# MILITARY POLICY AND STRATEGY IN THE GULF WAR

by

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Clausewitz wrote that "everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult." He attributed this difficulty to friction, perhaps expressed in modern managerial terms as Murphy's Law—anything that can go wrong, will go wrong. Clausewitz saw that the danger, fatigue, and uncertainty inherent in combat caused things to go wrong on the battlefield.[1] But things can go wrong long before troops are committed to battle. Clausewitz's conception of friction was limited largely to the battlefield, but today misjudgments related to the selection of political objectives or to policy, or flaws in planning, can doom a military operation before the battle is joined.

When the Iraqi Army mounted a full-scale invasion of Iran on 22 September 1980, the expectation of many Western military analysts was of an Iraqi blitzkrieg that would overrun Iran's disintegrating armed forces in a few weeks and establish Saddam Hussein as the most powerful leader in the Persian Gulf. The invasion was characterized as "Saddam's Qadisiya," an allusion to the Battle of Qadisiya in 637 A.D. in which the Arabs decisively defeated the Persian Army, leading to the fall of the Persian Empire.[2] If the expectation was of a daring and violent *jihad*, the reality was that Saddam Hussein was less a holy warrior than a scheming opportunist.[3]

One reason such military operations go awry on the battlefield is that political objectives, security policies, and military strategy often are not compatible. Before any nation resorts to the use of force to secure its national interests, the politician and the general must together insure that the military means are consistent with the political objectives. If political objectives, security policies, and military strategy are ambiguous or improperly integrated, failure on the battlefield is certain. For a political leader, there may be some virtue in ambiguity in dealing with his enemy; there may even be some virtue in ambiguity in relations with an ally. But ambiguity can have no virtue when he sits down together with his own strategists.

The Gulf War may prove to be a classic case of such crippling ambiguity. The most formidable strategic problem for Saddam Hussein before undertaking the Gulf War was to insure that Iraq's political objectives, security policies, and military strategy were clearly defined and congruous. Had he properly evaluated the conflicting demands that his political objectives and security policies placed upon his strategic concept, he might have been able to devise a war-winning strategy at a price he was willing to pay. More likely, he would have abandoned the entire enterprise. Since he did not, what started out as Saddam's Qadisiya may yet prove to be his Waterloo.

## ROOTS OF WAR

The roots of the Gulf War lie in the centuries of religious, ethnic, and territorial differences between Arabs and Persians. This smouldering enmity, fueled by the repeated calls of the Ayatollah Khomeini to the Iraqi people to "wake up and topple this [Baathist] regime in your Islamic country before it is too late,"[4] needed only a suitable spark to ignite the flames of war. Saddam Hussein had a

suitable spark at hand in the Shatt al-Arab territorial dispute, a long-standing disagreement between Iran and Iraq that has often served as a barometer of the relative power status of these oil-rich, contentious neighbors.[5] The Shatt al-Arab waterway flows 120 miles from its origin at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to the Persian Gulf, delineating the border between Iran and Iraq over most of its length. The important Iranian oil ports of Abadan and Khorramshahr are situated on its banks, and at Basra the Shatt al-Arab provides Iraq its major outlet to the Persian Gulf.

The Shatt al-Arab dispute was "settled" in 1975 when Iraq agreed to set the boundary in the center of the waterway in return for Iran's pledge to refrain from providing further assistance to the Kurdish insurgency then holding sway in the mountains of northern Iraq. The 1975 settlement reflected Iran's ascendancy in the Persian Gulf and remained intact until Iran's power waned following the overthrow of the Shah. The fomenting of religious and political discord in Iraq by Khomeini then led to an open split between Iran and Iraq and may have convinced Saddam Hussein that it was time to act.[6] Hussein must have reasoned that Iran's military weakness in the chaotic aftermath of the Shah's overthrow would enable Iraq to depose Khomeini by defeating Iran in battle, thereby inflicting a severe setback on the militant Islamic revolution, crippling Iran as a Gulf power, and simultaneously establishing Iraq (and Hussein) as the leader of the Persian Gulf region. Consequently, in September 1980, President Hussein unilaterally announced that the 1975 treaty regarding the boundary on the Shatt al-Arab was "null and void."[7] Then, to demonstrate Iraq's ascendancy and Iran's deterioration to the world, Saddam Hussein demanded recognition of Iraq's complete sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab. Other demands were the return of certain border territory in the north allegedly promised to Iraq in the 1975 agreement but never provided, and the return to the United Arab Emirates of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs, three islands strategically located near the Strait of Hormuz. When Iran rejected these demands, the Persian Gulf stood on the brink of war.

## STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

In developing an operational military strategy to achieve their political objectives, Iraqi war planners had to consider the geographic and other strategic factors that would affect their operations. It was imperative that they protect Baghdad from possible Iranian incursions along the ancient invasion routes in the northern mountains and that they simultaneously protect the oil-rich Basra area. They also had to secure the mountainous area in which the potentially rebellious Kurds were always capable of causing trouble, and they had to consider the possibility of a Syrian threat still further north. Thus, approximately five Iraqi divisions would be needed in the northern highlands, two would defend the central area near Baghdad, and three armored and two mechanized divisions would guard the southern frontier opposite Khuzistan.[8] All of Iraq's 12 divisions, then, were arrayed on or near the Iranian border, relying on the desert

to protect the less-threatened southern and western flanks.

Iran, however, had different strategic priorities on the eve of war. Faced with a Soviet threat from both the Transcaucasus in the north and Afghanistan in the east, with the unrest in Baluchistan on the Pakistani border, and with the need to protect Tehran against the possibility of another US attempt to free the American hostages, Iran posted only four of its nine understrength divisions along the 1300-kilometer Iraqi frontier. Elements of these divisions, along with the revolutionary guards, had already been in contact with Iraqi units for several months along the border in the north. The Iranian deployment against Iraq consisted of one infantry division stationed at Sanandaj in the mountainous Iranian Kurdish area; another infantry division posted near Urumiyeh to protect against the Soviet threat to Azerbaijan, although it could also be used to threaten Kirkuk; an armored division placed farther south in Kermanshah; and a second armored division located at Ahvaz to cover the entire area from Dezful to Abadan.[9]

From an Iranian viewpoint, a rational prewar strategy to counter an Iraqi invasion would have called for a forward defense of Khuzistan, imposing as long a delay and as many casualties as possible on invading Iraqi forces, while preparations were being made for a counterthrust in the north, probably from Kermanshah, aimed at Baghdad. Other elements of the Iranian operational plan probably would have included the use of unconventional forces to infiltrate the Shia region of eastern Iraq and the Kurdish area in the north to stir up trouble in the rear of the attacking Iraqi forces.

As subsequent events showed, the Iraqi plan clearly envisioned a main attack in the south weighted with three armored and two mechanized divisions to secure the line Dezful-Khorramshahr-Abadan. Supporting attacks in the north of divisional strength would seize critical terrain in Iran to block the avenues of approach to Baghdad. In the air, Iraqi planners hoped that a preemptive attack patterned on the Israeli air attack on Egypt in 1967 would gain air supremacy by destroying Iran's already weakened air force on the ground. Because of the disparity in naval power favoring Iran, little help could have been expected from Iraq's navy to assist the land battle. That all did not go according to plan can be attributed in part to what Clausewitz called friction—the difference between war on paper and war on the battlefield.[10]

Before the Iraqi attack on Khuzistan, Iran and Iraq had been fighting intermittently along the northern border for almost 14 months. Fighting flared anew in early September 1980 at Qasr-e Shirin when Iraq "liberated" two villages—Zain al-Qaws and Saif Saad—in a disputed border area. The lack of an effective Iranian response must have convinced President Hussein that the time was ripe to seize the Shatt al-Arab.

The timing of the Iraqi invasion was an intricate matter, revolving around perceptions of Iraqi strength and Iranian weakness. Although the Iraqi Army had been supplied by the Soviet Union for years, Iraq was in the process of modernizing and diversifying its armed forces. Spain, Brazil, Italy, and especially France were selling modern arms to Iraq in return for oil. Hundreds of tanks and armored personnel carriers for the army, four frigates and six corvettes for the navy, and 60 Mirage F-1 fighters for the air force were scheduled to begin to enter the Iraqi arsenal in 1981. Many

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military analysts saw that these Western weapons could tip the regional military balance decisively to Iraq. Yet, if Hussein were to await the completion of this modernization process, which would require extensive crew training on the new weapons, it would mean that an attack could not take place until the fall of 1981, or perhaps as late as 1982. A delay of even a few months, however, would postpone any possible settlement of Iraqi accounts with Iran until at least July 1981, when the weather would again be suitable for campaigning in Khuzistan. Such a delay might allow Ayatollah Khomeini time to consolidate his hold on Iran and, in view of the approaching presidential election in the United States, settle the divisive hostage crisis, which was isolating Iran internationally. Furthermore, Hussein had his eye on the conference of nonaligned nations that would be held in Baghdad in 1982. If he could defeat Khomeini in 1980 or 1981, Saddam Hussein would not only be the leader of Pan-Arabism, but might also become the most influential leader of the nonaligned-nation movement. Seemingly faced with this temptation, Hussein decided to launch his attack on Iran on 22 September 1980.[11]

## THE GROUND WAR

The ground attack swept the militia border guards aside and quickly bypassed and isolated Khorramshahr and Abadan from Ahvaz. The attacks on Ahvaz and Dezful, although not challenged strongly, were not as successful as those farther south in Khuzistan and were stalled short of those urban objectives, creating a salient at Susangerd that remained a threat to the Iraqi logistical network in that sector. The second prong of the Iraqi invasion force seized Mehran and pushed farther eastward to the foothills of the Zagros Mountains to secure the important road network linking Dezful with northern Iran west of the Zagros; simultaneously, it blocked access to Iraq from that same area. The third thrust, farther north, gained the critical terrain forward of Qasr-e Shirin to counter any Iranian plans to threaten Baghdad through that vulnerable sector. A subsidiary attack south of Mehran, in the Musian area, occupied territory that Iraq claimed had been promised by the Shah as part of the 1975 Algiers Agreement.[12] By the end of September, Iraq declared that the territorial objectives of the invasion had been reached.[13]

This announcement was a trifle premature, however, since the Iranian naval blockade had not been broken and neither Khorramshahr nor Abadan on the Shatt al-Arab had been captured, not to mention Ahvaz and Dezful. If the failure to occupy these key military objectives had been part of an Iraqi plan to thrust its armored force deep into Khuzistan, consciously avoiding such urban pockets of revolutionary resistance and thus bringing the regular Iranian Army to battle, it would have been in the classic tradition of armor tactics. But this was not the plan. Battle in the cities apparently was avoided as a deliberate policy to keep casualties low;[14] however, the Iraqi Army did not strike deep to engage the regular Iranian Army. It chose instead to encircle the cities, if possible, and cause their surrender primarily through artillery and rocket bombardment supplemented by air attack.

The Iranian response to the Iraqi ground attack was not well coordinated. In fact, it appeared that two separate armies reporting to two separate leaders were fighting the war on behalf of Iran. Even so, the Iranian soldiers, particularly those belonging to the Pasdaran (revolutionary guards), fought with a fervor and intensity that surprised not only the Iraqis, but most Western military analysts as well. The Pasdaran and other militia units bore the brunt of the initial attack. Fighting with light infantry weapons and Molotov cocktails, they made the Iraqis pay a high price in the urban areas.[15] The primary reason Iran was not defeated at the outset of the war, however, lay in the inept strategy and tactics of the Iraqis, rather than the surprisingly fierce response of the individual Iranian soldier.

If the Iranian armed forces were to delay or stop Iraq long enough for Iran to mobilize its own larger population for a war of attrition that would be so costly to Iraq that Hussein would withdraw, then the separate

Iranian armies had to be brought under central control. To that end, on 13 October 1980 Ayatollah Khomeini established the seven-member Supreme Defense Council to run the war and decide on all defense issues. Bani-Sadr was named to head the council, but his power was diluted by the presence of hard-line mullahs.[16] The creation of this council was a step in the right direction, but it did not keep the religious leaders from interfering in combat operations—even to the extent of giving orders to front-line army commanders—nor did it stifle the internal power struggle that survived even the fall of Bani-Sadr.

The first tactical success of the war for Iraq was the capture of Khorramshahr. Taken at a cost of more than 1500 killed and perhaps three times that number wounded, the prize was renamed Khuninshahr—"city of blood." More than anything else, the casualty rate in this battle seems to have persuaded the Iraqi high command to lay siege to Abadan rather than attempt to capture it by house-to-house fighting. After the fall of Khorramshahr, the Iraqi Army set up pontoon bridges across the Karun River south of Khorramshahr, enabling the Iraqis to threaten Abadan with encirclement.[17] The encirclement was not completed, however, and Abadan held out.

Almost a year later, in October 1981, Iranian forces would mount their most successful ground operation of the war, pushing the Iraqi forces back to the western bank of the Karun River and lifting the siege of Abadan. Elements of an Iranian regular division, an airborne unit, gendarmerie, and newly mobilized recruits would take part in this battle, reflecting a command-and-control capability several levels above that experienced even in mid-1981.[18]

After Khorramshahr was taken in the fall of 1980, however, and the siege of Abadan begun, ground operations in Khuzistan slackened. The Iraqis apparently were willing to sit out the winter in a static forward defense in Khuzistan, digging in and attempting no further advances. Iran, beset by domestic instability, was believed to lack the capability to mount a major counterattack. Farther north, the Iraqis were still occupying positions they had captured in the first week of the war. By holding fast along the entire front, Iraq was able to keep its own border towns and villages out of range of Iranian artillery. The only deviation from this "sitzkrieg" occurred in the Kurdish area in northern Iran, where a new Iraqi front was opened in December in the vicinity of Panjwin by elements of an Iraqi infantry division. This new front would serve to support Kurdish guerrillas who were already active in the area fighting Iranians.[19] Securing advantageous terrain in the Panjwin area would also provide better protection for Kirkuk. The general lull in fighting caused by the onset of winter enabled both nations to reinforce their front-line units. Iran seems to have fared better in this regard than Iraq—of course, Iran also had fewer units committed to the early battles.

The initial Iraqi ground attack in September, following Soviet doctrine, had probably achieved a favorable local combat ratio in troops and armored vehicles of about five- or six-to-one; but by the end of December this ratio is estimated to have dwindled to about two- or three-to-one.[20] As the first winter of the war approached, Iran further bolstered its defenses, especially in the vicinity of Ahvaz, by selectively flooding certain areas to prevent their use by Iraqi troops.[21] For their part, the Iraqi engineers were busy constructing a network of earthen flood walls near Ahvaz to protect against the flooding of the Karun and other rivers in the area and to guard "against possible Iranian attempts to drown the invaders by opening irrigation dams."[22] Additionally, to insure that Iraqi troops in Khuzistan could be supplied during the rainy season, a two-lane paved road was constructed from Basra to the Iraqi front lines near Ahvaz. After making these preparations, both armies settled into fighting a strategic defensive war with daily artillery duels while they waited for the winter to pass.

This phony war was shattered when the Iranians counterattacked in the Susangerd sector on 5 January 1981. The attack was one of the largest tank actions of the war; unfortunately, few authoritative details of this battle have been published in the open

literature. It is clear, however, that Iran suffered a serious defeat, and both sides incurred heavy personnel and equipment losses.[23] Iraq reportedly lost about 50 T-62 tanks, and Iranian tank losses—primarily *Chieftains* and M-60s—may have reached 100. If this is true, 300 to 400 tanks may have been engaged in the battle. It has also been suggested that the ill-fated battle was fought more for domestic Iranian political reasons than for strategic ones. Analysts point to the fact that then-President Bani-Sadr had been under attack by the militant holy men for not prosecuting the war more assiduously. The religious leaders had been extolling the virtues and fighting spirit of the Pasdaran and denigrating the lack of aggressiveness on the part of the army. Although the Iranian counterattack was much less than Clausewitz's "flashing sword of vengeance," it did at least temporarily stabilize Bani-Sadr's position in his power struggle with the Ayatollah Khomeini.[24] After the battle, the ground war settled into an artillery stalemate[25] that was broken only by the Iranian successes in the fall and winter of 1981 and the spring of 1982.

In September 1981 the Iranian Army unexpectedly launched the offensive that lifted the siege of Abadan, and in early December 1981 attacked the Iraqi defensive positions in the vicinity of Susangerd. While both the fall and winter operations had limited successes, a spring Iranian multidivision operation code-named "Undeniable Victory" severed lines of communication between Iraqi forces in the north and those in Khuzistan. This week-long operation, which began on 21 March 1982, changed the pattern and tempo of the war.

"Undeniable Victory" was characterized on the Iranian side by surprise, human-wave tactics by the Pasdaran, and combined-arms operations. For the Iraqis, the operation revealed serious flaws in intelligence, command and control, and morale. Fortunately for Saddam Hussein, Iran did not have the logistical capability (or, perhaps, the political intention) to sustain operations long enough to complete the destruction of Iraqi forces in Khuzistan. Nevertheless, three Iraqi divisions were severely battered in the counteroffensive, and over 15,000 Iraqi troops were reportedly captured.

A close examination of the ground fighting during the war's first 18 months exposes several problems common to both Iran and Iraq. First, both nations were armed with the most modern and sophisticated weapon systems that money could buy, but those systems were relatively ineffective during the course of the war. The lead computing sights on the Iraqi tanks seldom were used (probably because of substandard crew training), lowering the accuracy of the T-62 tanks to World War II standards. The Iranians too had problems with their M-60 and *Chieftain* tanks, but their problems were more maintenance-centered. Neither country was able to bring its sophisticated ground attack weapons up to maximum effectiveness. For example, Iraq used the Frog-7 and Scud-B surface-to-surface missiles only on two occasions, both in the vicinity of Dezful. Until the Iranian offensive in March 1982, the TOW and Dragon antitank missiles in Iran's inventory saw little action, even in Khuzistan where the line-of-sight visibility required by these weapons was excellent.[26]

A second problem was that neither Iran nor Iraq demonstrated the initiative and aggressiveness demanded by modern mid-intensity offensive warfare. The Iranian militia and revolutionary guards fighting in the cities of Khuzistan showed an aggressiveness and tenacity in defense not matched elsewhere on the battlefield, attributable perhaps to the fact that these "true believers" were fighting to save their revolution. To say that either side followed the doctrine of their superpower mentors, however, is to misread completely American and Soviet doctrine for offensive warfare. Both the United States and the Soviet Union stress the importance of maneuver in offensive warfare. Boldness, speed in the attack, coordinated use of all weapons, and combined-arms operations are all elements of each superpower's offensive ground-force doctrine. Although there are also differences, the combat operations of the war did not follow the doctrine of either superpower. One reason for this apparent anomaly may be that Iran had sent its superpower advisors home and Iraq had

opted not to use its advisors with Iraqi troops in the field.

Finally, for most of the war neither Iran nor Iraq was able to mount an effective combined-arms attack. The Iraqi attack in September 1980 was slow-moving and tedious, relying on artillery more than any other arm and never combining fire and maneuver in large-unit operations. Iran was similarly deficient until it launched the series of offensives at Abadan and Susangerd in the fall of 1981 and the corps-sized attack at Shush, east of Dezful, on 21 March 1982. These Iranian attacks were successful because they achieved tactical surprise, outnumbering the Iraqi forces at the point of attack, and because the Iranians showed an aggressiveness and a willingness to shed blood that was not matched by the Iraqis.

## THE WAR AT SEA

At sea, the picture has been much the same. The naval war began almost simultaneously with the land battle, with a naval engagement being fought by patrol boats of both navies. A second naval battle erupted within a week when Iranian warships attacked Basra and two oil terminals located in the Persian Gulf near the Iraqi port of Fao. The third and last, as well as the largest, naval engagement was fought two months later, on 29-30 November. This engagement included the shelling of Fao and a commando attack that damaged Mina al-Bakr, an offshore oil terminal. The navies retired after these engagements. If one can believe the rival claims of the two belligerents, Iran lost about 56 percent (76 ships) of its naval assets, while Iraq's losses were estimated at about 66 percent (42 ships). Although one cannot have a high degree of confidence in such unsubstantiated claims, especially since neutral journalists have been barred from the war zone, the losses would still be significant if they were only half the number claimed.[27] It should be noted, however, that Iran continued to resupply and reinforce Abadan by sea until the siege was broken in October 1981.

Iran continues to maintain its naval dominance. The Iranian blockade of Iraq, proclaimed on the first day of the war, has not been broken; 69 ships remain trapped in the war zone. Although the blockade has been effective in the Persian Gulf area, however, the Iranian Navy did not have the capability to blockade Aqaba or the Saudi Arabian Red Sea ports, through which Iraq has received a substantial amount of supplies and war goods.

Naval diplomacy has also played a key role in the war. Perhaps the most important policy established early in the war was Iran's public assurance that it was determined to keep the Strait of Hormuz open. Iran also warned that it was prepared to take appropriate naval action against those Gulf states that were aiding Iraq. The first of these declarations made Western naval intervention to keep Hormuz open unnecessary.[28] The second, the warning to the Persian Gulf littoral nations, was apparently necessary, since it was reported early in the war that Iraq had assembled helicopters and a ground force in Oman to attack and occupy Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs. The attack was reportedly forestalled when British intelligence discovered the plot and diplomatic pressure was exerted on Oman by other Western nations. The plan was finally abandoned when the Omani government would not permit Iraq to launch the attack from its bases.[29]

## THE AIR WAR

The air war began with a preemptive air strike on 10 military airfields in Iran. Although the air attack achieved surprise, faulty Iraqi air tactics prevented the destruction of the Iranian Air Force on the ground. As a result, the Iranian Air Force not only survived the strike, but achieved a measure of surprise in its own right when it conducted air attacks on Basra and Baghdad on the second day of the undeclared war. Iraq prudently had dispersed a large part of its air arm to the safety of neighboring Arab countries, however, presumably beyond the reach of the Iranian Air Force. Despite this

early activity, neither warring party used its air force to decisive advantage, preferring not to confront its opponent in air battle. This mutual policy of conflict-avoidance in the air paralleled similar policies on land and at sea. The pattern that air operations have followed for the remainder of the war was set during the first week. Each belligerent executed deep strikes into the interior of the other's country, largely bypassing military targets in favor of high-visibility economic or psychological targets. These attacks were conducted by tactical fighters, usually in pairs but often in groups of four, penetrating to their targets unimpeded because neither combatant could field an integrated air defense system. Combat patrols were airborne near the common Iran-Iraq border, but few successful intercepts were made.[30]

Although some fighters performed close air support missions early in the war—and Iranian helicopter gunships achieved some tank kills using antitank heat-seeking missiles—the tactical sortie rate has not been near capacity level.[31] Poor maintenance and lack of trained pilots have hampered Iran's air effort, to no one's surprise, but the level of air operations that this decimated force has apparently achieved has been reputable. The poor Iraqi performance, on the other hand, was unexpected and must be attributed to low pilot quality, although Saddam Hussein has put the blame on poor Soviet equipment.[32]

On 4 April 1981, in one of the more dramatic air actions of the war, F-4 Phantom jet fighters struck deep into Iraqi territory to attack the H-3 oil and military complex. To strike H-3 and the associated al-Walid airfield, the base of Iraq's strategic bombing force (composed of TU-22s and IL-28s), the Iranian aircraft would have had to fly 810 kilometers from Iran's nearest base at Reza'iyeh, with a full armament load, and at low level to avoid radar detection. The round trip is beyond the unrefueled range of the F-4. Iraq claims that it had radar contact with the Iranian F-4s and tracked them into Syria; 67 minutes later the aircraft again appeared on Iraqi radar scopes in Iraqi airspace. The inference is that the Syrians allowed the Iranian strike force to be refueled in their country; Syria, of course, denies the allegation, and there the matter rests.[33]

Other Gulf states have supported Iraq's territorial claims, closing ranks behind their Arab brother, but they have stopped short of attacking Iran either physically or rhetorically. Jordan was Iraq's earliest supporter and has been its most consistent one throughout the war. At the beginning of the war, Gulf state support for Iraq was more overt, witness the aforementioned arrangement allowing Iraqi aircraft to disperse to airfields in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, North Yemen, and Kuwait to avoid attack by Iran.[34] After Iran and Iraq began to attack each other's oil installations, however, the Gulf states became more painfully aware of the vulnerability of their own oil facilities. This vulnerability was emphasized by a figurative "shot across the bow" of the littoral states when Iranian fighters attacked a Kuwaiti desert outpost as a warning to desist from overt support of Iraq (Kuwait had been transshipping goods by land to Basra). The result of the Iranian attack was threefold. First, the Iraqis' dispersed aircraft were forced to leave their sanctuaries and return to Iraq. Second, the other Arab Gulf states began to demonstrate a more cautious approach toward the support of Iraq. Third, Saudi Arabia requested assistance from the United States in protecting her oil fields, and help was forthcoming in the dispatch of four Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft. These aircraft were on patrol on 1 October 1981 when Kuwait was singled out again to provide a warning to Iraqi supporters. Iran, in a potentially dangerous escalation of the war, attacked Kuwait's oil storage facility at Umm al-Aysh. The AWACS reportedly detected the approaching Iranian aircraft, but it is not known whether the Kuwaitis were then forewarned. In any event, the attack was unimpeded and successful.[35]

These Iranian threats to widen the war caused the Arab Gulf states to act with more circumspection on the question of aid to Iraq. The Gulf states clearly were willing sup-

porters of Iraq's limited territorial claims and certainly would not have been displeased if the war had quickly resulted in the overthrow of Khomeini, who was militantly advocating a fundamentalist Islamic revolt among the Shiite populations of these countries. Saudi Arabia and the lessser Arab regional states feared, however, that if events got out of hand, a cornered Khomeini might lash out to destroy the Persian Gulf oil facilities. Thus, the failure of Iraq to knock out the Iranian Air Force on the first day of the war opened the Gulf states to retaliatory strikes and left those states less than enthusiastic about continuing their overt support for Iraq.[36]

The war in the air has been marred by poor tactics, ineffective air defense systems, and an inability to mount sustained air operations. The Iraqi Air Force failed to destroy the Iranian Air Force on the ground in its preemptive raid because it employed faulty tactics. Either because of poor training or deliberate doctrine, the Iraqis concentrated the attack on cratering airfield runways instead of attacking more lucrative targets such as parked military aircraft and their support facilities. Both sides have put a low priority on using their air force to support ground operations (although Iran reportedly used its helicopters effectively during the March offensive). Consequently, both Iran and Iraq have been able to reinforce and resupply their front-line units. Finally, neither side has proven able to design and conduct an interdiction or rational strategic bombing campaign.[37]

The early-warning and command-and-control capabilities of both countries apparently collapsed, allowing each to violate the other's airspace with virtual impunity. Further, the surface-to-air missile systems of Iraq (SA-2, SA-3, SA-6, and SA-7) and of Iran (Hawk, Rapier, and Tigercat) have been uniformly ineffective. Similarly, although the Iraqis have employed excellent air defense gun systems, they have not operated them effectively. These air defense gun systems—the Soviet-built 23mm ZSU-23-4 and the tank-mounted 12.5mm machine gun—should have been effective weapons to use against the Iranian Cobra antiarmor helicopters firing American-made wire-guided TOW missiles.[38] Reports indicate that the Iraqis have had trouble maintaining the radar on the ZSU-23-4 and have simply massed their fire at a point in space, hoping that Iranian attack helicopters would fly into the "wall of steel"—not a very effective tactic.

The air war has been characterized by spasms in which first Iran and then Iraq would launch reprisal raids on the other's economic or population centers. Yet neither belligerent has seemed able to sustain an attack long enough to have a serious strategic effect. Neither air force seems to want to throw the knockout punch, either through design or because the lack of repair parts or jet fuel prevents it from mounting a sustained attack.

Much of the history of the war on the ground, at sea, and in the air has been a search for logistical resupply. Early in the war Iran received supplies, mostly medical and spare parts, from North Korea, Syria, and Libya. Israel, apparently in an attempt to keep the Gulf War going because it diverts one of Israel's staunchist enemies, has reportedly supplied Iran with parts by air. Iraq has used secret third parties to purchase arms from several countries that rely on Iraq for a large percentage of their oil imports. Iraq has spent at least $2 billion on arms since the Gulf War began, ordering missiles from Brazil, light tanks from Austria, jet aircraft and infantry fighting vehicles from Spain, and the Roland surface-to-air missile system from France. Some have speculated that the main reason these weapon systems are being bought is not solely for use on the battlefield, but to keep the armed forces loyal to Saddam Hussein.[39] On balance, it seems that both Iran and Iraq have been successful at resupplying the modest needs of their armed forces at a low level of combat.

## OBJECTIVES, POLICY, AND STRATEGY

The Gulf War is now well into its second year, and neither Iran nor Iraq seems motivated to stop fighting. Casualties on both sides number in the tens of thousands. The economies of both Iran and Iraq are in

shambles; 18 months of war have resulted in over $100 billion in total damage to both countries.[40] The conditions for a cease-fire have not budged since the first week. Neither country has sufficient military strength or political will to take the risks or casualties necessary to end the war. The war has resulted in a stalemate that operational strategists, constrained by the objectives, policies, and strategic concepts of their national leaders, will not soon break. In truth, the stalemate that exists on the battlefield is no more than the validation of the mistakes made by the strategists at the national level.

For its part, the political objective of Iran was to restore the *status quo ante*. But this straightforward political objective was confused and complicated by the intrigues of Iranian domestic politics. The war struck amid the struggle between the religious fundamentalists and the more moderate faction of Bani-Sadr, for the moment resolved in favor of the fundamentalists. This bitter internecine struggle had a marked influence on the conduct of the war, particularly in the besieged cities of Khuzistan, where the policy called for the revolutionary guards to bear the brunt of the fighting; in turn, the success of that policy strengthened Khomeini. Comparatively fewer victories were celebrated in the war by the regular armed forces, a fact that adversely reflected on Bani-Sadr. The hope of the Iranian religious leaders that the war would not develop in a way that would give the army a central role, combined with the Iraqi policy of not exposing its forces to the risk of heavy casualties, was a prescription for a low-intensity war.

Iraq's political objectives put demands on the military strategy and its armed forces that were difficult to satisfy. The territorial objectives, such as securing the Shatt al-Arab waterway and occupying the disputed territory in Kermanshah and Ilam provinces, were straightforward military missions that required only the occupation of limited amounts of terrain. Less limited and less easily accomplished were the further political aims of using military means to overthrow the Ayatollah Khomeini and to establish Iraq as the strongest power in the Persian Gulf. These two latter goals demanded nothing less than the decisive defeat of the Iranian Army in battle, which Iraq apparently was not willing to risk. The return of the United Arab Emirates' islands in the Persian Gulf also required a decision on the battlefield in view of the weakness of the Iraqi Navy vis-à-vis Iran's.

Given the disparate demands of the political objectives, it was vital that the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council define clearly its war termination goals *before* committing the army to battle. The objective of overthrowing Khomeini, which was hoped would lead to Iraqi Pan-Arab leadership, could be achieved only by pursuing a strategic concept of total war. Nothing less was compatible with the political object desired. But Iraq then chose to pursue a security policy that was designed to keep Iraqi casualties to a minimum. Whether this policy was adopted for humane reasons or, more likely, because the shaky Hussein government could not afford to incur relatively large casualties (particularly among Shiites) without incurring the wrath of the population, the result was the same: a disconnect between the security policy and the military strategy needed to achieve the political objective.

Certainly, it is possible that Hussein and his advisors underestimated the capability of the Iranian Army to resist even a low-intensity attack. They may have overestimated the effectiveness of their own military forces, or they may have allowed their expectations to place too high a probability on an anticipated uprising of the Arab population in Khuzistan. Reportedly, Shahpour Bakhtiar, the last Iranian prime minister under the Shah, was in Iraq two weeks before the invasion commenced and was in Jordan a short time later. Did he advise Saddam Hussein that the invasion would certainly trigger uprisings within Khuzistan and in the Iranian armed forces that would overwhelm Ayatollah Khomeini? Reports to that effect circulated early in the war. There was even speculation that Hussein

had agreed to install Bakhtiar as the head of an Iranian free government in Khuzistan as soon as Ahvaz was captured, which was expected to occur on about 5 October 1980.[41] If this account is true, President Hussein will not be the first would-be conqueror in history to be poorly served by an ambitious politician or general in exile. Whatever the expectation, an incongruity in the relationship of the objectives, policy, and strategy flawed the operation from the start.

**NOTES**

1. Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 119-21 and Bernard Brodie's Commentary, pp. 648-50.
2. Sir John Bagot Glubb, *The Great Arab Conquests* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1953), pp. 189-204.
3. Editorial, *The New York Times*, 23 September 1980, p. A22.
4. Richard Hoffman, "Iran, Iraq on War Footing; Khomeini Urges Coup," *The Washington Post*, 9 April 1980, p. A18.
5. For an excellent recent discussion not only of the Shatt al-Arab territorial dispute, but also of many other sources of conflict in Southwest Asia, see Robert Litwak, *Security in the Persian Gulf 2: Sources of Inter-State Conflict*, International Institute for Strategic Studies (Montclair, N.J.: Allanheld Osman and Co., 1981), especially pp. 1-24.
6. Ibid., pp. 5-10.
7. "Iraq Denounces 1975 Border Settlement with Iran," *The New York Times*, 18 September 1980, p. A8.
8. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey, 1980-81* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981), p. 50.
9. Ibid.
10. Clausewitz, pp. 119-21 and 648-50.
11. For an overall view of the war up to January 1981, see the "War Between Iran and Iraq," *Strategic Survey, 1980-81*, pp. 49-52; Edgar O'Ballance, "The Iraqi-Iranian War: The First Round," *Parameters*, 9 (March 1981), 54-59; and Claudia Wright, "The Iraq-Iran War," *Foreign Affairs*, 59 (Winter 1980-81), 286-303. For information regarding military operations after January 1981, various accounts in newspapers, news magazines, and other periodicals must be relied upon.
12. O'Ballance, pp. 54-55.
13. *Middle East Intelligence Survey*, 1-15 October 1980, pp. 97-104.
14. Edward Cody, "Baghdad Seeks Full Sovereignty Over Waterway," *The Washington Post*, 20 October 1980, p. A7.
15. *Middle East Intelligence Survey*, 16-31 October 1980, pp. 105-08.
16. Vahe Petrossian, "Iran: Revolution Before Victory," *Middle East Economic Digest*, 17 October 1980, pp. 15-16.
17. John Kifner, "Iraqis Move Tanks Across a Key River to Drive on Abadan," *The New York Times*, 12 October 1980, p. 1.
18. *Strategy Week*, 5-11 October 1981, p. 4.
19. *Strategic Survey, 1980-81*, p. 50.
20. David Hirst, "Persian Gulf War Centers on Artillery Duels," *The Washington Post*, 3 February 1981, p. A21.
21. W. E. Blaker, "The Physical and Climatic Difficulties of the Mesopotamian Theater of War," *United Services Institute of India*, 56 (April 1926), 111-21. In 1926 Colonel Blaker described this tactic thusly: "Whole tracts of country may be rendered unusable by the judicious cutting of dams, a flank may be secured or a line of advance barred by this simple device."
22. "Iraqi Troops Brace for Floods," *The New York Times*, 29 November 1980.
23. "Iran-Iraq War: Long Costly and Indecisive," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 3 April 1981, pp. 22-23. See also various newspaper accounts.
24. *Middle East Intelligence Survey*, 1-15 January 1981, pp. 147-48.
25. *Strategy Week*, 25-31 May 1981, p. 1. Nothing captures the character of this war so much as the report that both Iran and Iraq were desperately searching for artillery gun barrels to replace those they had burned out.
26. Drew Middleton, "Tactics in the Gulf War," *The New York Times*, 19 October 1980, p. 12; and "Iraqi Tank Guns Stop Missile Helicopters," *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 24 November 1980, p. 66.
27. William L. Dowdy, III, "Naval Warfare in the Gulf: Iraq Versus Iran," *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, 107 (June 1981), 114-17.
28. Ibid., pp. 115-16.
29. *Strategy Week*, 20-26 October 1980, p. 6.
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32. O'Ballance, p. 57.
33. *Strategy Week*, 13-19 April 1981, p. 6; and 20-26 April 1981, p. 2.
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35. *Strategy Week*, 12-18 October 1981, p. 5.
36. Adeed I. Dawisha, "Iraq and the Arab World: The Gulf War and After," *The World Today*, 37 (March 1981), 188-94.
37. "Iraqi Tank Guns Stop Missile Helicopters," *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 24 November 1980, p. 66.
38. Ibid.
39. *Strategy Week*, 9-15 March 1981, p. 1.
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41. Eric Rouleau, "The War and the Struggle for the State," *MERIP Reports*, No. 98 (July-August 1981), 3-8.