

**Iran and the Soviet Union**  
**Between Communism and Commonwealth**  
**1985-1992**

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my beloved daughters, Rieka and Erika.



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## **Abstract**

This study is an inquiry into the history of political relations between the Soviet Union and Iran. The focus of the work is the Gorbachev period from 1985 up to 1991. Although geostrategic considerations, national security concerns and economic interests continued to be the fundamental determinants of Soviet-Iranian relations during these years, they assumed new dimensions resulting mainly from regime changes, alterations in ideological trends as well as political and military developments on both sides. The study evaluates the nature and implications of these changes in the light, in particular, of 'new thinking' in Soviet Third World policy.

After 1985, growing evidence indicated that Soviet policy in the Third World was undergoing changes consistent with the basic principles of 'new thinking' in the theory and conduct of Soviet international relations. A revitalization of the Soviet role in the world and a move from standard policies practised in the past, just as it changed the nature of East-West relations, affected Soviet Third World policy too.

During the period with which we are concerned the Islamic revolutionary regime in Iran, still very much a political riddle to the outside world, was approaching a turningpoint in its political orientation, one that was obscure at the time as a result of the fact that the expression of foreign policy developments in Iran after the Islamic revolution had been treated with secrecy and regarded as the exclusive right of the clergy. The study examines Iran's national, historical and geographical motives in this context, considering its philosophy and political culture together with the basic mechanisms of its policy-making process especially in the most recent years. The study also addresses a number of crucial questions: Whether the shift in Soviet policy towards Iran after 1985 was substantive or merely involved tactical changes to increase the efficacy of old policies long in place? How did the former Soviet Union try to translate its power into political influence over Iran? How did Soviet foreign policy behaviour in the region change as a result of 'new

thinking'? And how did the Soviet Union perform in relation to national security with reference to the Islamic issue and regional crises on its southern frontiers?

The opening chapter of the work covers the entire historical background of relations between the Soviet Union and Iran, and the pre-Soviet monarchical relations of Tsarist Russia and Persia. Chapter two contains a review of the evolution of policy in the light of the Islamic Revolution and the developments which occurred during the post-Brezhnev period. The analysis of Soviet-Iranian relations under Gorbachev in a broader context of Third World issues is the core of chapter three. An investigation of the roots of regional crises with regard to Soviet-Iranian relations and the impact of 'new thinking' in the design and conduct of Soviet foreign policy is the backbone of chapter four. Chapters five and six investigate more general policy considerations and in Soviet policy towards Iran with particular regard to regional developments. Chapter seven deals with the final phase of the Soviet-Iranian relations. The concluding eighth chapter not only pays attention to the relationship between Iran and the CIS but also the relationship with the individual republics of the former Soviet Union with whom Iran has either a common border or strong cultural ties. Here and in other chapters the study draws upon the contemporary Soviet and Iranian press as well as documentary and statistical sources, memoirs and the relevant secondary literature in several languages.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **IRAN AND SOVIET THIRD WORLD POLICY: EXPLANATION OF PURPOSE AND DESIGN**

Soviet-Third World<sup>1</sup> policy developments under Gorbachev have played a key role in the shaping of the new world political system. They have however often been overshadowed by the pre-eminent issues in Soviet foreign affairs, particularly East-West relations and arms control, and as a result have received rather limited attention from political scientists and academic institutions. This writer is convinced that the study of Soviet foreign policy after the implementation of the 'New Thinking' would demonstrate a noticeable gap if it failed to comprehend important implications of Soviet relations with the Third World countries. During the formation and implementation of the 'new thinking' in the Kremlin from 1985 to 1991, South West Asia (wherein Iran stands as an influential power) enjoyed a growing importance in Soviet-Third World policy considerations, perhaps greater than South East Asia and the Arabian part of the Middle East combined with North Africa. The promotion of the latter was primarily due to the fact that regional crises in South West Asia, the Afghan conflict, the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf war in 1990-1991 had turned the area into a hotbed of constant tension duly increasing Moscow's chronic apprehension about national security challenges facing the Soviet Union.

Geostrategic measures, national security assumptions and economic interests continued to be the fundamental determinants of Soviet-Iranian relations since Gorbachev came to power in March 1985. These assumed new dimensions resulting mainly from political and military developments on both sides. In 1985 the change in Iran's position in

the war with Iraq from defensive to offensive, the revelation of the US-Iran arms deal scandal, the so-called Iran-Contra affair in 1986, the termination in 1988 of the Iran-Iraq war, the death of Khomeini, the coming to power in Iran of a presumed pragmatist administration headed by Rafsanjani, a major agreement for military co-operation signed between Iran and the Soviet Union in July 1989, the decision by Iran to help the release of all Western hostages in Lebanon by the end of 1990 and normalisation of its foreign relations have been noticeable examples. From Moscow's point of view, it involved a re-evaluation of the Soviets' perception of the 'changing international correlation of forces', by which at least for a decade or so they meant 'a global shift in economic, political and military strength respectively in their favour and against Western powers', which in 1985 led to the 'new political thinking' in the Kremlin.<sup>2</sup>

Since 1985, growing evidence indicates that Soviet behaviour in the Third World had been undergoing changes consistent with the basic principles of 'new political thinking' in the theory and conduct of Soviet international relations. In spite of having achieved strategic parity with the United States in the realm of military power, the Kremlin's new leadership considered that Soviet national security could not depend on a mere increase in military power since political and economic factors seemed to have assumed important roles, perhaps in the same way as they did for the United States. Revitalisation of the Soviet role in the world, based on the modernisation of the Soviet economy and moving from standard policies practised in the past, became the core of the new political thinking in the Kremlin. Gorbachev's conviction about the necessity for a change in the earlier belief that the greater the emphasis on military might, the greater the influence and the security of the Soviet Union, resulted in a changing Soviet military doctrine.<sup>3</sup> This meant no further weapons build-up and abandoning the arms race with the United States. Revision of the Kremlin's world view in line with the other aspects of Soviet foreign relations affected Soviet Third World policy and led to changes in the

concept of a zero-sum-game competition with the West over Third World influence and interests.

The 'new thinking', just as it changed the nature of East-West relations, gradually affected existing Soviet Third World policy too. This made inevitable the neglecting of ideological components of Soviet Third World policy; the abandonment of support for local Communist parties and national liberation movements; the termination of the supply of military and economic aid for Third World allies or client regimes; and a reduction in military presence and power projection beyond the immediate borders of the Soviet Union. The decision to withdraw the Red Army from Afghanistan and the change in emphasis to the resolution of regional conflicts through negotiation in the Third World, and in particular in South West Asia (adjacent to the Soviet border) have been significant by-products of the new political development in the Kremlin.

In the meantime the Islamic revolutionary regime in Iran, still very much a political riddle to the outside world, was approaching a threshold from which it seemed to be heading for the second phase of its controversial life. In 1985 signs of new developments in Iran were appearing in the form of further political stability, maturity in its world view and growing tendencies for conventional wisdom amongst the clergy, particularly in regard to the conduct of Iran's foreign policy. The new political developments had been kept in the dark for quite some time mainly due to the fact that the expression of foreign policy developments in Iran after the revolution had been treated with secrecy and regarded as the exclusive right of the clergy. Consequently, both East and West, which had originally failed to appreciate the political dynamism of Islam and the underlying philosophy of Iran's foreign policy which is deeply rooted in Shiism,<sup>4</sup> failed yet again to notice the latter development and thus continued to treat it by and large as a disturbing enigma.



## **The Ideological Dimensions in the Making and Conduct of Foreign Policy**

Since the Islamic revolution succeeded to power in Iran in February 1979, the philosophy underlying Iran's foreign policy in addition to its basic characteristics had assumed new ideological dimensions of religious origin. Therefore, analytical study of Iranian foreign policy under the Islamic regime required not only the examination of its national, historical and geographical motives, but also the consideration of Islamic socio-political principles and applications of the Islamic value system. Otherwise, neglecting the latter factors certainly would lead to a misunderstanding of policy developments in post-revolutionary Iran.<sup>5</sup>

In order to shed light on ambivalent components of Iranian foreign policy, its formulation, and the basic mechanism of the policy-making process, specially in the most recent years, this case study will take into consideration all determinants of Iran's foreign policy. In particular it will examine influential elements in the context of relations with the Soviet Union. In doing so, in addition to the conceptualisation of the relationship between foreign policy formulation and the conduct of Iranian foreign policy, basic impulses, underlying philosophy, political culture - such as the cult of personality (a Shiite tradition embedded in the Iranian national culture), ideological principles, and the impact of factional competition for power within the regime with regard to their power bases and political trends will be carefully inspected.

Since the Iranian clergy have systematically attempted not only to express and define but also to justify and defend their policies within an Islamic ideological framework and have attributed their decisions to divine law, personal statements on political issues by individual and influential leaders and their interpretation of Islamic political teaching alongside official statements have become informative sources for an examination of Iranian foreign policy attitudes. Thus, in order to compensate for the lack

of political literature on the subject, as well as the absence of solid documentation in relation to the most recent events, this study inevitably will rely on empirical accounts of relevant developments in the course of the formation and conduct of Iranian foreign policy. Albeit selectively and with due circumspection, this study will make such use as is possible of the open sources, mainly in Farsi, Russian and English, such as official statements and the personal views of high ranking Iranian and Soviet statesmen, rather than hypotheses and theories. Policy variations which resulted from changes in the leadership or vice-versa will also be carefully studied. In this study, examples of inconsistent opinions, and the cause and effect of tactical diversions from the Islamic ideology in the conduct of Iranian foreign policy, will be observed. We shall try to examine the content, viability and implications of political terminologies such as Liberal, Moderate, Fundamentalist, Pragmatist, Radical, Idealist. These were the means by which, particularly in the West, the attitudes and political trends of the Iranian leaders used to be measured and categorised. The debates in the Islamic Parliament and Persian media over the issues of foreign affairs with regard to the case study will of course be scrutinised. It is the author's hope that his background as a political journalist and civil servant who worked with the old regime at the closest point to its summit of power up to the final days before the revolution, and who has kept in touch with Iranian domestic and foreign policy developments ever since, will be of assistance in providing an additional 'behind the scenes' insight into the making of Iranian foreign relations during this period.<sup>6</sup>

Based on a comparative analysis of reliable sources of mainly Soviet, Iranian and English origin, this study will - it is hoped - provide a full, clear and objective view of the subject. In doing so, every factor of strategic or ideological substance with either cardinal or marginal impact on Soviet-Iranian relations, from the central role of the United States to Islamic fundamentalism, will be examined on its merits. This study, it is hoped, will contribute to a better understanding of Soviet-Iranian relations in particular and Soviet relations with the Middle East in general. It also attempts to address a crucial question:

whether the shift in Soviet policy towards Iran after 1985 was substantive or merely involved tactical changes to increase the efficiency of old policies long in place. This study will also try to foresee the likely developments in relations between the successor states of the Soviet Union and Iran on the basis of the changes which occurred after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

One of the most controversial debates amongst the scholars of Soviet affairs has been over the political significance and impact of ideology in the shaping and conduct of Soviet foreign policy. The philosophical world view known as Marxism-Leninism originated from Hegel's idea of 'advancement through contradiction', and the so-called 'scientific socialism'<sup>7</sup> was in fact developed by Georgii Plekhanov and Vladimir Lenin to suit Russian conditions. Marxism-Leninism or 'scientific Marxism', which during Stalin's years became the official ideology of the Soviet Union, was designed to reorganise society in the direction of socialism, and from there to the utopia of Communism. A Communist society, to be established after the victory of the proletariat and an end to the class struggle, would see real political freedom introduced and changes in the economic base leading to the creation of wealth within a mode of production that was based on public ownership and existed for the benefit of all members of the society.

The political application of Marxism-Leninism is to conceptualise international relations and create a political language for dialogue and to define the state's allies and enemies. This bears the same importance as domestic affairs, and therefore deserves proper attention and scrutiny on its merit. In his analytical view of the impact of the 'Gorbachev revolution' in the reconceptualisation of the Communist political system, Stephen White, by putting forward the fundamental question, what was the 'socialism', casts doubt on the whole traditional process of transition as defined in Soviet ideology.<sup>8</sup> The political function of Marxism-Leninism - the ideology of the Soviet system - cannot be denied by any historian or analyst of Soviet affairs since Soviet political thinking in respect of foreign countries, the formulation and operative policy of the state, has always

been affected by ideological guidance. The 'action orientation' of ideology was described by Friedrich and Brzezinski in 1966 as a 'weapon to be used in a battle'.<sup>9</sup> In sharing this view, Ronald J. Hill (*Communist Politics Under the Knife: Surgery or Autopsy?* 1990) argues that: 'ideology is a powerful weapon to establish the rule of the policies'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, ideology not only reflects the Soviet system of belief but also determines, in part, Soviet foreign policy. Thus, in the analysis of Soviet operative policy, with which this study is mainly concerned, the ideological factors must surely be included.

Individual communist leaders in the course of practising communism have influenced Soviet ideology, and correspondingly manipulated Soviet political thinking. In this respect, Stalin, who introduced the 'theory of socialism in one country' and became the ideological heir of Marx, Engels and Lenin, and his main opponent, L. Trotsky, who introduced the notion of 'permanent revolution', are not alone. In the early 1960s, Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor, suggested a 'rapid building of communism' and then Leonid Brezhnev put forward 'developed socialism'. Mikhail Gorbachev, a Marxist reformist, denied that the Communist Party had a ready-made ideological programme, and thus Marxism-Leninism as dogma.<sup>11</sup> In the same way as the Soviets' legitimate ideology was influenced and affected by individual leaders, leaders manipulated Soviet foreign relations. As far as this study is concerned, the dynamics of Soviet-Iranian relations have been affected by individual personalities. On many occasions, the role of individuals dominated the decisions of the governments on both sides. Reza Shah, the Iranian Court Minister Teymourtash, Chicherin, Karakhan, Agabekov, Stalin, the Iranian Prime Minister during World War II M. A. Forougi, Nikita Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and the Shah of Iran before the Islamic revolution, and after that, Ayatollah Khomeini, Gorbachev and the Iranian President Rafsanjani were the most prominent individuals who influenced Soviet-Iranian relations. In this study the role of individuals in the making and conduct of policies, wherever applicable, will be traced. The political memoirs of influential leaders and people who were either directly involved or had first hand

knowledge of the developments in the making and the conduct of Soviet-Iranian relations will be referred to in order to compensate for what is often an insufficiency of political documentation.

Soviet historians and scholars have long been denied access to the critical documents of the former Soviet Foreign Ministry, including records from both the post-revolutionary and Tsarist eras.<sup>12</sup> This was because the historical background was considered instrumental in suggesting likely policy developments in the future. Over the years and under different political systems, the foreign policy problems facing Russian diplomacy were similar. In particular examples, although during different periods, foreign policy problems were resolved by identical decisions. Therefore, comparative analysis of similar events not only should shed light on obscure parts of the policy-making process relevant to the case studies, but should also assist in suggesting the motives, dynamics, continuity and changes in the course of Soviet and Russian policy implementation. In this study empirical accounts based on background readings relevant to Russian-Soviet foreign relations particularly in connection with Iran will accordingly be included. Providing a comprehensive historical background of Russian and Soviet-Iranian relations at the beginning of this study has been thought of as a means of facilitating a systematic and chronological approach to the subject. The closer the history to the period of this study the greater the interplay and the impact of the implemented policies will have on the next part. Accordingly the first five years of Soviet-Iranian relations from 1979 to 1985 will be reviewed in greater depth than the rest of the background history.

### **The New Era in the Kremlin's Political Thinking**

With the onset of Gorbachev's 'new thinking' in 1985, the validity of 'classical theories' relating to Soviet foreign policy began to diminish. At the earliest stage, whilst the

demise of the Soviet empire seemed all but easy to envisage, it had been apparent that the new theoretical framework would have carried out fundamental changes in the nature and structure of the world political system far beyond the Eastern European border. The pro-democracy revolution of 1989 in Eastern Europe and subsequent events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the cold war, German re-unification and eventually the Second Russian Revolution, testified that a new era in world politics had been ushered in.

The collapse of Soviet-bloc Communism terminated a period which apparently was aimed at the revitalisation of the Soviet political and economic system. But the transformation of the old system led to a dramatic diversion from both pre- and post-Gorbachev foreign policy perceptions to the extent to which a viable analytical study of Soviet foreign policy became a matter of concern to academic bodies. For the fullest definition of this situation credit goes to Stephen White who has argued that by the early 1990s, the greatest difficulty in the study of Soviet politics was hardly one of sources, methods or access: it was simply that the pace of change was so rapid and its scope so far-reaching that almost all the work that was being produced was overtaken by events before it had appeared.<sup>13</sup> Before the death of the world's most sprawling socialist nation was formally announced and the disbanded Soviet Union replaced by a Commonwealth of Independent States, some other international political observers reacted to the changes by describing those events as the 'collapse of the political world'. Francis Fukuyama goes even further, arguing that 'this is the end of history'.<sup>14</sup> Indeed the year 1991 should be seen as a watershed in the study of the last version of Soviet foreign policy which its prime architect, Mikhail Gorbachev, described as 'modern foreign policy of the late 20th century'.<sup>15</sup>

With the Soviet Union abolished and its Communist Party (CPSU) dissolved, the 'classical' theories regarding the study of Soviet foreign policy seemed null and void. Consequently a need to move away from a Marxist theoretical framework became evident to the analysts of Soviet foreign policy who had been left with nothing reliable in the

'black box' of analytical data useful in adopting a suitable methodology to launch either a 'macro or micro' analysis of Soviet foreign policy.<sup>16</sup> In this context Stephen White argues that "There were many ways in which Soviet politics, in effect, became less Soviet as a result of perestroika. Studies of ideology and policy-making, for instance, required at least some reconsideration at a time when orthodox Marxist teachings were being increasingly obscured by 'all-human values'."<sup>17</sup> Z. Brzezinski, one of the protagonists of 'totalitarian theories' particularly in regard to the Soviet Union, was quick to modify his position and thus attempted to separate himself from other old guard theorists such as Skilling and Griffiths.<sup>18</sup> In his book, *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the 20th Century*, Brzezinski, although bleak in viewing the communist past, present and future, seemed more sanguine in assessing the communist 'threat'. Moreover, he was bold enough to admit that "nobody really knows what will happen next" in the crumbling empire.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, the study of Soviet foreign policy behaviour, in view of the immense turbulence of the Gorbachev era, requires the adoption of a more functional and less restrictive methodology, which nevertheless takes into consideration not only the historic background, but also conceptualisation of the background.

The period 1985-1989, which has been described by *Times International* as Gorbachev's personal 'first five-year-plan',<sup>20</sup> transformed the political identity of the former Soviet Union in a way in which it was no longer possible to suggest that the CPSU, despite remaining a 'Leninist party in its inspiration', could be postulated in its classic role as the monolithic force it once was in the time of Lenin and the reign of Bolshevism. During the continuation of the so-called 'Gorbachev revolution', the traditional idea of a 'democratic centralist' role of the CPSU eventually gave way to a decentralised approach whereby the monopoly of absolute power was superseded by a quasi-pluralist political system capable of adopting a larger degree of market oriented economic policies. The classical definition of socialism as state ownership of the means

of production and exchange became obsolete in order to open up the way for an economic system which amounted to private ownership of the means of production and exchange, i.e. a form of capitalism. Thus, in the aftermath of the cold war and break up of the Communist bloc, the international system must now be seen in a whole new array of political perspectives and in terms totally different from what it had been in existence during Gorbachev and before him. At this stage, the central notion of the 'classical theorists' that the international political arena is a battlefield between capitalism and socialism is now almost extinct.

### **Approaching Soviet-Iranian relations**

In the light of new economic assumptions, and the manifestation of the Soviets' re-oriented economic system, the implications and impact of change in the Soviet foreign policy attitude towards the Third World in general and Iran in particular will be assessed. In this regard documents recording trade and economic exchanges between the Soviet Union and Iran, its potential and possibilities, and the mutual tactical and ultimate objectives of both sides will be cautiously scrutinised specifically in the final chapters.

However, in order both to avoid theoretical traps as much as possible, and to turn around the classical frameworks, a more flexible, multivariate and differentiated empirically based approach will be preferred to the restrictive theoretical approach based on one central, all-pervasive factor or cause. Abstract, methodologically problematic analysis will therefore be rejected in favour of a focus on the concrete questions pertaining to Soviet foreign policy behaviour. Rather than attempting some *a priori* reconceptualisation of the existing literature on the subject, this study will be based, so far as possible, on the objective record of Soviet behaviour and the conduct of Soviet foreign policy towards Iran.



In this study the central questions will be as follows: How did the former Soviet Union try to translate its power into political influence over Iran? How did Soviet foreign policy behaviour in this connection change as a result of the 'new thinking'? How did the former Soviet Union perform in relation to national security with reference to Islamic issues and regional crises on its southern frontiers? This study expects to illustrate as precisely as possible the actual nature as well as the ambivalence in areas of the relationship between the two countries. It is hoped too, that in the context of Soviet-Iranian relations this modest academic study will be a contribution to the perennial subject of politics: who influences whom and how, and in regard to which issues? Although this study cannot provide a comprehensive basis for the analysis of historical developments in Soviet foreign policy behaviour during these seven crucial years, it is intended that it will constitute a foundation for the analysis of Soviet foreign policy within the specific context of Soviet-Iranian relations and be capable of suggesting the general landscape of the Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS) foreign policy design for the foreseeable future in relation to Iran.

The outline of this thesis is roughly as follows: the opening chapter covers the entire historical background of relations between the Soviet Union and Iran, and pre-Soviet monarchical relations of the Tsarist Russia and Persia. Chapter two contains an analytical review of the evolution of policy in the light of the Islamic Revolution and the developments which occurred during the Post-Brezhnev period. The focus of chapter three is on the analysis of the Soviet-Iranian relations under Gorbachev in a broader context of the Third World issues. Investigation in the roots of regional crisis with regard to the Soviet-Iranian relations and the impact of the 'New Thinking' in the design and conduct of Soviet foreign policy is the backbone of chapter four. In 1988, with the Iran-Iraq war over and the economic crisis in the Soviet Union becoming increasingly evident, the Soviet-Iranian relationship was passing through a period of uncertainty. The new development coincided with the changes in the balance of power in South West Asia and

a beginning to the end of the Cold War. Chapters five and six of this study investigate a process by which subjective and general policy considerations were applicable, and were applied, to the specific objective policy determinations in the overall policy of the Soviet Union towards Iran with regard to the latter developments. Chapter seven deals with the final phase of the Soviet-Iranian relations and the consequences of the changes in the region's economic and security arrangements after the collapse of the world's bi-polar political system.

Insofar as the inheritors of the former Soviet Union will have their own foreign policy priorities, independent from Moscow and reflecting their own interests, this study in its final chapter not only tries to pay attention to the relationship between Iran and the CIS but also to the relationship with the individual republics of the former Soviet Union. The newly independent states of the Caucasus and Central Asian Republics of the former Soviet Union with whom Iran has either a common border or a strong cultural and economic tie will obviously be our focus at this stage. It is also suggested how the prospective relationship between the heirs of the former Soviet Union and Iran could and should develop.

## NOTES

1. The Third World is a term invented in Paris in 1950s by French intellectuals in order to categorise and give identity to the newly independent former European colonies in Asia and Africa. The Third World meant, by them, to be not either Capitalist (First World) or Socialist (Second World). The Non Aligned Movement in the 1950s gave the Third World a new ideological identity. The new ideological trends had socialist inclinations and definitely at odds with the Capitalist camp. In 1960, with the number of the African independent nations decolonialised and the Soviet influence in Asia and Africa increased, the Third World countries virtually became potential political allies of the Soviet Union. In the 1970s with the number of newly industrialised nations increased and economic and political diversification amongst the so-called Third World countries became more evident than ever, the validity of the term came under question. The Shah of Iran voiced with the French President Charles de Gaulle, suggested in 1974, to revise the term on the basis of the South North (poor rich) classification. The relegation of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), from the mighty position they had achieved in the mid 1970s, and after a shock oil price increase in Teheran in 1974, to an ordinary and rather inefficient gathering of the Third World raw material exporter countries in the beginning of 1980, not only resulted in losing the political power they had obtained in the world scene, but also baffled them about their identity. The virtual termination of the cold war period in 1988 followed by the collapse of Communism in East Europe from 1989 to 1991, resulted in a final blow to the relevance of its being, as such a term was no longer referring to anything. Indeed, the Third World should have been abolished long before. The concept from the very beginning was an attempt to ignore vast differences of culture, religion and ethnicity amongst the Asia-African nations, joined by South and Central American and Middle Eastern countries, when a socioeconomic connotation added to its original geopolitical meaning, as the rest of the Third World. The Third World should have never been invented, never made much sense and never existed in practice, but, it has wildly been used in the world's contemporary political literature as a code phrase to refer to the poor and dark skinned people. The apparent racism and the concept of superiority and inferiority, imbedded in the phrase, better be replaced, if anything at all, by a new idea to identify the regimes, rather than the nations, on the basis of human right values and a democratic and dictatorial concept.
2. For the first signs of the new political thinking in the Kremlin see Mikhail Gorbachev, *Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Party Congress*, 25 February 1986. Also Mikhail Gorbachev, 'A Report to the USSR Supreme Soviet Session on the Results of the Geneva Summit', 27 November 1985, in Gorbachev, *The Coming of the Century of Peace*, New York: Richardson and Steinman, 1985, p.77. See also, M.S. Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, New York: Harper and Row, 1987.
3. See Stamen Merritt Miner, 'Military Crisis and Social Change in Russian and Soviet History', in George E. Hudson, *Soviet National Security Policy Under Perestroika*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989, p.29.

See also Alexander Dallin, 'Gorbachev's Foreign Policy and the New Political Thinking in the Soviet Union' in Peter Juviler and Hiroshi Kimura (eds.), *Gorbachev's Reform*, New York: Hawthorn, 1988.

4. Islam is a religion enriched with comprehensive political teaching and Shiism as a major Islamic sect embraces Islam's all political potential plus devotion and martyrdom. In the seventh century the crumbling empire of the Sasanid, on the brink of extinction was conquered by the Arab invaders. It took the Arab invaders more than 15 years to secure control of the vast Iranian empire the Sasanids had left behind. The early history of Islamic Iran is full of accounts of popular rebellions against the Arab rule. In every case a revolt of distinctly economic or social origin was camouflaged as a movement of religious protest. This tradition has continued in Iran up to the present day. It is unclear when and where Shiism developed into a distinct faith claiming an independent identity of its own. But it is clear that by the tenth century, the Shiite version of Islam was already fully established and seen by the majority of Muslims as a continuation of Zoroasterianism. See Rasoul Jafari, *The History of Shi'ism in Iran*, Islamic Propagation Organisation, Teheran 1989, pp.404-5.

Islam as revealed in the Quran and the original traditions attributed to Muhammed, has only three principles. They are Towheed (the belief that there is only one God), Nobuwwah (the belief that God had dispatched prophets to guide mankind and that Muhammed was the last of them), and Ma'ad (the belief that there will be a day of Reckoning). Shiism added to these principles two of its own: Adl (the belief that the justice of Allah must be established in this world) and Imamah (the belief that Ali and his eleven male descendants represent the only legitimacy on earth before the day of Reckoning). Thus from the start Shiism nurtured within itself a streak of anarchism which inspired and sustained more than one revolutionary movement. See Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah*, London: Hutchinson, 1985, pp.171-9.

The coming to power of the Safavid dynasty, in the sixteenth century ushered in a new era and opened a new chapter in the history of Shiism in Iran. Shiism during the Safavid emerged as a strong school of thought with distinctive Iranian characteristics. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Shiism was well established in Iran and around the Safavid empire. Giving the point that Shiism mostly grew up in Iran, nevertheless, the socio-political structure of the Persian empire and Persian culture deeply influenced the most radical branch of Islam. Shiism in terms of leadership represents a religious monarchy in which the leader has full authority over his Omma (followers), see Ahmad Kasravi, *Shiagari (Shiism)*, Teheran, 1946. The inner discipline of living in accordance with the spirit of Sharia' (Islamic Law), combined with the strong cult of personality, has given the Shiism a unique feature within the Islamic sects. Shiites today form more than 15 per cent of the world's nearly one billion Muslims. Iran and the republic of Azerbaijan are the only Shiite Muslim states in the world, and in Syria and the Lebanon, Shiite Muslims are in the majority.

5. For a review of post-1979 Iranian politics, including foreign policy, see for example, A. Ehteshami and M. Varasteh, (eds.), *Iran and the International Community*, London: Routledge, 1991.
6. In mid-1977 the author was appointed political advisor to the Ministry of Court. In 1978 he became Chief of Protocol and personal advisor to the Queen of Iran. During the last six months of the old regime (September 1978 to February 1979), with the Shah monarchy frustrated and physically diminished to a poor status of health, the Queen was acting leader of Iran. During that particular period the author was closely involved in political development in Iran.
7. Karl Marx quoted in Adam Ulam, *The Unfinished Revolution: An Essay on the Influence of Marxism and Communism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1964, p.14.

8. Stephen White, Alex Pravda and Zvi Gitelman, *Developments in Soviet Politics*, London: Macmillan, 1990, p.15.
9. Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, New York: Praeger, 1966, p.88.
10. Ronald J. Hill, *Communist Politics Under the Knife: Surgery or Autopsy?*, London: Pinter Publishers, 1990, p.66.
11. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for our Country and the World*, London: Collins, 1987, pp.166-7.
12. The literature on Soviet foreign policy is a very large and still expanding one. Specific works are quoted as appropriate in the body of the thesis. For a recent bibliographical overview, see Margot Light [in Konn]; useful general histories include [Starr, Fleron etc. reader, Donaldson & Noguee etc.].
13. See Stephen White in Tania Konn, (ed.), *Soviet Studies Guide*, London: Bowker-Saur., 1991, p.81. See also Stephen White in White, Pravda and Gitelman, (eds.), *Developments in Soviet Politics*, pp.1-16.
14. Francis Fukuyama, *The Soviet Union and the Third World*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987, p.12.
15. Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, p.175.
16. Margot Light, *The Soviet Theory of International Relations*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1988, p.14.
17. Stephen White in Konn (ed.), *Soviet Studies Guide*, p.82.
18. Skilling and Griffiths have helped to define the Soviet political system. For example they have suggested separating the political groups and putting them in two general categories, first, 'intellectuals' including academics, scientists, economists, writers and all others who should advise; second, the 'bureaucrats' including officials such as party leaders, and military men whose task is to decide and govern the state. See below, H.G. Skilling and F. Griffiths, (eds.), *Interest Groups in Soviet Politics*, Princeton, 1971.
19. Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the 20th Century*, New York: Harvard University Press, 1990. For Brzezinski's old views on the Soviet political system see his *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Cambridge, 1956, pp.10-18 and also Brzezinski, 'Totalitarianism and Rationality' in *American Political Science Review*, Vol.50 (September 1956), Skilling and Griffiths, *Interest Groups*, pp.4-5.
20. *Times International*, special cover about the Soviet Union, 19 February 1990.

## CHAPTER 1

### RUSSIAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS DURING THE TSARIST PERIOD

#### Introduction

Even before the rule of Peter the Great, Russia had been interested in extending its southern border and in influencing the Middle Eastern countries to the West and the Indian sub-continent to the East.<sup>1</sup> Iran, because of its strategic location situated along a large part of the southern border, comprising ethnic minorities, has remained of geo-political interest to Russia throughout history. It was Ivan the Terrible who made Russia's first abortive attempt to seize Iranian territory in the Caucasus.<sup>2</sup>

Peter the Great resumed where his predecessor had left off, but no major successes were achieved until the start of the nineteenth century when, in 1801, Russia annexed Georgia and part of Azerbaijan and turned the Caspian sea into a Russian lake.<sup>3</sup> In 1813, under the treaty of Gulistan, Iran was forced to accept Russia's influence in the Caucasus, which saw Moscow acquiring economic privileges enabling it to take an active role in Iran's internal affairs.<sup>4</sup>

In 1828, under the terms of the Turkmanchai treaty, Iran was forced to hand over the territories of Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as making economic concessions as a result of defeat in its war with Russia. The latter treaty established what is basically the present border between the two countries. The commercial convention attached to the treaty established the foundation of Russo-Iranian trade which by World War I constituted 65 per cent of all Iranian trade.<sup>5</sup>

At this time Russia's military and political élites viewed the domination of Iran as a part of Russia's undeniable rights. 'The Tsar, his minister and his generals firmly believed that sooner or later Russia was destined to incorporate Iran in its Empire'.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the Minister of Finance at the time believed that 'the northern part of Persia was intended as if by nature to turn in the future, if not into a part of the great Russian Empire, then, in any case, into a country under our complete protection'.<sup>7</sup>

Around 1848, the Russian poet and ex-diplomat Fyodor Tiutchev produced in a more literary form the boundaries of Russia's territorial ambitions. In his poem *Russian Geography* he identified seven rivers delineating Russia's natural frontiers: the Neva, Volga, Euphrates, Ganges, Elbe, Danube and the Nile. By the end of the Tiutchev era, Russia had already established its influence in the northern part of Iran.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1880s central Asia, up to the northern frontier of Iran, was under Russian control and Russian expansionist policy continued into the twentieth century, going as far as to manipulate Iran's internal affairs. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Russia protested more against internal developments in Iran (for instance, railroads linking two parts of Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan were considered to have military utility, or using the Cossack brigade as a leverage for manipulation of Iranian internal affairs). The Cossack Brigades, organised by the Russians in order to serve the Iranian monarch, were in fact more loyal to their Russian officers than him. That Russian influence in the region was an 'undeniable right' was something more explicit than implicit in official discourses at this time. For instance, V.M. Lamsdorff, Minister of Foreign Affairs under Nicholas II at the turn of century, saw the relationship between Iran and Russia as follows:

The principal aim pursued by us during the long years of our relationship with Persia ....[has been]....to preserve the integrity and inviolability of the position of the Shah, without permitting hegemony by a third power .... to

gradually subject Persia to our dominant influence, without violating the external symbols of her independence.... [or compromising] her internal regime....Our task is to make Persia obedient and useful....<sup>9</sup>

By 1907 the distance between rhetoric and reality to Iran's 'integrity' and 'independence', and its actual subservience, was still in vogue, as could be seen from the Anglo-Russian convention of 31 August 1907. While recognising in principle the 'integrity' and 'independence' of Iran, in practice the terms of the convention actually divided the country into two parts, the northern part of the country being allocated to Russia, the southern part to the British, with a neutral zone in between.<sup>10</sup>

This convention was referred to when, in 1910, Moscow forced Teheran to remove the American financial expert W. Morgan Shuster, who had been invited by the authorities to reform the country's financial system.<sup>11</sup> Russian troops, consequently, were to occupy the new parts of Iranian Azerbaijan.

In 1912 Russian troops launched a new invasion across the Iranian border (this time from the east), entered Mashhad in the north-east of Iran and shelled the tomb of the Imam Reza, the holiest shrine in the country. The Russian consuls, despite the earlier declaration about Iran's independence, gradually assumed firm control over the administration of the northern provinces, and by the summer of 1914 the Persian government in that region had virtually ceased to exist.<sup>12</sup>

### **After the Bolshevik Revolution**

By the end of World War I the traditional pressure exerted by Russia on Iran was relaxed. Revolution, civil war and invasion by foreign armies were to suspend Russia's policy of conquest against Iran. While the Bolshevik regime had to fight for its life and existence, Iran's strength grew noticeably. There was strong temptation for British officials to



include Iran in a British influenced protection zone which stretched from the Middle East (most of which was under British military occupation) to the Indian sub-continent (long a bastion of imperialism). Such plans were not to be realised, but British troops were stationed throughout Iranian territory, using it as a free transit zone for their expeditions into the Caucasus and Transcaspian.

During the civil war in Russia there was a temporary abdication of Tsarist privilege, but this was brief. The Bolshevik regime saw Iran not in terms of friend or foe but in terms of her revolutionary potentiality. Within a month of the Bolshevik rise to power, Leon Trotsky, Commissar of Foreign Affairs, denounced Tsarist arrangements in Iran and offered a new relationship.<sup>13</sup> In return for this, Iran officially recognised the new Soviet regime (becoming the first government in the world to do so).<sup>14</sup> But it was not long before the Bolshevik regime again assumed the features of a classical state and the new Soviet relations quickly came to be based on the patterns of conventional politics.

The Bolsheviks conquered Tsarist territories wherever possible, and simultaneously attempted to neutralise politically its ancient neighbour states, including Iran. In the latter case the Bolsheviks adopted a policy of developing instability by the undermining of legitimate governments. The decision to set up an independent Gilan Republic on the Persian side of the Caspian sea was an ironic example set against the promise they had made in respect of a withdrawal from Persia when all Tsarist agreements were declared null and void.<sup>15</sup> The apparatus to achieve this policy in the Middle East and Asia was set up following the Comintern-sponsored Congress of the Peoples of the East held in Baku in September 1920. The Bolsheviks also launched a major anti-imperialist propaganda offensive, declaring the Soviet regime the protector of the exploited peoples of Asia.<sup>16</sup>

In 1920 negotiations for the establishment of a treaty of friendship between Iran and Soviet Russia began in Moscow. The new regime was eager to secure collaboration with her southern neighbours: Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. The treaty arrangements with these countries would put an end to Soviet diplomatic isolation and would constitute a victory over western imperialism in Asia and the Middle East.<sup>17</sup>

Soviet concern about the possible use of Iranian territory by western powers to launch military attacks on the Russian and associated republics led to the conclusion of a treaty on 26 February 1921 in which Articles 5 and 6 would have legitimised their act of deploying troops on Iranian soil in the event of military interference by a third party.<sup>18</sup> Five days before the signing of this treaty, Iran experienced a coup staged by Reza Khan (then Reza Shah Pahlavi the first king of the Pahlavi dynasty). Both this treaty and a new agreement, added to the main treaty in 1927 regarding each side's neutrality and avoidance from hostile alliances, were by nature defensive measures that the new Bolshevik regime sought in order to protect its integrity.<sup>19</sup> However, the former Soviet Union repeatedly violated the original concept of the treaties and referred to the specific articles to justify its acts of aggression and the offensive measures which it employed against Iranian sovereignty.<sup>20</sup>

At this time the Cossack division was the only efficient unit in the Iranian army, but it was staffed by Russian officers. Reza Khan, in order to exploit Russian temporary weaknesses, engineered the dismissal of all Russian officers and took back the Iranian city of Rasht from the Red Army. The subsequent defeat of the pro-communist rebels of Kuchik Khan led to the suppression of provincial uprisings in other areas such as Khorasan, Azerbaijan and Kurdistan.

## **During World War II**

Inter-war relations between Iran and the Soviet Union have been a continuation of the pattern established in the nineteenth century, one of Russian pressure and Iran's attempt to protect herself by exploiting a third power whose Middle Eastern or global interests might bring them into conflict with Russia. With the exception of the short period after the civil war Iran has tried to use every means possible to stay outside the sphere of Russian domination.<sup>21</sup>

In November 1940, when Hitler invited the Soviet Union to join the Axis powers, Moscow put forward four conditions including domination over Iran. The Nazi-Soviet pact of August 1939 signed by Molotov and Ribbentrop, in which the Soviet demand was secured, encouraged Stalin's territorial ambitions. On 26 November 1940 Moscow informed Germany 'that the Soviet Union would be prepared to accept agreements with Axis powers whereupon spheres of influence would be drawn, providing amongst other things that the 'area south of Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf be recognised as under Soviet control'.<sup>22</sup>

On 22 June 1941, Hitler's forces attacked the USSR and this event prompted a joint Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran on 25 August 1941. Although Reza Shah had made a proclamation of neutrality at the start of the War, his pro-German sympathies and his toleration of Nazi activity made the Allies fear an Iranian drift to the German camp which could have placed the oil fields of the Persian Gulf in German possession as well as blocking the transit routes for shipments of vital war materials to the Soviet Union. Iran was once again divided into two zones of occupation; the Soviet Union occupied the provinces of Azerbaijan, Gilan, Mazenderan, Gorgan and Khorasan whilst Britain took control of the southern part of the country.<sup>23</sup>

With the tripartite treaty signed on 30 January 1942, Britain and the USSR agreed that allied forces would be withdrawn from Iranian territory 'not later than six months

after all hostilities between the allied powers and Germany and her associates have been suspended'.<sup>24</sup> It did not take long before Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, and was sent into exile.

The stage for the initial phase of post-war Soviet-Iranians relations was set during 1942-1943, when the Soviet army was engaged in a desperate struggle with Germany and Iran was under joint Anglo-Soviet occupation. Even while the fate of the Soviet Union itself hung in the balance, Moscow did not neglect to take measures that could be used to control Iran after the war. It was with the aid of Soviet agents, civilian and military, that Iranian Communist organisations were formed and armed.<sup>25</sup>

In the summer of 1943 when the Soviet embassy in Teheran ordered the newly appointed Prime Minister Ali Soheyli to turn over to the USSR: 100,000 rifles, 300 light machine guns and 1,000 heavy machine guns, the weapons were not intended for the Red Army. Two years later the Iranians found their rifles in the hands of troops raised by the Soviet sponsored separatist regime of Azerbaijan.<sup>26</sup>

During the war Soviet officials ruled their areas like conquerors. No Iranian troops were permitted in to the northern provinces, and separatist movements were encouraged among the non-Farsi speaking Kurds and Azaris.<sup>27</sup> The Tudeh (communist) party, which was established in 1941, operated freely as Moscow prepared the ground to intensify its activity in Iran.<sup>28</sup>

But successful Iranian resistance to Soviet pressure was prompted by the arrival of Sergei Ivanovich Kavtaridzeh, the newly appointed assistant Peoples' Commissar of Foreign Affairs, who came to Teheran in September 1944 with a demand for oil concessions in the northern provinces, ostensibly to match British privileges in the south. Simultaneously the Tudeh party denounced Saed (the Prime Minister), demanding his resignation and the granting of oil concessions to the USSR. To justify its demand, the Tudeh party worked out the thesis of 'the security perimeter of the Soviet Union', which

proclaimed northern Iran essential to the security of the USSR. Oil concessions, it was argued, especially one comparable to that of the British-Iranian oil company in the south, would consolidate the region as a security perimeter.<sup>29</sup> Despite Tudeh inspired demonstrations and labour unrest in Teheran, Iran stood firm and Kavtaradzeh returned empty-handed to Moscow.

In December 1944 Dr Mohammad Mosaddeq introduced in the 'Majlis' (the Iranian parliament) a bill prohibiting any minister from negotiating oil concessions with foreigners without the prior approval of Parliament. Oil, however, was only one of the goals of Soviet policy in Iran. The others were the establishment of a communist regime in Teheran as well as separatist communist dominated governments in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan (Kordestan). In Kurdistan, Moscow was able to exploit not only the anti-Iranian, but also the anti-government sentiments of the tribal aristocracy. The Soviet Union initially preferred to see this territory as part of communist controlled Azerbaijan, but they soon realised the Kurds would not accept such a solution.<sup>30</sup> In Azerbaijan the Soviet Union had assisted a local version of the Tudeh party, the so-called Democratic Party. The party was to stage a coup d'état, occupying government buildings and proclaiming the autonomy of Azerbaijan.<sup>31</sup>

On 19 November 1945, Soviet troops, who had since August kept Iranian forces encircled in the barracks at Tabriz, offered the Iranian commander a choice between surrendering and returning to Teheran, or joining the new Azerbaijanian army. The commander chose the first alternative. This was part of a larger Soviet plan to establish separatist states in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan and the takeover of central government itself. The Iranian government approached both the British and the Americans with requests for help but the western powers were in no mood to quarrel with Stalin.<sup>32</sup>

Iran, though discouraged by the West, decided to appeal to the first session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. The Soviet Union was furious and refused to

answer any questions on the subject. The security council then asked the parties to settle their dispute by direct negotiation. This meant of course, that Iran could not count on support from the international organisation either. In the midst of these diplomatic manoeuvres the cabinet of Ebrahim Hakimi resigned and Ahmad Qavam, an experienced old style politician, became Prime Minister.<sup>33</sup> With the war over, Britain and America were unwilling to risk a breakdown of their alliance with Stalin for Iran's sake. The Tudeh party provoked rioting in the streets and could have perhaps overthrown the government. Under the circumstances direct negotiations with the USSR appeared to Iran as the best, even the only action open to them.<sup>34</sup>

Qavam, following his appointment as Prime Minister on 27 January 1946, sent a telegram to Stalin offering to go to the Soviet Union to discuss Azerbaijan and oil. His offer was accepted and Qavam immediately left for Moscow where he conducted negotiations with Stalin and Molotov until 8 March 1946.<sup>35</sup> On 2 March 1946 Stalin called Qavam to tell him that Soviet troops would leave Khurasn (Korasan) and Semnan but would remain in occupation of Azerbaijan, Gilan Mazandaran and Kurdistan.<sup>36</sup> (In accordance with wartime agreements, all foreign troops had been scheduled to evacuate Iranian territory no later than six months after the termination of hostilities).<sup>37</sup>

Next, fresh Soviet forces poured into Iran and moved in three prongs toward Teheran and the Turkish and Iraqi frontiers. Hundreds of tanks and heavy concentrations of artillery were to be seen all over north western Iran. This build-up of military forces and the blatant violation of the wartime agreement alarmed the United States. On 4 March 1946 President Truman sent a note to Moscow which, while still being diplomatically polite, made it very plain that the United States did not like the way Russia was behaving towards Iran.<sup>38</sup> The American note expressed the concern of the United States over the continued presence of Soviet troops in Iran and the hope that the Soviet government would do its part in promoting international confidence 'by withdrawing immediately all Soviet forces from the territory of Iran'. This had little effect and Truman

finally decided to send a blunt message to the Russian Premier demanding their withdrawal.<sup>39</sup>

There is little information from the Soviet Union itself on the process through which Stalin decided to withdraw his forces from Iran but the political turmoil in Eastern Europe must have been foremost in his considerations. Stalin obviously did not want to jeopardise European goals for the sake of achieving his aims in Iran. To upset the United States over Iran may have compromised the possibilities of Soviet influence on its far more important western frontiers. At this time Stalin's hold over Eastern Europe had not been consolidated. Developments in Poland and East Germany may have been encouraging but the situation elsewhere was still uncertain. Czechoslovakia was still governed by a non-communist coalition led by Eduard Benes, and Masaryk was still alive. Rumania had not yet got rid of the King and the non-communist politicians. Similarly, in Bulgaria the struggle for political control had not ended. Stalin must have weighed up the opportunities and risks and decided that his chances of pushing much of Eastern Europe in the desired direction should not be endangered.

### **Postwar relations**

On 24 March 1946 Andrei Gromyko announced at the United Nations that all Soviet troops would leave Iran within five to six weeks.<sup>40</sup> But face-to-face with Stalin and Molotov, and with fresh troops on Iranian soil, Qavam had felt heavily under pressure. On 4 April 1946 Premier Qavam and Ambassador Sadchikov reached an agreement in which the Soviets thought they had eventually got access to Iran's northern oil. According to the agreement Qavam made four significant concessions: (i) to recommend to Parliament the establishment of a joint Russian-Iranian oil company (the Soviets to hold 51 percent of the stock) to exploit the oil resources of the Caspian sea; (ii) to grant cabinet posts to three Tudeh party members; (iii) to recognise the rebel Azerbaijan

government and (iv) to withdraw Iran's complaint against Russia before the United Nations.<sup>41</sup>

Celebrations over the fourth point were premature. At the United Nations the Iranian delegate Hosein Ala, disobeyed the Prime Minister and relying on the Shah, of whose sentiments he was aware, refused to withdraw the Iranian complaint. Ala addressed the United Nations on 21 March 1946. His articulate speech, the first complaint ever brought before the United Nations, focussed attention on events that were to alarm President Truman.<sup>42</sup>

Qavam ostensibly was determined to do everything possible in his power to implement the promises he had made in Moscow. Although he had his own policy outline, perhaps different with those of the Shah, both were pursuing the same objectives towards the Soviet pressure. Qavam, on the basis of his tactical calculation and despite the Shah's suspicions, promoted Russo-Persian cultural relations, allowed the Tudeh party freedom of the streets and appointed to the cabinet three of its prominent members: Iraj Eskandari, Dr Morteza Yazdi and Dr Freydun Keshvarz and granted the Azerbaijan rebel government considerable autonomy. The minor concessions enabled Premier Qavam to get on with his clever manoeuvring which led to parliamentary rejection of the agreement and made eventual withdrawal of Soviet forces possible.<sup>43</sup>

On 9 March 1946 when the Soviet army began its withdrawal from Azerbaijan most western officials publicly asserted that Stalin's retreat was prompted by pressure from the UN Security Council and criticism in the West. They also feared that Qavam was becoming a Soviet puppet, and indeed, in late spring and summer 1946, his policies seemed to bear out this assessment. But by the end of 1946 Qavam had dismissed the Tudeh ministers, set parliamentary elections for early 1947 and had totally changed his policy by turning his back on the Soviet Union as soon as he believed the imminent



danger of invasion was over. This U-turn had been preceded by the significant mobilisation of Iranian troops to evict the rebel regime in Azerbaijan.

Moscow faced a dilemma in this situation. The Soviet leadership could send troops back into Iran to prevent the Iranian army from intervening in Azerbaijan and to prevent the election of the fifteenth Majlis. Such an action in a rapidly deteriorating climate of world opinion and the deterioration of US-Soviet relations could lead to dangerous consequences. The Soviet leadership subsequently decided to do nothing.

The elections were held in January 1947 and on 22 October 1947 a coalition of Qavam's Democrat Party and the National Front, headed by Dr Mohammad Mosaddeq, by an overwhelming majority rejected the oil agreement with the Soviet Union. For the remainder of Stalin's era Soviet-Iranian relations were poor, trade was negligible and the Tudeh party was outlawed after an attempt on the life of the Shah in February 1949. In April 1951 the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (BP) was internationalised and Mosaddeq was elevated to the post of Prime Minister. Soon after Stalin's death in March 1953, a struggle developed between the Shah and Prime Minister Mosaddeq.

On 8 August 1953 Georgii Malenkov, the Soviet Premier, in his speech reviewing the world situation used conciliatory phrases towards Iran and argued that 'the experience of thirty-five years had shown that the Soviet Union and Persia are interested in mutual friendship and collaboration. At present, on the initiative of the Soviet Union, talks are being held concerning the settlement of a number of frontier problems and mutual financial claims'.<sup>44</sup> However there are different views on the Soviet attitude towards the Mosaddeq government. Although Mosaddeq was anti-Western and anti-imperialist the Soviet Union was very cautious in supporting him.

A week later the Shah tried to oust Mosaddeq but he failed and fled the country. *Pravda* echoed the Tudeh Party in denouncing the Shah's conspiracy and calling for an end to the US presence in Iran.<sup>45</sup> But the Soviets hesitated to support the Tudeh party's

demand to stage a riot to bring the regime down, perhaps for a little satisfaction with Mosaddeq's government or they may not have been quite sure whether the Tudeh Party had a chance for success or not. They may simply have been apprehensive about the American reaction. However three days later, with the assistance of America, the Shah was returned to power and Iran increasingly began to rely on US economic and military aid.<sup>46</sup>

### **After Stalin**

The post-Stalin Soviet leadership sought to normalise government-to-government relations with Teheran as part of its emphasis on 'peaceful co-existence' with the nations along its southern border. This must be interpreted more as a change in tactics rather than an alteration in substantive objectives as the Soviets with 'peaceful coexistence' meant pursuing the old interests through political and economic competition, instead of military confrontation. In late June 1954, despite Iran's reluctance to leave the Baghdad Pact which proved to be an obstacle to progress in relations between Teheran and Moscow, the Soviet Union offered to negotiate all unsettled border issues, and on 2 December 1955 the relevant protocols were signed in Teheran and came into force on 20 May 1954 with the final treaty concerning the Soviet-Iranian border being signed in Moscow on 14 May 1957.<sup>47</sup> Satisfactory settlement of the border issue removed an old source of tension and led to a Soviet-Iranian agreement on joint sharing of 'all water and power resources of the frontier part of the rivers Arask (Aras) and Atrek for irrigation, power generation and dumbest use'. Though normalisation was clearly the prior objective, Moscow was critical of Iranian membership in US-sponsored military pacts which became the Baghdad Pact in February 1955, an alliance initially composed of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Britain.<sup>48</sup>

In late June 1956 the Shah visited Moscow and impressed Soviet leaders with his desire for improved relations. Iran reassured Moscow on the defensive character of its

military relations with the West and insisted that no nuclear bases would be established in Iran. This must have satisfied the Kremlin because, as Khrushchev later noted during the Shah's visit, 'we had sensed on his part considerable interest on improving relations'. During the Shah's visit a three year commercial agreement was signed which to some extent improved relations.<sup>49</sup>

On 12 February 1959, with Moscow convinced that the Shah intended to sign a military pact with the United States, the Soviet press agency TASS issued a statement charging the Shah with 'pursuing a two-faced stance policy towards the Soviet Union which could not but lead to grave consequences, first of all to Iran'.<sup>50</sup> Prior to the Shah's decision came the revolution in Iraq in 1958, which added to his anxiety regarding relations with Egypt. Iran during that period needed to get closer to the United States.

In March 1959 the Iranian government formally declared Articles 5 and 6 of the 1921 Treaty 'obsolete' and no longer applicable. On 15 March 1959 Iran signed a defence treaty with the United States. *Pravda* rejected Iran's new path, asserting that the 1921 Treaty remained fully in effect.<sup>51</sup> The Soviet Ambassador, Nikolai M. Pegov, was called home and for the next three years the Soviet media launched bitter attacks against the Shah and his policy. The Iranian media responded in much the same style.<sup>52</sup> A communist, clandestine radio station calling itself the National Voice of Iran, started broadcasting from the Soviet Caucasus, calling for a revolution against the Pahlavi dynasty.

On 15 September 1962 the Shah had instructed the Iranian Foreign Minister to inform the Soviet government 'the imperial government of Iran will never permit Iran to become an instrument of aggression against the territory of Soviet Union and, specially denied any foreign nation the right of possessing any kind of rocket bases in the Iranian soil'.<sup>53</sup> This decision allayed the key Soviet security consideration and removed a major obstacle to diplomatic normalisation between two countries. With the Shah's 'White

Revolution' on and the threat of the left reduced, he could play the Russian card in order to reflect Iran's dissatisfaction with the US attitude regarding economic aid and military supplies.<sup>54</sup> However the Shah's decision was more symbolic as he continued to allow the United States to keep its intelligence gathering equipment in the north close to the Soviet border.<sup>55</sup>

During the next sixteen years of the Shah's reign, Soviet-Iranian relations were constantly expanded by good political ties and extensive economic co-operation. Indeed, Iran before the Islamic revolution in 1979 was the Soviet's third largest trading partner in the third world.<sup>56</sup> The trade was primarily based on Iranian exports and a marginal importing of Soviet goods into Iran. Teheran was the largest Third World purchaser of Soviet machinery and equipment.<sup>57</sup> In November 1963 President Leonid Brezhnev (that is, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet) visited Iran. Shortly thereafter, the Soviet attitude toward the Shah's domestic reform 'White Revolution' underwent an abrupt change from sharp denunciation to guarded approval and the Soviet media adopted a more balanced coverage of Iranian internal developments.<sup>58</sup>

In 1964 the Shah's twin sister and a strong economic delegation went to Moscow and one year later the Shah made his second trip to Moscow. Consequently, the security agreement greatly influenced the pattern of expanding economic co-operation and realistic political interaction.<sup>59</sup>

In January 1966 an agreement was signed allowing Soviet participation and aid in the construction of a steel mill, a machine tool factory, a gas pipeline to be paid for by Iranian deliveries of natural gas, and some power stations. The Isfahan steel mill which was a project that the US had refused to assist in building, indeed realised one of Iran's major aspirations. The 700-mile gas pipeline (IGAT 1) from Iranian oil fields in the south to the north was a tripartite deal with the Soviet Union and Western Europe. In 1977

IGAT 2, the laying of a second pipeline was contracted and planned to be completed in 1988.<sup>60</sup>

During 1967 business ties were further strengthened with the visit to Moscow of Prime Minister Amir Abas Hoveida. He brought with him almost all the ministers and executives responsible for the economy and planning. Despite Soviet dissatisfaction with Iran's military build-up and the notions of Iran being an American 'client state', the working relationships between the two countries, economically, militarily and even politically, improved and the Soviet Union became one of Iran's most important partners in the world. The USSR even began to supply the Iranian army with a certain amount of arms and equipment on a cash basis. Iran and the Soviet Union agreed an arms sale in 1967 with a \$110 deal which was extended largely from 1973. Although Iran's major motive in this regard was not to alter its main source of arms suppliers from the West, and this decision to some extent had political colour, aimed at putting pressure on the United States, however, the Shah ultimately intended to diversify Iran's sources of arms supply in order to get closer to his 'independent national foreign policy'.<sup>61</sup>

## NOTES

1. For a detailed discussion on Soviet Russia interests in the Middle East and the roots of expansionism see Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy Towards Turkey Iran and Afghanistan: The Dynamic of Influence*, New York: Praeger, 1982. For a bibliography of Soviet writings on Iran, see *Bibliografiya Irana: literatura na russkom yazyke, 1917-1967*, gg., Moscow, 1967. The standard collection of Soviet diplomatic documents, up to 1938, is *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, Vol.1-, Moscow: Politizdat, 1957-; for other periods see *Sbornik deistvuyushchikh dogovorov*, Vol.1-, Moscow, 1921- (abbreviated here as *SDD*). For an historical account of Soviet interests towards Iran see George Lenczowski, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East*, Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1971. For a survey of Russo-Iranian relations between the two world wars which also contains a historical review of the bilateral relations, see G. Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran, 1918-1948*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1949. For a study of the post-war relations between Teheran and Moscow see Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Soviet-Iranian Relations: A Quarter-Century of Freeze and Thaw*, in Ivo J. Lederer and Wayne S. Vucinich, *The Soviet Union and the Middle East*, Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1974, pp. 65-75.
2. For an Iranian account of Russo-Iranian conflicts see R.K. Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran: A Developing Nation in World Affairs*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1966.
3. For a different survey of Tsarist policy towards Iran from 1552 to the beginning of World War I and Russian interests see Ivan Spector, *The Soviet Union and the Muslim World*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1956.
4. Shahram Chubin, *Iran's Foreign Relations*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, pp.60-2.
5. Ruholla K. Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy, 1914-1973: A Study of Foreign Policy in Modernizing A Nation*. Virginia, 1975. For a detailed study of Russia's economic policy and objectives see Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914: A Study in Imperialism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968. [Iran has always been called Iran. The ancient name of southern parts of Iran 'Pars', where the Achaemenidae in 500 BC were ruling the world's largest empire, gradually became Persia and European countries tended to use the term to call Iran. In 1925 Iran under Reza Shah and as a nationalistic gesture, formally asked that all governments use the name Iran. Since 1979 and as counter-measure by the nationalist elements against the Islamic regime's attempting either to ignore Iran's historical heritages and cultural roots or to undermine it in favour of the Islamic values, the old term 'Persia', has been widely used. For the study of this issue see Abol Hasan Pirnia, *The History of Ancient Iran*, (in Farsi Teheran Donya-e-Ketab) also, *The Cambridge History of Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975].
6. Firuz Kazemzadeh cited in Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy Towards Turkey Iran and Afghanistan: The Dynamics of Influence*, New York: Praeger, 1982.
7. *Ibid*, p.58.

8. *Ibid.*
9. Ivo J. Lederer, *Russian Foreign Policy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962, p.510.
10. Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran 1800-1914*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.
11. Abraham Yeselson, *United States - Persian Diplomatic Relations 1883-1921*. New Jersey, 1956.
12. See Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran and the World: Iran and the Superpowers; The Soviet Union*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, pp.78-82.
13. In order to establish new relations with Persia on the bases different with those of the Tsarist era, Soviet leadership sent special envoys to the Persian government. The first Soviet envoy was one of the old-guard Tsarist diplomats called Karl Bravin who arrived in Teheran on 12 January, 1918 [there are disagreements between various historians regarding the date of his arrival, for example, George Lenczowski refers to the 14th January (George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran 1918-1948*, p.48) and Sayeed Fatemi believes the date was January. The latter seems more accurate.] He had a message from Lenin which categorically dismissed all privileges Tsarist Russia obtained in Iran by force. A more detailed message from the Soviet Foreign Ministry was delivered to Teheran by Kolomitsev on 26 June 1919. This note declared that all debts due to the Persian government to Tsarist Russia were null and void, the same as all concessions made to the Tsarist regime before. For the document of the first mission see S.N. Fatemi, *Diplomatic history of Persia, 1917-1923*, New York, 1952, pp.138-9 and for the details of the second mission see Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs*, New York, 1930, Vol.1, p.289.
14. See Harish Kapur, *Soviet Russia and Asia 1917-1927*, Geneva, 1965, p.146. Also L. Shapiro, *Soviet Treaties: A Collection of Bilateral Treaties, Agreements and Conventions, etc. concluded between the Soviet Union and Foreign Powers*, Vol.I, Washington, DC, 1952, p.2.
15. Galia Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East: From World War II to Gorbachev*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.176. For the Soviet literature on modern Iran see M.S. Ivanov, (ed.), *Istoriya Irana*, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1977; S.L. Agaev, *Iran mezhdú proshlym i budushchim*, Moscow: Politizdat, 1984.
16. See *Pravda*, 18 September 1920. In the case of Iran see Sepehr Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, pp.7-24.
17. See Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *ibid.*, pp.58-61.
18. See Karl Radek, *Vneshnyaya politika Sovetskoi Rossii*, Moskva, Petrograd, 1923, p.74. For the text of the treaty, see *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki*, Vol.3, pp.536-44.
19. R.K. Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 155-1941: A Developing Nation in World Affairs*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1966. For Soviet work on Iranian foreign policy during this particular period see S.L. Agaev, *Iran: vneshnyaya politika i problemy nezavisimosti, 1925-1941 gg.*, Moscow: Nauka,

- 1971; and E.A. Orlov, *Vneshnyaya politika Irana posle vtoroi mirovoi voiny*, Moscow: Nauka, 1975.
20. *Ibid.*, p.22.
  21. Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran*.
  22. For a documented account of the Nazi-Soviet agreements on northern tier see Raymond J. Sontag and James S. Beddie, (eds.), *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941, Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Office*. Washington, DC: Department of State, 1948, pp.255-60, Memorandum of meeting between Ribbentrop and Molotov on 13 November 1940.
  23. Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha, *The Soviet Union in the Middle East*. London: Heinemann, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1982, pp.32-3.
  24. For the text of the treaty, see *Vneshnyaya politika Sovetskogo Soyuza v period otechestvennoi voiny*, Vol.1, Moscow, 1944, pp.190-6.
  25. Galia Golan, *op.cit.*, pp.29-31.
  26. Hassan Arfa; *Under the Five Shahs*, London, 1964, p.316.
  27. The official language in Iran is Farsi. Some people, especially since the Islamic revolution and as a sign of 'Iranism' rather than 'Islamism', prefer to call it Persian, however, Farsi is not limited to Iran, as Tadjiks and Afghans speak in Farsi.
  28. Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *op.cit.*, pp.65-7.
  29. R.K. Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy, 1941-1973*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975, pp.25-38.
  30. For an interesting survey on the Soviet attitudes towards Mosaddeq from an Iranian angle see Shahrokh Akhavi, *The USSR, Mosaddeq and Khomeini: Soviet orientation toward two Iranian Revolutionary Regimes*, New York: Albany, 1980. On the issue of the Kurds see Howard Hensel, *Soviet Policy towards the Kurdish Question*. Also Richard Herrmann, *The Role of Iran in Soviet Perceptions and Policy, 1946-1988* in Nikki R.Keddie and Mark J. Gasirowski, *Neither East Nor West*, Yale University Press, 1990, pp.79-80.
  31. For an excellent study on the Soviet attempts to annexe the Iranian Azerbaijan and the reason behind Lenin's decision to change the name of Caucasus Albania (Aran) to the 'Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan' see Enayat Reza, *Azarbayjan va Aran (Albaniya-e-Ghafghaz): Azarbayjan and Aran (Albania of Caucasus)*, Entesharat-e-Iran zamin Teheran, 1981.
  32. See Bruce R. Kuniholm, 'Rules of the Game' in *Neither East nor West*, p.203.
  33. R.K.Ramazani, *op.cit.*, pp.45-7.
  34. The Soviet Union had pledged to call its troops before 1 January 1946.
  35. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, *Mission For My Country*, London: Hutchinson, 1968, pp.114-5.



36. There is a very limited amount of documented Soviet political literature on this issue. One of them, although not impartial and less documented, however, is the work of historian M.S. Ivanov, *Noveishaia istoriya Irana* (Contemporary History of Iran) and a part he has written on Iran in the sixth volume of the *Sovetskaia istoricheskaiia ensiklopediia* (Soviet Historical Encyclopedia), Moscow, 1965, 6, p.243. See also Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, *Mission For My Country*, pp.117-118.
37. On 29 January 1942 the Tripartite Treaty of Alliance was signed between the Soviet Union, Great Britain and Iran. Soviet Union and Britain pledged to defend Iran from aggression of Germany or any other power and 'respect the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Iran' and promised to withdraw their forces 'from Iranian territory not later than six months after all hostilities between the allied forces and Germany and her associates have been suspended'. For the full text of the treaty see Appendix II in G. Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran*.
38. This has been recorded as a starting point of the Cold War which later was spread in Eastern Europe as well as other parts of the Middle East. For an analysis of the the Soviet expansionst policy in the Middle East leading to the Cold War see B.R. Kuniholm, *The Origins of the Cold War in the Near East*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980. On the starting point of the Cold War, and a view on the fact that by 1946 the Cold War had not yet started, see Debrah Larson, *Origin of Containment: A Psychological Explanation*, Princeton University Press, 1985.
39. There are ambiguities surrounding the case from both sides, first in regard to Stalin's calculation and his conviction for withdrawal; second, the nature of the American attitude and their perception. However, Truman, based on his own version of the events gives more credit to the decision. See Harry Truman, *Mr President*, New York, 1952. Whatever the impact of the Truman role was, one should accept the timing helped him very much as Stalin could not see more than a little advantage in maintaining in Iran an exchange for possible greater losses. For an interesting study of US policy towards Iran during World War II and the post-war period leading to the response to the USSR over the Azerbaijan Crisis see Mark Hamilton, *The Origins of the Iranian American Alliance*, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987. For an American view on the Soviet intentions see William Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy: From Entente to Détente to Cold War*, New York, 1982, p.131. See also John O'Neill, *Foreign Policy Making at the Time of Crisis*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982, pp.133-5.
40. *Pravda*, 27 March 1946.
41. The Soviet government has failed to publish documents that could shed light on the process of Moscow talks and reflect the Kremlin's view on the issue. See Sepehr Zabih, *Communist Movement in Iran*, Berkeley, 1966, p.91, also Lev Vasilev, *Puti Sovetskogo imperialisma*, New York, 1954.
42. See Richard Herrmann, *The Role of Iran in Soviet Perceptions and Policy* in Keddie and Gasirowski, (eds.), *Neither East Nor West*, New Haven and London, 1990, pp.64-7.
43. Ruhollah K. Ramazani, *op.cit.*
44. *Pravda*, August 15, 1953, p.4.

45. *Tass*, 'A failure of attempted coup d'état in Iran', cited in *Pravda*, 17 August, 1953. p.4.
46. For a detailed survey of the struggle between the Shah and Mosaddeq and its outcome see Mark Gasiorowski, 'The 1953 Coup d'Etat in Iran', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, No.3, 19, August 1987. For a first hand account of the events, nevertheless from an American angle with a personal interest, see the CIA agent Kermit Roosevelt, *Counter coup: The struggle for Control in Iran*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979. For a recent Soviet view on this historical event see, Fyodor Sergeyov, 'Operation Ajax', *International Affairs*, Moscow, 8 August 1987, pp.105-15. For a British view, who was in a close collaboration with the US from the very beginning, see Anthony Parsons, *The Pride and the Fall*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1984. For the Tudeh Party's view see the *Pomphelet*, 28 Mordad (the day when the Shah returned to power) published by the Party and called to support Mosaddeq. The Shah too has given his view in two of his own books, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Mission for My Country*, London: Hutchinson, 1968. Also *Answer to History. I*, written in Farsi in exile, published in English, New York: Stein and Day, 1980.
47. For the texts, see *SDD*, vyp. 17/18, pp.76-84, and 22, pp.75-101.
48. Iran joined the Baghdad Pact on October 1955. Following the General Abdolkarim Qassem Coup on 14 July 1958, Iraq boycotted the Baghdad Pact and moved towards Moscow. Iran in order to counter balance the new alliance signed a joint defence agreement with the United States. In March 1959 Iraq came out of the Baghdad Pact. The Pact later was renamed CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation) and its headquarters moved to Ankara.
49. *Pravda*, 5 July 1956, p.1.
50. *Pravda*, 12 February 1959. In the fall of 1958 Iran started talks with the United States to sign a bilateral military agreement with the United States which strongly irritated the Soviet Union. After exchanging a few notes, Iran and the Soviet Union agreed to talk about the issue. The Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vladimir Seminov, came to Teheran and suggested Iran leave the Baghdad Pact. Two days later on 14 February 1959, Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Asghar Hekmat, attended a session of the Iranian Senate and rejected the Soviet demand. Following the latter development, the Soviet Union unleashed a violent war of nerves against Iran. In this regard the Shah's memoir offers a clear account of the issue.
51. The unilateral abrogation of Article V and VI by the Shah was a proper response to the Soviet intimidation based on the 1921 Treaty. The Soviets promptly insisted that all the conditions of the Treaty were valid. The Soviet reply appeared in *Pravda*, 15 March 1959.
52. The absence of the Soviet Ambassador N. Pegov from Teheran for almost nine months was a clear sign of Moscow's dissatisfaction with Teheran and the summit of three years of very cold relations between the two countries.
53. Pars, Iranian News Agency cited in *Ettelaat Teheran*, 16 September 1962.
54. The Shah's policy of having more balanced relations with the two super- powers had a broader historical base than one based on dissatisfaction with the United States. In 1952 a parallel policy albeit, with negative effects, was initiated by Mosaddeq and from 1979 Khomeini, too, in his own style followed suit. Indeed

whenever Iran feared a threat of a bigger power it moved closer to the opposite side.

55. These sites were operative until after the Islamic Revolution's success. The close down of the intelligence gathering sites reduced the US capability to control the Soviets' missile testing in Central Asia.
56. After Egypt and India.
57. See United Nation's Year Book of International Trade Statistics from 1975 to 1979. Also Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States, *Soviet Economy in the Time of Change*, Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1979.
58. For a detailed account of the Shah's revolution from the above (White Revolution) see Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (the Shah), *Mission for My Country*, New York, 1961 and Tamadon Bozorg, *The Great Civilization*, Teheran, 1972. For a different view on the issue see Anthony Parsons, *Pride and the Fall: Iran 1974-1979*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1984.
59. See R.K. Ramazani, *op.cit.*, pp.280-295.
60. For an analytical study of trade between the two countries and the roots of Soviet interests on Iranian energy resources see Central Intelligence Report, *Prospect for Soviet Oil Production: A Supplemental Analysis*, July, 1977. For a detailed description of Irano Soviet Energy Co-operations see C.H. McMillan and J.B. Hannigan, *The Soviet-Iranian Energy Relationship*, Ottawa: Carleton University, 1979. For a very interesting essay on this issue see Robert E. Hunter, *The Soviet Dilemma in the Middle East, Part Two, Oil and the Persian Gulf*, Adelphi Papers, Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1969.
61. See Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *The Great Civilization*.

## CHAPTER 2

### MOSCOW AND THE REVOLUTIONARY REGIME IN IRAN

1979-1985

#### **The power struggle in Iran**

In the autumn of 1978, the snow-balled protestation of the people against the Shah, hand in hand with indecisiveness of the morally discouraged Shah, led to the formation by the nationalists, Islamic fundamentalists and communist forces, of an alliance which paved the way for a classical revolution. On 16 January 1979, the Shah left Iran, and on 21 February his regime totally collapsed. The new regime led by Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini terminated a 2500-year history of monarchy in Iran and heralded the beginning of a new era in which Islamic ideology reappeared as a political force and a challenging phenomenon to the outside world. The new regime with an apparent militant Shiite tendency, seemed determined to spread the new model of government to the rest of the Islamic world.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the Islamic revolution of 1979 in heavily Shi'a populated Iran created an opportunity for practising the old politics of Shiism in modern age based on its traditional teaching.<sup>2</sup>

The advent of the new regime with its emphasis on the Islamic brotherhood was somehow against the ideas of Iranian nationalism which had assumed a highly secular and anti-Islamic character in the Pahlavi period.<sup>3</sup> Feeling insecure domestically, and preoccupied with the role of the foreign powers,<sup>4</sup> the new regime was prompted to attack Iranian nationalism and reject foreign influences symbolised mainly by the United States. In fact Iran's Islamic leaders were not, as it then seemed, against nationalism in its

patriotic sense as much as they were against superiority of a particular race or state which, from their point of view, could be considered a threat to Islamic universalism.

After the Islamic revolution, the USSR seemed more interested in responding to the new circumstances, rather than initiating new moves. The Soviets although very slow to understand the depth of the revolutionary changes in Iran, however, were quick to accept it.<sup>5</sup> On 12 February 1979, the day after the collapse of the Shah's regime, the USSR officially recognised the provisional government of Mehdi Bazargan. The anti-American orientation of the new regime and its anti-imperialist nature had convinced the Soviet Union that the revolution in Iran was going to be a clear cut political gain. Despite Iran's aspiration for exporting the Islamic revolution and also disagreements over Afghanistan, which could tarnish the course of relations between Teheran and Moscow, the Soviet Union continued in supporting the revolutionary regime even after the adoption by the new regime of a tough line against the 'left'.<sup>6</sup> The Kremlin's unconditional support for Teheran did not last long as the first signs of pessimism towards the new regime soon appeared in the Soviet press.<sup>7</sup>

The provisional government of Mehdi Bazargan with a cabinet formed by a coalition between Nehzat-e-Azaadi (Freedom Movement), and Jebhe-e-Melli (National Front), headed by Karim Sanjabi as junior partner and foreign minister, faced foreign policy challenges even before coming to power. The new government influenced by the clergy had inclinations towards Khomeini's dismissive and negative approach to the foreign policy issues. The new regime's first foreign policy statement signed by Sanjabi not only contained a vigorous support of nonalignment but also expressed a strong sense of animosity towards both superpowers.<sup>8</sup>

After two months and under pressure from the radical groups, Sanjabi resigned and Bazargan immediately appointed Ibrahim Yazdi, an educated former citizen of the United States, to the post of foreign minister. He, in 1987 had joined Khomeini's small

convoy from Iraq to France and returned to Iran in February 1979 on board the 'Revolutionary Flight' alongside Khomeini. Yazdi, at the beginning of his term in office, made a few critical decisions including the cancellation of military deals with the United States which Iran regretted most after eruption of the war with Iraq.<sup>9</sup> He also engineered the Algiers meeting with Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brezezinski, which accelerated the demise of the interim government later on in the year. The Iranian delegation included Bazargan and his defence minister, Mostafa Chamran, another US educated Islamic nationalist who was also in charge of SAVAMA - the new version of the notorious Iranian secret service, SAVAK. The meeting between the Iranian delegate and Brezezinski took place on 1 November 1979 in order to improve the severely deteriorated relations between Teheran and Washington.<sup>10</sup> The negative consequences of this ill-fated mission were intensified by the admission of the Shah to the United States for medical treatment. The latter led to the occupation of American embassy in Teheran and forced Bazargan to resign. In April 1980 the American failure to rescue the hostages in Teheran provided Moscow with an opportunity to renew its support for the Islamic regime and also to divert attention from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> Despite the Kremlin's friendly approach, Iran's anti-Soviet attitude continued and also assumed a new dimension when Iran decided to stop gas supplies to the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> Although competition for power between the radical clergy and the liberal nationalists had played a crucial role in bringing the Provisional Government down, foreign policy issues facilitated the process.

In March 1979 Brezhnev praised the 'good neighbourly relations' that existed with Teheran<sup>13</sup> and in less than a year, in his report to the 26th Congress of the CPSU, he appreciated the Islamic revolution's 'fundamentally anti-imperialist nature' and wished Iran success and offered the Kremlin's support to the new regime.<sup>14</sup> Indeed the Soviet Union was genuinely in favour of rallying around the new revolutionary regime in Teheran. Initially, the Soviet Union had vetoed the UN call for economic sanctions

against Iran and also warned the US against any military intervention in Iran, stating that 'Moscow would not tolerate any outside interference in Iran'.<sup>15</sup>

From the beginning of the revolutionary movement, the Shi'a clergy seemed eager to appear as a conventional political force in Iran. This desire seemed all but practical, since the absence of an appropriate political institution appeared as the main obstacle to achieving it. The lack of a conventional political institution at least for time being, led to undermining of the clergy's political role by the smaller parties. Consequently the power thirsty clergy were prompted to form their own political establishment called the Islamic Republic Party (IRP). The main founders of the the new party were Khomeini's proteges and close associates such as Mohammad Housein Beheshti, Akbar Rafsanjani, Javad Bahonar, Ali Khamnei. The newly formed party became the clergy's exclusive political club from where they launched a brutal attack against 'liberals' and successfully plotted the collapse of the provisional government.<sup>16</sup> This was the first phase of the clergy's battle against the liberals which prepared the ground for the Maktabis (Committed and Doctrinaire) to launch the second phase of their battle against the remaining Islamic nationalists and liberal elements of the regime.

Although some liberal elements of the interim government seemed interested in the normalisation of Iran's foreign affairs, a growing anti-American sentiment within the revolutionary ranks compelled them to adopt a more negative approach to foreign issues.<sup>17</sup> This was in accordance with the slogan 'Na-Sharghi Na Gharbi' (Neither West Nor East), inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the period marked by the provisional government witnessed Iran's further isolation in the world.

The Soviets, admittedly, were keen to improve their relations with an anti-US regime in Iran whose 'anti-imperialist attitude' was already considered a double bonus. These advantages, of course were in addition to the closure by Teheran of a US surveillance stations next to the Soviet border, the decision to withdraw Iran from

CENTO, and the calling home of Iranian forces from Oman in the mouth of the Persian Gulf.<sup>19</sup> In the meantime the Soviets had reasons to be disappointed with Teheran too since the new regime's manifested anti-Communist ideology,<sup>20</sup> the urging of Soviet Muslims to resent the Kremlin's rule, the vigorous protestation against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and systematic eradication of Iranian Communists had created an ambience of frustrations which the Kremlin seemed to be trying to ignore by adopting measures of self-restraint.

Although genuinely in favour of having good relations with Iran, the Soviet Union, on the whole, did not have a coherent policy towards the Iranian revolution which was necessary to strengthen its position in Teheran. The Soviets, rather than being firmly in command of their policy implementation, were more responding to policy developments in the region, either initiated or manipulated by the other states including the United States, Iran and Iraq.<sup>21</sup> It seems that the adoption by Moscow of inappropriate policies toward the new regime in Teheran, in part resulted in a misunderstanding of the socio-political changes in Iran after the Islamic revolution. However, the Kremlin's support for the Tudeh party, despite dissatisfaction with the Iranian regime, and a sharp increase in arms export to Iraq before and after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, in September 1980, further weakened Moscow's position and damaged Soviet strategic objectives in relation to Iran. Otherwise, the Soviet Union had managed to come to terms with conventional wisdom, would have had a better chance to establish a strong standing in Iran and avoid the forthcoming losses in the region as whole.

The Shi'a clergy and their Islamic extremist allies, during the period between the collapse of the interim government and the first presidential election, tried to play down their liberal Muslim allies and concentrate power exclusively in their own hands. In order to achieve this, immediately after Bazargan resigned, the first ruling body of the Islamic revolution 'Shoura-ye-Enghelab-e Eslami' (the Islamic Revolutionary Council), which



was hastily formed, partly in exile to fill the power vacuum which occurred after the departure of the Shah, and completed in Teheran in late 1978, took over the control of the state and appointed its members to ministerial jobs.<sup>22</sup> In the Interim Government, Ali Akbar Rafsanjani (now the President) became a Deputy Interior Minister and Ali Khamnei (Khomeini's successor), Deputy Defence Minister. In that cabinet, which lasted up to the presidential election took place in December 1979 (and which formally continued until after inauguration of the new presidency in January 1980), Abol Hasan Banisader had the office of foreign affairs. A few weeks later, Banisader despite Khomeini's hesitation in supporting him, was elected the state's first president.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the pro-American provisional government, Banisader's presidency represented a pro-European tendency, combined with an aspiration to take Iran back to the world community. Banisader, who seemed determined to centralise power in Iran and quite keen to get rid of the various power centres, was against administrative anarchy and manipulation by the interest groups of the State's affairs. The inexperienced President, in addition to the internal impediments, was facing complicated foreign policy issues, first and foremost the relations with the United States. He was also restricted by a preventive code of conduct set forth by Ayatollah Khomeini to regulate Iranian foreign affairs. The latter had crippled his liberal predecessors before him. Under the given circumstances, Banisader was left with little chance to implement his favourite policies particularly in regard to foreign affairs.

Meanwhile, the IRP and its highly ambitious and powerful leader Ayatollah Mohammad Housein Beheshti, whose desire to become the Republic's first president was dashed earlier in the year, were busy escalating their attempts to climb to the summit of executive power. At that stage, uprooting the discredited nationalists and purging the remaining liberals turned out to be the prime targets in the clergy's battle for power. In this scheme, the removal from the scene of the newly elected president and his close allies was carefully considered. The IRP leader Beheshti, and his colleagues, despite

having adopted radical policies in respect of Iran's foreign affairs, and publicly being against opening dialogue with the United States were, in private, quite interested in examining the routes and the potential for wheeling and dealing with Americans, albeit on their own terms.<sup>24</sup>

The taking hostage of American diplomats in Teheran,<sup>25</sup> followed by the outbreak of the war with Iraq,<sup>26</sup> fully occupied Banisader through his short-lived and ill-fated tenure in office and paved the way for his final removal by the clergy. The conclusive phase of the challenge between the clergy and the liberals, this time represented by Banisader, took place in May 1980, soon after the Madjlis election ended and the IRP appeared as the power house of the Islamic extremists.

The conflict between the Islamic extremists and liberals became a public war when Banisader, according to the Islamic republic's constitutional law, proposed his nominees for the post of Prime Minister, and the newly assembled Madjlis (controlled by the IRP) rejected them all. In order to break the deadlock, Banisader accepted the IRP nominee for the Premiership and thus, Mohammad Ali Raja'i, an ordinary school-teacher, became the Prime Minister. With the appointment of the Prime Minister, power was almost evenly divided between the two factions. However, the inter-regime factional challenges over the other ministerial jobs continued as both parties kept insisting on the legitimacy of their own candidates. Banisader, learning from the provisional government's mistake of allowing the clergy to manipulate foreign policy, insisted on having one of his own men head the foreign ministry. Banisader had concluded that, with maintaining control over Iran's foreign affairs, he would soon be able to bring state powers under control. This presumption resulted in the rejection by Banisader of seven candidates proposed by the IRP (including the editor of the IRP daily organ Mir Housein Mousavi), and the Islamic extremist prime minister Ali Raja'i. This post remained vacant until after Banisader was sacked by the Majlis and with his removal the first phase of the power struggle within the regime was completed in favour of Islamic hardliners.<sup>27</sup>

During the conflict of portfolios, Banisader's faction had been insisting on the candidates' qualifications while the IRP was trying to underline Islamic values. In other words, this conflict portrayed a confrontation of the clergy's idealism with the pragmatism of the so-called liberals. With the latter phase of power struggle ended, the future direction of the newly born republic was decided too. However, the IRP, confident of the likely outcome of the ongoing struggle, was preparing a grand design aimed at a radical departure from the State's past pattern of politics and implementation of new policies based on Islamic guidance and Khomeini's interpretation of Islam.<sup>28</sup>

The revolutionary leaders of all factions sharing the same historical suspicions of all Iranians about Moscow's ultimate objectives in Iran, despite the Kremlin's goodwill gestures and supporting the new regime, turned to anti-Soviet orientations and soon started attacking Moscow's policy. Amongst them were Abol Hasan Banisader, then elected the President, and Sadeq Ghotbzadeh, the Minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>29</sup> The Islamic conference created a new occasion for Iran to intensify her anti-Soviet policies. The Iranian representative, in an obvious attempt to exploit the Afghan crisis, urged the member states to 'condemn the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and demanded an immediate withdrawal of the Red Army from Islamic lands.'<sup>30</sup> Iran, apparently inspired by the Islamic Conference, decided to join the other Islamic nations in boycotting the Moscow Olympics, itself a political protestation against the invasion of Afghanistan.

In fact the new regime, despite receiving verbal support from Moscow and its client, the Tudeh Party, was more affected by the actual threat to its stability projected by the Soviet Union, including the moves by the Red Army, approaching Iran's border from the north and east, and also a possible subversive scheme, being plotted by pro-Moscow leftist groups. The preoccupation of the Islamic regime with a 'Kremlin threat' and its consequent results made Moscow suspicious in its turn about Iranian intentions. For example, the Soviets' analysis of Iranian perception made the Kremlin concerned about the potential for rapprochement between Iran and the United States. Moscow's anxiety

began to emerge in the Soviet press and in the publications of the Tudeh Party in Iran. Moscow's dissatisfaction, at this stage, was more directed at the interim government rather than the revolutionary regime as a whole. However the liberal nationalist elements of the interim government took the opportunity to justify their position by attacking Soviet policy and the 'Kremlin's clients in Iran', while favouring an immediate solution to end the hostage crisis. Moscow, in a retaliatory gesture, increased her support for the hardliners including the militant students who held the US diplomats hostage in Teheran.<sup>31</sup>

Alongside a brutal assault aimed at the liberals and their Western oriented political world views, the Islamic fundamentalists were also getting prepared to launch a new round of aggression against Eastern orientations in Iran. During the first phase of the struggle for power, although the main hostility was directed against the United States and the West, nonetheless, a systematic conflict against the Soviet Union and its left-wing allies in Iran (the Tudeh Party, Mujahedin Khalgh and Feda'een khalgh guerilla fighters) was continuing all the time.<sup>32</sup> The Islamic extremists, from the early days of the new regime, had concluded that the main threat to their position was from the heavily armed, well connected and politically organised 'left', to whom the Soviet support was guaranteed. But Banisader's appalling performance during the early days of his presidency, and his weakness in management particularly after the Iraqi invasion of September 1980, had made him a prime target of the clergy's elimination plot, even before his post-election honeymoon ended. Eventually, as the propaganda war between the liberals and the leftist groups was continuing, the powerful leader of the IRP and head of the state's judiciary force Ayatollah Beheshti took the opportunity to engineer Banisader's removal after he had prepared the stage for a vote of no confidence in the Madjlis. Beheshti's next move was aimed at elimination of the left wing elements and all Soviet allies in Iran.<sup>33</sup>

## **The birth of 'Hizbollah' in Iran**

The termination of the liberals' period of office coincided with the birth of 'Hizbollah'<sup>34</sup> in Iran's domestic political scene. Hizbollah, which soon became a new political home for Islamic extremists within the IRP and non-party members of clerical circles, at first was a small militant group. The chief protagonist and public advocate of the new organisation was Mohammad Ali Raja'i, who owed his Premiership to the clergy. The clergy, at this stage of power the struggle, needed to have a loyal figurehead, exposed to their domination and ready to do the dirty jobs. Indeed Raja'i, who soon managed to prepare the ground for the powerthirsty clergy to take over the state's power, proved to be the right man for the job. The driving force behind the Hizbollah, again, was Ayatollah Beheshti, whose greed for power had become public knowledge.

The Hizbollah organisation, from being merely a gang of agitators, gradually turned into a political force matching its hard line predecessors Danesh Jouyan-e-Mosalman Payro-eh Khat-e Emam (Muslim student following the Imam Line; MSFI), who in 1979 had captured the US Embassy in Teheran and taken the American diplomats hostage. Hizbollah soon appeared as a decisive factor in the formulation and conduct of Iranian foreign policy). The new organisation in order to justify its stand, and to defend its existence, claimed to be an advocate of Khomeini's school of thought. Later on in the year, the new organisation which was created mainly to fight the liberals and manipulate the state's domestic and foreign policies, appeared in the Lebanon and made its name known worldwide as the most powerful Shi'a political force - thanks to financial support received from Iran and also its brutal acts of terrorism on an international scale.

At the height of the challenge between the radicals and liberals upon having established firm control over the state's foreign policy, the polarisation of power played an instrumental role in providing the Islamic radicals with an opportunity to secure their objectives. The Islamic extremists, to whom the Palestine Liberation Organization and

the Shi'a Amal group in Lebanon were sympathetic, were determined to set up a power base in the Lebanon. The new move was justified under the banner of exporting the Islamic revolution. In this context, Iran's generous contribution paved the way for Hizbollah and turned the new Shi'a based politico-military organisation into the most important single political force in the Lebanon. In the face of this new development, the Islamic extremists could see the materialisation of their objectives in regard to the export of the Islamic revolution abroad. The success of Hizbollah in the Lebanon encouraged the radicals to push the Government to create similar centres in some other parts of the Middle East such as Sudan. In spite of the radicals' perception, to whom the export of the Islamic revolution was a 'divine duty', Iran's political and military presence in the Lebanon and Sudan must also be seen in the light of a desperation for publicity resulting from Iran's isolation in the world. The pragmatist elements in the regime joined Islamic idealists in supporting Hizbollah in the Lebanon at least for two reasons; first, Iran's presence in the Lebanon could be interpreted at home as a sign of strength; second, with influence over the terrorist groups, the Iranian regime would have a better position in negotiating with the West over its economic and political demands. This policy to some extent paid off when Iran emerged as one of the key players in the Lebanese politics and in the release of the Western hostages.<sup>35</sup>

The outbreak of the Gulf War following the Iraqi invasion of Iran on 22 September 1980, put Moscow, who despite Washington had full diplomatic relations with both countries, in a very difficult position.<sup>36</sup> From the Soviets' point of view, continuation of the war could have damaging consequences on their strategic interests in the region. However, despite some observers who believed the Soviet Union up to 1982 was siding with Iran,<sup>37</sup> the Kremlin's mainly even-handed approach to the Gulf War continued for quite some time. Implementation of this policy, due to its negative nature, from both the Iranian and Iraqi point of view, further diminished the remainder of the Kremlin's influence in the area. Consequently, the latter development forced Moscow

time and again to swing from one side to the other in order either to modify its position or to justify its policy towards the warring parties. Such a view regarding the Soviet support to Iran at the beginning of the war, although it contained ingredients of truth, failed to convince Iran to accept it, let alone appreciate it.

After the eye-catching victory of Iranian forces in the 'Battle of Khorramshaher' on 24 May 1982, during which more than 20,000 highly equipped Iraqi troops surrendered and the rest withdrew from the only major city they had captured in Iran,<sup>38</sup> the clergy's political position at home further improved. The Battle of Khorramshaher perhaps created the best opportunity for Iran to stop the war and claim war reparations. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia and other Arab states of the Persian Gulf were ready to pay Iran around \$150 billion in cash, if she stopped the war.<sup>39</sup> With the ceasefire implemented and the war ended, Iran was clearly in a position of strength. Not only would it have prevented further destruction and bloodshed on both sides, but also the country could have returned to the world community and claimed a leading political role in the region. One of the by-products of such a decision would have been a chance to join the Gulf Co-operation Council which Teheran had sought long before the revolutionary regime came to power.<sup>40</sup> However, Khomeini, who was possessed more by Islamic ideology and less inspired by new ideas, put 'divine duties' before 'worldly opportunities' and decided to continue with the war. Therefore, regardless of its strategic consequences in the region, he ordered the Iranian forces to advance further into Iraq, apparently in the hope of toppling the Iraqi regime and moving towards universalisation of the Islamic revolution.<sup>41</sup> The victorious battle of Khorramshaher, in the long run, despite the early expectations of the Islamic idealists' and their wishful-thinking hypotheses, proved to be a deceptive gain, since it did help the further spread of the fear of an Islamic expansion in the region and intensified Iran's isolation.<sup>42</sup>

An inevitable change in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy towards Islamic Iran took place in 1982 after the battle of Khorramshaher ended with a humiliating defeat of

the Iraqi forces. The new shift in the course of the war sharply increased the Soviets' anxieties since they had realised that the reshaping of the region's military equilibrium could jeopardise Moscow's strategic interests in the area. Quite interesting to Moscow, Iran, the dominant power in the region, had been turned from her pro-American orientation, while Iraq, a newly fledged power, had signed a friendship treaty with the USSR.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the Kremlin desired to keep the door of friendship open to both countries, and to turn the region's balance of power to its own side. But the continuation of the war would eventually compel the Kremlin to side with one party, and threaten relations with the other. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, deprived of a dynamic regional policy, instead of initiating constructive diplomatic moves aimed at strengthening its position kept trying to vindicate itself from the alleged involvement in the Gulf War. Nevertheless, from the Kremlin's point of view, the new development in the war front, could only make their problematic outlook more complicated.

Whatever the Soviet initial view of the war was, after July 1982 Moscow began to move towards Iraq and visibly abandoned its proclaimed policy of impartiality, perhaps in the hope of keeping a greater balance of power in the region. Indeed, 1982 was a watershed in terms of Soviet-Iranian relations as the Kremlin's unconditional support for the 'anti-imperialist' revolutionary regime came to an end.<sup>44</sup> With Iraq on the defensive and inevitably interested in a 'peaceful solution' to the war, and Iran increasingly adamant, the Soviets' change of heart seemed justifiable.<sup>45</sup> Soviet-Iranian relations were further exacerbated during the summer of 1982 when the Soviet media attacked Teheran for the decision to reduce the number of the Soviet diplomats in Iran and to close the Soviet Consulate in Rasht. Iran, in pursuing a policy of open hostility towards the Soviet Union, took further steps, refused to issue an entry permit for the Soviet journalists and reduced trade with the USSR. Soviet conciliatory gestures towards Baghdad, including the resumption of arms supply to Iraq hand in hand with increasing demonstrations of



anti-regime sentiments by pro-Moscow Iranian leftist groups, fuelled the anger of Iranian leaders and consolidated their hostility towards the Kremlin.<sup>46</sup>

In February 1983, a high ranking Soviet diplomat-spy, Vladimir Kuzichkin, a deputy head of KGB in Teheran, defected to Britain. After he had submitted a list of Soviet spies in Iran to the British Government, the Iranian regime stepped up the suppression of the Tudeh Party and its harsh treatment of the left. The Iranian regime who somehow had got access to the list of the alleged 'Soviet spies', arrested the Party's First Secretary, Nouredin Kianouri, along with almost all other top leaders.<sup>47</sup> On 30 April 1983, Kianouri appeared on television and confessed to spying for the Soviet Union. Within a few months the Commander of Iran's Navy Forces, Rear Admiral A. Afzali and two other officers whose undercover relations with the Tudeh Party had deepened Iranian leaders' suspicions of the Soviets' subversive plot, were executed. The suppression of the Tudeh Party coincided with the further penetration of Iranian forces into Iraq and apparently forced the Soviet Union to revise its policies towards Iran. The latter change of heart resulted in resumption of Moscow's arms supply to Iraq.<sup>48</sup> The Kremlin's renewed support for Baghdad was a reassuring sign for the Iranian clerical leaders who believed (as far as the fate of the Islamic regime was concerned) that the Soviet Union was no better than the United States.

From that point on, further deterioration of Soviet-Iranian relations continued and the Islamic regime intensified its anti-Soviet policy attitude. Comparative analysis of historical records offers enough substance to the argument that the period from 1979 to 1982 was a period of continuity in the Soviet foreign policy towards the revolutionary Iran. Since 1983, although the policies basically remained the same, however, some tactical alterations in the conduct of the Kremlin's policy towards Iran tarnished its image of continuity. In this regard, the Soviet decision to lean towards Iraq deserves to be mentioned as an example. The new development, from the Soviets' point of view, failed to translate into a major gain, no matter if it was pleasing to the United States.

Washington, still locked in a competition game with the Soviet Union and also at odds with revolutionary Iran, was not in the position to make her satisfaction public. The United States, despite a bitter memory of the Lebanon incident of 1983 in which a car bomb suicide attack (engineered and executed by the alleged pro-Iranian Hizbollah) had exploded the US Marine barracks in Beirut and killed more than 200 US servicemen, forcing Reagan to pull out of Beirut, was still determined to advance its policy objectives in the region. Thus, it was interested in avoiding further confrontational policies in the region.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Post-Brezhnev period**

Soviet foreign policy facing a period of stagnation during the final days of Brezhnev in office, and continued its indecisiveness even after Andropov assumed power in the Kremlin in 1982. Yuri Andropov, who in November 1982 had inherited from Brezhnev a deteriorating relationship with Iran, obsessed with his 'anti corruption' programme, neither had a mandate nor enough time to restrict Soviet policy. Therefore, during his brief period in the Kremlin the ailing leader, preoccupied with domestic issues, found but little opportunity to pay proper attention to foreign policy issues, let alone the regional crisis in the Third World and bilateral relations with Iran. Moreover, Andropov, the even before his own ascent to the Kremlin, had been a less than enthusiastic supporter of Soviet involvement in the Third World.<sup>50</sup> The reflection of his Third World scepticism continued during his period in office while he questioned the Third World's potential for socialism.<sup>51</sup> In this regard, the Afghan crisis perhaps was the only exception in which he had shown more than a little interest, since the Soviet position in Afghanistan seemed to have further deteriorated.<sup>52</sup> The new leader in the Kremlin was forced by domestic and foreign determinants to be content with minor changes in the course of Soviet-Iranian relations. Iran's upper hand in the war with Iraq and her uncompromising attitude in

regard to the Afghan crisis had virtually left him no room for manoeuvre.<sup>53</sup> In the meantime the Soviet initiative for a peace settlement in the Middle East suffered a setback when the Kremlin's diplomatic effort failed to sell the idea of an international peace conference to the parties involved. The latter blow to the Soviet position coincided with the revealing of the United States' decision to set up a new 'Central Command' for its Rapid Deployment Forces in the Persian Gulf which could have severely marginalised Soviet diplomacy in the region.<sup>54</sup>

Soviet-Iranian relations were further worsened by Iran's decision to expel 18 Soviet diplomats on spying charges. Although the Soviets protested against the decision, it did not bring about a change in Iran's growing hostility towards the Kremlin.<sup>55</sup>

The deterioration of Soviet-Iranian relations extended into an even briefer period when Chernenko assumed office in February 1984. Chernenko's period, although it witnessed an improving position of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, wherein it was forced to have a low profile for quite some time, nonetheless failed to improve the Kremlin's relations with Iran. 1984 has been an interesting period in the course of Soviet-Iranian relations linking the post-Brezhnev era to that of Gorbachev's. In this period, a cluster of incidents that occurred one after the other constantly exacerbated the tense relations between the two countries. In this regard a major offensive by Iran against Iraq that seriously threatened the Iraqi city of Basra,<sup>56</sup> and also Iran's intimidations to close the Straits of Hormuz should Iraq manage to disrupt Iranian oil exports, were amongst the most noticeable examples.<sup>57</sup>

The Iraqi regime, desperate to hold back Iran, was prepared to employ every possible leverage against Iranian forces since it was struggling for survival. Thus, they turned to a widespread usage of chemical weapons and application of poison gas on the war fronts. The new escalation in the war earned the Iraqi leaders worldwide condemnation even from the United States who risked its growing relations with Iraq to

join international public opinion in blaming Baghdad. The Soviet Union, deeply disappointed with Iran, and concerned too about the growing ties between Washington and Baghdad, failed to take advantage of the new developments.<sup>58</sup>

On 15 April 1984, the Soviet Prime Minister, N.A. Tikhonov, received T.Y. Ramazan, the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, and re-affirmed the Soviet Union's stand in favour of a settlement of the dispute between the two countries by political means.<sup>59</sup> Apart from the Kremlin's political support for Baghdad, the meeting was more about a sharp increase in Soviet arms supply to Iraq as part of an extensive inter-government agreement.<sup>60</sup> The latter move by no means could have helped improving Soviet-Iranian relations. There is no doubt that the Soviet Union had a good understanding of Iran's strategic significance, but on the other hand, the humiliation of an Iraqi defeat was far too much to be easily tolerated in the Kremlin. Moreover, Iran had never missed any chance to aggravate the tense relations between the two countries.

During Chernenko's period of office, Iran, firstly, to reflect its growing anger towards Soviet attitudes, secondly, in a bid to put pressure on the Soviets to urge them to respond to her demands, yet again reduced the number of the Soviet diplomats in Teheran and Soviet consulates in Tabriz, Isfahan and Rasht. Moscow first reacted the same way as she did in 1983, and then in denying Iran continuation of the technical assistance, called all Soviet experts home, claimed in order to prevent them suffering from the Iraqi air raids against the Iranian cities. Consequently, all Soviet-Iranian joint projects were brought to a standstill.<sup>61</sup> The decision by Teheran to reduce the number of Soviet diplomats, although interpreted in Moscow as a hostile gesture, did not provoke further retaliatory measures which could have led to the disruption of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Soviet diplomacy towards Iran was in accordance with the Kremlin's general inclination to avoid risk-taking measures even towards smaller states.

Although Chernenko, due to his poor health, had never asserted himself as a permanent leader, and thereby did not have any intention to lead the Soviet empire,<sup>62</sup> he nonetheless managed to restore part of Soviet confidence in the Middle East - thanks to US withdrawal from the Lebanon and escalation of the war in the Persian Gulf. Soviet foreign policy under Chernenko, despite a few diplomatic moves occurring towards the Middle East, including rapprochement with Jordan and courting Kuwait and Saudi Arabia at the height of Iran-Iraq War, was almost unchanged towards Iran. The Soviet Union during the Chernenko interregnum not only failed to fully exploit the opportunity created by the US defeat in the Lebanon, but ironically, suffered even more in the other areas as the United States, perhaps in order to compensate for its setback in the Lebanon, decided to strengthen its position in the Persian Gulf.<sup>63</sup>

### **The Soviet media and Iran: Debate upon the bilateral relations**

Moscow, which had once proclaimed its impartiality in the Gulf War,<sup>64</sup> found itself in a difficult position of either being forced to lean towards Iraq or to witness yet another Egyptian or Indonesian experience.<sup>65</sup> The Kremlin, instead of adopting a constructive policy capable of influencing the course of political development in the region, turned to the policy of carrot and stick. But in practice the Kremlin, rather than pleasing and punishing Teheran, seemed just content with a propaganda war against the Iranian leaders and their 'war worshipping policies' and offered them nothing more than verbal support. The attitude of the Soviet media towards Iran was indeed a perfect example of the political confusion the Soviets had in the region. In this context, backing Iran for one reason and attacking her for another even confused the Iranians, who were baffled by which Soviet policy attitude was the 'carrot' and which one was the 'stick'.<sup>66</sup>

On 22 February 1984 Baku Radio, run by the Tudeh party elements,<sup>67</sup> launched a severe attack on Khomeini's regime and condemned Iranian ruling circles for the

suppression of the Tudeh party, and accused them of brutality towards 'avant-garde political forces'.<sup>68</sup> This was only one of the regular daily radio stations broadcasting against the Islamic regime. Other stations such as 'Fedayee's Radio 19' in Afghanistan, 'National Voice of Iran' and the 'Radio Moscow' - 'Persian section', together with the major Soviet newspapers, *Pravda* and *Izvestia* and the 'Novosti' news agency, in line with Kremlin policies, were also busy taking part in a stereotyped political propaganda campaign against the Islamic leaders in Teheran. The reasons behind the Soviet-inspired media attacks on Teheran were mainly embedded in Iran's insistence on providing military aid to the Afghan Muslim guerilla fighters (Afghan Mujahedin), and suppression of the Iranian, pro-Moscow Communists, including the disintegrated Tudeh party. According to the Soviet interpretation, the Islamic regime was 'distancing itself from the will of the Iranian people, who once showed a solid determination to get rid of the American influence over their fatherlands'.<sup>69</sup> The Soviet Union then argued that Iranian policy towards Afghanistan was allied with that of the United States and against Soviet national security. The broad consequences of a prolonged war in the Persian Gulf was another reason for the Soviets' apprehension. In their view, the expansion of the war give the Americans a pretext to dispatch more troops to the region, ostensibly to protect their interests, but mainly to increase their political influence in the area.

The *Izvestia* commentary by I. Fyodorov, published on 31 March 1984, portrayed the Soviet Union's misunderstanding of the developments in the region. The article, in an abortive attempt to respond to 'Western fabrications' about Soviet involvement in the Gulf War, projected all but insight and intelligence into the argument. The article claimed, 'despite the fact that in the preceding few years the media within the NATO member states had rarely agreed on anything with Iranian political leaders and Iran's organ of information', they picked up the Iranian claim that Iraq was using chemical weapons and that these weapons had been 'supplied to Iraq by the Soviet Union'. The article continued 'as for whether or not chemical weapons have been used during the military conflict

between Iran and Iraq, much remains unclear'. Iran continued to insist on its version and condemned the Soviet Union, who, from their point of view, had failed to seize the opportunity to take a strong stand against the use of chemical weapons.<sup>70</sup>

An article in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 21 April 1984, blamed Iran for continuing the war with Iraq and argued that, 'Iran's ruling to stimulate the fighting spirit of its soldiers who are being sent to their deaths in large numbers by whipping up religious fanaticism and militaristic frenzy at the front and the rear, and by crudely slandering the country's democratic forces and by directing terror against them. They are counting on their manpower and economic resources, which are far greater than those of Iraq, and their advantageous position both militarily and geographically. It is the insidious and hypocritical role of the US administration which goes on and on about its supposed interest in ending the Iran-Iraq conflict, which is revealed. In fact, it is doing everything it can to ensure that Iranian and Iraqi blood continues to be spilled, which will lead to the weakening of both countries, split the Arabs and the still wider Muslim world and create the pretext (though a false one) for a further expansion of US military presence in the Persian Gulf zone and preparations for armed invasion of countries in the region'.<sup>71</sup>

After a publicity campaign lasting a few months in the West and a massive co-ordinated protest of people in the cities of Iran against the Soviet Union for providing Iraq with assistance to produce chemical weapons, the USSR tried to join the mainstream of world public opinion. During the occasion that President Mitterrand of France paid an official visit to Moscow on 20 June 1984, *Pravda*, in its long report on the Soviet-French summit talks published on 22 June 1984, noted that 'the exchange of opinion that took place focused on the cardinal problems of the current situation. Among the areas for curbing the arms race, emphasis was placed on the question of existence and elimination of chemical weapons'.<sup>72</sup> This attempt by the Soviets was too little too late and thus, failed to gain attention in Iran.

As Iraq kept moving towards the West and particularly improving its relations with both the United States and France, the Soviet Union, apparently concerned about its own position in Iraq, while still on paper loyal to a policy of neutrality and supportive of a rapid political solution to the war, moved closer to Baghdad and further increased its arms supply to Iraq. Then Moscow publicly supported the Iraqi proposal for a ceasefire and openly criticised Iran's negative attitudes.<sup>73</sup> The Iranian leaders, already at odds with the Soviet Union, kept accusing them of co-operation with Iraq including 'assistance in developing Iraq's chemical weapons', and 'waging chemical war against Iran'. Correspondingly, Teheran adopted a more hostile attitude towards Moscow when news emerged of a further Soviet arms shipment for Iraq.<sup>74</sup> The Soviet decision to bow to the Iraqi request for more arms was made at the wrong time, whilst Moscow was trying to vindicate itself for having assisted or encouraged Iraq to wage chemical warfare against Iran. Nonetheless, the Soviet attempt turned out paradoxical and proved to be an unwise tactical move. This prompted the Iranian masses to join the government-led protestations against the Soviet Union all over Iran.<sup>75</sup>

### **The policy of 'Neither East Nor West':**

#### **Moving towards a conventional regime**

In the meantime inclination towards pragmatism alongside further experience of the new regime in the foreign arenas was gradually appearing in the conduct of Iran's foreign policy. For example the concept of 'Neither East Nor West', which originated from a revolutionary slogan itself outlined by Khomeini not long before his ascension to power, in 1983-84, was an elaboration of the independent Islamic identity of Iran's revolutionary regime. Despite being misunderstood by a number of foreign observers, 'Neither East Nor West' in the beginning was only a reflection of Khomeini's aspiration to establish a genuine Islamic regime, rather than a manifestation of Iran's foreign policy orientation.



In the early days of the new regime and before the new constitutional law in Iran replaced the old one, left-wing groups preferred to have substituted the monarchy with a 'socialist democratic republic', liberals and Western oriented currents were suggesting to have a 'social democracy', whilst Khomeini, in denouncing both notions either as Eastern or Western oriented models, was in favour of an 'Islamic republic'. The precise form of the slogan that people were chanting in Teheran was: Na Sharghi Na Gharbi, Hokoumate Eslami (Neither East nor West, Islamic Regime). At that time the final form of the regime had not been decided and yet the abolition of the monarchy still seemed improbable, and the 'revolutionary anger of the masses' was directed more against the Shah than monarchism itself.

The concept of 'Neither East Nor West' before the Islamic zealots eventually managed to impose their ideal 'Islamic republic' on the others had really no more to do with foreign policy issues other than given the regime an Islamic identity and orientation, independent from both blocs. Even rejecting the East (Na sharghi) before West (Na gharbi) was only for reasons of poetic harmony and ease in chanting the slogan, since the anti-US (symbolising the West) fever of the revolutionaries was much stronger than their anti-Soviet sentiments. It is to say that socio-ideological aspects of 'Neither East nor West', in the beginning, was much stronger than assumed later in the year of its political feature. Up to 1983-84, 'Neither East Nor West', was more defensive and aimed at protecting the regime against the oppositions. The defensive nature of the slogan which later became the landmark of Iran's foreign policy led to the adoption by the regime of more dismissive policies and a negative approach to the issues of foreign affairs.<sup>76</sup>

Suppression by the Islamic fundamentalists of left-wing forces naturally went far beyond the destruction of the Tudeh Party. It did not take long before the radical Muslims' hostile attitudes towards all pro-Moscow groups intensified, and consequently plunged them on to the defensive. Following the declaration by Mujahedin-e-Khalq of an armed struggle against the Islamic regime and the mass execution by the regime of the

denounced members of that organisation, extermination of the left entered a new phase, unprecedented in its brutality and mercilessness. In 1983 and after the Tudeh party affair, systematic liquidation of the Left continued.<sup>77</sup> Moscow reacted to the Iranian's 'anti-Soviet campaign' and accused the CIA of plotting against 'avant-garde forces' in Iran.<sup>78</sup> During the latter phase of the power struggle, Khomeini and his extremist entourage managed to remove all clashing factions and 'anti-revolutionary' forces (the mass execution of the nationalist-royalist elements particularly within the remnants of the Royal Army, including execution of 150 military pilots after disclosure of a coup d'état attempt in 1980, extended the large-scale bloodshed the new regime had started from the early days of its accession to power).

The clergy's determination to establish an Islamic dictatorship was given a boost by the Mujahedin-e-Khalq proclaimed armed struggle. It is conceivable that if Mujahedin-Khalq had not resorted to acts of terrorism, perhaps an outright transformation of the revolutionary regime into a sheer religious dictatorship would not have happened. (The same process had been experienced earlier in Iran under the Shah, while Mujahedin for the first time in 1961 appeared as an Islamic-Marxist terrorist group, staged a number of bank robberies, killed innocent people and bombed civilian installations. The notorious Iranian secret service SAVAK responded to them decisively, and then justified its brutality as 'pre-emptive' and 'punitive' measures against the 'murderer terrorists').

During the first phase of the power struggle in Iran and the destruction of the nationalist and liberal forces, the Soviet Union and its allies in Iran such as the Tudeh party, not only rose to support the regime but even asked for 'further action' against anti-revolutionaries, in the hope that a total removal of Western oriented forces would eventually serve their ends.<sup>79</sup> In the second phase of the power struggle and during the extermination of the Left, Western oriented currents kept silent, perhaps on the basis of having the same presumption. Indeed, the Iranian clergy skilfully managed to eliminate all non-Islamic tendencies in post-revolutionary Iran by playing one side against the

other. In the meantime, the Islamic regime was facing sporadic ethnic uprisings all over Iran, which included the oil rich province of Khozestan in the south, Azerbaijan in the north, Kurdistan in the west, Turkman Sahra, Baluchistan and Phars. The emerging dictatorship, who already had managed to justify its aggressiveness against the 'enemies of Islam', firmly took arms to quell all these revolts. This time the Royal Army and the Nationalist Groups supported the regime's fight against the ethnic unrest, since as they could see, in the light of the latter move the integration of Iran was being preserved.<sup>80</sup>

The Islamic regime in the course of removing the Islamic liberals, suppressing the forces of the left and quelling ethnic unrest, accelerated its march towards a monolithic dictatorship in which even the tendencies for Islamic factionalism within its own ranks would not be tolerated. At the end of this period the reformed Iranian society seemed openly exposed to the application of force and religious dictatorial measures inflicted by the regime under the banner of the 'implementation of the will of God'.

If there is an 'organic connection between internal and foreign policies', then one could argue that the uncertainties dominating the domestic policies in Moscow since 1982 had a clear impact upon Soviet foreign policy including the Third World. In this respect, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf are perhaps the best examples wherein the signs of frustration in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy became visible.<sup>81</sup> Indeed at the time of the changing of the guard in the Kremlin in March 1985, the Soviets' Middle Eastern balance sheet, despite comparatively more activity and further funding, was negative. The critical Soviet situation in Iran was an example, representing the general pattern of Soviet position in the Middle East.<sup>82</sup> The course of Soviet-Iranian relations during 1982-1985 is indicative in suggesting the Soviet Union's general stance in the Middle East and to some extent Third World.

During the last 300 years, by and large, continuity in the conduct of Soviet Russia's foreign policy *vis à vis* Iran was more apparent than the changes, as Soviet

foreign policy (we shall be arguing) is dictated by strategic interests rather than ideological orientations.<sup>83</sup> The tactical policies and temporary objectives of Soviet Russia in Iran all in all reflect the historic drive of an expansionist empire. In that sense, ideology has had a limited impact upon the basic objectives and to drive the policies. The Islamic revolution in Iran in the same way as the Bolshevik revolution added an ideological dimension to the determinants of the bilateral relations between the two countries, influenced the course of relations between Moscow and Teheran. This pattern continued during Brezhnev's final years and to some extent even beyond it. What seems noticeable and interesting in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy during the post-Brezhnev period is the continuity of policies despite the changes in the Kremlin's leadership: competing with the United States and adopting low-risk measures to respond to the foreign issues. This is to say that during the post-Brezhnev period, the analysts of Soviet foreign policy should look more for tactical corrections within the Kremlin's general pattern of changing policy than for substantial changes particularly initiated by individual leaders.

The Iranian parliamentary election of April 1984, in which only candidates 'approved and loyal to the Islamic revolution' could take part, provided the ruling elite with a new opportunity to focus their attention on cleansing their inner circles and concentrating state power in their own hands. This time the maverick mullahs and radical clerical elements were the main targets for such a programme of eradication. Further experience in government had taught the ruling clergy how to practice *realpolitik* and to combine pragmatic measures together with their own policy objectives, despite the resistance posed by radical factions. The new development, interpreted in the West as 'pragmatism'<sup>84</sup>, at that stage was no more than a change in the conduct of Iranian foreign policy since the tough attitude of the dominant clergy on domestic issues remained unchanged.<sup>85</sup>

The ruling body, which preferred to have a more obedient and less nagging parliament, was challenged by the newly elected radical rival clerics who were denied the key jobs in Government. Thus, with Khomeini's intervention the government managed to terminate this phase of the power struggle having established more control over the new Madjlis. The recent victory of the so-called Pragmatism was achieved in part when Shora-ye Negahban (Guardian Council), whose members were appointed by Khomeini to supervise the legislation system, declared the election invalid in more than 30 constituencies and effectively prevented many radical candidates joining the opposition factions in the Islamic Consultative Parliament. However, the new assembly opened on 28 May 1984 and itself rejected some of the new deputies' credentials. During the vote of confidence on both the government and individual ministers, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Akbar Velayati came under attack from different flanks; radical deputies accused him of 'misconduct of Iran's foreign policy', and condemned his policy of 'openness'.<sup>86</sup> At the same time the moderates, close to the powerful Speaker Hashemi Rafsanjani, wanted him replaced by one of their own colleagues.<sup>87</sup> After the parliamentary election, a tripartite struggle took place between President Khamnei, Speaker Rafsanjani and Prime Minister Mousavi mainly focused on having more control over the state's foreign policy. It was proved later that the clear winner of the latter power competition was Rafsanjani who had managed to convince Khomeini to let him lead the state's foreign policy without intervention of other leaders.<sup>88</sup>

### **The Policy of 'Open Doors'**

The first signs of pragmatism in the conduct of Iran's foreign policy appeared soon after the debate in the new Parliament ended. The new trends for pragmatism portrayed in the face of growing support for further 'openness' amongst the moderate clerics. The first noticeable sign of openness was the policy of 'Open Doors', declared in 1984. This new

policy came almost immediately under attack by radical elements who accused the government of appeasing the West.<sup>89</sup> At that time the main advocate of the policy of 'Open Doors' was President Ali Khamnei, whose radical approach to foreign policy issues, after he succeeded Khomeini as Iran's new spiritual leader, surprised the foreign observers.<sup>90</sup> It seems that the main incentive behind the pragmatism of the moderate leaders and their move towards 'open doors' was the military requirements of the country and desperation of Iran's armed forces for spare parts. In 1984 the most pressing priority of Iran's foreign relations was the continuation of the war with Iraq. In order to make a breakthrough in the war, Iran needed to open a window to the outside world. Denying Iraq further political support and military supplies from both East and West blocs and obtaining the necessary weapons and securing as much support as possible of the outside world were the cardinal objectives of the new approach initiated by the so-called pragmatist leaders.

On 29 October 1984 Ayatollah Khomeini, apparently encouraged by moderate leaders, emphasised the importance of foreign relations and rejected the idea of self imposed isolation.<sup>91</sup> This was shortly after Velayati had outlined the Government's foreign policy in the Madjlis.<sup>92</sup> It was the same session in which President Khamnei had put forward the open door policy. Rafsanjani, himself a pragmatist, then kept silent because in his prospective bid for power he needed to have the support of all factions including the radicals. The power struggle within the clerical circles assumed a new dimension when Housein Ali Montazeri, Ayatollah Khomeini's designated successor, publicly criticised the 'system' and voiced 'inner circle' opposition. In September 1984 he openly condemned 'slogans without substance' and a few days later warned against 'violation of privacy and the nature of intelligence'. In his bitter criticism he made a clear reference to the Revolutionary Guards and the Committees' activities - the power bases of the regime and also the main sources of dissatisfaction in society.<sup>93</sup> The harsh tongue he used against the revolutionary guards and the committees was partly directed against

Rafsanjani, then in charge of both organisations (Rafsanjani took over the command and control of the revolutionary forces immediately after Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti got killed in the IRP headquarters bomb explosion in 1982). At the same time Ali Khamnei, as the President, assumed the command of the regular Army. The socio-political contrast which had divided the society after the revolution was clearly depicted in the contradiction between these two forces. In fact, the difference between the Iranian major armed forces illustrated the gap which occurred in Iranian society after the Islamic revolution. The forced coexistence of the regular Army and the Revolutionary Guards portrayed too, the dynamics of the developing conflict between the rival leaders). Ayatollah Montazeri, himself a serious contender for power, apparently was playing a bilateral role; first by acting as a pressure valve, in representing the friendly face of the regime (contrasting Khomeini's uncompromising attitude and toughness), second, by supporting Ali Khamnei, in order to undermine Rafsanjani's position. In 1984, however, despite the intense competition for power between the clerical leaders, the most powerful leader in Iran, was Khomeini himself who still had the last word to say even about his successors.

## Conclusion

Iran's foreign policy under the new regime, although influenced by the Islamic ideological aspirations, maintained its geostrategic, historical and economic determinants. From 1979 to 1985, despite the new discipline set forth by the new regime in favour of Islamic internationalism, nationalism gained ground at the cost of Islamic idealism. The cardinal principles of protecting Iran's integrity, independence and sovereignty, regardless of some striking departures from pre-revolutionary policies, continued to be the basic objectives of the new regime. Manifestation by the new regime of a new world view coloured by the Islamic ideology and determination of the Islamic idealist leaders to

change Iran's cultural identity, educational, economic, judicial system, and attempts to deny Iran's pre-Islamic national heritages, all failed to remove the society's underlying traditional forces and thus, Islamisation plans produced all but a limited change in that sense. The Iran-Iraq war and revival of the Iranian nationalist forces during this period in turn undermined the Islamisation programmes. In the context of external relations, the policy of challenging the big powers and exporting the Islamic revolution resulted in Iran's political isolation in the world. The policy of a negative balance approach in relation with the superpowers was characteristic of Iran's new pattern of behaviour.

In all, Iran's foreign policy in 1985: (1) has been independent of foreign influence and totally nonaligned. In the meantime a growing tendency amongst the moderate leaders for starting negotiation with the big powers over the issues of mutual interests was noticeable. (2) The policy of exporting the revolution maintained its priority but not at the cost of endangering Iran's integrity and the existence of the Islamic regime. (3) The policy of preferring Third World countries in the development of bilateral relations never exceeded the boundary of Iran's national interests, although due to political motivation rather than economic requirements Iran improved her relations with some Islamic nations. The same attempt was made towards the developed states if they did not have a pro-hegemony background or tendencies *vis à vis* Iran such as Japan, Germany, Italy, Australia and Austria.

Iran, during the first five years of the revolutionary period, remained at the forefront of resistance against the United States' influence in the region, and in the meantime confronted the extension of the Soviet presence in the area. In the period leading to 1985, Iran severely suffered from isolation, mainly inflicted on her by the United States and its allies. Failure of the new regime's inexperienced diplomatic network to deal with foreign policy developments, to some extent, intensified her isolation.



Iran's land mass, resources, geography and her political and social culture basically determine her policy options, and individual leaders regardless of their idiosyncrasies, differentiated aspirations and contrasting approaches to foreign policy issues (the Shah and Khomeini), ultimately have been forced to pursue the same objectives which in the long run form the backbone of the state's foreign policy. The Islamic republic of Iran under Khomeini gradually developed into a unique expression of an authoritarian theocracy in which, despite the presence, albeit symbolic, of Western style democratic institutions, such as a parliament and elected presidency, the state's powers were concentrated in the hands of the clergy. Regardless of the resistance presented by opposition forces, the new regime not only managed to maintain its power but also tightened its grasp on the state's domestic and foreign affairs. Iran, by 1985, was shifting her attention from idealistic issues to the more pragmatic objectives, at the cost of distancing herself from the ideological obligations assumed in 1979. The new trend, championed by Rafsanjani, and labelled in the West as pragmatism, introduced a new design in Iran's general pattern of behaviour. Indeed at the end of its first five years the Islamic republic of Iran was moving towards a conventional regime.

## NOTES

1. In 1979 with the advent of the new regime, Iran's foreign policy underwent changes in order to suit the Islamic orientation of the revolutionary regime and also to reflect its world view. The main characteristic of the new orientation in Iran, was embedded in the aspirations and objectives of the Islamic republic's foreign policy. The ideological underlying of Iran's new foreign policy, suggested an internationalist orientation, versus the nationalistic tendencies which was highly valued in Iran under the Shah. But the irony there was in the new regime's proclaimed internationalist tendencies, which later turned to a self imposed political isolation. The new regime proved to be expansionist and offensive, despite the old one, which was defensive, albeit, believed in defence from the position of strength. For a study of Iran's foreign policy during the old days, see R.K.Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran: A Developing Nation in World Affairs*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1966. For an insider's view on the previous regime's foreign policy see, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Mamoriat Barayeh Vatanam (Mission for My Country)*, Teheran, 1967. For an analytical view on the differences between the old and the new policies see Shahrokh Akhavi, *Religion and Politics In Contemporary Iran: Clergy, State Relations in Pahlavi Period*, Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1988. For a very interesting and deep study of the subject from an Islamic angle see Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971. Enayat in his work, quite clearly, expresses the political orientations of the modern clerics in Iran and their vision for an Islamic regime. For an idealistic manifestation of Iran's new policy orientation on the basis of Islamic aspiration see Rouhollah Khomeini, *Velayat-e-Faqih (The Regency of the Theologian)*, Teheran, 1980, also, *Hokomat-e-Eslami (Islamic Government)*, Teheran 1979.
2. See Gholam-Houssein Omrani, *Tarigheh Mobarezat Rohaniyat dar Iran (A brief History of the struggle of the clergy in Iran)*, Mashhad, 1979.
3. See Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran And the World*, Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, p.13.
4. From the early days of the new regime, the indigenous opposition forces and foreign powers were all trying to topple it. In 1979 an Islamic Group called 'Forghan' managed to assassinate more than 50 officials of the new regime including the commander of the army, General Gharaney. On 8 July 1980, a nationalist group, formed by the members of the Royal Army, called the Neghab Organization, staged a coup against the revolutionary regime but failed. More than 240 of them were arrested and executed, including 150 army pilots. Earlier in the year the Iraqi army invaded Iran in the hope of toppling the Islamic regime. According to Bob Woodward, (deputy editor of the *Washington Post* who revealed the Watergate scandal), in his well documented book *Veil*, 'Khomeini was a frequent topic of conversation in the White House meetings. There was sentiment to remove him if possible. After some discussion with the President, who seemed more than usually attentive, Casey (William Casey, the Director of the CIA), was asked to see if some covert plan might be undertaken to oust Khomeini and replace him with Reza Pahlavi, the young son of the late Shah'. See Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, London: Simon and Schuster, 1987, pp.111-12). In 1983, according to the confession made by the head of the Tudeh Party and broadcasted from Teheran television, the Communist forces, alleged with Moscow's blessing, were trying to undermine the authority of the Islamic regime and getting prepared to take over the power in Iran. The

'Mehdi Hashemi scandal' which in 1986 led to revelations of the so called 'Iran Gate Scandal' was yet another attempt to topple the Iranian Islamic regime.

5. Brezhnev's last message to the Shah (December 1978) in which he praised the Shah and wished him success, and Soviet media's attitude towards the Iranian Regime indicated that the Soviet leadership was not quite aware of the revolutionary changes in Iran up to the very last moment. See *Pravda*, 22 December 1981, p.1.
6. Pavel Demchenko, 'USSR-Iran: Horizons of Cooperation', *Pravda*, 6 April 1979, p.4. Also A. Petrov, 'To Strengthen Good Neighbourliness', *Pravda*, 17 June 1979, p.5. For a Soviet view on the Islamic revolution see Z.A. Arabadzhyan, (ed.), *Iranskaya revolyutsiya 1978-79 gg.; Prichiny i uroki*, Moscow: Nauka, 1989; and most recently Z.A. Arabadzhyan, *Iran: vlast' reformy, revolyutsiya (XIX-XXvv.)*, Moscow: Nauka, 1991.
7. See Pavel Demchenko, 'Notes of a Journalist', *Pravda*, 2 May 1979, p.4; A. Petrov, 'The Plot of Reaction', *Pravda*, 12 May 1979, p.5; Pavel Demchenko, 'Iran the making of a republic', *Kommunist*, No. 9, June 1979.
8. See the Interim Government's statement, *Ettelaat Teheran*, 29 February 1987.
9. Pars (the old Iranian news agency), Teheran, 23 March 1979.
10. For the Iranian version of the Algiers meeting see Mehdi Bazargan, *Shoraye Enqelab va Hokumat Movaqat* (The Revolution Council and the Provisional Government), Teheran, 1982, p.28. For the American version of the event, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-81*, New York, 1983, pp.43-52. In this regard see also Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith*, New York, 1982.
11. For the best of Americans views on the hostage crisis and its outcome regarding the Soviet attitude see Richard W. Cottam, *Iran and the United States: A Cold War Case Study*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989, pp.140-158.
12. There was a combination of the reasons behind Iran's decision to stop the gas supply to the Soviet Union. First, the gas supply was dependent on the amount of crude oil production, which was sharply slumped during the revolutionary period. Second, Iran demanded an increase of the gas prices to the level of the international market long before coming to power of the revolutionary regime. This demand remained in place after the Islamic revolution but the Soviets remained reluctant to accept it. Apart from the technical and economic reasons, the new regime in Iran seemed interested to demonstrate its independence as well as its political strength. Thus, adopting a tough measure against the Soviet Union could help these objectives. See Anthony Stacpoole, 'Energy as a Factor in Soviet Relations with the Middle East', cited in Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha, *The Soviet Union in the Middle East*, London: Heinemann, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1982, pp.99. For the Soviet view see Z.A. Arabadzhyan, (ed.), *Iranskaya revolyutsiya*, pp.440-1.
13. See *Pravda*, 3 March 1979, p.1.
14. Brezhnev's speech to the 26th Party Congress of CPSU, *Pravda*, 23 February 1981.
15. *Pravda*, 10 January 1980.

16. For a first hand account of the rise and fall of the Interim Government see Mehdi Bazargan, *Engelab-e-Iran dar do harkat*, Teheran, 1983, pp.123-45. See also Ibrahim Yazdi (the interim Government's second Foreign Minister who was appointed to the position after the first one resigned in less than two months), *Ahkarin Talash-ha- Dar Ahkarin Rooz-ha (Last Attempts in Last Days)*, Teheran, 1984.
  17. Mehdi Bazargan, *Engelan-e-Iran*, pp.112-17.
  18. See the review by Mohammad Reza Taghizadeh, *Soviet Studies*, Volume 43, No.2, 1991.
  19. Iran under the Shah was seeking a more effective role in the world scene. Iran's military contribution to the UN forces sent to Africa in the late 1960s, and then dispatching a medical military team to Vietnam before lending all her F-5 light fighters to the South Vietnamese forces in 1972, was in line with the Shah's aspiration for Iran's greater role in world affairs. As a growing regional power, Iran viewed the Indian Ocean in the East and Horn of Africa in the South, the areas of her strategic interests. The Persian Gulf in which Iran not only enjoyed a predominant geographical position, but also a military supremacy over the Arab states, has always been considered in Iran a private backyard. On the basis of this assumption, Iran interpreted it a direct threat to her stability when a Maoist Communist movement called Zofar challenged the Oman Sultanate's regime in the mouth of the Persian Gulf in early 1970. Sending up to 10,000 Iranian forces to Oman to quell the local Communists uprising, from the Iranian's point of view, was a just and a proper measure in defending Iran's national security. In 1979, although the Communist movement was wiped out and the Omani regime re established, a number of Iranian forces were still stationed there, working as Oman's military advisers.
- The same policy perception continued after the advent of the Islamic regime in Iran, albeit, under the banner of Islam. It was not later than mid-1979 when Ayatollah Sadegh Rouhani announced he would lead a movement to force the Bahraini regime to adopt Islamic form. Although Bazargan's Government tried, on March 1980, to convince the Bahraini Government that Ayatollah Rouhani's view was personal and different from Iran's official policy, it could do no more than a little to reduce the sense of fear in the Persian Gulf, as Iran actively continued to support the Islamic Front for Liberation of Bahrain, established in 1977. In December 1981 a coup was staged in Bahrain and the Bahraini regime accused Iran of having trained and sent the plotters. The fear of intervention by Iran in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf was increased by the outbreak of Shiia rioting in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait from 1980, to 1983. For more see Avi Plascov, *Security in the Persian Gulf Modernisation*, Political Development and Stability, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 1982. For an Iranian account on the importance of the the Persian Gulf and the Role of Iran see Abbas Amiri, *Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean in International Politics*, Teheran: Institute for International Political and Economic Studies, 1975.
20. Asef Houssein, *Political Perspectives on the Muslim World*, New York, 1985.
  21. Soviet policy towards Iran and Iraq revolved time and again in order to respond to the developments initiated either by them or the changes in the war front. For an interesting analysis of the USSR-US competition in Iran during the Gulf war see Steven Spiegel, Mark Heller, and Jacob Goldberg, *The Soviet-American Competition in the Middle East*, Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1988. For the US

assistance to Iraq during the war with Iran see the Documents of the US Congressional Hearing, Defence Committee; *Investigation to the US assistance for Iraq*, The US Government Publications, March 1992

22. The Islamic Revolutionary Council was formed in late November 1978 in France. On 2 January 1979, five days after his return to Teheran from exile, Khomeini presided over the first session of the Council in which Ayatollah Mortaza Mutahary and Ayatollah Mohammad Houssein Beheshti were the senior, and Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ali Khamnei the Junior clergy members. Accordingly, it did not take more than an hour before Khomeini retired to sleep on the floor of the room and the rest of the members continued their work. The names of the Council's members were kept secret until after the interim Government collapsed, see Banisader's memoir quoted in *Enghlab Eslmi*, Paris, February 1985, and Ali Khamnei, interview with *Kayhan Teheran*, 18 February 1982.
  
23. On the occasion of Banisader's fleeing to France, following a motion approved in Majlis, calling for the President's removal, Ahmad Khomeini, Ayatollah Khomeini's son, in an extensive interview with *Ettelaat, Teheran*, 18 June 1981, disclosed that, despite Khomeini being in favour of a non clergy President, (which denied Ayatollah Beheshti a chance to put his name forward as a candidate), he did not support Banisader's candidacy and voted for another candidate, Hasan Habibi, a French educated lawyer who had contributed to the compilation of the republic's constitutional law. Ahmad, in an obvious disappointment, also claimed, he, despite his father, supported Banisader and voted for him.
  
24. In 1978 the US Embassy staff in Teheran started contacting the opposition to the Shah including members of Jebhe-ye-Melli (National Front) and the revolutionary clergy. William Sullivan, the last US Ambassador in Teheran who engineered the collapse of the Shah, in his memoir; *Mission to Iran*, New York, 1981, pp.57-61, although avoiding mentioning the names, however, verifies the meeting. The meeting was one of the main things which confused the Shah and made him deeply suspicious about the US administration's final analysis about his regime. During an informal talk with the Shah, at the height of the revolutionary turmoil in Iran in late 1978, when the writer mentioned Soviet Embassy's hostile activities in Teheran, and as a reminder referred to the record of the Soviet Ambassador, V.M. Vinogradov in Eygept, the Shah, with an apparent disappointment spoke of the US Ambassador, Sullivan's similar record in South East Asia (Cambodia), and reflected his suspicions about the US ultimate objectives. The writer was informed at the time, that Ayatollah Mohammad Houssein Beheshti and Ayatollah Mosavi Ardabili (a member of the Revolutionary Council who became Iran's head of the Judiciary force, after Beheshti was killed in a bomb blast in Teheran in 1982), were both involved in the meetings with the American personnel. The documents seized by the radical students from the US Embassy in Teheran and published later in the year, *The Nest of Spies*, Volume 32-49, Teheran, 1980-83, affiliated some of the interim Government's members to the United States, including Minister of Information, Nasser Minachi and Deputy Prime Minister, Abdollah Entezam (the latter is still imprisoned in Iran for the same accusation). The documents of the meetings between the revolutionary clergy and Americans were destroyed by the regime. General Rubert C. Huyser (deputy commander of NATO who was sent to Teheran to frustrate a possible move by the Iranian Royal Army, might have prevented the Islamic revolutionaries coming to power), confirmed the meetings in which he was personally involved.
  
25. The seizure of the US embassy in Teheran on 4 November 1979 by the radical Muslim students, resulted in an immediate collapse of the interim Government. This was not only a fight of the Muslim radicals against the secular nationalist but

also a hostile demonstration against the US presence in Iran. This action, however, prevented initiation of a working relationship between Iran and the United States. The taking hostage of the American diplomats and holding them for 444 days, which in part decided the direction of the new regime in the world political scene, was called by Khomeini 'the second revolution'. Despite its importance in terms of foreign affairs, there is still little reliable documentation about the hostage crisis in Teheran, released either by the US government or the Islamic regime in Iran. The admission of the Shah to the United States for medical treatment on 22 October 1979, which provoked the Islamic revolutionaries, the US abortive attempt to gain the hostages release, and speculation about a deal between Khomeini and Reagan's aids, to delay the release of the hostages until after his inauguration in January 1980, are some of the unfolded aspects of this historical event. According to Garry Sick, who served as the staff of the national Security Council under President Ford, Carter, and Reagan, the author of *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran*, New York: Random House, 1985, Ronald Reagan and his close aids, including George Bush, were involved in a deal with Khomeini's regime to delay the release of the hostages aimed at uplifting their image after the election. For a view, reflected after a new inquiry into the case launched by the US Senate in early 1992, see *News Week*, 6 February 1992. In this context, and from a different point of view, Hamilton Jordan, Carter's Campaign manager and his close aid, has offered some interesting evidence in which he had personal involvement, see H. Jordan, *Crisis*, New York, 1983. The Iranian Royal Army's last chief of staff Abbas Karim Garabaghi who was accused of collaboration with the revolutionary leaders during the final days of the old regime, has given a different account of the American's activities in Iran. He too, confirmed that the 'meetings' had taken place on a few occasions, see Abbas-Karim Garabaghi, *Haqayeq dar Bareyeh Iran (Facts about the crisis in Iran)*, Paris, 1984. Garabaghi, in a different publication also referred to a close relationship between the revolutionary forces and the US sources in Iran. See A.K Gharabaghi, *Choon Barf Aab meeshaveem (We are Melting Like Snow)*, London, 1979, pp.56-78.

26. For the US assistance to Iraq during the war with Iran see the documents of the US congressional hearing, Foreign Affairs Committee, Fall 1990 and the US Senate, Defence committee; *Investigation into the US Assistance for Iraq*, The US Government Publications, March 1992.
27. The final victory for the Islamic forces against the Liberals came in June 1981 when President Banisader fled to France. From that stage on, Khomeini totally surrendered to the clergy's pressures and provided them with exclusive power.
28. This period was marked by the rise of fundamentalism in Iran during which society came under tight control of the clergy. See Taher Ahmadzadeh, *Hokoumat-e- Eslami va Monafeqeen (Islamic Government and the Hypocrites)*, Rome, 1984; William Griffith, 'The Revival of Islamic Fundamentalism: The Case of Iran', in *International Security*, Summer 1979. Shaul Bakhash, too, has an interesting analysis of the mechanism used by the clergy to bring the regime under its firm control, see *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, New York: Basic Books, 1984. For the clerics' view, see Rahim Ali Zarbaf, *Payam-e- Qum (The Message of Qum-a holy city and the power centre of the Iranian clergy)*, Qum, 1984 and Fathollah Derakhshan, *Rah-e- Imam (Path of the Imam)*, Qum, 1984.
29. See *Kayhan Teheran*, 21 January 1980.
30. The Islamic conference was held on 26 January 1980 (the Arab States wanted it to be postponed because of its coincidence with the date of Camp David

Agreement). For the declaration of the Islamic Conference see *New York Times*, 31 January 1980.

31. For an American view on the hostage crisis and its outcome regarding Soviet attitude see Richard W. Cottam, *Iran and the United States*, Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988.
32. The streets of Teheran were all covered with the slogans condemning the Soviet Union and its left wing 'clients' in Iran. The main slogan of the Friday Pray was coloured by Marg Bar Shooravi (Down with the Soviet Union), negating the East as the same as the West. In the meantime articles were regularly printed in the Papers controlled by the regime, against the Soviets and Soviet policies. The Soviet Union accused Iranian Islamic authority of displaying 'hostility to socialism and a particular kind of support to imperialist positions in the regions despite a background of anti-imperialist rhetoric': see Z.A. Arabadzhyan, (ed.), *Iranskaya revolyutsiya*, p.449.
33. The first presidency in the life of the new regime and together with it the period of liberals' power sharing with the clergy, ended in June 1981, when Khomeini, following a vote of no confidence in Majlis, ousted the President.
34. Hizbollah (Hezb-Allah) means Party of God. Such a term was taken from the Quran by a group of militant Talabeh (Theologian Students) in 1979, to fight the liberals. They called themselves Hizbollahi, mainly to oppose the political pluralism and also to institute the rule of the clergy. Their leader was Hadi Ghaffari, himself a militant white-turbaned young mullah whose father was imprisoned by SAVAK and died five years later in 1975. The first major appearance of the Hizbollahi hooligans took place in early 1980 when the liberal and leftist students sheltered in Teheran University and the regime sent its lumpen elements, the committee members and revolutionary guards combined with radical Islamic students and militant talabehs (under the name of Hizbollah) to remove them. This was also the first major public defeat for Banisader who had sided with the students
35. See M. A. Rajayee, 'I'm a Hizbollahi', *Ettelaat Teheran*, 25 July 1981.
36. See R.A. Ul'ianovsky, *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, 22 June 1983. Also, Aleksei Vasiliev, *Persian Gulf in the Centre of the Storm*, Moscow: Political Literature, 1983.
37. Robert Freedman, 'Soviet Policy Towards Ba'athist Iraq' in R. Donaldson, *The Soviet Union in the Third World*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1981. See also Francis Fukuyama, *The Soviet Union and Iraq Since 1968*, Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1980. For an interesting essay on the Iran-Iraq war and Soviet dilemma see James Clay Moltz, University of California, Berkeley and Dennis B. Ross, US Department of State, 'The Soviet Union and Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988', in George W. Breslauer, *Soviet Strategy in the Middle East*, London and Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp.123-46.
38. Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp in Shrin Tahir-Kheli and Shahin Ayubi, *The Iran-Iraq War*, New York: Praeger, 1983, pp.127-9.
39. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati in an interview on 24 October 1984 (*Kayhan Teheran*) revealed that Saudi Arabia was prepared to pay Iran a considerable amount of money in order to convince the Islamic republic to stop the war. The Saudi sources, officially suggested to contribute to the initiation of a

financial fund aimed at helping both Iran and Iraq, in their reconstruction programmes after the war was over. It seems, despite the lack of reliable documents, there are some grounds which make the argument somewhat acceptable. Mahdi Bazargan who apparently was informed of the proposal, in his book, *Enqelab Iran Dar Do Harkat* has referred to the case. The author, during the final days of the previous regime received first hand information about \$20 Billion Dollars aid offered by the Saudis to the Iranian officials in order to help the regime to overcome financial and economic problems Iran was facing during the national strikes. The Saudi sources are still paying some Iranian opposition groups abroad. To the Saudi's regime the power of money has long been considered a major means of policy implementation, although this power has recently been significantly reduced to a very low level.

40. The Gulf Co-operation Council formed in May 1981, was composed of conservative and pro-Western monarchies, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait. The Organisation mainly has a defensive orientation but political and economic co-operation between the member states has always been important. When Iran, under the Shah, suggested the formation of such organisation, it had a different design in mind. Iran's strategic objectives and her relations with the Arab States of the Persian Gulf did not alter with change in its political system after the Islamic evolution, as she continued to control the smaller states of the Gulf. The Iran-Iraq war and the other events of the 1980s leading to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 2 August 1990, gave new dimensions to the organisation. The new circumstances provided the West with an opportunity to give the Organisation a more serious role to play in the security of the region.
41. Based on a doctrine similar to Brezhnev's doctrine of 'Common responsibility of the Socialist world', the Islamic revolutionary regime in a self-promoted style assumed common responsibility of defending the Islamic world, thus, from the very beginning of its commencement, it started to respond to its presumed responsibility. The Islamic idealists were mostly behind Iran's worldwide involvement in defending the Islamic values. The latter aspect of Iran's foreign policy attitude continued even after the emergence of the new tendencies for pragmatism in Iran in 1985. The Salman Rushdie affair during which the late Ayatollah Khomeini issued a death order against the author in February 1989 over his 'blasphemous novel' *The Satanic Verses* provoked a world scale controversy, perhaps was one of the most famous acts of intervention conducted by the Islamic regime in order to respond to its self allocated 'Islamic common responsibility'. Mediation by Iran in the conflict between the Christian Armenian and Muslim Azeris in February 1992 and taking sides with the Muslims in Sarajevo against the Christian Serbs in the former Yugoslavia are the latest examples in the continuation of Iran's policy of intervention in favour of the Islamic values. For Khomeini's view in this regard see *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, translated by Hamid Algar, Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981.
42. See Mohammad Reza Taghizadeh's review of Haim Shemish's study of Soviet Iraqi relations from 1968 to 1988, *Soviet Studies*, April 1993.
43. See Sh.A. Niyazmatov, *Irano-Irakskaa konflikt: istoricheskii ocherk*, Moscow: Nauka, 1989. For examination of Soviet Policy towards the Iran-Iraq War at that stage, see Carol R. Saivetz, *The Soviet Union and the Gulf War in the 1980s*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1989.



44. For an Iranian view see the Interim Government's first Ambassador to the UN, Mansour Farhang, 'The Iran Iraq War: The Feud, the Tragedy, and the Spoils', *World Policy Journal*, 1985, pp.659-80.
45. The Soviet press from 1982 started attacking Iran for her stand towards the war. For the Soviets' views in this context see K. Vitaliev, 'For whose Benefit?', *Pravda*, 18 February 1982, p.5 and Yuri Gluchov, 'We Answer Readers: The Drawn-Out War', *Pravda*, 14 November 1983.
46. The Mujahedin Khalg proclaimed 'Armed struggle' against the Islamic Republic, stepped up the ongoing confrontation between the regime and its leftists opponents. In fact the term of hostility between the Islamic fundamentalist revolutionaries and their left wing associates reached its peak in 1983. The Soviets' new orientation against the Islamic regime was interpreted in Teheran as a sign of support for the leftist elements who desired to have the regime overthrown. Although reflection of the Soviets' anger had far less to do with the way Iran was treating the left wing elements, the Islamic regime based on a linkage theory, was convinced that Moscow had masterminded the leftist conflicts in order to topple them. However, the proclaimed armed struggle of the left, provided the regime with an opportunity to crash its opponents with an unprecedented brutality under the banner of 'self-defence against the acts of terrorism' and paved the way for a full-scale Islamic dictatorship. See Dilip Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.
47. In 1982 Vladimir Kuzichkin, a senior diplomat in the Soviet Embassy in Teheran, who was in touch with MI6, through a joint operation led by the CIA and British intelligence Service, defected to Britain and subsequently briefed in London. Accordingly, he disclosed a list of Soviet spies in Iran which, reportedly, via Pakistan was passed on to the Iranian regime. For the American version of the events see *New York Times*, 20 November 1986. Surprisingly, despite a considerable number of Soviet agents who defected to the west and gave important accounts of their activity to the Western media.
48. Haim Shemesh, *Soviet-Iraqi Relations, 1968-1988: In the Shadow of the Iraq-Iran Conflict*, Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992, pp.191-93.
49. For the reports of Bombing the US Marine Camp's at Beirut International Airport in October 1983, see *Washington Post*, 24 October 1983.
50. For the evidence see Andropov's speech, *Pravda*, 23 April 1976, p.5, in which he offers not more than 'our sympathies' for national liberation movements.
51. Andropov's speech, *Pravda*, 23 November 1982, p.1, also *Pravda*, 16 June 1983.
52. See note in 'Justification for the Soviet presence in Afghanistan' by P. Nadezhdin, 'Against National Interests', *Pravda*, 6 March 1985, p.4.
53. Diana Spechler, 'Soviet Policy in the Middle East: The Crucial Change', in Paul Marantz and Blema Steinberg, (eds), *Superpowers' Involvement in the Middle East*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1985. For an interesting analysis see William J. Oson, *Soviet Policy Towards the Persian Gulf From the Outbreak of the Iran Iraq War to the death of Konstantin Chernenko, US Strategic Interests in the Gulf Region*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1987, pp.45.

54. For the Soviet reaction see *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 'Washington is Trying to Compensate in the Persian Gulf', 4 March 1984, cited in *FBIS*, USSR, 7 March 1984.
55. *Pravda*, 26 March 1983, p.5.
56. In March 1984 Iran launched a major offensive against Iraqi lines in the Southern fronts and made considerable gains inside the Iraqi territory. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, *A Review of the Imposed War*, Teheran, February 1985. For a detailed record of the war and a view from an Iranian angle see 'Jang-e-Iran va Aragh (Iran-Iraq War)', *Madjid Torab Zamzami Safeer Press*, Teheran, 1989.
57. Ayatollah Khomeini, speech in Jamaran Teheran, 15 November 1983. All other Iranian leaders on different occasions repeated the same threat which gradually became a part of political propaganda during the Gulf War period, although the Iranian leaders have never intended to carry out their threat for many reasons, first and foremost, this would have been a kind of economic self suffocation.
58. See Bernard Gwertzman, *New York Times*, 26 March 1985 and numbers of other articles by David Ottaway in the *Washington Post* from mid-1984 to the end of the same year. For the survey of Soviet Iraqi relations during the same period and in regard to the latter development, see Carol R. Saivetz, *The Soviet Union and the Gulf in the 1980s*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1989, pp.55-60.
59. V.Pustov, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 21 April 1984, p.2.
60. *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 22 March, 1984, and *Pravda*, 26 April 1984. For the reports of increased Soviet arms supply to Iraq from 1984 to 1987 see *The Military Balance*, *SIPRI*, Stockholm, annual books.
61. *Pravda*, 23 November 1984, p 5.
62. In this connection see the BBC 2 television documentary; 'The Soviet Second Revolution', broadcast in six parts during October and November 1991. In this extraordinarily informative programme, the high ranking CPSU leaders and Soviet officials who were directly involved in the 'behind the scene' power struggle during Brezhnev's final days and incumbency of his three subsequent successors, tried to shed light on the obscured parts of policy making process in the Kremlin. The programme offered a significant account of insight into the Kremlin's inner circles competition and interplay of the pressure groups and individual leaders in the making and implementation of Soviet Policies. The documentary was also illuminating in the context of the procedures and mechanism under which the appointments and promotions of the CPSU leaders used to be decided by the Kingmakers. In the second part of the programme, it was revealed, quite clearly, that some of the Kremlin's old guards such as, the then Soviet Defence Minister General Dimitry Yazov, had supported Chernenko's nomination for the post of the CPSU General Secretary, because Chernenko was an ailing man and with him in the office, supposed, they could protect their own power bases better.
63. Robert Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East*, p.187.
64. George W. Breslauer, *Soviet Strategy in the Middle East*, p.131.
65. The Soviet Union has had an expensive involvement in supporting the Arab radical regimes and leaders in the Middle East, including President Nasser of

Egypt. Anwar Sadat, who came to power in October 1970, after Nasser's death, adopted a policy orientation different from his predecessor and soon after the Soviet-US summit of May 1972 in Moscow, expelled the Soviet military troops and ended the Soviet control over Egyptian military bases. The action by Sadat was a serious blow to the Soviet Union's strategic position in the Middle East. In October 1965, Sukarno's regime in Indonesia, on which the Soviet Union had invested more than \$2 billion in military and economic aid arrangements, was removed from office and his successor adopted a pro-American orientation. This was considered a major setback for Soviet policy in the Third World.

66. For example compare the 'TASS statement', cited in *Pravda*, 8 March 1984, p.4 with Pavel Demchenko, 'Shadow over the Persian Gulf', *Pravda*, 19 May 1984, p.4.
67. The Tudeh Party (People Party) was incepted in 1941 by the Stalinist elements as Iran's new Communist Party. The Iranian first Communist Party (Adalat Committee) was formed in 1920 but dissolved with the accommodation between Reza Shah and the Soviet Union in 1921. During that period, another group known as 'The Group of 53', reorganised the party in the mid-1930s but all members were arrested, convicted and imprisoned until occupation of Iran by the allied forces in 1941 when most of them were freed. The Tudeh Party played an important role in the Iran's critical issues such as the Soviet demand for the oil concession in 1942, the Azerbaijan-Kurdistan separatist rebellions in 1945-6 and the nationalist movement in the early 1950s. Since the Islamic Revolution's success in February 1979, the Tudeh Party adopted a dual purpose, pro-revolutionary stand. In 1983 the Islamic revolutionary regime disbanded the Party and accused it of 'treason'. For the latter part of the Tudeh Party's activity see the confession of the Party's first Secretary, Nouredin Kianouri, *Analysis of the Betrayal of the Iranian Nation* published in Teheran in May 1983 by the Islamic regime. See also Sepehr Zabih, *The Left in Contemporary Iran*, London: Croom Helm, 1988, pp.25-65. For the history related to the first part of the Communist activity see an excellent research by Miron Rezun, *The Soviet Union and Iran: Soviet Policy in Iran from the Beginning of the Pahlavi Dynasty until the Soviet invasion in 1941*, Geneva: Sijthoff and Noordhoff International Publisher BV Alphen aan Den Rijn, 1981. For the period between 1933 until 1952 see Anvar Khomeyee, *Panchah va Se nafar (The Group of 53)* in three volumes, Teheran 1984. For first hand history of the Azerbaijan crisis and Soviet attempt to create a separatist regime in North West of Iran see Gen Hassan Arfa, *Under the Five Shahs*, London, 1964. For an interesting survey of the Kurdish rebellion see William Egelton Jr, *The Kurdish Republic of 1946*, New York, 1963.
68. Baku Radio in Azeri, 22 February 1984 cited in *Kayhan* (Persian), London, 1 March 1984.
69. Yuri Glukhov, 'A well Founded Threat', *Pravda*, 22 April 1984, p.5, and P.Nadezhdin, 'Iran: An Anti-Soviet Policy Trend seen', *Pravda*, 6 March 1985.
70. I. Fyodorov, 'Another Fabrication', *Izvestia*, 31 March 1984, p.4.
71. *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 21 April 1984, p.4.
72. Mitterand in Moscow for Talks, *Pravda*, 22 June 1984.
73. For the Soviet reaction to the American presence in the Persian Gulf and the anger towards US Iraqi relations see *Izvestia*, 28 March 1984 cited in *CDSP*, Vol.36,

No.13, p.18. For the Soviet media attack on Iranian regime see *Pravda*, 31 December 1983.

74. *Washington Post* report on 21 July 1984 about \$2 billion Soviet credit for Iraq to purchase Soviet weapons.
75. Khomeini addressed a Group of foreign representatives in Jamaran, Teheran on 28 October 1984 and condemned both superpowers for their anti-Iranian policies. The Speaker of Majlis H. Rafsanjani and the Islamic Republic's Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati followed suit. For example see *Ettelaat Teheran*, 23 August 1984 and *Kayhan*, 29 October 1984. A widespread protestation of Iranian masses against the Soviet Union erupted from the beginning of 1984 and after heavy bombardment of Iranian cities by Iraqi raids in which the Soviet made Scud missiles, MIG fighters and Soviet made ammunition were widely used.
76. By mentioning only the first half of the slogan, leading to a false conclusion would seem almost inevitable due to the fact that the rest of the slogan contains a different implication. This slogan in its full form did not have much to do with foreign affairs as it was originally invented to manifest the Islamic status of the new republic in Iran and also negating both Western style democracies and Eastern style Social Democracies. However, the slogan gradually became a landmark of the new regime's foreign policy attitude since the regime itself started attempting either to accommodate or justify its policies within the formula. See M.J Larijani, *Maqulati dar Syasate Kharedgi (Articles on foreign policy)*, Teheran, 1986.
77. Official reports of the executions published in the daily papers in Teheran from July to September 1984. See statement by the Mujahedin Khalq ,broadcasted from Sedaye Mujahed (Voice of Mujahed) on 22 September 1984, and the Mardom, the Tudeh Party's Organ (in exile), a Joint statement by the Tudeh Party and Fedaeen (majority), December 1984. In this regard see *Amnesty International*, Annual Report, 'Human Rights in Iran', London, 1985.
78. *Pravda*, 26 March 1983.
79. Mardome (the Tudeh Party's Organ), Che Bayad Kard, (What shall we Proceed), Teheran, 20 June 1981.
80. From the Iranian nationalist's point of view, the efforts by the new regime in keeping the country together deserved to be supported by all means in that they could see a common cause to deafen the state's national integrity. Taking into consideration the nationalistic philosophy of the Royal Army formed under the Shah, then, co-operation of the regular army with the new regime in fighting the foreign enemy (Iraq) and challenging the domestic separatists, would be justified. For an excellent introduction and analysis to the Iranian royal army's doctrine, see Bahram Aryana, *Iran's Royal Army: Ideology and faith*, Teheran, 1973.
81. Ruhollah Khomeini, *Hokomat-e-Eslamii (Islamic Government)*, Teheran, 1979, *ibid.*, *Velayat-e-Fagih (The regency of the Theologian)*, Teheran, 1980, *ibid.*, *Gozideh Payam-ha va Mosahebe-ha (A selection of Massages and Interviews)*, Teheran, 1981.
82. Schehrezad Daneshku, 'Gorbachev's Iran Dilemma', *Middle East International Journal*, 320, 1988, p.17. Also Mark K. Katz, 'The Soviet Challenge in the Gulf', *Middle East Insight*, 4, 5, 1987, pp.25-7.

83. Alexander Dallin, 'Gorbachev's Foreign Policy and the New Political Thinking in the Soviet Union' in Peter Juviler and Hiroshi Kimura, (eds), *Gorbachev's Reform*, New York: Hawthorn, 1988.
84. Aryeh Yodfat, *The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Iran*,. New York: Martin's Press, 1984.
85. Iran's proclaimed and official policy towards both superpowers, suggesting a negative balanced approach, was different from her foreign policy in practise . In fact the longer the new regime lived, the further experiences in foreign relations gained and thus, it became more conventional, flexible and interested in wheeling and dealing over the foreign issues. In that sense, Iran's negative approach in foreign affairs, maintained but only on paper, whenever rapprochement and negotiation seemed helpful in achieving principal objectives. The fashion in the West of labelling Iran's Islamic movement started as early as 1978 while the Western observers began to define it on the basis of their own value system. In this regard see Bill, James, 'The Politics of Extremism in Iran' *Current History*, January 1982. For the same type of speculation see Bayat Mangol, 'The Iranian Revolution of 1978-79: Fundamentalist or Modern', *Middle East Journal*, 1983. The Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati in an article cited in *Majalleyeh Syasat Kharedgi (The Magazine of Foreign Policy)*, Fall, 1985, on the occasion of opening in Teheran of the Institute for Political and International Studies, admitted that the Islamic regime at the beginning was inexperienced and lacked a proper understanding of the modern world. He also noted; 'We are on the beginning of a long way to fulfil a comprehensive and exact definition of Islamic republic's foreign policy, its ultimate objectives and time tested patterns to achieve them'. See also Houssein Kazempour Ardabili (then Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister), *Amniat Melli (National Security)* - Centre for Political and Strategic studies- Teheran, 1986. Ardabili in his argument tries to justify the attempts in achieving the divine objectives at any cost, *ide . pp.76*.
86. The Islamic radical elements were arguing that the new policy of 'open doors' is a plot by pro Americans to normalise the relations with the United States, thus, it is treacherous and absolutely against the 'Path of Imam Khomeini'. See the reports of the Majlis debate, *Kayhan Teheran*, 5 June 1984. See also S. Khalkhali, head of the Majlis foreign affairs committee cited in *Kayhan Teheran*, 17 June 1984.
87. At that time Foreign Minister Velayati was closer to President Khamnei than to Speaker Rafsanjani. This relationship was formed on the basis of a political system inherited from the previous regime in which the Foreign Minister used to report to the Shah.
88. Rafsanjani, in order to concentrate the executive power in his own hands, preferred not only to have his own men in Government but also to change the constitutional law and to eliminate the post of Prime Minister before deciding to run for the presidency. With the Islamic republic's first constitutional law in place, he would have been more of a figure head than a powerful leader had he become the president.
89. See the document of the 'Majlis Discussions' May 1984, The Majlis publications, in Persian, Teheran 1985.
90. Speech by Ayatollah Khomeini in Jamaran Teheran, cited in *Kayhan* and *Ettelaat*, 29 October 1984, p.1.

91. See the statement by Iran's ministry of foreign affairs cited by *IRNA*, 7 October 1984.
92. Houssein Ali Montazeri Qum, *IRNA* in Persian, 8 September 1984.
93. H.A.Montazeri Qum in a meeting with the Friday Pray Imams, broadcast on Teheran Radio, 15 September 1984 and cited by the daily papers on 16 September 1984.

## CHAPTER 3

### SOVIET-IRANIAN RELATIONS 1985-1986:

#### THE GORBACHEV INHERITANCE

Gorbachev's period in office commenced in March 1985 and his 'new thinking' in foreign policy precipitated the popular revolutions of 1989 which swept across Eastern Europe and motivated the Second Russian Revolution. However, these changes up to 1990 had relatively little effect upon Third World countries of which the Middle East perhaps is the most important part. Correspondingly, the period brought about limited changes in Third World politics.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, neither the shift in nature and structure of the Soviet political system, nor the conversion in theory and practice of Soviet foreign policy during the same period, provides a solid base to examine the repercussions of the 'new thinking' in the Third World.

Kurt M. Campbell and S. Neil MacFarlane argued in 1987 that 'The Soviet Union stands at a crossroads in its policies toward the Third World'.<sup>2</sup> To some extent, there are reasonable grounds for the argument that the Soviet Union was still in the process of developing its policy toward the Third World during this period. Iran, which has immense geostrategic importance for Middle East-West Asian security and the balance of power in relation to the USSR from the North and to the Persian Gulf from the South, provides an opportunity to study the formulation of the Soviet Union's new foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the Third World as well as to those areas on its borders.

The impact of events that occurred after 1985 increased the significance of relations in the region, in that they became all the more crucial for the global political

balance. These events included: the revelation of American arms sales to Iran; the so-called 'Iran-Contra scandal'; the eruption of the 'Tanker War' in the Persian Gulf; the naval expedition of the United States and her allies into the Persian Gulf, the largest expedition of its kind that had taken place since World War II; the use of chemical warfare in the region; proliferation of ballistic missiles in the Middle East; the intensification of acts of terrorism in the region; the end of the Iran-Iraq war; the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan; the emergence of new waves of Islamic fundamentalism; Khomeini's death; the coming to power of the Fourth and the Fifth Republics in Iran; the emergence of the ethnic problem and the Islamic revival in the Soviet Union's Central Asian and southern republics, hand in hand with a strong sense of patriotism; the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute.<sup>3</sup>

The effect of all these events, particularly on the conduct of Iranian foreign policy, created the potential to influence the course of Iranian-Soviet relations. Thus, it is strongly believed that any comprehensive analysis of USSR foreign policy behaviour during Gorbachev's era, specifically regarding the Third World, will leave a serious gap if it fails to give due attention to Soviet-Iranian relations during the same period. Although it has not represented a fundamental departure from traditional Soviet views towards Iran, the Soviet Union's foreign policy behaviour under Gorbachev and up to 1990 nevertheless ought to be carefully studied because it:

- (a) contains significant changes in its tactical and strategic arrangements in the Middle East;
- (b) introduces a new pattern to study the revised Soviet national security concerns and
- (c) provides a new foundation for Soviet foreign policy formulation towards the Third World.



It should be considered that the Soviets' pre-occupation with their top priorities in the world during 1985-1991 prevented them from paying adequate attention to Third World affairs. The two exceptions, both having a connection with Iran's political conduct and a direct linkage to Soviet foreign affairs and national security concerns on its southern border, were the Afghan crisis and the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>4</sup>

These two cases not only had the potential to interrupt the Soviet obsession with its most pressing problems but also the capability to affect Soviet foreign policy conduct in the world at large, specifically in its relations with Iran and in its policy towards the Middle East in general. The Arab-Israeli conflict and the crisis in the Lebanon should also be mentioned here in connection with this point.

In line with the complexity of politics in this region and as a problematic factor in Soviet global and regional policies, the military build-up in the Middle East, in which the Soviet Union has played an important role, should be taken into account.<sup>5</sup> Finally, hand in hand with current sensitivity and the high importance of the region to world peace, it should be emphasised that the Middle East, based on its military and political potential, is bound to be at the centre of global and regional conflicts.

For a better understanding of the sensitivity of the region, it should be borne in mind that none of the Middle Eastern crises have yet firmly been solved, though all of them individually have the potential to be dramatically changed into serious crises. Regarding this case study, the first two subjects, the 'Iran-Iraq War' and the 'Afghan Syndrome', had coloured Soviet foreign policy attitudes towards Iran long before Gorbachev came to power. He, in turn, was expected to follow the political patterns already designed by his predecessors. The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and the coming out against a continuation of the Iran-Iraq War, in particular, had already been decided in the Kremlin. Gorbachev endeavoured to give a new boost to this idea and also engineered the circumstances in which they could best serve Soviet interests.<sup>6</sup>

The structure and objectives of Soviet-Iranian relations during Gorbachev's first year in office saw no changes in practice. Moscow's dissatisfaction with Teheran's single-mindedness, particularly the insistence on its continuation of the war with Iraq, sustained the previous state of relations. In fact, the Soviet political attitude *vis-à-vis* Iran that Gorbachev inherited was established in 1982, since Iran had driven back the Iraqi forces from its territory and Khomeini had manifested his intention to overthrow the Baathi regime in Baghdad in favour of a new Islamic Republic in Iraq. This induction could partially be based on general circumstances applicable to the conduct of Soviet foreign policy in the world including USSR-USA relations during the same period.

In his review and analysis of the Cold War and the Third World, Fred Halliday argues that in the period up to 1985, during the first Reagan Administration in Washington and the incumbencies of Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko in Moscow, Soviet-US relations were at an impasse on both issues of Soviet-US nuclear competition and Third World conflicts on the one hand, and a heightened arms race and a lack of substantial progress in negotiations on arms control on the other. Rivalry and mutual recrimination over the Third World was epitomised above all in the crisis of Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

### **Soviet Policy Attitudes towards South West Asia**

The Kremlin, quite aware of the advantages in keeping the diplomatic doors with Iran open, not only continued to have direct talks with the Iranians and through the ordinary diplomatic channels in Teheran and Moscow, but also seemed interested to exert the potential of the client regimes to contact the Iranian missions and negotiate with them whenever possible. In this context Damascus was one of the favourite centres for both parties to hold talks in. A number of meetings took place there between the Iranian missions and Soviet officials from 10 January up to mid-April 1985, despatching first,

Sheikh ol Isalmzadeh, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister to Damascus, then later, Kazemzadeh Ardabili, another Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, to Moscow. The latter mission included a long discussion with Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister at the time, and other high ranking Soviet diplomats.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to mention that the nature of the two meetings contrasted sharply because of changes in the course of the Iran-Iraq War.

During January 1985, Iran had been preparing to launch the long expected major attack against Basra, Iraq's second largest city, and the Soviet Union was attempting to prevent Iran, one way or another, from deepening her military penetration inside Iraqi territory. In less than two months the so-called 'War of the Cities' erupted and Soviet ballistic missiles were exchanged destroying several cities and killing thousands of people, including a large number of civilians.

Iran, generally speaking, still in an offensive position, suffered more from hitting the civilian targets and defenceless cities and bitterly criticised the Soviet Union for selling sophisticated weapons to Iraq including medium-range ballistic missiles and long distance bombers, plus large quantities of ammunition as well as technological assistance to produce them (in this area, the Soviet Union was particularly accused of providing Iraq with chemical bombs and co-operation to produce chemical weapons), to destroy Iran's economic base and kill innocent civilians.

During the Moscow talks between Gromyko and Ardabili, the Soviet Union for the first time in years not only had the upper hand but also used an imperative tone *vis-à-vis* Iranian delegates and was in a position to exercise political pressure against them. The Soviet Union took the opportunity and ignored Iranian requests to put pressure on Iraq in order to stop the 'tankers war' in the Persian Gulf. The Soviet Union openly argued that they favoured a comprehensive ceasefire rather than proportional limitation in the war. The Kremlin, confident of Iran's vulnerability on civilian targets, was trying to get

the best result out of the occasion and in putting pressure on Iran's weakest points put a new condition forward, plainly declaring that they would resume economic talks with Iran only after the war had been brought to an end.<sup>9</sup> The Soviet negotiators also implied that such conditions should contain technical assistance to the existing projects including completion of the power stations (which Iran was desperate to make operational). To make it clear that the Soviet Union was determined not to be flexible or open to compromise, the next economic meeting and forthcoming session of the joint committee for the end of the Iran-Iraq war was postponed.

Soviet policy towards Iran in 1985 was more passive than active. This is not surprising given the fact that there were no initiatives to improve their deteriorating relationship and to reduce the gap that was widening between the two countries. However, two factors combined to facilitate an improvement in relations. Although the two countries had still not sorted out their differences, the rapprochement was based on short-term tactical needs. These factors were:

- (i) The restoration of diplomatic relations between the United States and Iraq<sup>10</sup> and,
- (ii) The outbreak of war over the cities and the extension of the war fronts to the civilian targets.

Moscow, far from being happy about the latter development between Baghdad and Washington and deeply concerned about the inevitable consequences of their relations for the political balance in the region, rushed to approach Saudi Arabia in order to restore political relations. However, choosing Saudi Arabia as a counter-balance in the face of restored relations between Baghdad and Washington was a mistake. This was a ploy which had no chance of success. Perhaps playing the Persian card rather than the Saudi's - if the Soviet Union had any calculated intention at all - would have worked better in order to maintain the region's political equilibrium.<sup>11</sup> The Soviet Union initially

supported the Saudi standpoint on how to stop the war in the Persian Gulf and later despatched a mission to Riyadh to talk about the possibilities of opening formal relations.<sup>12</sup> Then, in another relatively risky approach, the Soviet Union showed its desire to have working relations with Iran in order to imply that closer ties between Iraq and the United States would not be received amicably in Moscow.

Moscow's anxiety grew when the United States began to supply Baghdad with vital information about the war fronts and went as far as to provide Iraq with airborne weaponry, including helicopters.<sup>13</sup> In the face of the political developments in the region, Moscow was witnessing a new version of the Middle Eastern experience of the 1970s in Egypt, and this was yet another humiliating setback for their diplomacy in the area. US-Iraqi political ties were an open secret. However, the same was not true of US military assistance for Baghdad. This provided the point where Soviet and Iranian policies converged in opposition to a common foe.

The Soviet Union's reaction to the new American initiative in the region was identical to that of Iran but aroused few repercussions in Teheran.<sup>14</sup> However, there had been sufficient attention paid to Soviet policy to motivate ruling circles in Iran to make moves to reduce the tension between the two countries. Although committed to a policy of neutrality, the Soviet Union, determined to bring the war to an end, asked Iran to submit a list of their military demands which, it was claimed, would be considered carefully. This was done in an attempt to force a ceasefire whilst achieving good relations with Teheran.<sup>15</sup> The Soviet Union, still diffident and quite reluctant to initiate a new and positive policy proposal then put forward another pre-condition by pointing out that any improvement in Soviet-Iranian relations would depend on changes in Iran's policy of securing endorsement for Afghan Mujahedin as well as the closure of all bases and offices in Iran.<sup>16</sup>

Based on its political principles, which it had consistently adhered to, and their Islamic commitment to obey the divine law demanding that Muslims help Muslim brothers against the infidels, Iran declined to entertain Soviet requests. Iran argued that it was bound to provide aid for the Mujahedin much in the same way that the Soviet Union was obliged to assist Iraq under the terms of the USSR-Iraq friendship accord.<sup>17</sup> Thus in 1985, despite all talks undertaken either directly or indirectly through Middle Eastern or East European third parties designed to alter the course of deteriorating relations between Iran and the Soviet Union, the two countries had failed to reconcile their differences.

It is not clear whether the Soviet Union had ever asked Iraq to abandon attacking Iranian civilian targets on the grounds that it could not assist Soviet policy in pressurising the Iranian leadership to accept a ceasefire. The USSR ambassador to Kuwait, Alovov, played a part in the Soviet Union's 'on the scene' politics by making a statement in mid-April 1985 in order to outline his country's declared neutrality in the Gulf war.<sup>18</sup>

The statement contained condemnation of any attack on the civilian installations and residential areas of the belligerent countries (apparently to favour Iran). In addition to this, occupation of land by either side received strong condemnation (at that time Iran had occupied some Iraqi territory). The Ambassador, in a message clearly directed at the USA, took the opportunity of expressing the Soviet Union's intolerance towards any foreign intervention in the regional conflicts in the Persian Gulf.

At the same time, the Soviet news agency, Novosti, condemned the 'war worshipping' trends in Iran and emphasised that the continuation of the Gulf War would not serve the national interests of the belligerent countries.<sup>19</sup>

*Pravda*, in another attempt to demonstrate Soviet anxiety towards the developments of the Gulf War, published an article by Pavel Demchenko which noted that

'Alarming reports have been received from the Iranian-Iraqi war fronts in the past few days. The warring sides have begun bombing and launching missile and artillery attacks on civilian targets, including the residential areas of major cities such as Baghdad, Basra, Mandali and Kirkuk in Iraq and Teheran, Abadan, Ahvaz, Isfahan and Tabriz in Iran. This new outbreak of brutality shows that both sides have violated the agreement concluded in June 1984 prohibiting them from taking military action against civilian targets. At the same time, it serves as yet another reminder of the urgent necessity to seek ways to put a speedy end to the Iranian-Iraqi war. Numerous attempts by international organisations, the UN, the League of Arab States and nonaligned movements, to stop the fighting and bring the two sides to the negotiating table have yet to yield positive results'.

The article concluded that 'the sooner both countries heed the peace-loving appeals and succeed in settling their disputes, the better this will extinguish one of the most serious hotbeds of war on earth'.<sup>20</sup>

Political trends in the region (in 1985/86) could be summed up as follows:

1. Iranian policy towards Afghanistan was in line with that of the United States (the irony here being that the USA had been labelled the arch enemy of Iran by the Islamic Republic and had the nickname, 'The Great Satan').<sup>21</sup>
2. Iran viewed the Soviet attitude towards the Gulf War as being 'shoulder to shoulder' with the regional policy of the United States in the area (the Iran-Iraq War of course was the most important element in forming Iranian foreign policy behaviour at this time).

3. The United States had a multi-purpose policy in the region. Although the USA was totally against the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism, the inevitable result of an Iraqi defeat in the Gulf War, it had also not been interested in seeing Iran defeated.
4. Both Israel and the United States were involved in a preconceived plan to privately provide Iran with arms in order to strengthen its defensive capacity whilst simultaneously providing Iraq with information about Iranian movements at the front.
5. Syria and Libya (the USSR's counter-balance to American patronage of Israel) were helping Iran and the Soviet Union was providing Iraq with military assistance. Although Syria and Libya had never wanted Iran to capture Iraq, they nevertheless could not tolerate Baghdad overcoming the radical revolutionary regime in Teheran.

The Iran-Iraq War is an example of the argument that the tactical interests of the client regimes could influence superpowers' policies to the extent that they did not contradict their own strategic interests.

The analysis of events in the Middle East in general and the Gulf War in particular prove that the Soviet Union had no intention either to overstretch its military resources (which were already giving cause for alarm to the Soviet leadership) or to throw the world into chaos through the regional crisis during the 1980s. Had the case been otherwise, the Gulf War could have been considered as the best opportunity for the Soviet Union to help Iran (representing a resurgent Islam) in the war with Iraq and consequently taking the Middle East to the brink of total anarchy, threatening the vital interests of the West all over the region from South West Asia up to North Africa, which would have seriously disrupted the world balance of power.



The Soviet Union had had the capability but not the desire to do so. Iran, on the other hand, was ready and eager to enjoy such co-operation at any cost. The Soviet Union had had a new political insight, which was different from its previous analogy of the world, which was far from favouring tactical adventurism in the region. The probable risk of a collapse of the Iraqi regime and implementation of a new Islamic republic in Baghdad under Iranian hegemony, which could be considered the first link in a chain of events sweeping across the Islamic world in a domino effect and which could have brought the danger of nuclear confrontation nearer, was considered too high by the Soviet Union. In this instance, the Soviet Union acted as a mature conventional power rather than an irresponsible adventurer and opted not to play a war game.

This was probably one of the few occasions wherein the Soviet Union rejected its ideological commitment to the forwarding of world communism for the sake of its strategic interests. This action had been conceived long before Gorbachev's accession to power, at the beginning of the 1980s soon after the invasion of Afghanistan, but needed time to take shape.

The implementation of a ceasefire would have been within reach if Iran had been ready for compromise. This, however, could never have been more than wishful thinking as up to this point Iran had had the upper hand in the course of the war with Iraq. The Islamic Republic, despite having been desperate to obtain weaponry, did not intend changing its views and the policy of continuation of the war. In early June 1985 and during Rafsanjani's official visit to Peking, Iran found an opportunity to play the Chinese card.<sup>22</sup>

This nevertheless provoked the conclusion in Moscow that there was no way to bring Iran to the negotiating table and therefore pressure had to be maximised. At the end of June, Andrei Gromyko mentioned that the intransigence in Iranian policy towards the Gulf War was posing a serious threat to peace in the region. This remark had been made

following separate meetings between Gromyko and representatives of the Arab League and the Iraqi foreign minister in Moscow and, in addition to this, after having received two Iranian delegates.<sup>23</sup>

Iran, in the belief that Soviet calls for a reassessment of international relations were nothing more than a ploy to enlist American co-operation in order to further cheat the Third World nations, was therefore not taken in by Soviet claims that it was abandoning its traditional global interests for the sake of general humanitarian benefit.

Two factors greatly assisted Soviet objectives in Iran:

1. The poor state of American-Iranian relations; and
2. The opportunities created by the Iran-Iraq War for the maximisation of Soviet influence. The irony here was that, although the Soviet Union had never favoured the eruption and prolongation of the war between Iran and Iraq, it would be extremely beneficial to the Soviets if they could manage to exert the potentials related to the case.

The Soviet Union was quite confident that, in the short term, Soviet pressure on Iran would not lead to an improvement in American-Iranian relations. But by adopting the same policy towards Iraq this would be the case. Iraq would then be in a position to take advantage of its newly restored relations with the United States and could easily play the American card against Moscow. This factor, in addition to others, prompted the Soviet Union to throw its hat in the ring on the side of Iraq. The new turning point, although guarded, nevertheless put the USSR foreign policy on a track quite different from what was defined by the Marxist-Leninist theory of international relations.

In a statement on the Middle East and the Israeli occupation of Lebanon issued in *Pravda* in June 1985, mention was made of the Iran-Iraq War and the negative effect it was having on the region as a whole. It was argued that the war was forcing a number of

states, especially those in the Persian Gulf fearing the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, to divert attention and resources from the Israeli front.

During July 1985 anti-Soviet fever in Iran was running high with a number of carefully orchestrated demonstrations. Iranian cities were suffering from shortages of electricity following Iraqi attacks on civilian targets using Soviet-made missiles and aircraft throughout the country.

In an article by V. Zotov on 17 July 1985 in *Izvestia* the Soviet Union responded to its Iranian critics about the departure of Soviet technicians from Iran by claiming that the lack of necessary security in connection with the increased fighting between Iran and Iraq was the reason for the departure of the Soviet specialists who had been working on Iranian power-generating plants.<sup>24</sup>

In December 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev met with the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in Moscow. The Soviet leader, in a clear attempt to bring Soviet-Iraqi relations closer, emphasised the 1972 Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship and co-operation and stressed that the expansion of co-operation between the USSR and Iraq would be in the interests of the peoples of both countries.<sup>25</sup>

Andrei Gromyko, who at this time was Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet, in a separate meeting with President Hussein, mentioned that the existing hotbeds of tension and conflicts in various part of the globe, including those pertaining to the Middle East and the Iran-Iraq conflict, continued to be the most acute problem facing world leaderships. He later commented that he would not be giving anything away when he said that the questions concerning the situation in the Middle East, including those related to the Iran-Iraq conflict, had been carefully examined in their talks and that those who, despite all logic, called for the continuation of the war 'to a victorious conclusion' and regarded it as a means of settling scores with an adversary and imposing one's political will, were acting unwisely. He then repeated most emphatically that the Soviet Union

was in favour of having the disputed questions between Iran and Iraq settled at the negotiating table and not on the battlefield.<sup>26</sup>

Two days later Andrei Gromyko, reflecting his country's apprehension, emphasised that the Soviets were in favour of an immediate end to the Iran-Iraq War and the beginning of discussions leading towards a political settlement.<sup>27</sup> This change in Soviet policy gave the impression that the USSR had strong reasons to oppose the war despite the fact that a peace settlement would do little to secure Soviet interests. Quite to the contrary, a peace settlement could even have been damaging to its regional interests. This can be explained thus:

1. A termination of the war could have pushed the two embattled countries towards the West in search of assistance for the reconstruction of damaged capacity incurred during the war.
2. The main objective of both Iran and Iraq in approaching the Soviet Union to purchase weaponry would have been undermined soon after a peace settlement in the Gulf.
3. Iran and Iraq would both have had to increase their oil production in order to cover the extraordinary costs of post-war reconstruction projects (this would undoubtedly have affected oil prices and thus imposed a heavy slump in Soviet foreign currency earnings).
4. In the course of the war the Soviet Union had more scope to operate a dynamic foreign policy in the region than would have been possible after a peace settlement.

From the Soviet Union's standpoint the implementation of a ceasefire between Iran and Iraq, whilst not solving their problems, would have perhaps been the best option given that the other problems in the region had not been firmly solved such as the future of Afghanistan through a political negotiation.

### **The Chinese Factor: The Impact on Soviet Iranian Relations**

In July 1985 the veteran diplomat, Andrei Gromyko, was replaced as Foreign Minister by Eduard Shevardnadze, a newcomer to the international stage. A few days prior to his replacement, Gromyko had sent a message to his Iranian counterpart, Velayati, offering Iran economic aid and technical assistance. Teheran Radio announced the submission of the message but failed to interpret the full ramifications of it.<sup>28</sup> This came at the same time as reports in the Iranian press on Rafsanjani's visit to Peking and made implicit reference to an important agreement between Iran and China on comprehensive bilateral co-operation.

Although China's minor political presence in the Middle East had hardly been challenged by Moscow up to this point, this time Chinese ambitions in the Middle East were perceived as an hostile attempt to increase weapons sales in the area and, by doing so, diminish the Soviet Union's influence and frustrate its regional foreign policy objectives. Chinese sales proposals were greeted enthusiastically by Iran in that it was offering Soviet armament prototypes including ballistic missiles and the possibility of technological assistance whilst putting forward no conditions other than hard currency payment. The Soviet Union had been aware of China's previous involvement in the Middle East via military exports to Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait. However, these incidents had not had such significance as that concerning Iran .

Mikhail Gorbachev during his first year in office had to take a close look at the many regional crises together with US-Soviet relations, if wanting to begin implementation of the new political thinking in Soviet foreign policy. The Afghan crisis and the Iran-Iraq War seemed to take priority over the other regional crises on the summit agenda. But at the same time the Soviet leadership needed to reassess its foreign policy

line in relation to other Middle Eastern issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Lebanese civil war, though of course not precipitously.

In the meantime, Moscow had received a letter from the Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Perez, containing a proposal to resume Soviet-Israeli diplomatic relations.<sup>29</sup> The Soviet Union envisaged the possible reaction this would elicit from the Arab States and therefore expressed little interest in this proposal and responded cautiously. Nevertheless, political links with Tel Aviv could have been seen as a counterbalance to the restoration of US-Iraqi relations.

Analysis of Soviet foreign policy in the region indicates that they had not only intended maintaining the balance of power via a reactive counterbalancing of American diplomatic initiatives and achieving this objective through opening new diplomatic front lines, but also the new Soviet leadership was intended to strengthen its working relations with the two existing axes, the first being Baghdad-Cairo-Algier and the second Teheran-Damascus-Tripoli. These axes were hinged by Algeria and both parties were greatly valued by the Soviet Union.

Taking into consideration the tense relations between the two alliances, what is implied is that the Soviet leadership was walking a tightrope in balancing its relations with them. Whilst relations with Iran took precedence over those with Iraq, a fact which was reaffirmed in the Soviet Union's revision of its national security arrangements, the same is not true of the comparison between Syria and Iraq. To a lesser extent, the animosity that prevailed in the relations between Egypt and Libya added to the Soviet Union's problems in the formulation of its foreign policy toward the Middle East which had remained unsettled since the early 1950s.

The Soviet Union has never enjoyed the full confidence of any Middle Eastern regime for any length of time. This has made the Soviet leadership cautious in dealing with the Middle Eastern states and anxious to avoid decisive action should it lead to the

deterioration of relations with individual states. This is revealed in the Soviet attitude towards Iran which, whilst applying pressure on Teheran, has not led to the abandoning of diplomatic channels. This policy appeared to have paid off when on receiving the Czechoslovak foreign minister in Mashhad in September 1985, Ali Khamnei, then State President, remarked that the socialist regimes were there to stay and that they were the only systems which viewed the Islamic revolution rationally.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the fact that Khamnei's remark was partly made to consolidate his personal position within the radical clerical factions in the run up to the fourth presidential elections in Iran in which he was standing, his comments also indicated a new approach towards the socialist bloc which was related to the indirect Soviet military assistance that Iran enjoyed via Syria and Libya.<sup>31</sup>

The study of Soviet-Middle Eastern affairs in 1985 provides sufficient grounds for the assumption that this period marked a turning point in Soviet foreign policy toward the region. Despite the fact that there was little opportunity for the implementation of these new policies, their outline gave notice of a dramatic shift away from the existing policy line and a thorough revision of its relations with the states involved.

Soviet suspicions of the Iranian leadership stemmed from the incongruity between Teheran's words and actions. However, the other factors affecting the course of Soviet-Iranian bilateral relations should be kept in mind. The Soviet leadership did not have a good understanding of Iran's new political and social system and was consequently reluctant to provide the military assistance that Iran claimed to need and preferred to supply technological assistance and economic co-operation. This resulted in an element of reciprocal suspicion on the part of the Iranian leadership which was not entirely convinced of the Soviet Union's neutrality in the Iran-Iraq War. It is therefore not surprising that by the end of 1985 Soviet-Iranian relations had failed to make any visible improvement.

In an article by P. Nadezhdin published in *Pravda* in March 1986 some of these contradictions were referred to. 'A good many official statements and articles concerning our country and Soviet-Iranian relations have appeared in the Iranian press recently. Some talk about Iran's interests in developing co-operation with the Soviet Union whilst others contain outright slander against it and pursue an openly hostile, anti-Soviet line .... It is known that the Soviet Union and Iran, two neighbouring states with a common border 2,500 kilometres long, in fact have very great opportunities for all-round co-operation. At the same time actions directed against such co-operation can do nothing but harm'.<sup>32</sup>

The realisation that the Soviet Union was not prepared to provide the military aid requested by Iran was interpreted as adding credence to the accusations that the Soviet Union was attempting a clandestine plot to topple the Islamic regime by means of support for the Tudeh party, massive military aid for Iraq and the occupation of Islamic Afghanistan following the invasion in December 1979.<sup>33</sup> Given the assistance that the Soviet leadership had provided in supporting the Islamic revolution, it had probably expected the new regime in Iran to be more supportive than critical.

The Soviet Union who had welcomed the overthrow of the Shah and when reports emerged of possible US intervention, issued a statement referring to the 'impermissibility of interference in Iran's internal affairs'.<sup>34</sup> In continuation of this same policy, when the US imposed a trade embargo on Iran and positioned naval vessels in the Persian Gulf in order to assert military pressure the Soviet Union condemned the US presence and granted Iran transit rights across Soviet territory. This move went some way to mitigating the damage caused by the American blockade.

Furthermore, the Soviet Union had also provided Iran with assistance in the development of its national economy. More than 110 projects had been completed and another 60 were in progress, most of which had been commenced long before the



revolution in 1979. Among the former was the Isfahan steel processing plant, a project that Iran had been attempting to realise using American aid for many years before turning to the Soviet Union. The Soviet leadership's misunderstanding of Iranian attitudes resulted from the manner in which the two states evaluated each other's behaviour. Whereas the Soviet Union had expected the new regime to respond to its gestures of goodwill in much the same way that the Shah had, the Islamic regime was a quite dissimilar political entity and responded to Soviet actions according to different principles.

Moreover, the Soviet leadership felt it had enough reason for dissatisfaction with Iran, as the Soviet media repeatedly referred to the point that Iran was one of the countries that were preventing the normalisation of the situation around Afghanistan. It was commonly known that several combat training centres had been set up and were being used by Afghan guerillas in the area around the city of Mashhad in the eastern province of Khorasan where, it was claimed by the Soviet Union, they were supplied with weapons, false documents and slipped across the border into Afghanistan. The Soviet Union was unable to remain indifferent to the Iranian authorities' policy in respect to Afghanistan. Likewise, it could not ignore the growing trend of anti-Soviet attacks in Teheran and could not fail to draw the appropriate conclusions from these facts. The hostile campaign against the Soviet Union was viewed in Moscow as a major interference in the development of Soviet-Iranian ties.

To observers of Soviet political behaviour, the year 1985 was an 'epoch' in the formulation of Soviet foreign policy in that it was brought into line with that of the so-called 'free world' in preferring co-operation and collaboration to confrontation. (This by no means should be interpreted as a sign that the Soviet Union was giving up the challenge for Third World interests with its traditional rivals - amongst whom first and foremost was the USA). This being the case, the Soviet Union's commitment to pulling its forces out of Afghanistan and its goodwill gesture in bringing the Iran-Iraq War to an

end, as well as its positive endeavours to solve other regional crises, could be considered genuine attempts to join the mainstream of the world international system. From this point of view, the basic objective of Soviet foreign policy ought to have been to prevent Iran achieving a decisive victory over Iraq (which could have become a double-edged sword in the long run, threatening both blocs). The impulsive desire to gain victory over Iraq and the illusion of power within Iran's ruling circles went hand in hand with its lack of political experience on the world stage and had thus denied it an accurate evaluation of the revision that Soviet foreign policy towards the Third World, and to the Middle East in particular, had undergone.

Soviet-Iranian relations continued to deteriorate throughout 1985 as both states remained locked in the negative aspects of their relations rather than developing the positive elements and exploring the opportunities they presented. A sharp slump in oil prices, the disclosure of American arms sales to Iran in the so-called 'Irangate scandal', Iran's further advancement inside Iraqi territory and the escalation of the 'tanker war' in the Persian Gulf predominated during 1986 and stimulated few developments in Soviet-Iranian relations.

In February 1986 Iranian forces captured the Iraqi oil port of Fao and, by doing so, cut off the road passing from the peninsula to Basra, the second largest city in Iraq. The advancement of Iranian troops towards the Kuwaiti border caused serious anxiety in the Arab world. A group of Arab states demanded that the UN Security Council be convened immediately. In a letter to the Council's chairman, the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Yemen Arab Republic, Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco and Iraq noted that, 'the current situation represents a serious threat to international peace and security both in the region and beyond its bounds'.<sup>35</sup>

On 17 February 1986 the Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze met with his Iraqi counterpart, Tariq Aziz, who had arrived in Moscow on behalf of the committee

of seven, which had been created by the League of Arab States in 1984 in order to assist in bringing the Gulf War to an end.<sup>36</sup> In a *Pravda* editorial, Aziz was quoted as having 'affirmed the Soviet Union's consistent policy aimed at rapidly ending the conflict by political means at the negotiating table'.<sup>37</sup> Three days before this meeting, Pavel Demchenko, a Middle-Eastern expert writing in *Pravda*, warned of the 'threat of greater expansion of the conflict's geographical limits' and mentioned that 'this dangerous escalation gives the Pentagon a new reason to keep large naval and air forces near the Persian Gulf'.<sup>38</sup>

The Soviet Union, seriously concerned about the latest developments in the Gulf War, moved closer to Iraq and even voiced its sympathy with Kuwait and expressed harmonious policies with the 'League of Arabs' towards the war in seeking a rapid solution to bring it to an end. By this time, although the Soviet Union had adopted a clear-cut pro-Arab oriented foreign policy attitude in the Middle East (as compared with that of the United States), it was self-evidently deprived of any tangible fruits of this approach.

The Soviet Union would have preferred the Arab nations to be more united in order to strengthen its anti-Israeli platform which could have partially frustrated US influence in the region. The Iran-Iraq War, in dividing the Arab nations, was a significant factor in preventing this Soviet foreign policy success.

Added to this were other important obstacles to the fulfilment of Soviet foreign policy objectives in the Middle East: (i) the Soviet ideological orientation based on atheism; (ii) the Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan; (iii) the on-going Arab-Israeli conflict; (iv) civil war in the Lebanon and (v) the prolonged political division amongst the hard-line and the moderate Arab regimes. Despite the absence of either new official treaties or agreements, it remains possible to evolve some means of classification

as to the political preferences of the Middle-Eastern states. The Gulf War had the effect of dividing the Arab nations into four groups:

1. Egypt and Jordan stood firm with Iraq (this group was supported by Sudan, Somalia and Oman);
2. Syria and Libya allied themselves with Iran (these two were the main countries, forming the so-called 'Front of Steadfastness and Confrontation', which utterly opposed the 'Camp David Agreement' and generally supported the Soviet foreign policy line;
3. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were forced to provide Iraq with financial aid out of fear of the eminent danger of the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism. (Tunisia, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates had more sympathy for this group than the others);
4. Algeria and South Yemen were more or less neutral (Algeria probably had a better understanding of the Iranian viewpoint than they did of Iran's arch enemy, Iraq).

The remaining Arab states divided themselves up among the four groupings deepening the political differentiations in the area.

Although the Soviet Union maintained a considerable presence in the Middle East, the USA was the dominating power in the region in the mid-1980s. Its naval forces had firm control over the region's waterways and despite the Iranian challenge, the local regimes were moving closer to the American camp than ever before since the 1960s. The Soviet Union, coming to terms with a more practical perception of the region's political developments, decided to adopt tougher measures against Iran. Iranian ruling circles, encouraged by the February victory at the Fao peninsula, over-estimated their own potential and tried to mobilise all combatant forces to launch the final and major attack against Iraq regardless of the worldwide consequences.

The Iranian heavy offensive took place less than a week after the Soviet Union's first Deputy Foreign Minister, Georgii Kornienko, had travelled to Teheran in February 1986, the highest ranking Soviet official to have visited Iran since 1979. During the visit both parties agreed in principle to resume Aeroflot flights to and from Iran. Following Kornienko's visit, the speaker of the Majlis, Ali Akbar Hashmi-Rafsanjani, attended a news conference and said that 'Soviet-Iranian relations were improving .... One can be optimistic in fields such as technical, military, economic, and possibly political co-operation'.<sup>39</sup>

The sharp slump in oil prices which cut Iranian foreign revenue almost by half and the emergence of the problem of obtaining much needed weapons during 1986 were the reasons which persuaded the leadership to urge for final preparations to end the war with victory. The proclaimed first priority of the Islamic Republic to continue the *imposed war*, did not prevent them from providing the Afghan Mujahedin with various kinds of assistance (one of the main sources of Soviet dissatisfaction). In an interview published in a British magazine *Arabia* in May 1986 Hussein Mousavi, the then Iranian Prime Minister, noted that 'the Iranian leadership considers its duty to Islam to give the Afghan people support in achieving their aims'.<sup>40</sup>

A. Kapralov in a report in *Izvestia* in May 1986 mentioned that 'Iran has not stopped its subversive activity against the DRA'.<sup>41</sup> He continued to argue that 'we remind the readers that this year alone, as the Afghan foreign ministry pointed out in a memorandum concerning the step-up in Iran's interference in the DRA's affairs, the air and ground forces of that country have committed 63 acts of armed aggression against the DRA'.<sup>42</sup> In June 1986 Iran agreed to attend the standing commission on Iranian-Soviet joint economic co-operation (the first meeting in six years). Mikhail Gorbachev, in his Vladivostok speech of 28 July 1986, outlined the Soviet Union's new foreign policy formula aimed at 'ensuring international security, and arranging peaceful co-operation between the states of the Asian-Pacific region'.<sup>43</sup> This part of his speech mainly referred

to the south-west Asian crises such as Afghanistan and the Gulf War, both having direct links with Iran.

The Soviet leadership brought into practice its new foreign policy formula, during talks between Andrei Gromyko, the then Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, and Mohammed Javad Larijani, Iran's Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister on 4 August 1986. Gromyko in referring to the proposal that Gorbachev had made in Vladivostok emphasised that the Soviet Union advocated good relations with Iran and favoured developing such relations in both political and economic affairs. If Iran were to take a stance in favour of peace and of averting the threat of nuclear war, then in the long run this would expand still further the opportunities for co-operation between their countries. Gromyko stressed that 'one day of war is worse than three years of negotiations'.<sup>44</sup> The Soviet Union's deep worries about the consequences of a prolonged war between Iran and Iraq were expressed in Gromyko's denunciation of a possible threat of nuclear war.<sup>45</sup>

## **Trade Relations**

Due to the domestic changes and international conditions during the revolutionary period, the course of Soviet-Iranian economic relations showed more fluctuation than stability. The first Western economic sanction against Iran because of the hostage crisis in Teheran improved Iran's trade relations with the Soviet Union. But Iran's disagreement with the Soviet Union over the exporting gas price appeared as an impediment to deter further improvements. After the settlement of the hostage crisis and as a result of lifting the economic sanction, Iran's trade with the West rapidly increased. Positive developments in economic relations with the Soviet Union, however, halted yet again. Even during the period while Western economic sanctions against Iran were in force, Iran, reluctant to become totally dependent on the Soviet Union, spread its trade widely among the

communist countries rather than trading exclusively with the Soviet Union. During the first four years of the revolutionary regime in comparison with the last four years of the Shah's regime, Iran's exports to the Communist block increased from an average of 0.05 per cent to 3.1 per cent of its total exports, and its imports increased from an average of 2.7 per cent to 10 per cent of its total imports. Altogether, during the Shah and after the revolution, the Soviet Union maintained its position as Iran's major commercial partner to compare with all other communist countries. During the last four years of the Shah's regime, the value of Iran's imports from the USSR averaged about \$390 million compared to \$230 million from all other communist countries.<sup>46</sup> During the first four years of the revolutionary regime, comparable figures were \$675 million for the Soviet Union and \$385 million for the rest. However after six years fluctuation in December 1986 Iran and the Soviet Union signed a major protocol to expand their economic co-operations.<sup>47</sup>

A visit to Teheran by the Soviet first deputy foreign minister, Georgii Kornienko, on 2 February 1986 was a turning point not only in the course of political relations between the two countries but also in the field of economic co-operation. Kornienko's visit followed by the exchange of high ranking delegations between the two countries which resulted in the signing of the economic-technical protocol and the revival of the Soviet-Iranian Permanent Commission for Joint Economic Co-operation after a six-year suspension. (The activities of the Commission had been suspended since the fall of the Shah).

As a result of this major development in Soviet-Iranian relations the Iranian oil minister, Gholam Reza Aghazadeh, announced a few days later that Iran was planning to resume gas sales to the Soviet Union almost eight years after having been interrupted in 1979, something that Moscow had long sought.<sup>48</sup> According to Aghazadeh, Iran agreed to export three million cubic metres of natural gas per day to the Soviet Union beginning from the end of 1986; this amount was to be increased to between 80 and 90 million cubic metres per day by 1990.<sup>49</sup> What turned out as a surprising development was the

agreement for a joint co-operation for exploration of the North oil which drilling operation by the Soviets was in the Southern parts of the Caspian Sea. In spite of the economic significance of the latter development, considering Iran's historical reluctance to allow Soviet oil operation in Iran, this had had major political implications.<sup>50</sup>

Iran's revolutionary leaders, eager to obtain weapons and distance the Soviet Union from Iraq, tried to cultivate Iran's relations with the USSR on their own terms. After all, what were the main objectives of Iran? (Perhaps during that period they were not more than the peripheral interests of the Soviet Union). In September 1986, Ali Khamnei, the then Iranian State President, attended the non-allied conference in Harara. During the conference Khamnei attempted to present himself as being in line with pro-Soviet states such as Cuba, Nicaragua, South Yemen as well as Libya and Syria. There is no evidence to either prove or reject the idea that the Soviet leadership had been impressed by Iran's pro-Moscow overtures in Harara. But it is evident that the new diplomatic moves could by no means be considered as a sign of coherent change in Iranian policy as far as the Soviet Union was concerned.

Iran's new military offensive in late September 1986, which made possible the collapse of the north-eastern Iraqi heights of Hady Omran, was clear-cut proof and a reminder of their commitment to continue the war in so far that final victory was a possibility. Moreover, relations between the two countries were further aggravated within a few months when the Iranian navy enforced an embargo on two Soviet merchant ships passing through the Straits of Hormuz stopping them for a routine search in the suspicion that they were carrying armaments bound for Iraq.



## Conclusion

The first years of Gorbachev's tenure in office and the onset of the 'New Thinking', though it revolutionised the world political system, carried only a little weight within the Third World including the Middle East. Although Soviet policies towards the Third World were mostly in the process of development and change rather than formulating a set of new strategic formulations and implementing them, there were nonetheless significant alterations in its tactical and strategic arrangements. The new thinking also introduces a new pattern to study the Soviet revised national security concerns in Asia.

Iran, the natural powerhouse of the Middle East, with its immense geostrategic importance to the world's balance of power, provides an opportunity for studying the formulation and development of the Soviet Union's 'New political thinking' and evaluation of its impact in the Third World in general and South West Asia and the Middle East in particular. It is wise to suggest that any comprehensive analysis of USSR foreign policy behaviour under Gorbachev and in regard to the Third World, would face a gap if it failed to review the course of Soviet-Iranian relationship during the same period. The structure and objectives of the Soviet-Iranian relationship during the first year of Gorbachev in office were more or less identical with the patterns established in 1982. The Soviet-Iranian relationship in 1985, alongside regional crises such as the Iran-Iraq War and the 'Afghan syndrome', was influenced by various parameters including in general circumstances applicable to the conduct of Soviet foreign policy in the world and in particular to USSR-USA relations during same period.

Moscow's dissatisfaction with Teheran's single-mindedness sustained the previous state of relations which up to the end of 1986 had witnessed no significant improvement. During this period Soviet policy towards Iran was more passive than active. The restoration of the diplomatic relationship between the US and Iraq and the outbreak of war over the cities resulted in a minor rapprochement between the two countries, based

on tactical needs. The Soviet Union, although committed to a policy of neutrality, seemed to be determined to bring the war to an end.

As a sign of compromising the ideological commitment for the sake of its strategic interests, the Soviet Union refused to break its policy of neutrality in the Gulf War, otherwise it had a chance to play a war game with a worldwide application. Against this, the first year of Gorbachev in office was observed as a watershed in the formulation of Soviet foreign policy in that it was brought into line with that of the so-called 'free world'. The Soviet attitude towards Iran, whilst applying pressure on Teheran, had never led to the abandoning of diplomatic channels. This advantage helped the Soviets to exert the potential and possibilities in the course of its relationship with Iran whenever was necessary.

Despite the fact that there was little opportunity for implementation of the new policies at the early stage of the 'new thinking', the study of Soviet-Middle Eastern affairs in 1985 provides sufficient grounds for the assumption that this period marked a turning point in Soviet foreign policy towards the region. This applies most clearly to Soviet relations with Syria and Iraq. However lack of good understanding of Iran's new political and social system amongst the Soviets prevented them from putting forward practical initiatives capable of solving their differences with Iran, which resulted in an element of reciprocal suspicion on the part of the Iranian leadership. A sharp slump in oil prices, the disclosure of the American arms deal with Iran in the so-called 'Irangate scandal', Iran's further advance inside Iraqi territory and the escalation of the 'tanker war' in the Persian Gulf predominated during 1986 and stimulated few developments in Soviet-Iranian relations.

Soviet-Iranian relations throughout 1985 and 1986 witnessed no visible improvement as both states remained locked in the negative aspects of their relations rather than developing the existing positive elements and exploring opportunities at hand.

The uncertainties continued to prevail upon the Soviet foreign policy as the attraction of the old objectives in the eyes of the new leaders were diminishing. In the meantime the 'new thinking' was yet to be mapped out in terms of modern foreign policy and its revised objectives on the process of change.

The first and second years of the new leadership in the Kremlin, however, experienced few significant developments in the course of relations between Moscow and Teheran. This period could briefly be evaluated in terms of uncertainties, misunderstandings, bitterness and mutual suspicion, of the two obsessed by ideological orientation neighbouring countries with great contradictions in their standpoints and desires in foreign affairs.

## NOTES

1. For an elaboration and analysis of Soviet foreign policy in the Third World see Francis Fukuyama and Andrzej Korbonski, *The Soviet Union and the Third World*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987. See also Robert H. Donaldson, *Soviet Policy towards the Third World: Successes and Failures*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1981. Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Moscow's Third World Strategy*, Princeton University Press, 1988. For a first hand account of the changes in the Soviet vision of the Third World see, Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, New York: Harper and Row, 1987. For initial Western evaluation of the 'New Thinking' see Robert O. Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East since the invasion of Afghanistan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. For an Iranian view see R.K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran, Challenge and Response in the Middle East*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. For reports of the events in brief see Foreign Broadcast Information Services Daily Reports (Iran/MEA/Near East and/South Asia); also Current Digest of the Soviet Press (Iran/Middle East).
2. Kurt M. Campbell and S. Neil MacFarlane, *Gorbachev's Third World Dilemma*, London: Routledge, 1989, p.17.
3. For a detailed description of the events see, Robert O. Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East*, 1991, pp.91-7. See also Nikkie R. Keddie and Mark J. Gasiorowski, *Neither East Nor West. Iran, The Soviet Union, and The United States*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990. Also, Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran and The World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade*, Indiana University Press, 1990. For studies of Islamic revival in Central Asia see Amir Taheri, *Crescent in a Red Sky: The Future of Islam in the Soviet Union*, Hutchinson, 1989, also Martha Brill Olcott and Marie Broxup in Hafeez Malik, *Domestic Determinants of Soviet Foreign Policy towards South Asia and the Middle East*, Macmillan, 1990, pp.40-52, and Galia Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East: From World War Two to Gorbachev*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For an excellent study of the Soviet Muslim question see Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A guide*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
4. For an evaluation of the impacts of these two cases on Soviet Foreign policy see Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1988, chapters 2 and 11. Robert O. Freedman, *ibid.*, pp.71- 105. George W. Breslauer, *Soviet Strategy in the Middle East*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp.135-146, and also, Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East*, chapter 12, pp.177-197. See also Roy Allison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-alignment in the Third World*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp.147 and 159.
5. For examination of the Soviet politics of arms sales see Alexander T. Bennet, 'Arms Transfers as an Instrument of Soviet Policy in the Middle East', *Middle East Journal*, Vol.39, No.4 (Autumn 1985) and, Helena Gobban, *Military Dimensions of Soviet Middle East Policy*, College Park, Maryland: Centre for International Security Studies, 1988. For statistics and information about Soviet arms sales to the Middle East annual issues of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) yearbook; The International Institute for Strategic Studies (London) and publications by the US Government, for example, *Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers*, published by the US Arms Control and

Disarmament Agency and the Congressional Research Service's *Trends in Conventional Arms Transfers to the Third World by Major Suppliers*.

6. Galia Golan, *Gorbachev's Middle East Strategy* cited in G.W. Breslauer, *Soviet Strategy in the Middle East*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp.123-151. Robert O. Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East*, chapter 3. Also Richard Herrmann, *The Role of Iran in Soviet Perceptions and Policy*, cited in N.R. Keddie, *Neither East Nor West*, Yale University Press, 1990.
7. Fred Halliday, *Cold War/Third World: An Essay on Soviet-US relations*, London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989.
8. *Za mir i bezopasnost' narodov. Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR g.*, 2 Vols. Moscow: Politizdat, 1988, see Vol.1 Dok. 88, pp.136-74. Reports of the discussion between Gromyko and the Iranian delegation headed by the deputy foreign minister, 6 April 1985. See also *Pravda*, 6 April 1985, p.4. For more details of the event see Robert O. Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East*, p.264.
9. *Kayhan*, London, 15 April 1985, p.1.
10. On 27 November 1984 and during a meeting between President Reagan and Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister T. Aziz in Washington, the two countries reached an agreement on restoring full diplomatic relations which were broken off in 1967.
11. The USSR's desperate attempts to approach Saudi Arabia and Kuwait not only failed to keep the region's political forces in a favourable balance, but also resulted in the acceleration of political and military co-operation between Washington and Baghdad. The Soviet diplomatic initiative backfired mainly due to the strong support that the US-Iraqi co-operation axis received from both; the Persian Gulf Arab States, and the western powers. The Soviet diplomatic set back in the Gulf was intensified when Iran protested the Soviets' 'double standard diplomacy' and further widened the already growing gap between Teheran and Moscow. The USSR lost some of its credibility even in Iraq as the US presence proved to be more feasible. Nevertheless, it could well be argued that this was the Soviets miscalculation in the Persian Gulf which in part resulted in the making, by the Western powers, of Iraq into a regional superpower. The rapidly growing military power of Iraq in the late 1980s disturbed the Persian Gulf's equilibrium and eventually led to the 2 August 1990 invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi forces.
12. In December 1982 Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al Faisal visited Moscow. He was the first Saudi official to visit the USSR since 1930s. From 1982 to 1985 the Soviet Union took a few steps to start diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. Supporting the Saudi's standpoint regarding an immediate halt in the Iran-Iraq War was one of those attempts.
13. The steady improvement of Iraqi ties with the United States was symbolised by its purchase of forty-five helicopters which were ordered during the time of the Shah and developed as troop carriers for Iran. For detailed background see David Ottaway, *Washington Post*, 13 December 1985.
14. *Pravda*, 15 April 1985, p.5. See also R. Allison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment*, pp.146-61.
15. *Pravda*, 26 April 1985, p.4.

16. Radio Moscow in Farsi cited in *Kayhan*, London, 12 May 1985, p.1.
17. The Iranian officials never referred to the Soviet proposals but the Iranian daily *Ettelaat*, in a leading article published on 28 April 1985 reflected Iran's view on the subject.
18. Kuwait, API, 15 April 1985.
19. Novosti cited in *Pravda*, 2 May 1985, p.5.
20. Pavel Demchenko, 'Dangerous Flare-Up', *Pravda*, 15 March 1985, p.5. For the Soviet view on the developments regarding the Gulf War and Iran's attitude see also V. Skoyrev, 'Whose Price and What For', *Izvestia*, 18 August 1985, p.4, and Konstantin Geivadov, 'A Gloomy Fifth Anniversary', *Izvestia*, 26 August 1985, p.5.
21. Khomeini, who genuinely had a strong feeling towards the United States, used the phrase first to reflect his personal anger long before the Islamic Revolution succeeded. The Great Satan (Sheitan-e-Bozorq) gradually became a landmark projecting the Islamic Republic's foreign policy attitudes towards the United States. For more see Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah: Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution: Taking on the Great Satan*, London: Hutchinson, 1985, pp.268-90.
22. From mid-1985 and after a visit by Hashemi Rafsanjani to Peking, the People's Republic of China assumed a very important position in Iran's foreign affairs since the revolutionary leaders viewed the country as a counter-balance to both, the Soviet Union and the United States. Purchasing by Iran of \$600 million worth of arms from China in 1986 which was negotiated during Rafsanjani's visit, reflects only one of the multi-aspects of the important relations between the two countries. For a detailed account of Iran-China relations after the Islamic Revolution see R.K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.
23. *Pravda*, 3 July 1985, p.4.
24. V. Zotov, 'Groundless Accusation', *Izvestia*, 17 July 1985, p.4.
25. *Pravda*, 17 December 1985, p.1 and 18 December 1985, p.4 (Saddam Hussein talks in Moscow).
26. *Izvestia*, 18 December 1985, p.1.
27. *Pravda*, 20 December 1985, p.4.
28. Teheran Radio quoted in *Kayhan*, London, 5 July 1985.
29. *Izvestia*, 13 August 1985, 'USSR reacts to Soviet-Israeli Contacts', cited in Current Digest of the Soviet Press.
30. *Ettelaat*, Teheran, 18 September 1985.
31. The Soviet Union, although loyal to its anti-Gulf War policy, has been exploited time and again by both warring parties (Iran and Iraq) and forced to assist them either directly or indirectly in the course of the war. In case of Iran in addition to the Iranian pressure, Moscow was concerned that Iran's need for arms might push them towards the United States. Though, Iran with Moscow's blessing was

provided with Soviet made arms through Syria and Libya. For the specification and quantity of Iran's arms purchasing from these two countries up to the end on 1986 see SIPRI year book, *The Middle East/Military Balance*, 1986.

32. P. Nadezhdin, *Pravda*, 18 March 1986, p.4.
33. The Iranian officials' perception regarding the presumed Soviet plot to topple the Islamic regime via supporting the Tudeh Party, in favour of a pro-Moscow Marxist puppet regime, cannot be firmly justified because neither the Tudeh Party had the capability to form a regime in Teheran nor Moscow had the desire or intention to change its already modified preferences regarding the state-to-state relations with the Third World regimes and party-to-party relations between the local Communist Parties and the CPSU. Moscow had believed that local Communist Parties and Communist elements would be more useful and serve Soviet purposes better by working from within the Middle Eastern regimes. No wonder that Moscow on one occasion (during Nasser) even went to the extent of urging the Egyptian Communist Party to dissolve and join the Arab Socialist Union (ASU). The application of the same policy could be traced even stronger in the course of relations between the Soviet Union and Iran especially since 1979.
341. From the moments that led to the demise of the Shah's regime became evident and a contingency plan for a possible intervention by the United States in Iran became a matter of consideration by all parties interested, the Soviet Union started warning against American interference. The strongest warning came from Brezhnev who in 19 November 1987 issued a statement and mentioned that Moscow would consider the US intervention in Iran a threat against the Soviet Union. For the complete text see *Pravda*, 19 November 1987.
35. After Iran succeeded in taking the Iraqi port of Fao in 12 February 1986 and Iranian troops approached the Kuwaiti border, the Kuwaiti Government and Parliament issued a joint statement cabling all members of the League of Arab States to observe their collective defence obligation. Then a group of seven Arab States was formed to represent the Arab League in dealing with the consequences of the Iran-Iraq war.
36. For news of conversation between T. Aziz and Shevardnadze see *Pravda*, 18 February 1986, p.4.
37. *Pravda*, 18 February 1986, p.5.
38. Pavel Demchenko, *Pravda*, 14 February 1986, p.5.
39. Islamic Republic's New Agency (IRNA) 24 February 1986 in Persian.
40. An interview with Iran's Prime Minister Mir Housein Mosavi, Arabia (London), 15 May 1986.
41. A. Kaparalov, 'Subversive Activity by Iran Against Afghanistan', *Izvestia*, 13 May 1986, p.4.
42. *Izvestia*, 13 May 1986, p.2.
43. Gorbachev's 'Vladivostok speech' of July 1986 was an epoch in which the Soviet Union for the first time claimed to be an Asia-Pacific nation. The Vladivostok speech was indeed a departure not only from the traditional style of Soviet foreign policy but a departure from the old ideological substance. The proposal for a

'Pacific Conference' in order to form an Asia-Pacific Security System was a positive distancing from Brezhnev's proposal of a collective security system in Asia. The proposal was for the first time made in 1969 and repeated in 1972 but failed to gain the support of the Asian nations (India fully supported the proposal and Iran under the Shah and as a tactical manoeuvring to expand influence across the Indian Ocean responded to the proposal rather positively albeit, conditionally). For an interesting analysis of the implication of the Vladivostok speech from an Asian angle see Michio Royama, *The USSR and the Asia-Pacific Region: Paper II, The evolution of Soviet policy towards Asia*, Adelphi Papers, 248, 1989-1990, p.17.

44. *Za mir i bezopasnost' narodov. Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR*, 1986 g., 2 Vols, Moscow: Politizdat, 1989. See Vol 2, dok. 250, p.5, report of reception by Gromyko of Iranian deputy foreign minister 5 August, 1986.
45. *Pravda*, 5 August 1986, p.1.
46. Central Bank of Iran, Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 1358 (1980) and *International Financial Statistics*, Vol. XXXVII No.7, July 1985.
47. Soviet and East European Trade and Financial relations with the Middle East, in Wharton Economic Forecasting Association, *Centrally Planned Economic Current Analysis*, Vol.110, Nos.77-8, October 1983.
48. The Soviet Union from the mid-1960s became increasingly interested in the oil and natural gas resources in the Middle East. This perhaps was a sign of change in the Soviet planners' optimistic prediction about the USSR sufficiencies of oil and natural gas to meet all its internal needs and to export to both, East European communist countries and the West European market and Japan. Because the Soviet Union's enormous oil and gas reserves were located in Siberia and would have required large investment for exploration, the Soviet planners concluded that the imports of oil and gas from the Middle East could feed industries in the Southern parts of the USSR while selling Soviet oil and natural gas to Europe. Moreover, such a plan would have enabled the Soviet Union to delay the huge investment needed to develop Siberian oil and natural gas. Consequently, Soviet leaders rushed to sign agreements with Middle Eastern countries to obtain oil and gas to cover the upcoming gap in energy consumption. The agreement in 1966 with Iran for exploration and purchase of oil and gas was the first step in this regard. Then in 1967 the Soviet Union signed an agreement with Iraq to develop Iraq's northern Rumeyla oil field. During the same year the Soviet Union signed a long term agreement with Afghanistan to import natural gas. For more information about Soviet interests in the Middle East's oil and natural gas, see Arthur J. Klinghoffer, *The Soviet Union and International Oil Policies*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1977 and Marshal Goldman, *The Enigma of Soviet Petroleum*, Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1980.
49. *Kayhan*, Teheran, 22 November 1986.
50. The implementation of the agreement was in fact a continuation of a major economic-technical co-operation agreement which the Soviet Union signed with Iran on 13 January 1966. In this context see the Statement by Nehzat Azadi-e-Iran (Iran's Freedom Front) led by Mehdi Bazargan, in opposition to the oil agreement with the Soviet Union. Teheran, December, 1986.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CONTINUITY AND CHANGES 1986-88**

#### **THE ROOTS OF REGIONAL CRISES**

If there is any substance to the argument that the USA and the USSR have deliberately fostered Third World conflicts, then there can be no doubt about their desire to explore ways of regulating and controlling those conflicts as part of their overall scheme of foreign relations.<sup>1</sup> The superpowers' new interests and desire for regional co-operation in order to reduce the dangers posed by Third World conflicts took shape during Gorbachev's tenure in office. The outcome of the superpowers' new political approach, although proceeding slowly, subject to the Soviet Union's traditional commitments, accelerated later with the development of the 'new thinking' which revolutionised the Kremlin's foreign policy behaviour and led to unprecedented US-Soviet co-operation in the Persian Gulf after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.<sup>2</sup>

It is no surprise that the Middle East has been a region of strategic uncertainties and vital interest to the superpowers. The modern history of the region has proved time and again that due to the complication and sensitivity of the area, risk taking policies in this part of the world have rarely paid off.

#### **The Soviet Union, the United States and the Gulf Crisis**

In late 1986, the Kremlin leaders were busier reacting to international issues than concentrating on the reformulation of the Soviet Union's basic assumptions about the

global situation in which they found themselves. The illusion of the Soviet Union's 'superpower status'<sup>3</sup> prevailing in the minds and orientations of the Kremlin's leadership maintained its negative influence and consequently distracted their attention from the facts and realities of the USSR's existing status as well as its problematic future.

The misconception of the leadership, nevertheless, resulted in securing the presence and maintaining the power bases of the die-hard elements within the Kremlin's hierarchy and at the summit of policymaking apparatus. Hence, despite the growing tendencies in favour of a departure from the classical framework and intentions of the pragmatist elements to make changes in the substance and the style of foreign policy, conservative currents managed to dictate their purposes and to exert considerable influence upon the Kremlin's general orientation in the conduct of foreign affairs.

The other outcome of the 'superpower illusion' was the Kremlin's obsession with the United States, which it perceived as an arch rival and a potential enemy to the Socialist bloc. In this context, therefore, relations between the 'two superpowers' became the first priority of the Soviet Union in the conduct of its foreign affairs. No wonder, during the first five years of 'new political thinking' and prior to any substantial changes in the Soviet Union's foreign policy orientation, almost all world issues - particularly those that concerned the Third World - were treated inside the framework of the bilateral relationship between the USSR and the USA .

It could be argued that apprehension of the Soviet Union about its national security, alongside a sense of responsibility for its global interests, had convinced Gorbachev and his associates that the success of 'new political thinking' would directly be associated with existing and prospective developments in the relationship between the two superpowers. Based on this belief and despite the fact that such reasoning was never articulated by the Soviet leadership, the relationship with the US was nonetheless given the highest priority in Soviet international affairs.

At the outset of the Gorbachev leadership it was not easy to foresee how the USSR's priorities in the international arena might have been basically changed and if that had been the case what would have been the appropriate direction to take in the Third World. The Kremlin, evidently, was still insisting on the validity of such zero-sum-game approaches in dealing with the United States all over the world, including disarmament talks and regional crises in the Third World. Accordingly, Soviet-Third World policy, even in the course of its revision, had an American aspect as well as its other features. In other words, the sense of rivalry and direct competition between the USSR and the US in the international arena was quite evident.

In an analysis by Georgii Arbatov published in *Pravda* on 21 November 1986 in response to President Reagan's anti-Soviet speech delivered on 18 November 1986 in the early stages of the 'Irangate' scandal, he argued that President Reagan had vowed to continue arms interference in Afghanistan, Angola and Nicaragua; 'he had even promised to interfere in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union and condemned this belligerent attitude'. Arbatov went on to say, 'As an example of American policy he presented the 'bleeding' El Salvador and 'raped' Grenada. McFarlane did not fly to Iran empty-handed, his plane was loaded with spare parts for the American planes that formed the backbone of the Iranian Air Force. McFarlane did not fly to Iran on his own initiative. He was on a special mission for the White House to establish ties with Iranian ruling circles that are trying to restore relations with the US'.<sup>4</sup> He concluded that 'the example of the McFarlane mission is typical of the action of the US administration in its efforts to follow the path of questionable deals and 'behind-the-scenes' manipulation of foreign affairs. US plans in the Persian Gulf consist of an attempt to exacerbate the situation there still further'.<sup>5</sup>

The 'Iran Contra affair' convinced the Soviet leadership of the need to step up their attempts to provoke a stalemate in the Gulf War should it prove impossible to achieve a rapid peace settlement. Pressurising Iran on the one hand and fortifying Iraq's military capacity on the other were the means of realising this option, by which they could not

only reduce American penetration into Iraq but also find a new foothold among pro-Iraqi Arab states in the Middle East. The 'Iran Contra affair' put US Middle Eastern policies on the defensive and enabled Moscow to reappear as the major actor in the region.

Iran's revolutionary leadership obviously suffered from the external and domestic consequences of the arms deal with the Americans and Israelis once it was disclosed. Still once again, based on a false assessment of the Soviet Union's altered position, Iran failed to respond accordingly. Iran had been thinking of making a concession to the Soviet leadership and of responding positively to the peripheral interests of the USSR such as economic co-operation, gas supplies and cultural exchanges, which were inadequate in meeting Moscow's requirements at that specific period of time. Thus, Iran's intention to establish better relations with Moscow failed to result in any improvement in relations between the two countries.

The Soviet Union's interest in its neighbours is rooted in the desire for stable borders as a means of enhancing its own security. But the expansion of the Iran-Iraq War could have put this desire in jeopardy and endangered Soviet security arrangements right in its own backyard.

In October 1986 Andrei Gromyko met with Herani Nobari, the Iranian Ambassador to Moscow, and called Iran's attention to the Soviet peace initiative put forward at the 27th CPSU Congress and in statements made by Mikhail Gorbachev. Gromyko informed the ambassador that the Soviet leadership considered the Iranian mass media to be assisting in whipping up anti-Soviet propaganda in Iran and added that such activities were not beneficial to the development of normal ties between neighbouring countries such as the USSR and Iran.<sup>6</sup> The exchange of economic missions in Teheran and Moscow also failed to reduce the tension in Soviet-Iranian relations. The Soviet leadership did not hesitate to pursue and implement its new policy line aimed at bringing

the Gulf War to an end. From this point on Soviet policies in the Persian Gulf assumed a new dimension, becoming more of a dynamic force.

Iran, seemingly more interested to play the Soviet card against the United States' presence in the Persian Gulf than to give up its basic foreign policy objectives in favour of improving its relationship with the Soviet Union, was prepared only to make small concessions in response to these friendly gestures from Moscow. The game Iran was playing could have resulted positively if Soviet foreign policy in the Gulf had not been in limbo. Iran was prepared to offer the Soviets more if they were ready to meet its major demands.

In January 1987 Iran launched a new offensive against Iraq. Perhaps due to the fact that the Soviets were quite sensitive towards escalation of the war, Iran a few days after its major military offensive stepped up its diplomatic activity with the Soviet Union. The Soviet leadership reacted to the Iranian offensive by issuing a new condemnation of the war and lodging a strong protest against the 'war worshipping' attitude of the Iranian leadership.<sup>7</sup> The statement in reflecting the Soviets' deep concern about the West's growing military presence in the Persian Gulf went on to claim: 'Imperialist forces are taking advantage of the continuation of the Iran-Iraq conflict in order to build up their military presence in the Persian Gulf'. The statement then accused the US of 'pouring oil on the flames of the war while verbally stating its desire for an end'. The statement in an obvious attempt to please Iran (like all other Soviet official statements regarding the Gulf War) went on to say: 'Under the false pretext of defending their own 'vital interests', powers located thousand of kilometres from this region are sending warships there, forming special military commands, conducting manoeuvres of rapid deployment forces, putting pressure on countries in the region and threatening their security'.<sup>8</sup>

On 12 February 1987 the Iranian Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, travelled to Moscow and met with Andrei Gromyko who took a tough line with his former

counterpart. The term 'frank and businesslike' was used in a *Pravda* editorial to describe the talks in which the Soviet leadership's dissatisfaction and toughness was expressed. Gromyko strongly criticised Iran for both the continuation of the Gulf War and the aiding of Afghan insurgents.<sup>9</sup>

Velayati had more successful talks with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, in which the Soviet Union stated its readiness to consider Iranian requests 'in a given manner'.<sup>10</sup> According to the Iranian media, Velayati warned the Soviet leadership of the damage being done to Soviet-Iranian relations by heavy Iraqi bombardment of Iranian cities. Moscow was seemingly unimpressed by Iran's criticism of her policy attitudes bent more towards the Arabs, perhaps hoping that the latter move would have a balancing effect on their position in the Gulf. The Soviet leadership, still hanging on to a zero-sum-game approach with the US in the Persian Gulf, was determined to explore every possible potential which could facilitate termination of the war and improve their position in the forthcoming postwar period. Thus, in a statement issued on 14 April 1987, the Kremlin agreed to a Kuwaiti request that the Soviet Union charter three of its ships.<sup>11</sup> This announcement made Iran even more suspicious of a 'superpower conspiracy' to further isolate Iran.

In an attempt by the Reagan administration to justify US involvement in the Persian Gulf, Iran, suffering from all-round American military and political pressure, was blamed for the death of thirty-seven American servicemen killed during an Iraqi air strike on the USS *Stark* in May 1987. The United States was careful not to tarnish the reputation of its new champion in the region, the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. On 19 May 1987 President Reagan, speaking with regard to the tragic event, noted that 'Iran was the real villain in the peace'.<sup>12</sup> He also accused Iran of posing a threat to Western freedom, security and oil supplies.<sup>13</sup>

An obsession with the Soviet threat in the Middle East had been enshrined in all successive US foreign policy doctrines since World War II. Ironically, the Reagan administration's decision to intensify the US military presence in the Gulf occurred at a time when the Soviet leadership was extremely sensitive to the security of the area and had offered to protect Kuwait's oil exports as a means of maintaining the status quo in the region rather than disrupting it. It was in fact Iranian oil supplies that were under attack by Iraqi air raids over the Persian Gulf. In response to its political isolation Iran had no choice but to penetrate further into Iraq and also disrupt the 'freedom of navigation and movement of oil supplies in the Persian Gulf' in the event that Iran was denied its navigation rights through the Gulf. This compared with the Iranian perspective on US involvement in the region. One Iranian political observer living in the USA, Rohollah Ramazani, summed this up in arguing that 'the US decision to intervene in the Persian Gulf largely reflected the misapplication of the rancid formula of containment of the Soviet Union and communism'.<sup>14</sup>

The leaders of revolutionary Iran viewed the course of events in the Gulf as little more than a harmonious Soviet-American 'conspiracy' against Iran. With the Soviet leadership offering to protect Kuwait's oil supplies the American presence in the area had widened the anti-Iranian angle more than anything else (in face of Kuwait's appeal to Moscow for help, the US rushed through the decision to flag eleven Kuwaiti oil tankers in March 1987).<sup>15</sup> Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, speaker of the Majlis (House of Parliament), remarked on the activities of the superpowers in the Gulf that 'the collusion between the United States and the USSR over the Persian Gulf is a conspiracy against Iran'.<sup>16</sup>

Tension in the 'tanker war' continued to mount during April-July 1987 with several vessels hitting mines allegedly planted by Iran. On 6 May 1987 the Soviet freighter, the *Ivan Koroteyev*, became the first superpower vessel of its kind to be attacked by Iran in a daylight raid. On 24 July 1987, two days after the United States

began to escort Kuwaiti oil tankers, the *Bridgeton* (a Kuwaiti super tanker flying the American flag) struck an Iranian mine. In resisting US intervention in the Gulf, the Iranian leadership perceived Soviet policy in the region not only as being co-ordinated but also as being in close co-operation with that of the United States and directed against Iran.<sup>17</sup> During this period of time the United States deployed massive naval forces in the Persian Gulf, the largest since World War II. In response to the military presence of the superpowers in the region, Iran threatened to blockade the Straits of Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf by military force.

On 22 April 1987 the Iranian Foreign Office once again insisted that the task of maintaining the security of the Persian Gulf rested 'solely with the countries in the region and that Iran, which has the longest shoreline in the Gulf, carried the greatest responsibility for the maintenance of security in the region'. This statement also emphasised that 'the Persian Gulf states will enjoy security as long as the security of the Islamic Republic is respected' and warned that 'interference by the superpowers in the region will not only increase the danger of regional conflict but will also be detrimental to those countries who requested protection from the superpowers'.<sup>18</sup>

On 27 May 1987 the Soviet Union issued a fresh statement and warned that 'war has created a serious danger to international navigation in the Persian Gulf. The statement in referring to the incident involving the attack on the American frigate *Stark* warned again that, 'there are plans to dispatch the aircraft carrier *Constellation* to join the large flotilla of US warships that is currently in the Gulf. The statement went on to claim: 'The US Navy has already received orders from Washington to open fire on any target whose actions are threatening in nature'.<sup>19</sup>

On 29 May 1987 Ayatollah Khomeini, speaking of the nation's sense of sacrifice and martyrdom, said that 'a nation that seeks martyrdom and whose individual members, when losing their limbs, ask God why he had not considered them worthy to take their



lives, is not afraid of the actions of the superpowers. They should not try to frighten such a nation with threats. Go and do whatever damn thing you can or cannot do. These superpowers intend to dominate the world'.<sup>20</sup> Khomeini attributed Iranian resistance not only to Shi'ite fearlessness but to the nation's will to defy the 'bullies' of world politics. The Iranian leadership intensified its campaign against both superpowers in favour of the proclaimed policy of 'neither East nor West' (a slogan invented by Ayatollah Khomeini in outlining Iran's independent foreign policy platform).

### **The 'Vorontsov Visit', The United Nations and Soviet Diplomatic Initiatives**

In mid-June 1987 Yuli Vorontsov, the First Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, travelled to Teheran and attempted to improve Moscow's relations with Iran by emphasising Soviet peace initiatives in the Persian Gulf.<sup>21</sup> This was one of a series of visits by Vorontsov to both Teheran and Baghdad in order to bring the war to an end. He reportedly insisted in Teheran that the Soviet Union would not enlarge its forces beyond that of three warships in the Gulf and would also not involve itself in a 'zero-sum' contest with the United States for influence in the region.<sup>22</sup> The 'Vorontsov visit' to Teheran had a broad range of purposes which included:

1. An improvement of bilateral economic relations between the two states.
2. A reduction in the tensions which had remained the dominating force in the course of political relationships between the two neighbouring states.
3. To encourage the Iranian leadership towards a point at which an immediate solution for the two crises in the region would be possible, i.e. the Gulf War and Afghan civil war.
4. To convince Teheran that no such Soviet-American conspiracy in the Gulf against Iran existed. This was to be achieved by pointing out that US policy in the region

was also considered anti-Soviet. (Reagan's statement on 30 May 1987, as reprinted in the *New York Times* on 1 June 1987, had had both an Iranian and a Soviet slant. 'The use of the vital sea lanes in the Persian Gulf will not be dictated by Iran. Nor will these lanes be allowed to come under the control of the Soviet Union'.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the significance of Vorontsov's visit to Iran and the cordial reception, a close study suggests that Iran had made no concessions on the major issues under discussion. Iran was concerned about the other side of the Soviet presence in the Gulf. This was clearly expressed in Hashemi-Rafsanjani's words when he stressed that the 'minor Soviet presence' in the Persian Gulf was abused by the United States for reasons of adventurism.<sup>24</sup> The Iranian Prime Minister, Mir Hussein Mosavi, clarified this stance when he argued that Iran favoured 'an improvement in its relations with the Soviet Union based only on Iran's declared principles'.<sup>25</sup>

The Soviet Union, despite being keen to play a major role in the Gulf, had always been denied a chance to come to the forefront of the Gulf politics due to the inefficiency of their diplomacy or American counteractions. For instance, the re-flagging of Kuwait's tankers by the Soviet Union became worthless soon after the United States took over the overall security of navigation in the Gulf and the escorting of the oil tankers. However, the Kremlin leadership, still believing that the Soviet Union was a superstate, never gave up their attempts to initiate a new role in the Gulf.

On 3 July 1987 the Soviet Union issued an official statement on the conflict in the Persian Gulf in which the main attention was paid to the expansion of the American military presence in the region rather than the other factors involved. The statement which was issued following Vorontsov's visit to Teheran proclaimed that 'events in the Persian Gulf are approaching a dangerous point beyond which the regional conflict runs the risk of developing into an international crisis. This cannot fail to concern the Soviet

Union, which is in immediate proximity to the expanding centre of the conflict .... The United States would like to take advantage of the present alarming situation in the Persian Gulf to carry out its long-nurtured design for military and political hegemony in this strategically important region of the globe'.<sup>26</sup>

In the statement it was proposed that 'all US warships having no direct relevance to the region be withdrawn from the Gulf waters as quickly as possible, an immediate cease-fire and halt to all military operations be implemented and the immediate withdrawal of all troops beyond internationally recognised borders'.<sup>27</sup> The statement stressed emphatically Soviet willingness to co-operate with all 'who truly share these goals'. The statement also reflected tactical flexibility combined with a pragmatic approach of the Soviet leadership to 'new political thinking' for the world's regional crises and provoked no objection as it had something positive for all parties involved in the Gulf war.<sup>28</sup>

The United States was offered co-operation. Iran was satisfied with the suggestion that all warships having no relevance to the region be withdrawn. Likewise, Iraq and other Arabian States in the Persian Gulf were happy with the suggestion of an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of all troops beyond internationally recognised borders. The United Nations peace-making mission was solidly supported in the Soviet statement, which had been adopted to solve the regional crisis through the UN. For students of Soviet affairs the latter move presented a new dimension to the Soviet Union's revised political perception of the world and their devotion to co-operate in the activities of the international political system more than ever before.

Soviet support for the UN's active role in solving regional crises deserves to be considered in a broader context and appreciated more than a tactical move, as it was a reflection of the new conceptualisation of international relations in the Kremlin and rooted in its 'new thinking'. Emphasising the importance of his Vladivostok speech on

the anniversary of its delivery, Mikhail Gorbachev, during an interview with an Indonesian newspaper, referred to it as a suitable base for a peace settlement in the Gulf.<sup>29</sup> Despite this, some Western observers summed up the situation in the Soviet Union as siding with Iran in order to gain strategic advantage. Robert O. Freedman, for instance, put this case in arguing that 'Moscow considered the tactical advantages of gaining influence in Iran to be more important than any co-operative efforts with the United States to pressure Iran to end the war, a policy Moscow would continue to follow'.<sup>30</sup>

Neither the statements nor the consequences of the 'Vorontsov trip' to Teheran indicated that USSR diplomacy in Iran, regarding the Gulf War, had secured anything more than a chance to express bluntly the Kremlin's perception of the worsening situation in the area and proclaim its emphatic objection to the continuation of the Gulf War. Thus, Freedman's evaluation of Soviet diplomacy and its purely theoretical gains in Iran lacked solid substance. In contrast to his argument, there are stronger reasons to argue that Soviet co-operation with the US to bring the Gulf War to an end (exactly through the tactical policy of pressurising Iran) was more important than to take advantage of marginal improvements in Soviet-Iranian relations.<sup>31</sup>

On 17 July 1987 Andrei Gromyko, seemingly still dealing with particular aspects of Soviet foreign affairs and acting as troubleshooter in relation to regional crises, received Javad Larijani, Iran's Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, who was in Moscow to seek Soviet military assistance and technical aid. Gromyko seized the opportunity to call the Iranian representative's attention to the statement as a framework for 'achieving a positive settlement of the problems in the Persian Gulf'.<sup>32</sup>

Soviet support for a UN peace-making mission and its role in finding a solution to the regional crisis paid off on 20 July 1987 when the UN Security Council unanimously decided to adopt the Washington-initiated Resolution 598 to bring the Persian Gulf War

to an end.<sup>33</sup> This was one of the rare occasions that all five permanent members of the Security Council had voted together on an extremely crucial international question.<sup>34</sup>

The UN Resolution was based on the Soviet government's statement of 4 July 1987, which put forward a proposal for an immediate cease-fire which included the discontinuation of all military action and the withdrawal of all forces beyond internationally recognised boundaries without delay as the first step toward a negotiated settlement to the Gulf War.<sup>35</sup>

This was a major departure from the Soviet Union's usually negative attitude towards the United States and was the result of 'behind-the-scenes' negotiations over the crisis between the two superpowers which had lasted almost one year. Insofar as the Soviet Union was adopting policies towards the Gulf War closer to those of the United States, the co-ordination and co-operation between the two superpowers was becoming more evident. In August 1987 Gennadii Gerasimov, Director of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in responding to a question during a press conference in Moscow said: 'The Soviet Union and the US could act together in the Persian Gulf just as they acted together in the Security Council to defuse the conflict' (Resolution 598).<sup>36</sup>

The Soviet Union, attempting to keep pace with the United States in the region militarily and diplomatically, announced on 28 July 1987 that Yuli Vorontsov was being sent (again) to Baghdad and Teheran to continue talks on the possibility of an early implementation of the UN Security Council's resolution 598.<sup>37</sup> Vorontsov made his visit to Teheran on 1 August 1987 and Ali Khamnei, following Khomeini's guidance, took a hard line and insisted on a continuation of the ground war until the downfall of the Iraqi regime.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, despite the American military presence in the Persian Gulf which had dramatically improved US relations with the Arabian States in the Gulf, Soviet-Iranian relations remained static. Both parties were nonetheless showing more understanding and

flexibility towards each other<sup>39</sup> and Moscow had delayed attempts to impose sanctions against Iran following the ratification of the UN Resolution 598. On 9 August 1987 TASS reported Iran's UN representative as saying 'Iran did not plant mines in international waterways'.

From the beginning of September 1987 Iraq and Iran resumed the 'tanker war' and UPI reported that 'despite the United States' public regret for these attacks the White House believes that heavy, continuous Iraqi strikes on Iranian oil targets, including tankers, were necessary'. According to a US staff member of the intelligence service department, 'they have been providing Iraq with very detailed technical data on targets for a year' (i.e. from the middle of 1986).<sup>40</sup> On 2 September 1987 a State Department representative rejected this report but UPI confirmed the accuracy of its report and added that the relevant decision had been adopted 'at the highest level of the US government'.<sup>41</sup>

In a long article by Yuri Zhukov published in *Pravda* on 6 September 1987 the US policy of 'positions of strength' was condemned, as was the 180-degree turn by the US administration of covertly supplying weapons to Iran. The knowledge that the USA was providing Iraq with intelligence assistance became an open secret soon after Iraq had recovered the Fao peninsula which was the beginning of the end to the Gulf War which came later on 20 August 1988.

### **Soviet Preparation for Post-war Relations with Iran**

It can be argued that the United States, by bringing 40 warships carrying about 25,000 troops into the Gulf, was in command of both political and military developments in the area whereas the Soviet Union was facing a diminishing role in the region and was denied an opportunity to put into practice its own policy. It was envisaged in Moscow that implementation of a cease-fire between Iran and Iraq not only could reduce US influence

in the Gulf but also provide the Soviet Union with an opportunity to throw off some of its 'political liabilities' and to make a fresh start in its relations with both countries. Soviet insistence on the necessity of a cease-fire made Iran (which, despite all odds, remained optimistic of a breakthrough in the war) assume that this move was nothing less than a conspiracy between the United States and the Soviet Union and conclude that the UN's intermediary role as well as the Resolution No 598 of the Security Council were products of the superpowers' co-ordinated policies against Iran.

The Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, attending the 42nd session of the UN General Assembly on 24 September 1987, gave a speech arguing that 'our view of the situation in the Persian Gulf is that it has become critically dangerous and could go out of control'.<sup>42</sup> This repeated the Soviet position which had been maintained for almost four years and insisted on the practicality of the Resolution 598 whilst calling for unity in the Security Council. Shevardnadze added that 'the safety of shipping in the Gulf can and should be guaranteed by the entire international community, on whose behalf the UN acts'.<sup>43</sup>

On 8 October 1987, two US MH-6 helicopter gun ships attacked a squadron of Iranian navy patrol cutters in the northern Persian Gulf and sank three of them under the pretext of 'self-defence'. The Soviet media reported the event without supporting either side and even went as far as to insinuate that Iran had been threatening Saudi oil platforms at Kafji.<sup>44</sup> The deterioration of the situation in the Gulf did not prevent the Soviet airline (Aeroflot) from resuming its flights to Teheran.<sup>45</sup> During the same month, Iran fired a missile at the Kuwaiti port of Shuaiba to which the US retaliated with a navy attack on Iranian off-shore platforms in the Persian Gulf. This incident pushed the crisis to its most critical stage and left the Soviet Union sidelined as nothing more than a spectator.<sup>46</sup>

The appearance of Chinese produced 'silk worm' missiles in the region and their use by Iran against tankers and Kuwaiti port installations provided more evidence of Chinese involvement in the Persian Gulf and can be interpreted as a move on the part of the Iranian leadership to counterbalance the perceived co-operation between the USA and Soviet Union. The Soviet leadership was not overly perturbed by the Chinese military presence, as the 'silk worm', a slow-moving, short-range missile (with a range of 90 km and a half ton explosive payload) had not significantly increased Iran's military capability. What was of more concern were the political implications that the 'China Card' might have for the Soviet position in the region.<sup>47</sup>

On 8 November 1987 a summit conference of 15 Arab states (among them Libya and Syria) was held in Amman. This gathering was to some extent a minor gain for Soviet Middle Eastern policy which had always sought to 'get the Arab nations together'. The military threat to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, both of which supported Iraq in the Gulf War, had the effect of alienating Iran from mainstream Arab opinion. The Iranian leadership, on the brink of total political isolation and faced with a sharp slump in civilian morale, had no other option but to approach the Soviet Union for support.

On 4 December 1987 a meeting took place between N.H. Nobari, the Iranian Ambassador in Moscow, and Andrei Gromyko in which the ambassador delivered a message which he described as 'containing the spirit of broad co-operation'.<sup>48</sup> The basis of this co-operation in Iranian terms was both political and military. The ambassador went on to say that Iran was prepared to co-operate closely with the Soviet Union in an effort to secure the withdrawal of all belligerent foreign warships from the Gulf (exactly the terms that the Soviet Union had used in its official documents regarding the Gulf War). However, the Soviet Union was neither willing nor prepared for such co-operation with Iran which might have involved military confrontation with the United States.



Thus, Gromyko, rather than responding to the proposal, asked the ambassador with which NATO countries Iran had relations that could be considered important. Nobari replied that 'at this time, Iran does not have good relations with any NATO country that would be worth mentioning. At the same time we value highly our ties with the Soviet Union and would like to develop them in two areas, co-operation in various UN agencies and co-operation on a bilateral basis'<sup>49</sup>. Gromyko then plainly expressed his views regarding the unreliability of Iran's revolutionary leaders to keep their promises. He argued that 'you as ambassador, as well as the Iranian leadership, have made a good many statements regarding a desire to end the war but without making any effort to end it'<sup>50</sup>. In response to this remark, Nobari stressed that Iran favoured political contacts with the Soviet Union at the highest level. However, this meeting failed to make any changes in the war nor to any extent the critical relations between the two countries at the time.<sup>51</sup> The occupation of the USSR General Consulate in Isfahan by Afghan refugees on 26 December 1987 provoked the Soviet leadership into lodging an official protest and subsequently aggravated Soviet-Iranian relations still further frustrating Iranian moves towards conciliation.<sup>52</sup>

There were few developments in Soviet-Iranian relations during the following year as US-Soviet unofficial talks continued on a means of solving the regional crisis and of accommodating their 'regional interests'. The Soviet Union did succeed in improving its position in the Middle East by issuing a statement on 8 February 1988 announcing the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Afghanistan. This was a turning point in Soviet Third World policy, adding further credence to the 'new thinking' in Soviet foreign policy.<sup>53</sup> The Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Vladimir Petrovsky, travelled to Teheran three days later in order to explain the situation to the Iranian leadership. Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, effectively in charge of war affairs, attempted to grab the opportunity to improve relations with the Soviet Union by offering the Soviet delegate close assistance in the Red Army's departure from Afghanistan.<sup>54</sup>

The Soviet withdrawal had been taken with Iran partly in mind. The Soviet leadership had adopted a broad perspective on the application of its foreign policy in the region and inevitably included an Iranian angle. On 22 February 1988 Mikhail Gorbachev met with George Shultz, then US Secretary of State, in Moscow and stressed the need for joint solutions to regional conflicts. Gorbachev reasoned that, 'at present, the situation is conducive to a peaceful settlement of the crisis and announced that the forthcoming round of Geneva talks between the USSR and US on the question of Afghanistan would be the last and promised on the question of the Iran-Iraq war that he would examine some ideas forwarded by the Secretary of State'.<sup>55</sup>

On the same day Eduard Shevardnadze, attending a press conference, responded to a question as to whether the Soviet Union would co-operate in trade sanctions to be taken against Iran saying that 'a draft submitted by Britain is under consideration and serious work is currently in progress'.<sup>56</sup> This was a departure from the Soviet Union's previous strategy of avoiding direct confrontation with Iran and ought to be considered a marker pinpointing the revision of Soviet priorities in the region. During the Moscow talks the USSR and the USA came closer in uniting their policies in South West Asia, an area of vital interest to the superpowers with the Iran-Iraq War and Afghan crisis at the top of the agenda.

The 'War of the Cities' escalated at the end of February 1988 and a new element emerged playing an important role in line with the policy of reducing Iranian morale. Iraqi missile attacks on Teheran, with the perceived support of both the USA and Soviet Union, were used as a strategic weapon to pressure Iran into accepting a cease-fire. Although Teheran and other Iranian cities had experienced Iraqi air raids at other times during the war, given the superpower involvement and Iraq's use of the modified Soviet-made 'Scud B' missile to inflict heavy civilian casualties, this new development not only had serious implications for the maintenance of civilian morale but also that of the military personnel at the front. Millions of people evacuated the capital in fear of a

massive missile attack and the possible use of chemical warfare. This had the effect of bringing life in Teheran to a standstill.

The Iranian leadership condemned the Soviet Union for providing Iraq with ballistic missiles capable of hitting Teheran (850 km away from the Iraqi capital of Baghdad) and helping the United States in their attempts to make Iran further isolated. Iranian demonstrators subsequently occupied part of the Soviet Embassy in Teheran and the consulate in Isfahan in protest against Soviet support being offered to Iraq. The Soviet leadership, in consideration of the implications this development could have for its long term objectives, responded with restraint and rejected 'any and all fabrication concerning the USSR's involvement in the missile attacks on Teheran',<sup>57</sup> for which Ali-Akbar Rafsanjani accused the Soviet Union of pursuing a policy of 'hypocrisy and duplicity'.<sup>58</sup>

The shelling of Iranian oil platforms in the southern part of the Persian Gulf by the US Navy in April 1988 causing more than three hundred million dollars' worth of damage, apparently in retaliation for the incident that took place in the Persian Gulf a few days prior to this when the US minesweeper, *Samuel B. Roberts*, had hit a mine, added to the fear that the superpowers were prepared to provide massive support for Iraq in their attempt to bring Iran to its knees. These incidents in the Gulf provided the Soviet leadership with the opportunity to express its sympathy over Teheran in an attempt to defuse the increasing conflict between the two states. Pavel Demchenko, *Pravda's* Middle Eastern correspondent, described the US attack as an 'act of brigandage, piracy and barbarism'.<sup>59</sup>

Although the Soviets expressed their sympathy over Iran and even used rather harsh words to condemn the US attack, however, the theory of 'superpower conspiracy against Iran' gained more ground whilst the US attacks coincided with Iraqi air raids and missile attacks against Iranian civilian targets, using Soviet made ammunition and weapon systems. The US attack had coincided with an Israeli commando raid in Tunisia,

in which a senior Palestinian leader, Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), had been assassinated. The Soviet Union reacted to this incident with the speculative suggestion that Washington and Tel Aviv were not only harnessed in tandem over Middle Eastern policy but were actually working in collusion.<sup>60</sup>

However, despite the rather harsh Soviet condemnation of US policy, Iran, embroiled in an escalating 'tit-for-tat' conflict with the US Navy following the attack on the oil platforms, interpreted the Soviet line as being 'hypocritical propaganda'.<sup>61</sup> The Soviet leadership, reluctant to directly respond to the Iranian accusation, chose to utilise the Tudeh Party's official mouthpiece, 'Peace and Progress', broadcast by Radio Moscow, to argue that 'those who support a protraction of the Iran-Iraq War regarded the war as a means of struggle in the Islamic world'.<sup>62</sup>

On 3 July 1988 an Iranian civil airbus on a routine flight and following its correct flight path was shot down by a US frigate, the *Vincennes*, over the Persian Gulf, killing all the crew and 298 passengers. This became one of the most influential events shifting the course of the Iran-Iraq War and superpower policy in the region. The plane was shot down not over the USA but over the Persian Gulf and as such was a direct consequence of the US military presence in the region. A tragic incident of this nature had been predicted and warned of by independent Iranian sources.<sup>63</sup> The Soviet Union took the view that the tragedy had not been accidental and called for the US commander who gave the order to bear full responsibility for the incident.

In order to keep pace with the wave of anger that had swept across the region both in Iran and the other Islamic states, regardless of ideological persuasion or political orientation, over the incident, the Soviet leadership was quick to issue its 'deep sympathy on the death of innocent people'.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, with the realisation that an end to the war was in sight, T. Kolesnichenko suggested in a *Pravda* article that 'US forces should leave the waters of the Persian Gulf immediately' and described the tragic incident as 'a

crime committed by the US Navy'.<sup>65</sup> US President, Ronald Reagan, commenting on the incident, said that the USA deeply regretted the loss of human life but felt the shooting down of the airbus to be justifiable and a case of self-defence. He therefore considered the matter closed.<sup>66</sup> George Bush, then Vice-President, argued that 'the commander of the frigate *Vincennes* acted properly, since he did not want to place his heroic young men in danger'.<sup>67</sup>

As far as Iranian opinion was concerned, the 'Persian Gulf air disaster' produced an hitherto unachieved level of national consensus in sharing Ayatollah Khomeini's description of the United States as the 'Great Satan'. All attempts to justify the US action failed to prevent the Iranian population from considering it a 'ferocious act of aggression' and to oppose retaliatory measures. The murder of 270 people on board Pan Am flight 103 which exploded over Lockerbie on 21 December 1988 some 5,000 kilometres away from the Persian Gulf was widely regarded as an act of retaliation for the 'Persian Gulf air disaster'. Iran, outraged by the 'Persian Gulf disaster', called the incident an 'act of state terrorism'<sup>68</sup> and the Soviet Union, formally condemned the act in much the same vein.<sup>69</sup> The Soviet media strongly endorsed the Iranian line and sought to use the incident to put pressure on the United States to pull its naval forces out of the Persian Gulf.

In attempting to seize the initiative, the Soviet response was politically opportune. With the war coming to an end, the Soviet leadership saw the possibility of realising its foreign policy objectives *vis-a-vis* Iran. Even at this stage many observers, the Iranian leadership included, found it difficult to believe that the war was coming to an end. Given this general opinion, the Soviet position was interpreted as being more 'realistic' than hypocritical or opportunistic. With hindsight it is possible to conclude that the Soviet Union had been ahead of the Iranian leadership in seeing the inevitability of the end to the war. However, a lack of understanding of Khomeini's political mind resulted in the Soviet Union being unable to take advantage of their position.

Using the intelligence it had been able to collect, the Soviet leadership decided to put its post-war plans into operation prior to the end of the war. The Soviet Union was thus the only non-Islamic nation to openly support the Iranian regime. This support came at a particularly crucial time for Iran and was destined to provide a dividend once the conflict ceased.<sup>70</sup> Iran, having begun to suffer military losses (the Fao peninsula was recovered by Iraq in April 1988 and then, the Iranian forces withdrew from the Majnoon Islands and the Hadj Omran Heights, therefore more areas captured by Iran came under Iraqi control), realised that the military will to continue the war was on the brink of total collapse. With the shooting down of the Iranian airliner by the US in July 1988, the Iranian leadership was compelled to make a U-turn on its policy of 'a continuation of the war at all costs' and eventually accepted an unconditional cease-fire in August 1988.

This was a significant achievement for the Soviet Union whose persistent opposition to the Gulf War from the very beginning had never changed as it became a cornerstone to its foreign policy in the region. Although the implementation of the cease-fire was considered the achievement of the United Nations, its accomplishment was as much attributable to the USSR. Yuli Vorontsov, who had been in charge of the diplomatic peace-making shuttle between Moscow, Teheran and Baghdad, was surprisingly present in the Iranian capital when the Iranian leadership accepted the cease-fire one year after it had been suggested in UN Security Council Resolution 598.

## Conclusion

By the end of 1987 Soviet 'new thinking' was openly and broadly manifested. On the basis of the new policy guideline the Soviet leadership seemed earnestly interested in making a collective effort to contain and control the regional conflicts. Thus, the Kremlin abandoned the policy of a zero-sum game with the United States and virtually ended the competition for influence in most of the Third World. Consequently, the Middle East,

and the Persian Gulf as an important part of it, became the main theatre for the examination of the new trends. However, the new vision and the departure from the old policy in the Third World had no direct pay-off as the Soviet dilemma in the Middle East continued to exist. The analysis of Soviet behaviour in the Middle East and towards Iran in 1987-1988 suggests an ingredient of conciliatory measures combined with the old approaches still practised by the Kremlin's foreign policymakers. A touch of moderation and go-between tactical moves in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy reflected the new orientations in the Kremlin and displayed the colour of Gorbachev's new political thinking.

In the case of Iran, the Soviet Union, despite the conciliatory policies adopted towards Teheran, received only a little appreciation from the Islamic Republic's leadership, because on the basis of a 'conspiracy theory' Teheran had believed that in connection with the Gulf War, Moscow was involved in a plot, sponsored by the United States, to put pressure on Iran and to force it to comply with the terms of the UN resolution for a peace settlement with Iraq.

During the Gulf War the Soviet Union, determined to avoid any confrontation with the United States, decided not to enlarge its forces beyond that of three warships in the Gulf, but instead, stepped up its diplomatic attempts at the highest possible level in the hope to stay at least in the heart of political developments in the region. However the Soviet Union's diplomatic attempts in the Gulf were rebuffed mainly because it had lacked sufficient supporting forces either politically or militarily as the Soviet Union itself was weakening. The shuttle diplomacy of the Kremlin launched by Yuli Vorontsov failed to bring the war to an end, mainly because the Soviet Union was not in a position either to force or to convince the two warring countries to take its mediation seriously.

Contrary to the Soviet failure, the UN role in solving the regional crises including the Gulf War and Afghan civil war gained ground and consequently earned the firm

support of the Soviet Union, because Moscow perceived that the UN role would be an alternative to the growing presence of the USA in the region. The pragmatist policy outline of supporting the United Nation - one of the landmarks of the 'new political thinking', to some extent - paid off as the Soviet Union at least managed to keep up its superpower standing on the world scene.



## NOTES

1. Since World War II, the West's so-called 'vital interests' in the Third World has been challenged by the rival Communist bloc. Before the West-East global competition came to an end in 1991, disagreement between the two blocs over Third World issues and differentiated approaches to the Third World questions had contributed to the creation and intensification of the regional crises. In fact the Third World crises mainly have been direct products of the role played by either blocks or the interplay between them. The growing trends for nationalism amongst the Asian-African nation states who challenged the so-called foreign interests, although giving a new dimension to the Third World claims but hardly changed the nature of the South-North conflict, since almost all of them received a backlash conducted by the greater powers and forced to pay a heavy price for their resistance. The regional crises occurred in the Persian Gulf, particularly from 1979 to 1990, which mainly have been conceived by initiation of the individual leaders and eventually involved their subjects, and inflicted hundreds of billions of dollar losses and hundreds of thousands of casualties on them, provides enough evidence for the argument that; the regional conflicts were created, manipulated and imposed on the Third World nations by the greater powers, either directly or indirectly. In this context the Gulf crises which contributed to the economic improvement of the western countries at the expense of the local nations, and despite all rhetoric made no positive changes of any sort, are quite illuminating. During the 1980s the nature of the East-West zero-sum-game approaches to the Third World began to change and consequently, although slowly, co-ordination and co-operation between the two blocks substituted the old competition and rivalry over the Third World interests. Third World nations did not like the new changes as they realised that they would have been more exposed to the world's hegemonial forces. For a Western view of the East-West competition in the Third World see K.M. Campbell and S. Neil MacFarlane, *Gorbachev's Third World Dilemma*. London: Routledge, 1989. Also, Donald Zagoria, 'Into the breach: New Soviet Alliances in the Third World', *Foreign Affairs Quarterly*, 58, Spring 1979.
2. During the second Gulf War and after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the Soviet Union despite the Treaty of Co-operation and Friendship with Iraq, actively sided with the allied forces, led by the United States and stood against Iraq. The Soviet support for the allied forces in the Gulf was extended beyond the boundaries of political support, while Moscow offered its military capacity to be used in the Gulf.
3. The Soviet Union's superpower status was widely accepted in the world. In fact, perception of the Soviet leadership in this regard was a common place recognition and far beyond a rigid political propaganda of the Soviet leaders for domestic consumption. The new status, since the 1960s, after the Soviet Union's triumphant attempt to possess the H-bomb, received worldwide acceptance. The Soviet achievement in space strengthened its new position. The Brezhnev era which was marked as the stagnation spell, illustrated a period of arms race between the USSR and the US which well established the Soviet Union as sole superpower. Of course, the superpower status of the former Soviet Union only accommodated its military strength.
4. G. Arbatov, 'Faltering Reagan Assails USSR', *Pravda*, 21 November 1986, p.5.
5. *Pravda*, 21 November 1986.

6. Iranian Ambassador received ... *Pravda*, 9 October 1986, p.4.
7. For the declaration of the Soviet government on the Iran-Iraq War, 8 January 1987, see *Za mir i bezopasnost' narodov. Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR, 1987*, two volumes, Vol.1, dok.12, pp.35-6. According to the statement, the Soviet government was 'ready to render any assistance whatsoever to any honest and constructive offers including those within the framework of the United Nations, to redirect the Iran-Iraq conflict towards a peaceful resolution'. See also Soviet government statement cited in *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, 9 January 1987, p.1.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Pravda*, 14 February 1987, p.2.
10. *Pravda*, 15 February 1987, p.4.
11. According to Robert O. Freedman, quoting an anonymous high ranking official in the Kuwaiti Embassy in Moscow, Kuwait had approached the Soviet Union in 1986 (*Moscow and the Middle East: Soviet Policy since the Invasions of Afghanistan*, Baltimore: Hebrew University; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.388). From March 1987 reports of Kuwaiti requests for superpower protection of its oil shipments began to appear, but the USSR response to the 'Kuwaiti request' to charter three Kuwaiti tankers came about on 14 April, when Moscow announced that it would escort Kuwaiti tankers with Soviet warships: Tass cited in *Pravda*, 14 April 1987, p.1. Based on an agreement signed by the USSR and Kuwait on 1 April 1987, the Soviet Union leased three vessels to Kuwait: *Marshal Chuikov* (which hit an Iranian mine on 17 May 1987 in the Persian Gulf), the *Marshal Maikov* and the *Marshal Bagramayan*. For more information see *New York Times*, 18 May 1987 and also R.K. Ramazani, 'The Iran Iraq War in the Persian Gulf Crisis', *Current History*, February 1988.
12. For Reagan's remark regarding Iraqi attack on USS *Stark* see *Washington Post*, 20 May 1987.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Nikki R. Keddie, *Neither East Nor West-Iran, The Soviet Union, and the United States*, Yale University Press, 1990, pp.51-7.
15. After the Soviet statement in regard to protecting the Kuwaiti tankers the United States in May announced reflagging the Kuwaiti's oil tankers. The United States started escorting the Kuwaiti oil tankers from 22 July 1987. For an analysis and explanation about Reagan's decision regarding reflagging the Kuwaiti tankers see *New York Times*, 30 May 1987. For an interesting essay on competition between the US and the USSR see International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey, 1987-1988*, London, 1988, pp.126-135. For reports on how the United States rushed for protection of Kuwaiti tankers and overplaying the Soviet initiative see *New York Times*, 26 May 1987.
16. The 3 July statement issued by the Soviet Union regarding the implementation of an imminent cease-fire in the Persian Gulf was the backbone of the American draft which became the UN Resolution 598 after the unanimous vote in the Security Council. Long before unmistakable unanimity between the US and the USSR being accrued towards the Gulf Crisis by the end of 1987, Iran had seen various overlapping tactical moves taken by the two superpowers in the Gulf and

particularly against Iran which convinced the Iranian leadership that there was a conspiracy between the two powers against them. Perhaps at the time they even did not know that just before the announcement of 3 July statement Vernon Walters (the US envoy) and Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Petrovsky were meeting in Moscow discussing the Iran-Iraq War (see Gary Lee, *Washington Post*, 3 July 1987). A month before this meeting Vladimir Petrovsky during a tour of Arab States visited Kuwait, Oman, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates. Indeed the harmony between the USSR and the US in the Gulf was just about ending the war though, when it came to the extent in which the United States insisted on imposing total sanctions against Iran Moscow did not join, but because the war with Iraq was the most important issue of Iran's foreign policy, the Iranian leadership could see nothing less than a comprehensive plot and a full scale conspiracy by the two superpowers against them. The full text of the statement was published in *Pravda* on 4 July 1987.

17. Rafsanjani speaking in Majles, *Kayhan*, Teheran, 12 April 1987, p.1. The Iranian protestation against the two superpowers, February 1987 became a daily business of the Iranian leadership. For more see Rafsanjani, *Ettelaat*, 6 May 1987, Ayatollah Mohammad Montazeri, IRNA, 22 April 1987. The same day Ali Akbar Velayati denounced the superpowers' intervention in the Gulf (Iran *ibid.*) and Ayatollah Khomeini's on 29 May in answering Reagan's offending characterisation of Iran on 26 May 1987 (*Kayhan*, Teheran, 26 May 1987). The Soviet Union media in responding to the Iranian propaganda against Moscow were more trying to accuse Iranian leadership and vindicating Soviet policy attitudes rather than attempting a solution to end the crisis. Perhaps by then the Soviet media through the States leadership were forced to put the maximum pressure on Iran to force them to comply. For the Soviets' view in this regard see statement by spokesman for the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Soviet Condemned Persian Gulf War' *Pravda*, 27 May 1987, p.5. V. Gan, *Pravda*, 2 June 1987, p.6, 'Cruisers, Tankers and the Road to Peace' by P. Demchenko, *Pravda*, 12 June 1987, p.4, and Gorbachev Talks with UN Secretary General in Moscow during which Gorbachev cited the conception of 'Universal Security' that was put forward by the 27th CPSU Congress, *Pravda*, 30 June 1987, p.1 and 5.
18. IRNA cited in *Kayhan*, Teheran, 22 April 1987.
19. Statement by spokesman for the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Pravda*, 27 May 1987, p.5.
20. Ayatollah Khomeini speaking in Jamaran Teheran, Iran Radio in Farsi, 29 May 1987.
21. Yuli Vorontsov's visit to Teheran, Tass cited in *Pravda*, 16 June 1987, p.5 .
22. From January to mid-1987, tactical manoeuvring and policy adoptions by the parties interested in the Persian Gulf were quite confusing. Perhaps either the high importance of the objectives or the sensitivity of the region or both were reasons for a further complexity of the politics in the region. Even to the local observers of Middle East politics, tactical moves by two superpowers were not in line with their strategic orientations. In regard to the Gulf War there would be no doubt that at least since the January offensive of the Iranian forces against Iraqi lines, which implied that the collapse of Basra ought to be considered as an imminent possibility, the two superpowers in line with the rest of the world, particularly the Arab community, were genuinely interested to see the war over. From the Iranian standpoint, those who would not support Iran's war efforts were indiscriminately considered enemies, thus, the USSR deserved to be criticised as much as the US

did. Looking at this from the American angle, the United States needed the Soviet support but not at the cost of Moscow's increased influence in the Persian Gulf. The Soviet Union who wanted the war to come to an end did not have as clear a position as the Soviets although virtually in alliance with the State however there was concern about the US's increasing presence and consequently its mounting influence in the Gulf. In the meantime both superpowers were interested to have some of the linking bridges saved in order to enable them to return to Iran after the war was ended. Iran wanted the Soviet Union to counter-weight the US presence but having no military presence in the region. The Arab States of the Persian Gulf wanted to enjoy the full support of the United States and to achieve this were prepared to play the Soviet card.

23. *New York Times*, 1 June 1987.
24. IRNA in Persian, 18 June 1987.
25. Teheran IRNA cited in *Kayhan*, Teheran, 14 June 1987.
26. Statement by the Soviet government, *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, 3 July 1987, p.1.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. Gorbachev interview with B.M. Diah, Editor of the Indonesian newspaper, *Merdeka* cited in *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, 23 July 1987, pp.1,2.
30. Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East*, p.227.
31. In 1987 as the Gulf War was approaching a critical point and Soviets' anxiety for its consequences was growing, the Kremlin's attention was merely focussed on the measures which could assist in terminating the war. Given the Gulf War's top priority in the Soviets' Middle Eastern foreign policy attitudes, rapprochement of Iran by the Kremlin during that particular period for the sake of marginal interests seems irrelevant. Against this, regarding the Soviets' utter dissatisfaction about Iran's adamant attitude towards the peace initiatives accepting an opposite account of Soviet behaviour would be logical. Moreover there is no solid evidence to prove Freedman's view in this regard.
32. *Pravda*, 18 July 1987, p.4
33. UPI from New York, 20 July 1987.
34. Contrary to the belief of some observers, the UN Resolution 598 was the first Resolution passed unanimously in the UN Security Council. Of course following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, on 2 August 1990, unanimity in the Security Council was recorded again. Up to these two occasions, the main obstacle to the unanimity of the permanent members of the UN Security Council was the Soviet negative attitude. Consistency of the Soviets in rejecting the Security Council's resolutions, earned its long serving foreign minister - from 1957 to 1986 - Andrei Gromyko a nickname 'Mr NYET'. During UN debates on the Gulf crisis, the Soviet Union itself on the course of political changes, joined the mainstream of world politics and acknowledged the leading role of the United States. Indeed significant alteration in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy was the consequent result of the 'New thinking'.

35. 4 July 1987 statement. For the text, see *Za mir i bezopasnost' narodov: Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR, 1987 god*, 2 vols., Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1990, Vol.1, No.190.
36. G. Gerasimov, Director of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in responding to a question addressed during a press conference held on 8 August 1987, in Moscow said that: 'the Soviet Union and the US could act together in the Security Council to defuse the conflict in the Gulf. For a full text of the press conference, see *Izvestia*, 9 August 1987, p.4.
37. *Pravda*, 28 July 1987, p.4.
38. *Kayhan*, Teheran, 2 August 1987.
39. *Pravda*, 10 August 1987, p.4.
40. UPI cited in *Herald Tribune* on 1 September 1987.
41. *Herald Tribune*, 3 September 1987. Alexander Bovin, Soviet Middle Eastern expert viewed the American policies in the Gulf as 'anti-Soviet'. He in referring to the resumption of the tanker war in the Gulf pointed out that 'the USSR is not against oil access for the West but must protect its own interests', *Izvestia*, 31 July 1987, p.5. For a description of the Soviet policy towards the tanker war see, Retired Rear Admiral, Timur Gaidar, 'The Tanker War', *New Times*, No.13, 1988. For the Soviet view on the US manipulation of the tanker war see Geivadov, *Izvestia*, 8 August 1987 and Yuri Zhukov, *Pravda*, 6 September 1987, p.4. For an independent account of Soviet interests on the Persian Gulf oil see Dennis Chaplin, 'Soviet Oil and the security of the Gulf', *RUSI Journal*, Vol.123, No.4, December 1978, pp.50-4.
42. Shevardnadze in the UN, *Pravda*, 25 September 1987, p.4.
43. *Ibid.*
44. See M. Kozhevnikov, 'Situation heated to the limit', *Pravda*, 10 October 1987. The incident was the second direct armed confrontation between the US and Iran and the Soviet Union was concerned about the escalation of the war by the United States.
45. On 15 October 1987, flight SU-515, an Aeroflot TU-154 aircraft took off from Sheremetyevo-2 Airport for Iran. This was the first regularly scheduled flight to Iran by a Soviet airliner, after a three-year hiatus. The Moscow-Teheran air route was closed in 1985 during a period of exacerbation of the Gulf War and Soviet-Iranian cold relations. The resumption of the aeroflot flights had more political implication than commercial effect as it was interpreted a breakthrough in the course of relations between the two countries.
46. Vladimir Peresada in reflecting the Soviets' view on the incident suggested that restoration of stability needed political rather than military measures ('Counting on Force', *Pravda*, 20 October 1987, p.5). He warned of a threat of open armed confrontation between the US and Iran but failed to support Iranian stands. Instead in line with the Soviet foreign policy suggested to 'step up collective political efforts (with the US) on the basis of full and immediate implementation of the UN Resolution 598.

47. For an interesting account of Soviet-Chinese competition in the Persian Gulf see Roy Allison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-alignment in the Third World*. Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp.126, 148-180. Also Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East*, pp.27-31.
48. *Pravda*, 28 December 1988, p.5.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. The Soviet Union called the attack 'a criminal act' and on 27 October 1987 the acting Chargé d'affaires of the Islamic Republic was called to the USSR foreign office and given a strong protest. Moscow did not go any further to avoid further exacerbation of the relations with Teheran. For a detailed account of the incident see *Pravda*, 28 December 1987, p.5.
52. IRNA, Teheran, 26 December 1987.
53. See statement on Afghanistan by M.S. Gorbachev, *Pravda*, 9 February 1988, p.1. According to the statement 15 May 1988 was set as a specific date for beginning of the withdrawal of the Soviet forces due to be completed over a period of ten months. For an informative view on Soviet policy towards the issue see Robert S. Litwak, 'Soviet Policy in Afghanistan' in Campbell and McFarlane, (eds.), *Gorbachev's Third World Dilemma*, also a comprehensive review by Theodore L. Eliot, Jr, *Gorbachev's Afghan Gambit*. Cambridge: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis: National Security Paper No.9, 1988.
54. IRNA cited in *Kayhan*, Teheran, 14 February 1988.
55. During the Moscow talks between Gorbachev and Shultz on the Question of the Iran-Iraq War, the Soviet leader apparently under pressure from the Americans reflected on a new inclination towards the US policies regarding the Gulf War which clearly was anti-Iranian as he promised Shultz that 'he would examine the new ideas put forward by the Secretary of the State'. The press conference of the Soviet Foreign Minister on the same day after the Gorbachev-Shultz talks revealed that the 'new idea' was about the American asking Moscow to join the sanctions against Iran (despite the speculations, Moscow never joined the sanction). *Pravda*, 23 February 1988, pp.1-2, *Izvestia*, 24 February 1988, p.1.
56. Shevardnadze press conference, *Pravda*, 24 February 1988, p.4.
57. *Pravda* noted on 7 March 1988 that 'following inflammatory speeches of the Iranian mass media in an attempt to blame the Soviet Union for the current bombardment of Teheran and the other Iranian cities the USSR embassy in Teheran was attacked by mobs who tried to break into it and showered the Embassy's ground with rockets. Following the incident Iran's temporary chargé d'affaires in the USSR, Ghahramani, was called by the foreign office and received a formal protestation.
58. *Jomhuri e Islami*, Teheran, 8 March 1988.
59. Pavel Demchenko, 'Shelling Iranian Platform', *Pravda*, 19 April 1988, p.5
60. 'Disregard for International Law', *Pravda*, 18 April 1988.

61. Rafsanjani speaking in Majlis cited in *Ettelaat*, Teheran, 22 April 1988.
62. Radio Peace and Progress in Farsi, 15 June 1988.
63. For an Iranian view on the incident see M.R. Taghizadeh, 'The US plot over the Gulf', *Kayhan*, London, 28 July 1988, p.7.
64. *Pravda*, 5 July 1988, p.5.
65. For the Soviet view on the incident see Tomas Kolesnichenko, *Pravda*, 6 July 1988, p.5.
66. Reagan cited in the *New York Times* on 12 July 1988.
67. *Ibid.* This incident and the attitudes surrounding it can be compared with the shooting down of a Korean Boeing 747 by the Soviet air force over Sakhalin in 1983 when President Reagan used the term 'Evil Empire' to describe the Soviet Union. There are indeed major differences between the two incidents. Whereas the shooting down of the Iranian airbus took place over the Strait of Hormuz, more than ten thousand kilometres away from the United States, while on a regular flight within the boundaries of an international air corridor intended for civilian flights, the South Korean Boeing 747 had been in Soviet air space and had flown over strategic sites having deviated from the official flight path. Whilst the Western powers had found justification for the Persian Gulf incident, the Soviet version was treated with strong condemnation.
68. IRNA Statement by Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4 July 1988.
69. For Soviet reaction to the incident see Vsevolod Ovchinnikov, *Pravda*, 18 July 1988.
70. From 20 July to 22 July, Yu. M. Vorontsov visited Teheran apparently in continuation of the peace efforts by Moscow, however he offered Iranian leadership firm support by the Kremlin. In this regard see also A. Shalnev, *Izvestia*, 21 August 1988, p.4.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE POST-WAR PERIOD 1988-89

#### CHANGES IN THE BALANCE OF POWER IN SOUTH WEST ASIA

#### AND THE PERSIAN GULF

By the end of 1988 the economic crisis in the Soviet Union was becoming increasingly evident to the outside world. With the Soviet Union entering what turned out to be the final phase of the transformation period, the economic deterioration was acquiring further momentum and its detrimental effects on the course of foreign policy implementation more conspicuous. In addition to domestic disarray and economic crisis, the question of reform in Eastern Europe was beginning to take up more time and effort on the Soviet foreign policy agenda. By comparison, these two elements had considerably reduced the ability of the Soviet leadership in competing with the US over its 'influence in the Middle East without resorting to the use of military capacity'. The weakening Soviet Union could do little more than peddle its rhetoric of providing a constructive and peaceful way forward in Soviet-Third World relations.

The policy of arms transfer which had successfully been promoted during the Brezhnev era and earned considerable influence for the Soviet Union was becoming more and more expensive, thus, under the circumstances, resorting to the military capacity of the Soviet Union was not an easy option any more.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime the Soviet arch-rival, the United States was well placed in a commanding position and was enjoying the political and economic benefits of its 'military presence' in the region. Indeed the diminishing capability of the Soviet Union in general which curtailed its trend for further influence in the Third World began to emerge about the time that the old opposition of



the local nations to the expansion of the Kremlin's influence in the region was lessening. Moreover, the growing tendencies amongst the Middle Eastern regimes for having Moscow back in the centre stage of Middle East politics was somewhat noticeable.<sup>2</sup> However, if the Kremlin leaders were intended to respond to these trends, because of a variety of domestic impediments they could not do so. The Kremlin's dilemma in the Third World was particularly evident in the Middle East, which was one of the most difficult foreign policy challenges of its kind that the former Soviet Union had ever experienced.

Iran, on the basis of its strategic location and significant resources, clearly was regarded in the Kremlin's strategic thinking as a prime target. But despite Soviets' interests and the new trends in Teheran for having a better relationship with Moscow, the situation in the region from both the Iranian and Soviet angles was not quite satisfactory. The US position in the Gulf, fortified by a massive military presence, which had made it unattainable, was the main factor in denying the USSR a more influential role to play in the Gulf region. From the US point of view, improving relations between Teheran and Moscow could have undermined its position in the region. The US determination to hold on to its position and fully exert its potential in the region was clearly reflected in US open sources and official statements. A State Department spokesman, P. Oakly, outlined US intentions in a press statement in which he revealed that 'we [the USA] certainly intend to remain a strong player in the Gulf. Our policy has not changed'.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Secretary of State George Shultz announced that the US had no immediate plans to reduce the number of warships in the Persian Gulf or in the approaches to it.<sup>4</sup> It was in this complex context that Soviet policy towards the region developed in the late 1980s.

## The Afghan Crisis and Gulf War

The Afghan crisis, despite the Geneva Accord and the Soviet pledge on withdrawal of its forces, remained unsettled in the late 1980s, and the Iran-Iraq conflict despite the cease-fire remained problematic. These two syndromes were more complicated than it seemed to Moscow even at that stage.

What Moscow needed was a pragmatic vision for the evaluation of the cause and effect of modern conflicts in the rapidly changing Third World. Many of the conflicts in the Third World were rooted deeply in the history of the region and required a comprehensive solution but Moscow seemed still entangled in old ideas. Of course, the roots and nature of the conflicts were quite different from the classic categories stated either by Lenin as 'two stages of revolution'<sup>5</sup> or Stalin's classification of conflicts: (1) in defence of the socialist homeland; (2) civil wars between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; (3) national liberation conflicts; (4) to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. These conflicts at the regional and inter-state level were about challenging hegemonial forces, fighting for justice in the world, waging war to regain national sovereignty, struggling to establish national identity, pressing for the redistribution of Third World wealth, and demanding national parity. Neither Lenin nor Stalin ever realised or believed that nations might undertake a Jihad to defend their religious beliefs so they tried, on the whole, either to denounce it or ignore it. At the national level, Third World conflicts in this period were about democracy, freedom of expression, civil rights, and challenging dictatorial forces. It seems that the Soviet Union in 1988 still was not only - in Raymond Garthoff's words - 'extremely reticent'<sup>6</sup> about the nature of the Third World conflicts, but to some extent in line with the Western powers and to some extent even deeply involved in them. However regardless of the nature of the conflicts and the position of the two big powers, at this stage both the US and the USSR had understood that there was a lot to do before the regional crises terminated.

On 22 August 1988, two days after the implementation of the cease-fire between Iran and Iraq, the Soviet Union released a manifesto outlining its policies in the Middle East. In an official statement the United Nation's effectiveness and its peace making capability were praised and Resolution 598 was described as 'a just and balanced basis for resolving the [Gulf] conflict'.<sup>7</sup> The Soviet statement contained three major points:

1. A reduction of the American naval presence in the Gulf as a means of political influence over the local states and a potential threat against the Soviet Union.
2. Support for the UN position as a mediatory force with the proposal that it replace American forces in the region.
3. A strengthening of the Soviet position in the area and an improvement of bilateral relations with the local regimes regardless of their ideological trends and political positions.

The statement suggested that the achievement of a just and durable peace between Iran and Iraq was an integral part of efforts to create a comprehensive system of international peace and security. In the Soviet view, according to the statement, 'an eventual agreement to reduce the density of weapons in the region could be a significant step in this direction'. The statement went further to affirm, 'it would later be possible to study the feasibility of taking more far-reaching steps, in particular, steps to prevent the proliferation of nuclear arms there, to eliminate weapons of mass destruction and to build mutual confidence'.<sup>8</sup> In this statement, the Soviet leadership not only tried to defend itself against charges that it had assisted some of the local states in obtaining ballistic armaments, chemical weapons and even a nuclear capacity, but also expressed its support for measures designed to prevent a military build-up in the region .

The statement finished with the argument that 'In the Soviet view, an appropriate international agreement could provide for a system of guarantees on the part of the permanent members of the UN Security Council or some similar mechanism. The Soviet

Union will carefully take into account the consideration of the Persian Gulf States which needs to have as its principal and greatest objective that of turning the Persian Gulf into a zone of security, good-neighbourliness and co-operation'.<sup>9</sup>

The termination of the war had initially seemed to promise an expansion of Soviet diplomatic ties in South West Asia and the Persian Gulf. Iran, it can be taken for granted, was desperate to eliminate the consequences of a humiliating domestic backlash after the cease-fire. Although it had been difficult to maintain military and civilian morale during the final five months leading up to the cease-fire, the humiliating defeat and the realisation that the conflict, despite all rhetoric, had failed to yield any tangible gains, would have had a much more detrimental effect. However, the Iranian leadership had to find a means of camouflaging the reality of defeat.<sup>10</sup>

The unexpected incursion of the Mujahedin Khalgh (National Salvation Army), a group of pro-Soviet Iranian insurgents based in Iraq, into Iranian territory added to their anxiety but they were able to mobilise sufficient forces to repel the attack.<sup>11</sup> The Soviet leadership was aware of the situation confronting Iran's leaders and of the likely consequences should the regime fall from power and saw its own interests as being best served through a maintenance of the status quo. The Soviet Union neither desired or was equipped for 'adventures in its own back yard'.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst it would conceivably have been possible for the Soviet Union to manipulate the internal situation in Iran and to engineer the removal of the regime, instead a 'breathing space' to consider its next move was thought more appropriate.<sup>13</sup> There had also been a rapid acceleration in the Soviet Union's own domestic problems. In addition to its deepening economic crisis and external commitments, ranging from arms negotiations with the United States to its dealings with Eastern Europe (still its most central foreign policy priority), there had been an explosion in ethnic conflicts in the

southern republics. This left the Soviet leadership little time to concentrate on policy concerning South West Asia and the Persian Gulf.

Soviet foreign policy in South West Asia since the end of World War II had been largely defensive in character,<sup>14</sup> and five central objectives were followed after the cessation of hostilities in the Iran-Iraq War:

1. A reduction of the prominent influence of the US in the Gulf region (the consequence of its military presence in the area).<sup>15</sup>
2. A settlement of the Afghan crisis through a conciliatory solution not only *vis-à-vis* the United States and based on the Geneva Accord but also in relation to Iran and Pakistan.<sup>16</sup>
3. A strengthening of the Soviet Union's political and economic ties with the states in the region, regardless of their ideological trends, and the securing of a suitable portion of the stake in the Gulf through negotiation and co-operation with all interested parties.<sup>17</sup>
4. Participation in the region's political developments, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>18</sup>
5. The promotion of a UN presence in the region as a counterweight to the US presence.

The Soviet Union was always sensitive to events on its peripheral zones.<sup>19</sup> However, the interplay of two major regional factors, the future of the Islamic regime in Iran and the future of Afghanistan, both having the potential to play a highly important role either to facilitate or frustrate an American initiated and sponsored policy of 'containment' along the Soviet Union's southern borders, were bound to be considered in Moscow with special attention given the transformation in the Soviet domestic political situation.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time the Middle Eastern regimes were attempting to understand the Soviet assumption of the US position in the region in order to shape their own relations with the superpowers. These states had a legacy of playing one superpower off against the other as a means of securing both a local balance of power and their own national security. The alteration in Soviet policy toward the region had therefore necessitated such a revision.<sup>21</sup>

In viewing Iran from this perspective, its behaviour toward the Soviet Union can be more clearly understood. A strong, non-aligned and neutral Iran acting as a defensive buffer on the Soviet southern flank and with the industrial facilities situated there would have been more desirable to the Soviet leadership than a militarily weak and insignificant Iran. This would save the Soviet Union from having to divert military resources from Europe, or in the aftermath of the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, from the Far East to its southern flank. Iran therefore understood the Soviet need for a stabilisation of the political situation in the Gulf region as well as its position from the Soviet's point of view.<sup>22</sup> In return for this, what the Islamic regime expected of the Soviet Union was non-intervention in its domestic affairs. The Soviet stance towards Iran was like a double edged sword capable of harming as well as defending the Islamic regime. However, despite the Islamic regime's deep suspicion, the Soviet leadership rather than playing a wild card, decided to support them, even without managing to convince Teheran to compromise over the controversial issues.

### **Khomeini and the Islamic movement in the Soviet Union**

On 17 November 1988 there was a new development which had a considerable effect on Soviet-Iranian relations. In Baku, the capital of the predominantly Muslim Soviet republic of Azerbaijan, a demonstration began in front of the House of Government in Lenin Square which was to last for three weeks until the night of 4 December 1988. The

gathering had as its objective the settlement of the highly explosive issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, a predominantly Armenian enclave which had been treated inside Azerbaijan since 1923. Following allegations of Armenian mistreatment of the Muslim minority in the enclave, the demonstrators were demanding that it be placed under Azerbaijani supervision. In addition to this, they were also demanding that Kirovabad, a large Armenian city, be allowed to revert to its original name of Gyandzha as it had been called when the area was part of the Persian Empire (1804-1917 Russian Empire) and under Soviet rule until 1935. The city was so called in honour of the 12th century Persian poet, Nizami Gyandzhevi (Gandjavi).<sup>23</sup>

Looking out over the square was a large portrait of Ahmed Akhmedov, a nationalist leader executed by the Bolsheviks. But what was more significant for the Iranian leadership were the number of demonstrators displaying green flags, representative of Islamic sentiments, and pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini. With the Soviet Union sinking further into domestic turmoil, this development played into the hands of the Iranian leadership. Khomeini, who appeared to be losing power in Iran, was able to use the demonstration in Baku to reassert the Islamic revolution and his personal position.<sup>24</sup>

The course of Soviet-Iranian relations following the cease-fire in the Gulf War and up to the end of 1988, despite the socio-economic transformation in the Soviet Union and the general uncertainty in Iran, remained largely amicable. Although concrete advancement in economic and political co-operation was slow, the exchange of missions and diplomatic communiqués indicated a tangible improvement in relations.

Given a variety of friendly gestures and tactical political moves conducted by the Soviet Union to please Iran, the Kremlin's leaders expected to enjoy a position of strength in Iran during the post-war period. By insisting on the point that the Soviet Union did not pursue objectives reciprocal to those of the US in the Persian Gulf, and the

'fact' that the US policy in the region was directed against both Iran and the USSR, and the Soviet Union was against foreign military forces in the Persian Gulf - a view that Iran had insisted upon for a long time - Moscow demonstrated, first, its desire to maintain the competition with the US in the Gulf and second, to assure Teheran that they were taking the Iranian side. Indeed Moscow had enough reasons to back up its claim as the Kremlin leaders during two US-Iranian military confrontations had stood by Iran, and on the occasion of the US attack on the Iranian oil platform had condemned the attack as 'a violation of the UN charter', and during the Persian Gulf disaster had firmly supported Iran and offered them deep sympathy. Even during the Mecca riot, Moscow had tried to keep an impartial position perhaps to avoid being an embarrassment to the Iranians.

Moscow had also turned down the US request to join the trade embargo against Iran, and while the United States continued to ban virtually all imports from Iran, agreed to the processing of Iranian oil at Soviet refineries - mainly in the republic of Azerbaijan, which has had a significance during a period in which energy shortages had been one of the major embarrassments to the Iranian leadership and a source of unrest for the angry masses. Although less visible to the outside world, the Soviet attempts to draw a more moderate picture of the Iranian regime (when they accepted Iran's UN ambassador's version of the case relating to the mine planting in the Persian Gulf which led to one of the US-Iranian military confrontations in October 1987) came at the right time and pleased the Iranian leadership during a crucial period in which they desperately needed to have international support to justify their position both domestically and more widely.

Pulling the Red Army out of Afghanistan was yet another positive development which Moscow thought of as an advantage in the attempts to shore up its relations with Teheran. However, although Moscow had made plenty of friendly gestures towards Iran and Iran understandably was willing to improve its relations with Moscow, there was no decisive improvement in bilateral relations. This state of affairs was not so surprising



given the need for both regimes to concentrate on more pressing issues. Indeed both countries were quietly entering a period of transformation.

Almost six months after the implementation of the cease-fire, Ayatollah Khomeini, still suffering from the backlash to the war at home and perhaps encouraged by the events in the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union, decided to bank on his pan-Islamic aspirations and call for changes in the USSR. On 4 January 1989 Khomeini despatched a representative to Moscow with a personal message for Mikhail Gorbachev, his first such message to the head of another state, inviting him to convert to Islam and suggesting that the Soviet leadership send their experts to the holy city of Gom to study the principles of an Islamic economy in order to find an 'Islamic' solution to the Soviet Union's socio-ideological and economic problems.<sup>25</sup>

The message not only had a sharp edge against Communism and former Communist leaders, but also blamed Gorbachev: 'It is possible that improper policies and practices of the former Communist leaders concerning the Soviet economy have helped the Western world seem more appealing, however, the truth lies somewhere else. If you wish to put an end to the economic woes of Socialism and Communism by simply resorting to Western capitalism you will not only ease the pains prevalent in the Soviet society, but will also call on others to offset the mistakes you made, because if Marxism has met with stalemate in its economic embroilment in the same problems, but only of different description, as well as other problems ....' The long message continued to claim: 'It is crystal clear to all and sundry that from now on one should look for communism in the museums of world political history, since Marxism cannot meet any of the real needs of human beings'. Khomeini then went out of his way to blame Gorbachev when he noted 'It is likely that on some aspects you have not convincingly turned your back on Marxism and in the future, you may voice your heartfelt belief in Marxism in public interviews; however you yourself may well be aware that in reality things are different'.<sup>26</sup>

Although Gorbachev received the mission with dignity and respect he was careful not to provide the Soviet Central Asian Muslim republics with a lever with which they could promote their national and ethnic demands. Gorbachev, in meeting with the mission, noted that geography and history had determined that the USSR and Iran were 'fated' to live peacefully as good neighbours and to co-operate with one another, but also stressed that 'our fundamental creed is the right of every people to be in command of its own destiny'.<sup>27</sup> He left the delegation in no doubt that there was no room for compromise over the issue of Islam. He insisted on the fact that 'we are different and adhere to different political principles, world views and traditions'. Although the Soviet leadership did not take the religious content of the message seriously, it was considered a goodwill gesture and a new base upon which to improve their relations with Iran.<sup>28</sup> Islamic issues were emerging as a source of unrest in the Soviet Union at this time, not only in the republic of Azerbaijan but all over the predominantly Muslim Central Asian republics; Gorbachev needed to take this into account should he want to avoid more difficulties arising from the same hotbed of Islamic thought.

If foreign policy attitudes are motivated by and also reflect the internal development of a state, then it is essential to appreciate that the domestic situation may be encouraged or discouraged by the correlated performance in the state's external arenas. Khomeini, still far from having a firm hold on power in Iran, utilised the exaggerated political propaganda put out by the state controlled media about his message to Gorbachev in attempting to maintain control over the country where signs of disagreement between different factions within the leadership were emerging and a clerical power struggle for the prospective succession was on. In fact the post-Khomeini period had already begun. Although he was still physically alive, politically he was close to death.

The 'Revolutionary Guard', the power house of the Islamic regime, was disintegrating and the articulation of social problems was becoming more vocal. Faced

with this potential crisis, Ayatollah Housein Ali Montazeri, Khomeini's designated successor, began to criticise the work of the Revolutionary Council and campaign publicly for a revision of official policy. Whereas his original criticism was politically pragmatic in nature, it evolved into genuine disagreement with the leadership and the political line it was following. Many observers of Iranian affairs recognised that the countdown had started for Khomeini's political succession and that even the termination of the Islamic revolution was in sight.

In February 1989, however, an unexpected factor emerged to play a crucial role in the revitalisation of Islamic fundamentalism. The publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* in Great Britain evoked fierce condemnation throughout the Islamic world and was capped by Khomeini issuing a death sentence on the author. Khomeini had capitalised on the incident as an instrument facilitating his political comeback as the spiritual leader of the Islamic world. He cleverly orchestrated an external political move to divert attention away from Iran's internal problems.

It can be conjectured that the Western powers saw the use to which the scandal could be put. Instead of solving the problem, by exacerbating it the West would be able to justify their continued involvement in the Middle East and would act as a 'surrogate' for the Soviet Union once the 'communist threat' had diminished. The international row this incident provoked acted to speed up the progress of Soviet-Iranian relations. The Soviet leadership was unable to remain impassive to the issue and took on the role of mediator between Iran and the Western world.

Igor Belyaev, in an article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* published on 8 March 1989, expressed deep suspicion of the main objectives of the row: 'I am convinced, however, that politics is behind the whole furore over this ill-fated novel. Yes, big politics that have to do with the fate of the Islamic revolution'.<sup>29</sup> Belyaev, in expressing the Soviet standpoint, also viewed the case from a different angle, the opportunity seized by

Khomeini to outflank the growing power of the so-called 'moderates' and 'pragmatists'.<sup>30</sup> A few days prior to the publication of the article, Gerasimov, the USSR Foreign Ministry spokesman, responding to a question from a BBC correspondent, noted that while visiting Teheran Shevardnadze had raised this issue with the Iranian leadership. This was a positive development for Soviet diplomacy and an opportunity for exercising their influence over Teheran at the request of the Western powers who had lost their connections with Teheran.<sup>31</sup>

On 23 March the Soviet Union in a statement praised the new tendency amongst the European Community to return their ambassadors to Teheran. (During a collective act and as protest against the Khomeini's Fatwa the EC members had recalled their ambassadors from Teheran; Iranian ambassadors were recalled from West European capitals at about the same time.) The statement noted, 'There are reports that several EC members have already stated their intention to return their ambassadors to Teheran. We [the statement went on] view this step as a positive one and one that promotes a resolution of the situation that has come about'.<sup>32</sup> In the statement there was a point which had implications for the Soviet Union's diplomatic effort during and after Shevardnadze's tour of the Middle East shortly afterwards. The statement noted, 'The return to Teheran of some EC ambassadors is in keeping with the spirit of the Soviet approach and with efforts made by the Soviet side - including efforts made during the USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs' talks in Teheran and Vienna - to ease the tensions between the EC countries and Iran'.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed the Soviet Union in its new role had not only joined the world community but also placed itself in the mainstream of world politics and assumed a positive role. Interestingly, Soviet mediation over the Rushdie issue took place during a period in which Iran was totally isolated and there was not a reliable link between Teheran and the outside world; thus the Soviet mediatory act, although demanded by the West, was welcome in Iran too. Khomeini, flying on the wings of international media acclaim, once

again enjoyed the implications of his position as the indisputable religious leader of the Islamic world, which could be translated for domestic consumption. Khomeini had always been an extremist since he made his reputation as a religious leader and had never liked to play conventional games.<sup>34</sup>

It was no surprise that Ayatollah Khomeini's successful fightback corresponded with the re-emergence of Islamic fundamentalism, which he naturally championed and which without any doubt contained a strong anti-western element. Soviet observation of the incident was conditioned by the West's naivety in reacting to Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie<sup>35</sup> and which fuelled speculation that the West was using the conflict to support its own political objectives.<sup>36</sup>

However, the Soviet Union, which had been approached by the West to mediate between Iran and the European Community, adopted an 'evenhanded' approach which was largely reflected in its domestic media. Only two Soviet writers, Anatoly Rybakov and Tatyana Tolstaya, who had signed a declaration in defence of Rushdie together with hundreds of prominent writers throughout the world, chose openly to oppose the official Soviet line. Indicative of the Soviet position, the USSR Writers' Union had prepared and signed a separate declaration which condemned both Iran and Rushdie.<sup>37</sup> The Soviet attitude pleased the Iranian leadership and convinced Western observers that Soviet diplomatic influence could be used in the Rushdie affair.

### **The Soviets' new diplomatic initiative in the Middle East**

On 17 February 1989 the USSR Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, started his tour of six Middle Eastern countries with a visit to Syria and Iran. It was the final stage of a diplomatic tour which had included Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. The Soviet foreign minister had objectives to pursue in the Arabian part of his visit which were different to

those he intended following in Teheran. Shevardnadze was able to gain a first-hand account of current Middle Eastern politics and was able to elaborate on Soviet foreign policy based on the 'New Thinking'. The Soviet Union expected the new diplomatic offensive to play an important role in strengthening its position in the area by getting the Arab nations closer together and preparing the ground for an international conference under the sponsorship of the UN to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict and through mediatory measures, terminate the Lebanese crisis as well.

The final leg of the tour in Iran could be considered the most important, as one in which discussions on the Soviet strategy for an 'Asian security order' based on the latest developments in the region were renewed, but this was only one of the objectives to be pursued in Teheran.<sup>38</sup> The Soviet leadership was also determined to deny the United States a chance for opening a new foothold in Iran via so-called 'pragmatist' elements<sup>39</sup> and under the pretext of the necessity of obtaining material aid from the West for post-war reconstruction and to prepare the ground for an improvement in bilateral relations between Teheran and Moscow.

As had been expected, the Salman Rushdie affair was also subjected to close scrutiny by Shevardnadze and his Iranian counterparts. In summing up Shevardnadze's Middle Eastern mission, it can be concluded that he did not achieve everything he had wanted to. However, without a doubt it was a crucial learning experience for Shevardnadze in getting to know and understand the political situation in the Middle East and was instrumental in improving Soviet-Iranian relations.

During his discussions with King Hussein in Amman, Shevardnadze met with the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Moshe Arens, and also talked to the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, in Cairo and was able to examine the Arab-Israeli conflict from a number of different angles. In an attempt to please the Palestinians, although at the price of upsetting the Israelis, Shevardnadze noted that 'the heroic uprising in the occupied

territories reflects the national aspirations of the Palestinian people and that no one can fail to take this into account'.<sup>40</sup> The Soviet Foreign Minister during his meetings in Damascus, Amman and Cairo suggested compromise approaches to the Middle Eastern issues particularly in regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Attempting to arrange a full-scale dialogue on a Middle East settlement in the context of an international conference in which the Soviet Union could participate was one of the basic objectives that Shevardnadze failed to achieve in the same way as he, despite his vigorous insistence on the necessity of the Arab unity, ceased to close Arab ranks. No wonder, as the Soviet Foreign Minister was not talking from a position of strength; he was representative of a crumbling Empire that had really nothing important to offer any more.

In Baghdad Shevardnadze had an even more difficult task; the talks were described as 'frank' and 'businesslike', over 'a broad range of bilateral, regional and global problems'. Iraq, based on close ties and growing relations with the West, was distancing itself from Moscow. Indeed the Soviet Union, itself under pressure from multiple deficiencies at home and growing ineffectiveness on the world stage, was losing ground in Baghdad to the West and there was not a promising prospect for a 'further improvements in mutually advantageous bilateral ties'. On the other hand, Baghdad, having had the upper hand in the war with Iran, was trying to convince Moscow to let Iran down and accept a new balance of power in the region with a predominant role for Baghdad.<sup>41</sup>

Shevardnadze had a series of multi-purpose talks in Teheran with a broad range of the Islamic leadership including direct talks with Ayatollah Khomeini, which the Iranian Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, described as being an extraordinary event in the history of Iranian diplomacy.<sup>42</sup> Shevardnadze was given deferential treatment in Teheran and to some extent his gains in Teheran were far more visible there than those he

had achieved in the other Middle Eastern states. This mission could be considered as the best opportunity for both parties to improve their relations and obtain a realistic understanding of each other's expectations.

The mission in Teheran removed almost all the major obstacles to an improvement in Soviet-Iranian relations that had existed and prepared the ground for a fresh start. No wonder that Shevardnadze, in his visit, had offered Iran a Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation with the USSR. The Iranian leadership, although believing that the remaining minor differences in the political perceptions of the two states would not endanger the future course of their relations, declined to compromise their highly publicised independent foreign policy for the sake of pleasing Moscow. From the Iranian standpoint signing such an agreement would have meant going over to the Soviet camp.

Shevardnadze, in order to placate the West European states and to exploit the Soviet Union's newly improved position in Teheran, raised the Salman Rushdie question with the Iranian leadership<sup>43</sup> but despite more than two hours talks with Iran's foreign minister on the issue could not obtain any movement in the Iranian position. The case remained clearly out of the reach of any one within the Iranian ruling circle apart from Khomeini himself. It is to be assumed that, despite all attempts to find a solution to the problem, all interested parties were agreed that disagreements over the issue would in some way serve their interests.

In removing ideological dogma from Soviet foreign policy by way of the 'New Thinking', the Soviet leadership was in a position to develop bilateral relations with other states based on the spirit of mutual co-operation and interests. This new characteristic of Soviet foreign policy was reflected in the course of Soviet-Iranian relations. The talks between Shevardnadze and Ali Khamnei left the latter in no doubt that systematic support for left-wing, pro-Soviet groups such as the Tudeh Party, Mujahedin Khalgh and Fedaeen Khalgh in Iran was no longer a matter of major interest for the Soviet leadership.



Iran's revolutionary leaders ultimately became convinced that the threat of a subversive attempt to overthrow the Islamic regime in Iran using the political and even logistic support of the Soviet Union no longer existed. This made the potential for further improvement in the course of the bilateral relationship between Teheran and Moscow almost unlimited. The Soviet Union, never a supporter of Islamic fundamentalism, was keen to ensure that the Islamic regime would relax its backing of the Afghan Mujahedin. However, Shevardnadze's talks in Teheran coincided with a growing resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran. There was very limited scope for Iran to make concessions on the Afghan question as it was one of the means of maintaining Islamic spirit high in the region. Despite this, there was some speculation about the extent to which Iran might co-operate with the Soviet Union in the future in order to find a common stand in breaking the stalemate in Afghanistan.<sup>44</sup>

The Soviet Union's strategy in the Middle East could be described both as offensive and defensive, since Moscow had always been committed to do her best to: firstly, prevent the Middle East being used for projecting a threat or launching a military assault against the Soviet Union, secondly, exploit the potential to play an offensive role which could be justified on the basis of a pre-emptive legitimate defence. In order to play both roles, the Soviet Union used to employ various tactical elements, first and foremost, the supply of arms, as a crucial instrument for increasing its influence in the Middle East.<sup>45</sup> Pursuing a policy of arms sale provided the former Soviet Union with a unique opportunity to become the leading supplier of tanks, armoured cars, artillery, submarines, subsonic combat aircraft, helicopters, and surface to air missiles to the Middle East from the beginning of the Iran Iraq war up to very end of it.<sup>46</sup>

In 1989, the Soviet Union, still engaged in a competition for influence with the United States in Iran and quite keen to improve its relations with the Islamic Republic, returned to the old tactic of weapons supply and exploitation of its potential not only as a foreign policy instrument but also as a lucrative source of hard currency. Iran, on the

other hand, regarding its considerable foreign income and its desire to rebuild its armed forces, could have constituted a large market for the Soviet military industries. During Shevardnadze's visit to Teheran, according to sources close to the Islamic regime, both parties agreed to study the possibility of an arms deal agreement, which was finally concluded in June 1989 (see p.171).

The talks between Iran over the details of the agreement continued during a visit to Moscow by Iran's Foreign Minister, A.A. Velayati, on 31 March 1989. Velayati had two important tasks, first, to prepare the ground for a visit to Moscow by Iran's powerful man, Hashemi Rafsanjani, which was scheduled for the summer, and second, to conclude a protocol for the major arms deal to be signed during Rafsanjani's visit. Gorbachev, inspired by the progress in the course of relations between Teheran and Moscow, during his conversation with Velayati took note of 'the growing dynamics in relations between the two countries in a spirit of good-neighbourliness', and emphasised the role played in this by the political will of the two countries' leaders and the 'exchange of messages between himself and Ayatollah Khomeini'.<sup>47</sup> Gorbachev also expressed the Soviet Union's readiness to continue the political dialogue and expand relations, observing that 'Iran is a welcome partner'.<sup>48</sup> Velayati's visit to Moscow in Iranian terms was favourable because the Iranian side obtained almost all they asked for (mainly the arms sale and assurance of full Soviet political support for the regime), and from the Soviet point of view satisfactory, albeit they yet again failed to convince Iran to change its policy towards Afghanistan.

From the Soviet point of view the new situation in the region was ideal to expand the relationship with Iran since the regional determinants of Irano-Soviet relations were changing favourably towards them. If in 1987, at the time of Gorbachev's major diplomatic effort to transform East-West relations, a close co-operation between Moscow and Teheran could have faced a risk of provoking Washington or irritating Baghdad, then

in 1989 both obstacles were visibly lessened - thanks to the political changes in the region and wider changes in the course of international relations.

However, Iran, which in 1987 at the height of the war with Iraq and in desperation had made overtures to the Soviet Union to procure weapons and failed, now would have every reason to try it again and be confident of a positive response. Of course procuring arms was not the only area of Iran's growing interest in a rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Facing major difficulties in its gigantic post-war construction plans, Iran needed to use the Soviets' technical capacity and possibly their economic assistance. But over and above their economic and military interests, the Iranian leadership required Soviet political support as a means of securing their survival in the turbulent post-war period.

## NOTES

1. For a broad examination of the Soviet military involvement in the Third World see Mark N. Katz, *The Third World in Soviet Military Thought*. London: Croom Helm, 1982. For an assessment of the Soviet position and policy of arms supply regarding the case, see Shahram Chubin, 'Hedging in the Gulf: Soviets Arm Both Sides', *International Defence Review*, June 1987.
2. Iran despite its opposition to the Soviet Union's military presence in the area, was a prime example for the countries who supported Soviet political involvement in the Middle East during that particular period. One of the reasons for Iran supporting Soviet involvement was balancing the United States's influence in the region's political arena.
3. *New York Times*, 26 July 1988.
4. UPI cited in the *Herald Tribune International*, 14 August 1988.
5. In 1920, during the Second Comintern Congress, Lenin stated that, 'the colonial and semi-colonial nations would experience a two-stage revolution'. The first stage would be a national revolution to establish independence, and the second stage, a socialist revolution to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. (For details of the major statement see: *Second Congress of the Communist International*, New Park, London, 1977, p.111). Stalin adopted almost a similar view and categorised Third World conflicts into four types. Khrushchev separated wars and put them into two groups: world wars and regional wars, and maintained almost loyal to the definition invented by Lenin within his own categories. Soviet thinking about the nature and classification of the Third World conflicts underwent a change during Brezhnev with a rejection of Khrushchev's classification. This time ideological and non-ideological factors were separated and Soviet perceptions were formed on the basis of socio-political factors, which was more of a cosmetic change. None of these categories, with the exception of 'national liberation wars', was emerging in the way that the Soviet leaders had predicted. During Gorbachev the conflict between socialism and imperialism terminated and eventually in December 1991, together with the Soviet Union, the theories about the nature and type of the Third World conflicts were buried.
6. See Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Military Policy: A Historical Analysis*. New York: Praeger, 1966.
7. Soviet government statement, *Pravda*, 22 August, 1988, p.1. Quite interesting, the statement had pointed out, 'the problems that gave rise to the conflict are complex and many of them are rooted deep in history', and in mentioning the historical background, the Soviet leadership was reflecting a tendency for a visible departure from the classic theoretical framework in which the causes of the Third World conflicts were defined differently, but despite the changing heart such as the latter, they frequently have failed to understand the historical roots of the regional conflicts and have failed to achieve a satisfactory track record in the Third World.
8. *Pravda*, 22 August 1988, p.1.
9. *Ibid.*

10. After implementation of the cease-fire, it was widely expected that a basic change in the nature and structure of the Islamic regime in Iran would happen soon. The Iranian masses encouraged by the events had shared this perception, which was mainly conceived by the foreign observers of Iran's affair and were getting prepared to take on the regime in the belief that the right time for the final blow was in sight. The reflection of this evaluation and its social repercussions drew the attention of the regime whose serious concern about its eventual demise during the last phase of the war was the first reason to comply with the UN Resolution 598 and hastily accept the cease-fire. In the aftermath of the war, the Islamic regime in order to maintain its integrity decided to exploit two avenues: resorting to the reign of terror to frustrate the encouraged masses at home, and turning to the Soviet Union to gain foreign support or at least denying its opponents the same chance.
11. The 'National Salvation Army' was in fact a division of the Iraqi army recruited about 10,000 of the pro-Mujahedin dissidents from all over the world. These forces, apparently based on the assumption that the war had entered its final phase and the Iranian regime would accept the cease-fire one way or the other, were mobilised to be sent into Iran to overthrow the Islamic regime seemingly in the hands of Iranian elements. Despite a considerable effort to mobilise these forces, lack of support from the people and immense unpopularity of the Mujahedin in Iran inflicted a severe defeat on the belligerent army and provided yet another chance for the regime to resurrect the execution squads and consequently spread a sense of fear amongst the masses and prolong its survival. The National Salvation Army which penetrated more than 100 kilometres inside Iran during a three-day fight suffered more than four thousand losses and the remaining elements returned to Iraq in full retreat. For an Iranian detailed evaluation of the Mujahedin's ideological orientation and activities see Sepehr Zabih, *The Left in Contemporary Iran: Ideology, Organisation and the Soviet Connection*, London: Croom Helm, 1988. For an interesting essay in this connection see Nazar Alaomalki, 'The New Iranian Left', *Middle East Journal*, Vol.41, No.2, Spring 1987, pp.226-32.
12. The Kremlin's attitudes towards Iran, from the beginning of the post-war period, presented a fresh example of a shift in the traditional theories regarding the creation of pro-Moscow puppet regimes either in the Soviet periphery or elsewhere in pursuit of political expansion in the Third World. The Soviet Union preferred to improve its state to state relations instead, but the Islamic regime failed to understand this alteration and was never convinced that the new policy attitude was genuine and not circumstantial, otherwise, the likely outcome would have been totally different from what had happened in the region up to 1988. For the changing heart in the Kremlin in this connection see Robert O. Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East*, pp.248-58.
13. For a view on Soviet historical trends for manipulation of the regional crises and the involvement in the Third World conflicts see Bruce Porter, *The USSR in the Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars*. Cambridge University Press, London, 1984.
14. As argued in Soviet military policy since the Second World War.
15. For a general view in this regard see Sergei P. Fedorenko, 'Soviet Perceptions of US Threat' in Carl G. Jacobsen, (ed.), *Strategic Power USA/USSR*, London: Macmillan, 1990.
16. Iran has never officially participated in the talks with the Soviets over the Afghan crisis and boycotted the Geneva talks. For a detailed account of Soviet interests in

South West Asia and the reasons which led to the Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan see Bhabani Sen Gupta, *The Afghan Syndrome: How to live with Soviet Power*, London: Croom Helm, 1982. For a solid analysis of the invasion and its consequences see John C. Griffiths, *Afghanistan: Key to a Continent*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1981. For the latest developments including the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal and changes in Soviet policy see Robert O. Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East*, pp.69,74; and Antony Arnold, 'Soviet Relations with Afghanistan: The Current Dynamic' in Hafeez Malik, (ed.), *Domestic Determinants of Soviet Foreign Policy towards South Asia and the Middle East*, London: Macmillan, 1990, pp.188-95.

17. See Galia Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East from World War Two to Gorbachev*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp.197-210.
18. For a general study of the Soviet interest in the Middle East and the trends to take part in the talks and initiations regarding the Arab-Israel conflict see Galia Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, also Galia Golan, *Yom Kippur and after: The Soviet Union and the Middle East Crisis*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1977. See also Harold H. Saunders, 'Regulating Soviet-US Competition and Co-operation in the Arab-Israeli Arena 1967-86', in Alexander George Philip and Alexander Dallin, *US-Soviet Security Competition*, London: Oxford University Press, 1988.
19. For a detailed examination of Soviet national security policy and the implication of the changes under Gorbachev see George E. Hudson, *Soviet National Security Policy Under Perestroika*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1990.
20. See Hafeez Malik, *Domestic Determinants of Soviet Foreign Policy*, pp.303-19.
21. Suitability of a militarily powerful Iran to the Russian Federation and Commonwealth, of course depends on the nature and orientation of the regime in Teheran. Taking into account the history of the last 400 years between the two countries, and also the cultural structure of the Caucasus and the Central Asian Republics, conventional wisdom suggests that an Islamic Autocracy in Iran with naked ambition for expansion, would certainly pose a serious threat to the security of the North, versus, a significant democracy in Iran would help the stability of the region. For a valuable study of Russia and Soviet objectives in Iran see F. Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia 1864-1914: A Study in Imperialism*, London and New Haven, 1968. For a modern work in this regard and an assessment of Soviet intentions in Iran see Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy Towards Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan: The Dynamics of Influence*, New York: Praeger, 1982. For an Iranian view on the subject see Shahram Chubin, *Soviet Policy Towards Iran and the Gulf*, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London, Adelphi Papers, No.15, Spring 1980, pp.36-8.
22. See Carol R. Saivetz, *The Soviet Union and the Gulf in the 1980s*, Boulder: Westview, 1989 and also J.C. Campbell, 'The Soviet Union and the Middle East in the General Direction of the Persian Gulf', *Russian Review*, April 1970, pp.145-153.
23. 'Iranian Azeri Sources in Baku and Tabriz', cited in *Kayhan*, London, December 11, 1988. See also Konstantin Mikhailov, *Sobsednik*, No.3, January 1989, pp.6-7. Moscow, in order to quell the Azeri's unrest adopted the policy of carrot and stick, first the Azerbaijan Republic Supreme Court convicted T.S. Ismailov one of the Azeri leaders, for an alleged 'involvement in murder of Sh. G. Sarkisyan from hooligan motives' then another Azeri leader called Ya

G. Dzhaferov (Jafarov) was charged with 'organising and directly participating in mass disorder', *Pravda*, 19 October 1988, p.6. During the riot in Azerbaijan, the Soviet papers first attempted to underestimate the depths of the movement and then condemn it in their own stereotyped jargon such as: 'An odd assortment of social and anti-social elements - exponents of the petit bourgeois ideology and narrow minded, philistine, anarchistic morality who worship the golden calf of foreign enrichment, and the big shots of the 'shadow economy' and the corrupts', *Pravda*, 26 December 1988. In July 1988 and before the Azerbaijani unrest reached its summit Gorbachev, speaking at a meeting of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, suggested that Nagorno-Karabakh should stay with the Republic of Azerbaijan. During the same meeting, Gorbachev indirectly referring to the ethnic problem in the Soviet Union said that: 'Today 90 per cent of our people are born under Soviet rule' but failed to mention how many of them had been integrated into the Soviet Union and lost their cultural roots and national identities. For the Gorbachev speech in this connection see *Pravda*, 20 July 1988, pp.1-2.

24. *Kayhan*, London, 18 December, 1988.
25. Ayatollah Khomeini's message to Gorbachev, *Kayhan* and *Ettelaat*, Iranian papers in Farsi, 8 January, 1989. (For a full text of the message in English see *Zambia Daily Mail*, Lusaka, 12 June 1989; for the Soviet news on the case see *Pravda*, 5 January 1989, p.1).
26. *Zambia Daily Mail*, 12 June 1989.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Gorbachev's report to the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee on the issue of his meeting with Ayatollah Javadi Amoli, Khomeini's personal representative and the purpose of the message. The Politburo formally responded to the report: 'Communique confirms Iran's commitment to maintaining good neighbour relations with the Soviet Union', *Pravda*, 26 January 1989, p.1.
29. Igor Belyaev, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, No.10, 8 March 1989. The Rushdie affair provided the Soviet leadership with a different opportunity to distance itself from classic Marxism. *Moskovskie novosti*, No.11, 12 March 1989, printed a statement signed by some of the prominent members of the USSR Writers' Union. The statement mentioned that: 'We support respect for all religions, including Islam. Such magnificent works as the Bible, the Koran and the Talmud are a part of humanity's great spiritual wealth'. The statement then went further to suggest: 'None of us has read Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*. Perhaps he has truly insulted Islam. But have mercy on him. [signed] Academic R. Sagdeev, A. Bitov, A. Vainer, B. Okudzhava, L. Smirnov, Ye. Yevtushenko, I. Vinogradov, D. Sukharov. The Soviet Union adopted an even handed approach towards the Rushdie case and tried not to upset them.
30. Statement in *Moskovski novosti*, No.11, 12 March 1989.
31. Briefing for Journalists, *Pravda*, 1 March, 1989, p.4.
32. Statement by USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman, *Pravda*, 23 March 1989, p.4.
33. *Ibid.*

34. See Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah: Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution*, London: Hutchinson, 1985. For a firsthand expression of Khomeini's World View see Ruhollah Khomeini, *Hokumat-e-Eslami* (Islamic Government), Teheran, 1979. For an interesting collection of Khomeini's verdicts see Hamid Ruhani, (Khomeini's bibliographer), *Zendegani-e-Emam Khomeini* (Life of the Imam Khomeini), Qome, 1983.
35. What exactly Khomeini needed after accepting the cease-fire, was a world class challenge and its consequent worldwide publicity to divert the attentions from the backlash he personally had suffered at home. The Rushdie affair had provided this opportunity and Khomeini exploited its full potential.
36. There was speculation around a deliberate attempt by the Western media especially in Britain to make publicity around the Satanic Verses in order to create enough potential for the Islamic fundamentalism in the world which at the time was championed by Ayatollah Khomeini. Even the Soviet media shared this view and in part joined the supporters of the 'Conspiracy Theory'. See Igor Bilyaev, 'Great Satan and Great Politics', *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 8 March 1989.
37. See *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 8 March 1989 (an article beside Bilyaev's article).
38. The Soviet Union decided to bank on Iran's strategic importance and giving its southern neighbour a higher profile in the Kremlin's new strategic thinking. During Shevardnadze's visit to Teheran, the Soviet Union agreed to sign a very important protocol for military co-operation with Iran. Beside the point that Soviet Union's new strategic thinking required strengthening Iran's hand in the regional security and also in addition to Moscow's commitment not to give the US any chance to revive its old influence in Iran, a desperate need for hard currency made marketing for the Soviet military industries inevitable. Thus, arms sales to Iran became one of the most important objectives of Shevardnadze's talks in Teheran. An agreement for a huge arms sale between Teheran and Moscow indeed was the major achievement for the USSR Foreign Minister's tour of the Middle East. The final talks over the details of the deal took place later during Velayati's visit to Moscow in April. The significant arms sale agreement was signed in June 1989 but no official document has ever been produced in public.
39. The US wheeling and dealing with the so-called pragmatist elements in Teheran has always been one of the major worries of the Soviet Union in Iran since the Islamic regime's accession to power. The Irangate scandal was the latest event which made Moscow deeply suspicious about the ultimate objectives of the United States in Iran and profoundly concerned not to be overplayed by the US in its own backyard. The first rapprochement of the US by the interim Government was made in 1980 when Mehdi Bazargan and his Defence Minister met with Zbigniew Brzezinski in Algiers [for the Bazargan version of the meeting see Mehdi Bazargan, *Enqelab-e-Iran dar do Harkat* (Iran's Revolution in Two Moves), Teheran, 1984, and for the US version see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981*, New York, 1983. For the Islamic ruling elements and fundamentalist's view on the issue see documents from 'The US Espionage Den', Teheran, 1984.
40. Ministers meet in Cairo, *Pravda*, 23 February 1989, p.4; *Izvestia*, 23 February 1989, p.5.
41. Conversation held in Baghdad and Basra, *Pravda*, 26 February 1989.



42. See *Ettelaat*, Teheran, 27 February 1989; *Pravda*, 27 February 1989, p.4 and *Izvestia*, 28 February 1989, p.4.
43. TASS cited in *Pravda*, 1 March 1989, Gerasimov in answer to a question from the BBC correspondent.
44. *Kayhan*, Teheran, 29 February 1989, pp.1-2. During Teheran talks Iran made no concession to the Soviet Union and despite its genuine desire to reconcile its relations with Moscow remained unchanged on its principal foreign policy issues including policy towards Afghanistan.
45. See Abraham S. Becker, 'A note on Soviet Arms Transfer to the Middle East' in Becker, A.S. (ed.), *The Soviet-American Competition in the Middle East*, Oxford, 1987, pp.48-59, also, Alexander T. Bennett, 'Arms Transfer as an instrument of Soviet Policy in the Middle East', *Middle East Journal*, Vol.39, No.4, Autumn 1985, pp.760-74.
46. Richard F. Grimmell, *Trends in Conventional Arms by Major Suppliers 1981-1988*, Washington: Congressional Research Service, 1989.
47. Gorbachev confers with Velayati, *Pravda*, 1 April 1989, p.1.
48. *Ibid.*

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **A MAJOR SWING TOWARDS IRAN 1989-1990:**

### **SUPERPOWER COMPETITION CONTINUES?**

The death of Khomeini on 3 June 1989 left his successors in a state of deep apprehension about their possible demise. With the devastating war ended in late 1988, the Islamic regime expected to be in trouble both at home and in dealing with foreign states including the massive US presence in the region. The anxiety of the Islamic Republic's leadership about the ultimate objectives of the US in the region was sharply increased when Khomeini passed away. Therefore the Soviet political support for the new leadership in that particular atmosphere could have been quite helpful.<sup>1</sup>

A mini-shuttle diplomacy and exchange of missions between Teheran and Moscow headed by the Soviet and Iranian Deputy Foreign Ministers, Yu. Vorontsov and M.J. Larijani, prepared the ground for a major breakthrough in the course of relations between the two countries. It was expected that during Rafsanjani's visit to Moscow a comprehensive agreement for economic and cultural co-operation between the Soviet Union and Iran would be signed. The death of Khomeini did not prevent the preparation for the visit going ahead. Indeed under the given circumstances both sides expressed their interest in giving a green light to the scheduled visit after Khomeini's death. The Soviets were naturally keen to study what was going on in Iran after Khomeini, and were trying to take full advantage of the situation by getting close to the new leadership. Khomeini's heirs were enthusiastic to know how the outside world would respond to the

new circumstances in Iran. Therefore Rafsanjani's visit to the USSR could have been treated as a desirable opportunity for both parties.

On 21 June 1989 Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly and Acting Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of Iran, arrived in Moscow for an official visit. The reception for Rafsanjani was the same as one for a head of state. Gorbachev in addressing the Iranian delegate said, 'We were always convinced of the need for co-operation and good-neighbourliness with Iran. We have heard that your visit is a fulfilment of the will of the late Imam'.<sup>2</sup> Then Gorbachev stated his desire to build relations with Iran on a new basis and pointed out, 'we will sign documents on the principles of our relations and co-operation to the year 2000'. Gorbachev, referring to the 'unusual content of the agreements', stressed 'we are willing to go as far as Iran is willing to come'.<sup>3</sup> Gorbachev, the day after the first round of his talks with Rafsanjani and as intensive preparatory talks at ministerial level were going on, noted that 'The two sides are reaching specific and large-scale agreements which would open up prospects for a new era of co-operation, in the interest not only of our two peoples but of the region and the world as a whole'.<sup>4</sup> During Rafsanjani's visit to Moscow, agreements on gas, the resumption of the Moscow-Teheran rail service and a number of other documents for political, economic, scientific and technical co-operation were signed.

The significant part of the visit was an agreement in principle for the purchase by Iran of a large quantity of modern Soviet weapons. It was estimated that an arms sale of \$5 billion would be concluded between the Soviet Union and Iran. Perhaps Moscow in trying to cut the Red Army to a new size would have never thought of a better chance to get rid of some unwanted items from its arsenal.<sup>5</sup> Such a deal would also have helped to keep the military industries going, by generating a considerable amount of desperately needed hard currency. The agreement signed by Gorbachev and Rafsanjani, on 22 June 1989, emphasised, 'Taking into consideration the fact that they (Iran and the USSR) are

neighbours, the sides will expand comprehensive co-operation in various areas, particularly in economics, trade, technology, and industry, and will seek new forms and spheres for such co-operation, including co-operation in the area of the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The Soviet side agrees to co-operate with the Iranian side in strengthening the latter's defence capability'.<sup>6</sup> Iran on the political side of the agreements promised to prevent the coming to power of a regime in Kabul hostile to the Soviet Union. Gorbachev, who in March had pulled the Red Army out of Afghanistan, could not accept a right wing anti-Moscow regime in Afghanistan and Iran in part could help the Soviets in this regard.<sup>7</sup> One other important part of Rafsanjani's visit to the Soviet Union was a short trip to Baku, the capital of the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. Rafsanjani called the latter part of his visit to the Soviet Union 'a victory for Islam'.<sup>8</sup>

The Soviet Union, although on the verge of transformation and deeply preoccupied with domestic matters, still seemed interested in regional affairs. Therefore, the Kremlin could see in the face of Iran's Islamic regime a potential which could have assisted Moscow's objectives in the Islamic world if it was exerted properly. Regarding the proximity of the Soviet southern republics to Iran, having more than a 2,500 kilometre long border, improving relations with Teheran could have been a positive element in improving the economies of Central Asian and Transcaucasian republics. In general, gaining influence in Teheran had strategic importance for the Kremlin and could improve the Soviet position *vis-à-vis* the United States since the Americans had managed to improve their relations with the Persian Gulf Arab states.

Quite surprisingly, the course of Soviet-Iranian relations during a difficult period in which Moscow was under pressure from the United States and Western European countries to join the arms embargo against Iran, witnessed a significant increase in the extent to which the Soviets considered Iran vital to their national interests. From the Iranian point of view, they seemed to have overcome their anger and disappointment with

Moscow, which was deeply sensed during the war with Iraq and the days that the Iranian major cities were pounded by Soviet-made bombs and missiles.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of August 1989 the outlook for a closer co-operation between Iran and the Soviet Union seemed very promising. In fact there was not even a single factor which could have tarnished it. In reflecting the new prospect for co-operation between the two countries which had undermined Iran's ideological obligations, Rafsanjani on his return home warned about the 'plot staged by global imperialism to divide the Soviet nations' and suggested the Azeri Muslims in Baku to 'keep their unity within the Soviet Union'.<sup>10</sup>

The examination of Soviet-Iranian relations could hardly come across in a comprehensive form if it fails to take into consideration the effect of relevant Middle Eastern issues. The Soviets' involvement and Iran's influential presence in the Middle East on the one hand, and on the other, political developments in the region, not only make this attention inevitable, but necessary and essential. This became apparent on 28 July 1989, when Israeli commandos landed in helicopters, kidnapped a pro-Iranian Lebanese Shi'ite clergy called Sheikh A. Obeid who was a leader of Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon. The Israeli commandos abducted him and two other people and took them to Israel. The Soviet Union on 31 July issued a statement and condemned the Israelis' attempt.<sup>11</sup> The statement referred to the Israelis' claim in regard of Sheikh Obeid's 'alleged involvement in acts of terrorism', and called it 'a flagrant violation of Lebanon's sovereignty' which constituted an 'act of international terrorism'.<sup>12</sup>

Execution by Hezbollah of a UN military observer, American Lt. Col. Higgins, who had been taken hostage in Lebanon, in response to the abduction of Sheikh Obeid, and a statement by a Lebanese terrorist group called the *Revolutionary Justice Organization* (a branch of the Lebanese Hezbollah), threatening to execute another US citizen, Joseph Cicipio, unless the Israelis released Sheikh Obeid, created a new situation in which the Soviet Union could play a crucial mediatory role in the Middle East.

On 30 July 1989 the Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, seemingly at the invitation of his Iranian counterpart, A. Velayati, visited Teheran and met with Iranian leaders. Shevardnadze during his talk with Velayati (the sixth official talk between the two in the course of the year) set forth a number of issues of mutual interest including the evaluation of the progress made in the course of co-operation between the two countries within the framework of the principles signed earlier in Moscow, implementation of a cease-fire in Afghanistan, the release of Soviet hostages in Afghanistan, adoption of the measures aimed at preventing further escalation of the Lebanese hostage, and hindering the execution of the American hostage Cicipio.<sup>13</sup>

In a report from Teheran the Soviet news agency TASS, referring to Shevardnadze's 'working visit' to the Iranian capital, mentioned that 'The discussion of international topics took note of the narrowing of differences between the Soviet Union and Iran with respect to ways of bringing about a cease-fire in Afghanistan ...'<sup>14</sup> TASS, in continuation of the same report, stressed that 'the Soviet leadership is devoting particular attention to the question of freeing the Soviet prisoners of war held by the Mujahedin. He (Shevardnadze) asked the Iranian President to use his personal prestige to facilitate the achievement of this objective'.<sup>15</sup> Although the official reports stressed that Hashemi Rafsanjani had told the Soviet Minister 'Iran has nothing to do with the tragedy that has unfolded in Lebanon', but the statements issued later by the Soviets as well as the results of the Teheran talks proved that Iran had positively responded to the Soviet appeal and promised to employ every instrumental means to meet Moscow's demands, particularly in regard to the Soviet prisoners in Afghanistan and preventing the retaliatory execution of the American hostage Cicipio. Indeed the latter visit by the Soviet foreign minister to Teheran during which the two countries even agreed to 'begin preparations for a joint Soviet-Iranian space flight', was the most successful mission of its kind and reflected the appearance of a new spirit dominating the course of relations between Moscow and Teheran.

On 3 August 1989, and at the peak of the Lebanese hostage crisis, the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement condemning 'the gross flouting of human rights and terrorism in all forms and manifestations'.<sup>16</sup> In order to please all parties involved, the statement condemned Israel for the abduction of Sheikh Obeid and also noted that contacts had been underway for some time with respect to all hostages in Lebanon. The Soviet statement was a diplomatic form of co-operation between the Soviet Union and Iran to cool down the tensions in the Lebanon.<sup>17</sup> The same day another statement by the Revolutionary Justice Organization printed in *Al-Nahar* said that the decision to execute Cicipio had been 'frozen'.<sup>18</sup> This was a considerable achievement for Soviet diplomacy in the Middle East which not only strengthened its position in relation to the United States but also earned the Kremlin new credence in the world's affairs - thanks to the improvement in relations with Teheran. On 4 August 1989 B. Ivanov, writing in *Izvestia* about the role Moscow played towards the Lebanese hostages, noted that the Lebanese had taken that step as 'a consequence of the intervention of other interested parties and the states that the United states had asked to play an intermediary role'.<sup>19</sup> Soviet mediation to solve the Lebanese hostage crisis was mentioned at a regular briefing in the State Department and some Western journals including the French newspaper *Libération* referred to 'The decisive role the Soviets played in gaining the postponement of the American hostage's execution'.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the hostage crisis, at the end of 1989 normalisation of Soviet-Iranian relations was proceeding satisfactorily. From the Iranian standpoint, the growing interest in improving relations with Moscow was significant, though there was little understanding in Iran about the profundity of the domestic developments which were taking place inside the Soviet Union.

## **The Domestic-Foreign Linkage**

The organic connection between domestic developments and the conduct of Soviet foreign policy which has always been evident assumed a stronger colour by the end of 1989, while Gorbachev's revolution forced the Communist parties in Eastern European into a power sharing process and ending their monopoly of power. The conditions created by Gorbachev which led to the termination of one-party rule in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria by letting the Communist regimes in East Europe know that they were on their own, similarly were being extended at home. The Baltic republics were demanding independence and the Transcaucasian republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan were busy intensifying their bloody ethnic conflict over the enclave of Nagorno Karabakh. The ethnic problem was only one of the aspects of domestic developments, which was added to the Kremlin's obsession and prevented the communist leaders from paying adequate attention to foreign affair issues. The Soviet Union's major cities, Moscow and Leningrad, were both approaching the verge of explosion since public desperation for food and commodities, together with aspirations for political change, appeared as a source of widespread tension. The Kremlin's Communist leadership, struggling for survival, had neither the opportunity nor the intention to pay proper attention to foreign issues.

In January 1990 the ethnic unrest in the Soviet Union assumed a new dimension when the people in the Nakhichevan Autotomous Republic (a Muslim Azeri populated enclave, located between Iran and the former Soviet Republic of Armenia) approached the Iranian border and called for the unification of South (Iranian) and North (Soviet) Azerbaijan.<sup>21</sup> The peaceful demonstration gradually turned aggressive and the furious demonstrators violently destroyed tower and border markers, communication lines and set fire to border posts and inflicted millions of dollars' worth of damage to installations along the 137 kilometres of the Soviet-Iranian border.



The first reaction of the Soviet authorities to the incident was rather mild. The Iranian reaction to the incident was mixed and equivocal. Perhaps under any other circumstance this could have been considered a golden opportunity for Iran to address the historical question of the validity of the treaties under which the people of Nakhichevan, like all other areas of Transcaucasus and Central Asia, were separated from Iran and annexed to the Russian Empire. But the Islamic regime, deprived of a strong leadership, preferred to forget about the historical dispute and instead allowed the Soviet Union to maintain its integrity. Rather than playing a wild card, the Iranian leadership soon managed to overcome the increase of domestic Islamic idealism and nationalistic temptations and protested about the violent incident as an 'act of aggression' without referring to its underlying origins.<sup>22</sup>

On 2 January 1990 after the enraged crowd, in a fresh attempt, managed to reach the border, Iran's border troops were immediately put on combat alert. The Iranian border commissioners, of course receiving instructions from Teheran, issued a formal protest pointing out that 'the Soviet side was violating the 14 May 1957 Treaty between the USSR and Iran on Soviet-Iranian border regulations'.<sup>23</sup>

The Iranians' formal protest apparently justified stronger action by the Soviet central authorities against the incident. On 3 January 1990, as further disturbances occurred in Zangelan and Pushkinov, and warning signals of rioting were received from Lenkaran, I. Petrovas, troop commander of the State Security Committee's Transcaucasus Border District, warned that, 'A difficult situation is taking shape along almost the entire section of the border between Azerbaijan and Iran, that is about 790 km. The situation may become worse. The extremists are demanding that a number of border posts be removed altogether, and they are provoking the border guards. We are trying to restore order on the border'.<sup>24</sup> After Petrovas' ultimatum, 3 January was specified as the date by which the border would be reinforced and in doing so 'reserves' were sent to the area with

the warning from the local authority that 'We took every measure we could to relieve the situation on the border'.<sup>25</sup>

After the border rioting in Nakhichevan was brutally quelled, Moscow sent a high ranking mission to the region in the hope of settling the region's problems on the basis of a 'permanent solution'. Amongst the mission were A.N. Girenko, Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee and R.N. Nishanov, Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet Council of Nationalities, who immediately went to the region and set up a committee to talk to the self-styled Nakhichevan People's Front.

During a conference set up on 7 January in Baku to study the roots of conflict, A.Kh. Vezirov, first secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party Central Committee, noted that: 'Communists need new forms of ideological work with the masses, that they must really learn the art of political struggle. Parties have always acted as an instrument of the struggle for power, as spokesman for the political will and aspirations of various classes, social groups and forces. Recent events have convincingly demonstrated the need for the CPSU to declare in a new way and at the top of its voice that it is the party of the working class, the defender of the people's interests'. He, apparently out of touch and unaware of the depth of events, was trying to suggest a new future for the Communist Party which should have rescued the mission his colleagues had failed to fulfil in more than seventy years as he noted: 'This is especially urgent before the elections to republic and local Soviets, which will no doubt give rise to a new outbreak of the politicisation of the masses'.<sup>26</sup>

Whichever way the conflict proceeded, it was clear that within the existing political framework it would be all but possible to find a solid solution to the ethnic problem since the demise of the Soviet Union seemed a factual reality. One of the main reasons behind the Nakhichevan rioting was rooted in the bigger issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave and the Azeri refugees from Armenia. The people of Azerbaijan, who

were witness to the collapse of the Soviet Empire, likewise the Armenian and the other nations of the Union, had realised that in order to sort out their ethnic and territorial differences with the neighbouring nations, they should rely on their own or receive help from abroad. Therefore, people from Nakhichevan and to a greater extent the Republic of Azerbaijan, in the course of preparation for the forthcoming challenge, were turned to the south as Iran seemed to be the first source to provide them with assistance.

By the end of January widespread rioting was brought under control after a state of emergency was declared in Azerbaijan - thanks in part to the proper reaction from Iran. The Iranian regime, still optimistic about the future of the Soviet Union and its integrity, was walking a tight-rope to keep a balance between their Islamic commitments towards the Muslim Azeris and their developing relations with the Soviet Union whose presence was valued in Teheran particularly for the sake of a greater balance in relation to the United States. From the Iranian standpoint, any policy towards the incident should have been carefully considered within the influential existence of two parallel factors, firstly, the Iranian Azeri interest group consisting of more than fourteen million Azeris who had blood, historic and cultural relations with the north, secondly, a large number of Iranian Armenians who were sympathetic to their fellow Armenians inside the Soviet Union. Keeping the balance between the Azeri and the Armenians inside Iran was one aspect of the difficult situation the Iranian leadership was entangled in, the other was its relations with Turkey whose Pan-Turkism aspiration could have been a threat to Iran's regional influence and national interests.

Iran, on the one hand, considering a bitter memory maintained alive between the Turks and the Armenians after the 1915 massacre by the Muslim Turks of the Christian Armenians, wanted to play the Armenian card against Turkey when it faced a competition for influence which was about to start in the region. On the other hand, it could not be totally indifferent towards its stand in the Islamic world and totally neglect the Muslim Azeris in the north. Geography, to some extent, helped Iran to improve its position in the

area since the Soviet Republic of Armenia, next to Turkey and locked between Iran and the republic of Azerbaijan, had only one side left having access to the outside world. The republic of Azerbaijan, although keen to seek help from Turkey, could not expect much because they did not share a common border.<sup>27</sup>

The policy Iran adopted towards Transcaucasus was a 'negative balance approach'. Such a policy provided Iran with enough room to play for time and do nothing important, while keeping all parties interested and happy. Iran, although unaware of the extent to which the transformation of the Soviet Union would go, might nevertheless on the basis of developments in East Europe have realised that the existing framework would not be capable of holding the Soviet Union together much longer. Therefore they realised in the absence of the Soviet Union and after the transformation process was accomplished, that Iran would have to assume a very important role towards its new northern neighbours particularly in regard to the region's new equilibrium.

In February 1990 as domestic problems in the Soviet Union were worsening, Gorbachev, under pressure from the old and new Soviet political establishments tried to rescue the system as well as its programme for political and economic reform by modifying the crumbling system. His short-cut solution seemed to be a further concentration of power in his own hands. Gorbachev's desperate attempt seemed to have paid off when 249 members of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, after a three-day debate, agreed on a draft proposal that virtually ended the Communist Party's seventy two-year long monopoly on power. The Central Committee also approved the creation of a presidential system of government, approved by the Third Congress of People's Deputies in March, which provided Gorbachev with more formal power than any other leader of the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup> During the debate, Yegor Legachev, a conservative member of the Politburo, warned that: 'We are beginning to discard everything old'<sup>29</sup> and Boris Yeltsin, the old Moscow party boss and new Parliamentary reformer, advised

Gorbachev to join them if he did not want to lose them.<sup>30</sup> In fact this was the final stage in which everyone could see that the old Soviet Union was dying a humiliating death.

### **Soviet-Iranian relations and Afghanistan**

In 1990, unlike the United States who seemingly had lost almost all its interest in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union, given its proximity, was still seriously concerned about it. Due to its national security concerns regarding the 'Afghan syndrome' Moscow proposed a 10-point plan on ways to end the Afghan crisis.<sup>31</sup> The Soviet plan proposed by Shevardnadze, although supported by Afghan left-wing forces, suggested power sharing by all parties and gained the indirect support of Teheran, as the Islamic regime responded 'it cannot wholly be rejected'.<sup>32</sup> The new proposal suggested that the future of Afghanistan be decided through a free election. On the basis of the new proposal Afghanistan was to be demilitarised and a peace conference with neighbouring countries to be set up in order to settle the ongoing conflict.

On 17 February 1990 in continuation of Moscow's attempts to earn Iran's support for the Afghan peace settlement plan, the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Vladimir Petrovsky, visited Teheran and submitted a message from Shevardnadze to his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Velayati, declaring Moscow's readiness for 'continued co-operation in settling the Afghan issue and the Iran-Iraq conflict with Iran in the context of the Security Council resolutions'.<sup>33</sup> The Soviet inclination towards Iran and the distancing from Iraq became more evident whilst the Soviet support for implementation of UN Resolution 598, on which Iraq had not more than a little interest, was emphasised during the Teheran talks.

At the height of the turbulent changes in the Soviet Union the US Secretary of State James Baker paid a visit to Moscow, to prepare the ground for the forthcoming

summit in July between George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev. Baker's visit alongside its formal objective was also a fact finding mission about the latest developments in Moscow. The summit was designed mainly to emphasise the US-USSR agreement over further arms reductions. The US, trying to cut Soviet military power to a new size, managed to go beyond its expectations, as Moscow was quite prepared to reduce its forces even unilaterally in order to cope with the increasing expenses. The two parties during the Moscow talks agreed in principle - as expected - to reduce long-range nuclear missiles, gradually abolishing chemical weapons and reducing the number of forces in Europe to 195,000. The US, which had tried to eliminate the Soviet advantages in conventional forces for so long, achieved its objectives with the principal agreement being signed in Moscow. The outcome of the Moscow meeting was yet another sign of fundamental changes in the structure of the old Empire and a tell-tale signal of forthcoming changes in world politics.<sup>34</sup>

An incident of marginal importance in March 1990 directed the world's attention to the emergence of a new Third World power which was determined to challenge the old world order. On 14 March by the decision of a military tribunal in Baghdad, a 31 year old journalist from a British newspaper, *The Observer*, was sentenced to death and hanged. In September 1989, Farzad Bazoft, who was in Baghdad at the invitation of the Iraqi authorities to report on recent developments in Iraq after termination of the war with Iran, was arrested near a military factory and charged with spying. Despite desperate attempts by the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and mediation by world leaders, the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein ordered the hanging of the journalist. It was reported that the Soviet Union in the same way as it had mediated in solving the Lebanese hostage crisis, was approached by the West to ask Iraq for clemency in the Bazoft case. But Iraq, in the course of preparation for a world challenge, was reluctant to accept its old master's demand. The execution of *The Observer* journalist had an Iranian angle too, as he was of Iranian origin, although the Islamic regime, deeply involved with different issues, did not

bother to raise the case even in local papers. The execution of the journalist sparked worldwide anger and the British Prime Minister called it 'an act of barbarism' but Saddam, reportedly, said, 'the worldwide pressure did not frighten him'. (*Izvestia* took a mild stance towards the incident by saying that 'the journalist's execution is an utterly unacceptable act in a civilized world'.<sup>35</sup>)

The Soviet Union, virtually sliding on the slope, was giving in wherever it met firm resistance, either from domestic or foreign sources, and whether it had political or ideological or economic roots. The crumbling empire, hopelessly struggling for survival, was ready to bend in every direction in order to escape from a challenge as it was losing its entire confidence, particularly in the international political arena. Therefore, under the circumstances and while the Soviet Union step-by-step was losing its superpower status, Eduard Shevardnadze flew to Washington to hold talks with the Americans in order to finalise preparations for the forthcoming summit meeting. In Washington, the Soviet foreign minister, quite expectedly, agreed with almost all the proposals set forth by the US government both in regard to the political changes in East Europe and global arms reductions. The Soviet foreign minister in Washington, emphasising the importance of the summit, said, 'The upcoming summit meeting should move us substantially closer to the signing of agreements on radical reductions in strategic offensive weapons'.<sup>36</sup> The Soviet Union, after retreating from East Europe, compromising in the arms reduction agreements with the United States, and acknowledging realities in the Baltic, was getting ready despite its previous opposition to accept a united Germany staying in NATO.

Such a case was confirmed in the early June 1990 meeting between Gorbachev and Bush, although Shevardnadze with far from total conviction noted that 'In the matter of the future of Germany's politico-military status, our position (with the US) is different'. From the Soviet point of view, the star wars plan was not an obstacle deterring a radical agreement on an arms reduction being achieved. Even a proposition for 'an equal ceiling

for USSR and US combat aircraft outside their national territory in Europe at 500 units each, was more of a face saving gesture rather than a limit to keep the strategic parity'.<sup>37</sup>

### **USSR: Searching for a Common Language with the US**

In 1990 the Soviet Union was not in a position to appear as a superpower, since it was trying to find a 'common language' with the United States in the international theatre, even at the cost of being treated by the US like a second class ally. The compromising attitude of the Soviet Union was well extended and applied to Third World issues where the Soviet Union used to act as a balancing factor *vis-a-vis* the United States.<sup>38</sup> Moscow's changing attitude was examined yet again in the Middle East whilst the Kremlin succumbed to US pressure and agreed to remove all the barriers in the way of a mass exodus of its Jewish subjects to Israel. In doing so it adopted instrumental measures to facilitate their emigration, including the establishment of direct air services between the USSR and Israel.

The influx of Soviet Jews to the Israeli-occupied territories provoked Iran, which shared the Palestinian concern about new Israeli settlements in 'Islamic lands'. The emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel since the beginning of 1990 became one of the main issues for discussion whenever a diplomatic meeting between the Soviet and Iranian missions occurred. In February 1990 the Iranian Embassy in Beirut termed the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel a 'step towards the expansionist and hostile goals of the Zionist regime against the Muslim identity of the Islamic land', and blamed the Soviets for their co-operation in facilitating such a 'Zionist plot'.<sup>39</sup> The Soviet Union, aware of the problems it had to face, tried to reduce the growing anger of the Islamic nations by adopting a sympathetic position at least in the official statements without changing their policy. The Soviet foreign ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerasimov, for example, during a visit to the Philippine capital Manila on 19 February 1990, voiced his



government's opposition to the settlement of Russian Jews on the West Bank.<sup>40</sup> Iran angrily reacted to the Soviet policy and its double standards. A good number of commentary articles appeared in the Iranian papers in denunciation of the Soviet policy and making clear the Iranian hard feelings towards it.<sup>41</sup> A leading article in the *Teheran Times* - known in the West as the Iranian President's mouthpiece - reflected Iran's dissatisfaction, pointing out that 'The Soviet officials have not gone beyond expressing regret and verbal condemnation of the outrageous Zionist move .... As far as the Soviets are concerned they simply could have stopped the emigration of their Jewish subjects if they were sincere in their condemnation of the Zionist policy'.<sup>42</sup> Although Iran raised the issue with the Soviets time and again, the emigration of the Russian Jews to Israel was not sufficient reason to tarnish the improving relations between Teheran and Moscow. What Iran was more interested in was its appearance as a leading anti-Zionist regime and the advocate of the Muslim nations and their cause.

The Shevardnadze visit to Washington coincided with growing tension in the Persian Gulf, where Saddam Hussein of Iraq, after claiming victory against Iran, had started exerting his military muscle by threatening Kuwait and Israel. The Western powers, who had armed Iraq, engineered the creation of a new Middle Eastern 'Genie' through a five-year militarisation plan started in 1984, then helped it out of the 'bottle' in 1990 when the Iran-Iraq war was forgotten, were facing the fact that Israel and Kuwait in particular, and the Middle East in general, were directly exposed to an imminent threat coming from Iraq.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the coming to the scene of a new Middle Eastern maverick power had enough potential to put the economy and politics of the region in danger and possibly change the Middle East's geographical map. The new development had not only disturbed the region's balance of power but to a greater extent put the world's economic and political stability in danger.

On 8 July 1990 the Soviet Union in pursuing its new policies in the region attempted a new move to settle the Iran-Iraq conflict through sending a senior envoy to

Baghdad. The new move was aimed at convincing the Iraqi regime to start peace talks with Iran. The Soviet envoy, Vladimir Petrovsky, who had meetings in Teheran ahead of his visit to Baghdad, proposed that a peace summit between the Iraqi President Hussein and his Iranian counterpart Rafsanjani take place in order to settle their differences.<sup>44</sup> The Iraqi President, who had sent two letters to Rafsanjani earlier in the year, although interested in the peace talks and the idea of a permanent settlement between the two countries, wanted to do business on his own terms, which was not quite acceptable to the Iranians. What Soviet diplomacy was trying to do was get these two potential enemies closer to a political solution. If Soviet diplomacy had succeeded, perhaps Moscow would have been best placed to host the first session of the summit and achieve a major diplomatic triumph. Although the Soviet Union was not in a position to take full advantage of such an opportunity, any success could have helped the Kremlin to reappear as an influential force in the highly important Middle Eastern political scene during a very crucial period. But unfortunately, from the Soviet point of view, all Moscow's attempts were dashed soon after Baghdad started a new move to capture Kuwait.

Soviet foreign policy, almost paralysed in the Third World, neither had the desire to exploit the existing potential nor the inclination to confront the situation in the Persian Gulf. In other words, Moscow apparently had no policy towards the new developments in the Gulf and preferred to wait and see what would happen next. Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, who was asked by the press in Washington to comment on the remark made by the Iraqi Foreign Minister a few days earlier that 'Iraq can destroy Israel with chemical weapons', drew a clear picture of this frustration when he noted 'I can express regret regarding anything having to do with statements about or threats of making practical use of chemical weapons'.<sup>45</sup> The Soviet Union in the early 1990s had only one foreign policy preference with which it seemed obsessed, its relationship with the United States.

## Iran and the Central Asian Republics: the dynamics of the relations

In mid-1990, taking advantage of the policy of openness which was still in effect, Iran attempted to promote an Islamic spirit within the Central Asian republics. In doing so, direct communication with the Azeris and Turkmenians started and missions were exchanged with them on a regular basis. The new offensive included infiltration via Afghanistan of Islamic missionaries to the region, to form and organise political-religious cells in Tadzhikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Smuggling the Koran and Islamic revolutionary literature into the Central Asian republics alongside daily radio broadcasting from Iran were considered as publicity measures in line with other systematic activities designed to prepare the ground for an Islamic fundamentalist rising in the area. Printing quite a number of articles in the Iranian press in favour of pro-Islamic activities in the Central Asian republics reflected the emerging enthusiasm in Iran to support by all means the Islamic revival inside the Soviet Union. These articles were mainly trying to link the developments in the Soviet Union to the content of Ayatollah Khomeini's message to Gorbachev regarding 'the inevitable downfall of Communism' and the potential of 'Islam as a proper alternative', particularly for the Asian Soviets.<sup>46</sup>

In May 1990 as a new sign of Islamic revival in the Soviet Union, the first issue of the newspaper *Islam Nuri* (Ray of Islam) was published in Tashkent and became the Soviet Union's only Islamic newspaper. The paper was published in two versions - in Arabic script and in Cyrillic - with a circulation of 40,000 copies. The editor of the *Islam Nuri*, Muhammad Sharif Dzhumanov, on the occasion of the paper's publication said, 'The appearance of our newspaper is a result of the changes taking place in the country and the republic. The religious life of Muslims is becoming increasingly rich in important events. In just one year for example, the number of mosques in Uzbekistan has grown by 150 per cent. The State has turned a number of Islamic architectural monuments over to the spiritual administration, and restoration work is already under way

on many of them. Families today are devoting increasing amounts of attention to children's religious upbringing. The republic has adopted and is implementing a programme to revive our national culture, which is rooted in the values of Islamic civilisation'.<sup>47</sup>

The continuing disintegration of central state authority was the main factor encouraging opposition forces in the Soviet Asian nations to challenge the old system. In this challenge, the Islamic fever, amalgamated with the sense of nationalism, appeared as an efficient lever in the hands of people who seemed committed to stand by their national identity and determined to defend their cultural and historical roots. Iran, regarding its geographical advantages, its proximity to the area and its established position, assumed a role as the power house of Islam, relying on its historical and cultural ties with the area, and was well positioned to play an influential role in the region.

During the same period, with the separatist movements in the Baltic republics gaining further momentum, the Soviet Union was more likely to collapse than to survive. In Lithuania the parliament had just confirmed the people's wish for independence, and the same pro-independence decision was made in Estonia on 30 March and in Latvia on 4 May to bring the end of the Soviet Union even closer. But Gorbachev who had failed to keep up the pace of revolutionary changes, underestimated the dynamics of the new developments and consequently rejected the Baltic republics' pro-independent actions in principle as he warned: 'To exercise self-determination through secession is to blow apart the Union, to put people against one another and to show discord, bloodshed and death'.<sup>48</sup> Gorbachev, whose revolution was approaching its final destination, was not only about to lose its command and control over the secessionist republics but also forced to face a vigorous challenge by Boris Yeltsin who wanted to take over the Kremlin's power from him in the name of the Russian republic.

Following Gorbachev's warning, Moscow sent diplomatic missions to some countries outlining the Kremlin's view on the issue of the Baltic republics and their bids for independence. In this connection a message from Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze was delivered to his Iranian counterpart Ali Akbar Velayati. The Soviet Ambassador to Teheran, Vladimir V. Gudev, who handed over the message, in a meeting with Velayati, ignored the recent activity of the pro-Islamic fundamentalist missions which either were supported or sent to the Soviet Central Asian republics by Iran and stressed the 'good neighbourly relations between the two countries'.<sup>49</sup> The Ambassador attacked the Western powers and noted that 'the political objectives of certain foreign countries are creating severe problems in the Soviet republic of Lithuania'. The Soviet Ambassador also claimed that 'the Lithuanian issue is an internal problem of the Soviet Union and efforts to internationalise it will have adverse consequences not only for Moscow but for the whole world'.<sup>50</sup> Velayati in the same manner called the Lithuanian issue an internal affair of the Soviet Union and wished that the 'recent developments in the Soviet Union will be for the prosperity of the Soviets'.<sup>51</sup>

The way Soviet diplomacy was employed to deal with the Lithuanian issue and ignoring the Caucasus and Central Asian developments and foreign activities in these areas indicated that the Soviet central authorities had lost their consistency in dealing with Soviet foreign policy issues and were interested only in urgent cases. On the basis of a different interpretation, one might argue that the immediate importance of the Baltic republics' crisis had forced Moscow to shop around for support and let the Central and Caucasus problems be solved later, on their own merits. The second argument was relied on for two reasons, firstly, the outside world had shown little interest in the changes in Central Asia and Caucasus in comparison with the universal rally around the Baltic republics, secondly, the southern flank of the Soviet Union was a backyard and Moscow presumed it could handle its problems much easier than anywhere else in the empire.

The economic desperation of the Soviet Union with \$61 billion foreign debt and an imminent need for \$3 billion to pay for imports which virtually had brought the empire to the verge of bankruptcy was sensed everywhere. Gorbachev, still loyal to his belief in socialism, was in favour of a modest reform. Against this, his arch-rival Boris Yeltsin who despite Gorbachev had a reasonable understanding of the problems and also a vision for the future, favoured a more radical move towards the market economy and democratisation of the Soviet political system.

On 12 June 1990 Yeltsin - an outspoken populist - was elected head of the Russian Republic's Supreme Soviet and promptly declared Russia's sovereignty.<sup>52</sup> Yeltsin, who had made his return from the political wilderness a few days before Gorbachev's visit to Washington started, suggested that the Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov should resign, and that the Russian Republic should join the UN and open its consulates abroad. He also suggested that the Soviet central government should look for a new home other than Moscow. In that atmosphere Gorbachev went to Washington for summit talks which were overshadowed by the 'Yeltsin factor'. The summit, despite the positive speculations, failed to achieve a breakthrough in terms of German unification and Lithuanian independence but succeeded in establishing a new agreement leading to nuclear warhead cuts of as much as 25 per cent by 1998. The Washington summit on the basis of the latter agreement heralded the end of the world bi-polar political system and the US emerged as the world's sole superpower.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Soviet Union, Iran and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait**

On 2 August 1990, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait shocked the world and turned the region into a major crisis. The Soviet position regarding the incident must be seen in the light of the ramifications of the incident as whole. In fact Moscow had many reasons to see itself closely and deeply involved in the incident: (i) the USSR still was a military

superpower and should have responded to its global interest - however non-existent by that time;<sup>54</sup> (ii) the proximity of the region (a few hundred miles away from Soviet land borders) was an element of anxiety in regard to its national security concerns;<sup>55</sup> (iii) Iraq - still a Soviet ally - had captured Kuwait mainly with Soviet provided arms while a few thousand Soviet specialists were working in Iraq;<sup>56</sup> (iv) the course of the competition with the United States over the influence in the region had not yet been terminated.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps on a different occasion, Moscow would have seen the Persian Gulf crisis as a desirable event for the potential it had to put the so-called free world's 'vital interest' in jeopardy. But Moscow neither had the intention nor the power to play politics over this issue.

The Soviet official policy position which could have benefited *vis-à-vis* the Gulf crisis was proclaimed by Shevardnadze earlier in the year. A few months prior to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and on the occasion of Namibia's independence, the Soviet Foreign Minister had illustrated the Kremlin's new perception of 'the application of force to solve problems at home and abroad' when he said: 'We are against the use of force in any region and we are particularly against the use of force domestically'.<sup>58</sup>

On the basis of the policy pronounced by Shevardnadze, the Soviet Union had virtually abandoned its earlier commitments and had accepted the new world order. The Iraqi regime perhaps was the first in the Third World to take note of the new changes and move to fill the vacuum that Soviet power had left behind. The old balance of power had provided the small states with an opportunity to manoeuvre between the big powers and secure their positions within the international order. After the ending of the world bipolar political system, these states were equally exposed to the power projection of the United States and nonetheless, vulnerable to it. These states could have been punished if their independent foreign policy was not in line with the global interests of the United States. One option was to join the US global camp and the other was to become strong to deflect the danger of being bullied by the bigger powers.

However, Iraq, after an eight-year war with Iran, emerged as a mighty power and had its own interpretation of the post-cold war politics and the way to solve its differences with the neighbouring states even at the cost of 'vital interests of the greater powers'. Baghdad was seemingly committed to test the the US limitation in the absence of the Soviet balancing factor. This perception in a different arena and in a smaller scale was practised while Iran decided to establish its own power base in the Caucasian and Central Asian republics. In summary, the regional powers such as Iran and Iraq, before the disintegration process of the Soviet Union was accomplished and the crucial change in the old balance of power had taken place, decided to move to protect their strategic interests in the region.

The new Gulf War provided yet another occasion for an examination of the new Soviet foreign policy in the Third World, invented after the termination of the Iran-Iraq War and the retreat of the Red Army from Afghanistan. Soviet Third World policy, particularly towards South West Asia and the Middle East where it had been steadily retreating since 1988, faced a new dilemma when Arab unity suffered a fresh backlash with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Moscow became disappointed when the United States managed to have the Arab States rally round its regional ends in the Middle East more than ever before - amongst them were the Soviets' long-time friends such as Syria.<sup>59</sup>

In response to the suggestion by Iraq of linking the withdrawal of its troops from Kuwait to the withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon, and the Israelis' from the occupied Arab territories, Soviet spokesman, reflecting the Kremlin's indecisiveness and its lack of strategy, stated that, 'The USSR advocates a peaceful political settlement of the conflict'. The Soviet spokesman in fact repeated the same policy position pronounced by the Soviet foreign minister a few months earlier and long before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait had taken place.<sup>60</sup>



The Soviet media, which were still enjoying an unprecedented freedom of expression instead of the old fashioned backing of the state's official stands, voiced the Kremlin's critical position in the Middle East and graphically described the situation without prejudice. In an article by *Izvestia's* political commentator, Kondrashov, the 'relative weakness of the Soviet position' was clearly stated: 'If we were to think in the categories of the cold war, the new crisis [in the Persian Gulf] has posed a greater threat to the West but demonstrated the relative weakness of our own position'.<sup>61</sup> He then went on to say, 'The Arabs have not responded to Moscow's appeal that the aggression be countered only within the framework of the UN and this is further proof of their sober calculation of which side has the power advantage. Let us also recall the overall background, which is of decisive importance in this particular situation - the multifaceted domestic crisis in the Soviet Union. It forces us to lie low, so to speak, in keeping with our modest capabilities. What next? In the Middle East, too, we are ridding ourselves of the pretensions of a superpower that automatically - with or without justification - opposes its rival. Living according to our means, here, too, we are bidding farewell to costly ambitions and seeking a more modest place'.<sup>62</sup>

Kondrashov's revealing analysis of the Soviet position in the Third World and the Middle East portrays quite realistically the shrinking place of a discredited superpower in its final days. Of course the remaining parts of the Soviet Empire, particularly the Russian Federation, would need to have a strategic presence in the region.

On 14 August 1990 as international pressure against Iraq's act of aggression was mounting, Saddam Hussein, in order to concentrate his forces in Kuwait and secure his Eastern and Southern flanks (common borders with Iran), made a peace offer to Iran. The Iranian regime, quite surprised by such an unexpected offer, did not hesitate to accept it.<sup>63</sup> Moscow, aware of the historic magnitude of the new initiative, warmly welcomed the Iraqi initiative to settle their differences with Iran and tried to play a catalyst role towards it. The new development, which came out of the blue, was quite pleasing to the

Soviets since Moscow could see in the peace settlement between Iran and Iraq a greater degree of stability for the region.

A Soviet statement issued on 16 August 1990 hoped that the initiative could 'put an end to a serious source of tension in the Persian Gulf'.<sup>64</sup> The Soviet statement implied that perhaps with the Iran-Iraq conflict terminated it would be possible to create a new basis for ending the Gulf crisis.

Vladimir Belyakov, a *Pravda* commentator who believed that the 'Iranian opposition to the deployment of the US armed forces in the region would serve Soviet Middle Eastern policy', supported a peaceful alternative to the Iran-Iraq conflict and hoped that 'The implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions on restoring Kuwait's independence would cut the ground from under the feet of the American military forces in the region'.<sup>65</sup> But Iraq, regardless of the Soviets' aspirations for peace in the Persian Gulf, had a plan which was different from the perception of the Kremlin which could see in the light of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait the 'collapse of the Arab world'.<sup>66</sup> From the Soviet point of view the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and its inevitable consequences would have led to the further political influence and military presence of the US in the area.

Perhaps the Soviets could have reduced the damage inflicted to their interests by the Gulf crisis with some economic gains, if their domestic problems had allowed them to do so. With economic sanctions imposed on Iraq and the oil price increased by 20 per cent the USSR could have had its trade balance significantly improved, but a sharp decline in oil production dashed all its hopes to take advantage of the oil price rise and its political impediments denied it a lucrative business in Iraq. In fact in 1990, the Soviet Union, once a major oil producer, was just about to experience a domestic oil shortage.<sup>67</sup>

In September the USSR moved closer to the camp assembled and organised by the US against Iraq. The Soviet Union with a few thousand specialists in Iraq was faced with

a painful dilemma since getting close to Baghdad in order to rescue its citizens would have provoked the United States, and getting tough with Iraq would certainly have put their lives in danger. The Kremlin had already accused the US and Western media of having a part in the Iraqi military invasion of Kuwait and was under pressure from the newly formed groups at home first to take Soviet subjects out of Iraq and to keep Soviet foreign policy free of its old obligations. Entangled in an awkward position, Gorbachev, after summit talks in Helsinki with George Bush in early September, decided to take a new action as he warned Iraq: 'We are determined to see this aggression end, and if the current steps fail to end it, we are prepared to consider additional ones consistent with the UN charter'.<sup>68</sup>

The Soviet president implied that the application of force and also a joint military operation with US against Iraq could not be ruled out. Clearly the new step was a departure from the Kremlin's old policy in which the Soviet Union rather than standing by one of its friends and a valuable ally, was taking a position against it. This is not to say that the Kremlin's warning was an indication of a changing heart in Moscow, which had previously been against military solutions for the Gulf crisis; as Gorbachev quite sincerely confessed the same day, it was 'better to resolve the situation through political ways'.<sup>69</sup> However the new tough line adopted by Moscow was in part due to the Kremlin's desperation to extract Soviet citizens from Iraq. On the other hand the Soviet temptation to take part in a military action particularly under the banner of the UN or in a joint military command with the United States cannot be totally dismissed, since Moscow preferred to be a part of the solution in the Gulf crisis even if this role required a military partnership.

Later in September 1990 Soviet foreign ministry spokesman Gennadii Gerasimov, reflecting the new trends in the Kremlin, said that 'The Soviet Union would be willing to provide troops for a UN peace keeping force in the Persian Gulf if they were under a joint command that included Soviet generals'.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps Moscow was worried that it would be

excluded from forthcoming developments in the Gulf if its contribution had not satisfied the United States. The hastily organised summit talks held between Bush and Gorbachev in Helsinki demonstrated that the Soviet Union and the United States had far more in common than disagreements over world issues particularly in the Persian Gulf. It was clear that the United States wanted to exploit the potential created by the Gulf crisis to cement the US-Soviet relationship. In fact after four decades of diplomacy by the United States devoted to keeping the Soviet Union out of the Middle East, Washington and Moscow were working together in the Middle East with the Soviet Union the junior partner.

Two months later as the Gulf crisis was moving towards its most critical stage, Georgii Shakhnagarov, a close foreign policy adviser to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, reflecting the Kremlin's state of policy confusion in regard to the Gulf crisis, noted that: 'The Soviet Union will not send troops to fight in a possible Persian Gulf War, due to the continuing effects at home of its disastrous intervention in Afghanistan'. He bluntly told the *Washington Post* that 'neither the Soviet Government nor its people would accept a new "military adventure" less than two years after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in February 1989'.<sup>71</sup>

In mid-September 1990 the Soviet Union, resorting to the 'policy of the carrot and stick', joined the US in invoking UN powers to use force against Iraq without any comment on its contribution. The Security Council, in an extraordinary session at foreign minister level on 15 September 1990, voted 14 to one in favour of an air embargo against Iraq - with Cuba casting the negative vote. The Soviet foreign minister who presided over the Council meeting emphasised later that the Soviet Union insisted on resolving the crisis through diplomacy.<sup>72</sup>

During the Gulf crisis, for the very same reason which had encouraged Israel and the United States to support continuation of the war between Iran and Iraq,<sup>73</sup> the Islamic

Republic of Iran, since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, silently favoured a full-scale military operation against Iraq. This view remained valid even after it became evident that Iraq could not hold on to what it had achieved in the Persian Gulf.

The Iraqi offer of a peace settlement, although it impressed Iran, did not change its strategic speculation nor alter its broad support for the military operation against Iraq. In order to make the forthcoming battle as drastic as possible to both sides, Iran favoured helping Iraq to take on the United States and the United States were convinced that Iran would not take any action in the conflict. However, the Kremlin, under pressure from the US to take a symbolic military part in the Gulf conflict, and also facing a serious demand by the politically awakening Soviet media to keep its distance from any military operation in the Gulf, was caught in the cross-fire. Despite Iran, the Soviet Union could not adopt a policy of neutrality since it was forced by international expectations to act as a responsible global power and take a position against Iraq. It is necessary to mention that even at this stage of US-USSR co-operation, the strong opposition of Moscow to the US presence in the Gulf was not subject to change.<sup>74</sup>

At this point Soviet interests in the Gulf converged with Iran's official policies. Iran formally proclaimed its impartiality towards the conflict (although it vigorously condemned the occupation of Kuwait), and was quite prepared to co-operate with the Soviet Union in the hope of taking full advantage of the ongoing crisis. Indeed there were grounds for common anxieties in Teheran and Moscow as the conflict was taking place in their backyard, as well as a good deal of opportunities for regional co-operation. The Soviet Union had good reason to approach Iran and ask for collaboration and assistance to secure their ends, the same way as Iran needed the Soviet support to have a stronger hand in the Gulf game.

In October 1990 the Soviet Union seemingly was in a position to mediate in the Gulf crisis, although mediation in the US term meant 'Iraqi compliance with the UN

charter' and an 'unconditional withdrawal of Saddam from Kuwait'. In other words Soviet diplomacy, without any opportunity for manoeuvring, was expected to play the role of a messenger not a powerful arbiter or even a negotiator.

By the end of October, despite an emerging chance for a breakthrough in the Gulf, the Soviet envoy, a veteran journalist and academic Yevgeni Primakov, was despatched to Baghdad to meet the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. This was Gorbachev's personal envoy's second visit to Baghdad in less than a month and after touring the US, UK, France and Italy as a part of Moscow's efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Persian Gulf crisis.<sup>75</sup> The Soviets' hectic diplomacy could do nothing but take the messages of the allied countries to Baghdad and in part try to keep the communication door with Iraq open. This was to the advantage of the US, which needed to play for time in order to get prepared for a military operation against Iraq.

The Soviet Union, evidently lacking the means to force Iraq, had only a voice to raise and suggest the Iraqi leaders agree to withdraw from Kuwait. The Iraqi leaders entering the final phase of the conflict knew that the war with the US was inevitable. Thus, they were getting prepared for a defeat and to claim it as a victory. The way the conflict was proceeding without any influence being exerted or inflicted by Moscow, and the marginal role left for Moscow to play in the Gulf, showed that the Kremlin was more of a witness than an essential factor in developments in its backyard.

At the time of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait there were as many as 3,350 Soviet military specialists in Iraq. After the invasion and while the threat of military action against Iraq was mounting Baghdad implied that it might use more than 10,000 Western citizens as a 'human shield' to protect its military and civilian installations against the allied air raids. Such implications, however, indirectly included Soviet citizens as well. By the end of November only 26 Soviets had managed to leave Iraq and with the threat

of a military confrontation closer, the lives of Soviet subjects in Iraq was becoming a matter of serious concern for the Kremlin.

On 27 November 1990 V. Petrovsky, the USSR Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and representative of the Soviet leadership and President Gorbachev himself, paid a visit to Teheran and met with the Iranian President Rafsanjani and the Foreign Minister Velayati. The main topic of the talks in Teheran was the evacuation of Soviet citizens from Iraq through Iran. The Iranian leaders, keen to strengthen their relations with Moscow, to improve their international image and to break their isolation, promised to assist the Soviets wholeheartedly, which to some extent was a measure to compensate the US role which had deliberately kept ignoring them in the Gulf conflict. Petrovsky, apparently satisfied with the result of his visit to Teheran, told *Izvestia* that 'The positions of the USSR and the Islamic Republic of Iran are close'. He also revealed that Velayati had stated, if need be, that Iran was ready to assist in the departure of Soviet citizens from Iraq through Iranian territory. This was the second time that Iran had pledged to assist the release of the Soviet citizens since the Red Army withdrew from Afghanistan.<sup>76</sup>

In December 1990 despite the rest of the world to which the Gulf crisis was a hot issue, Moscow like all other major Soviet cities had a different problem to handle, food shortages or even the prospect of starvation. As the economy continued to spiral downwards, the Soviet Union was moving closer to its final destination. The discredited empire through its painful transitional course to the market economy was overwhelmed by numerous problems as the rouble had lost much of its buying power, and in Moscow and Leningrad panic buying had emptied store shelves, oil shortages had slowed production and transportation of goods, ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus and Central Asia had disrupted supply routes, and in the Ukraine farmers were withholding grain - anticipating higher market prices. Gorbachev, who favoured a tough line to avert the 'disaster', had two major challenges on his mind: to get food to the people who needed it

and to hold onto power and prevent either a military or a populist move removing him from power.

## Conclusion

At the end of 1990, nonetheless, with the protest resignation of the Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze from office, announced in the Congress of People's Deputies on 20 December 1990, Soviet diplomacy was plunged into further uncertainty. Shevardnadze's resignation came after a swing to the right of Gorbachev on 3 December 1990 by appointing a new hard-line interior Minister, ahead of a vital parliamentary debate on a 'New Union Treaty' designed to keep the Soviet Union's restless republics under Moscow's control. Replacing Vadim Bakatin by Boris Pugo was interpreted as a move to the right in order to keep the Red Army calm. Gorbachev, under pressure from party officials to end the country's growing economic and political crisis and also keen to put the government under his control, resorted to the 'law-and-order' slogan and presumed the new appointment would help his cause. It was only 24 hours before Shevardnadze's resignation that Gorbachev had threatened to impose a state of emergency or direct rule over the areas in which there was a possibility of chaos. Shevardnadze warned that 'reactionaries' were on the way and 'dictatorship' lay ahead as he said: 'I resign, let that be my flag, let that be my protest against the advance of dictatorship'.<sup>77</sup> The Soviet Foreign Minister a week ahead of his resignation had re-stated the Soviet foreign policy in the Gulf. In addressing the law makers in Moscow on 12 December 1990, Shevardnadze said: 'None of our moves on the international scene and none of our diplomatic moves implied, given even the wildest fantasy, any participation of Soviet combat, auxiliary or any other troops or units in any military operations in the Persian Gulf area'.<sup>78</sup>

By the end of 1990 Soviet-Iranian relations were at their best. Although only limited room for economic and technical co-operation between the two countries still



remained, nonetheless military and political co-operation had developed so as to bring the two neighbouring states close to each other in a way quite unprecedented during earlier years. In fact with the threat of the Soviet Union against Iran diminished, discredited communism on the verge of a total collapse, and the Kremlin's support for the left wing opposition in Iran terminated, Iran could have considered the Soviet Union more of a potential ally than anything else. Quite interestingly, in 1990 if there was a matter of speculation between the two states, it was mainly due to the concern reflected from the Soviet side about the role Iran could have played to damage its national interests, not the opposite. Indeed the Soviets were right in their speculation as they could see the Afghan problem was far from solved, the ethnic conflicts in Caucasus and Central Asia were continually deteriorating and the tendencies for the Islamic fundamentalism in the region was growing.

Regarding Soviet-Iranian relations in 1990, one could argue that Iran for the first time during the previous seventy years had the upper hand in dealing with its big neighbour and could speak from a position of strength. However, the sense of understanding and mutual interest between Teheran and Moscow was much greater than the marginal speculations over the existing differences over the Islamic issues in Central Asia and Afghan crisis. Therefore, the two countries were about to establish the ground for a broad range of economic, political and military co-operation and explore the potential for further closeness. Although the Soviet Union was undergoing a large change which could have immensely affected not only the course of politics in the region - including the Soviet-Iranian relationship - it could also bring the world into a new area in which the old rule of the political games seemed obsolete.

## NOTES

1. The new tendency had no chance to become public in so far as Iran's independent policy orientation had to be appreciated by the new leaders even after Khomeini whose political might still was a deciding factor in Iran's political arena.
2. *Pravda*, 22 June 1989, p.4.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Pravda*, 24 June 1989, p.1. See also *Teheran Times* quoted IRNA 23 June, p.1. Rafsanjani's visit to Moscow was highly publicised in Iran in order to indicate by the new leadership, that the country is stable and well-treated by the outside world.
5. Rajan Menon believes that the reason behind the Soviets' decision to offer the Third World highly sophisticated weapons is the 'fierce competition in the arms market' particularly by the USA. For an excellent account of the Soviet policy regarding military export and the reasons behind the Soviets persistent attempts in the Third World see Rajan Menon, *Soviet Power and the Third World*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1986, pp.198-210.
6. Tass quoted in *Pravda*, 23 June 1989, p.4.
7. The Iranians' pledge has never been mentioned either in the Soviet or the Iranian press, but considering the Soviet sensitivity towards Afghanistan, the position of Iran and the history of the talks between the two countries indicates that Iran had been approached and had promised to co-operate with the Soviets, however such a case was indirectly referred to in the joint statement issued in Moscow.
8. For an extensive coverage of the last leg of Rafsanjani's visit to the Soviet Union see *Ettelaat*, Teheran, 25 June 1989, p.1.
9. The signs of forgiving, in the policy attitudes of the Islamic regime has a lot to do with the so-called pragmatist approach of the new leaders to the foreign issues in order to take full advantage of the latest developments. In doing so they are well prepared to go far beyond expectations if the Islamic basic principles are not tarnished. The same friendly attitudes have been seen towards Iran's arch enemy, at the height of the second Gulf crisis in 1990, when Iraq offered Iran a generous peace agreement.
10. At that stage growing ties with the Soviet Union was more important to the Iranian leaders than supporting the ethnic struggles in the Soviet Republics. In fact Rafsanjani's visit to Azerbaijan was designed to imply to the Azaris that they should not rely on help coming from Iran if their resistance would have a secessionist angle and be focussed on independence. Iran at that stage for obvious reasons did not want to cross the Soviets even over Azerbaijan.
11. *Izvestia*, 1 August 1989, p.5.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Tass quoted in *Izvestia*, 1 August 1989, p.5.
14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*
16. Soviet Foreign Ministry statement, Tass, *Pravda*, 4 August 1989. The Soviet statement reflected an inclination by the Soviets towards the Iranian call for condemnation of the Israeli's act of terrorism. It contained items to please the Islamic groups in Lebanon. These measures were necessary to prepare the way for the Soviet diplomatic mediation through Iran.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Al-Nahar*, Lebanon, quoted by API 3 August 1989.
19. See B. Ivanov, *Izvestia*, 4 August 1989, p.5.
20. *Libération*, 'Soviets halt execution in the Lebanon', 6 August 1989 translated in *Kayhan*, London, 14 August 1989.
21. For a reliable historical account of the ties between the Iranian Azaris and people of the Soviet Azerbaijan (Aran) see Lederer and Vucinich, *The Soviet Union and the Middle East: The Post World War II Era*, Stanford, 1974; and Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Soviet Iranian Relations: A Quarter-century of Freeze and Thaw*, Hoover Institution, USA, 1974, pp.55-77.
22. IRNA cited an anonymous Iranian foreign office spokesman, 2 January 1990.
23. IRNA in Persian, 3 January 1990.
24. Although Gorbachev arguably has been in favour of the relaxation of tensions with the ethnic groups inside the Soviet Union but impediments of greater forces prevented him taking a more liberal gesture towards nationalities and changing the classic concept of nationalism. In the region of Islamic heritage, on the southern part of the Soviet Union, conflicting regional and ethnic interests although a component of the politics of 'restructuring', nevertheless has been a different issue and necessarily required a treatment totally different from what has been seen in the Baltic Republics. In this regard see William J. Bishop, 'Domestic Politics and Gorbachev's Security Policy' in George E. Hudson (ed.), *Soviet National Security Under Perestroika*, Boston and London: Unwin Hyman, 1989, pp.131-5.
25. Tass quoted in *Pravda*, 6 January 1990, p.4.
26. At that stage Moscow presumed it could confront the changing ethnic interests by changing the face of the executives. For the statement by Vezirov and his view points see *Izvestia*, 9 January 1990, p.5.
27. Iran and Turkey despite mutual hard feelings which had been seen between them for years - mostly originating from strong historical roots - are potential allies with strategic interests. In fact their national and regional interests are closely interconnected. The disintegration of the Soviet Union has not reduced the need for strategic co-operation between the two states. The Azeri-Armenian conflict and competition for influence in Caucasus may indulge them to confront one another rather harshly but this must be resisted for the sake of greater interests. A real coalition between Iran and Turkey - both non-Arab Muslims - could create a new power centre with potential to serve the stability of the region. The imminent threat of a bloody conflict renewed in Caucasus - Georgia, Armenia and

Azerbaijan - and rather slower emerging signs of unrest in Central Asia, sooner or later would make formation of a new regional security system inevitable. In such a system the two neighbouring Islamic states would have an important role to play. This role will significantly be increased if they manage to sort out their insignificant differences.

28. For the text of the debate see *Pravda*, 18 February 1990.
29. Tass quoted in *Pravda*, 19 February 1990, p.5.
30. *Ibid.*
31. For the text of Shevardnadze's plan and the Soviet Foreign Ministry statement on Afghanistan see *Pravda*, 14 February 1990, p.4
32. *Teheran Times*, 22 February 1990, p.1.
33. See the same source quoting the Persian papers commenting on the talks between the Soviet delegate and Iranian officials.
34. Perhaps this was the first time that to the sadness of the Third World countries who had benefited more from the world bi-polar political system, the smaller states sadly realised, the old competition between the East and West was virtually over. For an extensive review of the roots, cause and effect of the 'General improvement in the course of US-USSR relations, started with Gorbachev's leadership in the Kremlin', see Stephen L. Flanagan, 'New Thinking: The Debate on Strategy and Security' in Carl G. Jacobsen, *Strategic Power USA/USSR*, London: Macmillan, 1990, pp.479-484.
35. *Izvestia*, 16 March 1990, p.4.
36. API 8 April 1990. For detail of the Soviet foreign minister's discussion in Washington see *New York Times*, 19 April 1990.
37. *New York Times*, 19 April 1990.
38. *Ibid.*
39. IRNA quoted in *Teheran Times*, 22 February 1990, p.1.
40. API reporting from Philippines, 19 February 1990.
41. See *Abrar*, published in Teheran, 25 February, p.3 and *Jomhuri Eslami*, 26 February 1990, p.2.
42. *Teheran Times*, 22 February 1990, p.2.
43. For a review of the evidence and the plan behind the militarisation of Iraq see coverage by *Newsweek*, 9 April 1990. For more, see *Washington Post*, 13 August 1990.
44. *Pravda*, 12 July 1990.
45. *Pravda*, 14 April 1990, p.4.

46. See various Iranian journals from April to July 1990, many of them quoted in abstract in the English language daily paper, *Teheran Times*, for the same period.
47. For news of the new publication see *Pravda*, 12 May 1990, p.4.
48. Tass news agency quoted in *Pravda*, 26 March 1990, p.4.
49. 'Lithuanian Issue Solely Internal', says Velayati, *Teheran Times*, 8 May 1990, p.1.
50. *Ibid.*
51. Shevardnadze's Message to Iran, *Teheran Times*, 8 May 1990, p.7.
52. The Russian Presidential election took place on 12 June 1991.
53. For the signs of the Soviets' willingness to agree with a quick German unification see the *Washington Post*, 7 May 1990. The Soviet foreign minister's proposal on the issue set forward in Washington during his recent visit to the US. The only obstacle which remained, even after the Gorbachev-Bush summit, was the case of a unified Germany's membership of NATO.
54. In this regard see Mark N. Katz, *The Third World in Soviet Military Thought*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982, pp.83-87.
55. For an elaborate essay on continuity and change in Soviet national security policy see Roger E. Kanet, 'Changing Soviet National Security Policy in Relations with the Third World' cited in George E. Hudson, *Soviet National Security Under Perestroika*, pp.248-51.
56. For description of the Soviet interests in Iraq see Haim Shemesh, *Soviet Iraqi Relations 1986-88*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 1992, pp.181-240.
57. For the roots of the US-USSR continued competition in South West Asia and the Persian Gulf see Lederer and Vucinich, *ibid.*, pp.34-53.
58. Tass cited in *Pravda*, 24 March 1990, p.4.
59. Syria which had been told by Moscow in 1989 that it could not relay on military aid from the Soviet Union, was searching for new sources for the same purpose. Saudi Arabia was one of the options. Indeed, the role Saudi played to convince Syria to join the coalition forces against Saddam, was more important than the conviction by the US appeal. The Egyptian issue was slightly different since Cairo already had working relations with Washington. However if Syria had not joined the coalition, then participation of the other Arab states would have been uncertain.
60. Tass cited in *Pravda*, 14 August 1990, p.4.
61. See V. Kondrashov, *Izvestia*, 14 August 1990, p.5.
62. *Ibid.*
63. See the Iranian daily papers on 15 August 1990. Iran carefully embraced the move and reflected its satisfaction and readiness for negotiation. The Iraqi peace offer was interpreted in Iran as a victory for the Islamic Republic's foreign policy. In this regard see IRNA, statement by the Iranian foreign office, 18 August 1990.

64. *Izvestia*, 16 August 1990, p.1.
65. V. Belyakov, *Pravda*, 16 August 1990.
66. See Konstantin Geivandov, *Izvestia*, 16 August, p.4. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf suddenly became a hot issue in the Soviet Union and Soviet foreign policy absorbed lots of attention from the media. The new trends towards foreign policy gathered more pace since the Kremlin decided to play a more active role than before in order to compensate in part some of the losses in the Third World.
67. See an article by E. Guseinov in *Izvestia*, 17 August 1990, p.4.
68. API reporting Gorbachev's remark made on 9 September 1990.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Izvestia*, 8 September 1990, p.4.
71. AFP 2 December 1990. Report by *Reuters* on 15 September 1990.
72. Teheran has always claimed that the United States and Israel were both supporting Saddam to wage war against Iran. In November 1982 the former Secretary of the States Henry Kissinger noted that, 'continuation of the Gulf War would serve the strategic interests of the United States'. The Israeli statesman Izhaq Rabin during an interview in December 1983 pointed out that continuation of the war deflects the threat of both Iran and Iraq against Israel. In support of these policies, the United States and Israel so far as the Iran-Iraq War was 'under control' militarily were helping the warring parties. The Iran-contra scandal, revealed in August 1986 is all about the US-Israeli clandestine arms deal with Iran. Iraq too has been the beneficiary of the US military support since 1984 up to the very last moment of the war with Iran in 1988. For evidence see Haim Shemish, *The Soviet Iraqi Relations 1986-88*, London: Lynne Rienner, 1992, p.195.
73. See Eduard Volodin in *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 30 November 1989, p.3.
74. AFP, 28 October 1990.
75. See the article by M.R. Taghizadeh, 'Clandestine deal to rescue the Soviet citizens' in *Kayhan*, London, 21 December 1990, p.6.
76. CSCE quoted in *Teheran Times*, 28 November 1990.
77. For the text of Shevardnadze's speech see *Izvestia*, 12 December 1990.
78. Tass cited in *Pravda*, 13 December 1990, p.4.

## CHAPTER 7

### TERMS OF OBSESSION 1990-91

#### WEST, USSR AND THE GULF WAR

At the beginning of 1991 Soviet foreign policy in regard to the Gulf crisis remained unchanged as the decision to remove the Iraqi occupiers from Kuwait appeared an inevitable answer to the conflict. Although a deadline (15 January 1991) was set for starting military operation against Iraq, if Baghdad ignored the UN resolution and failed to withdraw from Kuwait by then, it turned out that the United States, in spite of its willingness to engage in talks was already committed to attack Iraq no matter even if she did withdraw. The Soviet Union still rejected the application of force and continued its diplomatic efforts in the hope it might succeed in averting the danger of an all-out war. Iran in 1991 officially stuck to the same policy, and more or less shared with the Soviet Union a similar apprehension.

Iran's standing policy towards the Persian Gulf crisis was reflected in Rafsanjani's remark made on 18 December 1990 during a question-answer session with Beheshti University students in Teheran as he pointed out: 'The only solution to the Persian Gulf crisis is the unconditional withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait. We feel very uneasy that the Iraqi people are suffering. The shuttle diplomacy being made by our foreign minister nowadays is an effort to avoid the outbreak of a war in the region. We want to prevent war and are strongly opposed to Iraq being battered by the US, nevertheless, the responsibility lies with the Iraqi regime'.<sup>1</sup>

On 1 January 1991 Iran reiterated its 'policy of neutrality' in the event of war in the Gulf and emphasised that it would not allow the warring parties to use its land, water or air space against each other. The Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati, addressing a gathering in Teheran University, noted that: 'We do not want to enter this predicament, since we do not consider either of the two sides (Iraq and US) and their conduct to be righteous. We believe that the crisis should be solved by peaceful means'.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime Iran denied a report published by Saudi Arabian *Daily Al-Madina* which said that Saddam Hussein proposed to his Iranian counterpart Rafsanjani a military alliance between their two countries in the Gulf. A senior official of the Iranian Foreign Ministry told the *Teheran Times* that: 'As the 15 January deadline is drawing nearer and some countries are trying to involve Iran in the crisis while the Iranian stance in the crisis is clear and there is no change in the policy of the Islamic Republic'.<sup>3</sup>

Iran, which had a firm policy towards the Gulf crisis, managed to stay on the right track and stand by its strategic interests without facing a serious problem. Continuity of the conflict and changes in the policies of the involved parties did not affect its consistency unless for the sake of marginal corrections. In regard to the principal objectives Iran was keen to see the Iraqi military machine dismantled, the regional balance of power shifted to its own side, and the old credence it had enjoyed for so long as a regional power before the revolution restored. In regard to the US factor, Iran desired the American military presence in the Persian Gulf diminished if it were to be there for long, and the Soviet Union to continue competing with the United States.

The Soviet Union's foreign policy objectives in the Gulf in many areas had similarities with those of Iran since Moscow favoured staying out of trouble and having only a limited involvement in the Gulf conflict; it also wanted to see the strong US military presence in the region ended, the danger of war in its backyard averted and the Gulf conflict settled through a political solution. Moscow favoured, too, having a reasonable influence in the region and being offered a role to play in the Gulf's future



developments. What Moscow liked less was to see a military coalition taking place between Iran and Iraq or the United States managing to get close to Iran and in this way restoring its old position in Teheran.

The United States had a policy objective contrary to those of Iran and the Soviet Union in many areas. Washington's determination to dismantle Iraq's military machine was an exception, in which Iran's national security objectives and the US strategic interests in the Gulf converged. The last thing Iran wanted was to see Iraq, already at odds within OPEC, an oil power even stronger than Saudi Arabia - another arch rival in the Gulf competition and in OPEC. At the beginning of 1991 US policy towards the Soviet Union had two major goals: maintaining international unity against Iraq, and clinching a crucial arms reduction treaty with Moscow.<sup>4</sup> The negative aspect of US foreign policy was to deny the Soviet Union chances of increasing its influence in the Gulf and preventing Iran from fishing in troubled waters. Washington was interested to utilise Iran and the Soviet potential in order to achieve its own purposes, but not at any cost. Meanwhile the US administration seemed quite careful to keep both countries in check and constant control at least up to the end of the conflict and the establishment of a new security order in the region.

Iran, on the basis of its own perception of US intentions and due to a deep suspicion built up since 1979 between the two countries, was quite careful not to provoke the United States while it was busily intimidating Iraq, particularly after the peace offer was made to her by Saddam. Iran in fact had a considerable interest in the continuation of the Gulf crisis. Iraq was ready to meet all the requirements Iran had put forth to achieve a peace settlement. This was a purely business-like approach to the issue for the both parties since neither could trust the other, but the options, particularly for Iraq, were far too limited since it was locked between the enemies. For instance in the case of Iraqi aircraft, either they had to be left on the ground and exposed to air attacks and annihilation by the allied forces, or they had to be sent to Iran in the hope of being

recovered one day. Iraq, arguably under the influence of the Soviets, decided to go for the second choice. Despite a first day denial and then a pretence of being indifferent, it can be assumed that the Iranian leadership was delighted to give shelter to a large number of Iraqi combat planes as well as commercial aircraft - all of which were added to the Iranian air force after the Gulf War. Although loyal to the sanctions imposed on Iraq by the UN, Iran under the pretext of exporting humanitarian aid and foodstuffs to Iraq could have enjoyed a lucrative market in its arch-rival's land. Denying Iraq its oil exports as a part of the UN sanctions, could have given Iran a chance to replace its quota in OPEC with its own products. Soaring oil prices resulted from the instability in the Gulf were appreciated in Teheran since Iran could hope to improve its own financial position as a result. However, Iran, determined to take full advantage of the new development, did not hesitate when it felt the need to sympathise with its old enemy for the sake of publicity in the Islamic world. In the meantime Iran was quite careful to keep and protect the recent gains which in the long run were required to be taken into account in US strategic plans in the region.

Future developments could have taken a number of different courses, and the eventual outcome was inconsistent with Iran's general expectation. The huge military preparation on the both sides of the conflict was a clear sign of a major confrontation which was going to have clear winners and losers.<sup>5</sup> Iran like all other major players in the Persian Gulf was determined to avoid being grouped with the losers if not invited to be on the winning side. The next step was to try to consolidate the gains it had made. If the Iraqi military machine, for example, had a chance to survive, a new round of the Iran-Iraq conflict would have been inevitable and the recent gains dissipated. Therefore Iran in its strategic calculation had to have a balanced approach to both enemies in order to minimise the negative consequences of the developments in case the conflict did not turn out favourably.

First of all the Iraqi offer for a peace settlement had to be accepted without hesitation, second, the US presence in the Persian Gulf ought to be considered as an important factor since its position in the Gulf seemed unassailable. Teheran realised that Washington was bound to be a leading power in Gulf politics in the future. Had the latter been the case Iran would have been forced to walk a tightrope, in so far as it was at odds with Washington and in constant apprehension about future developments.<sup>6</sup>

It seems that it was carefully decided in Teheran how to emphasise Iran's 'determination' to defend its 'natural and legitimate interests against any aggression'. Although Iranian navy commander, Ali Shamkhani, used strong words to pronounce Iran's 'readiness' to defend the Gulf waters 'if the war started' and Iran did practically nothing, it might have provoked the United States.<sup>7</sup> Instead, on the ground, where Iran was more vulnerable and also stronger in defence, it was decided to hold a joint manoeuvre, a 'Fajar', by the forces of the regular army and the Revolution's Guard Corps in the southern and western parts of Iran.<sup>8</sup> The extent of the areas in which the manoeuvre was designed to take place (more than 2,000 kilometres long, through the northern part of Persian Gulf) showed that the Iranian regime had apparently considered a possibility in which the United States for one reason or another might have decided to launch a 'pre-emptive strike' against its territory. Therefore Teheran was to be prepared for such occasion. Of course such an assumption by the Iranians was based more on the hostile attitude towards them by the US and their analysis of forthcoming developments, rather than on reliable intelligence and solid information about the enemy's planning and movements.

Soviet foreign policy regarding the Gulf crisis, which was close to that of European states like France, was in favour of an 'international conference' on the Middle East focussed on finding political solutions to end the Gulf crisis and possibly link it to the perennial Arab-Israeli conflict. From the Soviet point of view, the undertaking by the United Nations of 'the conference' should have reduced the influence of the United States,

and Moscow, as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, expected to be given a major role in post-crisis situation. The basic theme of 'the conference' should have been 'compromise' by all the parties involved. In that case, the US would have to back down and let Saddam keep with his mighty army. Israel, too, would have to compromise and give 'land for peace' if the Gulf crisis and the Arab-Israeli conflict were linked together. Moscow, since it had nothing more to lose, would have been quite happy if such a suggestion (supported by Saddam) had a chance to materialise. But the US administration, still obsessed with pre-cold war policies and determined to deny the Soviet Union any chances for increasing its influence in the Middle East, was to reject the idea of an international approach to the conflict.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Washington, at least during that crucial period, could not see a positive point in linking the Gulf crisis with the Arab-Israeli conflict before the fate of Saddam was decided. Washington was committed to preventing Saddam becoming an oil power, and it had firmly decided to demolish his army in order to implement a new security arrangement in the region.

### **Soviets looking towards the post-war situation in the Gulf**

After all the mediation efforts had failed to avert the danger of an all-out war, the Soviets stepped back to ponder their position regarding the latest developments in the Gulf. It was quite clear that the Soviet Union had no reason to join the allied forces and celebrate their victory. However in the long run the outlook could not be as bad as it seemed at first, since Moscow expected Washington's 'pyrrhic victory', at least in part, could serve the stability of the region. The Soviet Union, so close to the area and equally interested in Middle East issues, had to re-evaluate its priorities in the post-war situation. In its final analysis, the Soviet Union, given the circumstances, was forced to accept the US's inevitable victory. However, Moscow, taking into consideration a growing sense of nationalism in the Arab world, was optimistic that the US long-time presence in the

region would mean a sharp step-up in Pan-Arab, anti-Western sentiments. Besides, Moscow had some instruments in hand to use to undermine the effect of the US presence and gradually increase its own influence in the Gulf. The best chance for the Soviets to shore up their position in the Gulf region was linked to Iran, particularly since the balance of power was bound to shift from Iraq. In order to undermine the US presence in the Gulf, Teheran would have the best chance if its military capacity was increased to a level sufficient to balance US forces in the region.<sup>10</sup>

The arms sale agreement and military co-operation accord signed in July 1989 between the Soviet Union and Iran (see above, p.172), had already paved the way for closer ties between the two states. Although there was far too remote a chance to win an argument that the Soviet diplomacy had a correct reading and precise evaluation of the developments which had occurred in the region between 2 August 1990 to 15 January 1991, when it decided to sign a controversial and highly important agreement with Teheran in July 1989. However, regardless of its underlying background, in February 1991 the situation seemed a favourable one to establish a growing relationship between the two countries. Quite ironically, in arming Iran, although for different reasons, US planning was not contradictory to Soviet strategic thinking since Washington, in the absence of Iraqi power projection, needed to have a strong resistance in the Gulf, firstly, to justify its own military presence on the pretext of defending the region's smaller nations against the threat from Teheran, secondly, to secure its military exports to the area. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union seemed a loser in the Gulf War, however, there had been a slim chance left to Moscow to reduce the inflicted damages in the long run. Needless to say the Soviets' and US military thinking in regard to the arming of Iran was warmly embraced in Teheran.<sup>11</sup>

The Soviet weakness and its critical position in the post-Gulf War situation was partly reflected in the view expressed by Vitaly Gan, *Pravda's* US correspondent, who noted that, 'The (US) strategists evidently think that we are too involved in our own

internal problems to become involved in external problems as well'. He continued, 'Moscow (Americans think), is not in the right weight class to perform in the Middle East'.<sup>12</sup> The Soviets of course valued the goals expressed in the UN Security Council decision such as: protecting international law and stopping aggression, as they, too, knew that the Gulf War was all about securing the flow of oil, and shifting the balance of power from Iraq. Some other Soviet analysts observed the situation in a different way, for example, S. Kondrashov, who emphasised that 'Our (Soviet) fate, too, is being decided in the Middle East', adding that 'The success of the allies (Americans)<sup>13</sup> will, in a large part, decide the fate of the military balance in the world'. In looking at the case from a different angle, Kondrashov tried to link the US victory over Iraq to democracy in the USSR and the weakness of the Red Army as he concluded that the US might try to 'dictate' in the Middle East.<sup>14</sup>

As the Gulf War proceeded, Soviet anxiety mounted steadily. A statement by Gorbachev at the height of the war and before the ground attack against the Iraqi forces started made clear the Kremlin's deep apprehension. In fact after a long period of indecisiveness, Moscow seemed to be turning to a tougher line as the statement was in rather a harsh tone. Gorbachev in his statement, after re-affirming the 'Soviet fundamental commitment to the UN Security Council resolution', noted that 'The logic of military operations and the character of military actions pose a threat that the mandate set forth in those resolutions could be exceeded'.<sup>15</sup> For this particular reason it would be fair to argue that Soviet resistance to the US's deep advance into Iraq may have contributed to the salvation of Saddam as the US after a decisive and quick victory in the Gulf War and the securing of all its goals stopped short of entering Baghdad and 'calling for Saddam's head'.<sup>16</sup>

Gorbachev, reflecting his worry about the escalation of the war, noted that 'Judging from certain statements at the political level and in influential news media, there is a desire to accustom the people of both sides of the conflict to the idea of the

possibility of using weapons of mass destruction. Were this to occur, all world politics and the entire world community would be shaken to their foundations'. Gorbachev then suggested that 'developing a lasting and equitable security system in a region of such importance to the entire world, must begin'.<sup>17</sup> The United States in its official response to the Soviet statement apparently decided to ignore its harsh words and only referred to Moscow's formal support for the UN Security Council resolution.<sup>18</sup>

The Soviet media, generally speaking, reflected views very similar to the publications of the Persian press. For example, Viktor Ovchinnikov, reflecting his scepticism about the US's ultimate objectives in the Gulf, noted that 'the US is seeking to preserve the right to a permanent military presence in the world's most important oil producing region'.<sup>19</sup> He then, in line with Iranian views, referred to the proportions of oil imports from the Gulf (9 per cent by the US, 60 per cent by Japan, and much larger quantities imported by Europe than the USA), and continued, 'It is hardly likely that American boys are being sent to spill their blood in the Arabian sands for the sake of an alliance'.<sup>20</sup> Ovchinnikov concluded that the Gulf War was waged to place the oil fields under American military control and acquire an effective lever to exert pressure on the rival centres of economic might - Japan and Western Europe.<sup>21</sup>

In February 1991 the Persian Gulf was a burning exhibition of the latest weapons of death and destruction. Moscow, visibly wondering about the drastic function of the Western powers' fantastic arsenal of 'Smart Bombs', 'Stealth bombers', invisible to radar, and 'Patriot' anti-missiles - American made but crammed with Japanese electronics, was watching the battlefields with apprehension. One of the major conclusions Moscow should have drawn after the Gulf War perhaps was to realise that its confrontational military policy towards the West must be revised and its military doctrine changed.<sup>22</sup> In similar view, *Izvestia's* political commentator, Vitaly Kobysh, gave a graphic account of the Soviet position and while denouncing the consequences of the war, claiming that, 'Action has unfolded in a way totally different from what the UN Security Council

resolutions envisaged. Not the freeing of Kuwait, but the destruction of Iraq - that is how this war is now being perceived not only in the Arab world but in a number of Western countries as well, not to mention the Third World'.<sup>23</sup>

A day after Gorbachev's 9 February 1991 statement was issued in Moscow, he, in an attempt to improve the Soviet position in the area, launched a diplomatic offensive and sent his personal envoy, academic Yevgeny M. Primakov, to Teheran. Primakov in Teheran met with Iranian leaders. The Soviet delegate in Teheran found even more common ground with Iran than he had expected. Iran, silently happy about the ongoing systematic destruction of the Iraqi army by the allied forces, was trying to make the most out of the situation and the Soviet Union in this regard could have been an important catalyst. During the Teheran talks on 11 February 1991, Iran and the Soviet Union co-ordinated their policies and jointly pledged to prepare the ground for further co-operation and closer ties.<sup>24</sup> Teheran and Moscow at least had similar policies in public as both were against the partition of Iraq and the continuation of the US presence in the Persian Gulf.<sup>25</sup> It seems that Iran was assured that the allied forces had no plan to get Iran involved in the war if Iran remained neutral. In fact, under the circumstances, Iran's involvement in the war was the last thing the allied forces wished to face. Therefore, in order to improve its image in the Middle East and amongst the Islamic nations, Iran publicly expressed its sympathy for the Iraqi nation and denounced the 'destruction of their country under indiscriminate air raids by the allied forces'.<sup>26</sup> A few days earlier, in an attempt to express its goodwill to the allied forces, Iran without giving any reason had cancelled the highly publicised military manoeuvres of its ground forces.

Iran's double standard diplomacy paid off whilst Teheran became one of the important centres for talks and negotiations about the Gulf conflict. Iran's proclaimed policy of neutrality in the war had earned the Iraqis' confidence as they frequently turned to Teheran in order to improve their position. Quite a number of visits to Teheran by high ranking Iraqi delegates during the conflict in fact had given Iran a prime position



incomparable to any other state in the region. As an example, a day before a visit by Primakov to Teheran, the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Saadon Hamadi had a lengthy conversation with the Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati and discussed ways to bring the conflict to an end.<sup>27</sup>

Gorbachev's personal representative thereafter visited Baghdad and met with President Saddam Hussein. In Baghdad Primakov was trying to convince Saddam to agree with the US terms and to comply with the UN resolutions. It was proved later that Primakov's eleventh hour mission in Baghdad was not successful since the fate of the conflict was decided in Washington and Moscow had no power to manipulate the course of the ongoing process from the either side.<sup>28</sup>

The Soviet diplomatic attempt to prevent the war and possibly to rescue Saddam was evaluated as a failure, but the reasons behind Gorbachev's decision to unleash such a effort despite the US's disclosed policy and the ultimatum to start the war remained open for discussion. Considering his tough attitude in Azerbaijan and the crackdown on secessionist movements in the Baltic republics and the use of the army and the KGB to put a damper on perestroika, all of this could be interpreted as a playing into the hands of conservative elements at home. If this was the case then he did not need to appease them further in the field of foreign affairs through pursuing Soviet traditional policy objectives in the Gulf. In watching developments from a wider angle, it looks as if Gorbachev had a different objective in attempting a peace initiative in the Gulf, giving further chances to his 'new thinking' in foreign policy, broadening Soviet relations with the outside world, appearing as a moderate force in the Middle East and attempting to bring together the old radical friends like Syria and Iraq with more moderate regimes, reminding the world that the Soviet Union despite the crisis at home was still a real player in the region with a 'legitimate interest' to claim. Regarding Gorbachev's talent for publicity, the latest effort in addition to being an attempt to 'normalise' Soviet diplomacy could be seen as providing him with an opportunity to return to the world news and television screens.

Prior to Gorbachev's 9 February 1991 statement, Alexander Bessmertnykh, the new Soviet Foreign Minister, had visited Washington and issued a joint statement with the US Secretary of State James Baker on the Gulf conflict. The new foreign minister, due to the Soviet general position and his inexperience in the office, could have carried little weight in the US and could do nothing but pretend that Soviet diplomacy was still moving on.

The number of Iraqi aircraft which fled to the bases in Iran had sharply increased soon after the first round of Soviet last minute diplomacy had taken place. It seems that tripartite, secret talks between Iraq, Iran and the Soviet Union in Teheran and Baghdad were the main reason behind the decision to transfer a major part of the Iraqi air force to Iran. The allied forces shot down six Iraqi aircrafts before they could cross the border, but quite surprisingly, later, they totally ignored them and let them fly safely to Iran. Consequently between 147 and 152 Iraqi aircraft fled to Iran without any interception by the US air force.<sup>29</sup>

By mid-February and during the days when the start of a ground assault against Iraq seemed imminent, *Newsweek* reported that on 3 January more than 50 Iranian military officers had begun training at a naval base in the Baltic coast city of Riga, Latvia, the site of unrest and confrontation between pro-independent Latvians and Soviet troops.<sup>30</sup> Based on *Newsweek's* report the Iranian officers were instructed on how to handle submarines and defensive patrol boats. According to the report, their arrival had come despite the fact that the Latvian parliament in late 1990 protested against the presence of a previous group of Iraqi officers in Riga. The interpretation of such an event could only be a sign of close military co-operation between Iran and the Soviet Union and a taking shape of a 'national alignment between them once the Persian Gulf War was over'.<sup>31</sup>

In late February 1991 Gorbachev proposed that the Warsaw Pact as a military entity be scrapped by the following 1 April. Although the Warsaw Pact was actually dead the official announcement of its demise was an important step towards the transformation of East Europe and also a convincing sign of the rapidly changing situation inside the Soviet Union. The disappearance of the Warsaw Pact was yet another reason for the Soviet Union to revise its old military doctrine and establish a new framework for its military thinking based on new needs, free of ideological obligations.<sup>32</sup>

At the end of the Gulf War, with the 'Vietnam syndrome' wiped out and the Eastern bloc as a military threat officially ended, the United States, encouraged by domestic and international circumstances, was in a proper position to claim world leadership. In the absence of the Soviet Union it seemed that the only resistance which would have resisted US domination could have been projected from the smaller states who either might have had ambitions for regional hegemony or for pursuing a foreign policy independent of Washington. Iran in this context deserved to be placed in the forefront of Third World nations, particularly if she had managed to expand her diplomatic relations with the rest of the world.<sup>33</sup>

On the basis of these developments the so-called moderate leaders in Iran who had supported the UN resolution and maintained Iran's neutrality in the war were provided with a chance to rebuff the radical elements who had once urged a holy war against the West.

If there was only one clear winner in the Gulf War next to the United States, it was Iran whose significant gains were a windfall, achieved by chance and without a serious effort on their part. This was a victory recorded for the pro-moderation and anti-isolationist policy of the new administration in Teheran.

After the Gulf War, Iran could have wished for no more than it had gained: the Iraqi army was crushed and Shi'ite rebels were fighting for control of the country. Indeed

the Islamic revolution was again on track to cross the boundaries of Persia and effectively enter the Arab world. What an eight year war with Iraq and the full support of the late Ayatollah Khomeini had failed to achieve was indeed in the hands of the new leaders, of course with the help of the 'Great Satan', the United States. In April 1991, despite a warning by the United States prohibiting Iran from making a military advancement into Iraq, Iran already was involved in the Shi'ite uprising in the south of Iraq albeit penetration was made only to a limited extent.<sup>34</sup>

What Iran preferred to see in Iraq after the Gulf War was basically different from the desire expressed and fought for by Ayatollah Khomeini to set up a new Islamic republic in Baghdad. Iran wanted a government in Iraq with friendly attitudes towards Teheran and supporting Islamic orientations. Such a regime, from the Iranian point of view, should not have strong military teeth. At the end of March 1991, Ali Akbar Rafsanjani urged Saddam to 'submit to the will of the people' and also urged political groups in Iraq to work together.<sup>35</sup> These and other reactions to Saddam's defeat came somewhat impulsively from Teheran. The psychology of an eight-year war with Iraq in which Iran had suffered significantly led to a reckless reaction by Teheran to internal developments in Iraq. But after calculation, and weighing all aspects of the issue, Iran realised that the chaos on its Western borders would be disastrous, thus, promptly moved to bring the situation under control.

### **The Kurdish Question, OPEC and the Collapse of the USSR**

It was apparent that the Kurdish resistance in the north against the central government in Baghdad was much stronger than the Shi'ite uprising in the south, and if Iraq was being fragmented Iran's western borders would have been subjected to permanent disorder. Even worse could be a nightmare scenario based on the formation of a Kurdish government or the creation of an autonomy of the Kurds in the north-east of Iraq. Iran

together with Turkey and Syria had been against any power projection by the Kurds, and this policy had not changed. As a consequence of the new developments in Iraq, Iran had more to lose than to gain. Therefore after reviewing the latest developments and the likely outcome, Iran returned to its proclaimed policy of supporting the integrity of Iraq. If the short-lived tactic of military penetration into Iraq by the Iranian revolutionary guards or the idealist elements of the regime to support the Iraqi Shi'ite groups was inconsistent with the recent policy co-ordination between Moscow and Teheran, a swift return to the previous position cleared the way and unified their policies in the region.

The moment of the Iraqi uprising coincided with attempts by the Iranian regime to rebuild its war damage and normalise relations with the outside world. An Iranian Embassy was about to open in Amman, and Teheran and Cairo had agreed to re-establish interest sections - two big steps into the Arab lands. Iran and Britain were to resume their diplomatic relations and soon even rapprochement with the US seemed possible. The new trend towards pragmatism in Iran which emerged after the war with Iraq and was boosted by the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, together with the awareness by the Iranian clergy of the drastic consequences of ideological temptations, led to the adoption of wiser policies in the region.

The 'New Thinking' of the Soviets faded as the 'New World Order', sponsored by Washington, was becoming the world's catchphrase particularly in the Middle East where the United States had scored a major victory against Iraq. Indeed the US triumph in the Gulf War was a victory against the Soviet Union too. Relying on its strong position in the Gulf and quite confident about the future market for US military exports, the United States was determined to curtail Soviet arms export to the region when it called for arms control in the Middle East. At least one of the concepts of the new world order, suggested by George Bush - generally ambivalent to the rest of the world - perhaps was clear to the Washington administration as they pushed to take early advantage of the military gains they had made in the Middle East. Increasing the US arms export to the

area and excluding rival exporters such as the Soviet Union and China might have been thought of before the recent call for the 'new security system in the Middle East' and the necessity for arms control in the Third World pronounced.

China was defiant of the new pressure by the United States and the Soviet Union it seemed would follow suit, if domestic impediments allowed the Kremlin return to its old policy objectives in the Third World. Iran, increasingly aware of its growing importance in the region, had the money and the appetite to encourage both the Soviet Union and China to resist the new world order. With the success of mobile missile launchers in the Gulf War, the efficiency of missile warfare and a policy of deterrence became more attractive to the Middle Eastern countries and China was offering them its M-9 missiles, with a range of 600 kilometres and M-11 missile systems with a range of 300 kilometres, capable of carrying on a 500 kg warhead. Beijing also was to offer nuclear technology, presumably for scientific purposes and peaceful research but it could have military implications too.<sup>36</sup> The Soviet Union had to rush to improve its position and thus was forced to defy US pressure in the same way as the Chinese, firstly, because the Middle East seemed to continue to be the most important weapons market for a long time, secondly, political influence following the arms deal with the South West Asian countries such as Iran, regarding the closeness of the area to the southern flank of the Soviet Union, had national security implications.

In July 1991 the Kurdish problem in Iraq was dominating the world news since every day a few hundred refugees were dying in Iran and Turkey. The partition of Iraq and the creation of a so-called 'safe haven' for the Kurds in Northern Iraq's border area with Turkey, proposed by Britain, was supported by US. Iran and the Islamic Arab nations were against the disintegration of Iraq. The Soviet Union neither had a new policy appropriate to the changing circumstances in Iraq nor was in a position to offer a new proposal different from the United States policy.

Soviet diplomacy was not only paralysed in the Middle East but also seemed stagnant on the world political scene. A visit to Tokyo by Mikhail Gorbachev who had travelled 7,500 kilometres to find a friendly crowd in Japan, could have been an exception. But a politically weakened Gorbachev was too weak to negotiate with the Japanese Prime Minister, Toshiki Kaifu, over the Kurile issue, a territorial dispute which since World War II has appeared as an obstacle preventing a peace treaty between the two East Asian neighbours being signed. Gorbachev's appeal for Japanese economic aid reduced even further the Soviet leader's credibility, who indeed had nothing important to offer in return.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, Gorbachev's diplomatic effort, which was meant to result in political and economic gains, proved not to be more than a tourist visit to the East.

This was a different time and a different circumstance for the Soviets than July 1986 when Gorbachev had appeared in Vladivostok and manifested the Asian vision of the new thinking in the Soviet foreign policy. Gorbachev's visit to Japan ended without a noticeable gain. From the Asian point of view the Soviet Union with its economy in a shambles, militarily frustrated and politically insignificant, was not much of a strategic factor. However some of the Asian states had different reasons to appreciate the decisions by Gorbachev to pull the Red Army back from the Chinese frontier, to reduce the Soviet fleet operations in the Pacific, to recognise South Korea and seek co-operation for peace in Cambodia. Now a declining Soviet Union was faced with Asia's economic giant the old days were over.<sup>38</sup>

In May 1991 the course of Soviet-Iranian relations continued the same way as they had before, flat and trouble free. But the struggle with social tensions and economic hardship in the Soviet Union was bound to be further aggravated. The threat of radicalism particularly from the right was becoming an imminent reality. The former Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze during a tour of the United States, intended to raise money for his 'think tank' called the Soviet Foreign Policy Association, envisaged that

Gorbachev had only 'a few months to establish the Soviet Union'. He then went on to warn: 'if we have a chaotic situation in the country, dictators can arise on the right or on the left'. The events of August proved that he was quite right in his warning of the danger of dictatorship.<sup>39</sup>

Russia's first presidential election in June 1991 ended with a landslide (57% of the vote) victory for Boris Yeltsin who enjoyed the advantages of being an incumbent chairman of the Russian Parliament, which convinced the voters to support him - the old tradition of the socialist system.<sup>40</sup> Iran officially welcomed Yeltsin's presidency and praised his support for the market economy. From the Iranian point of view disintegration of the Soviet Union was a positive point in which they could see the diminishing of a threat projecting from the north. Thus up to this point Yeltsin was a better choice despite his support for democracy which could have caused discomfort to the Iranian leadership. The Iranians were concerned about a deal signed with Moscow in July 1989. Any break in the continuity and validity of the agreement would have been costly to Teheran since they did not know what would be Yeltsin's reaction to the relations they had established with the Kremlin before him. Therefore they treated the new development with care and caution.<sup>41</sup>

After the Soviets' impotent attempts failed to save Saddam's military machine, Moscow tried to set up new targets for its regional policy in South West Asia and the Persian Gulf. Increasing ties with Iran, trying to help Saddam stay in power and undermining the US military presence in the Gulf were the prime objectives of Soviet diplomacy at this point. In the new Soviet diplomatic initiative, mediation between Teheran and Baghdad, whose short-lived honeymoon during November/December 1990 to January 1991 was over by May/June, appeared to be the first step. Iran, which realised that a practical alternative to Saddam's regime would have to be a pro-US-Saudi regime, preferred to see the broken leader continue to hold on to power in Baghdad. The



Soviet Union although for different reasons had a similar policy towards Saddam's regime.

The Soviets' new diplomatic effort started with the meetings in Teheran between the Soviet ambassador, Vladimir Gudev, and high ranking Iranian foreign policy officials in June 1991. Despite mutual understanding and the interests of both sides, the new initiative gradually petered out. A similar attempt by the Soviets to settle the disputes in Afghanistan failed, too, when the first round of talks in Moscow between the Iranian delegation headed by Director General of the Department for West Asia in the Foreign office Mir Mahmud Mosavi and Nikolai Kumirov, the Soviet Ambassador in charge of Afghanistan, ended inconclusively. The latter failure was in part due to the disagreement in Teheran between the Foreign Office and the office of the President over the issue. A leading article in the *Teheran Times* on 15 June, 'Any Chance of Success for Iranian Mission in Moscow?' reflected the Iranian president's views on the Moscow talks: 'We realise of course that the Islamic Republic and the Soviet Union have common points of view on the Afghan problem and that both countries believe that the disputes should be resolved through diplomatic channels. But this does not justify the hasty dispatch of a high-ranking delegation to Moscow for negotiations in which the Afghan Mujahedin are not participating'.<sup>42</sup>

The course of Moscow-Teheran relations despite a few impediments was proceeding satisfactorily while the relations with the neighbouring republics of the Soviet Union were acquiring further momentum. A visit to Teheran by Azerbaijan Council of Ministers Chairman Hassan Aziz Ogly Hasanov on 10 June 1991 was in line with Iran's new policy to expand her direct relations with the republics adopted since the demise of the Soviet Union had become increasingly likely. During a meeting between the Azerbaijani Prime Minister and the Iranian President, Rafsanjani referring to the latest developments in the Soviet Union called them 'positive and in the interests of the Soviet people and the region'.<sup>43</sup> He also termed Irano-Soviet relations 'strategic'.<sup>44</sup>

One of the main issues discussed between Iranian officials and the Soviet delegate in Teheran was the exploration of oil and gas in the Caspian Sea. With the probable disintegration of the Soviet Union, regarding the historical and political application of the north (Caspian) sea oil, Iran would have certainly preferred to terminate the agreement it had signed with the Soviet Union on the exploration of oil and gas from its Iranian coasts. Instead Iran was supporting the idea of Soviet membership in OPEC.

On 12 June the Soviet oil ministry forwarded a proposal to the Council of Ministers on joining the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).<sup>45</sup> The subject was discussed in a meeting in Moscow between the Iranian oil minister Golam Reza Aghazadeh and Soviet officials.<sup>46</sup> The impact of Soviet membership in OPEC, although it has not been carefully studied yet, was likely to be significant since it could give the Organisation a new political dimension. Soviet membership would open up a new field for closer co-operation between Iran and the Soviet Union and form a new group which could severely undermine the Saudis' influence in OPEC, Iran representing an independent line in support of an oil price rise and the Soviet Union in the event of becoming an OPEC member following suit. Another issue raised in the Moscow talks was the building of the Mangyshlak oil refinery in Mangylash Peninsula, north of the Caspian Sea in the Kazakh republic. But with the economic crisis in the Soviet Union any agreement with Moscow would have been subject to change since uncertainty in the Soviet Union had been increasing.

In June 1991 the US new ambassador to Moscow, Robert Strauss, was named. The nomination of Strauss was interpreted as a sign that the US was preparing for the forthcoming changes in the Soviet Union's political life. Gorbachev's long awaited trip to Oslo to accept the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize did not help much to improve his tarnished image in the world after the January crackdown on the pro-independence protests in Lithuania. In Oslo Gorbachev tried to link the Soviet future with the fate of the new world order when he emphasised that 'The world needs perestroika no less than the Soviet

Union itself does'.<sup>47</sup> His personal appeal for economic aid received little sympathy in the West since no one knew who really would be in charge of the crumbling empire in the near future, where the given aid would go and how it would be spent. In mid-1991 Gorbachev was more of a 'lame duck' leader than an incumbent executive president. In fact Western powers wanted to be polite to him - for what he had done before - when they accepted his present at the G-7 summit conference which was due to be held in mid-July 1991 in London. Gorbachev was a man who neither had a mandate nor a vision for the future.

The expectation of an imminent political change was deeply sensed inside the Soviet Union as both flanks were keen to see Gorbachev out of office soon. The same feeling was much greater in the outside world since the political demise of Gorbachev seemed inevitable. Then what really mattered, particularly in the West, was a peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union and a civilised transition of power in the Kremlin and with it the termination of the threat of totalitarianism in the world rather than a collapse into anarchy and civil war. It was too late to continue to ask whether the world would be safer with the existing Soviet Union or without it, since continuity of the dying system seemed almost impossible. This was a classic process of a genuine revolution at its final stage. It would be possible to stop every revolution at any stage but the final one, in which the incumbent leaders give up their power and the challenging forces, enjoy their maximum potential. This was the case in the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran, during which the frustrated royal army gave in to the revolutionary forces. In mid-1991, the Red Army could do nothing to stop the revolution since it had approached its explosive stage.

The G-7 summit in London where the Soviets' appeal for aid was politely turned down, emphasised Gorbachev's shrinking role. Even Gorbachev's bargain for an arms-control deal with the US President George Bush, which was announced in London during the same G-7 summit did not pay off convincingly as the western powers although seemingly grateful for the termination of the cold war era, were asking why the Soviet

Union still needs to have four million armed forces? In early August George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev eventually signed the 700-page document of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, agreed in principle a month before in London. Gorbachev after signing the long waited agreement declared the arms race over. But did it mean any more to the world? Perhaps not, at least in so far as Gorbachev's personal position was concerned.

### **Iran and the Final Days in the Life of the Soviet Union**

While the legitimate reason for the existence of the Soviet Union was under question and moves for reshaping the massive empire had been started, a shocking attempt by conservative elements of the regime took place to do what had seemed impossible, to rescue the dying regime from destruction. Prior to the incident it was expected that six of the fifteen republics would sign a new accord proposed by Gorbachev to form a Union of Sovereign States which itself was a contradiction in terms: how could fifteen republics be individually sovereign and the Soviet Union itself a sovereign state too? Moreover, the proposed Union which was about the formation of a federation lacked a practical chance for survival if it had a chance to take shape at all. Apart from the economic and political chaos in Russia, the Armenian and the Azerbaijanis still were fighting over their territorial disputes, more than half dozen republics including the Baltic republics, Georgia and the Ukraine were not intending to join the treaty which was about to retain control over foreign policy and security and leave limited issues to be dealt with by the local (sovereign) governments.

In the early morning of Monday 19 August 1991 conservative elements of the Communist regime in Moscow staged a coup d'état to remove Gorbachev from power and 'restore law and order'. Gorbachev was in his holiday dacha in Crimea when on 19 August Gennady Yanaev, the Vice President, declared himself Acting President and announced a state of emergency. After three days of turmoil and frustration, the shaky

coup retreated and then collapsed. Together with Yanaev, who was more of a figurehead in the coup, the chairman of the KGB Vladimir Kryuchkov, Defence Minister Dmitry Yazov, and Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov were arrested. Interior Minister Boris Pugo committed suicide, and Parliamentary Speaker Anatoly Luk'yanov (arrested), military Chief of Staff Mikhail Moiseev and Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh were fired. All were accused of either having a part in the coup or supporting it. With the coup over, the Russian Federation's President who had resisted the coup and led the 'second Russian revolution' to success appeared the new hero of the masses and the only hope of salvation.

Gorbachev, although disillusioned, but still out of touch with realities, returned to Moscow and after a humiliating show of weakness, issued a statement and soon afterwards quit as head of the Communist Party which was already dead. The statement itself was clear proof of Gorbachev's lack of understanding of what was happening in the Soviet Union as it said: 'No one has the right to make sweeping accusations against all Communists, and I, as President, consider myself obliged to defend them, as citizens, against unfounded accusations. In this situation, the CPSU Central Committee must make the difficult but honourable decision to dissolve itself. I do not consider it possible to continue performing the function of General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee and I resign from the position'.<sup>48</sup>

Teheran which first, along with the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Iraq and Syria had supported the ill fated coup d'état, after the coup collapsed made a U-turn and congratulated Gorbachev on his 'successful return'.<sup>49</sup> The Iranian regime had good reason for happiness about the new developments in the Kremlin since they understood that Gorbachev's new choice for directorship of the KGB was Leonid Shebarshin, once a close friend. After the Islamic revolution, Shebarshin - a fluent Persian speaker - who was appointed head of the KGB branch in Iran, had managed to develop good relations with the Islamic leaders and consequently played an influential role in some of the

important policymaking processes in Iran.<sup>50</sup> He succeeded in overcoming the troubles caused by the defecting to the West of his deputy in the Soviet embassy in Teheran, Vladimir Kozichkin. The appointment of the new chief of the KGB did not last more than 24 hours before Gorbachev under pressure from Yeltsin's camp dismissed him and appointed a new boss, Vadim Bakatin, to the post. This was an occasion for Gorbachev to test the extent of his power and realise where the Soviet Union was standing and what role was left for him to play.

The Soviet Union, already virtually dissolved, was waiting for the official announcement of its death, which took a little longer. On 21 December 1991 leaders of eleven republics of the Soviet Union signed an agreement to form a new Union called the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Gorbachev agreed to resign after the document was approved by the republics' parliaments. This was a ceremonial process before the end of the year. 1992 started with the non-existence of the Soviet Union.

Iran had reasons to be optimistic about the new developments and reasons for minor disappointments too. With the Soviet Union dissolved the danger of a big power constantly threatening its national security was deflected. Instead of having more than a 2,500 km border with the Soviet Union, smaller buffer states were emerging between Iran and the Soviet Union. This time these were new republics which should be concerned about the power play projecting from the south, rather than Iran constantly being concerned about the Soviet threat against its national security. Being a neighbour to a superpower such as the Soviet Union has given Iran a unique opportunity to assume a strategic importance in the world.

Like Turkey, with the Soviet Union dissolved, Iran too, lost part of its strategic weight in the global balance of power. With the Soviet Union officially dissolved the mutual agreements signed between the two former neighbouring countries were subject to new conditions. International law would have a different interpretation of the charters,

treaties and agreements the old Soviet Union had signed with foreign countries and relied on for years. The controversial agreement of 1921 which had played a crucial role in the course of relations between Teheran and Moscow for almost sixty years and used as a pretext to start the cold war over Azerbaijan, was one of them. Under the circumstances the old agreement seemed baseless and for practical purposes was already obsolete.

During the time of the cold war Iran could have had more chances to take advantage of the interplay between the Soviet Union and the United States. If there was only one reason for Iran to be happy about the doomed August coup in Moscow it was her hope for the revival of the cold war, as with the Soviet Union gone Iran's hope for a revival of the West-East rivalry which could have given the Third World and independent states more room in the international arena for manoeuvring were dashed. In sum, Iran had gained much more than it lost in the demise of the Soviet Union. In this context perhaps Iran was next to the former republics of the old union.

## NOTES

1. *Ettelaat*, Teheran, 19 December 1990, p.1.
2. *Teheran Times*, 2 January 1991, p.1.
3. *Al-Madina* quoted anonymous Egyptian sources saying that Saddam Hussein had sent an Arab emissary to Teheran with a proposal for an alliance, warning that the US sought to overthrow the Iranian regime. For the full report see *Al-Madina*, Saudi Arabia, 26 December 1990, p2. For the Iranian response to this claim see the leading article in *Teheran Times*, 1 January 1991, p.2.
4. See the *Washington Post* in reporting the Secretary of State's visit to Moscow and commenting on the US policy objectives, 2 December 1990.
5. For an informative analysis in this context see Scott Sullivan, 'After the Gulf War', *Newsweek*, 14 January 1991.
6. The Islamic Republic has always been suspicious about the US' ultimate objectives and a plot which might be set up to remove them from power. For the latest reasons behind the Islamic leaders' sources of suspicion see Bob Woodward, *Veil, The secret wars of the CIA 1981-1987*, London: Simon and Schuster, 1987, pp.480-491. The older memory of the CIA plot to remove Mosaddegh from power in 1953 was still alive and so was Jimmy Carter's abortive attempt to rescue the US diplomatic hostages in Teheran in late 1979.
7. IRNA reported the Iranian Navy Commander speaking in Bandar Pahlavi (North of Iran), 5 January 1991.
8. IRNA, *Teheran Times*, 6 January 1991.
9. For the US perception of the Soviet threat see Ken Booth in Carl G. Jacobsen, (ed.), *Strategic Power USA/USSR*, London: Macmillan, 1990, pp.50-55.
10. For an explicit example of the Soviets' revised policy on the Gulf crisis see *Pravda* staff correspondent in US Vitaly Gan: 'Gulf War', *Pravda*, 26 January 1991, p.5.
11. This has never been a part of Iran's official foreign policy outline but in private, the so-called pragmatism of the 'moderate leaders' had led the regime to adopt friendly gestures towards both powers from time to time if the principal interests of the regime had been secured.
12. *Pravda*, 26 January 1991, p.5.
13. Stanislav Kondrashov, 'Without self respect one can not improve', *Izvestia*, 26 January 1991, p.5.
14. *Ibid.*
15. For the text of Gorbachev's statement which was issued on February 9, see *Izvestia*, 11 February 1991.
16. The reasons behind Washington's decision not to remove Saddam from power is deeply rooted in the US strategic thinking and far more complicated than being



made as a concession to Moscow, however, this too, was an influential factor since Washington determined to keep the coalition against Iraq intact before the ground attack started.

17. Gorbachev statement on 9 February 1991.
18. See George Bush commenting on the USSR statement, AP, 12 February 1991 and Secretary Baker appearing on the CBS programme 'Face the Nation' saying that 'The Soviet Union's position with respect to the need for the Iraqis' full compliance with the UN security Council resolution remains unchanged', 12 February 1991.
19. Vsevolod Ovchinnikov, 'Oil that Reeks of Blood', *Pravda*, 8 February 1991, p.4.
20. *Ibid.*
21. For a similar view see the leading article in *Teheran Times*, 'US economic plot', 18 January 1991.
22. Gennady Vasilyev, 'Unprecedented Proving Ground For Latest US, Western Military Hardware', *Pravda*, 12 February 1991, p.5.
23. Vitaly Kobysh, *Izvestia*, 12 February 1991, p.5.
24. IRNA, Teheran, 12 February 1991 and *Pravda*, 15 February 1991, p.4.
25. *Ibid.*
26. IRNA reporting Iran's Foreign Ministry Statement, 12 February 1991.
27. See IRNA, 9 February 1991. The news of the visits by the Iraqi delegates to Teheran, due to the bitter memory of the recent war between them, was treated with caution, thus, the Iranian media used to refer to these visits on the basis of the information obtained through officials.
28. For the Soviets' view on the Kremlin's ineffective role in the Gulf see V. Ignatenko, head of the USSR president's press service in briefing Soviet and foreign journalists on the events in the Persian Gulf, Tass cited in *Izvestia*, 13 February 1991, p.21.
29. There have been speculations about a bilateral agreement between Teheran and Baghdad, presumed concluded before the Soviet diplomatic initiation even started, but there are not more than a little reliable substance to prove it. For more see *Keyhan*, London, 14 March 1991.
30. See *Newsweek*, 18 February 1991, p.5.
31. In September 1992 the first Russian-made submarine purchased by Iran left the Baltic port of Riga and seemingly despite strong protests by the West, the Russian Federation, undertaking the Soviet Union's duties, defended the agreement and noted that since they did not see the submarines posing any threat to the stability of the region, two more submarines, according to the deal, would be despatched to Iran.
32. For a modern view on the needs for change in the Soviet military doctrine see Lt. Col. O. Falichev, 'Shilka' versus the B-52, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 5 April, p.3.

33. For the Iranian view on the US claim see Khamnei addressing a group of revolutionary committees in Teheran, 'US has no right to claim world leadership', IRNA, 1 March 1991.
34. Iran has never admitted playing a military part in southern Iraq's Shiite uprising, although their involvement was quite evident as it was reflected, however indirectly, even in the Iranian press. Giving shelter to more than half a million Iraqi refugees, promptly led to arming them by Iran and sending them back to Iraq to fight Saddam's demoralised forces.
35. See IRNA, 30 March 1991.
36. Purchase by Algeria and Iran of two nuclear reactors from China with a capacity estimated between 15 and 40 megawatts - too small for generating electricity and too large for scientific research - is clear evidence of the Chinese tendency to break the ranks in the Middle East.
37. API, Tokyo, 12 April 1991.
38. For the latest review on Soviet foreign policy in East Asia see Charles E. Ziegler, *Foreign Policy and East Asia. Learning and Adaptation in the Gorbachev Era*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Paperbacks 10, 1993. In this book Charles Ziegler develops the concept of learning in foreign policy by exploring the link between Mikhail Gorbachev's domestic reforms and the radical transformation of Soviet relations with North-east Asia in the 1980s. He argues that, although international factors may have played a role, it was pressures for domestic change, and economic reform in particular, which had the greatest impact on new Soviet thinking. The history of Soviet relations with North-east Asia is briefly traced, highlighting the extent to which ideology impeded foreign policy learning under Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev.
39. 'Look who's smiling now', *Newsweek*, 15 July 1991.
40. For the result of the Russian presidential election of 12 June 1991, see *Pravda*, 20 June 1991, p.1.
41. Pushing for more reform in the USSR, *Teheran Times*, 16 June 1991.
42. See the leading article in *Teheran Times*, 15 June 1991, p.2.
43. IRNA quoting the Iranian President Rafsanjani, 10 June 1991.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Pravda*, 13 June 1991, p.5.
46. Tass cited in *Pravda*, 19 June 1991, p.5.
47. API, Oslo, 18 June 1991. See also 'How to help Gorbachev', *Newsweek*, 17 June 1991, p.24.
48. *Pravda*, 23 August 1991, p.4.
49. Rafsanjani message to Gorbachev, IRNA, Teheran, 23 August 1991.

50. It was alleged that he was the main source of translating Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and the man who provoked the Islamic regime to respond to it (see *Libération*, Paris, 22 August 1991). See Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, London: Viking, 1988, pp.91-128. Although the motive - damaging the improving course of relations with Britain and West Europe - is convincing there is no convincing substance to back up the claim. On another occasion, Kalim Sediqi, the self-appointed head of the Islamic Parliament in London, during an interview with BBC Radio 4 on 23 June 1992 claimed that he was the first source to hand over a translation of the *Satanic Verses* to the Iranian officials in Teheran Mehrabad Airport and asked for it to be passed on to Ayatollah Khomeini and then the death verdict issued. The latter claim may have more ground since Sediqi has good connections in Teheran and is still in touch with the Iranian leaders.

## CONCLUSION:

### IDEOLOGY, REGIME CHANGE AND THE FORMULATION OF FOREIGN POLICY

Iran, strategically placed in the conjunction of the vital interests of two distinct superpowers - the USSR and the US - has been closely involved in the Near Eastern (Trans Caucasus, South Asia and the Middle East) power politics since World War II. The historical background of the region's political developments from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century, contrary to the military and political dynamics of the Persian empire in the period from the 17th century up to the early 19th century, portrays a period in which Iran has almost been passively exposed to the consequences of a multiple struggle by the bigger powers for influence in the area. This by no means minimises the importance of the role Iran has played in the contemporary political life of the region. Iran, emerging as a regional power during the mid-1970s, had the ambition to assume a greater role in the world scene. The growing importance of Iran in world affairs features, in part, the upsurge of the smaller states' fortunes *vis-a-vis* the greater powers.

This development in the Third World, coinciding with the economic and technological advance of the newly industrialised states, intensified the sense of patriotism particularly among the newly-fledged economic and military powers. The latter further encouraged the smaller states to challenge the worldwide interests of the greater powers regardless of their background alliance and relationships. In the 1970s, independent approaches by Middle Eastern states to the foreign policy issues, based on their national interests, decided the nature of such challenges. The Shah of Iran, who successfully led OPEC's oil price war in 1972; Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan, who turned his country's pro-US foreign policy orientation to an independent eastern oriented

axis aimed at political and military co-operation with the regional states; and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, who attempted to curtail the United States' dominant role in his country, and actively supported the Arab nations' fight against Israel, were the leading representatives of the new trends and determinations in the Third World. The significance of these political developments in the 1970s should only be compared with the importance of détente between the West and East and the return of China to the world community during the same period.

The history-making events of the 1980s, despite the demise of the 1970s' authoritarian independent leaders in the Middle East, proved that the smaller states' positions *vis-a-vis* the greater powers were strengthening. In the 1980s the Islamic Revolution in Iran demonstrated, quite vigorously, the challenging nature of the new inclinations among the Third World nations. In the 1990s, with the Communist bloc dissolved, the pro-democracy tendencies in the world increased and the economic and technological strength of the newly industrialised nations of the Third World established, the global role of the smaller states in world affairs nevertheless grew to an extent that seemed impossible to neglect. Thus, in order to shed light on the regional and global outcomes of these changes, and consequential effects of such developments on the course of international relations, the study of political trends and policy attitudes among the smaller states appears to be a task to be undertaken by both policy-makers and political scientists. In this regard, investigation of the relations between the world's big powers and the smaller states seems more pertinent perhaps than scrutiny of the individual events in which they have played parts. This is to emphasise that without examination of a consistent line of policy developments within the framework of bilateral relations and analysis of the interaction of the relevant forces and interplay of the policies, mutually adopted by the states involved, the studies of states' foreign policy developments - particularly in regard to the smaller states - would result in misunderstanding of their policies and would lead to inappropriate conclusions. Comprehensive studies of the states'

begin.<sup>28</sup> The withdrawal of the Red Army from Iran, which began in May 1946, and the consequent collapse of the puppet republics in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, was a clear victory not only for the brilliant performance of Iranian diplomacy but also for the Americans who backed Iran's diplomatic attempts by using both the United Nations and the threat of military force. All Moscow obtained before the Azerbaijan crisis ended was a promise of negotiations with Iran over an oil agreement rather than gaining the oil concession the Kremlin had long been insisting on.<sup>29</sup> Stalin's political defeat in Azerbaijan, which was indeed the first time the Red Army had withdrawn from a foreign territory, was interpreted in a different context.

In order to understand the logic behind Stalin's decision to pull back the Red Army from Iran, it is important to remember the reasons for which he invaded Iran in the first place. In addition to the pursuit of the traditional policy of conquest towards the east, the Soviet Union seemed terrified of capitalist encirclement and thus needed to fortify its defence capability.<sup>30</sup> George Kennan, referring to the proximity of Iran to the Soviet Azerbaijan oil fields and the importance of Iran's geo-strategy as well as Iranian oil in the hands of Soviet enemies, argues that the Soviet strategy which led to the occupation of Iran was driven by security apprehensions and was in fact defensive.<sup>31</sup>

But in 1946, Iran's oil was neither that important to the Soviet Union nor was its apprehension about Anglo-American domination of Iran. Therefore, in that light the Soviet intervention in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan cannot be justified otherwise, the question would have to be asked, what convinced them to pull back their forces since none of the circumstances had changed in the meantime. The American pressure on the Soviets carried limited military weight since the US was incapable of sending a contingent force to Iran. It may, however, be more feasible to accept the reason behind the Soviet move was a combination of all those motives with the final persuasion to withdraw based on their perception of Qavam's premiership, whom they believed would act as an independent leader regardless of pressure from Britain and the United States. In

addition to the Qavam factor, and what was supposed to be an oil concession, there is the fact that Iran's position at the southern flank of the Soviet Union, was not, during this period, the centre of its priorities as the European theatre was the USSR's top priority. Thus, it would not have been wise for the Kremlin to have weakened its military position in Europe by continuing the conflict over Azerbaijan.

However, despite the termination of the Soviet intervention in Iran, the so-called Cold War continued as the Soviet motivation in Eastern Europe and Greece became evident, affecting the course of East-West relations and leading to the circumstances which prompted the Kremlin leaders to describe the United States as the greatest threat to the Soviet Union. This development in the international arena also influenced Soviet-Iranian relations. This time the most important foreign factor, with regard to the Kremlin's relations with Teheran, was the United States, whose desire to gain further presence and more influence in the area seemed quite clear to Moscow.

With the Soviet Iranian agreement rejected in Majlis and the Tudeh Party outlawed, the decline in Soviet-Iranian relations was exacerbated. In 1949 the Soviets complained about the way the Tudeh Party was treated by the Iranian Government.<sup>32</sup> In 1951 Mossadeq who was appointed the Prime Minister immediately acted to nationalise the Iranian oil industry which was under British control. The Soviet Union offered him moral support but the United States preferred to stay on the sidelines of the ongoing crisis. When Mossadeq supported the 1952 extension of U.S. military aid to Iran, the Soviet Union changed its policy and dismissed him as little more than an 'agent of the big bourgeoisie'.<sup>33</sup> In 1953, Mossadeq was overthrown and the United States appeared as an influential force in Iran. Iran's decision to join the Baghdad Pact in October 1955 and her tendency towards a closer military co-operation with the United States in 1958 led to the signing of a military agreement between the two allies. Moscow, whose position in Iran was undermined by the new development, became further disappointed with Teheran.

During Khrushchev's period of rule, the Soviet Union fostered the notion of helping the non-aligned and nationalist movements assuming the 'correlation of forces' under the new circumstances would assist in shifting the balance of power away from the capitalist bloc. As this new assumption increased, so too did Moscow's interest in competing with the West in the Third World. Also, Moscow gave a higher profile to state-to-state relations with the countries of the Third World. The course of Soviet-Iranian relations under Khrushchev, despite a few political moves initiated from both sides, including a visit by the Shah to Moscow in 1957, failed to prevent further deterioration of their relations since a mutual sense of distrust was taking momentum. Soviet support for the Iranian communists abroad and continual attacks by the Soviet media, mostly directed against the Shah, together with Iran's growing military co-operation with the United States, provoked further tensions between Moscow and Teheran.

By the mid-1960s, new developments made possible a departure from the Kremlin's Cold War relations with Teheran. In 1962, the Shah agreed to negotiate a non-aggression arrangement with Moscow and also pledged not to allow the United States to site rocket bases on Iranian soil.<sup>34</sup> In 1966, following an arms deal signed between Teheran and Moscow and valued at approximately \$344 million, the first consignment of Soviet military hardware arrived in Iran. This, although representing only 12 per cent of Iran's military purchases while the United States had 85 per cent of Iran's arms market, did, however, suggest a normalisation of Soviet-Iranian relations.<sup>35</sup> In the meantime, the Soviet Union gradually became one of Iran's most important trade partners. The world famous Iranian-Soviet gas arrangement of 1966 was one of the landmarks of rapidly growing technical and commercial co-operation between the two countries.

In the 1970s, with the growing importance of Iran in US strategic calculations in the Middle East, and despite Soviet support of the Iraqi regime similar to that given to President Nasser of Egypt in the 1960s, improvement in the course of Soviet-Iranian



relations continued. Brezhnev's strategy of détente in 1972 encouraged the Shah to take advantage of the Soviets' easy-going approaches to Middle East political and military issues. The Shah had the dream of making Iran not only a regional super-state, but also a world-class power in both economic and military terms. His aspirations concerned Moscow but did not cause a major problem. In fact, as Iran became stronger, the Shah (it was thought) would pursue his policies with more independence from the United States.

No sooner had the Moscow summit of 1972 finished than the Shah managed to convince the Nixon administration to back his Kurdish game aimed at destabilising Iraq. The United States agreed with the Shah, partly because he had established his influence in U.S. policy-making in the area. Moreover, Washington, still unimpressed with détente, and loyal to the notion of the Cold War and its classic strategic thinking, could see the new game bringing the destabilisation of a Soviet client - Iraq - thus agreed to support the plan.<sup>36</sup> Israel was also in favour of the plan in as much as it was aimed against an Arab country. Moscow, recently thrown out of Egypt, failed to support Baghdad but, for at least two years, rather than coming to help Iraq's defence, preached in favour of a regional and national reconciliation. After the Kurdish leaders declared their autonomy in the Iraqi oil-rich province of Kirkuk, the Shah changed the course of his plan and eventually, in 1975, during the Algiers Conference, he signed an accord with Saddam and ended his support of the Kurdish rebels.<sup>37</sup> All through this period, Soviet-Iranian relations kept improving on the basis of mutual understanding and equality. The way the Kremlin leaders were treating the Shah reflected the importance of this relationship to the Soviets.

The Shah mutually appreciated this new phase of relations with the Soviet Union since he recognised the development as posing a lesser threat from Moscow to Iran's stability and also a better opportunity for practising Iran's independent foreign policy. In this atmosphere of mutual understanding, the Soviet Union not only succeeded in keeping its share of Iran's arms imports but also managed to export more non-military goods to

Iran than any other Middle Eastern country.<sup>38</sup> During the years prior to the Islamic Revolution, the Soviet Union also became the largest market for Iranian exports of goods and products. This period was indeed a sheer expression of peaceful coexistence between the two countries. It seems that Brezhnev's idealistic concept of *détente* and the belief that 'the Soviet strategic nuclear arsenal had proved its importance and the United States accepted the notion of parity in relations with the USSR, thus the post war domination of the United States was ended' to some extent affected Soviet Third World policy.<sup>39</sup> On the basis of Brezhnev's perception, revolutionary change in the Third World was inevitable and the Soviet Union would help with direct or indirect assistance if counter-revolutionaries were being swept aside. Iran, seemingly, was excluded from this presumption as there is no reliable evidence to prove that the Soviet leadership was in pursuit of a destabilising policy against the Shah.

The prospect of an Islamic revolution in Iran heralded a significant change course in the substance and conduct of Iranian foreign policy. The Soviet Union neither showed enough intelligence in receiving the revolutionary signals from Iran nor did it help to stimulate this socio-political movement, despite the fact that the Kremlin would have embraced the Shah's downfall if it was in sight. This was because the collapse of the Shah would have been a blow to US strategic interests in the area, and Moscow had never been happy with the US presence and its influence in Iran. Despite the insignificance of any threat from Iran to Soviet national security, from the Kremlin's point of view it would have been preferred if this minor threat had been reduced to nothing through the collapse of the Shah.<sup>40</sup>

To the surprise of the region's observers, up to the end of October 1978 Moscow had shown no sign of criticising the Shah's regime which could have indicated it might collapse. In the Soviet Press, for example, one could see nothing more than complaints about 'economic antagonism' in Iran, and attribution of Iran's domestic disorder to a corrupt bureaucracy.<sup>41</sup> From November 1978 to February 1979 the Soviet media started,

albeit slowly, to support the revolution and began warning the United States against any intervention in Iran's domestic affairs. A noticeable message soon came from Brezhnev in his 19 November 1978 statement that Moscow would consider American interference so close to the Soviet border a threat to Soviet security.<sup>42</sup> The Soviets, who had enjoyed a growing relationship with Iran under the Shah and since the 1970s and demonstrated no sympathy for Islamic trends in Central Asia, should have worked hard to prove that they were genuinely in favour of an Islamic regime in Teheran. Regardless of the Soviets' defensive or expansionist perceptions, the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran was an opportunity for Moscow to exploit and try to gain influence.

However, despite the United States' weakness in South West Asia, the Soviet Union, in supporting the revolutionary movement in Iran, decided not to go beyond verbal intimidation, fearing it might have locked Moscow into an actual confrontation with Washington. Washington, apparently unaware of the Kremlin's final analysis - and consequently on the basis of a false political assumption - did not rule out the Soviet military threat to Iran and even prepared for the worst scenario.<sup>43</sup> The way the two superpowers faced their differences proved yet again that their confrontational positions were more political than military and thus, in the course of competing with each other, they preferred to manipulate political events rather than contesting in the battlefield.

The Soviets, despite having no doubt about the Iranian revolution's Islamic roots and its non-socialist identity, continued to support it since it presumed it was progressive and anti-imperialist. In line with ideological justifications, Moscow hoped too that the Iranian revolution would soon turn into a socialist democratic change and thus, its client, the local Communist party, the Tudeh, was urged to join the Khomeinists and support the new regime. This policy lasted until 1983 when the Left forces in Iran were eradicated.

After the Tudeh Party was purged by the Islamic regime, its first secretary Nureddin Kianouri publicly confessed that they had served as Soviet agents and plotted to

overthrow the Islamic regime.<sup>44</sup> If the Soviets expected to see the Iranian Left forces having a chance to seize power from within the revolution, they soon realised this hope was unrealistic. The Tudeh Party in particular, even on the basis of the most optimistic evaluations, had no chance of undermining the Islamic orientation of the Iranian revolution, and the Soviets should have realised this. It was clearly unrealistic to challenge the Islamic regime from the Left in the immediate post-revolutionary period but the Kremlin failed to reach this simple conclusion. With regard to the US factor, Moscow's short-term objective was to deny the United States a chance to make a comeback in Iran. Perhaps the Kremlin expected the Islamic regime to fall apart so it could pursue more ambitious objectives.

The outbreak of the war and the way it proceeded disposes of this hypothesis and shows that the Soviet Union, as early as 1980, did not have an adventurous plan for Iran. If it had, it might have provoked the United States. When Saddam Hussein invaded Iran in September 1980 Soviet forces had the best chance to move into Iran but they did not. And again, when Iran in 1982 reversed Iraq's initial battlefield, the Soviets could have supported Iran for the sake of greater adventures in the Middle East's oil fields. As Iran went on to the offensive, Soviet military aid to Iraq resumed and the Kremlin kept insisting on her territorial integrity and called for the war to end.<sup>45</sup> Moscow, however, failed to take any advantage of the events in the Persian Gulf region from 1980 to 1983 but passively witnessed a vigorous U.S. presence in the area. After that time, the Soviets and Soviet policies in the region become a permanent target of attacks from all sides: the U.S. in continuation of the Cold War extended its hostile policies; Iran took position against its military support for Iraq; the Kremlin's political support of Iran's local Left brought Iraqi anger over Soviet double standards; and the Islamic world condemned the Soviet act of aggression in Afghanistan and their brutality against the Afghan Muslims.

Regardless of its origin and underlying principles, the track record of Soviet international relations, like other areas of the state's activities, proved to be incompetent

and ineffective. Therefore, a 'new political thinking' was needed to stop the Soviet Union from exacerbating the situation and to re-activate its political infrastructure.

### **'New Thinking', the Soviet Union and the Third World**

Analysis of the Soviet theory of the Third World, once formulated by specialists in Marxist-Leninist ideology as a branch of Soviet international relations and within the framework of Soviet foreign policy principles, was changed by Khrushchev over the years. Despite the framework established by Stalin and the revision announced by Khrushchev at the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, there was little innovative thinking in the Soviet academic literature about international relations before the Brezhnev era. During the Brezhnev era a group of international relations specialists (*Mezhdunarodniki*) contributed to the intensive academic studies in the field of Soviet international relations.<sup>46</sup> This is not to say that before Brezhnev Soviet ideology did not employ a Marxist-Leninist theory of international relations - it was used time and again by Soviet policy-makers either as a rhetorical dressing or as a means to legitimise Soviet foreign policy.

As early as 1983, during Brezhnev's final days, speculation by the Soviet academics and policy-makers about the economic failure, widespread corruption and domestic problems in the USSR, suggested formation of a 'new thinking' among the Soviet elites.<sup>47</sup> On 10 March 1985, when Konstantin Chernenko, Leonid Brezhnev's crony and political heir died, Gorbachev, on assuming the post of General Secretary of the CPSU, began his reform plan immediately. Chernenko and his cohorts, 13 months earlier, had sabotaged efforts by the late Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov, to pass the reform mantle to Gorbachev. This time there was no time to waste. Within 24 hours of Chernenko's death, Gorbachev was elected the Communist Party's General Secretary and inherited a system in terminal decay. Gorbachev, quite convinced of the need for far-

reaching changes, started the revolution which he called perestroika. With the problems the Soviet system was facing, it seems a radical change in the Soviet system was inevitable. As Jonathan Steele quite rightly says: 'Without him perestroika would have started anyway.'<sup>48</sup>

The new terms perestroika (reconstruction) and glasnost (openness) were adopted as the reform plan's slogans and represented the economic and political aspects of the 'new thinking' in the Kremlin. It is widely believed that Gorbachev was not alone in understanding that the Soviet political system was rotten. Many people, particularly in the middle ranks of the apparatus, shared his view that the economy could not develop by adding more capital and labour in the old way. They believed it needed fundamental reform. There were also numerous analysts in the foreign ministry and think-tanks who saw, for example, that the arms race was crippling the system. But at the end of the day, it was Gorbachev who managed to take these theoretical ideas and turn them into the dominant ideology of the party.

By August 1985, public support for the changes was too strong. The programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, a draft of which was published in October 1985 on the basis of the new thinking, marked a radical departure from the Marxist-Leninist theoretical framework and expressed the new theoretical principles.<sup>49</sup> These principles were stressed in Gorbachev's political report to the 27th Congress the following February, including an explicit criticism of Brezhnev's foreign policy.<sup>50</sup>

The reform of Soviet foreign policy contained changes in personnel and methods and also represented pragmatism in principles. The new approach suggested that 'collective security' should be linked to 'national security' and flexibility and compromise over the place of the Soviet Union in the international system should be considered in the course of reform. The 'new political thinking', in its search for the Soviet Union's prospective image, had also kept an eye on propaganda advantages in the world scene.

The primary application of the 'new political thinking' was more an issue of war and peace and consequently dealt with strategic and conventional arms reductions. Nevertheless, the main focus of the new political thinking was on USSR-USA relations in order to improve detente and to protect Soviet security in the world community. In November 1985, Gorbachev and President Reagan met in Geneva for their 'summit talk' (the first of five such meetings). This was the beginning of the end of the world's old order.<sup>51</sup>

Although re-examination of Soviet theory of the Third World was not the first priority of the 'new political thinking', rapprochement of the Third World seemed somewhat inevitable. This was mainly due to the Soviet Union's geographical location and also its status as a global power.

At his first Communist Party Congress as leader in 1986, Gorbachev outlined his vision of an 'integral world'. In contrast to the bi-polar world, he said, there was a 'growing tendency towards the interdependence of the countries of the world community', although what he mainly meant by saying that was getting together with the West.<sup>52</sup> From that point on, Soviet foreign policy went through a series of radical changes that utterly transformed the post-war world within a few years. Some of these changes, however, have been seen in the Third World political scene.

The USSR's symptomatic failures in the Third World were realised by Soviet thinkers even before the 'new political thinking' emerged and took proper shape. Nevertheless, the 'new political thinking' was forced to adopt a Third World angle and sooner or later move towards reconceptualisation of the 'existing theory'.<sup>53</sup> Under the circumstances, it was felt that resolving certain problems and sorting out regional crises ought to be contained within the USSR-USA relations. At the Reykjavik Summit in October 1986, alongside the plan for scrapping the world's strategic nuclear weapons, Third World issues were closely discussed. In December 1987 Gorbachev went to

Washington and signed with Reagan the first superpower deal: reducing their nuclear arsenals and agreeing to scrap their intermediate range missiles. A year later, in December 1988, he went to the United Nations General Assembly and announced the Red Army's withdrawal from Eastern Europe; within two months the last Soviet soldier had been pulled out of Afghanistan and the biggest test of Gorbachev's non-interventionism was marked in the Third World. Later, in this regard, he was positively judged and praised for what he did in Eastern Europe and in the Third World, ironically, with emphasis on what in fact he did not do.<sup>54</sup> In July 1989 Gorbachev, in addressing the European parliament in Strasbourg, said: 'The political order in one or another country changed in the past and may change in the future. These changes are the exclusive affair and choice of the people of the country concerned.' This was a sharp reversal from Brezhnev's 'doctrine' of sending tanks to crush the revolts in the satellites and creation of more socialist puppet regimes in the Third World.<sup>55</sup>

It is not quite clear whether the Marxist-Leninist theory of the Third World genuinely framed, guided and defined Soviet Third World policy or, as a Polish philosopher, Kolakowski, believes: 'It has simply been a rhetorical dressing for the *real politik* of the Soviet empire',<sup>56</sup> nor is it commonly accepted that the Soviet Union, during the primary period of the 'new political thinking', did indeed have an explicit perception of its overall interests in the Third World. Despite the existing confusion about the 'perception' and regardless of being motivated either by ideology or power, the USSR under Gorbachev was responding to the developments in the Third World rather than following a calculated policy. The snowballing reform that Gorbachev had started in 1985 became a fully fledged revolution in 1989-90 and gathered momentum to a scale which convinced many people that it was going to change the Soviet political system.

Eventually, on 21 December 1991, 11 republics founded a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and paved the way for dissolving the Soviet Union. The new situation has left unanswered many questions about the future of the member republics



and the worldwide impact of the ongoing developments. In fact, after the Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were granted full independence, any attempt to sketch an overall picture of the prospective replacement to the Soviet Union was risking a major error of judgment. The failure of the conservative communist elements of Soviet leadership, nominally headed by Vice President Gennadii Yanaev, in their August 1991 coup attempt against Gorbachev, and in favour of 'wrenching return of despotism', provided the liberal elements of the same leadership, headed by the Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, with a golden opportunity to accelerate the revolutionary process.

It took the liberal reformers a full four months - from 21 August 1991 to 21 December 1991 - to overcome some of the subjective impediments and political taboos on the way to declare officially that the Soviet Empire was dissolved and replaced by the newly-founded Commonwealth. However, despite Gorbachev's opposition, they succeeded first to decide - at least on paper - the identity of the new substitute for the Soviet Union, and second, to prevent, temporarily, anarchy arising from the disintegration of the old Union.<sup>57</sup>

On Wednesday, 25 December 1991, as was widely expected, and contrary to the traditional procedure of change in the Kremlin's leadership, Gorbachev's period in office came to an end and with him the Soviet Empire effectively dissolved.

If the Soviet Union's foreign policy success under Gorbachev is evaluated by what he did not do rather than what he did, then the period between 1989 up to the final days of the former Union should be marked as the most distinguished period of all. With the Cold War over, the bi-polar world political system had changed and the balancing power of the Soviet Union had disappeared. The Third World countries, particularly Middle Eastern nations who regarded the region's political equation as being heavily dependent on the balance between the two superpowers, did not embrace the new situation. It was not good news for the Third World to witness the collapse of the Second World and face

the inevitability of being exposed to the domination of the United States as the leader of the First World.

Gorbachev's foreign policy achievements fall into three main areas. First, superpower relations and arms control negotiations with the United States; second, amalgamation of Soviet relations with Western Europe and attempting to lay a foundation in the 'common European home'; and third, taking part in the attempts to bring the regional crises to an end. The latter achievement disengaged the Soviets from Afghanistan and also enabled them to offer co-operation in the search for a Middle Eastern settlement. In regard to the first and the last area, the Soviets to some extent managed to capitalize on their gains and succeeded in keeping up their status as a superpower, but in connection with Europe, the Soviets kept compromising without being provided with a chance to take a viable reward in return.<sup>58</sup> Gorbachev's early call for change in international relations was a new idea suggesting the resolution of regional conflicts outside the context of East West global rivalry.<sup>59</sup> Despite the pressures that the new vision generated for change, Moscow continued to attack the US's on-going military build-up in the Gulf on the ground that this was contrary to the notion of mutual security and was providing Washington with the upper hand in the Soviet southern borders. Moscow instead preferred to have UN forces acting as a watchdog in the area, a return to Brezhnev's early 1970s policy of replacing US forces with the UN's wherever possible.

Gorbachev's policy towards Iran, despite the Kremlin's desire for change, continued to be loyal to many of the established patterns first, because a radical and rapid change of course in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy towards Iran seemed almost impossible prior to a greater change in the international environment (including the Persian Gulf region), and also change in the Soviet political system, and second, Soviet policy, which is widely accepted to be multi-dimensional and influenced by different institutions, despite expectation for change in the traditional concepts, needed time to be reconceptualised. It is not wise to suggest that the new thinking at the beginning was

about the abandonment of power calculations or a Soviet retreat from the Third World, thus, neglecting its security and interests in the bordering states including Iran. However, in the face of all these factors, the Gorbachev period slowly but steadily witnessed changes in Soviet diplomacy towards Iran. Some of these changes could be seen in the light of the glasnost that Gorbachev employed to push through political changes at home and to affect the Soviet decision-making process. In order to draw a clear perspective of the changes and continuity in the conduct of Soviet-Iranian relations it is not only necessary to review the Soviet perceptions of Iran particularly since the Islamic Revolution but also to evaluate the whole issue from the Iranian side.

The initial Soviet view of the revolutionary Iran had dual characteristics, 'anti-imperialist' and 'progressive', although Islam itself could have a 'reactionary role and serve imperialist purposes'.<sup>60</sup> This view neglected the Islamic character of the revolution and the leading role of the clergy, and insisted on its nationalistic character. The main task, according to the new concept, was to consolidate the anti-imperialist orientation of the revolution and make an alliance between the revolutionary forces. This view concluded that there were three major competitors for power in the Iranian mass revolt: Left, Liberals and the the clergy. On the basis of this concept the Iranian Leftist parties had common objectives and thus needed to be helped to find a co-operative platform. Until such a this view concluded, all of them could co-operate with the other leading forces. It was only in 1984 that the Soviet writers agreed that the Iranian revolution was in fact an 'Islamic Revolution'.<sup>61</sup> By then the Islamic Revolution had crushed the 'progressive forces' including the Tudeh Party and established a 'religious despotism'. The Islamic regime's proclaimed commitment to continue a destabilising war in the Persian Gulf and to support the Mujahedin in Afghanistan, made the Kremlin leaders' conclude that the Iranian regime, in the shape of a subversive force directed against the progressive regimes, was serving Washington's objectives in the Middle East.<sup>62</sup>

In 1986, a second view suggested that Iran, under the Islamic regime, was more of a threat to the Soviet Union than an opportunity for gain. This perspective was against the dual characteristic of the first view and thus rejected Brezhnev's early optimism about the Islamic regime in Iran.<sup>63</sup> In this context, the Soviet Armenian theorist and writer, Arabadzhyan, in his geo-political argument, suggests that the Left should have worked with the Liberals to stop the clergy, whereas in fact they fought the Liberals on the basis of an anti-American perception they had towards the regime. This view did not blame the left for the failure to unite ranks, but criticised the Liberals who had failed to support Bakhtiar's nationalist regime before Khomeini came to power, which could have 'created a bourgeois-democratic platform capable to contain the anarchy and prevent the Islamic extremists gaining a leading hand'.<sup>64</sup> In this view, inclination for co-operation between East and West in order to contain the Islamic Revolution is apparent as he argues that the Islamic fundamentalism has neither been pro-American nor pro-Soviet.

A third view was based on detente in East-West relations. Gorbachev suggested that regional crises must be dealt with outside the East-West context and the terms of the Cold War.<sup>65</sup> Yevgenii Primakov, a leading Soviet specialist in the Middle East and a personal adviser to Gorbachev, argued by analogy that East and West have common interests in exerting a 'restrained' influence on regional events, and in the meantime he related it to a 'common concern about Islam'.<sup>66</sup> This view reflects more the Soviets' fear of being drawn into an unwanted conflict with the West than a direct danger from the Third World countries to the universal security. The dual characteristic of the first view was to suggest that Iran might have been used either by the Soviet Union or the United States to foster fear on the other side, disturbing the balance of power in the region. The third view concluded, as long as either of the two superpower failed to have decisive control over Teheran, they should exclude Iran from the terms of the Cold War and seek their own strategic advantages. Gorbachev seemed to be inclined towards this view, but geo-political determinants of Soviet foreign policy denied him a chance to set forth and

implement relevant policies. However, the Soviets further moved towards a pragmatic evaluation of the Iranian regime and a realistic view of Islam. This perspective, despite Western views of the Islamic fundamentalism versus modernity, insists on Islam as a political force with historical and cultural roots, but dismisses it as a 'third way' of development.<sup>67</sup>

### **Gorbachev and the Dynamics of Society Policy in Iran**

Soviet-Iranian relations under Gorbachev, in addition to the long-established determinants including national security considerations, regional interests and ideological measures on both sides, had been under the influence of a US factor too. Although the new thinking was to redefine the Soviet position in the Third World, geo-political consideration of the Cold War period, East-West relations and to some extent ideological trends continued to affect Soviet perception and policy towards Iran until the Cold War period ended in 1989 and Soviet domestic politics faced radical changes. The Soviet Union, in spite of co-operation with the United States in the Persian Gulf, continued to compete with it as the Kremlin still seemed unwilling to agree to lose its logistic edge in South West Asia and surrender to the circumstances resulted in the US presence in the Persian Gulf. Always critical of the US 'interventionist policy', Moscow carried on to attack the US military buildup in the Gulf. Even after August 1988 when the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq was implemented she called Washington the 'common enemy of Baghdad and Teheran'.<sup>68</sup> Policies pursued by Gorbachev towards Iran, despite a desire for change and preliminary signals for modification, were mainly consistent with traditional concepts. In the meantime, Gorbachev's genuine effort to reduce the tension between the East and West and to pursue detente, and also the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, proved that he was trying to re-design Soviet relations with the outside world including neighbouring states.

The Soviet diplomatic offensive launched by Eduard Shevardnadze with a tour of the Middle East in February 1989 proved that the Soviet Union, despite the withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan, maintained its interests and objectives in South West Asia and that the new thinking was not all about abandonment of the power contest or an entire retreat from the Third World. In fact Soviet policy towards Iran up to 1988-89 was a reflection of its general attitudes in the world scene: trying to apply pressure whenever possible and to make concessions if necessary. This complex approach made it all the more difficult to find an authentic perspective on Soviet-Iranian relations under Gorbachev since its basic determinants - new trends for change and tactical manoeuvring - were constantly breaching one another's boundaries as the Soviet Union itself went through profound changes. However, Gorbachev's cautious approach to Iran left no doubt that the Soviet Union would want to continue to reduce the chances for an American come-back in Iran and to minimise the US presence in the region. The Soviet Union under Gorbachev was keen to establish better relations with Teheran even at the cost of irritating the United States whose influence in Iran had been a major concern since World War II until the Islamic Revolution saw this dramatically shattered by the new regime in Teheran.

The view of the Islamic regime on the issue of relations with the Soviet Union, prior to the formulation of its foreign policy, was based on Islam's political philosophy and Iran's historical relations with Russia. The Islamic regime, at the beginning, advocated a negative balance approach to all superpowers, calling it 'negative equilibrium'. Such a policy, which was inherited from Mossadeq, became the core of Khomeini's 'Neither East Nor West' slogan. Iran, under the Islamic regime, sought to have working relations with the Soviet Union, and seemed concerned about Moscow's ultimate objectives. The fear that the Iranian Left forces might attempt to take over power, with the help or blessing of the Kremlin, kept the Islamic regime deeply sceptical of Soviet intentions. Therefore, Iran resisted any change in its anti-Communist policy

towards the Soviet Union. During the interim government, Iran viewed the Soviet Union as more of a threat to her stability and a danger to her national security than any other powers, including the United States.<sup>69</sup> The Islamic leaders felt apprehensions about Soviet intentions of manipulating Iran's ethnic minorities in order to gain influence in Iran or to make possible a sovietisation of Iran in the same way as was attempted during World War II.<sup>70</sup>

However, Iran's military and economic needs, together with the state of relations she had with the West, paved the way for rapprochement between Iran and the Soviet Union. From 1985 onward the Soviet-Iranian relations, which had suffered a severe deterioration mainly as result of Soviet disillusionment with the Islamic regime and the impact of Islamic ideology on Iran's foreign policy attitudes, turned to a moderate course of improvement. This new development fluctuated, however, due to the interplay of domestic and foreign issues, including evolution of politics which shifted the balance of power within the Iranian leadership in favour of pragmatism, and a particular change in the Soviet perception and policy in the Third World. One of the main factors which prevented Soviet-Iranian relations ever hitting rock bottom was the decision on both sides to keep the door of communication open by continuing diplomatic relations between Teheran and Moscow regardless of the circumstances.

The shift in US policy in the Persian Gulf which had resulted in an intensification of the US-Iranian confrontation, to some extent helped Soviet-Iranian relations improve as they shared the same concerns about the US presence in the region. The Soviet-Iranian agreement on the export of Iranian oil through Soviet territory, the building of a railroad to link Sarakhs on the Soviet-Iranian border with Bandar Abbas in the Persian Gulf, the joint project for exploration of oil in the Caspian Sea and the resumption of the Aeroflot flights to Teheran were the noticeable signs of progress in the course of bilateral relations between the two countries.<sup>71</sup> On the issue of imposing an arms embargo against Iran, suggested by the UN in order to force Iran to comply with a ceasefire, Soviet policy was

not defined as they suggested giving more time to the UN and Iran to discuss their differences. The Kremlin's position towards Iran underwent a tactical change when the Soviets forced Iran to agree to a ceasefire in the war with Iraq.<sup>72</sup>

The war between Iran and Iraq was an important factor which affected the course of Soviet-Iranian relations. Despite the official Soviet policy of neutrality towards the battling countries the Kremlin's attitude changed from time to time, mainly in order to respond to the developments in the war fronts and depending on Moscow's assessment of the impact of the war on its regional interests. Iran's decision to accept the terms of the Security Council Resolution 598 regarding implementation of a ceasefire, shortly after the US forces shot down an Iranian civil airliner over the Persian Gulf on 3 July 1988, was warmly welcomed in Moscow since in the face of the new development the Kremlin could see a way to achieve some of its lost strategic objectives. Indeed, with the war over, the Soviet dilemma in the Gulf would be terminated and the outlook for progressive relations with the states of the region, of which Iran was an important one, seemed clear.

A visit to Moscow by the Iranian President Rafsanjani in June 1989, after termination of the war with Iraq and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, was a big step towards closer ties between the two countries.<sup>73</sup> One of the main by-products of this visit was the signing of an important military deal between Iran and the Soviet Union which could have helped Iran change the region's balance of power in her favour. It can be concluded from the content of this new agreement that the Soviet Union, by the end of 1988, perceived Iran as a potential ally with which it could have close political, economic and military co-operation. Iran, simultaneously, perceived the Soviet Union under Gorbachev as a lesser threat against her national security. These mutual developments provided the two parties with an opportunity to expand their relations which had been limited to economic areas since the onset of the Islamic regime in Iran.



In 1988-1989 the Soviet leadership, to whom a 'historical transformation of the Islamic Revolution' and consequently an increase in the Kremlin's influence in Iran was once an ideal notion, seemed to lose its entire ideological orientation. Iran simultaneously indicated that Islamic ideological obligations, although important on their merits, should not be seen as an obstacle to improving relationship with the Soviet Union. Indeed, having better relations with the Soviet Union, beside conventional advantages, could offer the Islamic regime a chance to be better represented in the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union. It seems that by 1988, Soviet assessment of Islam's 'progressive potential' had become more viable as Moscow seemed to be convinced that the Islamic pragmatism could be treated as an ally to their dramatically diluted socialism. It is not irrelevant to suggest that the Kremlin leadership, after a few years of uncertainty in their relations with Teheran, had concluded that an Islamic Iran was a vital factor to their national interests, both politically and economically. Politically Iran could help Russia deal with its Muslim populations and would also assist Central Asian republics in improving their economies. It seems that in 1989 economic and political considerations were playing a greater role than before in determining the Soviet approach to Iran. Mutually, an isolated and severely excluded Iran, by the force of the United States, from the political and security measures in the Persian Gulf, could have had a vital breathing space in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia and manage to divert part of her attention from the Middle East to the Caspian region and Central Asia, although, Iran would continue to perceive the Persian Gulf vital to its national security and regional interests.

In retrospect the Soviet policy of threat and intimidation designed to gain influence in Iran either failed to achieve its objectives, due to the interplay of various forces, or petered out in frustration. The Soviet support for the Iranian Left forces, which had constantly been pursued by all the Kremlin leaders, not only made impossible the setting up of working relations between the two countries, but also forced Iran to turn to the United States and other Western powers in order to counter the Soviet threat. The

latter inevitably resulted in a prolonged tension and bitterness in Moscow-Teheran relations. If the danger of the Soviets from the North and the subversive intentions and attempts of the militant Left was not threatening Iran's national security, the potential for comprehensive and progressive relations between Iran and the Soviet Union would always have been considerable. Contrariwise, if the Soviet Union had perceived Iran as vital to its national and regional interests and embraced Iran more as an ally than treating her as a subject of subjugation and hegemony, this would have certainly served the strategic interests of both parties.

It is quite unrealistic to conclude that the change in Soviet policy and attitude towards Iran during the era of the new thinking resulted merely in the lessons Gorbachev might have learned from the history of Soviet-Iranian relations. It is wiser to evaluate developments of such relations in the light of the broader context of overall Soviet relations with the outside world. The new thinking, in line with a greater change in the pattern and conduct of Soviet foreign policy, altered Moscow's behaviour towards Teheran. As a result, the Soviets' long-lasting negative approach to Iran changed for a more reasonable attitude, and the policy of smear and intimidation was revised to make possible an intensive co-operation and even alliance with Teheran.

### **The Impact of the Collapse of the Soviet Union**

The final days of 1991 witnessed the transformation of the Soviet Union of different nations from a classic totalitarian centralized power to a smaller, looser, more diverse association of republics. During this process, communist monopoly gave way to multiparty politics and Marxism was replaced by free market values. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States marked one of the most momentous developments of the twentieth century. The new development necessitated the building of the institutions to suit the new status of the

independent republics and simultaneously changed the member states' priorities in regard to their foreign relations and national security concerns. Change in priorities of the CIS members will continue parallel to the pursuance by these nations of different roads to self-assertion and independence. The latter would certainly lead to greater changes in the orientation and the conduct of their foreign relations with the outside world. The consequential impacts of the collapse of the Soviet Union by no means could be kept within the border of the former empire. For example, as far as this study is concerned, with the coming to the Asian scene of the new independent states, the interrelation of the forces would require a new regional balance of power in Asia and new power balancing arrangements, would lead to greater changes in the near East and the Middle East politics.<sup>74</sup> It is, however, too soon yet to suggest the fate of the CIS as its creation primarily was considered a counter-measure aimed at the neutralisation of centrifugal forces within the eleven republics when it was hastily devised in order to replace the former Soviet Union.

The evaluation of the likely development in the formulation and the conduct of the CIS member states' foreign policy, beside deep-rooted issues such as ethnic conflict, nationalism, religion, mass migration, environmental catastrophe and poverty, should too rely on the changes in the state of their bilateral relations and also the desire for political and economic groupings with the nations in their periphery. In this context, it seems that Moldavia, Georgia and Armenia are more interested in taking directions that are politically and economically independent from the Commonwealth.<sup>75</sup> The Armenian pro-independent motivation is as strong as that of Georgia, although the fear of being under siege by Azeri forces may keep them within the Commonwealth for the time being.<sup>76</sup> Without these six republics, making a new, looser union or a confederation consisting of Russia, the Ukraine, Belorussia and Kazakhstan seems to be a practical solution.<sup>77</sup> In this case Central Asian Muslim republics (Kirgizia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan) might attempt to break from Moscow and take an Asian

direction which would likely be aimed at the formation by other Central Asian nations of a new Union. The establishment of a new political grouping in Central Asia would nonetheless be a phenomenal factor in the region's socio-political, military and economic equations.<sup>78</sup>

The multi-aspect conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia is taking both republics to a difficult position in which the chances for remaining together in any political union such as the Commonwealth would seem very limited since Azerbaijan is counting on a closer ties with South West Asian Islamic nations, and might expect to find more common ground with Iran and Turkey rather than with the Christian nations in the north. A parallel outlook for co-operation with Georgia, Ukraine, Moldavia, the Baltic Republics and the East European states would attract Armenia. These two republics with no lost love in between them would not see it to their strategic interest staying together in the Commonwealth. If Georgia, as a result of Moscow's indirect intervention in favour of the old ties and against pro-independence nationalist forces, joined the Commonwealth or signed new treaties with Christian republics of the former Soviet Union, then Azerbaijan inevitably would have to consider counter measures such as forming political military pacts with the Islamic nations of the region.<sup>79</sup> The republic of Azerbaijan, on the way to establishing an economic infrastructure independent from the Commonwealth, has already expanded its economic co-operation with Iran and Turkey and has formed a few joint ventures with these two countries. It seems the new political forces in the Muslim republics of the Caspian Sea region may force the CIS to adopt a more Asian orientation in the conduct of its foreign policy.<sup>80</sup>

Iran, the natural power house of the Persian Gulf, once assumed great importance in the West, has always been noteworthy to the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. There are reasons to expect that the steady interest in the southern periphery of the new political entity towards Iran will grow in the future. In terms of geography Iran has not only one of the longest land borders of any of the Commonwealth neighbours but it also

controls the northern part of the Persian Gulf and its outlet to the Indian Ocean. With a declining ability to export oil, if it should, as could happen, be denied the oil resources in the republic of Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and their Slavic republic allies as well as the Central Asian republics of the ex-Soviet Union will be left dependent and consequently interested in the international energy market throughout the 1990s.<sup>81</sup> Then the most convenient source of supply, considering the geography of the region, will be the Persian Gulf. The existing agreement between Iran and the former Soviet Union for exporting Iranian gas to the North and also bilateral economic and technical treaties for co-operation in exploration of Iranian oil reserves in the Caspian Sea have given Iran a unique position on which the new Commonwealth will increasingly be dependent so far as its demands for energy is concerned.

Banking on her unique geographical advantages and relying on historical, cultural and religious ties with the post-Soviet states, Iran is capable and highly interested in helping the Central Asian republics to expand their relations with the outside world. In doing so, Iran is willing to provide them direct access to the Middle Eastern parts of the Islamic world and to open to them a broad window on Eastern Asia and the Indian Ocean. It seems that exploration of the existing potential in order to expand the relationship between Iran and the former Soviet Union's Transcaucasian, Transcaspian and Central Asian republics should not be circumstantial as it seems would take place regardless of the prospective political developments in the area. The existing mutual aspirations for having closer ties between Iran and these republics would acquire further momentum soon after the domestic difficulties of mainly political and economic origin in the former Soviet republics becomes less acute. Given her considerable capacities including geographical advantages, natural resources and economic potential, Iran will play an important role in the future of the Central Asian republics in any conceivable circumstances.

The newly independent states should take into consideration the making of a basic revision in their vision of Asia in order to secure themselves a permanent place in the region's dynamic life. The Russian Federation, the main heir of the old Empire, although 'Eurasian', however should not overlook Europe as the last remaining opportunity to which it could resort and consequently forget about the very significant fact that the new Commonwealth has only a small head in Europe and still a huge body in Asia.<sup>82</sup>

The Commonwealth even after the departure of the Baltic republics is more than twice the size of the United States and occupies 8.3 million square miles. The Commonwealth is bigger than either North or South America, and is more than two and half times the size of China. If the new Commonwealth wants to defend its land mass it should defend it in Asia where Russia made its main historical expansion.<sup>83</sup> More than half of the new Commonwealth's borders with neighbouring lands are in the Middle East, South Asia, and the Far East. The major Russian naval base of Vladivostok in the far east stands today on former Chinese territory. In order to demonstrate the geographic significance of Central Asia and the Transcaucasus republics of the CIS, the eleven Commonwealth republics can be placed into three categories: (I) Slavic/Rumanian; (II) Transcaucasian; and (III) Central Asian. Despite the possibility of further instability in Central Asia and the Caucasus which is likely to have anti-Russian character, the Russian Federation should consider the reassessment of its foreign policy in order to keep up with political and military changes in the world. The CIS's Southern Theatre of Military Operations (TMO) adjacent to Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan must be upgraded to the second most important among its major theatres, behind the Far East TMOs and prior to the European TMOs. If the Central Asian republics for any reason take directions independent from Moscow, then Central Asia must join the southern theatre and in this case the military importance of the combined areas will be very close to those of the Far Eastern theatre.

Russia, the main inheritor of the Soviet Union and the driving force of the CIS, has the same global ambition as the Soviet Union had in the world affairs. Therefore, it is widely expected to see the Russian Federation, soon after its basic problems at home are solved, moving on to regain its stand in world affairs.<sup>84</sup> The recreation and strengthening of Russia's foreign relations necessitates a reconsideration of its foreign policy and a new design to approach a new set of circumstances in the world. In so far as Russian relations with the West are concerned, closer co-operation and ties will continue in the same manner as was started after the 'Collapse of the Cold War'.<sup>85</sup> What requires a basic reassessment is the assumptions about the relations with the Third World, bilateral relations with the neighbouring states, and change in the region's politics. If Russia is not a real threat to the West any longer, it is still considered a serious source of danger to the East and the South. If Russia is intended, as it seems, to come back to the forefront of the world scene, it must first be made economically and politically competent, and if determined to reshape its relations with the Third World of which its own environment in Asia is a major part, Moscow should gain the full confidence of the states in the region. This perhaps is the main challenge of Russia foreign policy. Russia's new theory of international relations must be inspired by a new world view and based on a revised evaluation of a rapidly changing world. The challenge facing Russia is the implementation of a security system which could restore order in the republics of the former Soviet Union and conclude interstate conflicts amongst the liberated nations of the disintegrated empire. This system can no longer rely merely on the application of the force, as the pro-nationalism and pro-democracy forces, resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union, are still strong.

## **Future Relations between Iran and the Soviet Successor States**

Since the end of the Cold War and particularly after the collapse of Communism in East Europe, Russia's national security requirements have been undergoing changes made to suit the new circumstances which necessitated the adoption of alternative approaches. Facing the new challenges at home and coming under threat from the south and east, almost in time with the dramatic changes in the nature of the relations with the West, are the main issues which have forced Russia to reassess its national security needs. The new approach would require changes in Russia's strategic arms policy, which itself must be consistent with the new assessment in Russia's foreign policy objectives. Regarding the geopolitics of the CIS's Asian environment, the ideological differences and national and ethnic conflicts between the republics of the former Soviet Union, it seems that the new political entity should take into consideration a further shift in its defence emphasis from Europe to East and South Asia. A shift in the CIS strategic defence priorities and appearing in the Asia-Pacific region more of an indigenous entity, would sure be a part of a greater challenge facing Russia. China a fast growing economic power, still loyal, at least theoretically, to the old system, would resist Russia's new tendencies to play a greater role in Asia. China herself, however, could play a crucial role either to facilitate or frustrate Russia's move for a bigger Asian place which would inevitably lead to a change in the region and political equation. The CIS and Russia, after stripping away the ideological value system which had made their predecessor the most notable threat to the so-called Free World's stability so long as it managed to exist, in the pursuance of an ideology-free foreign policy, may soon be tempted to join the US camp and help it to encircle Communist China the same way as the USSR was treated by the US for decades. However, competing with China not only in the region and upon the gaining further political influence, but all over the world and particularly for the sake of safeguarding its arms market, would appear to be one of the toughest challenges facing this newly converted democracy. Taking into consideration all aspects of this competition, it seems



that Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan in the South, India in the South East, North Korea and Vietnam in East Asia are the main theatres of the 'Great Game' between the CIS and Communist China.

The manifestation of Gorbachev Doctrine in Vladivostok and his overtures for enhanced co-operation with the countries of Asia-Pacific region, which once was widely considered as a new vision of Asia, in spite of some diplomatic attempts, due to the circumstances, failed to achieve its proclaimed objectives. The CIS states are now in a better position to pursue the same and perhaps more ambitious objectives of the old doctrine.<sup>86</sup> There is no doubt about the growing importance of the region in the world's economic and political life. In 1990-91, for the first time since the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development began keeping statistics, the Asian Nations of the Yen Bloc alone, with their competitive, export-oriented manufacturing based economies, generated more wealth than either the European Community or the combined economies of North America. One of the leading economists at Jardine Fleming Security Ltd in Tokyo, Paul Summerville, has expressed his view as: 'The beginning of 1990s will be remembered as a watershed in the economic history of the region'.<sup>87</sup> There is no doubt about the CIS states' understanding of the importance of the Asian-Pacific region, but what is not yet quite clear is the CIS' readiness to face the challenge regarding its integration into the community.

The new vision of Asia by no means should suggest denial and neglect of the 'Common European Home' by the Russians, but what the new vision may stress is the formidable advantages of their Asian opportunities. Since the end of 1991, as was mentioned earlier, the CIS has not been threatened by West European democracies, but it has been under threat from China and South West Asian countries. 'Peace in Europe and peace in Asia' that Gorbachev once said to have 'equal significance in Soviet policy' (and at the time perhaps with some exaggeration) in the CIS strategic thinking should not be equal any more.<sup>88</sup> The CIS should not keep waiting behind the EEC doors to beg for a

first class citizenship, instead, it must get rid of the old obsession with Europe and re-draw its policy to enter the Asian world with a commitment to live together with them in peace. The future of the former Soviet republics (except the Baltic republics, Belorussia and Ukraine) simply lies in Asia although they could and should deal with the rest of the world as well.

The military capacity of the CIS and its enormous natural resources could and should be employed as facilitating leverage in the process of moving towards Asia. Such attempts must be focused on earning the confidence of the region's nations and securing a power base for the new Commonwealth in the area. The military presence of the former Soviet Union in the Asia-Pacific region has been very impressive. After the Cold War, despite a sharp reduction in the capacity of the CIS and Russia's armed forces in the Western military theatre, the Eastern Theatre has been treated the way as it was during the reign of Communism in the Kremlin. According to Western sources, over one fourth of all the CIS states' armed forces are now deployed in the Far East. These forces are equipped with 162 SS-20 missiles and 2,390 war planes, including about 85 TN-20 supersonic Backfire bombers. The Russian ground forces stationed in this region have been increased to more than 400,000 soldiers, armed with T-72 tanks. The former Soviet Pacific fleet is now the largest of its four fleets, with more than 800 ships including 2 aircraft carriers (the former Soviet Union had 4 aircraft carriers in all), and 115 submarines, of which 31 are equipped with nuclear missiles. However, this huge military strength will not increase the political prestige of the former Soviet Union among the Asia and Pacific nations if the CIS fails to formulate and practise its new foreign policy aimed at gaining the regional states' political confidence.<sup>89</sup>

The foreign policy of the new political entity is bound to be decided by strategic interests. The strategic interests must be approached through a master plan. In order to achieve this, with the ongoing political and economic transformation process in the republics of the former Soviet Union terminated, the identity of the Commonwealth

defined, and interrelation of the member states regulated, the CIS should employ new principles to shape its policy aimed at revitalization of its external relations. Although neither the current position of the CIS states, nor the surrounding circumstances in Asia are the same, as the world has undergone fundamental changes since World War II, however, in order to avoid risk taking measures in the design and the drive of its Asian policies, the CIS states could consider copying the policies designed and performed by the United States in the Middle East and East Asia after the Second World War.<sup>90</sup> It seems, despite the existing differences, that reconceptualisation of the classic ideas in the making of the new policies might prove advantageous.

Located in the Asia-Pacific region and sharing the same security concerns with other nations of the region could certainly be considered a silver lining which has its own clouds. The nations of the region, unlike the EC, are politically, socially and economically quite diverse. The CIS states, would walk a tightrope in dealing with the region's security system if it is not being politically reoriented. The new approach must first be made within the CIS member states. The second step should be taken towards the nations in the periphery of the CIS.

### **Religious factors**

The oppression of the Islamic peoples in the Soviet Union started by Stalin in 1928, and was perceived by the Muslim natives as a continuation of the Christian Russian policy of conquest against them. The resistance by all means of the Muslim nations of the South and Central Asia against Russification and then the imposed atheism has developed nationalistic tendencies and provoked strong anti-Russian trends amongst them. The Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980 resulted in an awakening of the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union and alteration of the nature of their resistance from social and cultural into political by the end of 1990.

Gorbachev's decision to desert Brezhnev's policy of appointing local leaders to the key posts and practising 'limited intervention by the central authority' convinced the South and Central Asian nations that that glasnost was basically for Russia and had nothing to do with their demands and causes. During Gorbachev, the Kremlin continued to insist on the Islamic identification as potential underminer of political loyalty while at the same time nourishing Russia's Christian roots.

The distinct characteristic of the notion of Islam in central Asia and Caucasus is in its amalgamation with nationalism.<sup>91</sup> The new era of awakening and self-assertion is not only religious and cultural but also has a considerable degree of political significance. The growing Islamic trend in the region has closely interwoven with nationalistic tendencies. It is expected, as happened in Afghanistan, that the Islamic world would unite their ranks and stand by the Central and South Asian nations if current conflicts further escalated. According to calculations based on the 1979 Soviet census, the Muslim populations in the Transcaucasian and Central Asian republics were already over 65 million. The significant number of the Muslim populations in the Southern flank of the former Soviet Union not only has given them the status of a social force but also provided them with an impressive feature of a political force. What is happening, slowly but constantly, in Central Asia, and the Caucasus, is a consolidation and nativisation process which might be turned to a bloody conflict against the traditional dominant forces in the region. The demographic dynamics of the Muslim republics indicate the importance of the role that Islam may play in the future political life of the Commonwealth, and in the region's equilibrium. Posing a serious threat against the stability of the Christian parts of the former Soviet Union by militant Islam, would be one of the multi aspects of the prospective challenge.<sup>92</sup>

Iran, resorting to her historic, cultural and religious ties with the Caucasus and Central Asian nations, is in a favourable position to respond to their needs and provide them with logistic and moral support. From an Iranian point of view manipulation of the

situation in Central Asia and Caucasus would be advantageous if they decided that destabilization of Iran's northern neighbours would serve their strategic interests. Iran's strategic interests in the Caucasus and Central Asia require to keep Russia out of the region if Moscow returned to the old policy of conquest and hostility. Tactically, Iran could join the People's Republic of China and make a political axis against the Russian Federation the same way as she could support Russia if the policy of containing Communist China was on the cards. Making of a new Islamic bloc with the Central Asian republics, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the republic of Azerbaijan is another option open to Iran if Russia adopts an anti-Islamic attitude in addition to a hypothetical return to the policy of conquest towards the South. The latter could dramatically upset the regional balance of power and usher in a new era of instability in the world.<sup>93</sup> It seems that the best option which could deflect the threat of a new ideologically inspired alliance, since its own ideological obligations are removed, is making an understanding with the Islamic nations of the region and promoting democratic values in the conduct of foreign policy towards the region states. One of the distinguished Russian orientalists and an admirer of Persian culture and poetry, Ilya Pavlovich Petrushevsky, who successfully managed to maintain the tradition of Iranian studies by pre-Communist orientalists, argues that 'However weak Iran may have been as an adversary over the centuries, it has always been able to out-manoeuvre Russia'.<sup>94</sup> Iran, represented by an Islamic fundamentalist regime, either could encourage the region's anti-Russian xenophobia and threaten the CIS's security or, if it would be conducted by a democratic regime, help to create and consolidate a regional unity.

In order to secure Iran's support, Russia needs to employ reassuring measures. Renunciation of articles V and VI of the 1921 treaty, which was imposed on Iran and for decades maintained as a source of national obsession since the the Soviets referred to it in order to justify their act of military intervention in Iran, is the easiest and the most influential of all. Although neither application of these articles which had limited Iran's

freedom of choice in relations with the outside world, after independence of the Transcaucasus and Central Asian republics are important, not even Iran demanded the removal of these articles together with the rest of the 1921 treaty although a Russian initiative to use the opportunity to scrap the articles would certainly be conducive in building a new relation with Iran based on mutual trust. If they could do the same with the Helsinki-Moscow treaty and bring an end to the policy of 'Finlandization', they could do the same with the 1921 treaty as well.<sup>95</sup>

In order to eliminate the elements of tension and threat, these elements must first be pinpointed. Islamic fundamentalism is next in importance to the threat represented by the authoritarian nature of the regimes such as Iran. Central Asia, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, is claiming its Islamic identity as an integral part of its national culture. Islam (at this stage and no matter how) is about to play a very important role in the region's prospective political life. The Islamic identity of the region's nation states, which despite Moscow's long lasted hostile policy of oppression, has never been forgotten, seems to be and indeed capable of playing a dynamic role in the political life and reorientation of these republics. With an Islamic fundamentalist regime in Iran, itself the main cause of an Islamic awakening in the region, the prospect of instability would seem close. What appear to be the most single important of all to deter a political explosion of an Islamic fundamentalist movement, in Central Asia, is testing the Islamic principle and its value system within a genuine democracy. Only a democratic approach, after decades of eradication and oppression, would lead to control the political dynamics of Islam, since the other policy options have been proved ineffective. The Islamic revolution in Iran after decades of Westernisation is a telling example.<sup>96</sup>

Russia, too, is expected to have learnt this lesson particularly after witnessing the collapse of Communism. This contradicts the views offered by some of the Russian experts such as Vladimir Skosyrev who believe 'The powerful irritant that used to be pushing Muslims into the arms of extremists will gradually be diminished to nothing', - a

view that contains factual elements and thus deserves to be considered as an alternative, otherwise the Islamic movement sooner or later will gather momentum in Central Asia and the Caucasus anyway.<sup>97</sup> The extent to which the consequences of such movement may go, depends on the interplay between the supporting forces in the peripheral environments and the conduct of appropriate policies designed to treat it. The socio-political evidences strongly suggest that the Islamic movement in the region is well rooted and is still alive. One statistic in this connection speaks more than many false analyses: two years ago there were only 18 mosques in Tadzhikistan, today, according to the Muslim authorities, there are more than 2,500. The other Muslim republics are not very different and so far as every single mosque in the absence of proper political democratic institutions could turn into a political power base, the Islamic organisations by comparison, are growing faster than other political and democratic institutions in the area. Supporting by Russia of the old and formally dismantled institutions and resorting to the application of force to bring the old elements back to power, like Moscow did with the help of the pro-communist Uzbek forces in Tadzhikistan, from December 1992 to February 1993, is only a desperate attempt and a shortsighted game to play into the hands of fundamentalism.<sup>98</sup>

*Newsweek International* in its special report about the Central Asian search for Islamic identity writes: 'For most of the last two centuries, the remote lands of Central Asia were a chess board across which Moscow pushed its empire southward. Russia's rivals in the *Great Game* were the British, then the Americans. Now a new contest has begun with immensely high stakes. Turkey, a pro-Western Muslim state, and Iran, a fundamentalist Islamic republic, are competing to shape the region's identity. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and many other players are also trying for influence'. And this 'great game has just begun'.<sup>99</sup>

It is foreseeable that the the success of the first outburst of an Islamic extremist movement would take the whole region into a domino chain of changes. When the first

waves of the movement starts, moral as well as logistic support from the outside could play a crucial role in accelerating the speed of events. The Islamic revolutionary regime in Iran, a power house of Islamic thought, could and would help the Central Asian Islamic movements under circumstances in which either extremist elements manage to divert the current tendencies for pragmatism in Iran or the Islamic movement in the region approaches a crucial stage.

Iran's foreign policy approach and her objective in Central Asia was noticed by some Soviet authors long before the collapse of the Soviet Union. For instance Berdyeva and Khommaturdyev in 1986 described Islam as a 'live weapon in the hands of our enemies', and claimed that Iranian ideological subversive tendencies was aimed at the collapse of Soviet administration in Central Asia.<sup>100</sup> Now, with the collapse of Communist rule which had been playing a deterrent role against foreign influences, such a threat seems closer to the region. But what makes a major difference is the way to handle the threat.

Morton Abramowitz, a former U.S Ambassador to Turkey who now heads the Carnegie Endowment, argues that 'all Central Asians really want is a better life'. He then concludes: 'The Iranians don't have cachet in the area, particularly in countries that want to improve their economies'. Although Abramowitz tries to draw a distorted picture, from an American, necessarily anti-Iranian, angle, however, he does not dismiss the role Iran may have to play as he goes on to say: 'There is undeniably a fundamentalist, messianic element in the Muslim world that might respond to Iran's expansionist intention but I don't think that element is the wave of the future'.<sup>101</sup> What seems likely to be Iran's game plan in the Caucasus and Central Asia is to make a new power base similar to those of the Lebanon. What makes difficult evaluation of Iran's final intention is the uncertainties resulted in a power struggle between different factions within the Islamic regime. If the United States continue to play into the hands of radical elements and



insists on making Iran 'the bogey man' of the region, then, the Islamic expansion in the region becomes an eminent threat.<sup>102</sup>

Iran's isolation and encirclement by no means could serve stability and strategic interests in the region. It would be wrong to implement the same policies towards Iran which were conducted before to contain Communism, as a new world order requires new rules of the game. If Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria fights for power under the banner of democracy, it must too be challenged with the same weapons not suppression. South West and Central Asia require the same approach towards a possible challenge by Islamic thought before it turns to its extreme form of expression. Otherwise the immunity of the region would be seriously threatened by Islamic fundamentalist forces. Islam still enjoys very much of the political dynamic gained after the success of the revolution in Iran. This political force has never been fairly and democratically examined ever since as neither does the Islamic value system itself believe in Western style democracy and freedom of political choice, nor have the governments of the Islamic nations ever wanted to democratically embrace Islam as an existing political force. Thus, the real potential of Islam, its tolerance, the political durability it might have in competing with other notions, and consistency in the people's support for the Islamic orientations, has mainly been left in myth. There is no doubt, if the Islamic fundamentalism in its power house Iran had ever been freely challenged through the ballot box, it would have gained less support than it has now in Islamic states such as Jordan and Egypt. Similar circumstances would be applicable in Algerian model within a few years if the Islamic fundamentalists were given a chance to come to power democratically. Islam in the republics of the former Soviet Union is not an exception.

### **Economic parameters and the CIS States' relations with Iran.**

The course of relations between Iran and Russia has been deeply affected by Russian economic interests in Iran particularly since 1828 when the first commercial protocol was annexed to the treaty of Turkamanchai. Iran and the Soviet Union between 1927 and 1940 signed a few more trade agreements mainly in favour of the Soviets. In 1967 the first five-year, Irano-Soviet trade agreement was signed, and in 1975 the total value of the trade between the two countries increased from \$20 million to over \$700 million.<sup>103</sup>

During the revolutionary period economic co-operation including trade between the two states was undermined by the political forces mainly functioning inside Iran. A major disruption in trade relations between Iran and the USSR occurred when the decision was made by Iran to stop exporting natural gas to the Soviet Union. The Soviets responded in 1980 by temporarily denying her transit routes in the Soviet Union. After a few years of uncertainties a major breakthrough occurred on 11 December 1986 when Iran and the Soviet Union signed an important economic protocol. The new convention covered all areas of economic co-operation between the two countries.<sup>104</sup>

During a visit to Teheran by the Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister, Georgii Kornienko on 2 February 1986 the revival of the Soviet-Iranian Permanent Commission for Joint Economic Co-operation was discussed and eventually by the end of the same year, after a six-year suspension, the Commission was reactivated. In the wake of signing the new protocol, Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister, Mohammad Javad Iravani and the Chairman of the USSR State Committee for Foreign Economic Relations, Konstantin Fedorovich Katushev, both tried to draw a promising picture of future economic co-operation between the two countries.<sup>105</sup>

The protocol included the export of 3 million cubic meters of natural gas per day to the Soviet Union from 1986 with promises that this amount would be increased up to between 80 and 90 million cubic meters per day by March 1990. Iran also agreed that the

Soviet Union would co-operate in the exploration of Iran's oil reserves in the Caspian sea. The implementation of the agreement, originally conceived 20 years earlier during the Shah's regime, was interpreted by observers of Iranian affairs as 'a reverse in Iran's historical reluctance to allow Soviet-aided oil operations in northern Iran'.<sup>106</sup> After the war with Iraq ended in 1988, a substantial increase in trade between the two countries was expected but due to internal developments in the Soviet Union nothing of importance happened.

The pro-democracy changes in Eastern Europe resulted in a sharp fall in commercial exchanges between Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Iran, but the Soviet Union failed to take full advantage of the new development as Iran seemed more inclined to deal with the West rather than with Moscow. From 1989 with all major obstacles removed, and the political horizon at its clearest since the Islamic revolution's accession to power, official talks between the Soviet Union and Iran resumed in order to expand economic ties and increase bilateral trade between the two countries. During a visit to the Soviet Union by Hashemi Rafsanjani in 1989 a \$6 billion dollar agreement for economic, military and technical co-operation was signed between Iran and the Soviet Union. In June 1990 the Iranian oil minister, Golamreza Aghazadeh, paid a visit to Moscow and agreed to increase Iran's annual export of natural gas to the Soviet Union from 3 billion cubic metres to 6 billion cubic meters. During this visit both parties emphasised the continuation of Irano-Soviet hydrocarbon relationship-included an Iranian supply of 100,000 barrels of oil per day by pipeline from the south to the Caspian sea coasts in return for gasoline and diesel fuel from the Soviet petroleum products.

On 18 September 1991 Yevgeni Primakov, officially representing President Gorbachev, visited Teheran, and asked Iran to postpone the Soviets' outstanding debts and offered Teheran in return, a supply of more modern weaponry from the Soviet arsenal.<sup>107</sup> Although economic relations between the former Soviet Union and Iran were

subdued during the last three decades by political events, however, the formation of the CIS and the consequent freedom of the Caucasus and Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union has prepared the ground for an attempt to upgrade the ties with Iran and widen the horizon for growing economic co-operation and substantial increase of trade between Iran and the CIS's member republics.

The Russian Federation as the main heir of the former Soviet Union should extract the full potential of existing agreements with Iran and try to gain a bigger share in Iran's growing market. Amongst the areas in which the two countries have better possibilities to expand their co-operation with Iran are: transportation, fishery, manufacturing industries (construction of steel plants and power stations), technology, housing construction, tourism and scientific exchange. As an example, tourism between Iran and the republics of the CIS could turn into a multi million dollar business simply by shifting the destination of Iranian tourists from Turkey to the Russian side of the Black Sea. The same potential in the former Soviet southern republics could annually accommodate hundreds of thousands of Iranian domestic tourists. Shipping in the Caspian sea and sailing of the Iranian ships in the CIS's international waters and making joint ventures for further commercial and industrial co-operation would help to increase the trade between Iran and the CIS republics.

Azerbaijan and Iran have already concluded an agreement to built an oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf. A new project is under way to transfer parts of Azerbaijan oil products to the Turkish ports via Iran. Iran also has proposed a similar deal to pipe natural gas from Turkmanistan. Iran is a leading oil producer in the Middle East with high efficiency in oil production, exploration, drilling and management, and therefore could help the Caucasusian and Central Asian republics particularly Azerbaijan and Turkmanistan, in order to overcome their oil industries' problems. Signing of a tripartite oil agreement in 1992 between Azerbaijan, Iran and the BP of Britain for exploration and production of oil in that area proves the importance of the role that Iran

could play in the future economic lives of the former Soviet southern republics. Border exchanges between Iran and the cities of the Central Asian republics must be considered as an opportunity leading to a bigger market for both sides.<sup>108</sup>

Iran, relying on her geographical advantages, could offer Central Asian republics a vital right of access and transport to the South, up to the North Africa, and to the West towards Indian Ocean region. One of the projects which could help the economy of the Central Asian republics is building of a railway to link the Iranian Port of Sarakhs to the Iranian port of Abbas (Bandar Abbas) in the mouth of the Persian Gulf (strait of Hormouz). The Russian roads and railways, due to the given preference to military purposes rather than economic utilities in the making of these facilities, are either linking the republics to the Russian lands or passing across the Iranian border lines. Thus, all these republics have practically been denied proper access to the outside world. Iran is the best solution to these republics' transportation problems with the outside world. Since Iran has an ongoing multi-billion dollar project to connect by rail the northern part of Iran to the South, the land locked Central Asian republics with a little work could link their rail roads to the Iranians and have access to the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. In the meantime the republics of the Caspian sea region could have a similar chance to use the existing Iranian rail roads from the north to the southern parts of Iran and from there to the open sea. Co-operation in transport and offering transit facilities would be lucrative to Iran and economically vital to the former Soviet Central Asian republics. From the Iranian point of view this would significantly increase Iran's strategic importance and her influence in the region. The revitalization of the 'silk road' and the connecting of Europe to China though Iran and Central Asia now seems not only possible but also necessary.

The late Shah of Iran, once in viewing the Soviet-Iraqi security relations, said that 'European security is a sheer mockery without stability and security in the Persian Gulf'.<sup>109</sup> The Iraq invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the rapid reaction by the United States and the allied forces in January 1991 to it, proved the preciseness of his

evaluation of the importance of the region in which Iran enjoys a prominent position. If the sensitivity and importance of the Persian Gulf necessitates mobilization of the West's defence to protect its equation by all means, as they did in the Gulf war, the CIS states, almost an indigenous power, should not care less towards its strategic interests in the Gulf. According to the latest estimates for energy consumption in the year 2000, Russia at the end of the current decade will be heavily dependent on foreign sources for oil. The Persian Gulf, after the southern republics of the former Union, is the only destination which could respond to the Russia's current and prospective demand for energy. According to the annual report of the Italian Oil Union, by January 1993, the world's proved total crude oil reserve are 136,220,000,000 cubic metres. The major oil producing states of the Persian Gulf (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, and Iran) have more than 67 per cent of the world's total oil reserves. The former Soviet Union's share of the world's approved oil reserves are 5.7 per cent.<sup>110</sup> The future industrial and economic growth of the Russian Federation would heavily depend on oil and gas consumption. Iran, the largest state of the Persian Gulf with 60 million population, occupies all northern shores of the Gulf. Iranian crude oil reserves with 12,668,000,000 cubic metres, stands for the world's 9.3 per cent of total reserves.<sup>111</sup> Iran also has in her possession the world's second largest gas reserves (25 per cent of the world's total reserves). These figures clearly reflect the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf and Iran to the CIS states not only militarily and politically but also from the economic point of view.

The strategic evaluation of the West, of the importance of South West Asia as compared with East Asia, should lead the CIS states to employ new policy principles and adopt a new doctrine which could serve its longterm interests in the area. For example, if by comparison and due to its geo-strategic priorities, CENTO (established in 1955 as an attempt by the Western powers to form the Middle East's defence organization and to encircle the Soviet Union from the South) had gained more prominence than its East Asian version, SEATO (established in 1954 to serve the same objectives in East Asia),

then the CIS, relying on a similar assessment, should upgrade its national defence priority in South West Asia. Within CENTO, Iran, from the US strategic point of view, was considered the most important, so long as the pact existed.<sup>112</sup> The validity of the same calculation may help the CIS to appreciate the importance of the regional states in its strategic calculations.

It seems that Iran, in terms of geo-strategic values, would have the same place in the CIS regional defence strategy as it had to the United States before the Islamic revolution, since Iran could play either a balancing or counter-balancing role in the security of the region from the North African flank of the Middle East up to the eastern part of Asia. The United States by ignoring Iran in the Persian Gulf's security measures, hastily formulated after the Gulf War in January 1991, has made a costly mistake. There is no way any power could initiate a security measure for the Persian Gulf and guarantee its efficiency if Iran was excluded. The CIS in its ideology-free foreign policy should take full advantage of the US miscalculation and establish a new bridge towards South West Asia through Iran and consolidate its position in the Persian Gulf region and the Indian Ocean.

Located on the conjunction of the Middle East and the Indian Ocean, Iran either could help the CIS's attempts to sustain its advancement into Asia, or interrupt it. Iran could also provide the CIS in general and its Central Asian nation states in particular with the best opportunity to have access to the East and West Asia. By comparison the Russian Federation and the CIS would enjoy, in the long run, an even better chance than the US had in the region if it could manage to exploit the existing potential. The military capacity of the former Soviet Union could serve as a significant leverage of policy implementation and a powerful element in strengthening the new ties with Iran if it was based on the Commonwealth's long term interests. It seems that the CIS has already resorted to this potential as Iran since 1990 has become one of the most important markets for CIS military exports.<sup>113</sup>

Taking into consideration the complexity of the CIS's identity, its problematic future, the imminence of the danger threatening its stability particularly from the South and Central Asia, one should conclude that an improper policy of arms transfer to Iran, although a lucrative deal which could generate a considerable amount of hard cash and therefore help Russia solving her economic problems, in the long run would nevertheless lead to the making of Iran a new regional super state and create circumstances similar to those of the pre-Islamic revolutionary period in which even the United States (an outside ally of Iran) could not tolerate. Had it happened, then the CIS members and to some extent Russia would have been the first to pay the price for this miscalculations. In fact rebuilding by the CIS states of Iran's military machine so long as the authoritarian Islamic regime maintains power in Teheran, not only continues to be an enigmatic factor, capable of disturbing South West Asia's equilibrium, but could also threaten the stability of the CIS's Central Asian and Transcaucasus republics. The formation by Iran's initiation of a new Islamic front in which the Central Asian and Caucasus republics plus Afghanistan and Pakistan could be expected to join, ought to be perceived as a feasible notion. If the new Union formed, then it would soon assume a strong political colour and contribute to the silently ongoing global conflict between the South and the North. The trend of political developments in Central and South Asia suggests that Islamic principles are likely to gain momentum and play a greater role in that region. If the Islamic forces were concentrated in a new front, then the the rest of the Middle East and North Africa either would join or support it. In this nightmare scenario, militant Islam would gain enough power to set up new discipline and vigorously challenge the world old convention and bitterly define the 'politics of disappointment'.<sup>114</sup>

Without any doubt *real politics* suggests that the military capacity of the former Soviet Union should be used as an instrumental leverage not only in improving the CIS states' image but also in implementation and promoting its policies and strengthening its position in the World including Iran, as far as this study is concerned. In the meantime



rational thinking insists on the point that exerting the former Soviet Union's military potential in heavily arming an authoritarian regime whose rigid ideological principles have never been concealed, would definitely be a risk taking measure from which the CIS states' national security might seriously suffer. Thus, in order to diminish the side effects of such a move, the CIS policy for military consignments to Iran must be formulated on the basis of the new strategic considerations. The formulation of the CIS states' policy regarding militarisation of Iran must be accommodated within the state's new military doctrine and in line with Russia's new vision of Asia.

It seems that the Commonwealth is to abandon the former Soviet Union's policy of expansion and committed not to exert the application of force in the conduct of its external policy.<sup>115</sup> If this would be the case, then the CIS should not allow its military capacity to be used by the other states for implementation of hostile policies.

From the political point of view, the ideological orientation of the Islamic regime in Iran must be accounted a source of socio-political contradiction with the CIS, which after the reign of Communism is expected to develop into a fully fledged democratic system. Though the CIS states' support for the democratisation of Iran's political system in the hand of its own people, must be considered in the interests of the State's new strategic thinking and discussed during the talks with the other democratic regimes. Democratisation in Iran must be a part of a greater process aimed at evolving the nature of politics in the region. This would serve more than any other deterrent measure the national interest of the Commonwealth republics, and in part would help to safeguard their national security. The formulation of CIS policy towards Iran should precisely reflect its new world view.

The CIS states would soon be in the position to practise either a creeping or a precipitating role towards political changes in South West Asia and Middle Eastern politics. The Russian President Boris Yeltsin who declared during his speech in the UN

Security Council Summit on the last day of January 1992, that Russia supports democracy and human rights world wide: 'The end of the twentieth century is a time of great promise and new anxieties. Perhaps for the first time there is now a real chance to put an end to despotism and to dismantle the totalitarian order whatever shape it may take. Our topmost priority is to ensure all human rights and freedoms in their entirety, including political and civil rights and decent socio-economic and environmental standards'.<sup>116</sup> Indeed the Yeltsin manifesto which is the first official sign of a changing heart in Moscow after the Soviet Union, should be followed by actual support for a wider democratisation of authoritarian regimes across the world. The new orientation not only seems in line with the needs of the changing world but also would be an answer to national interests of the newly freed republics of the former Soviet Union.

In sum, although the future relationship between Iran and the heirs of the former Soviet Union, due to the existing political uncertainties prevailing on both sides, will face problems of different natures, however it is expected to see these problems gradually being solved. The prospective relations between Iran and the republics of the former Soviet Union must be based on two parallel lines, first, Iran's relationship with the individual Muslim republics in Central Asia, Transcaucasus, Georgia and Armenia, second, the Russian Federation and the other Slavonic republics. Of course it will not be easy to create a framework to contain the basic interests of all nations involved in so far as, first, the political orientation of the independent republics seems quite ambivalent, second, having close relations with one state may effect the relations with the other - Azerbaijan and Armenia are expressive examples.

The initiation by Russia of a comprehensive system of security in Asia as a significant part of a greater arrangement of international security, designed to suit the new world order, would definitely serve the strategic interest of the region's nations. Because the nature of the relationship between the CIS and Iran is evolving, a zero-sum-game perception: worse for my neighbour - better for me, would soon look outdated. The

world is increasingly growing interrelated and interdependent, thus, in order to make a solid base for a lasting peace, the structure of the world political system and the nature of politics in the Third World must too be changed, in favour of democracy. The CIS states' support for pro-democracy movements in the region as part of a greater effort for democratisation of the Third World would help in removing the sources of tension and diminishing the threat of further conflicts in the future. In so far as the possibilities for instability in Central Asia and Caucasus is real and anti-Russian, proper measures need to be employed in order to prevent extremist elements turning the region into a hotbed of hostile and chaotic movements. Otherwise, the existing chances for a chain of radical changes which would have drastic consequences for the region and the rest of the world would be promoted. Islamic fundamentalism should not be given a chance as a substitute for the collapse of Communism. The notion of Islam versus Christianity must be changed to the notion of Dictatorship versus Democracy. Only in this case will the old and growing North-South conflict turn into a worldwide co-operation for a better standard of living, both politically and economically. Russia could help. Iran is the best possibility to do so.

## NOTES

1. One of the best political studies on Soviet Union and Iran is George Lenczowski's *Russia and the West in Iran 1918-1949: A Study in Big Powers Rivalry*, New York, 1949. In this area Firuz Kazemzadeh has prepared a valuable academic work too, see Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia 1864-1914*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968. For the works on the earlier periods see Muriel Atkin, *Russia and Iran, 1789-1828*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980, and R.K. Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran: A Developing Nation in World Affairs, 1500-1941*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1966. Although these works have covered an extensive period, the following practices seem to have succeeded only in extending the time rather than breaking new ground and offer different conclusions. In this regard, there are a few academic studies which have mainly been prepared for the degree of Ph.D.; Irene W. Meister, *Soviet Policy in Iran 1917-1950*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Medford, Massachusetts, 1954; and Ahmad Choreichi, *Soviet Foreign Policy in Iran 1917-1960*, University of Colorado, published in Persian in 1974 when the author was chancellor of the Mashhad University in Iran. Amongst the academic studies on Soviet-Iranian relations there is one interesting exception: Miron Rezun's *The Soviet Union and Iran: Soviet Policy in Iran from the Beginning of the Pahlavi Dynasty until the Soviet Invasion in 1941*, Geneva: Sijthoff & Noordhoff International Publisher, 1981, which offers an excellent account of Soviet Iranian relations for the period concerned, without being directly influenced by the previous works. Soviet Iranian relations have recently become subjected to far more serious studies by professional political writers and academics such as Professor Harish Kapur whose work was modelled by Professor Alvin Z. Rubinstein in producing his own work in the same field a couple of years later; compare a less famous work of Harish Kapur, *Soviet Russia and Asia 1917-1927: A Study of Soviet Policy Towards Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan*, Geneva, 1965, with the much referred to source of the well known work by Alvin Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy Towards Turkey Iran and Afghanistan: The Dynamic of Influence*, New York: Praeger, 1982.
2. See M.S. Ivanov (ed.), *Istoriya Irana*, Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1977; the translation of Ivanov's *History of Iran* was published in Farsi by the Tudeh Party in Teheran in 1979; S.L. Agaev, *Iran: Vneshnyaya Politika i Problemy nezavisimosti 1925-1941 gg*, Moscow: Nauka, 1971; Agaev, *Iran mezhdur Proshlym i budushchim*, Moscow: Nauka, 1984; Z.A. Arabadzhyan, (ed.), *Iranskaya Revolyutsiya 1978-79 gg.: Prichiny i uroki*, Moscow: Nauka, 1989.
3. B.M. Dantsing., 'Iz Istorii Russkikh Puteshestvii i Izucheniia Blizhnego Vostoka v Dopetrovskoi Rusi, *Ocherki po Istorii Russkogo Vostokovedeniia*. Moskva: Akademiya Nauk SSSR, 1952, pp.195-230.
4. See L. Lockhart, 'The Political Testament of Peter the Great,' *Slavonic and East European Review*, 14 (1935-36), pp.438-41; D.V.A. Resis, 'Russophobia and the "Testament" of Peter the Great, 1812-1980,' *Slavic Review*, 44 (Winter 1985), pp.681-93.
5. See an article by M.A. Lobyntseva, 'K Voprosu o Sozdanii Aziatskogo Departmenta Ministerstva Inostrannykh Del Rossii, in *Iran: Sbornik Statei*. Akademiya Nauk SSSR. Institut Vostokovedeniya, Moskva, 1971, pp 85-90.

6. A.I. Medvedev, *Polkovnik General' nogo Shtaba*. Persia: Voenno-Statisticheskiiye Issledovaniia S. P. B., 1909, p.618.
7. The system of capitulation represented a dishonourable chapter in Iran's foreign relations. Russia's initiation subsequently acquired by other European powers and extended to France in 1855; the USA in 1856; Great Britain, Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Norway and Denmark in 1857; Greece in 1861; Italy in 1862; Germany and Switzerland in 1873 etc. In 1964, and a few decades after the old law was abolished, the United States, following negotiation of a \$200 million loan with Mansour Government for modernisation of Iran's armed forces, requested the same legal right to be secured for its military advisers and technicians who would be sent to Iran to train the army in the use of new equipment. The bill, which was to guarantee extraterritorial capitulatory rights for American military personnel and prevent Iranian courts from hearing complaints about them, was hastily pushed through the parliament and passed in October the same year. The ratification of the bill provoked a considerable measure of dissatisfaction even amongst the hand-picked members of the Majlis (parliament) and provided Khomeini with a new opportunity not only to attack the Shah's regime but to take on the United States too.
8. See Lobyntseva, 'K Voprosu o Sozdanii Aziatskogo', pp.84-90.
9. See the Russian Minister of Finance Count S. Yu. Witte, *Vospominaniye*, Vol.II, Berlin, 1922, cited in Miron Rezun, *The Soviet Union and Iran*, Geneva: Sijthoff & Noordhoff International Publisher, 1981, p.7.
10. Ivo. J. Lederer, *Russian Foreign Policy: Essays in Historical Perspective*, New Haven, 1962, p.509.
11. Fereydon Adamiyat argues that the Iranian constitutionalist movement of 1905-6 had a copy of the declaration of the French Revolution. See *Faker-e-Democracy-e- Ejtemaie Dar Nehzat Mashrutiyyat-e-Iran* (The Idea of Social Democracy in Iran's Constitution), Teheran 1967.
12. See Sepehr Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, pp.8-23.
13. *Novyi Vostok*, No.5, Moskva, 1924, pp.101-113.
14. V.I. Lenin, *Sobranie Sochinenii*, Vol. 19, Moskva, 1932, p.252.
15. For a detailed history of Jangali movement, the collapse of the Gilan republic and Soviet participation see Harish Kapur, *Soviet Russia and Asia 1917-1927. A Study of Soviet Policy Towards Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan*, Geneva: Institute Universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales, 1965, pp.165-81. See more in George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran 1918-1948. A Study in Big Power Rivalry*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1949, pp.54-64.
16. Miron Rezun, *The Soviet Union and Iran*, p.46.
17. It was only at the end of 1927 and after the Fifteenth Party Congress that Stalin's victory as the unchallenged leader of the Party and the Government was established.

18. For Zinoviev's comment see *International Press-Korrespondenz*, No 145, 20 October 1925, pp.2144-5; for Kamenev's comment see *ibid.*, No.160, 8 December 1925, p.2502.
19. Soviet Orientalist V. A. Gurko-Kriazhin was the first to begin a supportive debate and a positive assessment of Reza's coup d'état in Persia. For details of his interesting argument see A.V. Gurko-Kriazhin, 'Perevorot v Persii' *Novyi Vostok*, No.12, 1926. This argument continued when another Soviet Marxist I. Vissanov took a view different from those of Gurko-Kriazhin and characterised Reza's monarchy as Bonapartist. For his view see I. Vissanov, *Persiya Reza Shaka*. Vol.15, 1926, pp.1-16.
20. Such an idea was discussed in the Politburo in 1927. For details see Yuri Agabekov, *Zapiski Chekista*. Izdatel'stvo Strela, 1930, p.118. The English translation of this work has been done by Henry W. Bunn. Brentano. published in New York in 1931.
21. See Agabekov, p.118.
22. The Iranian and Soviet political writings about the rise and fall of Teymourdash are numerous. For an example of the Iranian account of this legendary statesman who has always been treated in the Soviet Union the same as a head of state, see Hassan Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, London: John Murray, 1957.
23. For the text of the proposal see Rouholla Ramazani, *The Foreign Policy of Iran 1500-1941. A Developing Nation in World Affairs*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1966, p.237.
24. Communist International was generally expected to remain the forum of theoretical debate, while, at the same time, it was to serve as an instrument in the hands of Soviet government and Party apparatus.
25. The observers of Iranian affairs are divided over the judgement of whether the problem of a supply route was behind the invasion of Iran or it was the German threat. The first group, relying on Winston Churchill's memoir, favoured the notion of supply route and the second, like George Lenczowski, referred to the German threat. Indeed, Germany had given the great powers rivalry in Iran, a new dimension which until they entered the game, was more or less restricted to Britain and Russia.
26. For the text of the Soviet note see *Manchester Guardian*, 26 August 1941.
27. See Sir Reader Bullard, *Britain and the Middle East*, London: Hutchinson, 1951, p.135. Of course the British negative publicity including the BBC radio broadcasting from London and Delhi against Reza Shah, and British military movement, played the same role as the Soviet military operation, to change the political scene in Iran and forced abdication of Reza Shah.
28. See Rohollah Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy. 1941-1973: A Study of Foreign Policy in Modernising Nations*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975, pp.115-123.
29. See Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy*, p.42.
30. The way the Kremlin was simply trapped in an action-reaction cycle in Afghanistan and eventually found itself in a difficult position, which made the

Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan almost inevitable in 1980, proved that domestic policy developments in foreign countries could never have been excluded from the determinants of Soviet foreign policy. In that context one can argue that the Red Army's invasion of Iran was partly due to the political developments, mainly in connection with the German presence in Iran and their ultimate objectives in the area.

31. See George Kennan in Nikki R. Keddie and Mark J. Gasirowski, *Neither East Nor West: Iran, The Soviet Union and The United States*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990, pp.65-67.
32. See 'Note from the Soviet Government to the Government of Iran', *Pravda*, 23 May 1952. For an interesting view on Soviet policy towards Mossadeq see Shahrokh Akhavi, 'The USSR, Mossadeq and Khomeini: Soviet image towards Two Iranian Revisionist Regimes' (paper presented at the conference on 'Iran, the US, and the USSR' at the University of California, Los Angeles, 22-23 April 1988).
33. Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy*, p.315.
34. See Michael Brzoska and Thomas Ohlson, *Arms Transfer to the Third World, 1971-85*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.343.
35. *Ibid.*, p.347.
36. Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy*, p.330.
37. The Shah closed Iran's border to the Kurds and ended military and logistic aids to them. In return, Iraq agreed to change the boundary of the Aravand Roud (Shattal Arab) to the middle of the river as is the custom in most waterways.
38. International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 1979*, London, 1979, p.53.
39. For the Soviet view in this regard see Richard Herman, *Perception and Behaviour in Soviet Foreign Policy*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985.
40. See Alexander Bovin, 'Iran in the People's Hands: Inevitable Denouncement', *Izvestia*, 13 February 1979, p.4.
41. Alexander Bovin, 'Iran: Consequences and Reasons', *Literaturnaiia Gazeta*, 25 October 1978, p.14.
42. Leonid Brezhnev, 'Message to Iran', *Pravda*, 19 November 1987, p.2.
43. See Thomas McNaugher, *Arms and Oil: US Military Strategy and the Persian Gulf*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1985, pp.22-48.
44. Vladimir Kuzichkin the Soviet Vice Consul in Teheran, who in June 1982 defected to Britain, confirmed that all Tudeh Party leaders were on the payroll of the Soviet Union. See Vladimir Kuzichkin, *Inside the KGB*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1990, pp.285-295.
45. See Zalmay Khalilzad, 'Islamic Iran: Soviet Dilemma' *Problems of Communism*, Vol.33, No.1, January/ February 1984, p.16.

46. Margot Light, *The Soviet Theory of International Relations*, London: Wheatsheaf, 1988, p.12.
47. See Alexander Dallin, 'Gorbachev's Foreign Policy and the New Political Thinking in the Soviet Union', in Peter Juviler and Hiroshi Kimura, (eds.), *Gorbachev's Reform*, New York: Hawthorne, 1988. Changes in Soviet Third World policy have been scrutinised by political journalists such as Alexander Bovin; and theorists such as Dobrynin, once head of the International Department of the Central Committee.
48. See Jonathan Steele, 'Reformists will look back and recall a golden age', *The Guardian*, 6 March 1986.
49. The new draft was adopted by the 27th Congress of the CPSU in February-March 1986.
50. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for our Country and the World*, New York: Harper and Row, 1987, p.160.
51. Mikhail Gorbachev, 'Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th Party Congress', *Novosti*, 25 February 1986.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*
54. It has been widely accepted that Gorbachev's role lay not so much in what he did as what he did not do.
55. *Newsweek*, 18 July 1989, p.24.
56. A. Kilakowski, *Problems of Communism*, 1978, No.3, p.8.
57. Gorbachev favoured a centrally-controlled single Soviet state in the shape of a looser confederation. However, he objected to the idea of founding the Commonwealth as an alternative to the Soviet system, on the grounds that 'ethnic minorities in the republics would find themselves living abroad'. He also argued 'the existing tensions could lead into civil war', API, Moscow, 18 December 1991.
58. Although arms reduction treaties with the United States served the economic interests of the Soviet Union, in return for the major concessions the Soviets made over East Europe, they could have secured a more lucrative agreements in the same way as they gained \$15 billion dollar pledge from Germany after German unification was guaranteed.
59. Ulyanovsky was one of the advocates of this view. He argued in 1982 that Iran in the era of the Cold War can not have a neutral role in the East West struggle. See Rostislav Ulyanovsky, 'Iranskaya Revolutsia i ee Osobennosti', *Kommunist*, 1982, No.10, pp.106-116.
60. See Semen Agaev, 'On the Concept and the Essence of the Islamic Revolution', *Aziya I Africa Segodnya*, 1984, No.5, pp.27-31.
61. See R. Ulyanovsky, 'Sud'by Iranskoi Revolutsii', *Kommunist*, 1985, No.5, p.109; see also S. Agayev 'On the Concept and the Essence of the Islamic Revolution'.



62. See Igor Belyayev, 'Iranian Gambit', *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 26 November 1986, p.9, in FBIS SOV-86-228.
63. See A.Z. Arabadzhyan, 'The Iranian Revolution: Causes and Lessons', *Aziya I Africa Segodnya*, 1986, No.3, pp.32-36 in JPRS UIA-86-034. Arabadzhyan, in his geo-political analysis, suggests that the Left should have worked with the liberals to stop the clergy, whereas they fought the liberals on the basis of an anti-American perception of the regime.
64. *Ibid.*
65. Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, pp.173-80.
66. Yevgeni Primakov, 'USSR Policy on Regional Conflicts', *International Affairs*, No.6, 1988.
67. 'The wave of Islamic fundamentalism: Problems and lessons', *Voprosy Filosofii*, 6, 1985, pp.63-73. Yevgeni Primakov is the main advocate of this view which is close to the realistic view of Arabadzhyan and to some extent Ulyanovsky's argument in regard to the 'Islamic ideological force.
68. Radio Moscow Persian Service, 12 September 1988, FBIS SOV 88-179.
69. The Islamic Regime's Foreign Minister Sadeq Ghotbzadeh, who in 1990 was accused by the Soviet agent in Teheran of being a KGB-recruited agent at the time of studying in the United States was, quite blunt in criticising the Soviet Union. The main argument the interim Government had with the Soviet Union was on the validity of article 5 of the 1921 Soviet Iranian treaty on which Moscow was insisting but Teheran wanted it made null and void. For the Kuzichkin comment on Ghotbzadeh see Kuzichkin, *Inside the KGB*, p.302.
70. The Soviet Union, after the outbreak of ethnic turmoil in Iran's Turkmenistan and Kurdistan, accused the United States and imperialist sources of plotting against these nations and cautioned them. Although it is difficult to find hard evidence that the Soviet Union after the Islamic Revolution favoured Iran's fragmentations through ethnical disturbances, Soviet propaganda, whenever Moscow-Teheran relations were becoming further aggravated, seemed quite keen to sympathise with Iran's national minorities, particularly with the Kurds. For the Soviet view on Iran's ethnic minorities see Pavel Mezentsev, 'Iran: Faced with complex problems', *New York Times*, 18 August 1979, pp.8-9.
71. For the draft of the Soviet Iranian Big Projects see the *New York Times*, 5 August 1987, p.1, A 13.
72. For an analytical view on the Soviet change of heart see 'Soviets Cite Arms Ban As Topic for Gulf Talks', *Washington Post*, 23 December 1987, p.7.
73. Gorbachev, on the occasion of the visit, said: 'We explicitly declare that our country supports Iran's anti-imperialist revolution', and added that 'we are ready to go as far as Iran is ready to meet us'. For 'Declaration on the Principles of Relations between the USSR and Iran' which contained a long-term agreement on economic and technical co-operation between the two countries, see *Tass*, 22 June 1989, FBIS SOV 89-119, 23-24. For the military part of the agreement see *Al-Ittihad*, Abudhabi, 26 June 1989, 1, FBIS SOV-89-122.

74. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds.), *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. This comprehensive collection of studies of the new states which have grown from the old Soviet Union provide systematic and rigorous analysis of these nations and state-building. This study offers a fresh record of the different roads being pursued by these young nations.
75. The Georgian decision making potential was frustrated since they had been entrapped in a power struggle between the nationalist groups represented by the deposed president Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his pro-Communist opponents. Therefore, as soon as the power struggle is settled, they will express their desire to follow the Baltic republics' experiences. Although the cult of personality in Georgian, is similar to other southern republics of the former Soviet Union, Shevardnadze's return to Georgia may change the scene and help a national reconciliation
76. Withdrawal of the last Soviet troops from Nagorno-Karabakh, the disputed enclave, escalated the tensions between neighbouring Armenia and Azerbaijan republics and forced Armenian to take shelter behind the commonwealth, but they are expected to see go their own way, as soon as the existing differences with Azeris have been settled. Armenians are Christian and naturally have more inclination towards the Commonwealth than other republics in the Caucasus, but even their religious faith cannot force them to forget about their national identity and keep them in the Commonwealth for good.
77. If Kazakhstan breaks from the Commonwealth, the Russian populated areas will be forced to stay with the new Union. This would lead to fragmentation of Kazakhstan and of course will be rejected by the Kazakhs. Thus, Kazakhstan like all other Southern and Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union is expected to face severe challenges from Moscow and become a source of tension and instability if she decides to moves towards full independence.
78. Making a confederation with the Slavic parts of the former Soviet Union would seem to be a practical notion, but keeping the Central Asian republics alongside it seems unlikely in the long-run .
79. Although formation of the new military and political treaties in South West Asia may not seem to be taking place immediately, the possibilities of this can not be dismissed.
80. The Central Asian republics' political trends may motivate the Russian leaders to divert part of their attention from Europe in favour of a more Asian orientation.
81. The former Soviet Union's oil producing capacity in 1988 was 12 million barrels a day. At the beginning of 1992 this was 'significantly less' than 9 million barrels a day and may soon drop out of the exporting market (*Financial Times*, 12 January 1992). The short-fall in former Soviet oil production, according to the report, is expected to downgrade its ranking amongst the world's major oil producers this year.
82. With 90 per cent of Ukrainians voting on the 1 December 1991 for independence and taking formal steps to split from the Soviet Union, the future of the new union, formed by the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Bylorussia, seemed further confused if not utterly irrelevant. Then with Ukraine separated from the main body of the CIS and independently trying to join the European Community,

finding a proper European place for the remaining parts of the Commonwealth is becoming even harder than it seems now.

83. The Russians reached the Pacific Ocean and expanded into Central Asia during the nineteenth century. They conquered centres of traditional Islamic civilisation, including Azerbaijan in 1813, the Kazakh Steppe in 1824, Tashkent (Uzbekistan) in 1865; the Khanate of Bokhara in 1868; Khiva in 1873, Goek-Teppe in 1881, Merv in 1884, and the areas in the Pamir in 1895. Russian expansion in the direction of central, South Asia took place mainly at the expense of Iran, and in the direction of the Pacific at the expense of China.
84. Three of the West's leading scholars of Soviet and post Soviet affairs, Stephen White, Graeme Gill, and Darrell Slider, trace the politics of transition in the late-1980s and early-1990s from its origin to its uncertain post-Communist future. The authors analyse the full impact of transition on official and popular values, central and local political institutions, the post-Soviet republics, the CPSU and the parties which replaced it, and political communication. See Stephen White, Graeme Gill and Darrell Slider, *The Politics of Transition: Shaping a post-Soviet Future*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
85. The 1980s was a decade of upheaval unprecedented since the conclusion of World War II. In 1980 superpower d'étente had been abandoned and there was no sign of an end to the competition and conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Yet by the end of the decade Communist elites had been overthrown in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union was in a state of disintegration, and the two superpowers had embarked on a process of unparalleled international co-operation. The suddenness and rapidity of change took most observers by surprise, and led many to reassess their assumptions about global politics. For more see Mike Bowker and Robin Brown, *From Cold War to Collapse: Theory and World Politics in the 1980s*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
86. For an analytical view of an observer who had followed the Social, economic and political crises in the former Soviet Union during Gorbachev's final days and his speculation on the consequences of the collapse of Communism see Boris Kagarlitsky, *The Disintegration of the Monolith*. London: Verso, 1992, pp.157-168.
87. *Newsweek*, 5 August 1991, p.24.
88. For an accessible introduction to a set of political changes in the East see Ronald J. Hill, *Communist Politics Under the Knife*, London: Pinter Publishers, 1990, pp.184-190. For the latest analysis of the nation-and state-building processes in the former Soviet Union particularly in regard to the South and Central Asian parts of the collapsed empire see Muriel Atkin and Shirin Hunter in Bremmer and Taras, *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*.
89. For the change in the former Soviet military objectives in the East see Pushpa Thambillai, *The Soviet Union and the Asia-Pacific Region*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990, pp.17-19.
90. In the aftermath of the World War II, America, an emerging world power, introduced itself as a peace-loving state generously offering its full capacity to defend the security of the Middle Eastern and Asian nations against the elements of instability arising from internal and external sources. Therefore, the US managed to come to the forefront of the region's politics and substituted colonial powers.

91. See more in Marie Broxup, *Soviet Perception of Militant Islam*, London: Macmillan, 1990. For the latest survey of the changes in relations between the Church and the Soviet political system during the seven decades of the existence of the Soviet Union see Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. This book brings together fifteen of the West's leading scholars of religion in the USSR, and provides the most comprehensive analysis of the subject yet undertaken. This work discusses the policy apparatus, programmes of atheisation and socialisation, cults and sects, and the world of Christianity. See also Ivan Specter, *The Soviet Union and the Muslim World*, Seattle, Washington, 1959, pp.181-85.
92. See Amir Taheri, *Crescent in a Red Sky - the Future of Islam in the Soviet Union*, London: Hutchison, 1989, p.18, 128 and 203.
93. In 1985 alarming articles about the influence of Iran's revolutionary ideas on Soviet Muslims began to appear in increasing numbers in the Soviet press. See Marie Broxup, *Soviet Perception of Militant Islam*, pp.74-5. In this regard see more in Leon P. Baradat, *Soviet Political Society*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1986; also, 'Trends in the Soviet Muslim population', Y. Ro'i, *The USSR in the Muslim World*, London, 1984.
94. Ilya Petrushevsky, *Iran: Istoricheskii Obzor*, Tashkent, 1926, pp.122.
95. Finlandisation, the policy that cemented the Cold War relationship between Finland and the Soviet Union, was scrapped by the replacement on 20 January 1992 of the 1948 treaty of friendship, under which Finland was bound to defend the Soviet Union if any one tried to invade Russia through Finland, by a new agreement between Moscow and Helsinki. The new agreement contains no military commitment.
96. Comparative analysis of the social and political backgrounds in Iran before the Islamic Revolution and in North African states during modern times offering significant similarities to those of Central Asia and Caucasus where Islam, despite facing pressures of different natures, suffered the same, and then managed to survive. The authoritarian nature of the regimes and their despotic anti-Islamic attitudes and superficial social openness are among the noticeable common points in the three different societies where either the Islamic hurricane has taken place or is about to start.
97. Vladimir Skosyrev, *Izvestia*, 23 December 1991, p.4.
98. *Kayhan*, London, reporting the eye witnesses in Tazhikistan, 18 March 1993, p.8.
99. *Newsweek*, 3 February 1992, special report.
100. See L.Berdyeva and Dzh. Khommatdurdyev, *Soviet Turkmenistan*, 1985, 1986 and 1987, various articles translated and published in *Kayhan*, London. See for example, *Kayhan*, 12 December 1986, p.8.
101. *Washington Post* interview with M. Abramowitz, 12 January 1992.
102. See Shireen Hunter, a Middle East expert at Washington's Centre for Strategic and International Studies, *Newsweek*, 3 February 1992.

103. See Kamran Mofid, *Development Planning in Iran: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic*, Cambridge: Middle East and North African Studies Press Ltd., 1987, p.147.
104. *IRNA*, Teheran, 12 December 1986.
105. Report in the Persian daily *Entelaat*, Teheran, 4 February 1986, p.1.
106. See Rohollah Ramazabi, *Revolutionary Iran; Challenge and Response in the Middle East*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.
107. *Keyhan*, London, 26 September 1991.
108. The news of an oil agreement between BP, Iran and Azerbaijan has never been officially announced, but the writer has been in touch with a BP employee who had personally played a part in such a deal and travelled to Azerbaijan as a Turkish speaking geologist alongside BP delegates. For the news of the oil pipeline see *API*, 6 June 1993, reporting the Azerbaijan Deputy Prime Minister Rasol Golizadeh from Turkey confirming the route of the pipeline through Iran and Nakhijevan to Turkey's Mediterranean port of Yomere Talik. For the latest developments in this regard, see *Herald Tribune*, 6 August 1993, p.6.
109. *Entelaat*, Teheran, 3 May 1976, p.1.
110. See Tables in Appendix I.
111. See Table in Appendix II.
112. The decision made by Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, to take Pakistan out of CENTO, after the war with India in 1973 and the US failure to help Pakistan, followed by the Shah's dissatisfaction about what he called 'the United States, limited sense of responsibility towards the CENTO members' security consideration', brought the necessity for the existence of the treaty into question. During the mid-1970s, Iran under the Shah, considered CENTO as an obstacle on the path of improving her relations with Moscow. The Central Treaty was eventually dissolved when the interim government of the Islamic regime announced Iran's withdrawal in 1979.
113. From the end of the Gulf War the Soviet Union started talks and negotiations with Iran which led to an agreement for Iran to purchase more than \$6 billion of Soviet made weapons systems including MIG 27, 29 and 31 fighters and different types of missile batteries. By the end of November 1991, and at the request of the Islamic republic of Iran a large number of Soviet arms dealers representing Soviet military industries, after having their first show in Abudabi (Southern part of the Persian Gulf) came to Teheran to set up a similar show for Iranian customers. Amongst the weapon systems exhibited in Teheran were top-of the-line MIGs, SAM missiles, SU 25 T heavy bombers, M-I 28 anti-tank helicopters and E-S 11,12,13 batteries. The search for highly advanced arms has never ceased in Iran since the Islamic regime agreed to stop the war with Iraq. Though, Iran which can offer cash for its arms purchases, the best and, on the basis of ongoing deals, the biggest customer for the former Soviet Union's arsenals.
114. See 'The politics of disappointment - first stirring of the holy war', *Scotland on Sunday*, 19 January 1992, p.12.

115. See more in *Soviet Military Doctrine* by George Flynn, London: Routledge, 1989. pp.33, 53-59. For the Soviet strategic policy and an original analysis of the build-up of strategic forces before the SALT I agreement see Christopher Bluth, *Soviet Strategic Arms Policy Before SALT*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. The author studies a number of critical decisions taken in relation to strategic bombers, ICBM, strategic nuclear forces based at sea, ballistic missile defence and military uses of space.
116. Boris Yeltsin speech to the UN, PTA, 31 January 1992.

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**Table 1**  
**The World's Total Oil Reserves**  
**January 1993**  
**(million tonnes)**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Reserves</i>	<i>(% of total reserves)</i>
(North America)	4,089	3.0
USA	3,367	2.5
Canada	772	0.5
(Latin America)	16,892	12.4
Venezuela	8,547	6.3
Mexico	6,998	5.1
Others	1,347	1.0
(Middle East)	90,285	66.4
Saudi Arabia	35,176	25.9
Iran	12,668	9.3
Iraq	13,643	10.0
Kuwait	12,824	9.4
UAE	13,329	9.8
Qatar	509	0.4
Others	2,136	1.6
(East Asia)		
Indonesia	788	0.6
China	3,274	2.4
Others	4,019	1.5
(Western Europe)	2,159	1.6
Britain	565	0.4
Norway	1,201	0.9
Italy	102	0.1
Others	291	0.2
(Africa)		
Algeria	1,255	0.9
Libya	3,111	2.3
Nigeria	2,442	1.8
Others	1,633	1.2
(Eastern Europe)	8,075	5.9
Former USSR	7,776	5.7
Others	299	0.2
Total Reserves	136,022	
OPEC Share	105,346	77.4

Source: Italian Oil Union, Annual Report, June 1993.

