

### CHAPTER III

### C H A P T E R - III

#### Genesis of The Conflict

An attempt is made in this chapter to highlight the reasons that led to war between the two countries, Iran and Iraq.

" Saddam Hussein's decision in October 1980 to launch an invasion of Iran reflected sources of tension between the two countries that are both historical and of more recent origin. Among the former were Arab - Iranian cultural antipathies, long standing border disputes, rivalry for influence in the Persian Gulf, and a legacy of suspicion by each side that the other was seeking to undermine its authority by stirring up trouble among its ethnic and religious minorities."<sup>1</sup>

#### Arab - Iranian Cultural Antipathies :

The Arab - Iranian cultural antipathies have emerged with the emergence of the Mesopotamian Civilization and the Persian or Iranic Civilization. Out of these two Civilizations emerged the Sunni Islam and the Shia Islam. Arabic and Persian, the two languages became the instruments of the two trends. The split between the Sunni and the Shia Islam was political and it seems that it can never be abridged and solved.

#### a) Sectwise Conflict :

As already stated in my previous chapter, Gulf Countries have a total population of nearly 69 million people out of which Iran and Iraq account for over 80 percent of the population of all the Gulf States. Further majority of the population in the Gulf States belong to the Shia Sect of Islam; which is nearly

75% of the total population. Indeed, "Shiism is a powerful force in the Gulf, across sovereign frontiers. With the sole exception of Iran, all of the Gulf States are governed by Sunni political elites."<sup>2</sup> Even though Shia population is in majority, they have never enjoyed political power. They have never participated in the ' Decision Making ' process of the Governments in the Gulf States. This fact was exploited by Iranian authorities to their own advantage. Why was it possible for Iran to exploit Shiism against Sunnism and what is the difference between the two Sects?

Sunnism believes in Prophet Mohammed and Shiism believes in Prophet's Son-in-law Imam Ali. Further there is fundamental division between radical Islam and traditional Islam which is also called ' Populist Islam ' and ' Establishment Islam ' respectively. Both of them constantly compete to demonstrate their greater commitment to the faith and the law. Each attempts to discredit the beliefs and practices of the other.

" The Islamic Republic of Iran is a Government dominated by the Principles of Populist Islam in General and of revolutionary Shiism in Particular".<sup>3</sup> The Government of Iraq is, however, dominated by Sunni version of Populist Islam in general and Baathism in particular. The Iranian version of ' Islamic State', " is primarily opposed to the innovations imported from the west. It is a socio-political milieu from which Westernization as a social process must be excluded being repugnant to Islamic law. It disapproves of the western way of living, that is , of women moving in the streets without headscarves, indulging in sex, gambling, consuming alcohol, going to night clubs, movies pornographic shows, mixed dancing

and so on. Baathism on the contrary departs from the Iranian version. It challenges orthodox Islam; separates religion from politics. It advocates of creating a new society, freed of the shackles of the oppressive past. It supports education and technology, emancipation of women, economic development and material prosperity. In short it approves the western way of life. " Baathism, unlike Khomeinism, offers the hope of improvements in the people's standard of living."<sup>4</sup> " In contrast, Khomeini's revolution was otherworldly. Its realization is subjective. Abnegation is a reward, death a fulfillment."<sup>5</sup> His " conception of an " Islamic World order " is rooted in the idea of World order within the Imami or Twelvers' Shiite cultural tradition as interpreted by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. From his perspective, the existing world order is imperfect, but it will be perfected on the appearance of the Twelfth Imam, variously called Messiah (Mahdi), or " Master of the Age " ( Sahib-i-Zaman). The Messiah will create justice and equity in the world because, in Khomeini's words, he alone will be able to establish a " World government of God"<sup>6</sup>

However, the main aim of Shia revolution of Khomeini was to inspire the entire shia community, especially Shia's in Iraq to its own advantage. " With its active example of Populist Islam in power, Iran has placed external pressures upon Gulf governments who promote Establishment Islam. Internally, the forces of Populist Islam continue to criticize the regimes and organize their cadres. Establishment Islam, therefore, today finds itself caught in the tightening vise of its domestic Populist Islam on the one side and the revolutionary Populist - turned - Establishment Islam of Iran on the other side. Cutting across both jaws of this vise is the important force of

Shiism".<sup>7</sup> This was precisely the factor that worried Saddam Hussein. Because majority of the population in Iraq is Shia population and Saddam Hussein feared provocation to Shia Iraq from Iran. Hence Arab-Iranian cultural and religious antipathies proved to be one of the historical and fundamental factors that led to a war between Iran and Iraq.

#### Long Standing Border Disputes :

The history of border disputes between Iran and Iraq dates back to the days of the emergence of Mesopotamian Civilization when Turkish Empire exercised its sovereignty over Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia (Meso-middle, Potamia-rivers) is the land watered by the two rivers Euphrates and Tigris which combine into the Shatt-al-Arab flowing into the Persian Gulf. The whole story of border dispute begins with the occupation of Arabistan; the land inhabited by the Arabs; in the 17th century by the Persians. In the middle of the 17th century Sultan Murad IV signed the Treaty of Zuhab. The Treaty of Zuhab (1969) fixed the boundary between the two empires of the Turks and Persians. Till 18th century Arabistan remained under Persian Sovereignty but under the rule of an Arab Emirate which in the 18th century was abolished. Further the Treaties of Erzerum of 1823 and 1847 reconfirmed the boundaries between the Turkish and Persian Empires. With the help of British and Russian mediation, Persia acquired some more territory from the Turks. It acquired the city and port of Khorramshahr, the island of Khirz on which Abadan is situated as well as free navigation on the Shatt-al-Arab from its mouth up to where the frontiers of the two countries meet up the north. The Arab tribes, on the left banks of the river became Persian Subject. In spite of these

treaties the boundary between the Turkish and Persian empire remained undefined. On November 4, 1913, Turks, Persians, British and Russians signed a Protocol relating to the delimitation of the Turco-Persian boundary at Constantinople. However, with the outbreak of the I, world war the Protocol of Constantinople was not implemented and once again the boundary remained undefined. Iraq became the British mandate. On 4, July 1937 another Frontier Treaty was signed between Iran and Iraq. However, Persia continued its encroachments on Iraqi territory which were revealed later in the century.

Ultimately in the year 1969 Iranian Government unilaterally denounced the 1937 Treaty. This decision came in view of the British decision to leave the Gulf. Once again the navigation on the shatt-al-Arab became a matter of dispute, the river being Arab in all respects. Further; the Shah of Iran also encouraged secessionist rebellion in the northern Iraq obviously among the Kurds and Kurdish areas. This time Algeria mediated between Iran and Iraq to bring an end to the boundary dispute. On the mediation of the Algerian President Boumedienne, on March 6, 1975, Iran and Iraq signed a Treaty known as the Algiers Agreement. The Treaty envisaged a final and permanent solution based on the Constantinople Protocol (1913) which dealt with the demarcation of the boundary and delimitation of the fluvial frontier in the Shatt-al-Arab; between Iran and Iraq. In the meantime in 1971 the Shah acquired rather captured the islands of Abu Mussa, Tunb major and minor, strategically situated on the Strait of Hormuz. This caused lot of trouble between Iran and Iraq. Further there were signs of Iranian imperialism filling in the vacuum created by the British

departure. This worried all the Gulf countries and therefore Algeria mediated in the year 1975. However the "Algiers Agreement" could not function for a long time . It hardly remained in existence for five years, that is, till 1980. Because both the states stuck to their own demands and went on to follow incompatible interests in the region. Ultimately the war broke out in 1980 between Iran and Iraq. Thus : " The Iran-Iraq border after all, is one across which Arabs and Persians have feuded throughout much of recored history. Iraq saw the war in some ways as the latest round in an established routine."<sup>8</sup> Hence the boundary confrontations between Iran and Iraq was and is nothing novice to them; it was and is a regular phenomena between them.

#### Rivalry For Influence In the Persian Gulf :

Iran and Iraq has long harboured ambitions to become the superpowers of the Persian Gulf. Both the countries are always engage in influencing the Persian Gulf. The same factor is reflected in the policies of both the countries. Irans device to gain political supremacy in the Persian Gulf was its "Islamic Revolution". Through this revolution Khomeini wanted to control the entire Gulf. 'In fact, he wanted to export the revolution to other countries, advocate Shii Islam through it and ultimately unite the entire Gulf shii population to overthrow the Sunni dominated regimes in the Gulf. And thus control the entire Gulf. "The phrase "export of the Islamic Revolution" is not simply a revolutionary slogan; it is a cardinal principle of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republi of Iran".<sup>9</sup> khomeini's idea of Islamic Revolution was not limited to Gulf countries alone. He wanted to export Islam to the entire world. Thus controlling the

entire world was the main motive behind the 'export of Islamic Revolution'. " Iran proclaimed its foreign policy in absolute, exclusionary terms in which Iran's role was to serve as the exemplar and catalyst to bring "Islam to the entire world". The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the foreign service were purged repeatedly, and representatives abroad were exhorted to abjure traditional diplomacy in favor of revolutionary and doctrinal purity. Implicit in this approach was the assumption that the world was corrupt and, in the end, the world needed Iran more than Iran needed the world".<sup>10</sup>

Further Khomeini's revolution was also directed against the Shah, the American Satan and Saddam Hussein - the president of Iraq. His ' Islamic Revolution' was successful in overthrowing the Shah's regime in 1979. He also to some extent was successful in curbing American interference in Iranian affairs. However, he failed to achieve success in case of Saddam Hussein. He wanted to ouster Hussein from power but that did not happen. On the contrary he gained more support from the people of his country. His hatred toward Hussein was so intense that he was not prepared to compromise on this issue. " As long as Khomeini is alive, however, there will be no compromise on the removal from power of Hussein. Khomeini, who has always personalized disputes, blames Hussein for bowing to the Shah's request to put him under virtual house arrest in the last years of his exile in Iraq and for expelling him from Iraq in the fall of 1978".<sup>11</sup> It also appeared from Khomeini's attitude that, he wanted to ouster Saddam Hussein because he was the only challenge in the Gulf. He had the capacity to prevent Khomeini from achieving and extending his expansionist policies. Thus



Khomeini's personal rivalry, force of revolutionary shiism and so on were also some of the reasons that led to the conflict between Iraq and Iran.

Iraq's device to gain political supremacy in the Gulf was (and is) reflected in its Policy of 'Pan Arabism'. As mentioned in the last chapter, Iraq's attention is fixed on the Persian Gulf. According to Iraq, Persian Gulf is not 'Persian, it is more Arab than Persian and therefore he calls it an Arabian lake. Iraq, under the Baath, seeks to achieve its Pan-Arabism through unity, freedom and socialism; and promote the same without compromise in both the internal and external arenas.

Baathism departs from Khomeinism and stands for progress, this does not mean that Baathism "does not contain an expansionist germ. Not only does Baath ideology glorify Arab unity, but within every Iraqi resides the dream of restoring Baghdad's ancient leadership of an Arab Empire".<sup>12</sup> His Pan-Arab policy seeks to achieve progress through self reliant economic policies. His Baath Nationalism also seeks to get back Arabistan occupied by Persians and the three islands captured by the Shah. The things became worst when the oil was explored in western Arabistan. Both the countries began to struggle for the supremacy over the oil in the region.

Saddam Hussein, like Khomeini, wanted to topple Khomeini from the power. When, in 1979, Khomeini took charge of the Iranian Government, President Saddam Hussein of Iraq saw an opportunity to topple him. Because during this period Iran was faced with internal commotion. Further Khomeini faced internal opposition from some of the sections in the Iranian society. " By this point too, Iraq calculated that in military terms Iran was weaker locally and more isolated internationally than had ever

been the case before. In the past, borders demarcation disputes between Iraq and Iran had always involved the European Powers, Turkey and Russia-and in 1975, indirectly, the United States-and the outcome had generally favored the stronger of the two sides, backed by the strongest of the outsiders. Now Russia and the United States were out of the play, although each might come back at any time. With central authority apparently disintegrating in Iran, and a purge in July of the remnants of the regular Iranian armed forces in Khuzistan, the opportunity presented itself for Iraq to turn the clock back to the favorable border situation it had enjoyed from its independence to the unfavorable agreements of 1937 and finally 1975-and in the process to humble the revolutionary regime, destroy any appeal it might have for Iraq's Shiites, and quite possibly created conditions in which it would be overthrown .13

Thus both Iran and Iraq were vying for political supremacy in the Gulf; the political supremacy which was based on their indigenous ideas of 'Islamic Revolution' and Baathism respectively.

#### Legacy of Suspicion by Each Side :

Both Iran and Iraq suspected each other of stirring up trouble among its ethnic and religious minorities. Iran charged Iraq of provoking the Arab minorities in Arabistan and the three captured islands against the National Government. And Iraq charged Iran of providing weapons to Kurdish and other minorities in Iraq to instigate trouble and act against the Iraqi government. However, both of them took advantage of each other's territorial disputes, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities to accomplish their selfish interests.

Iran faced ethnic opposition from Mujahedeen Khalq, Arabs from Arabistan and from the three islands of Abu Mussa, Tunb major and minor. Whereas Iraq faced potential opposition from two sources; the Kurds in the North and the Shias in the South. This factor made Iraq feel more insecure when the revolutionary shiism began taking grip in the Middle East. Because Iran was already facing trouble and opposition from the Kurdish minority during this period. They were demanding autonomy from the Government of Iraq, which was granted very lately to them; with the emergence of Khomeini and his brand of Shiism Iraq feared potential opposition even from the shiis in the south. Because the main target of Khomeini's shiism were shias in Iraq. The shii factor made Iraq feel restless and worried and thus suspicious about Iranian instigation increased and further went on increasing.

Thus the element of suspicion and fear, especially since 1979, caused lot of problems between the two countries. Boundary overtures became a regular phenomena. Even the Algiers Accord of 1975 could not do anything. By 1980 the situation became so grim that no side was ready to compromise; both stuck to their own policies. Further "with a population of ethnic (and linguistic) Arab stock, that has coexisted uneasily with the Iranian majority of the country, the area has been a battleground for ambitious regional potentates since ancient times. The Shatt-al-Arab river is both a natural border for Khuzistan, between modern Iraq and Iran, and a strategically vital means of access for the cities on both sides".<sup>14</sup>

**Geographical Vulnerability of Iraq :**

" For Iraq , the Shatt-al-Arab is only one of its geographic vulnerabilities in the area."<sup>15</sup> Further Iraq has less than 50 miles of coastline between Fao Peninsula and Umm Qasr the Iraqi naval base. Most of this coastline on the Gulf is unusable for Iraqi shipping. The main Port Basara is 100 miles away from the Gulf, up the Shatt-al-Arab. It faces three-month cargo bottleneck even in the best of times. Umm Qasr, the Iraqi naval base lies on the border with Kuwait. It can only be reached by sea through a narrow passage between the Iraqi shore and Kuwaiti Islands. The approach to Fao and the entrance to the Shatt-al-Arab is commanded by Iranian artillery and naval posts on and around Abadan island.

**a) Territorial Insecurity :**

Iraq is always surrounded by potentially hostile hands. Iraq at the Persian Gulf must share its access to the sea with a non-Arab State and traditional enemy. Further Iraq is the only OPEC member state whose oil cannot be exported without crossing Syria, Lebanon and Turkey in the North and without coming close to the Iranian territory in the South. Moreover oil is the principal commodity on the basis of which the Iraqi state survives. It is the principal means of livelihood. However, its oil export itself is endangered because of its territorial insecurity.

**b) Reliability on Neighbouring States :**

The geo-political concerns of Iraq, make Iraq rely heavily on the goodwill and cooperation of neighbouring states, without which its domestic prosperity is unthinkable. This makes Iraq vulnerable to international developments; that is, whatever happens in the neighbouring states affect Iraq's

policies. Further it becomes very difficult for Iraq to define its stand in the times of crisis between its neighbouring states. Thus Iraq's international calculations are also complicated by having to deal at once with so many neighbouring states.

c) Military Aspect :

Militarily, Iraq falls within the range of fighter-bombers and ballistic missiles of Israel; as well as of U.S. aircraft operating from NATO bases in Crete and Turkey.

d) Protection of Iraq's Oil :

Considering all the above aspects, it becomes necessary, in fact compulsory on the part of Iraq to take preventive measures, diplomatically, economically and militarily, to protect its oil interests in the region.

e) Abrogation of Algiers Agreement ;

" Following the Algiers Declaration of March 1975 Iraq and Iran sought adjustment, the two countries entered into no less than four, if not five, pacts of the type known as protocols to demarcate and delimit the frontier between themselves but it appears that the Parties concerned attached different meanings to their approach for settlement. Iraq wanted the return of Arabistan which Iraq could not afford to do in view of loss of territory held by it for centuries as well as loss of national revenue derived from that part of Iran rich in oil. Iran was not prepared to liquidate what she considered as an integral part of its national territory."<sup>16</sup> This proves that Pan Arabism and Iranian Revolution could not settle their scores with each other. The increasing incompatible objectives of the two, led to the war that began

on 22 September 1980. On 22nd of September 1980 Iraqi infantry columns crossed the frontiers into Iran, while Iraqi bombers struck at Iranian military installations and that is how the war actually started.

The war which began in September was thus a rational, though not inevitable, result of Iraqi security concerns that were heightened by the fall of the Shah and the advent of the revolutionary regime of Khomeini.

Thus the immediate cause of the war appears to be the ' Treaty of Algiers ' signed in 1975. However all the above mentioned factors were responsible for the out-break of the war between Iraq and Iran.

#### Conclusion ;

Thus all politics in the Middle East is regional. Religion, ideology, ethnicity, competing strategic ambitions, and historical rivalries compel the Middle Eastern states to deal with and be influenced by one another. This is a regular phenomena. No states in the Middle East can follow its own indigenous policies, rather their policies are based on their regional role. This precisely were the factors that played an important role in the war between Iraq and Iran.

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