Why did the United States support Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran, 1980-1984?

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Introduction

On 22 September 1980, the President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, launched an invasion against Iran, led by his archenemy Aytollah Sayyid Ruhollah Mūsavi Khomeini, initiating a bloody eight-year war, destabilizing the region and devastating both countries. The Iran-Iraq War was one of the lengthiest conventional interstate wars of the twentieth century, with about half a million casualties on both sides.[1] It was also the only war in contemporary times in which chemical weapons were used on a considerable scale.[2] Saddam Hussein's desire to seize the oil-rich province of Khuzestan[3] was a key origin of the conflict, although there were many other drivers. First, there was the issue of sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab waterway; an important channel for the oil exports of both Iran and Iraq. Another important factor was rivalry between the two states that became particularly bitter after Ayatollah Khomeini, the former Supreme Leader of Iran, replaced Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (the Shah of Iran) during the (1978-1979) Islamic Revolution. Fearful that revolution in Iran could spread to Iraq – particularly given a persecuted Shia majority – Saddam Hussein decided to gamble in an attempt to overthrow Khomeini.

U.S. President Jimmy Carter declared that his country would stay neutral in the conflict. The reality was quite different. Both Iran and Iraq came to believe that the U.S. was 'flirting' with both sides during the war.[4] By mid-1982, Iraq was on the defensive against Iranian human-wave attacks. Now under President Ronald Reagan, the U.S. decided that an Iranian victory would not serve the country's interests and started in earnest its support for Iraq. Washington thus undertook measures to upgrade U.S.-Iraqi relations and exchanged high-level visits. On

[1] Robert Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 192.
[2] James G. Blight et al., *Becoming Enemies: U.S.-Iran Relations and the Iran-Iraq War, 1979-1988* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2014), p. ix.
[3] Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 43.
[4] Blight, *Becoming enemies*, p. ix.

28 February 1982, the State Department removed Iraq from its list of state sponsors of terrorism. The decision made it possible for Washington to rebuild commercial ties, extend credits, and proceed with investments in Iraq. On April 12 1982, Morris Draper, an American diplomat, travelled to Baghdad to launch formal first contacts. In the summer of 1982, Reagan dispatched CIA intelligence officer Thomas Twetten to provide the Iraqis with intelligence to support their military performance on the battlefield. Then, in 1983 and 1984, Reagan's Special Envoy to the Middle East, Donald Rumsfeld, visited Baghdad with the purpose of re-establishing diplomatic ties, as well as negotiating a deal to construct an oil pipeline from Iraq to Jordan. This pipeline would provide cheap oil to the U.S. and Israel – known as the Aqaba Pipeline project. Rumsfeld's visits to Iraq initiated a close relationship with Baghdad that would include financial support, the transfer of weapons, technology, food, and intelligence assistance to Iraq.[5] At the same time, Washington was selling arms to Iran that eventually led to the so-called Iran-Contra scandal of 1986. While the U.S. at times flirted with both sides, Washington certainly did not adopt a neutral stance in the conflict.

Historians differ in their evaluation of U.S. motives in support of Iraq. Bryan Gibson states that one of America's goals was to end the war with neither side emerging triumphant, a maintenance of the status quo.[6] Washington decided to provide assistance to Iraq as the lesser of two evils.[7] Pierre Razoux argues that the pressure inflicted upon the Reagan administration from the Gulf States and Jordan to shore up Iraq's resistance to Iran 'triggered' the acceleration of U.S. support to Iraq.[8] Indeed, since one of America's additional objectives during the war was to protect the Gulf States, it was important that America conformed to these pressures in order to protect its oil interests within the region. Therefore, despite Hussein's political

[5] Chris Wogan, *AmIraqa and the New American Century* ([Morrisville, N.C.]: Lulu.com, 2004), p. 13.
[6] Bryan R Gibson, *Covert Relationship: American Foreign Policy, Intelligence, and the Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2010), p. 5.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Pierre Razoux and Nicholas Elliott, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 250.

dictatorship, U.S. leaders believed that it made sense to forge close ties with Iraq as it was seen as a vital bulwark against Iranian expansionism. James G. Blight puts emphasis on the 1979 Iran Hostage Crisis. As the war began, Iran was holding dozens of American diplomats' hostage, mistreating some of them, and openly embarrassing all of them. Iran's actions during the hostage crisis set the benchmark for misbehaviour in the region, making all other countries surrounding Iran potentially rectifiable.[9] This principle applied specifically to Iraq, which had decided to attack Iran and eradicate the Khomeini regime. Steven Hurst in *The United States and Iraq Since 1979* stresses that the threat of Iran's revolution and of its radical ideology. Hurst shows that America had no option but to support Iraq during the war because according to officials like Howard Teicher, neither America nor its allies in the Gulf wanted to see "…Saddam Hussein swept away by Islamic fundamentalists answering Tehran's call."[10] Finally, Con Coughlin states that Iran's association with the bombing of the American embassy and the U.S. marine compound in Beirut in 1983 were key events in which Washington decided to extensively support Iraq in its war against Iran.[11] Generally speaking, what these historical debates show us is that Iran's hostile behaviour from 1979 onwards played a significant role in the U.S. decision to support Iraq throughout the course of the war.

This dissertation argues that U.S. policy in the region – including its support for Iraq – was determined by Cold War considerations. Chapter one frames U.S. policy in the Middle East, which since the 1950s, was shaped by Cold War logic. Denying the region to the Soviets defined U.S. strategies towards the rise of Arab nationalism post-World War II and the 1973 Oil Embargo. In this period, Washington's alliance with Iran and Saudi Arabia—the so-called 'Twin Pillar Policy'— became a bulwark against Soviet expansionism in the Middle East. The overthrow of the Shah of Iran and his replacement with Ayatollah Khomeini during the (1978-

[9] Blight, *Becoming Enemies*, p. xi.
[10] Howard Teicher and Gayle Radley Teicher, *Twin Pillars to Desert Storm: America's Flawed Vision in the Middle East from Nixon to Bush* (New York: William Morrow and Co, 1993), p. 271.
[11] Con Coughlin, *Saddam: The Secret Life* (London: Macmillan, 2002), p. 214.

1979) Iranian Revolution shocked the U.S. government, forcing Washington to review its strategy in the region. Chapter 2 analyses the reasons for Carter's support towards Iraq at the outbreak of the war, including the so-called 'Green Light' theory. Before the Iranian Revolution, Carter enjoyed a friendly relationship with the Shah and there was relative stability within the Persian Gulf region. However, the destabilization of Khomeini's supremacy in Iran following the 1979 Revolution was crucial for Carter to protect American interests. For example, Khomeini threatened access to the Strait of Hormuz and thus to vital source of oil – a major Cold War consideration.

Chapter 3 focuses on Ronald Reagan's policy in the Middle East, investigating the reasons why, by 1984, he had re-launched diplomatic relations with Iraq. From 1981 and onwards, it appeared that the entire Middle Eastern region was falling into the hands of the Iranians. Khomeini was aggressively exporting his vision of revolution, and by mid-1982, the chances of Iran winning the war seemed likely. Since an Iranian victory would endanger America's interests in the Gulf region, Reagan was forced to reconsider his position of neutrality which he carried with him after Carter left office. Therefore, from 1982 and onwards, the U.S. commenced with giving Iraq all the necessary aid it required to crush Khomeini's regime. This dissertation focuses on the years 1980-1984, a crucial period when a qualitative shift was taking place among the American administration towards Iraq. This led to the reestablishment of diplomatic relations and a substantial increase in assistance to Baghdad. Concerned that an Iranian victory would undermine America's influence in the Gulf region, Washington became involved in a regional conflict that was to U.S. policymakers of global significance and crucial to its interests. U.S. support to Saddam Hussein during the war was shaped by perceptions of alliances within the framework of the Cold War and the desire to maintain access to vital strategic resources – namely, oil. Besides secondary literature, this dissertation uses primary sources from the

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) database, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), and National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

Chapter 1: U.S. strategies in the Middle East during the Cold War, 1945-1979

The Cold War emerged in the wake of the Second World War when a series of conflicts over the division of Germany, crises in Iran and Turkey, and the Sovietisation of Eastern Europe led to the emergence of competition between the Soviet Union and the U.S. This competition was defined in terms of military capabilities, economic resources, as well as ideas. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union worked determinedly in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East to persuade Third World leaders that they should be allied with them. Politicians from both sides came to believe that victory or defeat in the Cold War depended on the result of Third World conflicts.[12] Whilst the USSR was spreading communism and expanding its sphere of influence globally, America was busy trying to contain or even 'rollback' communism.[13] Cold War logic dictated that both superpowers had to gain and maintain access to vital natural resources, and thus access to Middle Eastern oil became of prime importance. Western consumerism linked to the 'American way of life' was reliant on access to immense supplies of crude oil, and thus safeguarding access to foreign energy sources developed as a key component of U.S. foreign policy.[14] After World War II, the U.S. saw its share of global oil production fall from seventy to fifty-one percent while the Middle East's share rose from seven to sixteen percent.[15] The U.S., formerly the world's supreme oil exporter, could not uphold this position after the war had ended. Given that the Soviet Union tried to deny Western influence, and increase trade with the Middle East[16], the U.S. understood that it needed to maintain good relations with the countries surrounding the Gulf region. Therefore, from the late 1940s and early 1950s, the U.S. sought to undermine Soviet expansionism to guarantee the continued flow

[12] For detailed discussion of Cold War in the Third World, see: Odd Arne Westad, *Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*
[13] Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 7.
[14] For detailed discussion of Cold War in the Third World, see: Odd Arne Westad, *Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*
[15] Ronny Modigs, 'United States Foreign Policy in the Middle East after the Cold War', (master's thesis, University of Kansas, 2003), https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=712181.
[16] Ibid.

of Middle Eastern oil to its allies.[17]An example of this would be the Truman Doctrine of 1947 and the Marshall Plan of 1948.

The 1952 Revolution in Egypt and the Rise of Arab nationalism was among the first challenges to Western influence in the Middle East. When a group of young nationalist military officers under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser took power in Egypt, they presented a challenge. In particular, they opposed foreign military establishments on Arab land and gathered against the repressive economic practices of European colonial powers. Furthermore, they also joined forces against the autocratic regimes that occupied the region's politics.[18] Nasser called for Arab unity and the construction of a single pan-Arab state. On 1 February 1958, Nasser moved one step closer to that dream when Syria and Egypt formed an alliance called the United Arab Republic (UAR). His fantasy was to bring more Arab countries into the assembly. The rise of Arab nationalism posed a direct threat to the pro-Western regimes that guaranteed Western access to Persian Gulf oil at reasonably low prices.

The 1950s was also the time when the Soviet Union became increasingly interested in the Middle East. The initiative came from Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who wanted to compete with the West for influence in the region. By doing this, Khrushchev hoped to gain an advantage in the global bi-polar struggle. In 1955, the Soviets sponsored the so-called Czechoslovak-Egyptian arms deal between Egypt and Czechoslovakia that promised to rearm the Egyptian army in return for cotton. In 1956, Moscow and their allies strongly supported Nasser when he defied the West and nationalised the Suez Canal, which led Israel, Britain and France to invade Egypt – the

[17] Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), p. 119.
[18] David Ryan and Patrick Kiely, *America and Iraq: Policy-Making, Intervention and Regional Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 8.

Suez Crisis.[19] America's response to Soviet assertiveness in the region was the establishment of the Baghdad Pact in 1955. Originally consisting of Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, it was a defensive pact against Soviet expansionism in the region that the U.S. joined in 1957. However, on 14 July 1958, a coup d'état in Iraq led to the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy and the establishment of the Republic of Iraq, led by nationalist leaders, Abdul Salam Arif and Abd al-Karim Qasim, thus ending British influence in the region. Qasim withdrew from the Baghdad Pact, opened diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and proclaimed 'non-alignment' as its foreign policy.

U.S. strategy towards the rise of Arab nationalism progressed into a form of 'dual containment'. This strategy was directed at thwarting communist influence while concurrently restricting the spread of Arab nationalism. Since Nasser was often the foremost spokesperson and most powerful promoter of Arab nationalism, this dual containment strategy in practical terms meant containing both Egypt and the USSR. Washington also applied 'dual containment' towards Iraq since they saw Nasser as a puppeteer pulling the strings of Qasim. Simultaneously, American officials assumed that Nasser's strings were in turn being pulled by the Kremlin. The U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower once expressed that the events taking place on July 14 were "…fomented by Nasser under Kremlin guidance."[20] Eisenhower feared that the revolution in Iraq would spark a wave of defections to communism. If Iraq fell to communism, the rest of the region would sooner or later follow. At this moment, Eisenhower realised that something needed to be done. Eisenhower remarked that losing Iraq "…would be far worse than the loss of China, because of the strategic position and resources of the Middle East."[21] Eisenhower thus formed close diplomatic ties with Qasim, who was genuinely interested in pursuing friendly relations with the U.S. and Britain. In 1959, Baghdad announced that Iraq would not disrupt

[19] Vladislav M Zubok, *Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 135.
[20] Quoted in Ryan and Kiely, p. 10.
[21] Memorandum of Conversation with the President, July 14, 1958, *FRUS 1958-1960*, vol. XI, 211-215.

the flow of oil to the West. Qasim had taken measures to protect oil wells, pumping stations, and other oil-related facilities in Iraq. He also denied having any plans to nationalize the oil industry.

However, when in December 1961 Qasim took many of the oil fields out of foreign hands and claimed sovereignty over Kuwait, the U.S. started to fear Iraq "…to be returning something like the post-revolution period in 1958 and 1959, during which there was great alarm that Iraq was going communist"[22]. Consequently, Washington began to consider his overthrow.[23] In the end, there was no need to take action. On 8 February 1963, a coalition of Ba'athist and Arab nationalist officers and civilians overthrew Qasim. He was executed the following day. Washington's policy of 'dual containment' remained problematic because of U.S. support for Israel. While U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson continuously put pressure on Israel to avoid pre-emptive strike, ultimately its support for Israel during the Six Day War of 1967 led to six Arab countries breaking relations with the U.S. By the 1970s, it appeared that the U.S. had failed to contain these countries within its sphere of influence. With Egypt and Syria defeated as a result of the Six Day War, these six countries forged closer relations with Moscow in the immediate aftermath.[24]

The Soviet Union and Iraq started engaging in several high-profile visits in an attempt to warm relations between Moscow and Baghdad. In 1972, the two sides signed the treaty of 'Friendship and Cooperation'. The Ba'ath party went on a nationalization drive and became a member of Comecon, the Eastern Bloc's version of the OECD in 1975. From this moment on, the U.S. feared that Iraq might become a client state of the USSR and gain access to the region's resources. Iraq's closer relations with Moscow incentivised the U.S. to help Iran support the

[22] Little, *American Orientalism*, p. 205.
[23] Bryan R Gibson, *Sold Out?: US Foreign Policy, Iraq, the Kurds, and the Cold War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 18.
[24] Ante Batovic, 'The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six Day War', *Cold War History* 9:4 (2009), pp. 529-530.

Iraq-based Kurds striving for independence; Washington believed this could cause regime change or at least help to destabilise and weaken the country.[25] The 1973 Yom Kippur War and the response from the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) also inadvertently benefited the Soviet Union. During the war, OPEC increased oil prices (raising its posted price by 70 percent, to $5.11 a barrel), cut oil production (by 5 percent) and implemented an embargo against the U.S. and various other Western countries as punishment for aiding Israel. The consequent sharp increase in global oil prices followed a 25-year period where U.S. dollar prices had gone up by less than two percent per year.[26] OPEC's objective at this point was to continue cutting output until their economic and political objectives were met.[27] OPEC countries thus used oil as an 'economic weapon' given the West's vital dependence on Middle Eastern supplies.

Meanwhile, the Soviets benefited from the embargo, since they could now sell their arms, military equipment, and dual-use civilian goods to the now cash-rich Middle Eastern countries, and to organisations they supported. Most of these sales were for hard currencies or barter arrangements in which the Soviets received oil that they re-exported for hard currency. Between 1974 and 1984, the Soviets received around $19 billion in hard currency from arms sales, and earned around $23 billion on bilateral or soft currency arms sales.[28] Higher earnings from oil exports allowed the Soviets to continue importing large amounts of grain and food to cover poor harvests and to import Western technology. Some of this technology most likely enhanced Soviet military capabilities by being utilized in new weapons platforms and improving existing ones. Higher oil revenues may also have made it possible for the Soviets to increase their

[25] Gibson, *Sold Out?*, p. 121.
[26] Marin Katusa, *Colder War: How the Global Energy Trade Slipped from America's Grasp* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2014), p. 48.
[27] Ibid.
[28] David S. Painter, 'Oil and Geopolitics: The Oil Crises of the 1970s and the Cold War' *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 39: 4 (2014), p. 185.

involvement in the Third World in the 1970s.[29] The 1973 oil crisis exposed the vulnerability of the West to the collective power of OPEC and strengthened the Soviet Union, at least in the immediate term.[30]

All the while, it was the Shah of Iran that remained the key U.S. ally in the region. U.S. President Richard Nixon and his National Advisor Henry Kissinger admired the Shah and saw him as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism. Nixon's strategy was to develop an intimate, strategic and personal relationship with the Shah. This was possible because from the late 1960s and onwards, the U.S. depended on the "Twin Pillar" strategy that saw Saudi Arabia and Iran as the two pillars of American policy in the Middle East. Therefore, even though the Shah pushed most aggressively for the price increase when the oil embargo was first instigated, Nixon did not balk at the soaring prices. While he recognized the harmful effect of high oil prices on Western economies, with U.S. inflation reaching 11 percent in 1974, Nixon prioritised his administration's Cold War grand strategy.[31] Cheap oil was important for America's economic prosperity, but not as vital as keeping Iran as a strong ally. During a meeting with Defence Secretary James Schlesinger at the Pentagon on 9 August 1973, Kissinger expressed worries that he would be clueless in the event of a Soviet attack on Iran. In response, Schlesinger answered: "In Iran, for example, if we were to sly in some F-IIIs, we convey a message."[32] Here, it is clear that Schlesinger realised the strategic significance of Iran, and was prepared to put the U.S. Air Force through a perilous operation to protect Iran from Soviet aggression.[33] Kissinger replied by saying that they needed concrete military plans to protect their "main asset" in the Middle East.[34]

[29] Painter, 'Oil and Geopolitics', p. 203.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Amin Mirzadegan, 'Nixon's Folly: The White House and the 1970s Oil Price Crisis', *The Yale Historical Review*, (Spring 2016), p. 43.
[32] Ibid., p. 44.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

The rise of Arab nationalism post-World War II and the 1973 Oil Embargo jeopardized America's Cold War strategy. Both the 1952 Egyptian Revolution and the 1958 Iraqi coup d'état raised fears that both Egypt and Iraq would be absorbed into the Soviet sphere of influence. The oil crisis raised the question about the capability of the U.S. to ensure access to Middle Eastern oil. The crisis also bolstered fears that the Soviet Union was winning the Cold War. However, Nixon's strategy of forming a close relationship with Iran was a major turning point in terms of protecting America's Cold War considerations. Under the Nixon administration, Iran was transformed from a client state to a companion of the United States. In the global struggle to contain the Soviet Union, the Shah's alliance with the U.S. served as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism in the Persian Gulf. As a result, Iran became a frontline state sharing a 1,200-mile border with the Soviet Union and one of the few Muslim countries to not only recognize Israel, but also sell it oil.[35] A notable U.S. diplomat Morris Draper thus explained Soviet appeal to Arab nationalism and U.S. Cold War thinking at that time in a 1991 interview:

> "The forces of nationalism were far more significant and the Soviets had hitched their wagon to that drive, taking advantage of it. They listened to these Arab states and provided them arms and propaganda. Those of us who could separate our policy from ideology had another kind of fear, which had permeated the Middle East experts for many, many years. The Middle East was an area which could have been the battleground for a Soviet-U.S. confrontation. Russia was close to the area; both countries had a lot of clients in the region. Our worst nightmare was that we would plunge into this confrontation; in fact, we came very close to it in both 1967 and 1973 when the Soviets had decided that they would have to help their Arab clients and we had decided that we had to defend Israel. It could have been the beginning of World War III. In light of that context, the American diplomats were both anti-Soviet and fearful of Armageddon."[36]

[35] Geoffrey Kemp, 'The Reagan Administration,' Front Page | The Iran Primer, accessed April 2, 2017, http://iranprimer.usip.org/sites/default/files/The%20Reagan%20Administration_1.pdf.
[36] Interview with Morris Draper, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, February 27, 1991, available at https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004dra01/2004dra01.pdf, retrieved on 15 March 2017.

Chapter 2: 'Tilting Towards Iraq': Saddam, Khomeini and Carter, 1979-1980

The Cold War heated up under the U.S. President Jimmy Carter as a result of a series of factors, culminating in Soviet intervention in Afghanistan on 25 December 1979. Soviet actions had major significance for the balance of power in the region. It was the first time that the USSR launched a large intervention with 'boots on the ground' outside of the Eastern Bloc. The intervention put Soviet forces closer to the Persian Gulf than any time since the Second World War. A massive Soviet military presence was now on the border of a politically unstable Iran, where the pro-Soviet Tudeh party remained a significant force. The invasion thus generated fears amongst some American observers of the growth of Soviet influence in Iran. According to Carter, it was believed that a successful take-over of Afghanistan would allow the Soviets a "…deep penetration between Iran and Pakistan and pose a threat to the rich oil fields of the Persian Gulf area and to the crucial waterways through which so much of the world's energy supplies had to pass.'[37] Within the Cold War 'zero-sum game' framework, the Soviet invasion was a threat to Washington that carefully guarded the global balance of power. Morris Draper recalled reaction in Washington towards intervention: "That was actually a shock to all Russian watchers. It was the first time since World War II that the USSR had moved into something other than a satellite state. When it happened, not were people shocked by the Russian action, but began to question of what they would do next— Pakistan, Iran, Turkey?"[38]

Meanwhile, the Islamic Revolution in Iran led to a complete reorientation of Tehran's foreign policy. If Iran had previously been the key U.S. ally in the region, Ayatollah Khomeini reversed a pro-American course of the Shah. During Khomeini's supremacy, he and Iranian leaders identified the U.S. as a country with narcissistic motivations.[39] Unlike the Shah, Khomeini

[37] Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 471.
[38] Interview with Morris Draper, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, February 27, 1991, available at https://cdn.loc.gov/service/mss/mfdip/2004/2004dra01/2004dra01.pdf, retrieved on 15 March 2017.
[39] Krysta Wise, 'Islamic Revolution of 1979: The Downfall of American-Iranian Relations', *Legacy* 11:1 (2011), p. 7.

initially permitted the Tudeh; an Iranian communist party, to operate. In essence, he allowed this pro-Moscow party to re-appear in Iran and took measures that helped the Soviet Union. Washington had always used Iran to gather crucial intelligence on the Soviets. A result of the Islamic revolution was the decline of American intelligence activities in Iran, with Khomeini closing two American operated intelligence collection centres. One was located at the Soviet border near Bandar Shah. The other was in a remote location in Kabkam. Because Khomeini shut down these facilities, U.S. leaders were no longer able to spy on Soviet nuclear and missile testing sites in Soviet Central Asia. On the other hand, Soviet leaders now gained vital information on U.S. military developments that they were not aware of beforehand.[40] This was a huge setback to American officials and intelligence officers. These moves sparked anxiety and fury among U.S. leaders.[41]

Relations between Washington and Tehran soured rapidly after 1979, dramatically climaxing in the 'Iranian Hostage Crisis'. On November 4 1979, a group of Iranian students in favour of the Iranian Revolution seized the American embassy in Tehran and took nearly 70 U.S. citizens captive. This act was a response to Carter's decision to admit the Shah into the U.S. for cancer treatment. The hostage crisis lasted for 444 days and in consequence, it contaminated Carter's presidency. Although Carter made efforts to make peace with Iran in 1979, Khomeini continued to allow the students to hold the Americans because it showed Iran's "independence and opposition to American power."[42] Khomeini's first offer of peace made it compulsory that the U.S. apologize for past exploitation, hand over the Shah, and return his money to Iran. However, American leaders declined this offer. Then, Khomeini made a second offer for conciliation: the U.S. should give back Iran's frozen assets and the royal family's wealth, vow that America

[40] Ibid., p. 8.
[41] Alvin Z. Rubinstein, 'The Soviet Union and Iran under Khomeini', *Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 57: 4 (1981), p. 599.
[42] Barry Rubin, 'American relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979–1981', *Iranian Studies*, 13: 1-4 (1980), p. 316.

would not intervene in Iranian affairs, and drop law suits filed against Iran. Once again, the U.S. declined this offer.[43]

The crisis exacerbated the split between the two countries. Americans were upset at how the hostages were being treated whilst Khomeini's followers strengthened their anti-American sentiment. In response, Washington severed political relations with Iran and instituted sanctions. On November 26 1979, Carter passed Executive Order No. 12170 that froze all Iranian assets in the U.S.: "I hereby order blocked all property and interests in property of the Government of Iran, its instrumentalities and controlled entities and the Central Bank of Iran which are or become subject to the jurisdiction of the United States or which are in or come within the possession of control of persons subject to the jurisdiction of the United States".[44] The abrupt effects of the Revolution in Iran and the hostage crisis projected on U.S.-Iranian relations for the next few years.

Washington also feared what would come of the oil industry in Iran. Khomeini declined any Western influence in Iran because he did not want these countries to manipulate the country's oil industry. A collapse in Iranian oil output following the 1979 revolution strained the oil market instantaneously.[45] By December 1979, U.S. imported oil prices had nearly doubled versus a year ago (in nominal terms). Whilst Iran began earning more profits from its oil industry, America was now paying more for foreign oil. As a result, American leaders tried to cut its dependence on foreign oil and use energy more resourcefully.[46]

Khomeini also tried to damage the U.S. economy by terminating Washington's arms exports to Iran. While the Shah was in power, the U.S. sold arms to Iran, generating enormous export revenues for the U.S. economy. However, Khomeini was determined to sever Iran's reliance

[43] Wise, 'Islamic Revolution of 1979', p. 10.
[44] Quoted in Wise, p. 9.
[45] Wise, 'Islamic Revolution of 1979', p. 9.
[46] Ibid.

on America. In 1979, he formally annulled seven billion U.S. dollars' worth of U.S. arms purchases. This signified an extreme alteration in economic policies between the two countries.[47] For instance, U.S. arms sales to Iran boomed in 1978 during the Shah's reign at $4,500,000,000. In the following year, sales dropped to zero, with this exchange staying very low throughout the 1980s.[48] Consequently, the U.S. had to search for alternative buyers for the arms to avoid an adverse impact on the U.S. economy.[49]

The Iranian Revolution threatened U.S. strategy in the Gulf all in one go. Revolutionary Iran vilified the U.S. and called on Muslims to counter colonialism and end foreign access to Middle Eastern oil. Khomeini disagreed with the legality of the Gulf regimes and judged their 'American Islam'.[50] In the long run, Khomeini hoped to stir up the same grievances that had mobilized the Arab masses during Nasser's revolution in the 1950s.[51] Considering that America depended on its Gulf allies for access to oil, Khomeini's hostile attitude sparked fears for what may come in the near future. Most of the regimes in the Gulf were autocratic and Sunni-ruled with large and oppressed Shia populations. Given that Iran is an overwhelmingly Shi'ite country, there were Shi'ite protests and demonstrations – inspired by Iranian revolutionary broadcasts – in Kuwait in September and November 1979, in Saudi Arabia in February 1980 and in Bahrain in April 1980. A CIA report judging the circumstances cautioned that the survival of the Saudi regime "could not be assured beyond the next two years."[52]

The Iranian Revolution stimulated an intense debate among the U.S. administration on Iraq. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski suggested that the U.S. should re-evaluate its 'non-relationship' with Iraq. This idea found some approval in other parts of the administration,

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[47] Ibid.
[48] David Kinsella, 'Conflict in Context: Arms Transfers and Third World Rivalries during the Cold War' *American Journal of Political Science* 38: 3 (1994), p. 573
[49] Wise, 'Islamic Revolution of 1979', p. 9
[50] Steven Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979: Hegemony, Oil and War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 26
[51] Ibid.
[52] Joe Stork, 'Saudi Arabia and the U.S' *MERIP Reports* 60 (1980), p. 29.

but there was also disagreement.[53] A 1979 study produced by the Department of Defence and run by Paul Wolfowitz (an American diplomat) argued that Iraq signified a risk to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and thus to U.S. oil interests. The report argued that it was inevitable Iraq would attack Kuwait.[54] After Howard Teicher, former director for the Near East and South Asia, made a similar argument in a paper for Secretary of Defence Harold Brown, Brown sent it back with the comment "I disagree. Iraq has changed. It has moderated its behaviour."[55] Given that Iraq began to pursue a more sovereign line, threatening to cut off diplomatic affairs with the USSR if Moscow continued to support Ethiopia in its conflict with its Eritrean rebels, also vigorously condemning the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and repressing the Iraqi Communist Party, Brown-Brzezinski won the debate.[56] Despite the fact that there remained fears among U.S. officials about Saddam's nuclear activities, support for terrorism, and abusive anti-Israel speech-making, the Carter administration strongly believed that improving ties with Iraq was essential to promoting stability and hindering Soviet gains in the Persian Gulf region. According to a NSC paper from 18 June 1979: "A crucial objective for promoting a better regional balance should be to draw Iraq away from its current dependence and frequent alignment with the Soviet Union".[57]

It is in this context that historians have debated whether the U.S. clandestinely approved Iraq's attack on Iran – the so called 'Green Light Theory'. Green light theorists contend that Carter pushed Iraq to invade Iran in order to gain power in the U.S.-Iranian confrontation which formally began with the seizure of American hostages in Tehran on 4 November 1979. For instance, a range of observers suspect that the U.S. encouraged the Iraqi attack as a way of punishing Iran for seizing U.S. hostages, to accelerate the release of these hostages, or some

[53] Teicher and Teicher, *Twin Pillars to Desert Storm*, p. 61.
[54] Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979*, p. 29.
[55] Quoted in Hurst, p. 29.
[56] Hal brands, 'Before the Tilt: The Carter Administration Engages Saddam Hussain', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 26:1 (2015), p. 113.
[57] Quoted in Brands, p. 113.

mixture of these aims.[58] Proponents of the thesis also argue that the Carter administration wanted to punish Iran for their hostile behaviour, in the hope that Khomeini's government would be overthrown. According to Dilip Hiro, the Carter administration overemphasised the weakness of Iran's military as way of implying to Saddam Hussein that he should invade. Such an act would have provided "a solution to the hostage crisis on the eve of the presidential poll."[59] Furthermore, Sasan Fayazmanesh argues that Washington "…might indeed have given the green light to Saddam Hussein to invade Iran" so that the Iranian government would be undermined and that the hostages would be freed.[60] Another side of the story is provided by Saddam Hussein's former biographer Said K. Aburish. Aburish who stated that Saddam met with CIA agents twice in Jordan to discuss strategies for invading Iran. The first meeting is assumed to have taken place in the summer of 1979, just before Saddam took over from his predecessor, General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr. The second meeting supposedly occurred in July 1980, with King Hussein of Jordan acting as an intercessor between Saddam and several CIA agents.[61] Abul Hassan Bani-Sadr, the former President of Iran, seemingly told the journalist, Larry Everest, that during this meeting Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, "assured Saddam Hussein that the United States would not oppose the separation of Khuzestan (in southwest Iran) from Iran."[62] In addition, Kenneth Timmerman has also suggested a degree of embedded encouragement and makes reference to a quote made by Gary Sick (an analyst of Middle Eastern affairs). Apparently, Brzezinski was "letting Saddam assume there was a U.S. green light for his invasion of Iran, because there was no explicit red light".[63]

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[58] Hal Brands, 'Saddam Hussein, the United States, and the invasion of Iran: Was there a Green light?', *Cold War History* 12:2 (2012), p. 320
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] PBS interview with Said K Aburish, *FRONTLINE* report, available at www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saddam/interviews/aburish.html (Accessed 12 March 2017)
[62] Christian Emery, 'Reappraising the Carter administration's response to the Iran-Iraq War', in *The Iran-Iraq War: New International Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 151.
[63] Ibid.

While we cannot ascertain for certain whether Carter gave the green light, the U.S. administration took a number of measures at the start of the Iran-Iraq War that showed it favoured Baghdad. One measure was for the U.S. to provide security guarantees to regional allies backing Iraq. The Gulf oil monarchies were determined to prevent an Iranian victory at all costs and Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE and Oman therefore began to provide assistance to Iraq.[64] For instance, Saudi Arabia allowed access to its airspace and even to its airfields.[65] However, by doing this, Saudi Arabia made itself a potential target for Iranian attack. To overcome this risk, Saudi Arabia deserted their earlier caution about being seen as too close to the U.S. and demanded that America provide them with military assistance. Conscious of the importance of the Gulf to America's Cold War considerations – particularly access to the Strait of Hormuz (the world's most important oil chokepoint which Carter perceived to be crucial to the U.S.'s national interests[66]) – the U.S. moved the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) into the Gulf. As a result, four Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) reconnaissance planes were dispatched to Saudi Arabia in order to prevent an Iranian attack.[67] Indeed, the deployment of AWACS in Saudi Arabia shows that Carter supported Iraq because he was not willing to strain America's close relations with its Gulf allies.

Concerned about the suspension of Iraqi oil exports during the first week of the war, Carter took some steps to solve this issue.[68] Even though Saudi Arabia responded to the suspension by considerably increasing its own output, a senior source in the Energy Department confirmed that the U.S. also took active steps to make sure that Iraq's capability to export through the Gulf was unaffected.[69] For example, the U.S. expedited the purchase and early placement of signal

[64] Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979*, p. 32.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Tobias Vanderbruck, "Iran, Oil and Strait of Hormuz", Crude Oil Price, Oil, Energy, Petroleum, Oil Price, WTI & Brent Oil, Oil Price Charts and Oil Price Forecast, last modified 2012, http://www.oil-price.net/en/articles/iran-oil-strait-or-hormuz.php.
[67] Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979*, p. 33.
[68] Emery, '*Reappraising the Carter administration's response to the Iran-Iraq War'*, p. 165
[69] Ibid.

point mooring buoys in the Gulf. An Iraqi official was also granted a visa to visit Houston, where a member of U.S. intelligence advised him on buying and positioning the appropriate equipment.[70] These actions showed that the U.S. was taking precautionary measures to safeguard its access to oil in the Gulf. However, these measures only had limited effect, given the scale of Iranian retaliatory strikes. Nevertheless, as the war progressed, oil prices remained relatively stable, in part due to increased production of Saudi Arabia and other non-OPEC countries.

The events of 1979 posed a clear threat to U.S. influence in the Persian Gulf and Western access to the region's oil. Consequently, its overall global hegemony had also been affected. Khomeini's regime raised fears that his revolution would overthrow America's allies in Saudi Arabia and undermine American influence within the Gulf. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan raised the possibility of increased Soviet influence in Iran and the wider region. The Carter administration faced a challenge. It appeared that other ways of containing Iranian and Soviet influence in the Gulf needed to be found. That was the context when Iraq came back into the focus of the U.S. However, Carter still considered future rapprochement with Iran desirable. In a speech in Pennsylvania on 15 October 1980, Carter affirmed America's commitment to the "proposition that the national security and integrity of Iran is in the interest of national stability. We oppose any effort to dismember Iran."[71] The Carter administration also tried to prevent significant amounts of arms reaching Iraq from Jordan.[72] U.S. policy even caused Saddam Hussein to claim in December 1980 that Washington was supporting Iran's "aggression" against Iraq.[73] However, Ronald Reagan would demonstrate an even greater desire to contain

[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid, p. 169.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

the Soviet threat but also show great anxiety regarding the spread of Iran's revolutionary ideology.

Chapter 3: Ronald Reagan and rapprochement with Iraq, 1981-1984

The Cold War heated up by the time Ronald Reagan assumed office on 20 January 1981. The 1980 election saw the deployment of white evangelicals and the shift of support from the Democrats to the Republicans. By the time Reagan came to power, many Americans were worried about the decline of U.S. global power following defeat in the Vietnam War, the 1973-4 Oil Embargo, a sequence of Third World revolutions, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The demand for a more assertive America grew stronger among the public. These concerns were reflected in the revival of the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) who argued for a more assertive policy and who came to have a substantial influence upon the Reagan administration.[74] Riding the wave of uncertainty, Reagan entered on the promise that he would rebuild American power and adopt a more aggressive stance towards the USSR which he famously called "The Evil Empire".[75] That strategy included a more assertive stance towards regimes that endangered American interests.

Reagan's initial strategy towards the Middle East was the so-called policy of 'strategic consensus'. Its main objective was for the U.S. to unify its Arab and Israeli allies, in a defensive framework designed to track Soviet advances that would also protect Western access to oil. The architect of the strategy of 'strategic consensus' was Alexander Haig, the newly appointed U.S. Secretary of State. Haig believed that the Arab states – Iraq included – could find common cause with Israel over supposed threats posed by Moscow or Tehran, notwithstanding Jerusalem's stance on Palestine. Judith Wyer writes that: "the adoption of this step-by-step approach to the Middle East has nothing to do with negotiating peace; it is aimed at realizing

[74] Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979*, p. 34
[75] Ibid.

Secretary of State Alexander Haig's Cold War policy of building a military "strategic consensus" in the region to confront the USSR."[76]

However, the belief that moderate Arab states could one way or another be persuaded to join an anti-Soviet alliance with Israel was far-fetched. One reason was that Saudi Arabia did not want to act as a regional leader or join any kind of agreement with Israel, given its domestic issues of legitimacy as well as the Iranian threat. Moreover, Haig's assertion that the Arabs felt threatened by the Soviets and that the 'strategic consensus' already existed, was far from reality.[77] Arab states were actually far more concerned about the threats posed by Iran and Israel rather than the threat posed by the USSR.[78]

The Israeli government did not show any consistent effort to follow the policy of 'strategic consensus'. Washington wanted to establish an Arab-Israeli coalition to contain Soviet influence, but Jerusalem sought an American-Israeli alliance that would improve their ability to pursue their strategic benefits in relation to the Arab states. These contradictions became evident during the Lebanese Civil War, a prolonged and bloody conflict where both Israel and Lebanon were deeply involved. In November 1981, Jerusalem and Washington signed a Strategic Cooperation Agreement, according to which both sides pledged close cooperation to tackle the Soviet threat in the region. Yet only a month later, Israel formally annexed the Golan Heights – a matter of territorial dispute with Syria since the 1967 Six Day War. Then, in June 1982, the Israeli army drove all the way to Beirut, even though Washington and Jerusalem had previously agreed to a limited military intervention in Southern Lebanon. While some members of the U.S. administration, like Haig, believed that Israel's invasion was a welcome development as it targeted Syria and the PLO, it put the final nail in the coffin of the 'strategic

[76] Judith Wyer, "The 'strategic consensus' attempt," *Executive Intelligence Review*, September 1, 1981, 34.
[77] Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979*, p. 39
[78] Ibid.

consensus'.[79] Therefore, as the strategic consensus crumbled, Washington sought to redefine its strategy in the Middle East as a response to events in the region and global considerations.

A key consideration was Iran's threat to Washington's allies in the Gulf. By late 1981, Khomeini was getting bolder in his attempt to export the Islamic Revolution. Tehran at this point had managed to provoke riots in Mecca by integrating militants amid Iranian pilgrims going on the *hajj*, attack Kuwait in revenge for its support for Iraq, and sponsor an attempted coup in Bahrain. At the same time, Iran was on the military offensive against Iraq. Given that the Gulf, at the time, contained about 35% of known world oil reserves, 35% of the non-Communist world's production capacity and 25% of output[80], Khomeini's revolution generated fears that Iranian expansionism within the Gulf would choke oil supply to the West. Such an outcome could potentially lead to the overthrow of secular governments in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait and harm U.S. commercial interests. Even U.S. officials who, like Howard Teicher, saw Iraq as a permanent threat to American interests in the Gulf stated that "given the alternatives, neither the United States nor its Arab allies wanted to see Saddam Hussein swept away by Islamic fundamentalists answering Tehran's call."[81] At the same time, a SSG briefing of 31 December 1981 warned that "Iran's recent battlefield successes against the Iraqis have provided a new sense of confidence in Tehran, which may embolden Iran in its efforts to convince the Gulf states that aid to Baghdad is both futile and short-sighted".[82] Afraid that Iran might win the war, the United States antagonistically started supporting Iraq with weapons and economic assistance. On 28 February 1982, the State Department thus removed Iraq from its list of countries supporting international terrorism. That act made it easier for the U.S. to

[79] Ibid.
[80] Henry S. Rowen (National Intelligence Council) to Kenneth Dam (US Deputy Secretary of State), 'The Iranian Threat to American Interests in the Persian Gulf ', 20 July 1982, available at: https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83T00966R000100050017-8.pdf, retrieved 20 February 2017
[81] Teicher and Teicher, *Twin Pillars to Desert Storm*, p. 271.
[82] SSG Briefing: 'Iranian Threat to the Gulf', 31 December 1981, available at: https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP84B00049R000601460011-8.pdf, retrieved 12 March 2017

prolong credits to Baghdad as well as loosen control on the export of U.S. goods. The removal of Iraq from the list was also an indicator to other countries that they could resume business deals with Iraq.

The need for U.S. support became ever more urgent by mid-1982. On 22 March 1982, in an offensive called "Undeniable Victory", Iran disintegrated the Iraqi line at Susangerd, thus splitting units in northern and southern Khuzestan, leading to a flood of military victories. As the strategic initiative shifted from Iraq to Iran, the possibility of Saddam's downfall became real. Concerned that Iran could win the war, a group of high-level policymakers met at the White House and decided that Washington had to intervene more directly to avoid Iraq's defeat. That involvement included the supply of U.S. satellite intelligence on Iranian troop movements, and in July 1982, a CIA intelligence officer named Thomas Twetten was dispatched to Iraq to provide assistance on the ground. A year later, Reagan also launched "Operation Staunch" to stop the illegal flow of U.S. arms to Iran. At that point, the U.S. was no longer overly concerned about Soviet influence in Iran. Tehran had cruelly repressed the Tudeh Party in late 1981 and revealed almost as much antagonism towards Moscow (the 'Little Satan') in contrast to Washington (the 'Great Satan').[83] With the left in disarray in Tehran, Soviet relations with Iran soured. However, Iran's threat to key allies in the Gulf was real and it posed potentially a serious challenge to global standing of the U.S.

Another key event was the April 1983 bombing of the American embassy and the U.S. marine compound in Beirut. Taking place at a meeting of the CIA's station chiefs in the Middle East, it eliminated the majority of the agency's best experts on the region. Within weeks, satellite intercepts of telephone conversations confirmed that the terrorists responsible for the bombing had been guided by Tehran—the U.S. was now unofficially at war with Iran.[84] In the following

[83] Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979*, p. 41.
[84] Coughlin, *Saddam: The Secret Life*, p. 214

month, new Secretary of State George Schultz covertly met with Tariq Aziz, former Foreign minister of Iraq, during a trip to Paris. Schultz and Aziz both sought to engage in the fight against the Ayatollah. Shultz's visit was significant because Aziz offered to provide information on Iranian-backed terrorist groups.[85] Such information could help undermine Iran's aggressive stance towards America, as well as the spread of Iran's revolution. Besides Iran, Washington's key concern in the region was Syria, led by President Hafez al-Assad.

Syria was a problem for Reagan's administration for several reasons. In Lebanon, Assad's regime backed radical Lebanese Shi'ite Muslim groups, such as Hezbollah, whom alongside Iran played a major role in the 1983 Beirut bombing.[86] Additionally, Damascus enjoyed strong support from Moscow. Commenting on new deliveries of Soviet arms to the Syrian regime on 15 January 1983, the CIA estimated that Moscow wanted to utilise its influence there in order to expand its influence in the region: "If Moscow can build on its new military presence in Syria, over time it may become a factor that cannot be ignored, as it has been in recent years, by Israel and the majority of states in the region".[87] Therefore, Washington wanted to balance out Syrian and Soviet influence in the region by further developing its relations with Iraq.

Donald Rumsfeld's trip to Baghdad in December 1983 shows that Washington wanted to cultivate Baghdad to contain both Iran and Syria. During the meeting, Rumsfeld told his Iraqi discussers that the U.S. and Iraq had "shared interests in averting an Iranian and Syrian expansion" and stressed the administration's desire that the Iran-Iraq War concluded in a way that "did not increase Iran's interests and preserved the sovereignty of Iraq."[88] In response, Saddam and Aziz stated that Iraq did not want to be reliant on the USSR, strived for regional

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[85] Secretary's May 10 1983 Meeting with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, available at: http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB82/iraq17.pdf, retrieved 8 March 2017

[86] James Phillips, "The 1983 Marine Barracks Bombing: Connecting the Dots," *The Daily Signal (* 23 October 2009), available at: http://dailysignal.com/2009/10/23/the-1983-marine-barracks-bombing-connecting-the-dots/, retrieved 20 March 2017

[87] Soviet Policy in the Middle East and South Asia under Andropov February 8 1983, available at: https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp86t00302r000701070001-9, retrieved 21 March 2017

[88] Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979*, p. 42.

and international stability, frowned upon the Syrian and Iranian interference in Lebanon and, as an oil exporter, wanted constant long-term relations with its customers.[89] They also expressed their desire for American help to end the war. In addition, Saddam stated his hope that relations would now move towards the establishment of full diplomatic relations. A senior U.S. diplomat who accompanied Rumsfeld confirms that their aim was to stabilise Syrian influence: "We wanted to create a Cairo-Amman-Baghdad axis that would drive President Assad crazy."[90]

In the spring of 1984, Rumsfeld came back to Washington from another visit to the Middle East with a blunt caution that there was a "disaster on the horizon".[91] He presented Shultz with information confirming that "Iran's forces were now pushing the Iraqi army back inside Iraq, and soon they could threaten Kuwait and Saudi Arabia".[92] Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were significant in this context as Iran was viciously attacking their oil tankers during the Tanker War that began in 1984. Given that the U.S. started to feel significantly threatened by Iran's aggression at this point, the administration covertly ignored growing evidence of Iraqi use of chemical weapons (CW) against Iranian forces.[93]

Yet again, fear of an Iranian victory prevailed over all concerns, and the restoration of diplomatic relations was unaffected. In fact, the U.S. tilt towards Iraq became ever more evident. In June 1984, the administration openly blamed Iran for the persistence of the war, with Reagan pronouncing that Iraq was "playing by the rules of the game whilst Iran was the one who seems to resist any effort"[94] to end the conflict. This was supported by American votes in the UN Security Council in favour of resolutions condemning Iran's refusal to negotiate a

[89] Ibid, p. 47.
[90] Coughlin, *Saddam: The Secret Life*, p. 214.
[91] Quoted in Hurst, p. 47.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Hurst, *The United States and Iraq Since 1979*, p. 47.
[94] Ibid.

ceasefire. Subsequently, on 26 November 1984, U.S.-Iraqi diplomatic relations were formally restored. Both Rumsfeld and Saddam had similar interests: America would assist Iraq by preventing other countries from selling arms to Iran whilst Iraq would assist America by undermining a radical and terrorist-supporting regime in Iran. [95] In addition, Rumsfeld also emphasized the construction of a pipeline whereby oil would flow from Iraq to Jordan. American companies were encouraged to partake in the creation of newly built Iraqi pipelines which would enable both the U.S. and Israel to gain access to cheap oil. Despite the fact that this project which came to be known as the Aqaba Pipeline Project was rejected, by both Iraq and Jordan, U.S.-Iraqi relations still remained intact.

[95] Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), p. 8

Conclusion

The Cold War thus provided the framework for U.S. policy in the Middle East and towards Iraq, 1980-1984. Since America's share of oil production fell drastically after World War II, the country sought to maintain friendly relations with various countries in the Middle East. Given that Middle Eastern oil production rose significantly during this time, it was important for the U.S. to keep the Persian Gulf's oil reserves protected and reachable by both the U.S. and its allies. Since the Soviet Union also sought to enhance its oil production capabilities and spread communism at the global level, the U.S. found itself engaging in Third World conflicts and revolutions to challenge this threat. Since the 1950s, U.S. policy in the region was shaped by Cold War considerations, with the Baghdad Pact representing an early attempt to create an anti-Soviet bloc that would withstand the spread of communism in the region. Revolution in Iraq weakened the Pact, and it was the Cold War that explained U.S. attitudes towards Abd al-Karim Qasim. In the 1960s and the 1970s, it was the Shah of Iran and Saudi Arabia that remained key American allies and acted as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism in the region. That is why the fall of the Shah and his replacement with a radical Islamist Republic was a shock to the U.S. administration. Not only did the U.S. lose a loyal ally in the region, but also gained an archenemy, bent on the spread of its Islamic revolution in the region and beyond. U.S. strategy towards Iraq evolved in response to regional developments and global threats.

U.S. President Jimmy Carter still pursued a fairly cautious policy towards Iraq. There was substantial debate and disagreement within the administration about the need to support Iraq in the war, but the administration finally reached the agreement that Iraq was the "lesser of two evils" and that the improvement of relations would serve the interest of regional balance. The time of Carter's administration was also characterised by much uncertainty about the consequences of the Iranian Revolution. Washington was initially worried that Khomeini would forge close relations with Moscow, but these fears soon subsided as Soviet-Iranian relations

remained cold. However, Moscow was still a powerful player in the region and, with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Washington feared that the USSR could gain access to the Indian Ocean. Thus it is not surprising that U.S. influence in the Middle East became an increasingly important consideration as a check on Soviet influence. A major factor that influenced U.S. perceptions of Iran at this time was of course the Iran Hostage Crisis, an event generating massive coverage in the U.S., influencing Carter's decision to forge closer links with Iraq—Iran's main enemy at that time. Carter's response to Iranian and Soviet threats in the region was to increase support for its key allies and started making approaches to Iraq. Thus, Carter deployed AWACS to bulk the defence of Saudi Arabia and tried to shore up Iraqi oil exports. By strengthening relations with allies in the Gulf and by helping Iraq, Carter demonstrated that he was determined to act as a powerful player in the region, should either Tehran or Moscow cause complications in the movement of oil from the Persian Gulf to the West.

Reagan came into power at a time when Iran's military success started to pose a real threat not only to Iraq, but also to Washington's allies in the Gulf who feared the spread of Iran's Revolution. At first, Alexander Haig's 'strategic consensus' was envisioned as an alliance between Israel and Washington's allies against the Soviet threat. The policy disintegrated around the same time when Tehran achieved a series of military victories against Iraq. With the suppression of the Tudeh party in late 1981, Washington realised that Tehran did not plan to forge close relations with Moscow. Yet, Washington still believed that the Soviets could use instability in the region – and their role as the exporter of arms to many sides in the conflict, including Iraq, Iran, and especially Syria – to improve their regional and thus global standing vis-à-vis the U.S. The scale of the Soviet's armament of Assad's regime in Syria provided proof of Soviet intentions. With the Soviets using sale of weapons and with Iran putting increasing pressure on Iraq, Washington decided on rapprochement with Baghdad. Washington feared that Tehran's victory would strengthen the appeal of Iran's radical Islamic Revolution that would

threaten its regional allies—a potential disaster for U.S. global standing and easy access to oil. At the same time, rapprochement with Iraq was a counterweight to Syria—Iraq's regional rival. Not only did Syria back radical terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and tried to gain influence in Lebanon, a U.S. ally, but it also had close relations with Moscow. Washington's rapprochement with Iraq thus served the dual aim of containing both Iran and Syria. Rumsfeld's visits in Baghdad in both 1983 and 1984 prove that Washington's aim was dual containment. Therefore, the U.S. made a qualitative change in its attitude towards Iraq, despite the many human rights abuses and war crimes of Saddam Hussein's regime. With Iran and Syria posing a grave threat to U.S. interests in the region, Washington decided to protect its allies and supply to oil at all costs, driven by the logic of global competition with the Soviets. Many historians and observers have since condemned the consequences of this decision given the subsequent history of U.S.-Iraqi relations, but that story goes beyond this dissertation.

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