

IMPERIALISM ENTANGLED IN GU



LF'S RISING WATERS

By Behnad Gugushvili*

It has been seven years since the Iran-Iraq war began. With over a million casualties and incalculable destruction, this long-lasting war is no doubt living testimony to the criminal abomination of the imperialist system and the reactionary forces preserving it as well as of the two belligerents themselves. The bloody hands of all the imperialist powers — the U.S., USSR, France, Britain, W. Germany, Italy, Sweden, etc. — and their reactionary client states such as Israel, Syria, Saudi Arabia, China, can be seen in every criminal act of this war. The

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secret plotting and backroom scheming, the long-term and short-term manoeuvring of both imperialist blocs; headed by the U.S. and the USSR, along with their recent military build up and jockeying in the Persian — or Arab — Gulf and the Sea of Oman, are all evidence of this. The reactionary Gulf war is an embodiment of the intensification of the main contradictions and crisis of the imperialist world system and its increasing fragility, as all the imperialist powers become further entangled in the coil of a deadly rivalry to preserve and expand their overall strategic interests.

Background to the Gulf War

“The cumulative effect of the events and decisions of 1979-1980 was a strategic revolution in America’s global position. Up until the 1970s, U.S. foreign policy was anchored on the principle of interdependence with Western Europe and then later with the Far East. The Middle East was viewed as a semi-neutral (sic — *AWTW*) zone sealed off from Soviet power by a protective belt composed of Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, with a neutral Afghanistan providing a buffer. America’s interests, as well as the security of the Persian Gulf, was seen as resting on two secure pillars, Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, the collapse of Iran and the Soviet move into Afghanistan, preceded by the unimpeded Soviet military intrusion into Ethiopia and South Yemen, created an urgent security problem for the region as a whole, prompting by 1980 formal U.S. recognition of the security interdependence of three, instead of two, zones of central strategic importance to the United States: Western Europe, the Far East, and the Middle East” — Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Adviser to U.S. President Carter.¹

The Iranian revolution of 1979 and the Nicaraguan revolution that followed it were expressions of a great crisis that has gripped the imperialist world since the early 1970s. A crisis that each day demands a serious resolution more powerfully than the day before. The waves of the revolutionary struggle

of the Iranian people succeeded in depriving U.S. imperialism of its regional gendarme, and a gaping hole was blown open in the U.S. regional network of vassal states and faithful lackeys. Following on the heels of their defeat in Indochina, revolution in another U.S.-dependent country hit the “Number 1 World Master” hard. Among the oppressed and exploited it gave rise to revolutionary enthusiasm and a spirit of support for the Iranian masses’ struggle, both in U.S.-dependent countries and the imperialist countries themselves. For the U.S. imperialists, this meant losing its grip on a tremendous source of plunder and, even more, a strategic piece of territory. It meant the shutting down of one of the most important U.S. military and espionage bases in the region; the loss of vital listening centres along the southern borders of the Soviet Union; the expulsion from Iran of tens of thousands of American military and non-military experts and advisers; the dissolution of the ties commanding the half-a-million strong, armed-to-the-teeth army of the Shah; and the breaking up of the regional pact of Turkey-Iran-Pakistan, which was considered the extension of NATO to the Indian Ocean. For the Soviet social-imperialists, this meant a tremendous opening to advance its interests in its rivalry with the U.S.-headed imperialist bloc, especially since the genuine proletarian revolutionary forces were weak and unable to seize on the situation so as to turn it into a graveyard for the reactionaries.

The revolution, especially the Shah’s fall and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, gave rise to what the imperialists called a “power vacuum” in the region. In the course of this development, the Soviet social-imperialists took concrete measures to expand their influence in Iran and prevent the reconversion of its southern neighbour into a U.S. base. Obviously the Soviets were happy even with what had already transpired: the atmosphere of instability provided them with new room for manoeuvring to penetrate Iran. U.S. instability in the region made it possible

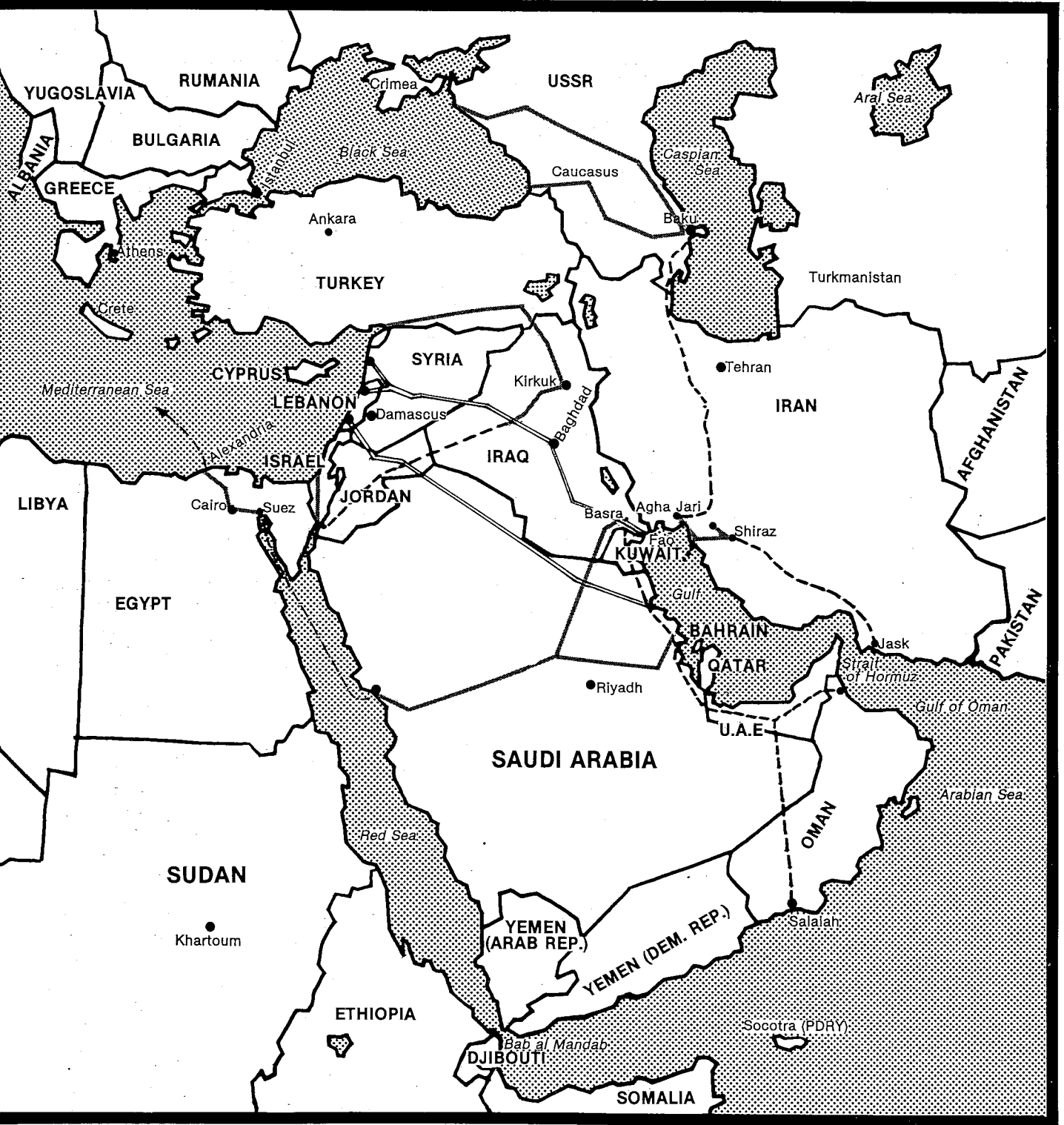
for them to occupy Afghanistan with an army of 120,000 shortly after the February revolution in Iran.

The U.S. was not just sitting by idly. As it became clear that the Shah was going to fall, months before this actually happened, American strategists tendered an approach towards the Islamic opposition and especially to Khomeini’s trend, which was at the fore, and undertook other major steps. In 1980, President Carter declared, “Any attempt by outside forces to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”² The U.S. promptly took steps to strengthen its client states such as Turkey, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and to build up its own military strength in the region. The military coup in Turkey on 12 September 1980 and the brutal clampdown on the revolutionaries there was part of this propping up.

Brzezinski wrote to President Carter in October 1980 that a war in the Gulf region would potentially be a threat to the region, but “the threat to the Gulf gives us a unique opportunity to consolidate our security position.” “We need to begin more subtle initiatives ... to put pressure on Iran in order to push it back from most if not all occupied territory and safeguard Iran from Soviet penetration or internal disintegration. We should enlist the help of Turkey, Algeria, Pakistan and the People’s Republic of China. Private and secret initiatives are needed.”³

The U.S. developed an overall strategy towards the Gulf which consisted of wearing out and suppressing the revolution in Iran, and through a series of carrot-and-stick policies reforging a favourable government in Iran; containing the Soviet advances in the region, especially in Iran; consolidating the client states of Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states; expanding its influence in the states such as Iraq and South Yemen and using all pretences to build up its military presence and involve its

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allies there in a qualitatively greater way. In the face of all this, the Soviets pressed their own interests, using every escalation by the U.S. to move in themselves, including with warships, all the while trying to present themselves as the non-belligerent superpower.

U.S. Imperialism and the Islamic Republic

Before Khomeini took power, the U.S. worked for a better alternative than Khomeini to try to put an end to the tumultuous period of social upheaval and revolutionary ferment and to prevent further disintegration of the U.S.-propped up state structure (especially its army and intelligence organisation). But they found no one else. Therefore, they paved the way for the establishment of the Islamic Republic (with its early heterogenous composition), or, to put it more accurately, they did not create serious obstacles to Khomeini's assuming power.

After the establishment of the new regime, the U.S. imperialists began to tighten up the remaining ties and develop new ties between Iran and the West. They assisted the Islamic Republic in breaking and diverting the strong revolutionary anti-imperialist spirit of the Iranian masses, in hunting and butchering the revolutionaries and suppressing the workers, peasants and oppressed nationalities. Under the instructions of the U.S. imperialists (see the review of General Huyser's memoirs in *AWTW* No. 9), officers in the army and SAVAK (the Shah's intelligence service, built and trained by the CIA and Israel's Mossad) declared their solidarity with the new regime, were given amnesty by Khomeini himself and were even taken back to work for the new rulers. These officers repaired the shattered army and SAVAK (now called SAVAMA) and assisted the buildup of the so-called Revolutionary Guards (*Sepah-e Pasdaran*, Islamic paramilitary armed forces which paralleled the regular army) of the Islamic Republic. All these forces were immediately dispatched on criminal operations to halt and suppress the just revolutionary struggle in Kurdistan and the anti-

feudal war of the peasants in Turkaman Sahra, to murder masses of the Arab people in Khuzestan (the south of Iran), etc.

It should be mentioned that even from the first days of the Islamic Republic, the Soviet revisionist lackeys in Iran actively joined in the rebuilding of the regime's military and intelligence forces. They sought to contain and suppress any revolutionary upheaval along the USSR's southern borders; also, according to their line of thinking, these were key areas in attempts to amass strength and influence in the state structure and expand Soviet influence over the new regime as well as prepare the ground for a possible Afghanistan-style Soviet-sponsored "revolution."

The U.S. imperialists also put political, economic and military pressure on the Islamic Republic to shake up the new regime and give birth to new alignments of reactionary forces and to create more favourable conditions for pro-U.S. forces within the state and throughout Iran. In December 1979, Brzezinski recommended "a number of steps designed to enhance our security presence in the region and to place greater pressure on Iran, including the possibility of assisting efforts to unseat Khomeini. I was particularly drawn to the notion of seizing Kharq Island and imposing a military blockade on Iran, combined perhaps with some air strikes."⁴ From these memoirs and other later revelations, it is apparent that the U.S. imperialists decided that massive military strikes might alienate some Islamic factions in Iran and Afghanistan from the U.S. and entail "Soviet exploitation of any major U.S. military action."⁵ But they were also concerned that some unforeseen "third force" might emerge (meaning the development of revolutionary upheaval in the whole society, springing free of the bloody reign of the new regime).

In the context of the U.S.' objectives and limitations, the Iraqi invasion of Iran in September 1980 was indeed invaluable for the U.S. and Western imperialists — and for the Soviet social-imperialists as well. Both used the Gulf war to the utmost and increased their influence

in this region at the expense of massive bloodletting of the two nations. The Iraqi invasion was backed by the U.S. with the hope of carrying out its objectives in Iran and also to increase its influence in Iraq. However, the complexity of the situation and the intensity of the inter-imperialist contention did not allow the U.S. to throw its full weight behind Iraq in the war, which would have risked pushing Iran decisively into the arms of the Soviets. The Soviets could not seriously oppose their long-time ally Iraq, nor could they alienate Iran. Thus the U.S. and Soviets, along with their allies, and through their clients, each *actively* played both sides of the war in order to safeguard and advance their imperialist interests.

The War Begins

On 22 September 1980, after a period of limited hostilities between the Iranian and Iraqi regimes ranging from the dropping of anti-Iraq leaflets by Iranian airplanes in Iraq to the sabotage of Iranian pipelines in Khuzestan and some border clashes, Iraqi forces launched a surprise attack, entering Iran from the south and west and occupying considerable parts of it, including Khorramshahr, Mehran, Susangerd and Qasr-e Shirin. Simultaneously, Iraqi airplanes dropped bombs on several Iranian cities. This lightning attack was designed to ensure rapid victories. The Islamic regime halted the Iraqis, and it did so by utilising the powerful anti-imperialist sentiments of the masses and obviously by relying on the masses' illusions about the Khomeini regime itself.

The first period of the war began in September 1980 and continued up to the summer of 1982. This period was essentially marked by the Islamic Republic's efforts to recover the occupied territory. During the same period the ground was laid for more openings to the West, and ties were established and strengthened. The Iranian armed forces met their military needs by resorting to the international markets through different European, Israeli and Argentine channels. These channels led mainly to one source: the U.S. Defense

Department.

The bloody hands of the old-line European imperialists were also active. It was revealed in 1987 that the main arms purchaser for the Islamic Republic was operating out of London with the full connivance of the British government. Further, it came out that the pre-1986 "socialist" government headed by Mitterrand had made substantial arms deals with Iran, while 40 percent of total French arms sales were going to Iraq. In this year of revelations, it even came to light that Italian mines were being laid in the warfields and waters of the Gulf and that nice, sweet peace-loving Sweden was selling arms to Iran. An updated "Special National Intelligence Estimate" on Iran worked out by the CIA and the National Security Council staff "portrayed the Soviets as well positioned to take advantage of chaos inside Iran. Our European and other allies could, however, provide a valuable presence to help protect Western interests. . . The degree to which these allies can fill a military gap for Iran will be a critical measure of the West's ability to blunt Soviet influence."⁶

The economic boycott of Iran by the West in the aftermath of the "hostage" affair provided favourable terrain for the East bloc to build up an extensive relationship with Iran, and numerous commercial proposals were made. In the early months of the war, transport of commodities to and from Iran went through the USSR. In view of Iran's military needs, the Soviets proposed military cooperation plans in an attempt to develop an important link in their relations with Iran, especially in this sensitive area. This was accompanied by a significant reduction in Soviet arms exports to Iraq. The Islamic Republic, however, did not accept the military proposals, for the needs of the U.S.-built army left over from the days of the Shah were basically American needs. In addition, the Soviets were not able to give all-around support to the Iranian regime because the other side in the war, Iraq, was a Soviet sphere of influence in the region, and the two countries had even signed a

"friendship and cooperation" pact in the early 1970s. Although significant pro-Western tendencies arose in the Iraqi ruling class towards the end of the 1970s, and although Iraq's attack on Iran was basically provoked by the U.S., the Soviets had significant concrete interests there which they had no intention of losing. Hence in the early days of the war the Soviets did not support Iran's proposal in the United Nations to condemn the Iraqi invasion. Due to the contradictoriness of the Soviet position and the overall complexity of the situation in the Gulf, active open political and military support for the Iranian regime was to be provided by two old rivals of the Iraqi regime, themselves close Soviet allies: Libya and Syria.

The Gulf War: A "Gift from God"

The war appeared to the Islamic Republic at the beginning to be a way to consolidate its counter-revolutionary rule and achieve national unity. Today it is a cause of great instability.

In the early days of the war, Khomeini called it "a gift from God." There is no doubt that it was a "gift from God" because like any other "gift from God" — including Khomeini's regime itself — this too sucked the blood of the oppressed! The war indeed rescued the regime from the masses' anger in the short-run. It started at a time when the Islamic Republic was internally torn with differences and its rule had been challenged in many parts of the country by the revolutionary masses; the communist movement, though without a clear orientation or a correct line, was growing; the revolutionary national war in Kurdistan was developing rapidly and the workers' movement was on the rise; and a peasant war in northern Iran (Turkaman Sahra) had just been put down. The revolutionary and anti-imperialist mask of the regime had been tarnished and their demagoguery was hardly cutting the mustard! When at the beginning of the war Iraqi bombs tore apart the city of Abadan, a major oil centre, and it was abandoned, one

of Khomeini's mouthpieces called this a good thing "because Abadan had become the Stalingrad of Iran." Which is true: in the workers' quarters Hezbollah gangs could not enter and tear down communist posters, rip up literature or knife revolutionaries, a common practice of such vigilantes in other parts of the country (leaving aside Kurdistan, which had become a burial ground for the Hezbollah).

Although the war had been triggered by the imperialists, the Islamic Republic used it from the beginning for its own reactionary ends, for suppressing the masses, launching extensive attacks on the revolutionaries and tempering its own military and paramilitary forces. The fact that Khomeini and other hated heads of the Islamic Republic were aggressively pounding the drums of war and calling for "war until victory" was not because of some reactionary mullah fantasy of establishing "World Islamic Rule" or "conquering Karbala,"⁷ etc. Even if some muddle-headed Hezbollah had any such illusions, the repeated and scandalous defeats of the Islamic Republic's "great offensive" at the front lines and the growing hatred of the oppressed masses of Iran and the Middle East for these great liars and butchers of the Iranian revolution has wiped out the basis for such fantasies. The war became a convenient cover for the Khomeini regime to disguise the real causes of the continuation and intensification of the social and economic misery of the masses. It gave the regime an easy cover to hunt down and murder revolutionaries and carry out more intensive, extensive and more open political suppression, like the medieval-style inquisitions, all in the name of national interests. Just to cite one example from the first days of the war: many youth and revolutionary Arabs, who are among the most downtrodden strata in the oil-producing state of Khuzestan, were arrested and shot, accused of being "Iraq's fifth column."

The Islamic Republic launched a vigorous ideological campaign, of nationalism in order to mitigate and divert the outrage of the masses away from itself and towards the

"foreign enemy," and called for "unity under the banner of Islam to save the country." It tried to unleash national chauvinism among the masses to isolate the Kurdish national struggle.

But very soon, in less than a year, the Islamic Republic grew more exposed, and many saw its ugly face and realised that the main enemy lies inside the borders. In the meantime, internal divisions in the ruling classes widened and Khomeini's own President (Bani-Sadr) and his followers started an open campaign against the dominant Islamic Republic Party. These cleavages opened the way for the boiling anger and outrage of the masses to burst forth.

Waves of the mass movement rose up against the dominant faction in the Islamic Republic. For various reasons that are beyond the scope of this article (see "Defeated Armies Learn Well," by the UIC, *AWTW* No. 4), the genuine communist forces were not able to seize the opportunity and rally the masses under a revolutionary line. Thus the prospects, scope and demands of the mass movement remained limited and an alliance of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois forces assumed the leadership of the masses in the cities.

But in any event, the birth and spread of this movement was a serious obstacle to the regime and necessitated a serious settling of accounts on their part. In the last days of spring 1981, the security, military and paramilitary forces of the regime unleashed a simultaneous, all-out assault on President Bani-Sadr and his followers, on the mass movements, on communist and revolutionary organisations, and on individuals and groups within the opposition; after several months of bloody suppression, the developing offensive spirit of the masses was seriously set back, and finally crushed. To bring the masses to their knees, the regime executed more than 500 people per day for more than one month: communists, other revolutionaries, workers, nationalists, youth, university students, teachers, poets, writers and members of the bourgeois opposition. Their names were printed daily in the press. The Islamic

Republic carried out the infamous "Indonesian solution" (as it is called by the U.S. imperialists, after Sukharto's bloody massacre of Indonesian revolutionaries in 1965), a solution which the U.S. had hesitated letting the Shah try for fear of provoking revolutionary upheaval. No wonder that in this period, the West, particularly the U.S., and also the pro-imperialist monarchist opposition, adopted an attitude of approval, and even at the Iran-Iraq front a kind of "ceasefire," or more accurately, a lessening of hostilities, took place.

In the spring of 1982, the Islamic Republic managed to reoccupy the main areas in Iran seized earlier by the Iraqi army. Now the armed forces of both sides essentially lined up behind their own borders, face to face. However, this did not mean the end of the war. Rather, a new phase in the Gulf war began: a stalemate during which the Western media referred to "the forgotten war" or "the dead-end of the Gulf war." This long period was marked by scattered and extensive attacks by Iran on Iraqi soil, sometimes leading human waves over minefields

The War and Factions

All along these criminals have used the war in their infighting, each trying to be the most die-hard supporter of the war and the most able to obtain war supplies. Provision of war needs, especially weapons, became a cover for each faction to seek ties with the imperialists, especially the superpowers, while continuing their shameless "anti-imperialist" sloganeering. During the course of the Gulf war foreign policy became the pivot for internal power struggles.

Ayatollah Karoubi, in his secret talks with Israeli officials in the fall of 1985 (disclosed during Irangate), said that Iranian politics were dominated by three parties, all of which were united in their commitment to the Islamic Revolution. "But the parties differed over foreign policy... They don't even know if they have support abroad and who is supporting them and, if they have it, what they should do and what is expected of them. My group has the knowledge, influence and a certain power, and it can be put in service of the joint interest." The Ayatollah pleaded for the West to adopt a policy of trying for the "moderation of the religious regime," rather than for its "subversion." He assured the Israeli official, the director-general of its Foreign Ministry, that his group believes that "the United States is less evil than the Soviet Union."¹ The infamous U.S. dele-

gation to Tehran headed by Robert McFarlane reported that the high-ranking Iranians they met with said that, "You should know that if there is only one other country in the world which is against the USSR, it is us. We have a famous saying: The enemy of your enemy is your friend."²

It is clear that the faction the Western press continuously refers to as "moderate" has a greater share of power, and that the so-called radicals are contending to hold to their share or to reach the top by more drastic means, such as by exposing the links of the first group with the West, by building up a stronger base among the Hezbollah and using it as a pressure group against the "moderates," and/or by seeking links to the East bloc. The "moderates" are headed by three of Khomeini's top men: Rafsanjani, the head of the Iranian Parliament, the Majlis; Musavi, the Prime Minister; and Khameini, the President. It was this group which, with Khomeini's knowledge and support, met with the U.S. delegation in Tehran in 1986. And it was the so-called radicals who, not part of the deal, first exposed it through leaflets in Tehran on 15 October and then leaked it out to the world through their Syrian friends. On 4 November, Rafsanjani publicly announced the U.S. mission but said that McFarlane and Co were "uninvited

and leaving countless victims in their wake. At this same time, weapons poured into both countries. The biggest military contracts were signed between Iraq and the Western countries, especially France, placing modern, sophisticated weaponry in the hands of Iraq's armed forces. The imperialists delivered their tested and even untested chemical bombs for Iraq to try on the battlefield, a criminal experiment costing thousands of lives. The Arab countries supplied Iraq with continuous aid — financial support from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait

and military supplies from Egypt and Jordan.

The market was also hot for selling spare parts to Iran for its U.S. Phantom jets, and anti-aircraft, anti-tank and ground-to-ground missiles. During this period there was not a trace of the West's economic boycott of Iran. The gates of commerce were opened to Japan, West Germany, Turkey, Italy. The Gulf war provided the West with a harvest of political, military and economic fruit in Iran.

The Soviets, witnessing the increasingly open penetration of

Iraq by the West and especially the U.S., re-evaluated their policy of reducing arms sales to Iraq and granted a \$2 billion credit to Baghdad; they also started up arms exports again so as to reinforce their position in Iraq against their imperialist rivals. In Iran, however, in 1983, the Soviet military security network suffered a heavy blow. In part thanks to the collaboration of the British and U.S. intelligence services, the Islamic Republic arrested more than 200 Soviet agents who had infiltrated the army, the *Pasdaran*, the intelligence apparatus and the high ranks of various ministries; among them was the commander-in-chief of the naval forces of the Islamic Republic, who was later executed. The Tudeh Party and the Fedayeen Majority (both Soviet-dependent revisionist parties) were declared illegal and some of their leadership was arrested. Eighteen Russian diplomats were expelled for espionage. Diplomatic relations between the two countries grew tense, though there were hardly any changes in the two countries' economic relations.

About this same time, the Islamic Republic — seizing upon the ebb in the overall revolutionary mood in the country — launched an all-out assault on the areas not under its control in Kurdistan and on the national struggle going on there; these areas were occupied by the Islamic Republic. Despite this military victory in Kurdistan, however, the regime was unable to stabilise its rule there. The regime had to establish hundreds of military outposts in the villages of Kurdistan and station tens of thousands of its *Pasdaran* and soldiers. It was forced to impose martial law in the cities, closing down the streets at 5 o'clock. It had to resort to the forced migration of Kurdish peasants to strategic hamlets. Nonetheless it has failed to subdue the heroic masses of Kurdistan.

in the Islamic Republic

guests"! Rafsanjani quickly got Khomeini's approval to round up the "radicals" and put their chief in front of a firing squad on the charge of having "declared war on God."

These events further revealed the desperation of the Khomeini regime. According to the report of the McFarlane delegation, published in *The Tower Commission Report*, "... in the course of the four-hour meeting it became evident that the three Iranian leaders — Rafsanjani, Musavi and Khomeini — are each traumatised by the recollection that after Bazargan met with Brzezinski in the spring of 1980, he was deposed (so strong was popular sentiment against doing business with the Great Satan) They still cannot overcome their more immediate problem of how to talk to us and stay alive. They are very fearful for their own vulnerability to factional attack if they are discovered in this dialogue before they can condition the people to a different perception of the U.S."³

Despite its representatives' fears for their skin, the regime more generally considers that its own life requires that it be sponsored more closely by the imperialists. It rests atop a comprador system engineered by and for the imperialists. To become the guardians of such a system without the imperialist masters is very difficult. The Iranian

rulers understand this well. As their Foreign Affairs Adviser said to the U.S. delegation: "We want TOWs, especially with technicians... We would appreciate your advice on F-14/Phoenix and Harpoon missiles. When the spare parts come on a large-scale, the public will naturally know where they come from. After some of this movement, our leaders could meet and accept this change officially. We have to prepare the people for such a change. Step by step."⁴

If at one point the Iran-Iraq war was a point of unity among the different reactionary circles of the Islamic Republic, today, with every round of intensification or ebb in the war, the in-fighting heats up and makes the Islamic Republic even more vulnerable. The problem that worries the Islamic Republic most of all is that these divisions will provide openings for a violent outpouring of the masses' outrage which would deal mortal blows to the Islamic Republic.

— B.G.

Footnotes

1. All quotes from "Deeper Inside a U.S.-Iran Link," *International Herald Tribune*, 13 October, 1987.
2. *The Tower Commission Report* (New York: Times Books, 1987), p. 313.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 298-299.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 317.

World War Preparations and the Gulf

The impact of the Gulf war in the region as a whole led to advances by the Western bloc, especially

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Gulf (Continued from page 17) the U.S., in mounting their world war preparations. It is obvious that all those nuclear weapons are not for the purpose of dealing with the threat of Khomeini, even if he posed any sort of threat to them at all, which he doesn't. In the period since 1981, the U.S. has been able to take the first steps towards a regional cooperation pact in the Gulf with the participation of reactionary Western-dependent sheiks and kings (the Gulf Cooperation Council) under the cover of fighting the menace of Islamic fundamentalism. It has permanently stationed its warships in the area on the pretext of ensuring "freedom of navigation" through the Straits of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. At the same time, the U.S. has equipped Saudi Arabia with AWACS spy planes and taken control of the airspace of the region and established military transport capability over a wide area. Special installations and sophisticated bases have been set up in Saudi Arabia and Oman for possible use by U.S. military forces. Shock troops — the "Central Command," formerly the Rapid Deployment Force — have been organised with a budget of \$20 billion and a contingent of 200,000 troops. Under the banner of fighting "terrorism" and "state-supported terrorism," widespread propaganda has been waged to prepare public opinion for any conceivable military action in any part of the region by U.S. imperialism.

The Soviet social-imperialists have also stepped up the arming of Syria and Libya as well as the training and organisation of their military and administrative cadres in Afghanistan and the construction of a large, sophisticated military infrastructure there. They have expanded their already sizeable military bases in South Yemen and also reinforced their dependent government there through a coup d'Etat and a bloody settling of internal accounts.

It is very obvious by now that every time the Gulf war intensifies because the West and East feed the belligerents more armaments, military information and financial aid,

the final result is a greater military build-up of the imperialist powers in the region: more warships, more soldiers, more military infrastructure in the client states, etc. And it is the blood of the Iranian and Iraqi youth which is spilt to provide a pretext for these crimes, which are in turn but preparations for an even greater crime to come: imperialist world war.

Stalemate and Imperialist Provocations

Both the imperialist blocs had high expectations of this period of deadlock and saw great benefit in a protracted war of attrition. For both it was a "guarantee" that the situation in the region would not spin out of control due to immediate drastic developments on or behind the front, or that one or another "surprise" would not lay the ground for some unforeseen dramatic step by the rival war bloc. In addition, a stalemate resulted in the kind of war with all the needs, limits and parameters for both sides that induced deeper dependence and gave openings to both imperialist blocs to sink their claws in more tightly. For U.S. imperialism, the continuation of the stalemate meant that the Islamic Republic would increase its efforts to open up to the West, including expanding political and diplomatic relations with Europe, Japan and U.S. regional lackeys; it meant strengthened military ties between Iran and Israel, Argentina and the U.S. itself; it meant the rise of pro-Western commanders in the army and pro-Western politicians in the comprador ruling class. In this context, U.S. imperialism would alternately stoke the fires of war — a sudden influx of arms into Iran's arsenal could facilitate a great offensive — and on the other hand would give the Iraqi army military information which would bring Iran's offensive to nought. One result of this vicious game was thousands of victims in each round. Iraq's diplomatic relations with the U.S., which had been cut off since the 1967 Middle East war, began to improve, and in 1985 bilateral diplomatic trips took place between Baghdad and Washington.

The Soviets sought to use the stalemate to maintain their existing inroads and to expand their influence with both sides. For the Soviets, the ongoing war also meant that the potential of the Islamic Republic to intervene in the Afghanistan war had considerably diminished, and that the Russian occupation troops and the Kabul puppet government would not have to worry much about the western borders of Afghanistan or the Islamic Republic's aid to the reactionary Islamic opposition groups. During this period the Islamic Republic's financial and military support of these groups was considerably reduced.

As for their public position before the world, however, both imperialist blocs insisted on their "neutrality" on the war. "Anti-war" statements were submitted to various councils, though not meant to be approved. So while ships and planes from every part of the world headed towards the Gulf, filled with the weapons needed to carry on the bloodbath, while U.S.-made poison gas was used against thousands — in the 1980s! — the imperialists of both blocs pretended that the war was "irrational," the work of "crazy mullahs" and didn't really have anything to do with them at all. News of the horrendous events of the war was simply relegated to a few sentences on the back pages — the "forgotten war."

The process of the last seven or so years has proven that it was not the Khomeini regime or any of its factions that prevented the U.S. or USSR from filling the "power vacuum." Two major obstacles kept the Iranian regime from slipping smoothly into the camp of either of the two blocs: first, the revolutionary, anti-imperialist upheaval in Iran, and second, the fierce rivalry between the blocs themselves. Indeed, Iran never really severed its ties with the West. It was the USSR which would not accept any decisive comeback by the U.S. into Iran. In fact, what is portrayed as Khomeini's anti-East, anti-West stance always meant *pro-both East and West*.

Though the sensitivity of the situation in the Gulf and especially

the Iran-Iraq war imposed a certain prudence on both blocs, the pressure of the deep worldwide crisis all the imperialists confront compelled them to push ahead with bigger, more effective measures to fill the power vacuum, before their rival did. High-stakes gambling and risky manoeuvres became plausible strategies for each bloc.

Gulf: Focal Point of International Contradictions

In the winter of 1985, Islamic Republic forces occupied the Fao peninsula in a surprise attack. This took the Iraqi army completely unaware and seems to have astonished international observers as well. After these operations known as "Al-fajr 8 and 9," the Iranian authorities confidently repeated that the year 1365 (1985-86) would be the year of victory over Iraq and thus the end of the war. A top Iraqi official pointed out in an interview with the *Washington Post* in late autumn 1986, "In this period, the United States has given us misleading information on the makeup and mobility of the Iranian forces, and this led to the successes of Iran." At the same time, in order to prevent the possible defeat or even serious weakening of Iraq, the American and Israeli authorities had taken into account the means for preserving a balance: "In one of the last meetings before the trip to Tehran, it was proposed that the question of selling arms to Iraq be studied and that the balance of forces — which might have been disturbed by the delivery of missiles to Iran — be preserved."⁸

In the early days of 1987, the Islamic Republic started "Operation Karballa 4 and 5" along the southern front with the intention of approaching and surrounding Basra. Using the TOW anti-aircraft missiles just received from the U.S., the Islamic Republic stopped the counterattack of the Iraqi air force and, using the missiles supplied them by China, bombarded civilian areas of Iraq. In this period much of the Western media talked of the possibility of the war ending with the victory of Iran and the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime. At the

same time a special conference of the heads of the Islamic countries took place in Kuwait, only a few kilometres from the fighting, and asked for the aid of the American Navy to guarantee the security of the conference! U.S. authorities even talked of the possibility of bombing the front lines of the Iranian forces in case they posed a serious threat to Basra. Imperialist analysts began to say that the Iran-Iraq war was witnessing a new round of fighting but a continued impasse. In fact, the Iranian offensive on Basra was halted. The balance of forces between Iran and Iraq was fundamentally unchanged. The Gulf war continued, now characterised by exchanges of artillery fire, air strikes against tankers and commercial ships and some scattered operations on the northern front.

But "new" players, previously behind the scenes, began to step out and take direct action — an event that signalled that the intensification of the fighting during Operation Karballa 4 and 5 was not the peak of the Gulf war but a prelude to future explosive scenes. U.S. and Soviet naval forces began manoeuvres in the Mediterranean Sea. Nuclear-equipped U.S. warships, including an aircraft carrier, set out from Spain towards Lebanon, and the Sixth Fleet was positioned near the Straits of Hormuz. A U.S. battleship left Subic Naval Base in the Philippines and set out for the western part of the Indian Ocean. Soviet submarines appeared in the waters of the Arabian Sea, and the Kiev aircraft carrier began a patrol of the Mediterranean which took Western military experts by surprise. A Pentagon spokesman, acting as if all these were everyday occurrences, stated, "We're doing what we have to do as to have what we need at hand."

Western and Eastern imperialists were simultaneously talking about the necessity of "security" in the Gulf and "freedom of navigation" of commercial shipping in the waters of the region. At the same time, Iraq was advised to attack tankers carrying Iranian oil, a proposal reiterated in consecutive articles in the *Economist*. On the other

hand the reactionaries ruling China today provided the Islamic Republic with Silkworm missiles, with the tacit approval of U.S. imperialism. Italy provided Tehran with mines. From the spring of 1987 onwards the development of events in the Gulf region accelerated. A "stalemate" was no longer on the agenda of the U.S. imperialists; rather, they tried to heat things up and push developments to a higher level.

First in the spring of 1987 the reactionary and lackey regime of Kuwait asked the U.S., Soviets and Britain to protect its commercial shipping in the Gulf with their naval forces. The Soviets immediately declared their willingness; the Reagan administration stated the necessity to support and protect friendly Kuwait in the face of "the danger of Iranian expansionism and aggression." After the U.S. military vessel the *Stark* was hit on 17 May 1987 by Iraqi jet fighters, the U.S. government declared its decision to "reflag" Kuwait's ships and take them under their protection, in order to "maintain security and calm in the Gulf" and "in its own interests." Small-scale hostilities and suspicious attacks on various commercial ships and warships, as well as the mining of waters where British, American and Soviet warships patrolled, provided new pretexts for the more extensive presence of imperialist forces in the region. Today the Gulf waters are full of nuclear warships; "with about 30 U.S. Navy ships in the region operating alongside at least as many naval vessels from West European nations and the Soviet Union, the Gulf and its nearby waters sometimes appear as choked with warships as a pond with water lilies."⁹ As the Committee of the RIM stated: "The various powers are each pursuing their particular imperialist interests, as members of two opposing blocs; the target has been control of the Gulf itself, and the Gulf in turn could be key to who controls the world." These power projections are specifically part of all-around preparations of the two blocs on the global scale to unleash a far greater crime than the Gulf war against humanity, a third war for the redivision of the

world.

In addition, the U.S. imperialists have given particular responsibility to the Turkish government in relation to preserving the interests of the Western bloc in the region, activating the Turkish army as the southern arm of NATO in the east of Turkey — and expanding its radius of action to include parts of Iraq and the Iran-Turkey border area. The agreement between Iraq and Turkey permitting Turkish forces to enter Iraq within 50 kilometres of the border was a pretext for legitimising the stationing of Turkish troops in northeastern Iraq at the Iranian border. In this way the U.S. is stepping up the military capacity at its disposal and preparing to ensure the success of possible direct military intervention in the Gulf region.

Also, the U.S. is using the Gulf crisis to forge an important local army from its lackey states in the region. King Hussein of Jordan has several times offered to station a Middle Eastern "peacekeeping" force to be stationed in the Iran-Iraq border area after the "imposition of peace" between the belligerents. Recently Egypt has offered to contribute 15,000 troops to a proposed Arab force to defend the Gulf states threatened with being drawn into the war. President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and King Hussein discussed such a force in early December in Cairo.¹⁰ The offer has been welcomed by the Arab Gulf states and "Egypt is laying the groundwork for a significant expansion of its military presence in the Arab countries of the Gulf."¹¹

The Future of the Gulf, the Future of the Belligerents

From the very beginning the Gulf war has had the potential to expand and draw the Eastern and Western blocs into a face-to-face conflict that they themselves have called "the horizontal expansion of war." The war was instigated by the U.S. imperialists with the design of enabling them to replace their bloody claws on Iran; the Soviet social-imperialists chose to support it and seek to advance their own interests in Iran and Iraq. The process of the

war basically developed subordinate to inter-imperialist rivalry and also served to further intensify it. The fact that there has been no neat alignment of the imperialist blocs with the two belligerents does not belie this analysis. Nor does the fact that the two countries involved use the war to serve their own reactionary interests.

From the beginning of the war, a number of solutions for "ending the conflict" have been proposed to Iran and Iraq by both the imperialists and the countries of the region. Iraq has found a "solution" by "internationalising" the conflict through attacking tankers in the Gulf as well as Iran's oil installations and pulling in the other countries of the region into the war. Iran followed periodically with mad attacks aimed at bringing down the Iraqi government and persuading the imperialists that they should not support Iraq but Iran. The Eastern and Western imperialists, while accomplishing many of the specific tasks they set for themselves in the region, have ultimately turned the Gulf into a storehouse of explosives, and in fact have declared that the knot of contradictions of the Gulf war is part of and subordinate to a bigger knot, and this bigger knot can only be untied the way that Alexander the Great untied the Gordian knot. This is the only resolution for the actors of the Gulf crisis.

The actual situation of the world dictates to the imperialists that, in order to defend their reactionary imperialist interests, they must move their ships right to the brink of the maelstrom. It is not without reason that all the imperialist spokesmen, East and West alike, call the Gulf a focal point of world contradictions, and all of them acknowledge that World War 3 might be ignited by events there. As Boris Piatishov, a spokesman of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, said on the occasion of recent fighting in the Gulf, "If in the first act of the play you see a gun, you know by the third act it's going to be fired." Both imperialist blocs are well aware of the future they are actively preparing for. For them and for all the reactionary governments of the world, the continuation or end of

the war does not have any meaning or any importance in itself. What counts for them is how much each development serves their needs and their goals. It is the strategic interests of the imperialists that decide their political and military orientation, especially in a crucial region like the Middle East. Under such circumstances, even if a pause were to occur in the war, or a ceasefire be imposed on the belligerents, or even if conditions were to develop such that the Iran-Iraq war ends, the extinguishing of the war's fires would only be a manifestation of the further intensification of the contradictions that gave rise to it in the first place. The end of the Iran-Iraq war would mean not more stability but instead heightened fragility of the whole region.

Who Makes History?

Those who only look at the surface of events in the Gulf region would see only the power projections of the imperialists, the mullahs, kings, etc., and would believe what these reactionaries are trying to get everyone to believe: that it is they and they alone who are on the map and determine the destiny of the peoples of the region. The simple fact that the Iranian regime and every other state in the region is compelled to rule over the masses at gunpoint proves the contrary. Long decades of imperialist rule and exploitation have turned the entire region into a simmering volcano, which already exploded underneath the Shah. Today the rumbling rolls right under the bows of the imperialists' mighty nuclear warships. When it explodes, these vessels will return home laden with the bodies of their soldiers and officers who have tried to serve their "national interests" under the guise of "freedom and democracy," etc., and carrying into exile kings, sheiks, and mullahs — those still alive. The more the imperialists dig into the region with their vast deployments of military power, the deeper will be their own grave — perhaps enough to hold them all together! This is not idle talk. The real possibility exists of the Gulf war being transformed into revolutionary wars.

What does all this mean for the revolution in Iran? Though the gravity of the defeat of the revolution and its capture by counter-revolutionaries still weighs heavily on the minds and souls of the oppressed people of Iran and holds them back from rushing to the front ranks of revolutionary politics, there is a central debate going on right now *among the masses*: how should the burial ceremony of the Islamic Republic be arranged, and by which forces? Outrage and hatred of the Islamic Republic regime can be seen at a glance in the streets of Iran. A burning desire for revenge now burns in the hearts of the majority of the oppressed. The intensification of the Iran-Iraq war has broadened the scope and scale of the now open, now hidden struggles of the masses: frequent demonstrations often burst out spontaneously after barbaric bombings of the cities by the Iraqi air force, aiming against the war and *against the Islamic Republic itself*; slogans and graffiti cover the walls calling for death to Khomeini, death to the Islamic Republic; posters of government bigshots are crossed out and covered with mud during the dark of the night; strikes, though they always end in the savage attack on the workers by the Pasdaran, are widespread in the factories; desertion from the front is endemic.

Battle between revolution and counter-revolution rages in Iran; at its centre is the revolutionary struggle of Kurdistan. For the oppressed in Iran, the revolutionary war in Kurdistan is a sign of their potential revolutionary might and a clear picture of the desperation of the Islamic Republic in the face of the determination of the oppressed. No wonder Kurdistan was one of the important issues of "common interest" discussed in the May 1986 meeting in Tehran between the U.S. delegation and the Islamic Republic.

The growing desperation of the Islamic Republic can also be seen in recent shifts in its ideological propaganda. For a while, they tried to use nationalist agitation and "defence of the fatherland" to rally the masses. This lost its value very quickly. Today nationalist agitation

by Khomeini and his men is aimed at uniting army generals and overthrown monarchists abroad. Now Rafsanjani openly says to the masses: maybe you don't like us but let's unite and do away with the common foreign enemy and then deal with each other. Especially as the masses have come to understand its reactionary character, the Gulf war, earlier useful for consolidating and solidifying the reactionaries' ranks, now has become a destabilising factor. It is a hand-saw up the rear-end of the Khomeini regime: no matter which way they move it, it tears! The social and economic fabric of Iran has been so tightly woven around the war that every serious change in the course of the war shakes the entire society and intensifies the Islamic Republic's crisis. And any end to the war — not apparent on the horizon — will further heighten its contradictions with the masses and within its own ranks. In any case, this regime is digging its own grave.

The Gulf war provides tremendous exposure of the international manoeuvres of the imperialists, and provides training ground for the oppressed in proletarian internationalism. Not only do the masses have the opportunity to advance the struggle against their own reactionary rulers, but in doing so they will strike heavy blows against the enemies of all mankind, who have assembled so arrogantly here in the Gulf. This task will be realised by mighty worker-peasant red armies marching to the fore under the banner of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-tung Thought! □

Footnotes

1. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 454.
2. Quoted in Fred Halliday, *Threat from the East?* (London: Pelican Books), p. 27.
3. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 453; 568-569.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 484; 488-489.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 500.
6. *The Tower Commission Report*, (New York, New York Times Books, 1987) p. 21.
7. A city in Iraq held sacred by Shi'ite Muslims.
8. *Tower Report*.
9. *International Herald Tribune*, 28 December, 1987.
10. *Ibid.*, 11 December, 1987.
11. *Ibid.*, 26-27 December, 1987.