



## GULF WAR AND PERSIA

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**GULF WAR and PERSIA** (correctly Persian Gulf War). Iran/Persia maintained a policy of neutrality during the war between Iraq, whose forces occupied Kuwait on 2 August 1990, and the coalition led by the United States. The Foreign Ministry of Iran immediately condemned the attack on Kuwait and called for the withdrawal of Iraqi forces, and at the same time it expressed concern that the aggression would provide a pretext for outside forces to enter the region (Tehran Television Service in Persian, 2 August 1990, in FBIS-NES-90-150, 3 August 1990, p. 47; excerpts quoted in *Iran Times*, 10 August 1990, p. 1). Iran was strongly opposed to the United States' military presence in the Persian Gulf and especially to the stationing of American troops in Saudi Arabia, on the grounds that it would endanger regional security. Iranians contrasted the rapid western effort to aid Kuwait with the indifference shown to Persia after Iraq invaded it in 1980. They also resented the major assistance provided by Kuwait to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War ("Papers View Invasion," in FBIS-NES-90-151, 6 August 1990, pp. 68-69). An editorial in *Jomhuri-e eslāmi* of August 14 declared that "America is a criminal and its biggest crime was in that it incited Iraq and Arab reaction against the Islamic revolution," in FBIS-NES-90-169, 30 August 1990, p. 64).

The war exacerbated tensions between radical and moderate factions within Iran and led to an intense national debate over the correct policy. The radicals regarded the American military presence as a major challenge to Iran and the Islamic world, a viewpoint reflected in the newspaper *Jomhuri-e eslāmi*. A senior military commander, Moḥsen Reżā'i, commander of the Revolution



Guards Corps (Sepāh-e pāsdārān-e enqelāb), declared that the presence of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf was more dangerous for the region than Iraq's occupation of Kuwait (Tehran, 9 August 1990, IRNA in English, in FBIS-NES-90-155, 10 August 1990, pp. 66-67). *Jomhuri-e eslāmi* called the presence of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia "a terrible disgrace on the Islamic world," and declared that "just as Iraq annexed Kuwait to its territory, the United States has annexed Saudi Arabia to its realm" (in FBIS-NES-90-164, 23 August 1990, pp. 46-47). Majles Speaker Mahdi Karrubi declared on August 21 that the U.S. was "the ring leader of aggression in the world," and that it had entered the region "with the aim to suppress the genuine Islam and enforce its own version of Islam" (Tehran, IRNA in English, 21 August 1990, in FBIS-NES-90-162, 21 August 1990, p. 52). The Muslim Association of College Students condemned the American presence, saying "they are in the region for the purpose of seizing the resources and the wealth of Muslim nations," and organized demonstrations in a number of cities (Tehran, IRNA in English, August 13, 1990, in FBIS-NES-90-158, 15 August 1990, pp. 55-56).

Radical ire increased after the onset of the air war against Iraq on January 16, 1991. However, a march through Tehran organized by the Union of the Muslim Students Societies of the Universities (*Etteḥādiya-ye anjomānhā-ye eslāmi-e dānešjuyān-e dānešgāhhā-ye sarā-sari-e kešvar*) condemning the U.S. military presence on January 17 only attracted around 5,000 people (estimate by Reuters news agency).

The radicals' attempt to gain attention was outweighed by the neutral position that the Rafsanjāni government espoused. Good Iranian relations with France, the Soviet Union, Turkey, and Syria helped reinforce this neutrality. Few Iranians felt sympathy toward the government of Iraq, with which Iran had recently fought an eight-year war. As early as August 9, the *Tehran Times*, considered close to President Hāšemi Rafsanjāni, backed foreign military intervention in the crisis as long as it was overseen by the United Nations (Tehran, August 9, AFP, in FBIS-NES-90-154, 9 August 1990, p. 60). The Foreign Ministry sought to remind the United Nations of its duty to help resolve the crisis (Tehran International Service in Arabic, 11 August 1990, in FBIS-NES-90-158, 15 August 1990, p. 56).

Iran benefited in a number of ways from the conflict, above all by the reduction of the Iraqi military threat. Early in the conflict, Iran believed that it had won a major concession from Iraq, which on 14 August 1990 appeared to agree to revert to the 1975 Algiers Treaty and recognize the thalweg or



midpoint of the Šaṭṭ-al-‘Arab waterway as the common border (at the outset of the war with Iraq in September 1980, Saddam Hussein had unilaterally abrogated this agreement; Bakhsh). Iraq also agreed to withdraw its troops from eight pockets it occupied along the border (see Maryam Daftari, tr.). These concessions, meant to neutralize any threat from Iranian forces while Iraq was facing the Allied Coalition, enabled Iran to proclaim a belated victory. Iran also felt vindicated by United Nations’ Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar’s reference to Iraq’s aggression against Iran in a report to the Security Council of 9 December 1991 (UN document S/23273, “Further Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 598, 1987”).

Iran resumed exchanging prisoners of war with Iraq; nearly 75,000 prisoners of war from both sides were released between mid-August and mid-September. In late January 1991, Iraq sent 115 military aircraft and 33 passenger planes to refuge in Iran, apparently without prior approval from Tehran. Iran, which acknowledged receiving only 22 planes, maintained that it would impound them as long as the fighting lasted (for details on the numbers see Baghdad, INA in Arabic, 12 April 1991, in FBIS-NES-91-072, 15 April 1991, p. 26 and Tehran IRNA in English, 14 April 1991, in FBIS-NES-91-073, p. 49). By early 2002, these planes had still not been returned and they may be retained as a bargaining chip with Iraq or as compensation for damages sustained during the Iran-Iraq War.

The war provided Iran with an opportunity to improve relations with Europe, the Gulf Corporation Council states and even the United States. In an attempt to influence the postwar settlement, President Hāšemi Rafsanjāni, emphasizing Iran’s neutrality, suggested in February 1991 that Iran might propose a peace plan, but this was largely ignored (Tehran, IRNA in English, 4 February 1991, in FBIS-NES-91-023, 4 February 1991, pp. 87-88). The Persian Gulf monarchs’ fear that Iran was a source of subversion lessened, and Iran sought to play a greater role in the Persian Gulf. According to a December 12 article in the Arabic newspaper *al-Šarq al-awsaṭ* (pub. in London), “Iran’s stand of rejecting the Iraqi occupation and changing the map of the area has been appreciated by all the Gulf countries without exception” (in JPRS-NEA-91-004, 11 January 1991, pp. 3-4). Relations with Saudi Arabia, broken since 1988, were normalized on March 26, 1991.

The United States was gratified that Iran observed the United Nations sanctions on Iraq and did not come to Iraq’s assistance during the conflict (see



President George Bush's comments in his news conference, on 5 February 1991, in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* XXVII, no. 6, 11 February 1991, p. 129). When Secretary of State James A. Baker outlined his postwar goals to the House Foreign Affairs Committee on February 6, he said that Iran could play a role in future security arrangements in the Persian Gulf (*Facts on File*, 14 February 1991, p. 92). To the relief of the United States, Iran refrained from providing much assistance to the Shi'ite revolts which broke out in southern Iraq in March 1991.

After the defeat of Iraq, Iran resented continued attempts to exclude it from regional affairs. The "Damascus Declaration," issued on 6 March 1991, called for Persian Gulf security to be in the hands of the Gulf Corporation Council states backed up with 100,000 Egyptian and Syrian troops. This plan was never implemented. Criticism of Iraq over issues such as border violations, the prisoners of war, and the issue of the planes soon resumed. A commentary in *Kayhan International* read: "One should be a fool to take Baghdad on its words because it makes promises to break them" (28 April 1991, p. 2, in JPRS-NEA-91-033, 12 June 1991, pp. 52-53). The introduction of the U.S. policy of "Dual Containment" in May 1993 then sought to exclude both Iran and Iraq from Persian Gulf affairs.

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