Iranian economic and industrial targets in July, a senior US air force officer, staying in the Meridien Hotel in Baghdad, was advising them on what and how to hit.[28] When in November 1986, the Iranian–American arms-for-hostages affair was leaked to the press after Robert McFarlane's May visit to Tehran, the Reagan administration was heavily embarrassed. This led to even worse relations between the two countries.

The year 1987 saw the beginning of direct military confrontation between the United States and Iran as well as a shift of America's *Feindbild* from the Soviet Union to the Islamic Republic. One could argue that this was the beginning of the end of the Cold War in the Persian Gulf. The United States had to restore Arab confidence. The tanker war had worsened by the end of 1986, and more ships going to and from Kuwait were attacked by the

Iranians. Kuwait asked both superpowers to reflag their tankers for protection. In May 1987, the Soviet Union leased three Soviet-flag tankers to Kuwait which put pressure on the US. In the same month, the *USS Stark* was hit by Iraqi missiles, which paradoxically was used by Washington not to criticise Iraq but to threaten Iran to stop the tanker war.[29] The American position demonstrated that the US perception of the Persian Gulf had changed. The US responded very cautiously and readily accepted the Iraqi explanation for hitting the US ship, using the occasion to point to Iran as the real threat. As a result, it began the reflagging operation. In July, it reflagged eleven Kuwaiti tankers and was instrumental in the approval of UNSC Resolution 598 calling for a ceasefire. The reflagging was seen in Iran as a conspiracy by the US and the Soviet Union against Iran and Islam.[30] The US reflagging operation was militarily and politically significant for the war and Iranian policy. It was a strategic move which contributed to the end of the war. It was particularly important as it meant an overt American alliance with the Gulf states against Iran, since the US had to ask for permission to use port facilities in return for its support. In fact, the Cold War had begun to come to an end in the Persian Gulf by 1987, when the prevention of the collapse of the Iraqi regime became the cornerstone of both US and Soviet policy. In this sense, the US reflagging operation had not just been a response to Soviet policy, but had constituted the beginning of a major shift in US policy. Further, the reflagging operation was a part of the economic campaign against Iran and not just a means to help Kuwait.

The Soviet Union after the Iranian capture of Fao was frightened of the export of revolution to its southern republics and supported Iraq with massive arms supplies until the end of the war.[31] Nevertheless, the Soviets attempted to establish better relations with Iran and started a shuttle diplomacy in the Persian Gulf to bring the war to an end. They negotiated long-term co-operation in the fields of oil and gas with Iran and suggested that 'all warships of states not situated in the region be shortly withdrawn from the Gulf and that Iran and Iraq should keep from actions that would threaten international shipping'.[32]

In the meantime, Iranian–American relations worsened further. At the end of July, more than 400 pilgrims were killed by Saudi security forces at the annual hajj. Iran contended that this incident was orchestrated by Washington.[33] In September, the first direct confrontation between Iranian and US military forces occurred. A US Army Special Forces helicopter fired at the *Iran Ajr* laying mines fifty miles north of Bahrain. In a reaction, Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, asserted: 'There must be a totally different kind of government in Iran . . . because we cannot deal with the irrational, fanatical government of the kind they now have.'[34]

Iranian Interior Minister Mohtashami responded to the situation by calling all Iranians to be prepared for 'a full-fledged war with the United States in the Gulf'.[35] In February 1988, after the Soviet Union had

announced its impending withdrawal from Afghanistan, which was to begin on 15 May, Khomeini endorsed closer relations with Moscow which was asked to promote peace in the Gulf.[36]

After further military clashes between the United States and Iran, on 3 July 1988, the US Navy cruiser *Vincennes* shot down an Iranian civilian airbus, killing 290 people. One result was that Iran accepted Resolution 598, which called for a ceasefire, on 18 July. It seems that in addition to the reflagging operation, the subdued international response to the US downing of the civilian airplane underscored Iran's isolation in the international community and strengthened the position of those in Tehran who thought that the war should be ended. This demonstrates the significance of the US role in the outcome of the war. The importance of their role in the Gulf was stated by Palmer:

> For the United States, the 1987–88 tanker war marked the end of a two-century old process – the displacement of Great Britain in the Gulf . . . The United States had accepted not only political, but also military responsibility for the security of the Persian Gulf. Americans were willing and able to defend their interests, not only against possible Soviet encroachments, but also against the machinations of a power internal to the region.[37]

After reducing its forces in the Gulf for a short period, the United States soon redeployed its troops to that vital region. By August 1989, the Navy had fourteen warships in the Persian Gulf and an unspecified number of other warships in the Arabian Sea – almost as many as during the tanker war.[38] This underlined the fact that the US wanted to ensure the free flow of oil at reasonable prices and saw its military presence as a means to deter any future Iranian threat.

With the emergence of Gorbachev and the end of the Cold War, Iran displaced the Soviet Union as the American enemy number one in the region. Nevertheless, the US was still worried about the Soviet Union expanding its ties with Iran, and President Bush expressed a desire to normalise relations with Iran.[39] The main reason, however, was hope of Iranian help in releasing Western hostages in the Lebanon.

A debate was waged inside Iran about opening up relations with the United States. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, President Rafsanjani had already welcomed the dropping of the 'death to the Soviet Union' slogan.[40] Moderate elements thought that Iran could now have relations with the US 'with complete self-reliance and confidence from a position of strength'. Others, like Leader Khamenei, strongly rejected the possibility of talks,[41] and Rafsanjani came under heavy attack when he helped the United States to release hostages in Lebanon, hoping to improve relations with the West.[42]

The United States in the 1990s

The Gulf Crisis and the increasing US military presence

In the 1990s, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Iran and Iraq had completely replaced the Soviet threat to American interests in the Gulf, a process which had already begun in 1987. The Gulf Crisis of 1990–1991 greatly increased the United States' permanent presence and Arab dependence upon it in the Persian Gulf. When Saddam Hussein moved his troops to the border with Kuwait in July 1990, the United Arab Emirates felt threatened and proposed joint military manoeuvres with US forces.[43] On 2 August, Iraq invaded Kuwait. On 7 August, the American-led military build-up named Operation Desert Shield began. By mid-January, the US-led coalition had deployed over 150 ships and 2,000 aircraft.[44] Despite the fact that the debate in Iran about the presence of foreign forces was heated, the Iranian government maintained its neutral position and its call for an Iraqi withdrawal. Whilst Khamenei denounced the foreign presence,[45] Foreign Minister Velayati declared: 'It is not reasonable to say that the foreigners must not be present in the region in circumstances in which there is no solution for ensuring the security of the region.'[46]

During the war, President Rafsanjani, reportedly expressed his concern in a secret meeting of the Supreme National Security Council, and warned the hardliners against their outspoken anti-Americanism: 'The huge US military build-up in the region can well be turned against us if we go too far in our denunciation of the Americans and there is no country on earth to come to our rescue.'[47]

The US-led military campaign called Desert Storm began on 16 January 1991 and lasted until the liberation of Kuwait on 28 February. The US forces did not turn against Iran, but neither did they go all the way to Baghdad to topple Saddam Hussein who was threatening the Gulf. Washington, which was still under the effect of the 'Vietnam syndrome', was concerned about the political impossibility of running Iraq after Saddam Hussein's fall. In addition to the domestic opposition to toppling him, concerns included the possible breakdown of the international coalition, including opposition by France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey. Another important factor, as believed by some observers, was Israeli influence on US policy making. In the 1980s, Israel had been a major supporter of balancing Iran with Iraq. The possibility of a Shi'a regime taking over in Baghdad would have been detrimental to that policy. A senior European diplomat held that the US Persian Gulf policy and its avoidance of toppling the Iraqi leader was connected with Israeli policy:

> The Americans weakened Saddam Hussein until they reached containment. They let him continue, however, as he fitted like a joker

> into the game between Tel Aviv, Washington, Baghdad, Tehran and Kuwait. Out of consideration for Tel Aviv, they did not pursue him to Baghdad as they were frightened of a pro-Iranian Shi'a regime taking over in Iraq.[48]

Due to Iran's neutrality during the Crisis and its efforts to help negotiate a solution, though, there was a short period of rapprochement between Tehran and Washington. President Bush was open to dialogue and promised economic aid for the reconstruction effort after the Iran–Iraq war. US imports from Iran had been illegal since 1987, but now US exports to Iran increased from none in 1989 to around $1 billion in 1993. These included sales of digital computers, radar testing equipment, computer software and inertial-navigation equipment.[49] Trade between the US and Iran was conducted partly directly, partly via Abu Dhabi and Dubai.[50] In early 1991, Iran resumed oil sales to US companies.[51] These trade relations contrasted with the official US policy. In August 1991, Rafsanjani attacked Washington for still refusing to unfreeze billions of dollars of Iranian assets which the Shah had deposited in the US.[52] Further, the Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 1991 made the US blocking of any loan by international funding bodies, such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development or the IMF, to Iran obligatory on the grounds that Iran supported international terrorism.

The US policy was linked to the development of the Arab–Israeli peace process and the Iranian opposition to it. Besides having direct effects on Iran's economy, it also affected Iran's relations with the Gulf states. As explained by Adnan Abdul Samad, a member of the Kuwaiti National Assembly:

> The West and especially the US administration were frightened that the Islamic revolution might spread to other countries. The US sought to stop the export of the revolution, in particular because of Iran's ideology of liberating Jerusalem and Palestine, and its opposition to the peace talks. This was the major theme which attracted the Islamic people to Iran and caused trouble for the US. So they started to think about how to isolate Iran . . . The Kuwaiti government has a problem in establishing better relations with Iran because of US pressure.[53]

A publication by the Kuwaiti National Assembly stated:

> It is clear that Israel and its friends in Washington exercise great influence over the drawing up of the American policy concerning Iran which Israel describes as the 'archenemy'. In addition, the Israeli secret services were the source of a lot of secret information

> which accused Iran that it is on the point of acquiring nuclear weapons and that it supports international terrorism.[54]

According to a Kuwaiti working in the National Assembly, the US Embassy in Kuwait distributed anti-Iranian leaflets and information in the Assembly at least once a week.[55] Despite critical Arab voices, military relations between the Arab regimes and Washington deepened. Kuwait still felt threatened by Iraq. In September 1991, the US and Kuwait signed a bilateral treaty according to which Kuwait placed air and sea bases at US disposal. Iran saw itself surrounded by the United States, which had created various bases around the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, and also had substantial military assets in, and a long-term relationship with, Pakistan. American pressure on Iran increased in 1992. On 27 March, the Director of the CIA, Robert Gates, affirmed:

> If in the next few years it again becomes necessary to deploy US combat power abroad, the strategically vital region encompassing the Middle East and the Persian Gulf is at the top of the list of likely locales. Among the several countries in this region that are hostile to US interests, two, Iran and Iraq, continue trying to build their military power to enhance their influence . . . While Iraq struggles to recover from the Gulf War, Iran is determined to regain its former stature as the pre-eminent power in the Persian Gulf. Tehran's reformulated national security policy has three main goals: first, guarantee the survival of the regime; second, project power throughout the region; third, offset US influence in the Middle East. To achieve these goals, Iran has undertaken diplomatic measures to end its international isolation, is purchasing weapons from a variety of foreign suppliers, and is developing a capability to produce weapons of mass destruction.[56]

In April, problems arose between Iran and the UAE about the islands of Abu Musa and the Tunbs, when the Iranian authorities on jointly administered Abu Musa expelled a number of expatriate workers. In August, the situation worsened when the Iranian officials on the island refused entry to a UAE ship carrying visitors without Iranian visas. (The Abu Musa crisis is explained in detail in Chapter 4.) The United States used the incidents to convince the Arabs of an alleged Iranian threat and Iran's territorial ambitions, and thus the necessity for US protection. In September, at the time of generally more outspoken anti-Iranian rhetoric due to the US presidential election campaign,[57] Edward Djerejian, US Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs, stated the need for US–GCC military co-operation in order to deter threats. He lauded the GCC stand on the islands issue and included the Abu Musa problem in the points generally listed by the US administration of Iranian threats:

> I assured the GCC leaders that the United States will cooperate closely with them to meet their legitimate defense needs. This includes both the sales of weapons . . . and bilateral security arrangements such as the periodic conduct of joint military exercises, the maintenance of an enhanced naval presence in the Gulf, and arrangements for the access and prepositioning of critical military material and equipment . . . It is important to understand that the purpose of both arms sales and collective security measures are to deter threats to our shared interests, and to raise the threshold of future requirements for direct US military action . . .
>
> Across the Gulf from our friends and allies lies the Islamic Republic of Iran . . . In our view, the normalization of relations with Iran depends on several factors. Iran's role in sponsoring terrorism . . . Iran's human rights practices, and its apparent pursuit of a destabilizing arms build-up . . . Further, Iran's policies towards the Gulf Arab states, as exemplified by its heavy-handed assertion of authority on Abu Musa island, have shown it to be an increasingly truculent neighbor. We welcome the firm stand that the Gulf Cooperation Council has taken on this issue. Another serious problem is Iran's categorical opposition to the Arab–Israeli peace process, and its support for those, like Hizbollah in Lebanon, who violently oppose it.[58]

The issue was upheld as an Iranian threat to Gulf security under the Clinton administration, when the US responded generally to Iran's policy on Abu Musa and the Tunbs within the framework of its dual containment policy, which will be discussed later. American government officials expressed very particular concerns about Iranian policy on the three islands, especially over the deployment of missiles and troops. The US was aware, however, that this deployment may have come as a reaction to the American presence. Joseph Nye, US Assistant Secretary of Defense, admitted:

> Iran has had forces on the islands for quite some time. The difference is since last October [1994] when we introduced forces to meet the threat from Iraq, Iran felt it was a threat to them as well. So I think the build up was probably in response to the American build up.[59]

Despite this awareness amongst US policy makers, the islands had taken on symbolic significance for the US as relations with Iran deteriorated, as explained by Caldwell: 'Although most Americans have never heard of these islands, they are of important symbolic significance to Iran, its Arab neighbors and, as conflict between the United States and Iran heats up, to the United States as well.'[60]

As a result more bilateral agreements between the GCC states and the US followed. In addition, the US increased its arms sales and troops in the Gulf states. Former UN Ambassador Said Rejai Khorassani explained one Iranian view on this:

> Iran does not feel threatened by the US, but the fact is that if too many troops are concentrated in the region, there is a possibility of military clashes . . . We think they are there for three reasons: first, the flow of oil at a price and conditions which the US wants – also in competition with Germany, the United Kingdom, France etc. who might have a say in this; second, Saddam Hussein is still a threat; third, US industry was not in a better predicament than the Russian after the end of the Cold War. No one wanted to buy military hardware. They needed some kind of psychological warfare to sell their useless arms. The only region with money and a threat – Saddam Hussein – were the Arabs in the Persian Gulf. The Arab states have been manipulated to save the US arms industry.[61]

Others in Iran were worried by the US presence, and Iranian military manoeuvres were held in the Persian Gulf in order to demonstrate the Iranian capacity to react to US threats. Furthermore, the Iranian government responded to the foreign presence by calling for regional security co-operation without the presence of outside powers. According to Sohrab Shahabi, advisor to the Foreign Minister, the small Persian Gulf countries had not much freedom in their own foreign policies. Iran could not make the US leave, all it could do was tell the Arabs that the American presence was not in their interest.[62]

In October 1992, the US Congress passed the Iran–Iraq Arms Non-Proliferation Act, barring governmental and commercial arms sales, the transfer of restricted goods and technology as well as nuclear material and technology to these two countries. It included the threat of sanctions against American and foreign governments, companies and individuals. Saudi Arabia, which had been lobbying in the West against Iranian arms acquisitions, supported this Act. Riyadh, like the US and Israel, was scared of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein which might bring about a pro-Iranian Shi'a state in southern Iraq.[63]

Clinton and dual containment

When the Clinton administration took over in January 1993, US influence in the Persian Gulf region and the oil rich Arab countries increased further. In May 1993, Martin Indyk of the National Security Council announced the new 'dual containment' policy, aimed at containing both Iran and Iraq. It came in the wake of the first Middle East trip, including to Israel, of the

new Secretary of State, Warren Christopher. He testified before the Senate Appropriations Committee:

> We think that Iran is one of the principal sources of support for terrorist groups around the world. When I was in the Middle East, I found it to be the common judgment among many of the leaders that I met with, that Iran was greatly feared at the present time because of their support for terrorist groups . . . That and their determination to acquire weapons of mass destruction, I think, leaves Iran as an international outlaw.[64]

Gary Sick explained that dual containment was actually a policy designed to prevent Iran becoming a second Iraq, and that it was created for domestic consumption, in particular for the parties supporting the peace process.[65] The policy focused mainly on Iran, calling on it to stop its support for international terrorism, for Hamas and its sabotage of the peace talks, subversion in the region through the support of fundamentalists, the acquisition of conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction. The US would oppose loans to Iran by the IMF and the World Bank, and try to persuade Europe and Japan not to have normal commercial relations with Iran.[66] The dual containment policy was welcomed in Israel, and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres indirectly admitted the link between US and Israeli policy towards Iran, when he stated: 'I admit, in all modesty, that it is better to let the United States, rather than us, stand at the head of this campaign.'[67]

Martin Indyk maintained that the Clinton administration was not opposed to the Islamic government in Iran but to the regime's behaviour.[68] Richard Cottam explained that the American policy led to a spiral of conflict. Iran was worried that the US might launch a Desert Storm type operation against it and therefore armed itself. The US in return armed its Arab allies.[69] The dual containment policy has been criticised by many in Europe and the GCC as preventing dialogue which could lead to more peaceful relations in the area. Whilst the Qatari Ambassador to Washington thought that US involvement was very important because it stopped Iraq and Iran from dominating the area,[70] the Omani Ambassador held that the dual containment policy would not improve the situation. There was no evidence for the allegations of Iranian support of terrorism, yet the West pushed Iran to be an outsider. The result was that Iran created problems, such as the continued support for Hizballah and Hamas.[71] A Saudi source asserted that the US policy was not effective, and that it was only useful for American domestic politics. He stated that Saudi Arabia had suggested to the United States government that the policy was useless and that they should hold firm talks with the Iranians.[72] In July 1997, Saudi Arabia openly offered to mediate between Iran and the US.[73] A Bahraini senior official in the Prime Minister's Office, Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, said that the US was interested

in co-operating with the Gulf regimes in order to protect its own interests, in particular the prevention of new Islamic governments in the Gulf.[74] The Arabs, however, did not have much influence on US policy in the region. As expressed by an official in the Omani Foreign Ministry: 'How can we have the power to tell the US to leave – when we see the aircraft carrier *Liberty* coming to the Gulf?!'[75]

This view was shared by a German diplomat:

> The American Defence Secretary came to visit, Bush came to visit. They put the Arabs under pressure and told them to buy arms. They insisted that the Arabs needed American help against Iran. The Americans talk them into believing in an imminent threat which does not exist in this way.[76]

Despite much criticism, US policy did not change. One of the reasons was that many veterans of the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979 were now serving at the highest levels of the US State Department, including Secretary of State Christopher. Another reason was that many American officials were convinced that the Arabs were pleased with the US policy and their presence in the region. A US State Department official in the UAE asserted:

> The UAE has defence agreements with the US, Russia, France, Germany, and Britain. They particularly like the relationship with the US because they know that we are here for the long haul. This is very comforting for the UAE and the other Gulf states as we defend them against Iran and Iraq . . . The US has 12,000 troops in the Gulf at any given time. In 1985, there was one visit by a US warship every two to three months to a UAE port. In 1987–88 it was one visit every month. Today we have twenty to thirty visits every month. These ships are here to patrol the Gulf and to protect the shipping. The soldiers get 300,000 to 400,000 liberty days every year in the UAE. There have been no incidents like Okinawa. This is a testimony to the recognition of the 5th Fleet, the Central Command, and the sailors paying tribute to the local culture.[77]

When Saddam Hussein moved his troops towards the Kuwaiti border in October 1994, the US increased the number of its long-term duty aircraft in the Gulf to 130. It also sent equipment for the armoured brigades in Qatar and Kuwait.[78] In 1995 the US increased economic pressure on Iran. In March Clinton vetoed a deal between the American company Conoco and the Iranian government to develop the offshore Sirri oil fields. The contract was later signed by the French firm Total.[79] In May the US imposed a further trade and investment embargo against Iran. In March 1996 the Iran–Libya Sanctions Act, ILSA, was approved which extended sanctions to

foreign firms investing more than $40 million in the Iranian oil and gas industry; the amount was later reduced to $20 million.

In the meantime, the US continued its military co-operation with the Gulf states. In September and October 1995 joint Kuwaiti–US military manoeuvres lasted forty-five days. Iran condemned the exercises. Rafsanjani maintained that the area was 'under the occupation of the Americans'.[80] The Iranian government clearly felt threatened in August 1996, when US fighter planes violated Iranian airspace and broke the sound barrier over Bushehr, the effects of which were similar to an explosion breaking windows.[81] The American act seemed simple provocation to which Iran did not respond militarily. Tehran continued calling for the departure of foreign troops and the establishment of a regional security system.

However, US and British forces in the Gulf were again increased to over 30,000 troops, three aircraft carriers and more than 300 combat aircraft in November 1997. In January 1998, Saddam Hussein defied UN weapons inspectors and called for a lifting of sanctions. Iran called for a peaceful solution to the crisis and Iraq's compliance with UN resolutions. Foreign Minister Kharrazi once again underlined that the presence of foreign forces threatened Gulf security.[82] But renewed Iraqi defiance and Iranian neutrality once again demonstrated that there was only one real threat in the region, Saddam Hussein. There were certain voices in the US which pointed out problems with the US military presence in the Gulf. Nevertheless, even if US–Iranian relations were improved, this would not mean a sudden end to US military presence in the Gulf as the Iraqi threat would remain. It might be reduced, especially in view of rising American criticism of the high costs involved in keeping a large permanent presence in the area, and increasing fears amongst Arab governments of a popular backlash. A study by the US Army War College in February 1998 even recommended that the US consider launching a regional peace process in the Persian Gulf including Iran and Iraq and phase out dual containment. It concluded 'dual containment represents only a temporary fix, has large accompanying costs and risks, and is probably unsustainable over the long term'.[83]

In view of the sanctions and official enmity, President Khatami tried to improve relations with the US on a more informal basis. He called for dialogue early in his presidency. In his efforts to improve links, he went much further than Rafsanjani had done. In January 1998 he gave an interview on CNN, addressing the 'great American people'. He called for dialogue 'right now' between the people, not the governments, for instance through exchanges of scholars and tourists. He condemned all forms of terrorism and declared that Iran was opposed to the Middle East peace process because it did not believe it would succeed. 'At the same time, we have clearly said we don't intend to impose our views on others or stand in their way.' He also regretted the taking of US hostages at the beginning of the revolution:

> With regard to the hostage issue . . . I do know that the feelings of the great American people have been hurt, and of course I regret it . . . In the heat of revolutionary fervour, things happen which cannot fully be contained or judged according to usual norms . . . Today we are in a period of stability of the system, and fully adhere to all norms of conduct that should regulate relations between nations and governments.[84]

The interview was a clear message to the US government that Iran had changed, was abiding by international law and was willing to bury enmity. Khatami earned much criticism from the hardliners for his words. Khamenei shortly afterwards launched strong attacks on the US. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that Khatami had discussed the issues with the Leader before the interview. In view of the continued US sanctions against the Iranian energy sector and the obvious need to improve relations in order to help the dire situation of the Iranian economy, Khamenei is likely to have sanctioned what Khatami was going to say. In that case, his verbal attacks against the US afterwards will have been addressed at his domestic hardline audience. Another example of this difference between rhetoric and *realpolitik* was the hardline reaction to the participation of an American wrestling team in the Takhti Cup at Tehran in February 1998. Whilst hardline newspapers denounced the visit, Nateq Nouri attended the contests between Iranian and US wrestlers which could be a sign that all factions had sanctioned the visit.[85] The visit has been compared by Western analysts to the American 'ping-pong diplomacy' with China in the 1970s.

From the American side, despite continued caution and pressure from pro-Israeli groups and the Israeli government, there were signs that the Administration had heard Khatami and was willing to reconsider. Whilst calling for an official dialogue, President Clinton in his remarks on *'id al-fitr* in turn addressed the people of Iran. He stated that the United States regretted the estrangement of the two nations, that he believed differences in policies were 'not insurmountable' and that he hoped that soon the US could enjoy once again good relations with Iran.[86] Both sides made increasing efforts. Foreign Minister Kharrazi in February 1998 at the World Economic Forum in Davos went up to the American UN Ambassador, Bill Richardson, and shook his hand. Shortly afterwards, US foreign policy experts and former national security advisors attended a Persian Gulf conference at IPIS in Tehran. Naturally, given the long animosity and the opposition to improved relations in both countries, the rapprochement will be a more difficult process, but should be possible in the long term.

After the end of the Cold War, the US substituted the former Russian threat with Iran and tried to persuade Iran's neighbours of Iranian territorial designs. Iran's major rival in the area, Saudi Arabia, at times justified its

purchase of US arms with the Iranian threat, but in fact seemed to feel more threatened by Iraq. The smaller states, however, whilst wary of Iran, especially of the export of the revolution, on the whole did not believe that Iran would start a military confrontation. Nevertheless, they were under enough influence to buy US arms, to co-operate militarily with the US and to open up their markets wider to American goods. To them, an Iraqi threat was also very real and they preferred to have some US military presence in the area.

Iran, feeling isolated after the Iran–Iraq war, tried to improve relations with the European Union and Russia. By the late 1990s, President Khatami called for a dialogue between the American and Iranian people but internal opposition on both sides stood in the way of a better political relationship.

The Europeans and the Persian Gulf

Since the discovery of oil, the main interests of Western Europe in the Persian Gulf have been oil and trade. In the 1980s, the European Community imported around 40 per cent of its total imports of oil from Iran, Iraq and the Arab states in the Persian Gulf, whereas Japan imported 60 per cent, and the United States 15 per cent.[87] Financial and commercial relations were equally important, with European exports to the region and Arab investment in Europe. Western European arms manufacturers competed with the Americans and Eastern Europeans. The security of the region was as important to Europe as it was to the United States.

In the 1980s, the Europeans did not share the American view of a Soviet threat to the Gulf and an 'arc of crisis' stretching from Cuba through the Horn of Africa to Iran and Afghanistan. The European opinion was that the Soviet Union wanted to deny advantage to the West rather than risk superpower confrontation in the Persian Gulf.[88] Since Europe depended on Gulf oil, though, they relied on the involvement of the United States, and were themselves strategically involved in the southern flank of NATO.

After the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq war, Britain and France sent troops to the Persian Gulf region in 1980 as reinforcements for the US presence. British 'Armilla patrol' was based near the Strait of Hormuz to escort British tankers, and twenty French ships were based in the western Indian Ocean.[89] The French supplied the Iraqi army with weapons such as Exocet anti-ship missiles launched from Super-Etendard planes. The British, even after their withdrawal East of Suez, provided a major advisory presence in the UAE and Kuwait. It further had small SAS units and contract naval and air officers stationed in Oman. In 1984, Britain joined the US in convoying ships through the Strait.

A greater European military involvement in the area came at the height of the tanker war in 1987. When the US reflagged eleven Kuwaiti tankers in July, Iran was discussing economic co-operation with the Soviet Union

and submitted ideas for peace and security in the Persian Gulf to the Europeans, trying to persuade them not to join the US forces.[90] By September though, Iran had stepped up laying mines in the Gulf, and naval forces from Britain, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium entered the Persian Gulf to help the Americans. Fourteen of the twenty-nine European ships were minesweepers.[91] The Europeans did not develop the same opposition to Iran as the US, despite the war and problems arising from Khomeini's *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie in 1989. Hence, after the end of the war, Iran sought to develop its trade relations with Europe.

The US continued to hold a leading role, which can be seen during the second Gulf war when the UK and France placed themselves under US command. The situation was similar during the renewed Iraqi crisis over the weapons inspectors in early 1998, when only Britain supported the US plan for military action and placed its ships alongside the US in the Gulf. Nevertheless, since the Gulf Crisis, Iran saw Europe and Japan as a counterbalance to the American presence in the region, which decreased the threat.[92] This view was supported when the Europeans and Japan strongly objected to the US sanctions imposed by the Iran–Iraq Non-Proliferation Act of 1992[93] and to the Clinton administration's dual containment policy. Since 1996 Europe and Japan have been outspoken critics of the Iran–Libya Sanctions Act.

In November 1993, German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel stated that Iran was a major economic and political power in the region and should not be isolated.[94] The Europeans were not prepared to support trade sanctions and give up the Iranian market. Improving relations with Iran was hastened when President Khatami came to power in August 1997. In April 1997, a Berlin court verdict had implicated the Rafsanjani government and the Leadership in the shooting of Kurdish activists in the *Mykonos* restaurant. The EU withdrew its ambassadors from Tehran in what was meant to be a temporary gesture of protest. However, when they were due to return Leader Khamenei declared that the German Ambassador should return last. The EU rejected this and a stand-off ensued with the ambassadors refusing to return. Khatami's new Foreign Minister Kharrazi called for the 'reconstruction of ties' with the EU; and in November the European ambassadors returned to Iran. In February 1998 the EU lifted the ban on high-level political contacts to end Iran's political and economic isolation.[95] In addition, the Europeans considered the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf as a market for their defence products and viewed American companies as competition.[96]

In a widely held Iranian view, which stems from their historical memory of British influence and their leaning towards conspiracy theory, Great Britain has remained the most important outside power in the Persian Gulf. 'If you trip over a stone', the Iranians believe, 'the British have put it there'. For many Iranians, the British are the masterminds and they greatly

influence United States policy in the Gulf. As expressed by Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Maleki: 'At first glance you may think that the US is the main influence in the Persian Gulf. But if you look closer, there is Britain as well. They know this region. They have a lot of military advisors and companies here.'[97]

By the 1980s and 1990s, the United States had taken over as the most influential foreign power in the Gulf, and their presence and impact on the Arab littoral states' policies towards Iran were far more important than the British. Britain certainly had vital interests in the Gulf, as explained by a diplomat at the British Embassy in Tehran. He contended that in the 1980s and 1990s, British interests were mainly related to trade. Persian Gulf oil was not a direct concern because of British North Sea oil. Britain had an export driven economy and its interests lay in a healthy international economy. It therefore wanted to keep the oil price stable. Persian Gulf oil mattered indirectly because instability could affect British exports to the rest of the world. The main British interest in the Gulf was the al-Yamama defence project, which marked a new stage with Saudi Arabia where Britain did not have much influence before. The economic relations with Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE depended on traditional links, in particular through the ruling families and the defence establishment. Members of the ruling families were studying in Britain, officers were trained at Sandhurst, British ministers regularly visited the Gulf and contract officers were hired by the Omani government. As for the military presence, the Armilla patrol, the naval presence in the Gulf of Oman which was started during the tanker war, remained in the area and continued to enforce the UN embargo against Iraq since the second Gulf war. Britain also had a significant military presence in Dhahran to support the Southern no-fly zone over Iraq. The British view was that operationally speaking, the British military presence was not connected to Iran. Britain thought that Iran had a strong interest in security, the question was who could secure it?

As an unresolved power struggle was continuing between Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and for the time being they had no interest in co-operating to secure the Gulf, in the short term there was no viable alternative security system on offer to the United States and the British. The military presence was very expensive and Western deployments were very unpopular with the Arab people. Britain therefore held that the GCC states should work together. As for British co-operation with the United States, Britain had a strategic partnership with the United States, they had been co-operating since Mossadeq and the Suez Crisis. Britain sought to use the transatlantic relationship to influence US policies, for instance during Desert Storm and the Iraq crisis in 1998. The French were not directly involved during the second Gulf war, they provided comfort. They were completely opposed to US action in the 1998 Iraq crisis. In economic terms, however, Britain was in direct competition with the US and had to use its historic

links in the Gulf. As for the British being behind American policy towards Iran, the British diplomat contended:

> We should like to think that we can influence United States policies towards Iran. But there is a difference between the military sphere on the one hand where we have influence, and the economic field on the other where we are direct competitors.[98]

The effects of the external factors on Iran's relations with the Gulf states

It has been demonstrated that the United States was the most important outside power to shape events in the region through its open support for the Gulf states against Iran during the Iran–Iraq war and against Iran and Iraq since the Gulf Crisis, underscored by an increasing military presence. A final question is how much influence these external factors had on Iranian policy towards the Gulf states.

Whilst US policy had a direct impact on the course of the Iran–Iraq war, it only indirectly affected Iranian policy toward the Gulf states. Throughout the war, Iranian policy was preoccupied with Iraq. As explained earlier, Tehran did not develop any strategy of how to deal with its other Persian Gulf neighbours. It had friendly ties with countries which were actively neutral such as Oman and the UAE, and was openly opposed to countries which supported Iraq, like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It attacked some of their oil installations and tankers, but never openly declared war on them. This may have been partly an effect of US support for these countries and the fear of US intervention. But it was probably mostly driven by the idea of not wanting to widen the war front. Once the US was militarily involved in the war, however, it was more difficult to punish the Arabs for their support of Iraq.

After the acceptance of the ceasefire in August 1988, the US presence did not seem to stand in the way of a slow rapprochement between Iran and the GCC countries. This was enhanced after President Rafsanjani came to power in 1989, and then as a result of Iran's neutral stance during the Gulf Crisis. Despite internal pressures, Rafsanjani attempted to bring about a rapprochement with the West, and President Bush seemed inclined to do the same at least in the beginning. He even supported the rapprochement between Iran and the Gulf states.

Had the Iran–US rapprochement been successful, this would inevitably have had a positive effect on Iran–GCC relations. Instead, the situation deteriorated with Iran's opposition to the Madrid peace conference in October 1991, the crisis over Abu Musa and Tunb islands (which Iran saw as fundamentally driven by the US) and the US presidential election campaign in 1992. Once the new Clinton administration took over, Iranian policy

towards the GCC was largely constrained by US Middle East policy. The US role in the Gulf, much more than in the 1980s, began to shape the Iranian perception of regional politics.

Clinton's policy towards Iran began to take form with the announcement of the dual containment policy in May 1993. As mentioned, it was mainly influenced by Iran's opposition to the Arab–Israeli peace process. The policy was a heavy-handed approach that aimed at isolating Iran in the region and the international community until it gave up its opposition to the peace process, its support of groups opposed to the process and its ambitions for nuclear, biological and chemical armament. The US increased its military and economic presence in the Gulf further and opposed any inclusion of Iran into a regional security agreement. Even if the GCC states had, for a short while after the Gulf Crisis, contemplated the inclusion of Iran, they now entered into bilateral security arrangements with the US and other outside powers such as France, Russia and Great Britain. Although, by and large, they agreed with the exclusion of Iran from their military arrangements, they still voiced open criticism of the dual containment policy and the isolation of Iran. They feared its repercussions on the general atmosphere and wanted to avoid confrontation with their bigger neighbour. They were aware that, in case of heightened tension and a military confrontation between the US and Iran, Iran would retaliate against them. The US, however, disregarded Arab opposition to its policy and their call for dialogue.

This may have contributed to the fact that Iran's hostility towards the US did not generate any corresponding response towards the GCC states. In its dealings with these countries and its efforts to establish good relations, Iran did not criticise them for their relationship with the US, it simply reminded them of the fact that the Gulf could only be made secure by its littoral powers. Iran seemed to have come to realise that the US military presence would remain in the region and that immediate regional security co-operation was impossible. Tehran, in the 1990s, was very cautious in its policy towards its neighbours and tried not to offend them but to build confidence in fields where it could ignore the US presence, such as trade and tourism.

In the security field, Iran was equally restrained. It did not sever relations with the Gulf states over their alliance with the United States. Besides the fact that it wanted to avoid yet another military confrontation, this was possibly also out of fear of an American military reaction. The more the US threatened Iran, the more cautious it became in its approach towards its neighbours. It was Rafsanjani's policy not to challenge the US. President Khatami took this one step further by openly calling for dialogue and eventual re-establishment of relations. This is a clear example of their pragmatic policy dominating over those in the Iranian establishment who were proponents of the 'universalist expansionist' ideology and who strongly criticised

the two Presidents for their soft line on the US. Nevertheless, despite Iran's non-aggressive attitude towards its neighbours, and their opposition to Clinton's Iran policy, rapprochement has been complicated as a result of direct US pressure on the GCC governments not to improve relations with Tehran.

It has been demonstrated in this chapter that Iran welcomed the European presence as a counterbalance to the US in the region, even if Tehran was wary of the British influence amongst the GCC governments. As the European countries had good relations with Iran, and were in direct competition to US companies in the GCC, Iran could hope that Europe would have some positive influence amongst the GCC states in supporting rapprochement.

Conclusion

The only external factor which had an impact on Iranian policy towards its Persian Gulf neighbours was the US policy in the 1990s, when Tehran felt threatened by the US military presence and had to manoeuvre carefully not to offend the GCC states. Iran's response to this outside presence was subdued, calling for the withdrawal of the foreign forces, but not actively taking any steps to counter it, and at the same time trying to improve links with the Arab governments as far as that was possible. It can therefore be argued that whilst the US presence in the 1990s was an obstacle affecting Iran's options in building better relations and trust with the Gulf states, particularly in the sphere of security co-operation, it did not make for any greater hostility towards the Arabs. In fact, Iranian policy makers used the Gulf states' dependence on the US to excuse and explain the slow progress of the rapprochement.

CONCLUSION

Iran and its Arab neighbours in the Persian Gulf have lived through a turbulent relationship ever since the fall of the Shah in 1979. One year after the revolution, the Islamic Republic found itself at war with Iraq, an event which overshadowed its relations with the Gulf states for eight years. Having emerged isolated and scarred economically by the war, Iran immediately looked for rapprochement. The strategic importance of the oil rich Persian Gulf region and Iran's main economic lifeline made good relations and a stable and secure environment vital for the Iranian reconstruction effort in the 1990s. Rapprochement, however, has not been easy at any stage, as this study has demonstrated. Promising signs of thaw only appeared in 1997.

So how can we interpret the Persian Gulf policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran? It might indeed be too early to make any definite judgement, but this work has identified a range of factors which have determined the relationship and will continue to do so in the future. The relationship between the two sides has been based on their impressions of history, and their perceptions of each other, as well as self-perceptions. Iran, on the one hand, sees itself in terms of its ancient history and the vastness of its terrain, long coastline and large population. From this, it tends to derive a sense of superiority towards its Arab neighbours – a sense stronger under the Shah, but increasingly adopted by the new political elite when it encountered Arab antagonism towards Iran during the Iran–Iraq war.

The Gulf Arabs, on the other hand, have been influenced by Arab nationalism and disliked and distrusted their Persian neighbour. In addition to the ethnic differences, there is also a deep Sunni–Shi'a divide. This historic distrust of Iran was to a great extent based on the fears smaller countries have of a large neighbour. They remembered the Shah's ambitions to be the regional military power and their fear of domination expressed through his role as gendarme of the Gulf. The fact that the Shah was no real threat, that he supported the Sultan of Oman against the Dhofari rebellion and relinquished Iran's claim to Bahrain upon the withdrawal of the British, did not change the Arab position. This distrust was carried over into the revolutionary period.

In addition to the former Shah's role and the fact that Iran was a bigger power, the Arab rulers, who defended the status quo, feared the export of revolution and its impact on their own people. They were supported in this fear by the West which was equally scared of revolutionary Islamic regimes taking over the oil resources. To the Gulf rulers, the essence of the Iranian threat was not territorial expansion, but the fear of their own regimes getting toppled. There were, however, differences in the degree to which they disliked and feared Iran. Those geographically closer to Tehran and with a higher percentage of Shi'a, like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain, distrusted Iran more than those further away and with traditionally close links, such as the UAE, Qatar and, in particular, Oman. The Iranian rhetoric which called for the overthrow of the Gulf regimes, in particular during the first years of the revolution and the Iran–Iraq war, heightened the Gulf countries' concerns; even though the rhetoric was often addressed at domestic audiences.

The approach of Iranian politicians towards the Gulf Arab states was interesting in that they came to terms with and excused Arab policy towards Iran. Tehran did not punish them too severely for their support of Saddam Hussein during the war, neither did it take a hostile stand after the Gulf Crisis when they aligned themselves militarily with the United States. Iranian policy makers seemed to believe that Iran as a big power should feel sympathy for its smaller neighbours who felt threatened. The Gulf countries discerned this Iranian attitude. Their position towards Iran was therefore slightly ambiguous. They were afraid of their large neighbour, and they supported Saddam Hussein during the Iran–Iraq war, but at the same time they knew that Iran was not a military threat to them. After the second Gulf war, they affiliated themselves closer to the United States, promoting the exclusion of Iran from regional security arrangements whilst at the same time privately expressing interest in better relations and slowly improving trade links. Iran also distrusted Arab intentions. The Iranian government has been deeply worried by their alliance with the US and the American military presence in the Persian Gulf which Tehran saw as primarily directed against Iran.

Generally speaking, the Persian Gulf policy of the Islamic Republic has been influenced by both its religious ideology and Iranian national interest. These two factors have not always been mutually exclusive. The idea of exporting the revolution to the Lebanon was used to increase Iranian political influence in the Middle East. Ideology and national interest existed side by side to varying degrees. Ideology was the driving force in Persian Gulf policy at the beginning of the Iran–Iraq war. The threat of export of revolution was used to put the GCC countries under pressure to stop their support for Saddam Hussein. In that sense, the export of revolution was not only ideological but also a political tool. The export of revolution to the Gulf countries may not have succeeded in the sense that the people did

not overthrow their governments and were not interested in establishing Islamic republics in their own countries, but it was not without consequence in the Gulf Arab states. For example, it was by and large as a result of this perceived threat that the regimes saw themselves pressured to increase popular participation, to enforce stricter Islamic laws and to curb the elite's display of wealth. The King of Saudi Arabia even changed his title to 'Guardian of the Two Holy Places'.

With heavy losses in the war and the realisation that Iran could not afford to antagonise the rest of the world, a slow shift away from ideology towards more national interest, and a more deliberately pragmatic foreign policy could be observed from 1984–1985 onwards. Iran sent an increasing number of envoys to the Gulf states and even invited the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud, to visit Tehran. However, this trend did not last for too long; in 1987 following the incident when around 400 Iranian pilgrims were killed at the hajj in Mecca, the policy towards Saudi Arabia at least reversed to one which was more openly hostile. This event left a deep psychological scar in Iran and made it difficult for policy makers to conduct a high-level, pragmatic policy towards Saudi Arabia for years to come. It was only after Khatami's election as President in 1997 and a generally more conducive political and economic climate in the region, that both countries were willing to overcome their problems.

Despite the apparent shift in 1984–1985, Iran's policy towards its neighbours before and during the Iran–Iraq war can be characterised as more reactive rather than driven by any well thought-out policy. For instance, as we have seen, when the Gulf countries adopted their position of either open support for Iraq, as did Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, or positive neutrality, like Oman and the UAE, Iran responded in kind by attacking Saudi Arabia and Kuwait or by being congenial towards Oman and the UAE.

It was only after the ceasefire in 1988, and in particular after Khomeini's death and Rafsanjani's becoming President in 1989, that Tehran openly shifted towards more pragmatism and slowly began to develop a Persian Gulf policy. Rafsanjani's overarching theme was development and reconstruction. He realised that Iran's economy depended on the safe passage of oil through the Persian Gulf and that further crises had to be avoided. Iran therefore needed to improve its relations with the GCC states. It also envisaged gaining Saudi support in OPEC, and Gulf investment in the Iranian economy. Gulf support for Saddam Hussein in the war was quickly forgotten, and many Foreign Ministry and business delegations travelled back and forth between Tehran and the Gulf capitals.

The Gulf Crisis and the ensuing second Gulf war in 1990–1991, gave Tehran the opportunity to prove its commitment to improving relations. Throughout the Crisis and the war, Iran remained militarily neutral and called for the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait. It further played a diplomatic role in trying to bring an end to the occupation. As a result, Gulf policy

makers, mainly from Oman and Qatar, began talking of the inclusion of Iran into a regional security arrangement.

The establishment of a collective security arrangement between the littoral states of the Persian Gulf without the presence of foreign forces had been at the core of Iranian Gulf policy since the end of the Iran–Iraq war. Since the amassing of Western military forces in the region after Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, Iran advocated this policy more strongly. Tehran did not develop a clear outline for such an agreement, but due to its size and long history as a nation state clearly envisaged a leading role in it. There are certain elements of continuity in this design which correspond with the Shah's Persian Gulf policy. He, too, had proposed the idea of a regional security policy without the presence of foreign forces. The main difference, obviously, was the stand taken by the United States. The Shah was acting on Washington's behalf, as its pillar in the region. The Islamic Republic's policy was much more fiercely independent and anti-American. Nevertheless, the Islamic Republic in the 1990s readily accepted the status quo regimes of its neighbours and was willing to enter into alliances with them. It was now clear that its Persian Gulf policy was dictated by geopolitics and the importance of oil, and was based on the Iranian national interest, as it was in the 1970s. The government of the Islamic Republic, like that of the Shah, came to realise that the Gulf states, apart from Oman, were not seriously interested in co-operating militarily with their big neighbour. The Islamic Republic therefore, like the Shah, shifted to concentrating on confidence-building measures and trade in order to overcome the prevailing distrust, bearing security co-operation in mind for the future. This policy became more pronounced under President Khatami.

Despite initial approval of the plan to include Iran into their security arrangements in 1991, the Gulf states soon changed their minds. In shock from the Gulf Crisis, and still frightened of Iraqi military capabilities, they entered into bilateral defence agreements with foreign powers, especially the United States. The presence of the United States in the region limited the chances of a quick rapprochement between Iran and the Gulf states. Iran's policy had been influenced for centuries by external powers in the region. After the departure of the British from East of Suez in 1971, the Shah's policy depended on the United States. In the 1980s, US policy under Presidents Reagan and Bush was driven by the idea to keep the Soviets out of the Persian Gulf and to secure the oil resources by balancing Iran with Iraq. In the 1990s, and in particular after the beginning of the Arab–Israeli peace process in October 1991, US policy towards Iran shifted away from the primacy of geopolitical considerations to ideology. Clinton's policy of dual containment which was mainly directed against Iran was in effect linked to Israel's fear of Iranian support for groups opposing the peace process and Iranian unconventional armament which could be directed against Israel. Despite the fact that the Europeans have been opposing this

policy, the US promoted the idea of an Iranian threat to the Gulf states. Washington insisted that they needed the US military presence and arms to ward off an Iranian military attack. The problems which arose in 1992 between the UAE and Iran over the islands of Abu Musa and Tunbs were downplayed by the Gulf countries but continuously referred to by Washington as proof for this imminent threat. The US has opposed any thought of including Iran into a regional security arrangement. Existing Gulf Arab fears of Iran, despite the awareness that Iran did not intend to attack them militarily, were thus to a large extent reinforced by US insistence. In view of this US influence in the region, it would appear that normalisation of relations between Iran and the Gulf states would depend greatly on a normalisation of ties or at least the lessening of tensions between Iran and the US. Arab policy makers repeatedly called the dual containment policy counterproductive to a peaceful atmosphere in the region and are themselves becoming increasingly critical of a large permanent US military presence on their soil.

Iran in the 1990s, attempted to improve its relations with the Gulf states in spite of their alliance with the US. This was a process that had already begun at the end of the Iran–Iraq war, with the difference that then the US did not have as large a presence. Tehran changed its rhetoric and it became clear during the Gulf Crisis that it had also changed its behaviour towards the Gulf states. Official Iranian Gulf policy was now purely pragmatic and free of any territorial ambitions, despite the fact that there might still have been some elements within or outside the government which supported or encouraged the overthrow of the Gulf Arab regimes. It can even be assumed that for the Iranian government, the inclusion of Iraq and the United States into a future collective regional security agreement became negotiating positions by the second half of the 1990s.

The Gulf Arab states only partially reacted to Iran's moderation. They did not include Iran in a regional security agreement and did not invest heavily in Iran's economy as was promised in the wake of the Gulf Crisis. Nevertheless, they were willing to hold regular meetings and consultations. But there was no real change in the overall Gulf position towards Iran. It seems that they were still wary of being dominated by their large neighbour, even if politically and not militarily. Iran which did not see any reward for its changed behaviour, partly shifted its attention away from the Persian Gulf to the new republics on its northern borders and the East, including China, Japan, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It was Khatami who made good relations with the Gulf states the top priority of his foreign policy. Once again the Persian Gulf became important in its own right and Iran has increasingly been able to portray itself as the bridge between its southern and northern neighbours. Khatami's charm offensive was welcomed positively in the Gulf capitals. Tehran and the GCC were now calling for a new era in their relations.

The Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to try to improve its relationship with its neighbours, if only to ensure a stable environment and an OPEC policy conducive to Iran's ailing economy. With a fall in oil prices, fears of a re-emergent Iraq and the deterioration of the Arab–Israeli peace process, Saudi Arabia and Iran have started to mend fences. Saudi Arabia along with other Arab governments is concerned that the failure of the US-sponsored peace process is creating a popular Islamic backlash in countries which are closely allied to Washington. The Arab regimes are further worried by the military alliance between Israel and Turkey. The final communiqué of the meeting of the Damascus Declaration countries in Syria at the end of July 1997 called for a new start in Arab–Iranian relations. Riyadh further renewed its invitation to former President Rafsanjani to visit Saudi Arabia. He visited the Kingdom for the first time in February and March 1998 along with a high-ranking delegation of the Khatami administration. Saudi Arabia offered its mediation in the continued islands dispute between Iran and the UAE, as well as between Iran and the United States; and Saudi Arabia participated in the ICO summit in Tehran at the end of 1997. Futhermore, in August 1997, the Secretary General of the GCC, Jamil al-Hujailan, contended that he considered an Iranian share in collective regional security arrangements 'essential', and rejected the claim that the Islamic Republic was a threat to the region. It remains to be seen whether this statement can be taken seriously and will result in the eventual inclusion of Iran into a regional security grouping; or whether the deeply rooted distrust prevails. All that can be said for the time being is that tentative rapprochement which has been on its way since the Gulf Crisis seems to be taking place at greater speed and that the Gulf states are responding positively to Iran's efforts.

To sum up, since 1979 Iranian policy towards its Persian Gulf neighbours moved from being ideology-driven to pragmatic and based on geopolitics. Iran was increasingly interested in building good neighbourly relations and removing tension in the region. The main obstacle was distrust which was difficult to overcome, but more serious efforts have been made on both sides at least since 1997, almost twenty years after the revolution.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The uniqueness of this study lies in the range of personal interviews in Iran, the Gulf states and the West. They included policy makers and analysts, as well as diplomats, journalists and academics who added their independent judgements. It has to be borne in mind that such testimonies, especially when elicited from political actors who have an interest in the way they and their past actions are portrayed, should often be considered to represent an interpretation of events and a reflection of present opinions and state of affairs, rather than the past. They nevertheless provided me with valuable insight and enabled me to verify the information that had been extracted from the media. I made use of a wide variety of Persian, Arabic and Western newspaper articles and radio reports. As for Iranian newspapers, I mainly surveyed *Ittila'at* and *Kayhan*, which both represent an official establishment line, as well as *Risalat* and *Salam*, which demonstrate the different leanings within the Iranian government. *Ittila'at* is relatively moderate and represents the government line. It was the mouthpiece of Rafsanjani's policy of development, in particular after he became President. *Kayhan* is more ideological in its outlook and represents the 'radical right', as exemplified by Seyyed Ali Khamenei since he became the Spiritual Leader in 1989. *Risalat* represents the 'traditional right', a stance also shared by Majlis Speaker Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri, whereas *Salam* is the paper of the 'radical left', run by former 'students of the Imam's line', for instance former Prime Minister Mir Hussein Musavi and former MP Muhammad Khoeiniha. In addition, I evaluated a variety of conference papers and speeches, in particular conferences held at the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), the research institute linked to the Foreign Ministry in Tehran, and at the University of Qatar. If Foreign Ministry documents have not been included in my sources, it is because of the contemporary nature of the topic. The fact that the post-revolutionary relations between Iran and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) states have not yet entered the domain of history means that the authorities in the seven countries under consideration have not released any documents. In spite of the difficulties I have tried to remain as objective as possible by using all available sources.

INTERVIEWS

Names are listed in the chronological order the interviews were held. Their official positions given are those held at the time of the interview. The names of those who asked not to be mentioned have been omitted.

Washington DC (May 1995)
H.E. Abdulrahman bin Saud al-Thani, Ambassador of the State of Qatar
H.E. Abdullah M. al-Dhahab, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman
H.E. Dr Muhammad S. al-Sabah, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait
H.E. Dr Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar, Ambassador of the State of Bahrain

New York (July 1995)
H.E. Dr Kamal Kharrazi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations

Manama (April 1996)
H.E. Sheikh Abdulaziz Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Senior Official in Prime Minister's Office
Dr Khalid al-Khalifa, Vice President, University of Bahrain
Dr Abdullah A. Yateem, Assistant Undersecretary for Culture and National Heritage
Dr Hilal al-Shayji, Editor-in-Chief, *Akhbar al-Khalij*
H.E. Sheikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Kuwait (April 1996)
Dr Saif Abbas, Head of the Political Science Department, University of Kuwait
H.E. Sulaiman Majed al-Shaheen, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs
H.E. Abdul Mohsen Y. Jamal, Member of National Assembly
H.E. Abdallah Bishara, Secretary General, Gulf Co-operation Council, 1981–1993

H.E. Ahmad Abdulaziz al-Jassim, Director of Research and Information Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ambassador to the IRI, 1979–1981)
H.E. Adnan S. Abdul Samad, Member of National Assembly

Muscat (April 1996)
H.H. Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Bu Sa'id, Secretary General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
H.E. Amer al-Higry, Deputy Chief for Bilateral Relations with Arabian Countries and Iran, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Abu Dhabi (May 1996)
H.E. Khalifa Shaheen al-Merree, Director, Department of GCC and Gulf States Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Dr Jamal Sanad al-Suwaidi, Director, The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research

Dubai (May 1996)
Dr Joachim Düster, Director, German–Omani Association
Bassem T. Ajami, Senior Writer, *Gulf News*

Tehran (May–August 1996)
Dr Farideh Farhi, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Political and International Studies, IPIS
Dr Jalil Roshandel, Senior Research Fellow, IPIS
Dr Zahrani, Senior Research Fellow, IPIS
Dr Mahmood Sariolghalam, Associate Professor, School of Economics and Political Science, National University
Said Hajjarian, Deputy for Political Studies, Center for Strategic Studies
Firouz Dolatabadi, Head, Strategic Study Group, IPIS
H.E. Sirous Nasseri, Ambassador of the IRI to the United Nations in Geneva
H.E. Seyyed Morteza Nabavi, Director General, *Risalat*, and Representative of Islamic Consultative Assembly, Majlis
Abbas K. Haghighat, Head, Persian Gulf and Middle East Research Center, IPIS
H.E. Dr Said Rejai Khorassani, Official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (former Ambassador of the IRI to the United Nations in New York, and former Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee)
H.E. Ali Khorram, Senior Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs
Muhammad Ali Emami, Persian Gulf and Middle East Research Center, IPIS
Dr Davoud H. Bavand, Professor of International Law, Imam Sadeq University

H.E. Dr Muhammad Javad Larijani, Deputy Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee

H.E. Abbas Maleki, Undersecretary for Education and Research, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Dr M. Hossein Mashayekhy, Deputy, Foreign Policy and International Relations Department, Center for Strategic Studies

H.E. Hossein Sadeghi, General Director, Persian Gulf Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Dr Sohrab Shahabi, Chairman of Scientific Council, IPIS, and Advisor to Minister of Foreign Affairs

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

* See Note on sources.

1 FOUNDATIONS OF IRAN'S PERSIAN GULF POLICY

1 G.E. Fuller, *The 'Center of the Universe': The Geopolitics of Iran* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 1–2.

2 Interview with Mahmood Sariolghalam, Associate Professor, School of Economics and Political Science, National University of Iran, Tehran, 7 August 1996.

3 Interview with Davoud H. Bavand, Professor of International Law, Imam Sadeq University, Tehran, 21 July 1996.

4 *al-Watan*, 24 December 1994.

5 The United Nations with its twenty-two Arab member countries has on two occasions officially declared the unalterable name of the sea between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula as the Persian Gulf. The first announcement was made through the document UNAD, 311/Qen on 5 March 1971 and the second was UNLA 45.8.2 (C) on 10 August 1984. Furthermore, the UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names has repeated the name 'Persian Gulf' every five years.

6 A.A. Hashemi-Rafsanjani, 'Address by Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 44 (Summer 1990), p. 465.

7 Iranian historians narrate how the history books in the Islamic period called this Gulf *Bahr-i Fars, al-Bahr al-Farsi*, *al-Khalij al-Farsi*, *Khalij-i Fars*. Abu ʿAli Ahmad b. ʿUmar b. Rusta who compiled the book *Taqwim al-buldan* in Isfahan in 290 H., wrote: 'A Gulf leads from the Indian Sea to Fars which is called *al-Khalij al-Farsi*.' M.J. Mashkur, 'Nam-i Khalij-i Fars', in Markaz-i Mutalaʿat-i Khalij-i Fars (ed.), *Majmuʿa-i maqalat-i Khalij-i Fars* (Tehran: Daftar-i Mutalaʿat-i Siyasi va Bayn al-Milali, 1369/1990), p. 13.

They cite European sources like Strabon, the Greek geographer who lived in the first century BC and who wrote that the Arabs lived between the Arab Gulf (Red Sea) and the Persian Gulf. Ptolemy wrote that the sea south of Iran was called *Persicus Sinus* which later became common use as *Sinus Persicus*. Latin geography books also described the Persian Gulf as *Mare Persicum* or *Aguarum Persicum*. F. Bakhtiari Asal, 'Khalij-i hamisha fars', in Markaz-i Mutalaʿat-i Khalij-i Fars (ed.), *Majmuʿa-i maqalat-i siminar-i barrasi-yi masaʾil-i Khalij-i*

Fars (Tehran: Markaz-i Mutalaʿat-i Siyasi va Bayn al-Milali, 1369/1990), p. 137.

8 M.S. Rizaʾi Shushtari, 'Khalij-i Fars az nazar-i tarikhi', in Markaz-i Mutalaʿat-i Khalij-i Fars (ed.), *Majmuʿa-i maqalat-i siminar-i barrasi-yi masaʾil-i Khalij-i Fars* (Tehran: Markaz-i Mutalaʿat-i Siyasi va Bayn al-Milali, 1369/1990), p. 285.

9 R.K. Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf: Iran's Role* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1972), pp. 9–10.

10 For details on Iran's history in the Persian Gulf, see Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 1–27.

More positive and direct interaction between Arabs and Persians was established through trade. Arab and Persian traders had travelled together as far as India and China from ports like Basra and Hormuz already before the ninth century AD. V.A. Sri Vira, 'Tijarat-i Khalij-i Fars az didgah-i tarikhi', in Markaz-i Mutalaʿat-i Khalij-i Fars (ed.), *Majmuʿa-i maqalat-i duvummin siminar-i barrasi-yi masaʾil-i Khalij-i Fars* (Tehran: Daftar-i Mutalaʿat-i Siyasi va Bayn al-Milali, 1372/1993), pp. 181–187.

The major exchange of Arabs and Persians began in the mid-nineteenth century, when Iranian merchants migrated to the Arab shores, for instance, to Kuwait, and Arab sheikhs spent their summers hunting in Iran. Interviews with H.E. Muhammad S. al-Sabah, Ambassador of Kuwait, Washington DC, 24 May 1995, and H.E. Abdullah A. Yateem, Assistant Undersecretary for Culture and National Heritage, Bahrain, 3 April 1996.

11 D.H. Bavand, *The Historical, Political, and Legal Bases of Iran's Sovereignty Over the Islands of Tumb and Abu Musa* (New York: Internet Concepts Inc., 1994), pp. 57–67.

12 Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 23–26.

13 R.K. Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy 1941–1973: A Study of Foreign Policy in Modernizing Nations* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1975), p. 406. The policy had more success after the 1967 Arab–Israeli war, when Iran condemned the Israeli occupation of Arab land. In 1968, the Shah suggested establishing an Islamic Common Market. S.M. Badeeb, *Saudi-Iranian Relations, 1932–1982* (London: Centre for Arab and Iranian Studies, 1998), p. 107.

14 J. Calabrese, *Revolutionary Horizons: Regional Foreign Policy in Post-Khomeini Iran* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), p. 46.

15 Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy 1941–1973*, p. 405.

16 Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf*, pp. 38–40.

17 Ibid., p. 42.

18 A. Alam, *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991), p. 46.

19 M.A. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833–1992* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), pp. 87–88.

20 Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy 1941–1973*, p. 410.

21 Ibid., p. 408.

22 Ibid., p. 411.

23 Ibid., pp. 415–416.

24 Alam, *The Shah and I*, p. 165.

25 In a side letter which was not published at the time, Iran also insisted that it was free to take any measures necessary in the island of Abu Musa. See Chapter 4.

26 Alam, *The Shah and I*, p. 34.
27 U. Steinbach, *Grundlagen und Bestimmungsfaktoren der Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik Irans* (Ebenhausen: Stiftung für Wissenschaft und Politik, 1975), p. 98.
28 Badeeb, *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, p. 130.
29 R.W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), p. 342.
30 Interview with Davoud H. Bavand, Tehran, 21 July 1996.
31 Interview with British diplomat, Tehran, 20 August 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
32 Calabrese, *Revolutionary Horizons*, p. 46.
33 The Minister of Court wrote in 1969, that Iran was 'prepared to draw up a fifty year defence agreement with [the Arabs], and that all in all it will be much the same as the agreement they once had with the British', Alam, *The Shah and I*, p. 34.
34 Interview with Davoud H. Bavand, Tehran, 21 July 1996.
35 The text of the agreement was presented in the form of a letter signed by the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Ali Khalatbary, and the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Qais al-Zawawi, on 6 March 1974. Here are some excerpts of that letter which is kept in the archives of the Foreign Ministry in Tehran:

> the development of cordial relations between Iran and Oman . . . constitutes an effective means for the achievement of our national aims and safeguards the mutual interests of our two countries . . . the ensurance of stability and security in the Hormoz Strait and its adjoining seas is the responsibility of the bordering countries . . . the establishment and expansion of good relations and cooperation between Iran and Oman constitutes an effective step on the road to the creation of co-operation between all the regional countries . . . Being convinced that our independence, territorial integrity and national sovereignty shall be best secured through the strengthening of our defense preparedness, the two parties have agreed to hold regular consultations and take coordinated and joint measures, including the use of each other's facilities when deemed necessary, in order to safeguard security and stability.

36 Interview with Omani official in Muscat, on 22 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
37 The Gulf Arabs' fear of their bigger neighbour does not necessarily correspond to a real threat. Apart from the Abu Musa and Tunbs issue, the Shah did not show any force against any Gulf state. In fact, he supported the Omani government against the Dhofar rebellion, he abandoned Iran's claim on Bahrain and concluded various continental shelf agreements. His armament and military power, but not his actions, inspired the Arab fear of Iranian military domination.
38 R.W. Cottam, 'Regional Implications of the Gulf War: Iran – Motives Behind its Foreign Policy', *Survival*, vol. 28 (November/December 1986), p. 486.
39 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Middle East Journal*, vol. 26 (Spring 1980), pp. 181–204.
40 Article 11 of the Constitution sets forth: 'According to the Koran [21/92] all Muslims are of the same and one single religious community, and the Islamic Republican Government of Iran is bound to base its general policies on the coalition and unity of the Islamic nations, and it should exert continuous efforts

in order to realize the political, economic and cultural unity of the Islamic world.' Ibid.

41 D. Menashri, 'Khomeini's Vision: Nationalism or World Order?', in D. Menashri (ed.), *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 44–45.
42 M.R. Djalili, *Diplomatie islamique. Stratégie internationale du khomeynisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), p. 60.
43 R. Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, Ed. and trans. H. Algar, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), p. 302.
44 Ibid., p. 304.
45 F. Halliday, 'Iranian Foreign Policy Since 1979: Internationalism and Nationalism in the Islamic Revolution', in J.R.I. Cole and N.R. Keddie (eds), *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 91.
46 *Le Monde*, 24 April 1987.
47 'A.A. Vilayati, 'Sukhanrani dar si-u-haftum ijlas-i Majmu'-i 'Umumi-yi Saziman-i Milal-i Muttahid, New York, Mihr 1361/October 1982', in 'A.A. Vilayati, *Didgahha-yi jahani-yi Jumhuri-yi Islami-yi Iran* (Tehran: Mu'assisa-i Chap va Intisharat-i Vizarat-i Umur-i Kharija, 1373/1994), pp. 5–6.
48 M. Sariolghalam, 'The New Middle East and Iran's Security Policy: National and Regional Implications', Paper presented at Conference on Arms Control in a Multipolar World (Southern Methodist University, Dallas, 17–19 November 1995), p. 11.
49 R.K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 24.
50 Ibid., pp. 25–26.
51 Interview with Foreign Ministry official, Tehran, 28 June 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named. According to this source, Iranian national interest has seven indicators: first, the need to obtain weapons, ammunition, spare parts – which can be bought from the international market; second, the capability to produce and export oil; third, the national need for technology and know-how in industry and economy, again obtained from the international market; fourth, the need to provide basic goods, such as sugar, fish powder (fertiliser), wheat, rice, meat, essential for the survival of the people, and provided from the international market – i.e. the need to have good relations with the exporting countries; fifth, the need for national security and the protection of territorial integrity; sixth, the need to communicate with the outside world; and seventh, social welfare and well-being of the people.
52 Interview with H.E. Muhammad Javad Larijani, Deputy Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee, Tehran, 27 July 1996.
53 Interview with Said Hajjarian, Deputy for Political Studies, Center for Strategic Studies, Tehran, 26 June 1996.
54 Interview with H.E. Abbas Maleki, Undersecretary for Education and Research, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tehran, 10 August 1996.
55 Interview with Jalil Roshandel, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Political and International Studies, IPIS, Tehran, 17 June 1996.
56 Interview with Jalil Roshandel, Tehran, 17 June 1996.
57 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, former Ambassador to the United Nations in New York, and former Member of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee, Tehran, 10 July 1996.
58 K.L. Afrasiabi, *After Khomeini: New Directions in Iran's Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 25–26.

59 Interview with Foreign Ministry official in Tehran, 29 June 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
60 See S. Akhavi, 'Elite Factionalism in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 41 (Spring 1987), pp. 171–201; M. Borghei, 'Iran's Religious Establishment: The Dialectics of Politicization', in S.K. Farsoun and M. Mashayekhi (eds), *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 57–81; and M. Sariolghalam, 'Conceptual Sources of Iranian Foreign Policy', Paper presented at Seminar on Arab-Iranian Relations: Contemporary Trends and Prospects for the Future, Qatar, 11–14 September 1995, pp. 1, 5.
61 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 10 July 1996.
62 Rose identifies this group as *Jamiat-i 'Ulama-yi Mujahidin*. G. Rose, 'Factional Alignments in the Central Council of the Islamic Republican Party of Iran: A Preliminary Taxonomy', in N.R. Keddie and E. Hoogland (eds), *The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic*, Proceedings of a conference (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 21–22 May 1982), pp. 45–47, 50–51.
63 Afrasiabi, *After Khomeini*, p. 27.
64 Interview with Farideh Farhi, Senior Research Fellow, IPIS, Tehran, 17 June 1996.
65 Akhavi, 'Elite Factionalism', p. 184.
66 Interview with Said Hajjarian, Tehran, 26 June 1996.
67 Interview with Abbas K. Haghighat, Head of Persian Gulf and Middle East Research Center, IPIS, Tehran, 6 July 1996.
68 B. Baktiari, 'Revolutionary Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: The Quest for Regional Supremacy', in H. Amirahmadi and N. Entessar (eds), *Iran and the Arab World* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), p. 81.
69 S. Bakhash, 'Iran: The Domestic Determinants of Foreign Policy', Paper presented at IISS Regional Security Conference, Abu Dhabi, 13–16 June 1993, p. 10.
70 Interview with Mahmood Sariolghalam, Tehran, 7 August 1996.
71 Interview in Tehran, June 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
72 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 17 July 1996.
73 Interview in Tehran, July 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
74 *Time*, 24 May 1993, p. 51.
75 Sariolghalam, 'The New Middle East', pp. 9–10, 12.
76 *SWB* ME/2222/MED/14, 8 February 1995; *SWB* ME/2225/MED/10, 11 February 1995.
77 *SWB* ME/2946/MED/10, 16 June 1997.
78 *Kayhan-i London*, 1 January 1998.
79 *SWB* ME/2990/MED/19, 6 August 1997.
80 *Public Broadcasting Service, PBS*, interview between Kamal Kharrazi and the host Charlie Rose, 7 October 1997.
81 *SWB* ME/3005/MED/12, 23 August 1997.
82 M. Behrooz, 'Trends in the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979–1988', in N.R. Keddie and M.J. Gasiorowski (eds), *Neither East Nor West: Iran, the Soviet Union, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 16.

2 IMPACT OF THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

1 R.K. Ramazani, 'Shi'ism in the Persian Gulf', in J.R.I. Cole and N.R. Keddie (eds), *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 34. Ali Akbar Velayati declared at the United Nations General Assembly in December 1984, that the Islamic Republic of Iran was the 'revolutionary centre of the Islamic world'. Djalili, *Diplomatie islamique*, p. 74.
2 Traditional Shi'a theory only allows *jihad* at the direct command of the infallible but absent Twelfth Imam. Therefore, military means are theoretically permitted merely in self-defence. A. von Dornoch, 'Iran's Violent Diplomacy', *Survival*, vol. 30 (May/June 1988), p. 255.
3 *Message of Revolution: A Publication of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps*, no. 0 (Tehran: April 1981), p. 3. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran*, p. 24.
4 *Message of Revolution*, no. 1 (May 1981), p. 23.
5 Ibid., p. 49.
6 Interview with Said Hajjarian, Tehran, 26 June 1996.
7 See e.g. *FBIS*/SAS/I9 25 June 1980; *FBIS*/SAS/I13, 3 September 1980; *FBIS*/SAS/I13, 24 October 1980.
8 M. Zonis and D. Brumberg, *Khomeini, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Arab World*, Harvard Middle East Papers, no. 5 (Cambridge MA: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1987), p. 32.
9 Interview with Hilal al-Shayji, Editor-in-Chief, *Akhbar al-Khalij*, Manama, 6 April 1996.
10 R. Wright, *Sacred Rage: The Crusade of Modern Islam* (New York: Linden Press, 1985), p. 27.
11 Zonis and Brumberg, *Khomeini, the Islamic Republic*, p. 32.
12 *SWB* ME/6247/A/4, 17 October 1979.
13 *Le Monde*, 12 May 1982.
14 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 13 February 1986.
15 *FBIS*/SAS/I2, 4 November 1985; *FBIS*/SAS/I14, 5 January 1980.
16 The Iranian Embassy in Kuwait issued a pamphlet in February 1996, accusing the ruling family of Bahrain of human rights violations and a policy of discrimination against the Shi'a which were responsible for the unrest in that year. Interview with journalist Hilal al-Shayji, Manama, 6 April 1996. The Bahraini embassy in Kuwait issued a statement condemning the allegations as false. *al-Hayat*, 8 February 1996.
17 *International Herald Tribune*, 3 January 1989.
18 K. Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guards* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), p. 96.
19 Interview with H.E. Abdallah Bishara, Kuwait, 16 April 1996.
20 Interview with H.E. Ahmad Abdulaziz al-Jassim, Director of Research and Information Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuwait, 17 April 1996.
21 Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam*, p. 99.
22 M. Dunn, 'Until the Imam Comes: Iran Exports its Revolution', *Defense and Foreign Affairs*, vol. 15 (July/August 1987), p. 46. Dunn does not mention any sources and the information therefore has to be regarded with caution.
23 Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran*, pp. 263–264.
24 Interview with Davoud H. Bavand, Tehran, 21 July 1996.
25 Interview with H.E. Kamal Kharrazi, New York, 7 July 1995.
26 Interview in Tehran, July 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
27 Dunn, 'Until the Imam Comes', p. 46.

28 Ibid., p. 47. Dunn also reports about a document from the Ministry of Islamic Guidance, of 26 May 1984, published in 1985 (no date given) in *Libération*. It was purported to be a top secret document but may have been forged. It said that a 200-page plan had been drawn up to set up an independent strike force, camouflaged within the army and the Revolutionary Guards, consisting of Iranian and foreign volunteers. It should be trained on land, at sea and in the air, and the target countries were Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain and Jordan. This corresponds with Iranian exile publications about a multi-national Revolutionary Guards unit, called 110th Independent Brigade. Ibid., pp. 48–50.
29 Interview in Tehran, June 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
30 Dunn, 'Until the Imam Comes', p. 46. I asked various officials and researchers in Tehran about this 'Gulf Office'. No one, apparently, had ever heard about it.
31 Wright, *Sacred Rage*, pp. 32–35. Wright mainly bases herself on interviews conducted in the Gulf countries, especially Bahrain, including security sources, and in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.
32 *FBIS*/SAS/I3–4, 28 March 1984.
33 *The Sunday Telegraph*, 8 November 1992.
34 See e.g. a statement issued by the IFLB in Beirut, *FBIS*/SAS/I10, 19 January 1982.
35 von Dornoch, 'Iran's Violent Diplomacy', p. 257.
36 J. Kostiner, 'Shi'i Unrest in the Gulf', in M. Kramer (ed.), *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), p. 177.
37 *Arab News*, 22 September 1979. The two went to the UAE where they were arrested and then released at Iran's request. *Kuwait Times*, 24 September 1979.
38 *FBIS*/SAS/I9, 25 June 1980; *FBIS*/SAS/I2, 15 September 1981.
39 *Le Monde*, 13 May 1982.
40 Interview with Arab journalist, Manama, April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
41 *SWB* ME/6231/A/7, 28 September 1979. Interview with Said Hajjarian, Tehran, 9 July 1996.
42 Interview with H.E. Sulaiman Majed al-Shaheen, Kuwait, 14 April 1996.
43 Wright, *Sacred Rage*, pp. 126–127.
44 *FBIS*/SAS/I8, 5 April 1982.
45 Wright, *Sacred Rage*, p. 157.
46 *SWB* ME/6304/A/2, 22 December 1979.
47 *Der Spiegel*, 12 December 1994, p. 138.
48 *Daily Telegraph*, 19 January 1997.
49 See e.g. *FBIS*/NES/52, 7 September 1988.
50 *Kayhan*, 6 October 1992. The paper did not give the date or place of the interview nor the name of the correspondent. It can therefore only been speculated whether it took place in Iran, which seems likely.
51 *Financial Times*, 29 August 1979.
52 *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 19 June 1979.
53 *Egyptian Gazette*, 21 September 1979.
54 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 12 October 1979. *SWB* ME/6237/A/8, 5 October 1979.
55 Interview with H.E. Seyyed Morteza Nabavi, General Director, *Risalat*, and Representative of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, Tehran, 6 July 1996.
56 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 10 July 1996.
57 *al-Ra'i al-'Amm*, 25 September 1979.

58 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 17 January 1980. In Bahraini official circles, opinions differ as to whether to take these claims seriously or not. For instance, H.E. Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, a Senior Official in the Prime Minister's Office, stated that Bahrain felt upset but did not take the rhetoric seriously, whereas Ambassador Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar asserted that after the occupation of Kuwait, all GCC countries had to take rhetoric seriously. Interviews in Manama, 3 April 1996, and Washington DC, 25 May 1995.
59 *Dawn*, 27 April 1980.
60 *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 13–14 January 1980.
61 J. Goldberg, 'The Shi'a Minority in Saudi Arabia', in Cole and Keddie (eds), *Shi'ism and Social Protest*, p. 239.
62 *SWB* ME/6290/A/11, 6 December 1979; *SWB* ME/6296/A/3, 13 December 1979.
63 Goldberg, 'The Shi'a Minority', p. 240. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran*, pp. 39–40.
64 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 December 1981.
65 *Egyptian Gazette*, 28 June 1981. *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 30/31 August 1981.
66 *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, 26 February 1982, 31353–4; 25 June 1982, 31563.
67 Interview with H.E. Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Senior Official in Prime Minister's Office, Manama, 3 April 1996.
68 Interview with Davoud H. Bavand, Tehran, 21 July 1996.
69 Interview in Tehran, summer 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
70 Former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani claimed that the Iranian government was very unhappy when it learned about Iranians being involved in the Bahraini plot. He stated that later on, Iranian newspapers produced evidence that some Iranians had gone to Bahrain to help establish an Islamic government there. Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 10 July 1996.
71 Interview with Arab journalist in Manama, 8 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
72 *Emirates News*, 21 December 1981. *Kuwait Times*, 2 April 1982.
73 *Egyptian Gazette*, 26 February 1983.
74 Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran*, p. 44.
75 *FBIS*/SAS/I1, 14 December 1983.
76 *FBIS*/SAS/C1, 28 January 1985; *FBIS*/SAS/S1, 13 July 1987.
77 It was reported that 114 Iranian labourers who were resident in Kuwait were deported after having been imprisoned for twenty days. *Ittila'at*, 1 January 1984. The Friday Prayer Leader of Ali b. Abu Talib Mosque in Kuwait was deported. *Ittila'at*, 31 January 1984. An Iranian deportee related how the Kuwaiti authorities imprisoned and tortured people whom they thought had sympathies for the Islamic regime of Iran. *Ittila'at*, 26 February 1984.
78 *FBIS*/SAS/I3, 8 June 1984.
79 Wright, *Sacred Rage*, p. 141. In 1988, another Kuwaiti plane was hijacked by a Shi'a group to Mashad demanding the release of Shi'a prisoners in Kuwait. The Kuwaiti government did not give Iran permission to storm the plane, and eventually it left Iran. Kuwaiti and Western sources implicated Iran, and especially Montazeri, in the incident. This was denied by the Iranian authorities. *FBIS*/NES/54, 15 April 1988.
80 *Keesing's*, vol. 31, September 1985, p. 33884.
81 *FBIS*/SAS/I3–4, 7 June 1985.
82 *Arab News*, 3 June 1985.

83 *Keesing's*, vol. 31, September 1985, p. 33884. The Arab Revolutionary Brigades claimed further responsibility for the attack on the UAE Vice-Consul in Rome in October 1984, and the assassination of the UAE Ambassador to France in February 1984. *Keesing's*, vol. 31, October 1985, p. 33945.
84 Interview with H.E. Abdul Mohsen Y. Jamal, Kuwait, 14 April 1996.
85 *Tehran Times*, 14 May 1990.
86 *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 22 May 1985. *Die Welt*, 21 May 1985.
87 *Middle East International*, 8 August 1987, p. 5.
88 *Ittila'at*, 2 August 1987.
89 *Jordan Times*, 16 August 1987. *Monitor Dienst*, Nahost, 19 August 1987.
90 *Financial Times*, 27 April 1988. *Monitor Dienst*, Nahost, 4 October 1988. *Washington Post*, 4 November 1996.
91 *Arab News*, 2 December 1989.
92 *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 16 January 1988.
93 *Der Spiegel*, 12 December 1994, p. 137.
94 *al-Hayat*, 22 February 1997.
95 H. Ash-Shaikh, 'Why Bahrain's Sunnites are Wary of the Protest Movement', *Mideast Mirror* (20 April 1995).
96 Interview with Sheikh Khalid al-Khalifa, Vice President, University of Bahrain, Manama, 3 April 1996.
97 Interview with H.E. Sheikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Manama, 9 April 1996.
98 *SWB* ME/2512/MED/11, 18 January 1996; *SWB* ME/2535/MED/9, 14 February 1996; *SWB* ME/2629/MED/1, 4 June 1996.
99 Interview with Arab journalist, Manama, 8 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
100 Interview in Muscat, 21 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
101 *SWB* ME/2652/MED/6, 1 July 1996; *SWB* ME/2654/MED/12, 3 July 1996; *SWB* ME/2655/MED/2, 4 July 1996.
102 *SWB* ME/2730/MED/33, 30 September 1996; *SWB* ME/3106/MED/7, 19 December 1997; *AFP*, 4 March 1998.
103 Quoted in M.R. Djalili, *Iran: vers un nouveau rôle régional?*, Problèmes politiques et sociaux, no. 720 (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1994), p. 50.
104 N.R. Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* (New York University Press, 1995), p. 120.
105 Zonis and Brumberg, *Khomeini, the Islamic Republic*, p. 23.
106 G. Nonneman, 'The GCC and the Islamic Republic: Towards a Restoration of the Pattern', in A. Ehteshami and M. Varasteh (eds), *Iran and the International Community* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 104. F. Heard-Bey, *Die arabischen Golfstaaten im Zeichen der islamischen Revolution. Innen-, außen- und sicherheitspolitische Zusammenarbeit im Golf-Rat* (Bonn: Forschungsinstitut der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V., 1983), p. 137.
107 Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran*, p. 39.
108 Ibid., p. 40. Goldberg, 'The Shi'a Minority', pp. 232–237.
109 *Financial Times*, 4 August 1987.
110 *Washington Post*, 4 November 1996.
111 Wright, *Sacred Rage*, pp. 119–121.
112 Interview with H.E. Adnan S. Abdul Samad, Kuwait, 17 April 1996.
113 Wright, *Sacred Rage*, p. 128. On 3 August 1986, *Ittila'at* reported of the donation of 20 million Rials by supporters of the Islamic revolution in the Persian Gulf countries to Iran. Ten million Rials were given to buy medicine, and 10 million Rials (in addition to 556 grams of gold) to help Iranian soldiers.

114 *Middle East International*, 4 June 1982, p. 5.
115 Zonis and Brumberg, *Khomeini, the Islamic Republic*, pp. 43–46.
116 Interview with H.E. Abdul Mohsen Y. Jamal, Kuwait, 14 April 1996. Nevertheless, tens of thousands of Iranian, Iraqi and Lebanese Shi'a were expelled during the Iran–Iraq war for fear of a fifth column. According to H.E. Abdul Mohsen Jamal, they returned to Kuwait after the second Gulf war.
117 Interview with H.E. Abdulrahman bin Saud Al-Thani, Ambassador of Qatar, Washington DC, 22 May 1995.
118 Heard-Bey, *Die arabischen Golfstaaten*, p. 99.
119 Ibid., pp. 138–139.
120 Interview with H.E. Khalifa Shaheen al-Merree, Director, Department of GCC and Gulf States Affairs, Foreign Ministry, Abu Dhabi, 6 May 1996.
121 Zonis and Brumberg, *Khomeini, the Islamic Republic*, p. 47.
122 Heard-Bey, *Die arabischen Golfstaaten*, pp. 81, 93.
123 This group is careful to avoid any problems with the government. When I asked a Shi'a Bahraini merchant of Iranian descent about problems between Sunnis and Shi'a, he replied: 'We can't talk about the Shi'a topic.' Interview in Manama, April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named. I observed that Sunni Bahrainis of Iranian descent were extremely supportive of the Bahraini ruling family and opposed to the Shi'a regime in Tehran.
124 Interview with Arab journalist, Manama, 8 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
125 Interview with Bahraini journalist, Manama, April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
126 Interview with Mohiaddin Mesbahi, Professor of International Relations, FIU, Miami, 31 July 1997.
127 Halliday, 'Iranian Foreign Policy', p. 107.
128 *Middle East Economic Digest*, MEED, 5 March 1993, p. 22.
129 Interview in Tehran, summer 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named. The term *umm al-qura* originally referred to Mecca in the Quran. By using this term, the source seems to imply that Iran is now self-sufficient and does not want to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, but that the rest of the Islamic world should look to Iran for religious guidance.
130 Interview with Mahmood Sariolghalam, Tehran, 7 August 1996. Badeeb expressed the Saudi view: 'If Iran abandoned its anti-Saudi rhetoric, both countries would unquestionably achieve great success in the area of Islamic solidarity. From the Saudi point of view, such a goal is possible and achievable, and the ball is in the Iranian court.' Badeeb, *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, p. 92.
131 Badeeb, *Saudi-Iranian Relations*, p. 82.
132 Ramazani, *Revolutionary Islam*, p. 92.
133 Interview with Jalil Roshandel, Tehran, 17 June 1996.
134 J. Goldberg, 'Saudi Arabia and the Iranian Revolution: The Religious Dimension', in D. Menashri (ed.), *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), p. 158.
135 R. Khomeini, *Imam Khomeini's Last Will and Testament* (Washington DC: Interest Section of the Islamic Republic of Iran, [1989?]), pp. 12, 16.
136 Goldberg, 'Saudi Arabia', pp. 164–168.
137 Interview in Washington DC, 24 May 1995. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
138 They base themselves on sura 2, verse 197 of the Quran: 'During the pilgrimage, there shall be no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation.'

139 *FBIS*/SAS/I2, 27 August 1985.
140 Interview with H.E. Kamal Kharrazi, Iranian Ambassador to the UN, New York, 7 July 1995.
141 Interview with H.E. Seyyed Morteza Nabavi, Tehran, 6 July 1996.
142 B.I. Kazimi, *Mururi bar ravabit-i Iran va ʿArabistan* (Tehran: Markaz-i Chap va Nashr-i Saziman-i Tablighat-i Islami, 1372/1993), pp. 23–28.
143 *Kuwait Times*, 25 September 1981. Already upon arrival to Saudi Arabia, Iranian pilgrims were searched and books and pamphlets were taken away from them. *Ittilaʿat*, 12 September 1981.
144 *FBIS*/SAS/C7, 20 October 1981. *Arab News*, 2 October 1981.
145 *International Herald Tribune*, 12 October 1981. *Financial Times*, 13 October 1981.
146 *Message of the Revolution*, no. 5 (September/October 1981), pp. 20–21.
147 *Message of the Revolution*, no. 6 (November/December 1981), p. 37.
148 *Kuwait Times*, 9 October 1982. *Arab News*, 14 October 1982.
149 Interviews with various hajjis, Tehran, summer 1996.
150 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 26 July 1983; 29 July 1983. *Arab News*, 15 August 1983.
151 Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran*, p. 96.
152 *FBIS*/SAS/I2, 11 July 1984.
153 Goldberg, 'Saudi Arabia', p. 168. Linking this invitation to diplomatic talks about the war, former UN Ambassador Rejai Khorassani did not think it wise of Khomeini to deny Rafsanjani the visit: 'Khomeini had many advisors who had different opinions. I believe it would have been good for Iran had Rafsanjani gone to Saudi Arabia. Anybody who prevented Rafsanjani from going made a mistake.' Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 17 July 1996.
154 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 20 September 1984.
155 *Arab News*, 7 August 1985.
156 *FBIS*/SAS/I3, 12 August 1986. *Arab News*, 2 September 1986. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 3 September 1986.
157 *Middle East International*, 8 August 1987, p. 4. In 1989, Ahmad Khomeini confirmed that in 1986 Iranians tried to smuggle explosives into Saudi Arabia. In a letter to *Ittilaʿat*, he quoted passages from a letter dated 9 October 1986, in which Ayatollah Montazeri discussed 'the matter of explosives in Saudi Arabia' with Khomeini. *Kuwait Times*, 18/19 March 1989.
158 B.I. Kazimi, *Mururi bar ravabit*, p. 31.
159 *International Herald Tribune*, 23 July 1987.
160 Interview with Said Hajjarian, Center for Strategic Studies, Tehran, 9 July 1996.
161 *FBIS*/SAS/S1, 29 July 1987. *FBIS*/SAS/S1, 30 July 1987.
162 *Arab News*, 22 August 1987.
163 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 August 1987.
164 *Kuwait Times*, 22 August 1987.
165 T. Koszinowski, 'Die iranisch-saudiarabische Kontroverse um die Zusammenstöße während der Pilgerfahrt in Mekka', in T. Koszinowski and H. Mattes (eds), *Nahost Jahrbuch 1987* (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1988), p. 194.
166 *Le Monde*, 4 August 1987. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 4 August 1987. *Kuwait Times*, 10 August 1987.
167 Former GCC Secretary General Abdallah Bishara declared that Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia never took a course toward conciliation because Iran wanted to introduce Shiʿa Islam at the hajj. They organised riots, as a result of which Saudi Arabia put restrictions on the number of pilgrims according to the population quota. Interview with H.E. Abdallah Bishara, Kuwait, 16 April 1996.

168 Interview with H.E. Abdul Mohsen Y. Jamal, Kuwait, 14 April 1996.
169 Botschaft der Islamischen Republik Iran, Pressemitteilung, 'Blutbad in Mekka', Bonn, 4 August 1987.
170 *Ittila'at*, 2 August 1987.
171 Koszinowski, 'Die iranisch-saudiarabische Kontroverse', p. 195.
172 *Jordan Times*, 21 September 1987.
173 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 24 August 1987.
174 Koszinowski, 'Die iranisch-saudiarabische Kontroverse', pp. 195–197. See also *Keesing's*, vol. 34, January 1988, p. 35676.
175 For detailed eyewitness accounts, see Z. Bangash, *The Makkah Massacre and the Future of the Haramain* (London: The Open Press Limited, 1988).
176 Interview with Said Hajjarian, Center for Strategic Studies, Tehran, 9 July 1996. Dr Zahrani added: 'If the Iranians had a plan to violate the hajj, they would not have put women, old people, and war cripples in the front of the march.' Interview with Dr Zahrani, IPIS, Tehran, 24 June 1996.
177 *Tehran Times*, 21 October 1987.
178 *Ittila'at*, 4 August 1987.
179 *Ittila'at*, 2 August 1987, in an article entitled 'Death to America and the Al Saud'. The general gist of various *Ittila'at* articles was that the attack was premeditated by Saudi Arabia as the security forces were too well equipped. It was planned by America, as a result of heightened tension in the war and the embarrassment of the Iran–Contra affair.
180 *FBIS*/SAS/S6, 4 August 1987.
181 *FBIS*/NES/10, 14 September 1987.
182 Interview with H.H. Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Bu Sa'id, Muscat, 21 April 1996.
183 Interview with H.E. Abdullah M. al-Dhahab, Washington DC, 23 May 1995.
184 *Financial Times*, 27 November 1987. *FBIS*/NES/63, 30 November 1987.
185 *Keesing's*, vol. 34, January 1988, p. 35677. *Jordan Times*, 31 August 1987.
186 Goldberg, 'Saudi Arabia', p. 165.
187 *FBIS*/NES/68, 12 April 1988. *Financial Times*, 28 April 1988. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 25 April 1988. Bahrain supported the Saudi move and Egypt reportedly agreed to send 5,000 policemen to Mecca to control Iranian demonstrations. *Ittila'at*, 2 May 1988.
188 *FBIS*/NES/64, 24 October 1988. *Egyptian Gazette*, 2 February 1989.
189 *Middle East International*, 3 March 1989, p. 11. Iran and Saudi Arabia were been supporting opposing groups in the Afghan civil war, and tried to gain influence in that country.
190 D.E. Long, 'The Impact of the Iranian Revolution on the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf States', in J.L. Esposito (ed.), *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact* (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990), p. 109.
191 *FBIS*/NES/51, 7 July 1989. *FBIS*/NES/62, 11 July 1989.
192 *Le Monde*, 12 July 1989.
193 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 12 July 1989. *Financial Times*, 12 July 1989. *Keesing's*, September 1989, p. 36906. *FBIS*/NES/19, 25 September 1989.
194 *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 13/14 April 1990.
195 *FBIS*/NES/37, 21 May 1990.
196 *FBIS*/NES/20, 14 June 1990; *FBIS*/NES/23, 25 June 1990. *Middle East International*, 20 July 1990, p. 6.
197 *Le Monde*, 6 July 1990. *Kayhan International*, 5 July 1990.
198 *MEED*, 9 October 1990. *Kayhan International*, 5 February 1991.
199 *Emirates News*, 19 March 1991. *Middle East Times*, 11/12 June 1991.

200 *MEES*, 10 June 1991. *MEED*, 28 June 1991. *FBIS/*NES/38, 20 June 1991. The demonstration with anti-American and anti-Israeli slogans was reported to have caused a bitter row in Saudi–US relations. *Middle East International*, 28 June 1991, p. 6.
201 *MEED*, 5 June 1992.
202 *FBIS/*NES/39–40, 15 June 1992.
203 *FBIS/*NES/45, 12 June 1992.
204 *International Herald Tribune*, 29/39 March 1993. *Middle East International*, 11 June 1993, p. 11.
205 *Middle East International*, 15 April 1994, pp. 18–19. According to Al-Mani', Saudi Arabia later increased the number to 65,000. S. Al-Mani', 'The Ideological Dimension in Saudi-Iranian Relations', in J.S. al-Suwaidi (ed.), *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability* (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996), p. 172.
206 *FBIS/*NES/51, 54, 18 May 1994; *FBIS/*NES/54, 19 May 1994. *Keesing's*, May 1994, p. 40033. *The Guardian*, 30 May 1994.
207 *SWB* ME/2303/MED/2, 15 May 1995; *SWB* ME/2594/MED/29, 24 April 1996; *SWB* ME/2598/MED/26, 29 April 1996.
208 *SWB* ME/2817/MED/9, 15 January 1997; *SWB* ME/2893/MED/6, 15 April 1997.
209 *Xinhua*, 5 April 1998.
210 Interviews with Dr Zahrani, IPIS, Tehran, 24 June 1996; and with Arab journalist, Manama, 8 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
211 Interview in Tehran, June 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named. Even if the rhetoric did not have any substance, it was received by Saudi Arabia as a political position and thus had political consequences.
212 Interview with Abbas K. Haghighat, Tehran, 6 July 1996.
213 Interview with Said Hajjarian, Tehran, 9 July 1996.
214 Interview in Tehran, June 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
215 Interview with H.E. Muhammad Javad Larijani, Tehran, 27 July 1996.

3 THE 1980S: IMPACT OF THE IRAN–IRAQ WAR

1 *SWB* ME/6019/A/5, 18 January 1979. *Kuwait Times*, 27 January 1979.
2 Interview with Omani official in Muscat, 22 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
3 *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 30 September/1 October 1979. *SWB* ME/6233/A/5, 1 October 1979. *Middle East International*, 7 December 1979, p. 3.
4 *Le Monde*, 11/12 March 1979.
5 *Journal de Téhéran*, 24 February 1979.
6 *Financial Times*, 13 March 1979.
7 J.A. Kechichian, *Oman and the World: The Emergence of an Independent Foreign Policy* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1995), p. 101.
8 *International Herald Tribune*, 16 July 1979.
9 Interview with H.E. Muhammad Javad Larijani, Deputy Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee, Tehran, 27 July 1996.
10 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 10 July 1996.
11 *Arab News*, 6 October 1979.
12 *Dawn*, 24 September 1979.
13 Interview with H.E. Abdallah Bishara, Kuwait, 16 April 1996.
14 *Le Monde*, 17 February 1979. *Arab News*, 3 April 1979.
15 Interview with H.E. Sulaiman Majed al-Shaheen, Kuwait, 14 April 1996.

16 Interview with H.E. Ahmad Abdulaziz al-Jassim, Director of Research and Information Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kuwait, 17 April 1996.
17 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 24 July 1979. *Arab News*, 22 July 1979; 23 July 1979; 24 July 1979. *Dawn*, 25 July 1979.
18 *SWB* ME/6178/A/9, 27 July 1979.
19 Interview with H.E. Muhammad S. al-Sabah, Washington DC, 24 May 1995.
20 *Arab News*, 8 February 1980.
21 *Arab News*, 11 February 1980.
22 Interview with Omani official, Muscat, 22 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
23 K. McLachlan, 'Analyses of the Risks of War: Iran–Iraq Discord, 1979–1980', in Rajaee (ed.), *The Iran–Iraq War*, pp. 25–29.
24 Interview with H.E. Ahmad Abdulaziz al-Jassim, Kuwait, 17 April 1996.
25 Heard-Bey, *Die arabischen Golfstaaten*, p. 19. There was a similar agreement between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and it is more than likely that in the autumn of 1979, a small contingent of Saudi troops was stationed in Bahrain. Ibid.
26 H.S. Seifzadeh, 'Revolution, Ideology and the War', in Rajaee (ed.), *The Iran–Iraq War Revisited* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), p. 94.
27 *Arab News*, 23 September 1979. *FBIS/*SAS/19, 26 March 1980.
28 McLachlan, 'Analyses of the Risks', pp. 28–29.
29 Ibid., pp. 29–30.
30 L.A. Mylroie, 'Regional Security After Empire: Saudi Arabia and the Gulf', PhD thesis, Harvard University (1985), p. 273.
31 Interview with M. Hossein Mashayekhi, Deputy for Foreign Policy and International Relations, Center for Strategic Studies, Tehran, 11 August 1996.
32 Interview in Washington DC, 24 May 1995. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
33 *FBIS/*SAS/3, 23 January 1981. *FBIS/*MEA/6, 13 February 1981. Cited in B. Baktiari, 'Revolutionary Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: The Quest for Regional Supremacy', in Amirahmadi and Entessar (eds), *Iran and the Arab World*, pp. 74–75.
34 Interview with H.E. Ahmad Abdulaziz al-Jassim, Kuwait, 17 April 1996. Mohiaddin Mesbahi doubts the fact that the Gulf countries really feared Iran and assumes that they had a deliberate policy of portraying Iran as the regional threat: 'Why is it that a country which suffers from domestic problems, international isolation, ready to sell its airforce on the "Gulf Sunday market," and without any clear Gulf policy – only a passive-reactive one, has been consistently identified as a deliberate, determined source of dynamic threat and expansionism? It seems that everybody, including the Gulf Arab states, has a policy except for Iran.' Interview with Mohiaddin Mesbahi, Professor of International Relations, FIU, Miami, 31 July 1997.
35 *The Observer*, 5 October 1980.
36 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorrasani, Tehran, 17 July 1996.
37 Interview with Omani official, Muscat, 22 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named. Nevertheless, according to the Omani Ambassador to the US, Oman was the only Gulf country to tell Saddam Hussein that the war was wrong. Interview with H.E. Abdullah M. al-Dhahab, Washington DC, 23 May 1995.
38 Kechichian, *Oman and the World*, p. 103. G. Nonneman, *Iraq, the Gulf States and the War: A Changing Relationship 1980–1986 and Beyond* (London: Ithaca Press, 1986), p. 97. According to Quandt, in mid-1982, Saudi Arabia cut back on aid to Iraq, which coincided, 'perhaps not by chance' with Iranian gains. W.B. Quandt, 'Saudi Views on the Iranian Revolution', in B.M. Rosen (ed.),

Iran Since the Revolution: Internal Dynamics, Regional Conflict and the Superpowers (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1985), p. 58.
39 Interview with H.E. Abdul Mohsen Y. Jamal, Member of the National Assembly, Kuwait, 14 April 1996.
40 Interview with H.E. Muhammad S. al-Sabah, Washington DC, 24 May 1995.
41 Interview with Saif Abbas, Head of Political Science Department, University of Kuwait, Kuwait, 13 April 1996.
42 Interview with H.E. Abdul Mohsen Y. Jamal, Kuwait, 14 April 1996.
43 Interview with Arab journalist, Manama, 8 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
44 Interview with H.E. Ahmad Abdulaziz al-Jassim, Kuwait, 17 April 1996.
45 S. Lotfian, 'Taking Sides: Regional Powers and the War', in Rajaee (ed.), *The Iran–Iraq War Revisited*, p. 18.
46 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 17 July 1996.
47 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 17 July 1996.
48 *Frankurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8 October 1981. This was confirmed to me by an Iranian source who does not wish to be named as being 'possibly untrue', which I understand as meaning that it could at least be partly true. Interview in Tehran, summer 1996.
49 *Kuwait Times*, 18 October 1981.
50 Interview with H.E. Abdallah Bishara, Kuwait, 16 April 1996.
51 It was reported in the *Jerusalem Post* that after the liberation of Khorramshahr, Saudi rulers offered Iran $25 billion to end the war. M.A. Heller, *The Iran–Iraq War: Implications for Third Parties* (Harvard University: Center for International Affairs, 1984), p. 15.
52 B. Naʿimi Arfaʿ, *Mabani-yi raftari-yi Shura-yi Hamkari-yi Khalij-i Fars dar qibal-i Jumhuri-yi Islami-yi Iran* (Tehran: Daftar-i Mutalaʿat-i Siyasi va Bayn al-Milali, 1370/1991), p. 81.
53 Interview with Iranian Foreign Ministry official, Tehran, 29 June 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
54 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 17 July 1996.
55 *Keesing's*, 4 June 1982, p. 31524. C. Marschall, 'Syria, Iran, and the Changing Middle East Order: The Syro-Iranian Alliance 1979–1988', MPhil thesis, University of Oxford (1991), p. 70.
56 Interview with Iranian Foreign Ministry official, Tehran, 29 June 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
57 Interview with H.E. Abdallah Bishara, Kuwait, 16 April 1996.
58 *Jordan Times*, 7 March 1982.
59 *Jordan Times*, 30 September 1980. *Arab News*, 16 July 1981.
60 *Arab News*, 3 June 1982.
61 *Middle East International*, 30 July 1982, p. 9. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 July 1982.
62 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 10 July 1996.
63 *Kuwait Times*, 27 November 1980. *Keesing's*, 4 June 1982, p. 31523.
64 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 18 May 1981. *Arab News*, 4 March 1982. *FBIS/SAS/I2*, 15 March 1982. *Xinhua*, 26 March 1982.
65 *Middle East International*, 9 April 1982, p. 5. It was Khomeini's idea that Iraq and the Persian Gulf would join Iran, once Iran had defeated Saddam Hussein. S. Chubin, *Iran and its Neighbours: The Impact of the Gulf War*, Conflict Studies 204 (Geneva: The Centre for Security and Conflict Studies, 1987), p. 8. The view of the Iran–Iraq war as a government sponsored means to export the revolution created problems for Foreign Ministry diplomacy.

66 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 15 April 1983.
67 *Ittila'at*, 6 August 1983. *FBIS/*SAS/C3, 1 August 1983. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 19 September 1983. *Middle East International*, 28 October 1983, p. 7.
68 *FBIS/*SAS/C1, 17 February 1984.
69 Iran's trade with the UAE had steadily increased since the outbreak of war, and it was not in Iran's interest to alienate this country. For instance, since the Iraqi occupation of Khorramshahr, Iran's main commercial port and the only one which handled large container ships, Iran had used the port of Dubai to unload imports which were then shipped to Iran. E. Hooglund, 'Iran and the Arab Countries', *Beirut Review* (Spring 1994), p. 29.
70 Interview with Jamal S. al-Suwaidi, Abu Dhabi, 8 May 1996.
71 *Arab News*, 18 May 1983.
72 *Keesing's*, December 1983, p. 32595. *Jordan Times*, 14 August 1983. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 15 August 1983.
73 J.A. Kechichian, 'The Gulf Cooperation Council and the War', in C.C. Joyner (ed.), *The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for Strategy, Law, and Diplomacy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 97.
74 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 10 July 1996.
75 Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati's speech at a gathering of Tehran's Diplomatic Corps, Tehran, 19 May 1984.
76 *Keesing's*, August 1984, p. 33059. The US and Iraq re-established diplomatic relations in October 1984. G. Sick, 'Iran's Quest for Superpower Status', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 65 (Spring 1987), p. 702.
77 Interview in Washington DC, 24 May 1995. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
78 *Middle East International*, 15 June 1984, p. 3.
79 *Keesing's*, April 1985, p. 33560.
80 Interview with H.H. Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Bu Sa'id, Secretary General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Muscat, 21 April 1996.
81 *Ittila'at*, 18 July 1984.
82 In Khomeini's meeting with politicians and military men, they decided to buy US TOW anti-tank missiles. Interview in Tehran, summer 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
83 *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 25 September 1984. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 24 September 1984.
84 Interview in Tehran, summer 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
85 *Kuwait Times*, 15 May 1985. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 28 May 1985. *FBIS/*SAS/14, 1 July 1985. *Ittila'at*, 17 October 1985.
86 *Arab News*, 8 October 1985. *Ittila'at*, 26 August 1985.
87 *Middle East International*, 11 October 1985, p. 13.
88 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 1 June 1984.
89 Marschall, 'Syria, Iran', pp. 70–71.
90 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 1 March 1984; 1 June 1984; 1 October 1984; 15 November 1985; 30 December 1985. *Jordan Times*, 28 May 1984. *Kuwait Times*, 29 May 1985. *Kayhan*, 21 December 1985.
91 *Middle East International*, 8 February 1985, p. 9. *FBIS/*SAS/I6, 15 February 1985.
92 *Arab News*, 3 June 1985; 5 June 1985.
93 *Khaleej Times*, 1 July 1985. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 15 October 1985.
94 *Middle East International*, 22 November 1985, p. 10. *Financial Times*, 12 November 1985.

95 *Khaleej Times*, 11 December 1985. *Jordan Times*, 11 December 1985.
96 *FBIS*/SAS/C1, 26 December 1985.
97 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 17 July 1996.
98 C. Caret, ' "L'alliance contre-nature" de la Syrie baasiste et de la Republique islamique d'Iran', *Politique étrangère*, vol. 52 (Summer 1987), p. 385.
99 *Kuwait Times*, 23 July 1984.
100 According to an Iranian source, the visit of Saud al-Faisal was not linked to obtaining US weapons. At this time, Iran was isolated and wanted to break out of its isolation. Before the visit, there was no clear policy towards Saudi Arabia. Interview in Tehran, summer 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
101 *IRNA*, Bonn, 18 May 1985. *FBIS*/SAS/I4–I6, 20 May 1985. *Kayhan International*, 26 May 1985.
102 *Die Welt*, 21 May 1985.
103 Sick, 'Iran's Quest', p. 703.
104 *Die Welt*, 21 May 1985.
105 Quoted in Nonneman, 'The GCC and the Islamic Republic', p. 107.
106 *FBIS*/SAS/I3, 9 December 1985. *Le Monde*, 12 December 1985.
107 *Middle East International*, 20 December 1985, p. 6.
108 *FBIS*/SAS/I4, 11 February 1986.
109 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 10 July 1996.
110 *Arab News*, 4 March 1986. *Middle East International*, 21 March 1986, p. 10.
111 Mesbahi, 'The USSR and the Iran–Iraq War', pp. 88–89.
112 *Middle East International*, 2 May 1986, p. 9; 27 June 1986, p. 9. *FBIS*/SAS/I5, 3 July 1986.
113 *Kuwait Times*, 23 August 1986. R.K. Ramazani, 'The Iran–Iraq War and the Persian Gulf Crisis', *Current History* (February 1988), p. 61.
114 *Middle East International*, 12 September 1986, pp. 17–18.
115 *Jordan Times*, AP, 6 October 1986.
116 Iran made economic promises and offered further military co-operation in the Lebanon to Syria. Marschall, 'Syria, Iran', p. 73. *Kayhan International*, 20 October 1986.
117 *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 2 December 1986.
118 Interview in Washington DC, 24 May 1995. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
119 *Middle East International*, 5 December 1986, p. 13. *FBIS*/SAS/C4–5, 1 December 1986. *Financial Times*, 5 December 1986.
120 M. Stern, 'Massaker in Mekka', in U. Steinbach (ed.), *Der Golfkrieg. Ursachen, Verlauf, Auswirkungen* (Hamburg: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1988), p. 141.
121 *FBIS*/SAS/I1, 15 September 1986.
122 *Jordan Times*, 12 November 1986. The Americans reportedly also diverted up to $30 million of the Iranian purchase in the form of cash and arms to the Sandinistas. Ibid.
123 *International Herald Tribune*, 1 December 1986.
124 Interview with Arab journalist, Manama, 8 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named. The sources of this journalist are not clear and may only be speculation.
125 *Arab News*, 17 December 1986.
126 *Jordan Times*, 12 November 1986.
127 *FBIS*/SAS/C3, 24 November 1986.
128 Interview in Tehran, summer 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
129 *Middle East International*, 5 December 1986, p. 8.

130 Ramazani, 'The Iran–Iraq War', p. 62.
131 *Financial Times*, 26 January 1987.
132 Interview with Saif Abbas, Kuwait, 13 April 1996.
133 *MEES*, 23 March 1987. In the meantime, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait kept up their financial support for Iraq, since 1983 mainly by selling the daily production of their Neutral Zone oil on behalf of Iraq.
134 *Middle East International*, 3 April 1987, p. 5. *FBIS*/SAS/I1, 23 April 1987.
135 *Middle East International*, 1 May 1987, p. 9.
136 *Middle East International*, 29 May 1987, pp. 3–4.
137 Interview with Said Hajjarian, Tehran, 9 July 1996.
138 *FBIS*/SAS/S1, 4 June 1987.
139 *Kayhan*, 23 June 1987.
140 *al-Majalla*, 8 to 14 July 1987.
141 *Middle East International*, 11 July 1987, p. 3.
142 Kechichian, 'The Gulf Cooperation Council', p. 105.
143 *FBIS*/NES/66, 3 December 1987. *FBIS*/NES/62, 7 December 1987.
144 *al-Majalla*, 29 July–4 August 1987, p. 15.
145 *Financial Times*, 28 August 1987.
146 Cited in A.R. Sheikholeslami, 'Saudi Arabia and the United States: Partnership in the Persian Gulf', in Rajaee (ed.), *The Iran–Iraq War*, p. 117.
147 *Le Monde*, 29 July 1987.
148 *Financial Times*, 17 August 1987.
149 *Middle East International*, 8 August 1987, p. 7.
150 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 13 August 1987. *Kuwait Times*, 15 August 1987.
151 *Middle East International*, 28 August 1987, p. 3. *FBIS*/NES/J3, 24, 8 September 1987. *Middle East International*, 12 September 1987, pp. 3–5.
152 *International Herald Tribune*, 5 October 1987. *Middle East International*, 10 October 1987, p. 5.
153 Interview in Washington DC, 24 May 1995. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
154 Interview with Davoud H. Bavand, Tehran, 6 August 1996.
155 Interview in Tehran, 17 July 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
156 *Khaleej Times*, 24 October 1987. *Middle East International*, 24 October 1987. Lotfian presented another reason for Iran's firing of Silkworms at Ahmadi port. She claimed that between 1984 and 1986, South Africa had supplied Iraq with artillery ammunition which was shipped in oil tankers to Aqaba. From there, it was sent to al-Ahmadi where Kuwaiti and Saudi oil was loaded and sent to South Africa in payment for the arms supplies. Lotfian did not give any sources. Lotfian, 'Taking Sides', pp. 18–19.
157 *Financial Times*, 31 March 1988. *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 1/2 April 1988.
158 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 11 April 1988.
159 Interview in Washington DC, 24 May 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
160 Sheikholeslami, 'Saudi Arabia and the United States', p. 119.
161 The primary reason for losing Fao was military unpreparedness of the Revolutionary Guards, who were in charge of Fao. However, Iraq in comparison to earlier battles was very well prepared and its intelligence went beyond Iraqi technical capabilites. It was thus the general belief in Iranian military circles that the US supported the Iraqi recapture of Fao. US support included intelligence backing, for example satellite pictures and deception, including electronic counter-measures. Interview with Iranian source. Informant does not wish to be named.

162 *Handelsblatt*, 22–23 April 1988.
163 *Ittila'at*, 20 January 1987.
164 *Khaleej Times*, 29 January 1987. *Middle East International*, 6 February 1987, p. 11.
165 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 16 April 1987.
166 *Kayhan International*, 17 May 1987.
167 Interview with senior official, Muscat, 22 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
168 Interview with H.H. Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Bu Sa'id, Muscat, 21 April 1996.
169 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 17 July 1996.
170 *Le Monde*, 2 June 1987.
171 *Ittila'at*, 12 May 1987.
172 *Middle East International*, 12 June 1987, p. 4.
173 *Keesing's*, December 1987, p. 35598.
174 *Kayhan International*, 18 August 1987. *FBIS/*NES/S8, 19 August 1987.
175 Interview with H.E. Muhammad Javad Larijani, Tehran, 27 July 1996.
176 *Middle East International*, 28 August 1987, p. 5.
177 Ibid., pp. 4–5.
178 *al-Majalla*, 2 to 8 September 1987, pp. 12–15.
179 *Middle East International*, 12 September 1987. *Jordan Times*, 14 September 1987. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 14 September 1987.
180 Interview with H.E. Sheikh Muhammad Bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, Manama, 9 April 1996.
181 *FBIS/*NES/28, 16 October 1987. *Jordan Times*, 24 November 1987. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 7 December 1987.
182 *Emirates News*, 31 December 1987.
183 Nonneman, 'The GCC and the Islamic Republic', p. 112.
184 Interview with H.E. Abdallah Bishara, Kuwait, 16 April 1996.
185 Marschall, 'Syria, Iran', p. 77.
186 Interview with Foreign Ministry official, Tehran, 29 June 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
187 *Arab News*, 11 January 1988.
188 *The Times*, 28 May 1988.
189 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 1 August 1988.
190 Nonneman, 'The GCC and the Islamic Republic', pp. 115–116.
191 Quoted in B. Rubin, 'The Gulf States and the Iran–Iraq War' in E. Karsh (ed.), *The Iran–Iraq War: Impact and Implications* (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1989), p. 128.
192 R. Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 154–155. According to Said Zahlan, the Sharjah newspaper *al-Khalij* was the only one to publish the entire report of UN Secretary General de Cuellar's September 1987 Gulf visit. It showed Iran's willingness to negotiate a just and lasting peace settlement through the UN. Ibid., p. 155.
193 Interview with H.E. Abdallah Bishara, Kuwait, 16 April 1996.
194 Interview with senior official, Muscat, 22 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
195 *Kuwait Times*, 15 October 1988.
196 *Kuwait Times*, 11 September 1988.
197 *Emirates News*, 8 November 1988; 9 November 1988. *Kuwait Times*, 20 November 1988.

198 *Middle East International*, 7 October 1988, p. 12.
199 *Kuwait Times*, 22 October 1988; 22 December 1988.

4 THE 1990S: GULF CRISIS, ISLANDS DISPUTE AND PRESIDENT KHATAMI

1 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 3 January 1989; 10 January 1989.
2 M.M. Milani, 'Iran's Post-Cold War Policy in the Persian Gulf', *International Journal*, vol. 49 (Spring 1994), pp. 335–336.
3 H. Amirahmadi, 'Iran and the Persian Gulf Crisis', in Amirahmadi and Entessar (eds), *Iran and the Arab World*, p. 100.
4 *Risalat*, 7 August 1989.
5 *Emirates News*, 20 May 1989.
6 *FBIS*/NES/15, 10 May 1989.
7 *Emirates News*, 26 June 1989.
8 *Emirates News*, 5 September 1989; 6 September 1989. *FBIS*/NES/56, 15 September 1989.
9 *Kayhan-i Hava'i*, 27 September 1989.
10 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 10 July 1996. See also *Emirates News*, 5 September 1989. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 22 September 1989. *Jumhuri-yi Islami*, 25 September 1989.
11 *FBIS*/NES/23, 26 June 1990. *FBIS*/NES/49, 27 June 1990.
12 *FBIS*/NES/59, 6 December 1989. *FBIS*/NES/17, 11 December 1989. *FBIS*/NES/49, 27 December 1989. *FBIS*/NES/52, 22 February 1990. *FBIS*/NES/52, 12 June 1990.
13 *al-Majalla*, 26 December 1989.
14 *Arab News*, 4 May 1990. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 10 July 1990.
15 *Ittila'at*, 14 July 1990.
16 *Kayhan*, 29 August 1989.
17 *Tehran Times*, 1 November 1989.
18 *Kuwait Times*, 9 July 1990.
19 *Keesing's*, February 1991, p. 37990.
20 Interview with senior official, Muscat, 22 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
21 Interview in Washington DC, 24 May 1995. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
22 Saddam Hussein's letter to Rafsanjani, 21 April 1990, *The Texts of Letters Exchanged Between the Presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Iraq 1990*, Ed. and trans. M. Daftari, (Tehran: IPIS, 1374/1995), pp. 2, 4.
23 Rafsanjani's letter to Saddam Hussein, 2 May 1990. Ibid., pp. 13–14.
24 Saddam Hussein's letter to Rafsanjani, 30 July 1990. Ibid., pp. 38–41.
25 Neither the GCC nor Iran seemed to believe that Iraq would invade that very moment, despite the fact that Iranian officials hold that Khomeini had warned the Gulf Arabs that Iraq would invade them next. Deputy Head of the Majlis Foreign Affairs Committee Muhammad Javad Larijani stated: 'We suggested to Kuwait that Iraq intended to invade Kuwait; we even thought Saddam Hussein wanted to assault Saudi Arabia. The Iraqi threat brought them closer to us. Then the invasion happened.' Interview in Tehran, 27 July 1996.
26 *FBIS*/NES/47, 3 August 1990.
27 *Kayhan International*, 8 August 1990.
28 Letter from Saddam Hussein to Rafsanjani, 14 August 1990, in *The Texts of Letters*, pp. 59–60.

29 *Ittilaʿat*, 25 August 1990. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 5 October 1990.
30 Interview with H.E. Muhammad S. al-Sabah, Washington DC, 24 May 1995.
31 *Kayhan*, 1 May 1991.
32 *FBIS*/NES/52, 15 August 1990.
33 M. Rezun, *Post-Khomeini Iran and the New Gulf War* (Quebec: Centre québécois de relations internationales, Université Laval, 1991), p. 16.
34 *FBIS*/NES/59, 9 October 1990.
35 Interview with Abbas K. Haghighat, IPIS, Tehran, 6 July 1996.
36 *Keesing's*, August 1990, p. 37668.
37 *FBIS*/NES/58–59, 17 September 1990.
38 *The Times*, 28 September 1990. *FBIS*/NES/52, 13 September 1990.
39 *Keesing's*, 37:2 (supplement), p. 38071.
40 *Ittilaʿat*, 5 September 1990; 6 September 1990; 18 September 1990. For instance, in November 1990, an agreement was signed between Ahwaz and Qatar to build a water pipeline. The Qatari Crown Prince signed five co-operation agreements, including the agreement to build a water pipeline and pump Iranian drinking water to Qatar. *al-Majalla*, 4–10 February 1991.
41 *Kayhan International*, 29 October 1990.
42 Interview with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 17 July 1990.
43 *FBIS*/NES/57, 1 October 1990. *FBIS*/NES/46, 4 October 1990. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 2 October 1990.
44 Interview with H.E. Hossein Sadeghi, Tehran, 13 August 1990.
45 *FBIS*/NES/56, 10 September 1990. *FBIS*/NES/58, 14 November 1990.
46 *Le Monde*, 30 November 1990. *MEED*, 28 December 1990.
47 *Financial Times*, 24 December 1990. *Keesing's*, December 1990, p. 37927. *Middle East International*, 11 January 1991, p. 9.
48 A.H.H. Abidi, 'Iran in the Post-Persian Gulf War Crisis Scenario', *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 7 (Fall 1995), p. 621.
49 *FBIS*/NES/51, 54, 10 January 1991.
50 *FBIS*/NES/59–60, 2 January 1991.
51 Interview with H.E. Abdul Mohsen Y. Jamal, Kuwait, 14 April 1996.
52 *FBIS*/NES/52, 18 January 1991.
53 Telegram by Rafsanjani to the Conference on Persian Gulf Security at IPIS, Tehran, 21 January 1991. In Markaz-i Mutalaʿat-i Khalij-i Fars (ed.), *Majmuʿa-i maqalat-i sivummin siminar*, p. 1.
54 ʿA.A. Vilayati, 'Matn-i sukhanrani-yi ʿAli Akbar Vilayati, vazir-i umur-i kharija', in Markaz-i Mutalaʿat-i Khalij-i Fars (ed.), *Majmuʿa-i maqalat-i sivummin siminar*, p. 5.
55 C. Marschall, 'Syria-Iran: A Strategic Alliance, 1979–1991', *Orient*, vol. 33 (1992), p. 445.
56 *International Herald Tribune*, 21 January 1991. *Middle East International*, 25 January 1991. *Keesing's*, January 1991, p. 37942.
57 *Financial Times*, 28 January 1991. *Keesing's*, January 1991, p. 37942; February 1991, p. 37990.
58 Interview with Davoud H. Bavand, Tehran, 6 August 1996.
59 *FBIS*/NES/91, 4 February 1991.
60 *FBIS*/NES/89, 28 January 1991.
61 *Le Monde*, 6 February 1991. *Keesing's*, February 1991, p. 37982.
62 M. Massie, *Iran: Key Regional Peacebroker in the Gulf Crisis* (London: Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 1991), p. 37.
63 *Handelsblatt*, 20 February 1991. *Le Monde*, 20 February 1991.

64 D.C. Barr, *Rafsanjani's Iran, Volume II: The Emergence of Iran as a Major Player in the Diplomacy of the Gulf Crisis* (London: Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies, 1991), p. 3.
65 Interview with Said Hajjarian, Tehran, 9 July 1996.
66 Amirahmadi, 'Iran and the Persian Gulf Crisis', p. 112.
67 Interview with H.E. Ahmad Abdulaziz al-Jassim, Kuwait, 17 April 1996.
68 Interview with H.E. Adnan S. Abdul Samad, Kuwait, 17 April 1995.
69 Interview with H.E. Abdul Mohsen Y. Jamal, Kuwait, 14 April 1996.
70 *FBIS/*NES/55, 30 January 1991.
71 *Keesing's*, March 1991, p. 38119.
72 Interview with H.H. Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Bu Sa'id, Muscat, 21 April 1996.
73 Interview with Abbas K. Haghighat, Tehran, 6 July 1996.
74 *Jordan Times*, 19 March 1991. *MEED*, 24 May 1991. *Financial Times*, 7 June 1991.
75 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 25 November 1991.
76 Interview with H.E. Sulaiman Majed al-Shaheen, Kuwait, 14 April 1996.
77 Interview with H.E. Muhammad S. al-Sabah, Washington DC, 24 May 1995.
78 Interview with H.E. Abdul Mohsen Y. Jamal, Kuwait, 14 April 1991.
79 Interview with H.E. Abdallah Bishara, Kuwait, 16 April 1996.
80 *al-Watan*, 26 March 1992.
81 *FBIS/*NES/65–67, 13 November 1991. *FBIS/*NES/22–25, 14 November 1991. *FBIS/*NES/53, 11 February 1992.
82 *Kayhan*, 27 March 1991. *Le Monde*, 7 June 1991.
83 *Die Welt*, 21 March 1991. Saudi Arabia in this way may have thought that it could have more influence over a new Iraqi government which was a coalition of various forces, rather than a Shi'a government supported by the Islamic Republic on its doorstep.
84 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 29 April 1991. *FBIS/*NES/50, 29 April 1991.
85 *Ittila'at*, 8 June 1991. Rafsanjani accepted the invitation in September, but never went until 1998 when he was Head of the Expediency Council. *Tehran Times*, 9 September 1991.
86 *Keesing's*, June 1991, p. 38309. *FBIS/*NES/19, 24 June 1991. *FBIS/*NES/48, 28 June 1991. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 9 December 1991; 12 December 1991.
87 Ministry of Information, State Information Service, *Egypt and the Gulf Crisis* (London: The Egyptian Press and Information Bureau, March 1991), p. 15. Egypt had been isolated from the Arab world since its peace accords with Israel at Camp David in 1979. By supporting Iraq politically and militarily in its war with Iran, Cairo attempted to re-enter Arab politics. The Gulf Crisis was seen in Egypt as a chance to gain influence in the GCC and control over Gulf politics.
88 Milani, 'Iran's Post-Cold War Policy', p. 344.
89 *The Independent*, 21 February 1991.
90 *Keesing's*, March 1991, p. 38119.
91 *FBIS/*NES/10, 19 March 1991.
92 Interview with Saif Abbas, Kuwait, 13 April 1996.
93 *FBIS/*NES/77, 4 March 1991. *Middle East International*, 8 March 1991.
94 Interview with Said Hajjarian, Tehran, 26 June 1996.
95 Interview with H.E. Muhammad Javad Larijani, Tehran, 27 July 1996.
96 *Egyptian Gazette*, 27 August 1991; 11 September 1991. *Khaleej Times*, 25 September 1991. *Die Welt*, 20 September 1991.
97 *Arab News*, 13 February 1992.

98 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 January 1992.
99 Interview with Abbas K. Haghighat, Tehran, 6 July 1996.
100 *Gulf News*, 10 March 1992.
101 R.K. Ramazani, 'Iran's Foreign Policy: Both North and South', *Middle East Journal* vol. 46 (Summer 1992), p. 393.
102 ʿA.A. Vilayati, 'Sukhanrani dar chihil-u-haftummin ijlas-i Majmuʿ-i ʿUmumi-yi Saziman-i Milal-i Muttahid, New York, Mihr 1371/October 1992', in Vilayati, *Didgahha-yi jahani*, p. 455.
103 Interviews in Tehran, 26 June 1996, and 24 July 1996. Interviewees do not wish to be named.
104 *SWB* ME/2611/MED/16, 14 May 1996.
105 Interview with Davoud H. Bavand, Tehran, 6 August 1996.
106 *FBIS/*NES/40, 4 March 1992.
107 Sir J. Moberly, 'Renewed Tension in the Gulf Over Abu Musa and the Tunbs', in Arab Research Centre (ed.), *Round Table Discussion on 'The Dispute Over the Gulf Islands'* (London: Arab Research Centre, 1993), p. 16. R. Schofield, 'Borders and Territoriality in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula During the Twentieth Century', in R. Schofield (ed.), *Territorial Foundations of the Gulf States* (London: UCL Press 1994), p. 40.
108 Interview with Richard Schofield, Geopolitics and International Boundaries Research Centre, SOAS, London, 19 May 1997.
109 The 1971 Memorandum of Understanding and the historical claims to the islands will be examined in the following section. In September 1992, Rafsanjani stated that an armed Dutchman had been arrested seven or eight months earlier, that is in early 1992, which prompted the Iranian decision to demand entry permits from foreigners visiting Abu Musa. *FBIS/*NES/45–46, 21 September 1992. An Iranian newspaper later reported that the Dutchman had been equipped with '77 maps, and a boat full of weapons and walkie-talkies'. *Jumhuri-yi Islami*, 17 October 1992. It may be possible that the Iranian government fabricated this story to justify its actions retrospectively.
110 *Keesing's*, April 1992, p. 38887. *MEES*, 20 April 1992.
111 Interview with Richard Schofield, SOAS, London, 19 May 1997.
112 *Middle East International*, 1 May 1992, p. 9. *MEES*, 30 August 1992.
113 *FBIS/*NES/42, 20 April 1992. A later Foreign Ministry statement stipulated that Iranian policy concerned 'people who were not Sharjah citizens on Abu Musa island'. *SWB* ME/1500/A/3, 1 October 1992. It is therefore confusing whether all UAE or only Sharjah citizens were allowed to be on the island without an Iranian permit, or whether in fact all UAE visitors would only come from Sharjah anyway.
114 *Jordan Times*, 12 May 1992.
115 *International Herald Tribune*, 17 April 1992.
116 *FBIS/*NES/14, 17 April 1992. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 May 1992.
117 *FBIS/*NES/40, 23 April 1992. *FBIS/*NES/49–50, 5 May 1992.
118 *al-Hayat*, 5 July 1992.
119 Interview with Mahmood Sariolghalam, Tehran, 26 June 1996.
120 *Jordan Times*, 12 May 1992. *International Herald Tribune*, 17 September 1992.
121 Moberly, 'Renewed Tension in the Gulf', pp. 16–17.
122 *Iran Focus* (November 1992). Cited in Schofield, 'Borders and Territoriality', p. 72, note 162.
123 *FBIS/*NES/24, 25 August 1992. *FBIS/*NES/20, 11 September 1992.

124 See e.g. *FBIS/*NES/23, 4 September 1992. *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 October 1992. *Mideast Mirror*, 23 October 1992.
125 *Salam*, 6 September 1992.
126 *FBIS/*NES/23–24, 4 September 1992.
127 *al-Duwaliyya*, 3 October 1992.
128 Interview with Jalil Roshandel, Tehran, 17 June 1996.
129 Interview with Muhammad Ali Emami, Persian Gulf and Middle East Research Center, IPIS, Tehran, 14 July 1996.
130 *FBIS/*NES/32, 10 September 1992. H. al-Alkim, 'The United Arab Emirates Perspective on the Islands Question', in Arab Research Centre (ed.), *Round Table*, p. 32.
131 Interviews with H.E. Said Rejai Khorassani, Tehran, 10 and 17 July 1996.
132 *FBIS/*NES/2, 10 September 1992.
133 *Keesing's*, September 1992, p. 39116.
134 *FBIS/*NES/47, 14 September 1992. *FBIS/*NES/43, 16 September 1992. *FBIS/*NES/47, 50, 21 September 1992.
135 During the meeting in Abu Dhabi from 27 to 28 September 1992, the UAE presented the following demands: Iran should terminate its military occupation of the Tunbs; commit itself to respect the 1971 MOU concerning Abu Musa; refrain from intervening in the UAE's exercise of its complete jurisdiction over its sector of Abu Musa; revoke all steps imposed on the UAE government organs on Abu Musa and on the UAE citizens and expatriates on the island; indicate a suitable framework to resolve the question of sovereignty over Abu Musa. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 30 September 1992.
136 *FBIS/*NES/11, 29 September 1992.
137 Interview in Tehran, 17 June 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
138 Interview with Said Hajjarian, Tehran, 26 June 1997.
139 Interview with Muhammad Ali Emami, Tehran, 14 July 1996.
140 Interview with Richard Schofield, SOAS, London, 19 May 1997. There was also a confusing article in *Ittila'at* about the Iranian acceptance of discussing the Tunbs. Accordingly, an Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman after the breakdown of the Abu Dhabi talks contended that Iran was ready to continue the discussions with the Emirates 'without any conditions' and that it respected national sovereignty, territorial integrity and good neighbourliness. 'The UAE official had said that if Iran accepts to have discussions concerning Greater and Lesser Tunb, the UAE will be prepared to resume negotiations in Tehran . . . Iran welcomes such a statement.' *Ittila'at*, 1 October 1992.
141 *'Alam al-Yawm*, 30 September 1992.
142 *Sawt al-Kuwayt*, 2 October 1992.
143 *Arab News*, 30 November 1992. *FBIS/*NES/19, 1 October 1992.
144 U. Steinbach, 'Iran zwischen Ideologie und Pragmatismus', *Europa-Archiv*, no. 18 (1993), p. 521.
145 *MEES*, 20 April 1992.
146 P. Mojtahed-Zadeh, 'Perspectives on the Territorial History of the Tonb and Abu Musa Islands', in H. Amirahmadi (ed.), *Small Islands, Big Politics* (Houndsmills: Macmillan 1996), pp. 33–34. *International Iran Times*, 14 October 1994.
147 Schofield, 'Borders and Territoriality', p. 38.
148 I.A. Sistani, *Jazira-i Bu Musa va jazayir-i Tunb-i Buzurg va Tunb-i Kuchik* (Tehran: Mu'assisa-i Chap va Intisharat-i Vizarat-i Umur-i Kharija, 1374/1995), p. 117.

149 *Jumhuri-yi Islami*, 17 October 1992. The statement that the Iranians are responsible for the Arab side with regards to dress code etc., is questionable as the administration is in the hands of Sharjah officials. According to Gargash based on interviews with residents, the Arab village is cordoned with barbed wire, allowing only a single road to the port. A. Gargash, 'Iran, the GCC States, and the UAE: Prospects and Challenges in the Coming Decade', in al-Suwaidi (ed.), *Iran and the Gulf*, p. 153. This should be equally questionable, also on the grounds that the administration of the southern side is in the hands of Sharjah, which should allow its citizens to walk outside the village within Sharjah territory.

150 Schofield, 'Borders and Territoriality', p. 35. According to Mirfendereski, various British officials between 1870 and 1896, thought that the Tunbs belonged to Iran. G. Mirfendereski, 'The Ownership of the Tonb islands: A Legal Analysis', in Amirahmadi (ed.), *Small Islands*, p. 127.

151 Schofield, 'Borders and Territoriality', p. 35. D.H. Bavand, 'The Legal Bases of Iran's Sovereignty over Abu Musa Island', in Amirahmadi (ed.), *Small Islands*, pp. 80–82. Mojtahed-Zadeh, 'Perspectives on the Territorial', p. 42.

152 Schofield, 'Borders and Territoriality', p. 35. See also Bavand's description of the modified Hennell Line drawn by the British in 1835 south of Abu Musa to restrict Arab hostilities, which was accepted by the Sheikh of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah. Bavand, 'The Legal Bases', pp. 82–83. After the breakdown of talks in September 1992, the Iranian press extensively asserted the Iranian position of ownership of the islands. It claimed that the islands had always been Iranian before the British got involved in the 1800s, and occupied them in the early 1900s. See e.g. *Abrar*, 3 October 1992. *Kayhan*, 13 October 1992.

153 Schofield, 'Borders and Territoriality', p. 36. By 1864, the Qasimi sheikhdom of the southern Gulf had become a Persian protectorate. Before his death in 1866, the Qasimi sheikh in Sharjah, Sultan bin Saqr, appointed his sons and brothers as his representatives in Ras al-Khaimah and other Qasimi towns. In 1867, Ras al-Khaimah was separated from and in 1900 reincorporated into Sharjah. In 1921, Ras al-Khaimah was separated again and remained so. Bavand, 'The Legal Bases', pp. 39–40.

154 Bavand, 'The Legal Bases', pp. 92–93.

155 A letter from Khalid bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah and Its Dependencies, to The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, London, 18 November 1971, published in 'A. ʿAbdullahi, ʿNigah-i bih masa'il-i jazayir-i Abu Musa va Tunb-i Kuchik va Buzurg', *Siyasat-i Khariji*, vol. 6 (Winter 1371/1992), p. 193.

The text of the *Memorandum of Understanding*:

> Neither Iran nor Sharjah will give up its claim to Abu Musa nor recognise the other's claim. Against this background the following arrangements will be made:
>
> 1. Iranian troops will arrive on Abu Musa. They will occupy areas the extent of which have been agreed on the map attached to this memorandum.
>
> 2.(a) Within the agreed areas occupied by Iranian troops, Iran will have full jurisdiction and the Iranian flag will fly.
>
> (b) Sharjah will retain full jurisdiction over the remainder of the island. The Sharjah flag will continue to fly over the Sharjah police post on the same basis as the Iranian flag will fly over the Iranian military quarters.

3. Iran and Sharjah recognise the breadth of the island's territorial sea as 12 nautical miles.

4. Exploitation of the petroleum resources of Abu Musa and of the seabed and subsoil beneath its territorial sea will be conducted by Buttes Gas and Oil Company under the existing agreement which must be acceptable to Iran. Half of the governmental oil revenues hereafter attributable to the said exploitation shall be paid directly by the company to Iran and half to Sharjah.

5. The nationals of Iran and Sharjah shall have equal rights to fish in the territorial sea of Abu Musa.

6. A financial assistance agreement will be signed between Iran and Sharjah.

Ibid., p. 194. As for point 4, in 1985, Crescent Petroleum Company, headed by Hamid Ja'far, bought out the entire interest of Buttes in the concession of developing the offshore Mubarak oil field. *MEES*, 20 April 1992. According to Menas Associates, who give no source, Crescent Petroleum is owned by senior Iraqi military figures. *Iran Focus*, October 1992, p. 4.

156 R. Schofield, 'Abu Musa and the Tunbs: The Historical Background', in Arab Research Centre (ed.), *Round Table*, p. 12.

157 See Chapter 1.

158 Interview with Davoud H. Bavand, Tehran, 21 July 1996. The UAE produced various letters confirming Ras al-Khaimah's ownership of the Tunbs between 1903 and 1971. For instance, a letter of the General Manager of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company to the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah of 2 December 1935, writing 'regards your Island of "Tunb"'; and a letter from the British Agency in Sharjah to the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah of 18 January 1949, asking 'to be vigilant in maintaining your rights in Tumb Islands as the Persian Government is interested in claiming these Islands'. Published in A.J. al-Tadmuri, *Al-juzur al-ʿarabiyya al-thalath* (Ras al-Khaimah, 1995).

159 Published in 'A. 'Abdullahi, 'Nigah-i bih masa'il', p. 198.

160 P. Mojtahed-Zadeh, *Political Geography of the Strait of Hormuz* (London: SOAS, 1990), pp. 22–23. *Risalat*, 11 October 1992. *Jumhuri-yi Islami*, 17 October 1992.

161 al-Alkim, 'The United Arab Emirates Perspective', pp. 28, 31.

162 Gargash, 'Iran, the GCC States', pp. 149, 153.

163 *Middle East International*, 9 October 1992, p. 4.

164 *Mideast Mirror*, 23 October 1992, p. 17. *Middle East International*, 23 October 1992.

165 *FBIS*/NES/49, 13 November 1992. *FBIS*/NES/50, 16 November 1992. *Emirates News*, 26 November 1992. *Keesing's*, November 1992, p. 39214. *Arab News*, 30 November 1992.

166 *SWB* ME/1573/A/7, 29 December 1992.

167 Despite the threat, Rafsanjani continued his sermon on a conciliatory course: 'In any case we once again . . . speak in a friendly manner, and stress that the Islamic Republic of Iran's policy is not to create disturbance and insecurity in the region. You should not listen to those pretexts . . . which disseminate from anti-Islamic arrogant powers. Consider the issue of arms procurement which has been raised. If we consider our population and territory, we have bought less arms than each of you.' *FBIS*/NES/53, 28 December 1992. Jamal al-Suwaidi, the Director of the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in Abu Dhabi, which is linked to the Ministry of Defence, however, took the

threat seriously: 'When thinking about US policy in the Gulf, people have to ask themselves about the UAE's policy towards Iran – we have the islands problem. The major problem with Iran is not the US policy, but Iran's policy about the islands. Iraq invaded Kuwait and brought the US to the Gulf. Iran with its nuclear armament invited the US to stay here. There has been a change in the UAE's position towards Iran since the invasion of Kuwait. Iran since then has held more than 200 military exercises. Iran is the main threat to the UAE because of the islands. It makes the UAE dependent on the US for Gulf security. But the UAE's only problem with Iran is about the islands. Our policy is not linked to the US.' Interview with Jamal S. al-Suwaidi, Abu Dhabi, 8 May 1996.

168 *Jordan Times*, 11–12 February 1993; 16 February 1993.

169 *FBIS/*NES/46–47, 6 April 1993. *FBIS/*NES/36, 7 April 1993. *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 20 April 1993.

170 *Jordan Times*, 23 May 1993. *FBIS/*NES/27, 24 May 1993. *Middle East Times*, 25–31 May 1993. *Keesing's*, May 1993, p. 39486.

171 See e.g. *Middle East International*, 30 April 1993, p. 9. *Keesing's*, June 1993, p. 39534–5. *FBIS/*NES/32, 8 September 1993. *FBIS/*NES/48, 27 December 1993. *FBIS/*NES/50, 12 January 1994. *Emirates News*, 4 April 1994. *FBIS/*NES/70, 8 June 1994. *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 21 September 1994. *Jordan Times*, 28 September 1994.

172 Interview with Abbas Haghighat, Tehran, 6 July 1996.

173 *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 19 September 1993. *Jordan Times*, 7–8 October 1993.

174 *FBIS/*NES/27, 24 November 1993.

175 *Jordan Times*, 11 July 1994.

176 *Jordan Times*, 20 September 1994. *Dawn*, 2 October 1994.

177 In 1994, Iran and Saudi Arabia entered into a major dispute over production ceilings. Tehran accused Riyadh of glutting the oil market and causing prices to fall.

178 *SWB* ME/2196/MED/1, 9 January 1995. *SWB* ME/2244/MED/5, 6 March 1995.

179 *SWB* ME/2466/MED/12, 21 November 1995. *SWB* ME/2467/MED/17, 22 November 1995. *SWB* ME/2468/MED/14, 23 November 1995.

180 *SWB* MEW/0417/WME/4, 9 January 1996. *SWB* ME/2558/MED/15, 12 March 1996. *SWB* ME/2587/MED/32, 16 April 1996. *SWB* ME/2592/MED/28, 20 April 1996.

181 *al-Hayat*, 9 August 1996.

182 *SWB* ME/2778/MED/13, 25 November 1996.

183 *SWB* ME/2879/MED/17, 20, 28 March 1997. *SWB* ME/3110/MED/1, 24 December 1997. *Reuters*, 8 March 1998.

184 Interview with H.E. Khalifa Shaheen al-Merree, Abu Dhabi, 6 May 1996. His reading of the connection between the islands problem and the revolution has to be questioned. Abu Musa seems to be a difficult problem domestically for Iran that has not been widely publicised. The Gulf states underestimate the Iranian fear of the US, which increases the strategic importance of the islands for Iran.

185 *FBIS/*NES/21, 13 May 1993. *al-Majalla*, 13 to 19 June 1993.

186 *MEED*, 29 February 1993.

187 Interview with European diplomat, Dubai, 9 May 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.

188 *MEES*, 28 September 1992. *Tehran Times*, 8 March 1993.

189 *FBIS*/NES/10, 25 September 1992.
190 *MEED*, 4 February 1994. For more detailed trade figures between Iran and Dubai, see Tables 5.1 and 5.2 in Chapter 5.
191 *SWB* ME/2788/MED/11, 6 December 1996.
192 Interview with European diplomat, Abu Dhabi, 5 May 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named. As for the alleged alarm about the tanker route running between Abu Musa and the Tunbs, Anthony Cordesman holds that the islands 'offer Iran a significant strategic advantage in threatening tanker traffic through the Gulf – which involve the movement of 20 per cent of the world's oil and an average of 75 ship transits per day'. Anthony H. Cordesman *Iran and Iraq. The Threat from the Northern Gulf* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, p. 31). As stated by Thomas Mullins, however, Iran practically could not block a 24 mile-wide stretch, and if it were to shoot missiles at the tankers, it would commit an open act of war which so far it had no intention of doing. Interview with Thomas D. Mullins, Associate Director, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge MA, 18 June 1997.
193 Interview with Arab journalist, Manama, 8 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
194 *MEED*, 10 July 1992. *FBIS*/NES/16, 3 August 1992.
195 *FBIS*/NES/44, 5 February 1993.
196 *FBIS*/NES/28, 3 May 1993.
197 *FBIS*/NES/19, 19 May 1993. *FBIS*/NES/46, 26 May 1993. *FBIS*/NES/49, 7 October 1993. *International Herald Tribune*, 28 September 1993.
198 *MEES*, 28 February 1994. *MEES*, 21 March 1994. *FBIS*/NES/85, 28 March 1994.
199 *FBIS*/NES/81, 7 June 1994.
200 *SWB* ME/2196/MED/5, 9 January 1995. *SWB* ME/2206/MED/2, 20 January 1995.
201 *al-Hayat*, 30 January 1996.
202 *Tehran Times*, 8 October 1996. *SWB* ME/2792/MED/3, 11 December 1996.
203 *SWB* ME/2875/MED/23, 24 March 1997.
204 *Financial Times*, 2 July 1997.
205 *Jordan Times*, 20 April 1992.
206 *Emirates News*, 28 July 1992. *Arab News*, 17 August 1992. *Emirates News*, 25 December 1992.
207 *FBIS*/NES/42–44, 5 February 1993. *Middle East Times*, 25–31 May 1993. *al-Kuwayt*, 21 August 1993.
208 Interview with H.E. Abdallah Bishara, Kuwait, 16 April 1996.
209 *al-Watan al-'Arabi*, 12 March 1993.
210 *FBIS*/NES/79, 30 November 1993.
211 *SWB* ME/2199/MED/6, 12 January 1995.
212 Majlis al-Umma, *Mudhakkirat tafahum bayna Majlis al-Umma al-Kuwayti wa-Majlis al-Shura al-Islami al-Irani*, Kuwait, April 1995.
213 Interview with H.E. Adnan S. Abdul Samad, Kuwait, 17 April 1996.
214 *FBIS*/NES/24, 21 May 1993.
215 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 9 September 1994.
216 *SWB* ME/2631/MED/3, 6 June 1996.
217 Interview with H.E. Amer al-Higry, Deputy Chief for Bilateral Relations with Arabian Countries and Iran, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Muscat, 21 April 1996.
218 Interview with H.E. Abdullah M. al-Dhahab, Washington DC, 23 May 1995.
219 Interview with H.H. Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Bu Sa'id, Muscat, 21 April 1996.

220 *SWB* ME/2875/MED/23, 24 March 1997.
221 Interview with Bahraini journalist, Manama, 7 April 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
222 *Arab News*, 8 June 1992. *FBIS/*NES/13, 16 October 1992.
223 *Monitor-Dienst*, Nahost, 11 April 1994.
224 *SWB* ME/2606/MED/11, 8 May 1996.
225 Interview with H.E. Muhammad Javad Larijani, Tehran, 27 July 1996.
226 Interview with H.E. Kamal Kharrazi, New York, 7 July 1995.
227 Interview with H.E. Hossein Sadeghi, Tehran, 13 August 1996.
228 *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 29 August 1997.
229 *Reuters*, 4 September 1997.
230 *SWB* ME/3073/MED/7, 11 November 1997.
231 *Los Angeles Times*, 7 December 1997.
232 *SWB* ME/3099/S1/15, 11 December 1997.
233 *Reuters*, 24 February 1998.
234 *Associated Press*, *AP*, 28 February 1998.
235 *Kayhan-i London*, 5 March 1998.
236 *Financial Times*, 7 March 1998.
237 *SWB* ME/3074/MED/7, 12 November 1997.
238 *AFP*, 11 February 1998; 18 February 1998.
239 SWB ME/3034/MED/13, 26 September 1997. *'The Emirates'*, Daily Bulletin, no. 23097, 9 October 1997.
240 *'The Emirates'*, Daily Bulletin, no. 29097, 21 December 1997.
241 *al-Hayat*, 27 February 1998. *Financial Times*, 7 March 1998.
242 See 'The Abu Musa crisis and its impact on Iranian–Gulf relations', p. 136.
243 *SWB* ME/3055/MED/8, 21 October 1997. *SWB* ME/3057/MED/13. 23 October 1997. *SWB* ME/3099/S1/15, 11 December 1997.

5 REGIONAL SECURITY CO-OPERATION

1 Interview with Davoud H. Bavand, Tehran, 21 July 1996.
2 S. Chubin, *Iran's National Security Policy* (Washington DC: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994), pp. 3–5.
3 S. Chubin, 'Iran and Regional Security in the Persian Gulf', *Survival*, vol. 34 (Autumn 1992), p. 63.
4 Quoted in Amirahmadi, 'Iran and the Persian Gulf Crisis', p. 100.
5 K. Kharrazi, 'New Dimensions of Iran's Strategic Significance', *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, vol. 1 (November 1994), p. 83.
6 *Khaleej Times*, 1 July 1987. Iran stressed that: 'The security of the region is dependent on the interaction and co-operation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.' *Ittila'at*, 18 May 1987.
7 *Kuwait Times*, 9 November 1988.
8 Interview with H.E. Ali Khorram, Tehran, 13 July 1996.
9 Interview with H.E. Muhammad Javad Larijani, Tehran, 27 July 1996.
10 Interview in Tehran, 14 July 1996. Interviewee does not wish to be named.
11 Islamic Republic of Iran Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York, Press Section, 'Statement by H.E. Dr. Ali Akbar Velayati, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran before the Forty-Eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly', New York, 4 October 1993, p. 7.
12 *FBIS/*NES/69, 24 November 1989.
13 Remarks by Dr M. Javad Zarif, Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on 'Security and Insecurity

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