THE GULF WAR: PEACE IN OUR TIMES?

by

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The Iran-Iraq War seems to defy understanding or resolution. It has endured for longer than any other major conflict since World War II, with the exception of the Vietnam War, and in doing so it has defied various predictions about the nature of war between developing nations as well as every effort to negotiate a settlement. The circumstances of the regional environment, the goals of the belligerents, and the weight of effort committed versus results achieved do not lead to optimism about an end to the war in the near future. For those of us who are observers to this seemingly senseless slaughter in an area of vital economic and strategic importance, it is essential that we try to understand the war and to discover means to contain it and perhaps ultimately to help end it.

THE COURSE OF THE WAR

The war is commonly divided into a number of phases. These vary considerably and are of limited use in any event, but they at least illustrate that the war has not been a uniform affair.[1] The war can be divided into four major phases:

I. The Iraqi Invasion, September to November 1980

II. Stalemate, November 1980 to September 1981

III. Iranian Initiative, September 1981 to May 1982

IV. Iranian Offensive in Iraq, May 1982 to present

A fifth phase might be added, in that the war is now in a new stalemated phase that overlaps with the fourth phase above. Although Iran retains the semblance of initiative on the ground, this has been costly and has produced little result. The Iranian offensive in February 1986, which resulted in the taking of the town of Fao in lower Iraq, indicates that Iran is still capable of initiative, but its failure to exploit the advantage is testimony to the limits on Iran's capabilities. Thus, despite drama, the war remains largely a Korean-style stalemate.

One point to note about the war is its episodic nature. The major events of the war tend to come in cycles, with long periods of relative inactivity punctuated by sharp clashes. This is due, in part, to the limits on Iran's logistical capabilities. The Iranians, in order to develop a sustained offensive, must spend months accumulating men and supplies in the area of main effort. These supplies are then quickly expended in the subsequent fighting, and Iran has not had the follow-on support to continue advances or sustain gains. In addition, the long lead time involved in preparing for an offensive enables the Iraqis to identify well in advance the most likely axes of attack and to prepare for the Iranian thrust. This helps to account for Iran's limited success and the high casualties. Iran's logistical problems are not likely to be resolved for the foreseeable future, and thus attrition warfare is likely to remain a key feature in Iran's strategy.[2]

Indeed, the attrition-style warfare that characterizes recent fighting has already cost tens of thousands of lives in exchange for a few square yards of territory. This has produced comparisons with World War I, but

a more apt parallel is Korea. An infantry-heavy force firmly dug in confronts an artillery-and-tank-heavy army well dug in, and heroic, mass infantry assaults on fortified positions have produced high casualties. This latter aspect has led the Iranians to move away from large-scale offensives and massed assaults. Instead, the Iranians have begun to use small infiltration forces, reminiscent of Iran's early campaigns in 1981-82, which work their way behind Iraqi positions and try to seize ground without the heavy loss of life.

The recent phase of stalemate on the ground has produced a twist in the nature of the fighting. Until August 1982, the war was largely confined to ground fighting along the frontier between the two belligerents; but beginning in August 1982, and increasingly ever since, Iraq has begun to use its air power in a more strategic sense—against Iranian cities and against Iran's oil-exporting network, Kharg Island and its associated facilities, as well as shipping to and from Iran's ports. Iraq's most recent escalation of this process was the surprising long-range air raid against Iran's new oil facility on the island of Sirri, just west of Hormuz, in August of this year. This strategy was Iraq's attempt to pressure Iran to negotiate by threatening its economic lifeline, and to raise the international level of consciousness about the war, which Iraq felt the international community was ignoring. This effort represents a more strategic approach, and it paralleled an Iranian effort to blockade Iraq, using naval forces in the Gulf and diplomacy—principally with Syria to close Iraq's major pipeline—as means of economically starving Iraq into defeat.

These economic strategies and the use of attrition warfare have produced limited success, and since no end to the war is in sight, new permutations to the war, as a result of a search by the belligerents for more effective strategies, are likely. The Iraqis, in particular, have been able to steadily improve their air power and to deliver increasingly effective strikes on Iranian shipping, towns, and the important oil facilities at Kharg Island. Iraq's strategic response is likely to continue, with further and potentially more devastating attacks on Iran's economic resources. The Iranians cannot respond in kind, though they too have attacked shipping, and it is possible that they may resort to sabotage, subversion, and terrorism to intimidate local states. While the search for alternative strategies is dangerous, neither power is likely to be able to seriously upset the regional balance, at least not as long as they remain locked in their mutual conflict. This should not lead one to conclude that it is in anyone's benefit for the war to continue, but to note that the dangers of the spread of the war are not unmanageable. In any event, neither side is likely to be able to effect a decisive result, and each side will continue to seek to expand its international contacts while trying to isolate the other.

LESSONS OF THE WAR

From a tactical military point of view, there are only limited lessons to be learned from the war. Although the Iraqis use Soviet equipment and tactics, and the Iranians learned their tactics and purchased most of their military equipment from the United

States, neither side has used the equipment or employed their forces as the United States or the Soviet Union would have. Both belligerents have shown a flair for certain features of war—the Iranians in their use of artillery, engineering capabilities, and infiltration tactics; the Iraqis in their use of logistical support and fortification techniques—but there are few lessons for the US military in terms of tactics or about the reliability and survivability of either US or Soviet equipment. There are, however, a number of strategic lessons to be gleaned from the conflict.

First, and perhaps most important, the war and its causes demonstrate clearly that states, even small, Third World powers with limited means and no indigenous arms capability, are perfectly able, ready, and willing to use force to resolve their problems. Iran was willing to use subversion and terrorism in an effort to effect a desired change in Iraq, and the Iraqis were willing to use armed force to gain their own ends. The violence of the confrontation and its longevity also demonstrate that war in the Third World does not have to be short, is not necessarily limited by dependence on external sources of supply, and is not readily open to external pressure to end it if the belligerents do not wish a settlement and are not militarily defeated.

Second, the war demonstrates the ease with which arms can be acquired, even under adverse conditions. This aspect of the war points up the proliferation of sources for arms, and it suggests a decline in the usefulness of arms sales, per se, as an instrument of policy, at least in the sense that the supply of arms gives the supplier any significant leverage with the buyer. Although the notion of the influence available to the supplier has been exaggerated in the past, it remains important to note this trend, and to further note that the number of arms suppliers is likely to increase, which will limit further the influence derived from selling arms. This does not mean that arms sales are not and should not remain important instruments of policy, but it means that there needs to be an adjustment of thinking about an arms relationship and a modification of the idea that there is any one-for-one return on an investment.

Third, the war illustrates the potential level of conflict in the Middle East. The briefness of the past Arab-Israeli wars has given rise to the idea that wars in the region are short and sharp. The Gulf War clearly shows that this is not the inevitable pattern (and the conflict in Lebanon may punctuate that statement). Wars can be protracted. This has implications for the regional states and beyond.

While the violence and length of the war may discourage other regional states from ever considering the resort to arms, the full import of the war must wait on its outcome. If Iran succeeds in the end, for example, this may well encourage Iran or others to use force in the future. In any event, the war does demonstrate the danger for potentially protracted wars and indicates the possibility for the escalation of fighting, either in scope, in violence, or in geographical extent. Although the belligerents in the Gulf War have shown considerable restraint in this regard, the resort to gas and long-range missiles, attacks on civilian populations, and the spread of the confrontation to include shipping in the Gulf illustrate the course open to expanding the war and suggest possibilities for future levels of violence.

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The ability of regional states to field large forces, to use various types of forces and weapons, and to employ them reasonably well also has implications for the United States and the Soviet Union, for it indicates an important problem facing any projection of force into the region. The war highlights the potential intensity of regional conflict and the likely costs facing the direct use of force by the United States or the Soviet Union against a regional power. Middle Eastern militaries are no longer ragtag forces indifferently armed. They may be poorly led, they may not fight as well as US or Soviet troops, but these cannot be taken for granted. In addition, the Iraqis have excelled at defensive operations, a point not lost on other Arab states, many of whom have studied Iraqi techniques closely. The employment of such techniques in other regional contexts could significantly increase the costs of any future confrontation.

Fourth, the war illustrates the limits of superpower influence. Although both the Soviet Union and the United States would prefer to see an end to the war, they have been unable to bring any convincing pressure to bear on the belligerents to end the fighting. This has led to a lot of speculation that the war was instigated by one of the superpowers or that the only reason the war continues is because one or the other of the superpowers wants the war to continue. This opinion was common in the Gulf when I visited there in December 1984, and one can find it in certain quarters of the United States as well. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union wants the war, but both are limited in their ability to influence the outcome. Neither power, however, is indifferent to how the war might end, and this means they must maintain an active interest in the war and they will try to influence its direction or contain its effects.

Fifth, the war shows, if an example were necessary, that violence and instability are intrinsic to the region. Indigenous ethnic and religious rivalries, conflict growing out of competing national interests, and the question of the legitimacy of local states are enduring problems. Even if the war ends tomorrow, such rivalries will remain to disturb the region's domestic peace for the foreseeable future. One cannot rule out a future war, more subversion, or another Islamic revolution.

One should be careful, however, not to learn more from this situation than there is to learn. In the first place, few areas of the world are far removed from violence and dangerous rivalry. Even in Europe, where people have grown accustomed to political steadiness, the picture is far from being free of violence or instability. Few regions of the world can boast a convivial environment free of disorder or the threat of sudden violence. Yet, it is also important to note that the dire predictions for the region have not been fulfilled. The regional states have not abruptly succumbed to a wave of Islamic fanatics, war has not dramatically increased oil prices, the loss of production in the region has not caused any noticeable financial disruption, and the war has not inexorably involved all and sundry in a more general struggle. The fact that Iran and Iraq could endure years of war with virtually no internal upheaval is a measure of the stamina and durability of regional states. This is not to say that the Cassandras are entirely wrong, but to note that catastrophe does not necessarily lurk in every event in the region. The local states have demonstrated considerable aptitude in meeting various threats, and they have shown resilience and ingenuity in protecting their interests. Even the belligerents have exercised restraint and judgment—within limits.

Finally, drawing on the last two points above, the war underscores the need for US policymakers to understand that regional instability is not likely to go away or to be amenable to US solutions. There is a dynamic to regional affairs quite separate from either US or Soviet concerns, and these affairs are likely to follow their own course despite the policies of the superpowers.

THE FUTURE OF THE WAR

Having looked at the nature of the war up to the present, we will find it worthwhile to look beyond the present at possible outcomes of the war. While this is a speculative exercise, it is important to realize that how

the war ends and how it develops toward that end will have an effect worth consideration on regional affairs and US interests.[3]

There are four possible courses the war may take, each with permutations that will influence the future of the Gulf. First, the war can continue, with the inherent danger of escalation; second, the war could be concluded with some sort of *status quo ante* settlement; third, Iraq could win; fourth, Iran could win. These will be considered in turn.

The most likely scenario for the war, for the present, is more of the same. Neither belligerent is militarily capable of defeating its opponent outright, and as long as Iran adheres to its determination to change the pattern of social and political relations in Iraq and relies on a strategy of attrition, then no end is likely soon. This means continued alarums and diversions, and the potential for an escalation of the conflict.

This situation is likely to continue until there is a change of heart or of leadership in Iran. Since it is Khomeini's resolve that sustains much of the war effort, his death or a change in his attitude may produce movement toward a settlement, or at least toward a gradual winding down of the war. This is not likely in the short term, and even Khomeini's death is not likely to produce a sudden change in Iranian policy; meanwhile, the death or removal of Saddam Husayn is not likely to lessen Iran's determination to make major changes in Iraq or cause Iraq to suddenly capitulate. Nor is Iraq likely to accept a de facto end to the war if this leaves Iraq's ability to export its oil through the Gulf in doubt. Still, a combination of exhaustion and frustration may lead both societies to seek a settlement, de facto or de jure. Such a settlement, however, will not remove the basic causes of conflict between the two states—divergent geopolitical goals and mutually hostile ideologies. Thus even a settlement will not restore peace, and a cold or "semi-hot" war will continue to disturb regional politics.

The war could end, however, with an Iraqi victory. Although this is not likely to be the result of direct Iraqi military action, the cumulative effect on Iran of internal disruption, economic blockade, and war weariness could force Iran to negotiate or to collapse into a state of civil war, making an effort to continue the war against Iraq impossible. Such a development would leave Iraq intact, with a well-developed military and no strong opponent. More dangerous, however, civil disorder in Iran could have profound consequences on regional affairs.

The fall of the Shah and the transition to the Islamic Republic was relatively smooth, especially given the fundamental nature of the shift involved. This meant that the potential for disruption was minimized. Collapse of the present government under adverse conditions, however, could produce a major upheaval. Divisive forces in Iran, held in check by the present government, could fragment the country, a prospect with grave implications. In the first place, such disorder invites external meddling. This could mean involvement in Iran by regional states such as Iraq or Turkey or Pakistan, or, more ominously, by the Soviet Union. This meddling could exacerbate internal strife, prolonging it or propelling it in dangerous directions. Soviet support to communist elements in the country, for example, could lead to a communist-dominated state. This prospect is singularly unwelcome, and to forestall it the United States would almost certainly become involved, increasing the prospects of a direct US-Soviet clash.

Strife in Iran also could spill over into surrounding states as various Iranian groups seek external support or carry their domestic struggles beyond Iran's frontiers. This type of instability in a strategically important region, where the interests of competing states have collided in the past, has been the source of considerable mischief and misfortune, and there is no reason to be optimistic about this situation should it develop in the Persian Gulf.

Similarly, an Iranian victory is not a reassuring prospect. Once again, an Iranian victory is not likely to come through an Iranian feat of arms but as the result of some internal Iraqi collapse that undermines Iraq's ability to resist. In any case, an Iranian victory would have serious repercussions.

First, the collapse of Iraq would create a dangerous regional instability inviting the form of meddling noted above. Second, it would provide Iran with the opportunity to establish a new Islamic Republic in at least part of Iraq. Not only would this give Iran an important forward base of operations for its revolutionary cause, it would also give weight and substance to Iran's revolutionary appeal and contribute to Iran's own conviction of self-righteousness. This combination would raise concern about the future stability of the Gulf states and their ability to resist Iranian pressure.

No major upheaval or climate of uncertainty of the sort that would follow either an Iranian or an Iraqi collapse would go unnoticed, and the consequent temptation or sense of urgent necessity to intervene in some fashion to influence events could not be resisted by any number of states. Although such a development would have unpredictable results, this very unpredictability at a time of fluid and violent change would be a dangerous situation for everyone with interests in the region.

This brief discussion does not exhaust the permutations of possible developments within the outcomes outlined above. Indeed, a fertile imagination can conceive an endless string of ominous contingencies. One must guard against the temptation to litter the landscape with neurotic visions of possible outcomes, but it is equally important to understand that there are worse things than the continuation of the war and that how it ends is not a matter of indifference.

US POLICY TO DATE

The United States did not welcome the outbreak of the war and it has consistently supported every effort to reach a negotiated settlement. The war, as any war, is fraught with uncertainties, not only for the belligerents but for their friends and neighbors. The potential that the war might disrupt oil supplies or spread, or that the defeat of one of the belligerents may significantly and adversely affect the regional environment and beyond, is an ever-present reality. For these reasons the United States is interested in seeing an end to the war.[4]

When the war began the United States declared its neutrality, but from the beginning this neutrality was compromised. It was not that the United States favored Iraq or desired a war, but the Iranian revolution and the fact that Iran was bitterly denouncing the United States and was holding 52 US diplomats hostage meant that US neutrality was spiced with pent-up fury and a built-in bias. It was a fine dilemma. On the one hand the United States did not want the Iraqis to win and establish a regional hegemony. Nor could the United States welcome an Iranian collapse with all the dangers that suggested. On the other hand, Iran was no friend of this country, and so any US effort to act as an honest broker was precluded. Indeed, there is still reason to assume that Iranian hostility toward and suspicions of the United States would undermine any peace initiative in which the United States was even remotely involved. Thus, the United States found itself, as with everyone else, a spectator to the main event. This did not mean, however, that the United States did nothing.

Although this country was unable to directly influence the war, the United States did try to lessen the war's effects and keep it from spreading. This involved various approaches over the course of the war. The most sustained aspect of US policy toward the war, apart from frequent statements about the desirability of a negotiated settlement, has been an arms embargo on the sale or supply of US military equipment to Iran.[5] In addition, the United States has encouraged other states to similarly curtail arms sales to Iran, with some success. The United States has not encouraged arms sales to Iraq, but it has not gone to any great lengths to discourage such sales either. Thus, our neutrality is selective, although the United States has roundly condemned the Iraqis for the use of chemical weapons.

In addition, in 1982-83, when Iraq appeared to be on the verge of collapse, the United States also undertook limited measures to shore up the Iraqis. This effort became known as a "tilt" toward Iraq and

involved limited assistance—commodity credits for agricultural products, support for Iraqi efforts to secure vital loans to bridge debt shortfalls, support for a UN-sponsored condemnation of Iran for attacks on Gulf shipping while remaining virtually silent over similar Iraqi attacks, and continuation of the embargo against Iran. This tilt did not reflect a US desire to see Iraq win, but merely a desire to see Iraq survive in order to prevent an Iranian victory. This negative solution helped to smooth the path to a resumption of US-Iraqi relations, but it has not brought an end to the fighting.

The United States has also reacted to other events in the war that have threatened US regional interests. This might be viewed as a sort of containment policy. In 1984, for example, when Iran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, President Reagan made it clear that the United States would not stand by and see this vital oil route closed. The United States maintains a US carrier battle group in the Indian Ocean and a small force in the Gulf itself as a conspicuous sign of US capabilities. The United States also supported Saudi Arabia with AWACs and more recently with Stinger antiaircraft missiles as a deterrent to Iranian attacks on Saudi shipping and oil facilities. The Administration also has condemned Iran as a supporter of regional terrorism and has promised military support to the Gulf States should they need and desire it, and it has encouraged the efforts of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to develop a collective security system. While these US efforts do not promote an end to the war, they do aim at keeping it from spreading.

The US approach to the war has not been restricted solely to containment efforts, however. Recognizing that it has limited leverage with either belligerent and that an active role could jeopardize negotiations, the United States has maintained a low profile while encouraging every effort toward a settlement. This has meant US support for various UN peace initiatives and for the efforts of various third parties such as Algeria, the GCC, and Japan. As with the labors of others, such as the Organization of Islamic Countries, the Arab League, Somalia, Pakistan, Egypt, and Turkey—even the Soviets have tried—these approaches have all foundered on the determination of Khomeini to punish Iraq. As long as Khomeini remains steadfast, ending the war must wait on Iran's will, determination, and ability.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Given this admittedly impressionistic appraisal of the regional environment and the problems inherent in developing a policy for the area, what should the United States do in regard to the war? Once again, it would be focusing on the wrong issue to deal solely with the war. One must come to terms with its context and develop responses that make sense in this larger environment.[6]

One of the first things to consider is the possibility of some form of opening to Iran that might lead to a US-Iranian rapprochement and a move toward peace. A number of writers have argued for this point of view and have offered evidence to support the contention that Iran is ready to be more flexible on negotiations and more agreeable to a resumption of relations with the United States. They point out promising signs of Iranian reasonableness in speeches by various leaders, including Hashemi Rafsanjani, the powerful speaker of the Majlis, the Iranian parliament. In addition, the Iranians provided some diplomatic help in the 1985 TWA hijacking in Athens, which may indicate a willingness to be more flexible. This is an encouraging development that deserves close attention to see if there is room for further moderation of Iran's policies. Developments such as these lend credence to the argument that the United States should listen to these overtures and reconsider its position—in effect, to tilt toward Iran.[7] Such a diplomatic approach has some attractive aspects, especially if the present government in Iran is as ready to reach a settlement as some argue. But is this the case and should the United States seek to restore relations?

It is common to burrow through various Iranian commentaries for signs of change and then to quote Khomeini and other Iranian leaders as proof of a new attitude. It is often pointed out that Iran is seeking openings to

the West and Japan and that by these efforts Iran has demonstrated a surprising openness of mind. These findings are then presented as evidence that Iran is more flexible and willing to listen to reason. The fact that Iran's internal economy is in shambles and that there is war weariness in the country is also enlisted to argue, by extension, that Iran is being forced into a more pragmatic assessment of its objectives. It would be folly, so the argument goes, to ignore this new flexibility, and so the United States ought to explore a new open-door policy. Explore it, perhaps, but one should be cautious in what one believes.

The careful scrutiny of various speeches by Khomeini and others is likely to yield the results being sought. Thus, some analysts have seized on a speech Khomeini made in early 1985 expressing depression over yet more battlefield failures and hinting at a willingness to consider negotiations. These same analysts, however, tended to overlook the contrary fact that only several days later Khomeini made a blistering new speech that dismissed any lessening of resolve to continue the war until Iraq was defeated. Speeches by other leading figures are scrutinized similarly, but a recent sampling of speeches yields the impression that Iran is still "hanging tough." Even taken together, occasional hints of openness do not indicate any fundamental change.

That Iran has reduced its battlefield effort does not necessarily represent a change of goals either. As the spokesman for the Iranian War Information Center noted, "We are trying to bring the enemy to his knees with the minimum of casualties and bloodshed." Iranian battlefield tactics are tending more toward small-unit infiltration techniques, but this represents merely a new method, not a change of heart.

Neither are Iranian openings to the West and Japan necessarily moves toward a settlement. The Iranians recognize that part of their problem has been diplomatic isolation, and Khomeini and the Majlis have sanctioned efforts to break out of this isolation. The motive is debatable, but it is at least as plausible to argue that the aim is not to seek an end to the war but to gain access to sources of economic and diplomatic support and arms. Iraq has employed a similar strategy with some success. Of course, the Iranians argue that the war was imposed, and they feel that everyone is against them—enough to make anyone keep up a bold front. Yet Iran continues to encourage regional terrorism and is no friend to this country; well-meaning but biased counsel that would simply wish these realities away is not a sound basis for policy.

The fact remains that Iran continues to fund and train terrorists and to provide them with documentation, cover, and refuge. Despite prior statements about not really wanting to spread the revolution by force, the Iranians have encouraged subversion, assassination, kidnappings, and bombings as instruments of state policy.[8] The Iranians also maintain ties with Syria and Libya and have established relations with Nicaragua in an attempt to join in a general anti-American scheme. These actions are not likely to cease, nor is any premature US overture to Iran likely to moderate this behavior, though the present Iranian government may be willing to exploit it.

We in the West have become accustomed to thinking of the international system as a worthy device for regulating disputes and relations among states. After World War II we invested the United Nations with our hopes for a more orderly and peaceful mechanism for regulating international aggression, and we have slipped into a psychology that any use of force for any reason, especially to defend something so mundane and vaguely immoral as national interest, is somehow repugnant and vile. Much of the world, however, does not share this view, though other states may be perfectly willing to maintain the idea as a double standard in order to incapacitate the West. But there is a more sinister feature to this.

To a considerable degree, a separate international system is beginning to emerge. It is composed of a number of states and individual groups that resent the present system, which is largely an artifact of Western design, and seek to develop a new

system based on subverting the old and establishing a new balance. While this process goes on, they continue to work within the older system but use it to cover their other acts, and they use its very principles to undermine it. In this environment terrorism and the transnational support of "millennial revolutionism" are the instruments designed to effect the desired change. Within this system terrorists move freely, receiving economic support and training. The goal is to use these methods to replace the international system we now know. Iran is a ready player in this environment, and as such its motives must be regarded with suspicion. Naive views that interpret Iranian behavior through the lens of the international system as we know it miss an important dimension.

Furthermore, we have become accustomed to thinking of the state as the institution that maintains a monopoly on violence, both domestically and internationally. While this is true in some cases, it is also true that the proliferation of states and would-be states has raised a challenge to this concept, and there has been a significant decline in state power and an increase of force available to even small groups. The spread of weapons and an acclimation to violence have had an influence on state and non-state actors alike. Lebanon is a stark reminder of the fragility of government and the fact that the state holds no monopoly on the means of violence. Iran has contributed to this environment by providing arms and assistance to terrorists. Thus, any move to interpret Iran's motives congenially and to pursue a resumption of relations should proceed only cautiously.

There are a number of guidelines that US policymakers should keep in mind. First, Iran is no friend of the United States, and until there are more unequivocal signs that Iran is moderating its anti-US stance and is withdrawing from terrorist involvement, then relations should not change dramatically. Second, Iran still has a lot to answer for, and the present regime should not be rewarded for its holding of US diplomats and its involvement in bombings of US facilities by an overeager desire to jump at any sign of a thaw. Americans too often tend to reward those who have snubbed and abused them, as if our goodwill and a desire to forgive and forget were reciprocated. Third, and following from these, any steps to resume relations should be linked to a cease-fire and an Iranian effort to cease terrorist activities; Iran would have to make the first move. Fourth, it is important to note that Iran does not have its own house in order. Various elements of the government do not agree with others and this can produce a rivalry that means one set of officials can act without the approval of others. Thus, the Foreign Ministry in Iran might genuinely seek rapprochement while elements within the Revolutionary Guard, the office for Islamic Guidance, or even within the Foreign Ministry itself may continue to support terrorism and undermine the policy of the Foreign Minister. This has another aspect: Given the incipient struggle for power within the Iranian government, individuals who approach the United States could easily find this fact used against them. Thus, the Iranian government is not necessarily free to act, nor is it necessarily able to guarantee its intentions. This is not an encouraging environment for any major new demarche.

This does not mean that the United States cannot explore, privately, avenues to reestablish relations. For the reasons noted earlier, it is by no means in the interest of the United States to undermine Iran or to encourage its collapse. Certainly informal discussions should not be ruled out, but a rapid rush to restore relations is likely to be rejected acidly by Iran and achieve little more than embarrassment.

Aside from a rapprochement with Iran, what other steps should the United States consider in dealing with the war? Basically the United States should continue its efforts to contain the conflict, support its regional friends, and encourage efforts to reach a negotiated settlement. The development of policy also depends on coming to terms with the limitations on US abilities noted above, and on devising the means to manage the contradictions that are now an essential feature of US regional involvement.

In conjunction with this, the United States should continue to supply military equipment to its regional friends, and to support local efforts at collective defense. This involves support to the Gulf Cooperation Council and to individual states. The value of a Jordanian rapid deployment force, for example, remains real, as does the need to support both Jordan and Saudi Arabia with arms and technical assistance. As noted above, Iran and Iraq are not only likely to remain rivals for dominance in the Gulf, they are also likely to increase their capabilities to pursue that objective. Iranian or Iraqi pressure also could undermine the stability of states friendly to the United States or force them to reconsider their position vis-à-vis the United States. Thus, sustained attention and efforts to build strong ties to these states in the present climate are essential for long-term US interests.

The United States also should develop its regional policy with less Soviet preoccupation. This means stressing military planning better designed to deal with local realities and contingencies, something a Jordanian RDF could contribute to. The United States, however, also needs to make it quite clear to the Soviets that armed aggression in the region would contribute to a war climate and that the United States would respond to such a move. The development of clear, consistent policies for the region is essential in this effort. Our interest in the region tends to wax and wane on a cycle of bureaucratic interest, crisis, or congressional and presidential politics rather than on any precise effort to deal with the region on the basis of a rational assessment of threats and goals. This tends to make US policy appear inconsistent and it undermines our credibility.

One of the key elements of policy should be a clear idea of what situation the United States would prefer when the Iran-Iraq War is over. Thus, efforts at improving US deployment capabilities and improving the capabilities of US friends in the region are important. In addition, this means continuing efforts to build on the rapprochement with Iraq and encouragement for a resumption of formal Egyptian-Iraqi relations. Iraq has embarked on a more pragmatic policy, and this should be encouraged. The United States, however, also should move to strengthen its ties with Kuwait and to help create a climate in which potential Iraqi and Iranian pressure on that small state can be confronted.

The United States also should continue explorations with Japan and the European allies for means of supporting mutual interests. This needs to include a recognition of limitations on European and Japanese cooperation and a realization that future assistance is likely to remain low-key and to be scenario-dependent.

As noted earlier, the ability of this country to manage regional conflict is limited, and our efforts to do so are troubled by our own conflict over priorities. The proliferation of challenges to our interests only complicates the search for effective responses. Still, the United States is viewed by many in the region as the power most likely to be able to make things happen, and it is from this perception that much of US influence flows; as long as this remains true, it will impose a burden upon us as well as afford us opportunities. How well we suffer our burden and take advantage of our opportunities, history will judge.

NOTES

1. On the evolution of the war see William Staudenmaier, "Iran-Iraq (1980-)," in *The Lessons of Recent Wars in the Third World*, ed. Robert Harkavy and Stephanie Neuman (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1985), I, 211-38; and Shirin Tahir-Kheli and Shareen Ayubi, eds., *The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons, Old Conflicts* (New York: Praeger, 1983).

2. See Gary Sick, *The Washington Post*, 15 May 1986, p. F1.

3. See my "The Iran-Iraq War and the Future of the Persian Gulf," *Military Review*, 54 (March 1984), 17-29.

4. For an overview of US policy see US Senate, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Staff Report, "War in the Gulf," August 1984.

5. The effect of the embargo on Iran can be seen in the steady decline in Iran's combat equipment and in Iranian attempts to acquire US arms illegally.

6. On aspects of the problem facing US policy see William Quandt, "The Gulf War: Policy Options and Regional Implications," *Arab-American Affairs*, 9 (Summer 1984), 1-21.

7. The leading proponent for a rapprochement with Iran is R. K. Ramazani in his "Iran: Burying the Hatchet," *Foreign Policy*, No. 60 (Fall 1985), 52-74. What such arguments tend to ignore is Iran's intransigence.

8. See Arnold Hottinger, "Khomeini's War: Exporting Revolution," *Swiss Review of World Affairs*, 34 (April 1984), 26-27.