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ARABS AND PERSIANS BEYOND THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE GULF

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'If the Iranians had not tried to establish the Abbassid Government and culture in Baghdad, or their great thinkers and volunteers had not striven and even sacrificed their lives in 1920 for the independence of Iraq, the Iraqis could not now pride themselves of their past history'. Iranian Foreign Minister, 1965, quoted in Jasim Abdulghani, Iraq and Iran (London : Croom Helm, 1984) p. 21.

'What are these Persians shouting about all the time? We were Shi'ites before they were Shi'ites. We had a revolution before they had a revolution'. Author's conversation in the Baghdad suq, April 1980.

Introduction : A Gulf of Misperceptions.

The geopolitics of the contemporary Gulf are dominated by a triangular conflict between the three most powerful states of the region - Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Emerging from an earlier history of western intervention, and from the process of state building within Gulf states in the post-1918 period, this conflict has dominated the region for the past quarter of a century, and shows no sign of abating: no stable resolution of the conflict, one in which each state feels itself to be at a potential disadvantage, has yet been achieved. Yet if this instability is evident to all, the causes of it remain less evident. There is, at first sight, no insuperable international obstacle to peace between these three states;

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there are plenty of mechanisms that could resolve those issues - territorial, economic, political - that divide them. It is this apparent conundrum that the article which follows seeks to examine i.e how this apparently factitious conflict came about, and what its underlying determinants are. The central thesis is that the causes of instability in the Gulf, of past conflicts and probable future ones, lie much less in a continuous history or in the geopolitics itself, in past external intervention or relations between local states, and more in the contemporary domestic politics of these countries. The story is one of how in the modern period politics has both created linkages between the two peoples that hitherto did not exist, and has at the same time constituted new barriers between them, as well as between the two major Arab states of the Gulf themselves.

In this perspective, the conflict between Gulf states, and between Arabs and Persians, is a product not so much of imperialist interference, or of long, millennial or atavistic, historical antagonisms, but of two interrelated, modern, processes, state formation and the rise of nationalism. This is visible in the nature of the psychological gap that divides Arabs from Iranians: one of the most enduring features of the strategic situation in the Persian Gulf is the gap, as much psychological and cultural, as economic, military or political, between the Arab and Iranian perceptions of the region, a point I would like to illustrate with an anecdote. In the spring of 1980, I visited the Centre for Arab Gulf Studies at the University of Basra. The Centre was situated in the university campus, on the outskirts of Basra, but a few miles from the frontier with Iran. It would have taken little more than an hour to walk to Iran. Within months, the area was to be convulsed by the war which was to last for the following eight years. In the course of the discussion with faculty members I asked whether any of them had ever been to Iran. The answer was no. I asked to see the Iranian newspapers that they had in their library : some old copies of the English edition of *Kayhan*, from the time of the Shah, were produced. I asked if anyone spoke Persian. A junior colleague was produced: a Palestinian, who was an expert on Hafez and Sa'adi. This academic centre, closely tied to the party and state structures in Iraq, had no resources with which to evaluate, let alone understand, the powerful neighbour lying nearby.

The purpose of this story is not to single out the faculty of the Centre for Arab Gulf Studies in Basra. It illustrates a broader characteristic of relations between the two communities, and one that could certainly be replicated on the Iranian side as well. The Arab world occupies a place in the consciousness and history of modern Iran, but very much as a symbolic point of reference, negative

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for Iranian secular nationalists, selectively positive for Islamists. Iraq has been important as the site of the holiest cities of Shi'ite Islam, Najaf and Karbala, and networks of clerics and traders have grown around these pilgrimage routes. But in the modern period such connections have, largely, been without political import. Thus, while references to Russia and Britain, America and Germany would be mandatory, one could write the modern political history of Iran up to the time of the revolution without mentioning Iraq or the Arab world at all. The same applies, grosso modo, to Iraq up to the fall of the Hashemite monarchy¹. Arabs and Persians are aware of each other's existence, and of the long history of culture, religion and politics that has linked them. There is not between them the complete chasm that, until at least very recently, separated Arabs and Israelis. Yet proximity has not produced, and is not producing, greater knowledge or understanding. The antagonism, or lack of shared perception, between the two sides is enduring, and is an important constitutive element in the unstable strategic situation in the Gulf.

It is certainly easy in such circumstances to fall back as an explanation on 'history': there is plenty of history to invoke, above all because the dividing lines have been, if not uninterrupted, then certainly recurrent. From pre-Islamic times one can cite the conflicts between the Persians and their western neighbours, the Mesopotamians and Medes: during the Iran-Iraq war Iraqi propaganda made much of the claim that Khomeini was a *magus*, an ancient Persian king. Iraqi and other Arab nationalist denunciations of Iranian expansionism *al-tawassu' al-irâni*, make much of this connection. The conquest of Iran by the Arab armies and the victory of Qadisiyyah have often been invoked by modern politicians: if Iranian secular nationalists denounced the Arab conquest and sought to claim legitimacy from the pre-Islamic times, leading even to the linguistic distortions of the Pahlavi period, Saddam was quick to invoke Qadisiyyah as a mobilisatory symbol in his war with the Islamic Republic². The

¹. For example, in Ervand Abrahamian's classic study, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) there is no mention of Iraq. Equally, in Hanna Batatu's study of the Iraqi revolution of 1958, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) there is virtually no mention of Iran. These silences are an accurate reflection of how events were perceived at the time discussed.

². Samir al-Khalil, *The Monument. Art, Vulgarity and Responsibility in Iraq* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1991); Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology in the formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968-89* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

subsequent history has its own themes, appropriate for defining difference: the Arab hostility to the Persians, traditionally denoted by the contemptuous term '*ajam*', is matched by Ferdousi's characterisation of the Arabs as 'eaters of lizard'³. The re-emergence of distinct Iranian states in the mediaeval period is associated with a reassertion of a distinct Persian culture, and political interest. This was to culminate in the establishment of the Safavi dynasty in 1501: in addition to creating a strong Iranian state, which on several occasions invaded Ottomans Iraq, the Safavis continued to clash with the Ottomans over the frontier between the two states, and in particular over the delimitation of the Shatt al-Arab river. A series of treaties did succeed in defining most of the land boundary between the Safavi and Ottoman empires, but the issue of the Shatt, and the related issue of the loyalties of groups living across the frontiers, remained unresolved⁴. The Safavis also institutionalised what was to be another central defining difference between Arabs and Persians, the predominance of Shi'ite Islam in Iran. This made formal the religious difference between Arabs and Persians that had been smouldering since the early years of Islam. In subsequent nationalist rhetoric the Iranians could be seen as *shu'ûbiyyin*, defectors from both Arabism and the orthodox faith⁵, while in Khomeini's rhetoric Saddam was associated with Yazid, the Ummayyad tyrant who killed Hussain at Karbala in 680AD⁶.

In this perspective, hostility between Arabs and Iranians has been an enduring feature of the Gulf for centuries, if not millennia. It is in this way that contemporary nationalists, and those who see the region in terms of timeless

³. 'By drinking the milk of camels, and eating lizards, the Arabs have reached such a state that they aspire to capture the crown of Persia'. The derogatory Iranian expression for Peninsula Arabs, *mushkhor*, 'mouse-eaters', is in similar vein.

⁴. On this historical background see ĩsim Abdulghani, *Iraq and Iran. The Years of Crisis* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Keith McLachlan, *The boundaries of Iran* (London: University College London Press, 1994).

⁵. For a perceptive discussion of the usages, and suppressed racist connotations, of *shu'ûbiyya* see Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear* (London: Hutchinson/Radius, 1989) pp. 216-220.

⁶. Saddam was also another one of the 'idols' which the Imam, officially titled *bot-shekan*, or 'idol-smasher', was to smash, following the others he had destroyed - the Shah, Carter and Bani Sadr. Unfortunately, Saddam did not oblige.

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cultural forces, often present current conflicts. But such an approach is questionable. History is not univocal: for all the conflicts and conquests, and insults and divergences, there has been at least as much to unite and bring together the Arabs and Iranians as there has to divide them. Language, religion, pilgrimage, migration, trade have tied the regions of both peoples together for all of history. For much of the time they have lived in peace, not war. Moreover, the very formulation of the issue in terms of two opposed, conflicting, 'nations' is misleading: the political boundaries have not corresponded to neat ethnic and linguistic divisions. Within what is today the Arab domains there have always been communities with Iranian characteristics; in Iraq, open for centuries to Iranian influence, not least in the period of the Persian-influenced Abbasid empire, the very culture of the Arab speakers is suffused with Iranian influence. One only has to listen to spoken Iraqi⁷, or look at the turquoise domes of the mosques of Iraqi cities, to see how strong the Iranian influence is, not forgetting the fact that half of the whole population of Iraq are Shi'ites, while another quarter are Kurds who, by language and culture, fall very much within the Iranian cultural sphere⁸. On the Iranian side, script, vocabulary and religion are all of Arab origin. If one ventures into the difficult and often tendentious domain of racial characteristics, the situation is clear enough: the faces, physical characteristics, body language in Baghdad and Basra differ little if at all from those in Tehran and Isfahan. The 'we' and the 'they' are not given by history but are the products of specific, often conscious, political interventions.

To answer the question of where this misperception comes from it is not, therefore, sufficient to invoke 'history': indeed far from history being an explanatory factor, a cause, it would be better to see this history, or more precisely the contemporary interpretation of it, as itself a result of other factors. For all that they draw on the past all nationalisms, and all official ideologies of 'historic' national conflict, are modern products, a result of the intellectual and economic processes of the past two centuries, and in particular of the rise of

⁷. Among many examples, *hich*, 'nothing', *chare* 'remedy', and the half-Persian half-Arabic *khoshwalad*, 'good guy'.

⁸. Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.25. But Shi'is only came to comprise the majority in Iraq in the nineteenth century. The Kurds also qualify for inclusion in the Persian sphere of cultural influence by the fact that they celebrate the Persian New Year, *nuruz*, the Zoroastrian festival.

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modern forms of communication and of the state⁹. This applies to the Gulf as to anywhere else. If we are to ask what it is that has constituted the current divisions within the Gulf, including the misperceptions, the answer is to be found in the forms of state produced in the region in the modern period, and in the way which two groups of people, previously almost completely separated from each other, came to be brought into contact by modern political forces, in particular by two such forces, first external, imperial intervention, and then internal, the rise of nationalism. Here we have to look at the formation and interests of states, and at the mechanisms - education, socialisation in the armed forces, writings of nationalists, print and electronic media - that served to constitute and diffuse such ideas. The form that relations between Arabs and Iranians take today has much to do with these two factors, and much less to do with Medes or Persians, Sunnis or Shi'ites, Ottomans or Safavis. To illustrate this argument, one may divide the modern history of the Gulf into three periods: 1921-1958; 1958-1979; and 1979 to the present day.

1921-1958 : Compartmentalised State Building

The emergence of the contemporary inter-state system in the Gulf, and of the antagonisms underlying it, can be seen as a product of the imposition of modern forms of state formation, and of the nationalist or revolutionary ideologies associated with it, upon the pre-existing mosaic of peoples, languages and beliefs in this area of West Asia. The initial territorial divisions were a result of imperial state formation from the fifteenth to the early twentieth centuries. The boundary between Safavis and Ottomans was the site of substantial wars in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries but was gradually stabilised through treaties, beginning with that of Zuhab (Qasr-i Shirin) in 1639, and culminating in the Treaty of Erzurum of 1847, while that between the two encroaching modern empires, the Russian and the British, was gradually drawn from the late eighteenth century onwards: the Romanovs took Iranian territory in the Transcaucasus, while the British pushed against Iran's eastern frontier, through India (now Pakistan) and Afghanistan, and from the late nineteenth century also encroached on the Arab territories lying on the southern side of the Gulf.

⁹. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

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World War I was to produce a new strategic situation, and create the structure of inter-state relations that has continued thereafter. The frontiers of Iran with the Russian, now Bolshevik, state and with British India remained constant, but the territories formerly ruled by the Ottomans were divided into a now independent Turkey to the north-east and the new state of Iraq, formed from three Ottoman *vilayet*, to the west and south-west. In the aftermath of the Ottoman collapse, one further change was to occur: in the oases of central and eastern Arabia, regions only vaguely influenced by either Ottomans or British, a tribal confederacy led by the Saud family, and proclaiming a revival of the Wahhabi sect first seen in the eighteenth century, seized large areas of territory (including two thirds of Kuwait) and established, in 1926, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thus one year after Reza Khan established a new dynasty in Iran, the Saudi dynasty had emerged in the Arabian Peninsula. Albeit this probably caused little concern in Tehran at the time, it was later to do so, to both Shah and Imam; for the Iraqis, on the other hand, this rebel regime, which had ousted the Hashemites from the Arabian Peninsula, was to remain a rival, and at best an uneasy ally, for decades to come.

For the following four decades the dominant power in the Gulf was neither Arab nor Persian, but Britain, in formal control of Iraq and much of the Peninsula's coastline, from Kuwait to Aden. The strategic situation was, therefore, one in which Britain maintained its military and administrative dominance : local states, Iran included, conducted their relations largely with Britain, and other major powers. There was very little contact of substance between the regional states. Iran and Saudi Arabia formally recognised each other. At first, however, Iran refused to recognise Iraq, since Baghdad refused to provide suitable guarantees to Persians living in its territory¹⁰. Later Reza Khan was drawn into a loose, sympathetic, relationship with Atatürk, and with Iraq and Afghanistan, and formalised in the Saadabad Pact of 1937: but these were secondary, largely ineffectual, activities. The real business was in relation with the great powers: hence, because of British control of Iraq, the frontier between Iraq and Iran itself, particularly that along the Shatt al-Arab, reflected Iraqi interests.

Where there was upheaval, nationalist and social, in these states it had little to do with other regional peoples, and much to do with external, imperial,

¹⁰ For background, see Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, pp.100-105.

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domination. Thus the 1920 revolt in Iraq, or the mobilisations in Iran between 1941 and 1953, were not to any significant extent influenced by events elsewhere in the Middle East¹¹. Indeed in accounts of the politics of these countries there is little or no mention of this regional dimension. This was most evident in the case of the Mosadeq period in Iran itself: Iran's challenge to the western states, and to the oil companies, took place in the aftermath of the first war over Palestine, and coincided with the Egyptian revolution of 1952. Yet there was little echo in the Arab world of what was happening in Iran, and the Arab upheavals had little influence on Iran. If there was an interaction, it was a negative one: Iran's nationalisation of oil, and the embargo on oil exports subsequently imposed by western states, provided an opportunity to the Arab world to promote its own interests. Kuwait increased its production to fill the gap left by Iran, while in the British colony of Aden BP constructed a refinery to replace the one lost at Abadan. The Arab world's exploitation of Iran's difficulties confirmed the gap between the two regional blocs, and was to leave some bitterness in Iran in subsequent years.

Following the restoration of the Shah to power in August 1953, the US began to encourage the formation of a regional military bloc, and this led in 1955 to the signing of the Baghdad Pact, comprising Iran, Iraq and Turkey. While this very much reflected the continued dominance of external, western, strategic concerns, it also reflected the shared interests which the monarchs of Iran and Iraq had in facing a rising nationalist tide in the region: the Shah had already weathered the storm of the Mosadeq years, the Hashemites in Iraq were increasingly anxious about the challenge from Egypt. On this basis the first overt Gulf alliance was formed. All was, however, to change in 1958, when the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown and Iraq became an unstable revolutionary republic, the site of successive nationalistic military regimes that were seen as a challenge to Iran's political system and regional influence. Equally, the Iraqi revolution reopened two other issues that were to have a permanent destabilising impact on the region - territorial claims on neighbouring states (Kuwait and Iran's Khuzistan province) and the Kurdish question.

This picture of an apparently compartmentalised Iran and Arab world in the period up to 1958 requires, however, one important qualification, one that

¹¹ The Iraqi revolt of 1920, in which Shi'i clergy played a leading role, was to some degree encouraged by hostility to British plans for Iran: but it was the shared enemy, rather than active solidarity, that produced this interaction.

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was to have an important function in later periods. For if external relations were largely conducted without reference to each other, Iran and the Arabs, and particularly Iran and Iraq, sought to define this new national identity, and territory, in contradistinction to the others. While Reza Khan eliminated the autonomous Arab region ruled by Sheikh Khazal in Khuzistan, the new rulers of Baghdad began to put pressure on the Persian inhabitants of Iraq¹². At the same time, each used perceptions of the other as an important element in a central component of the new process of state formation, namely education. The post-World War I states in both Iran and Iraq sought to consolidate their hold on society by the development of education and by the diffusion of a state ideology of national identity: as elsewhere, such an identity involved both a recuperation of the past, sifted or even invented to suit present purposes, and the identification of what distinguished their own people or 'nation' from others. It was here above all, in the requirements of national state building, that ideologies of antagonism were formed. On the Iranian side, the Pahlavi monarchy sought to distinguish Iran from the Arabs, by highlighting the glories of the pre-Islamic past, by promoting changes in symbolism, vocabulary and personal names, and by identifying Iran as an 'Aryan' as distinct from a Semitic culture and people. In both official and unofficial nationalism, the Arab world became identified with what Iran was not, with what had weakened it in the past¹³. On the Iraqi side a comparable process took place, with an educational programme that drew heavily on the writings of the Arab nationalist Sati' al-Husri. Al-Husri, who worked in Iraq and wrote fictional stories that focussed on the suspicious influence of Iran on the Arabs, not only played up the unique national characteristics of the Arabs, but also identified Persia as the great enemy of the Arab people¹⁴. To ascribe subsequent hostilities between Iran and Iraq simply to

¹² There were an estimated 80 000 Persians in Iraq in 1919. 75% of the population of Karbala were reckoned to be Persians (Nakash, pp.100-101).

¹³ This anti-Arab orientation was no means confined to the official ideologists of the state. From the early nineteenth century onwards Iranian writers identified the source of their country's backwardness in the influence of the Arabs, and Islam, on their country. Ahmad Kasravi, a twentieth century theorist of secular nationalism, sought to locate the backwardness of Iran in the influence upon the Persian peoples of Arab and other, such as Turkish, cultures (Evrard Abrahamian, 'Kasravi: The Integrative Nationalist of Iran', *Middle East Studies*, Vol.9, October 1973).

such ideologies would be simplistic: but the diffusion of such ideas, by states intent on mobilising their populations through nationalist ideology, was a prelude to later inter-state conflicts.

1958-1979: Arab Nationalism Confronts Imperial Iran

If there was, therefore, one event that served to break the mould of previous Gulf politics and lay the foundations for the later decades of instability and rivalry in the Gulf it was the Iraqi revolution of 1958. This for the first time breached the compartmentalisation which had separated the domestic politics of the Arab world from those of Iran, and provoked considerable anxiety within the Iranian regime itself¹⁵. In the first place, the fall of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq marked the beginning of the end for British influence in the Gulf, coming as it did a year and a half after the Anglo-French debacle at Suez: decolonisation was already in the air, yet the fall of the Baghdad monarchy, albeit in a country formally independent since 1932, was a serious additional blow to British influence and prestige. The withdrawals from other comparatively less important states followed: Kuwait 1961, South Yemen 1967, Bahrain, Qatar and the Emirates 1971, Oman 1977. In part, the British place - military, political, economic - was being taken by the USA, which had begun developing its position in the Peninsula in the 1940s and which had taken advantage of the crisis in Iran to displace Britain as the Shah's major ally. But the USA, while increasing its naval presence and becoming the main arms supplier to pro-western regional states, was not willing to duplicate the British presence. The result was that Iran came, increasingly, to present itself as the dominant power in the Gulf: it developed its navy, and, especially after 1971, insisted that the Gulf be known by the name 'Persian Gulf'. During the 1970s this assertion of Iran's

¹⁴ Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear* pp. 152-160. Al-Husri also argued against the possibilities of Muslim unity, counterposing to a more desirable, and attainable, Arab unity. In Sylvia Haim ed., *Arab Nationalism. An Anthology* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964) pp. 147-154.

¹⁵ Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran* (London: University of California Press, 1974), chapter IV, 'Iran-Iraq Relations'. Graphic illustration of how much Iraq concerned the Iranian regime can be found in the diaries of the royal adviser, Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991). These cover the years 1969-1975.

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hegemony was reinforced by the Shah's desire to make Iran a great economic power, a 'second Japan': this imperial project was conceived of as a counter-weight to the Arab world as a whole, and Iran sought to develop its military and economic ties with a bloc of non-Arab states - Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India - as a counter-weight to the Arabs.

This assertion of Iranian influence in the Gulf was a result, however, of another factor, namely the improved relations with the USSR. If after the 1953 coup relations between Tehran and Moscow had been cool, reaching a critical point in 1959, there was thereafter a significant improvement, such that Iran felt, by the middle 1960s, that it did not face a major threat to the north. This meant, in effect, that Iran could refocus its forces to face a possible challenge in the south, from Iraq, and to promote its presence in the Gulf. On the Iraqi side, the revolution of 1958 also opened the way for increased confrontation with Iran: the assertion of Iraqi nationalist aspirations on the one hand, and the involvement of Iran, real or imagined, in the now fragmented domestic politics of Iraq, made the connection with Iran for the first time a factor in Iraqi politics¹⁶. This was all the more so because onto the regional conflict was now superimposed the conflict of the cold war: Iraq, allied with the USSR, faced Iran, an ally of the USA. Iran was seen as a potential supporter both of Kurdish and Shi'ite movements. As a result the tone of Arab nationalist reference to Iran became much more assertive and critical: Iran was accused of expansionism, of using Iranian migrants in the Gulf as agents, of infiltrating the Iraqi educational system and so forth. These themes were particularly present in Ba'thist ideology, where, under the influence of al-Husri, Iran was presented as the age-old enemy of the Arabs.

Al-Husri's impact on the Iraqi education system was made during the period of the monarchy, but it was the Ba'thists, trained in that period and destined to take power later, who brought his ideas to their full, official and racist, culmination. For the Ba'thists their pan-Arab ideology was laced with anti-Persian racism, just as their interpretation of Iraq's international role, and of the character of Iraqi society, rested on the pursuit of anti-Persian themes. Thus over the decade and a half after coming to power, Baghdad organised the expulsion of Iraqis of Persian origin, beginning with 40 000 Fayli Kurds, but totalling up to 200 000 or more, by the early years of the war itself. Such racist

¹⁶ Majid Khadduri, *Republican Iraq* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.181-5.

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policies were reinforced by ideology: in 1981, a year after the start of the Iran-Iraq war, Dar al-Hurriya, the government publishing house, issued *Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews and Flies*. The author, Khairallah Tulfah, was the foster-father and father-in-law of Saddam Hussein¹⁷. It was the Ba'thists too who, claiming to be the defenders of 'Arabism' on the eastern frontiers, brought to the fore the chauvinist myth of Persian migrants and communities in the Gulf being comparable to the Zionist settlers in Palestine¹⁸.

The stage was therefore set for the protracted military rivalry between Iran and the Arab states that lasted for the two decades between the overthrow of the Hashemites in Baghdad and the fall of the Pahlavis in Tehran. Following the revolution of 1958, Iran began to support the Kurds in northern Iraq, a commitment that reached its peak in the period 1969-1975 when Iran and Iraq fought a controlled, but at times intense, border war. Iraq, for its part, provided some assistance to Kurdish groups inside Iran, and, from 1965 began to champion the cause of the Arab population of south-west Iran. Much of the overt conflict between the two states involved the question of the frontier: an unfavourable settlement imposed by Britain on Iran in 1937 was rejected by Iran in 1969, but this border issue was less an issue of substance in itself, a reasonable compromise being possible at any time, and more a symbol around which inter-state and nationalist mobilisation could occur. The settlement reached by Iran and Iraq at Algiers in 1975, an agreement made possible because of Iraq's exhaustion and Soviet withholding of arms supplies to Baghdad, contained three elements: an agreement on the disputed land frontier, an agreement on the Shatt al-Arab water frontier, and, most importantly, an agreement on non-interference in each other's internal affairs. It was around this third issue that the conflict had raged since 1958 and which was to occasion the next, and far bloodier, confrontation after the Iran revolution.

The concentration on conflict with Iraq did not prevent Iran from asserting its position vis-a-vis other states in the region. Relations with the third powerful state in the Gulf, the fellow monarch Saudi Arabia, remained correct, but there was suspicion between the two royal families, not least because of Tehran's closeness to the Hashemites in Baghdad. As the British withdrew, the

¹⁷ *Republic of Fear*, p. 17 n. 21. According to Tulfah, Persians are 'animals God created in the shape of humans'.

¹⁸ Abdulghani pp. 77-78.

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USA tried to promote a loose alliance, the 'twin pillar' policy, involving Iran and Saudi Arabia in a formal 'Gulf Pact': however, this never reached fruition, and the Saudis, lacking a significant military capability, were suspicious of the Iranians. For its part, Iran continued to press for recognition of the 'Persian' character of the Gulf, and was to a considerable extent hostile to the constitutional plans made for the British withdrawal from the smaller Gulf states between 1968 and 1971. Thus Iran at first opposed the independence of Bahrain, and only accepted its sovereignty after a UN 'consultation' of the islands' population. Less officially, but in unmistakable terms, it also insisted that its yielding on Bahrain should be compensated for by the acquisition of three small islands, the Tumbs and Abu Musa, belonging to the Emirates: when no agreement was forthcoming, London acquiesced in the Iranian seizure of the islands in November 1971, on the eve of the British withdrawal. Iran also took advantage of crises in other regional states to assert its military influence : thus it sent support to the royalist forces in North Yemen after 1962, despatched several thousand troops to assist the Sultan of Oman against the Marxist guerrillas in his southern, Dhofar, province between 1973 and 1975, and provided the Bhutto government in Pakistan with helicopter gunships to help suppress the guerrillas operating, with some Iraqi support, in Baluchistan in the early 1970s¹⁹.

These conflicts over influence, nomenclature and military power opposing Iran to the Arab states were not, however, the only side of the picture. In another, very significant, arena, oil, a different pattern emerged, one in which the dividing line conformed not to the Arab-Iranian distinction, but to demography and economic logic. Iran and the Arab states had been members of OPEC since its founding in 1960, but from the early 1970s divergences began to emerge, the Iranians forming an alliance with Arab states, including radical ones, to increase prices. Here Iran and Iraq had a common cause, and one that pitted them against the Saudis and other Arab Gulf states, even as the latter benefitted from higher prices. Throughout the ensuing two and a half decades, Iran and Iraq, for all their other differences, shared a broadly common position on oil prices and quotas: whatever else, their disagreements were not a result of a divergence on economic interest.

The conflicts unleashed by the Iraqi revolution of 1958 lasted for nearly twenty years and produced a linkage between the politics of Iran and the Arab

¹⁹ Chubin and Zabih, Chapters V-VII; Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship_and Development* (London: Penguin, 1978) Chapter 9.

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states that had previously been absent. Yet by 1975 it appeared that these tensions had abated: Iran and Iraq settled their disagreements in Algiers, with Iraq recognising the *thalweg* or middle course principle in division of the Shatt al-Arab river, the revolutionary movement in Dhofar had been defeated, and the Iranians and Saudis, albeit suspicious of each other, had learned to live together. For their part, the Russians and the Americans had, in the spirit of negotiation then prevailing, agreed to reduce their rivalry in the West Asian and Indian Ocean regions. They did not want trouble. All this was, however, to last for only a rather short time: four years later the politics of the Gulf were to be convulsed by another upheaval, as sudden and dramatic as that which had convulsed Iraq in 1958, namely the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979.

1979-1995 : Revolutionary Iran, Aggressive Iraq

The fragile understandings of the mid-1970s were overturned by the Iranian revolution, and its impact on the Arab states of the Gulf. As in the case of all revolutions, interpretations tend to diverge as to whether the subsequent worsening of relations was a result of the actions, based on various forms of internationalist appeal, of the revolutionary regime, or whether the prime responsibility lies with the states opposed to the revolution, who used a supposed 'threat', in this case from Tehran, to pursue their own political goals, domestically and in the region. The reality, in the case of the Iranian revolution, as much as in that of other revolutions caught up in such conflicts (France after 1789, Russia after 1917, China after 1949, Nicaragua after 1979 etc.) is that both factors operated. No objective reader of the record can doubt that Iranian leaders did appeal to fellow revolutionaries, and in particular to Shi'ites, beyond their own frontiers, and that at least some sections of the Iranian state gave active, financial and military, support to such forces. No one can doubt either that on occasion Iranian leaders challenged frontiers: they allowed clashes to develop along the land frontier with Iraq and some sought to revise the agreement on Bahrain which the Shah had concluded in 1971²⁰. At the same time, it is equally

²⁰ R. K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran. Challenge and Response in the Middle East* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) Chapter 4. Ramazani argues, persuasively, that it was the fall of the more cautious Bazargan government in November 1979 which precipitated the more militant phase of Iran's policy towards Iraq.

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evident that Arab regimes, and the Iraqi regime in particular, responded to the Iranian revolution by seeking to promote their own interests in the Gulf: in other words, beyond a very real apprehension about the potential impact of the Iranian revolution on their own people, and above all on the Kurds and the Shi'ites, the Baghdad regime believed it had an opportunity to wrest dominance of the Gulf from Iran and to push its territorial and other claims against Iran itself. We shall never know the full story, but it would seem likely that, in part influenced by the exaggerated reports of Iranian exiles, in part deluded by their own fantasies and lack of information, the Iraqi regime believed that by attacking Iran it could lead to the fall of the Khomeini regime itself²¹. The result of these multiple forces was the Iraqi attack on Iran in September 1980, and the ensuing eight year war, the second longest war between states of the twentieth century²².

As with any war, it is too easy to identify one single cause: both sides contributed to the outbreak of hostilities in September 1980, which was preceded by months of recrimination and border clashes, and in each case several factors seem to have operated. International factors were certainly present: Iran saw an opportunity to promote its revolutionary message, against Iraqi and other Arab leaders; Iraq believed it could reverse its 1975 acceptance of the *thalweg* division of the Shatt al-Arab and project its power in the Gulf. In both states too there were groups who saw the Iranian revolution as an opportunity to revive their causes and becoming politically active - the Kurds and Shi'ites in Iraq, the Kurds and Arabs in Iran. The old fear which both states had, of external support for domestic opposition, had returned.

However, on their own these causes could hardly have led to war. The decisive factors were, in each case, internal. On the Iranian side, the revolution, like all such processes, unleashed a political process in which calls for revolution abroad, and assertions of the importance which the new regime had in other countries, were part of the domestic legitimacy of the state itself. In addition, in

²¹ 'Never Invade a Revolution' ran the editorial in *The Times* soon after the outbreak of hostilities. For analysis see references in note 19 and al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, 'Conclusion'.

²² The war lasted seven years and eleven months, two months less than the Sino-Japanese war of 1937-1945. Among general accounts see Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988); John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, *The Gulf War. Its Origins, History and Consequences* (London: Methuen, 1989).

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the Iranian as in other revolutions the ideology of the revolution led its exponents to deny the very legitimacy, or importance, of inter-state frontiers: when Khomeini proclaimed 'Islam has no frontiers', he was merely repeating, in altered form, what revolutionaries of the past two centuries had proclaimed²³. The reason for this was primarily the logic of the ideology itself: if the ideals in the name of which the old regime had been overthrown and a new regime was being created, were to be legitimated this could not be done simply by reference to what was occurring within Iran. If they had any relevance, it had to be an international one. On the Iraqi side, two very important factors operated: on the one hand, the fear of domestic challenge, encouraged to a greater or lesser extent officially by Iran, on the other, the temptation to consolidate domestic legitimacy by an act of international bravado that would mobilise patriotic sentiment within²⁴. No explanation of the outbreak of the war can omit the role which these domestic factors, products of the contrasted priorities of the two states involved, played.

The consequences of the war were three. In the first place, the Iraqi attack, far from leading to the collapse of the Iranian regime, enabled the Islamic Republic to consolidate its hold, political and administrative, on the country. Within three years of the war having started, and most spectacularly in the confrontation with the Mujahidin-i Khalq in July 1981, the regime had confronted, and defeated, all the main opposition currents in the country. At the same time it not only rebuilt the regular army, but developed para-military institutions, the *basij* and the *pasdaran*, that served both internal political as well as front-line functions. The long-term cost to Iran of the war was enormous, in terms of destruction and lost opportunities, but the immediate result was to give the regime a patriotic legitimacy it had sorely lacked, not least because of the sense, widespread in 1978 and 1979, that Khomeini was too influenced by the Arabs. Within a short time, Iran had reconstructed a viable, if disorganised, army and air force; in the longer run the war led to the mobilisation of large numbers of young people into military and para-military units²⁵. At the

²³ Fred Halliday, 'Iranian Foreign Policy Since 1979: Internationalism and Nationalism in the Islamic Revolution', in Juan Cole and Nikki Keddie, eds. *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (London: Yale University Press, 1986).

²⁴ On the Iraqi Shi'ite opposition see Hanna Batatu, 'Shi'a Organizations in Iraq: al-Da'wah al-Islamiyah', in Cole and Keddie, eds.

²⁵ See Chubin and Tripp op. cit.

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level of ideology, the regime also adjusted its message to introduce patriotic, as well as strictly Islamic, elements into its appeal: Khomeini, in the initial days of the revolution had spoken only of the 'people of Islam', now began to talk of Iran and of the need to defend this particular country (*mihan*).

Secondly, the Iraqi attack on Iran led to a realignment of the other Arab Gulf states. To say that they simply supported Iraq would be mistaken. They continued to fear Iraq, and, in varying measures, maintained relations with Iran: while Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were closest to Iraq, and provided substantial financial support to Baghdad, estimated at around \$30 billions by the end of the war, some lower Gulf states, notably Dubai and Oman, maintained commercial and diplomatic links to Tehran. One of the most striking indices of this dual concern, directed both at Baghdad and Tehran, was the founding of the Gulf Cooperation Council. For years prior to the Iranian revolution, there had been calls, most notably from the USA and Iran, for the establishment of a Gulf alliance, or pact: the reason it was not set up was that the Arabs, and particularly Saudi Arabia, feared Iranian dominance. At the same time, the Arab monarchies feared Iraq, just as, to a lesser extent, they feared Yemen. Rich monarchies, with small populations, feared larger states, not least Arab republics, with large populations and comparatively less oil resources. It is this dual concern which explains the timing of the establishment of the GCC: March 1981. **It was only possible to establish this union of Arab monarchs once both Iran and Iraq were otherwise distracted:** the main function of the GCC was not, as it might have appeared at the time, to control Iranian influence, but rather to protect the Arab monarchies from the influence of Iraq. Its correct title might have been the 'Keep Saddam Hussein Out of the Gulf Council'.

The timing of the founding of the GCC is important, however, because it occurred at a time when Iraq was in a stronger military situation and appeared to be capable of winning victory over Iran: the other Gulf states understood very well what this could mean for them. They provided aid to Iraq, but at the same time feared its triumph. When, from the middle of 1982, the tide of war swung against Iraq, and when it appeared that Iran might win, their problem was to a large extent resolved: they could now support Iraq without fearing negative consequences for themselves. In 1984 this alignment with Iraq went a stage further when Iraq, seeking to internationalise the war, began attacking Iranian shipping: since, because of the Iranian blockade of Iraqi ports, there was no Iraqi shipping for Iran to retaliate against, Iran began attacking the ships of Iraq's

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closest allies, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The 'tanker war', in which the USA and other navies were eventually drawn on Iraq's side, had begun.

The third consequence of the war was a gradual alienation of Iran from the populations of the Arab Gulf states. This is not an issue about which it is easy to be precise: there is a need to be sceptical about claims either that there was great sympathy for Iran immediately after Khomeini's advent to power, or that subsequent events completely alienated Arab popular opinion. The reality is that, given the undemocratic nature of these states, no-one can be sure, and in any case sentiment on such issues was probably confused. The Iranians hoped that the oppressed masses, the *mustazafin*, of the Gulf would, as elsewhere support the Iranian revolution. They must also have hoped that where there was a Shi'ite population this would play a leading role in opposing existing governments. There was considerable validity to this latter point of view: in Iraq, support for the underground *al-da'wa al-islamiyya* rose in 1979 and 1980, and the low-level guerrilla war being waged in Iraqi cities must have been a contributing factor to Saddam's decision to go to war with Iran; in Bahrain, an underground Shi'ite organisation came quite near to staging an uprising in 1981; in Kuwait, an urban guerilla bombing campaign by non-Kuwaitis, with some support from Shi'ites in Kuwait, was waged from 1983 to 1985²⁶. However, not only did these movements not succeed, but there is also considerable evidence that even among Shi'ites support for the Iranian revolution was qualified. In Kuwait the majority of the Shi'ites, a community comprising around a quarter of the population, remained supportive of the state. In Bahrain, the Shi'ites, while sympathetic to Iran, continued to work within a Bahraini political framework, calling for the restoration of the constitution abrogated in 1975. Above all, in Iraq the mass of the Shi'ite population, while resenting Saddam, remained supportive, and did not seek to rise in response to Iranian appeals. It would be too simple to say that the Iranian revolution was perceived simply as a Shi'ite revolution, or as yet another chapter in the history of Iranian expansionism. But some suspicion of Tehran, and some support for an Arab or Iraqi patriotism, seem to have been evident²⁷. The result of the war was, therefore, that far from creating more links or solidarity between Arabs and Persians it compounded those divisions which earlier state policies and nationalist movements had created.

²⁶ See Ramazani, Chapter 3; and 'Iran and the Gulf Arabs', *Middle East Report* No. 156, Vol. 19 No. 1, January-February 1989.

²⁷ Faleh Abd al-Jabbar, 'Why the Uprisings Failed', *Middle East Report* No. 176, Vol. 22, No. 3, May/June 1992, pp. 3-4.

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The end of the Gulf war led to some improvement in relations between Iran and the GCC countries, yet suspicions on both sides remained. Tensions continued for some time over the Iranian participation in the *hajj*, the Saudi organisers believing that the Iranian pilgrims were using their visit to Mecca and Medina for political purposes. Relations with the Emirates remained difficult because of the unresolved issue of the Tumbs and Abu Musa: Iranian moves to reinforce their position on these islands led to protests from Arab countries. Above all, however, the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq in August 1988 did not lead to a new period of stability in the Gulf, but rather, after a year and a half of apparent calm, to a new crisis, this time between Iraq and Kuwait, culminating in the Iraqi occupation of the state in August 1990.

There is as little agreement on the causes of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 as there is of its invasion of Iran in 1980²⁸. One contrast is obvious enough: if in the case of Iran in 1980 it could at least be argued that the Iranian revolution presented a political and military threat to the Iraqi regime, this was not so in 1990. Iraq's attack on Kuwait can, however, be seen as following a comparable logic to its earlier assault on Iran. There were international causes, in particular Iraq's sense, shared in this instance by Iran, that its economic strength was being undermined by lower oil prices, a trend encouraged by Kuwaiti and Abu Dhabi exports above their OPEC quotas. The fear that the GCC states were overproducing to keep both Iran and Iraq weak was evident in both Baghdad and Tehran. At the same time, Iraq may have felt that there was a political vacuum in the Middle East caused by the lack of progress in the Arab-Israeli context, which Iraq could fill by a dynamic move. But as in 1980 the domestic factors were important, and in particular the link between the impasse vis-a-vis Tehran and domestic sentiment: Saddam had fought the eight year war with Iran, and had survived, but he had little to show for it. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis had died, tens of thousands were held prisoner by the Iranians, the national debt had risen to an estimated \$80 billions²⁹. Immediately

²⁸ Among many analyses, Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990-1991*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1992); Amatzia Baram and Barry Rubin, *Iraq's Road to War* (London: Macmillan, 1994); 'The Gulf war 1990-1991 and the study of international relations', *Review of International Studies*, (vol. 20 no. 2 April 1994).

²⁹ In itself a debt of \$80 billions, roughly half owed to Arab states and half to western and Soviet institutions, was not catastrophic: Iraq had plenty of oil reserves against which to pledge repayment, and the Arabs had no way of enforcing repayment of their

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after the ceasefire he may have felt that he could impose an unfavourable peace on Iran and he seems to have wanted to wait to see how Tehran would react. But events following the death of Khomeini, in June 1989, followed by mass outpourings of grief and support for the regime, and by the rapid reorganisation of the Iranian government, may have convinced him that he would not wring more concessions from Iran. It can be argued that the attack on Kuwait had less to do with conflict with the Arab world, and more to do with the inability of Saddam to force the Islamic Republic to its knees. In these circumstances, he appears to have felt that, failing any breakthrough on the east, Iraq should try instead to attack Kuwait, as a compensation. The domestic cost of inaction was too high; the prospects of international benefit were too great.

The events following this Iraqi invasion of Kuwait do not need detailed repetition here: suffice it to say that despite its hostility to any external intervention in the Gulf region, Iran did not oppose the US-led coalition in its war with Iraq³⁰. Yet the war, while it reversed the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait, and reduced Iraq's power, did not resolve the most important issues in the Gulf itself that had led to the crisis in the first place. As far as the international issues were concerned, there was no progress : Iraq continued to dispute the frontier with Kuwait, especially after it was redrawn in Kuwait's favour by the UN; there was no progress on the issue of 'unitization', concerning oil fields that lay beneath their common frontier; the issue of oil prices remained beyond any diplomatic or negotiating process, with Iraq remaining under a complete embargo; beyond the specific limits imposed on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, there was no discussion of multilateral arms control measures for the Gulf states as a whole, and an arms race continued apace³¹. Most importantly, the underlying political causes of both wars, the character of the political regimes in Iran and Iraq and, by extension, in other states remained

share. But any such arrangements would have involved international agreements and monitoring of Iraqi finances to which Saddam was opposed.

³⁰ Hooshang Amirahmadi, 'Iran and the Persian Gulf Crisis' in Hooshang Amirahmadi and Nader Entessar eds. *Iran and the Arab World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); Said Amir Arjomand, 'A Victory for the Pragmatists: The Islamic Fundamentalist Reaction in Iran', in James Piscatori ed. *Islamic Fundamentalisms and the Gulf Crisis* (Chicago: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991).

³¹ Anthony Cordesman, *Iran and Iraq: The threat from the Northern Gulf* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1994).

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fundamentally unchanged. If anything, the situation got worse: while in Kuwait there was some political improvement, associated with the parliamentary elections of October 1992, the Saudi elite remained anxious about nationalist and religious discontent, and its constitutional reforms had little effect; in Iran, the regime, buffeted by economic and social pressures, and facing continued difficulties abroad, was more beleaguered than at any time since the crisis of 1981. The difficulties of regional accommodation, and the temptations of external confrontation, therefore remained.

To a considerable extent, the drama of 1990-1991 was therefore followed by a return to the uneasy status quo ante, with the difference that Iraq was, for some time at least, reduced in power. Iran's acceptance of the GCC and US response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait did not lead to any marked improvement in relations with Saudi Arabia, or in relations with Iraq: on the contrary, at least two issues emerged following the Kuwait war to make relations with Saudi Arabia and other states more difficult. One was the continued conflict between Iran and the west, and in particular the USA, now exacerbated by the increased direct US presence in the Gulf, following the Kuwait war. Any prospects of improved Tehran-Washington relations that had existed in the immediate aftermath of the Kuwait war were soon dissipated: by the early months of the Clinton administration, Iran and the USA were once again on collision course, and Washington evolved a policy of 'dual containment' towards both Iran and Iraq. As with the policy of 'containment' vis-à-vis the USSR, the explicit goal of preventing external expansion by these states was accompanied by an implicit goal, that of weakening them within. Although it was not able to get complete western and Japanese support for this policy, Washington was able to put significant economic pressure on Iran. For their part, and despite some differences between them on dealing with Iran, the GCC states rejected Tehran's insistence that the security problems of the Gulf should be solved without external involvement, and in particular without the involvement of the USA. For Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, whose whole security policy rested upon a US guarantee, this was unacceptable. The USA justified its containment of Iran by reference to four issues: Iran's opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process, Iranian support for 'terrorism', including its call for the killing of Salman Rushdie, its alleged plans for nuclear weapons, and its domestic, human rights, record. As in the case of the earlier policy of 'containment' towards the USSR, first enunciated in the 1940s, the apparent goal of the policy, to *contain* the expansion of the revolutionary state concealed another goal, that of

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undermining it altogether, by depriving it of its international ideological legitimation, the spread of revolution³².

The other issue that divided Iran from the GCC, less obviously spelt out but present in the minds of Gulf rulers, was the fear that if there were a crisis in Iraq, and if the regime was foundering under international or domestic pressure, the Iranians would take advantage of it and install their own supporters in Baghdad. Iran had failed to promote an uprising in Iraq during the eight year war, and had been indecisive in the opportunity opened up by the Iraqi uprising of March 1991: but Iran obviously retained a long-term interest in the political future of Iraq and could be expected to take advantage of any new crisis to promote its interests, through both its Kurdish and Shi'ite associates. For the Saudis, and probably for the others, a weakened Ba'thist regime, even with Saddam in charge, was thought preferable to the creation of a pro-Iranian Islamic Republic of Iraq³³.

Gulf Geopolitics in the 1990s: the Issues

From the perspective of the mid-1990s the Gulf would appear to be one of the potentially most unstable regions of the world, given the combination of economic resources, militarized tension, and internal political instability. Yet beyond this evident instability it is worth examining in what the difficulties consist. As far as international questions are concerned, one can identify at least six areas of tension: territory, ethnic and religious minorities, oil, arms races, conflicts in foreign policy orientation, and interference in each other's internal affairs. Yet the sheer accumulation of these issues need not lead to alarmist conclusions. The territorial issues, if properly addressed, can be resolved by compromise, be they the Shatt al-Arab or the Tumbs and Abu Musa: by the

³² Geoffrey Kemp, *Forever Enemies? American Policy and the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Washington: the Carnegie Endowment, 1994); Fred Halliday, 'An Elusive Normalization: Western Europe and the Iranian Revolution', *The Middle East Journal* Vol. 48 No. 2 Spring 1994.

³³ Even if, in a longer-term perspective, such a second Islamic Republic would be most unlikely to enjoy good relations with Iran: one could envisage that, after initial protestations of eternal Islamic fraternity, a revolutionary Islamic Iraq would find itself at odds with Tehran, a Shi'ite China to Tehran's Moscow.

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standards of other border disputes, these are relatively minor affairs. The question of minorities is again something that can, when not enflamed by external factors, be resolved. Iraq has no formal claim on Khuzistan, while Iran accepts the sovereignty of the Gulf states in which Iranian minorities live. These communities only become a major, international, problem, when states for other reasons chose to make them so. As far as oil is concerned, there are differences of opinion, and interest, but, as in the 1970s, these correspond not to any Iranian-Arab division, but to the division that underlay the Iraqi attack on Kuwait in 1990, namely that between oil-producing states with larger and small populations, and between states which are disputing a restricted world market. It is commercial and demographic factors, not religion or history, that explain this issue, which is one that can also be resolved by multilateral negotiation: for this, OPEC remains the obvious forum. The issue of the arms race is, equally, one that should, under suitable political conditions, be open to resolution: for all that arms races are seen as having an autonomy of their own, beyond political rationale or control, that in the Gulf is born of the evident political suspicions of the three major states of each other and of the sense that each may be tempted, for reasons of political calculation, to engage in further military adventures in the future. The same applies, *a fortiori*, to the two final issues mentioned above, non-interference and foreign policy coordination: the former is a pure function of political will, of calculation by regimes of where their state and national interest lies; the latter is something which could easily be resolved, through a combination of tolerated diversity, as on the Arab-Israeli question, and broad consultation.

It is not the issues themselves that pose the greatest problems, but rather the insecurity of the three major regimes vis-a-vis their own peoples and their fears as to what others will seek to exploit. In such circumstances relations between Iran and the Arabs, and the ideologies of rivalry and suspicion which Gulf states generate, reflect the political character of these states themselves. What we see in the 1990s is what has been the pattern since the collision of Arab nationalism with Iranian state interests first emerged in 1958: the upheavals in both Arab states and in Iran have produced a situation in which the politics of all countries are now interconnected but this interconnection has been accompanied by the intervention of states whose ideologies stress the differences, and reinforce the psychological gaps, between Iranians and Arabs. The rise of the modern state, and of forms of radical nationalism and revolutionary ideology associated with it, has, therefore, in addition to dividing

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Iraq from the Arab monarchies of the Gulf, served to drive a deeper wedge than ever before between the Arab world and Iran ends.