

that it had lost two fighter planes in a clash with Iraq; and on 20 September Bani Sadr ordered the mobilization of Iranian military reservists 'to defend the integrity of the country'.<sup>197</sup> On 21 September both states again reported heavy fighting along the Shatt. Iraq was reported to have used rockets to shell the Iranian port of Khurramshahr, and Iranian planes attacked Iraqi positions in Basrah.<sup>198</sup>

### The Iraq-Iran War of September 1980

On 22 September 1980 Iraq announced that her planes had hit ten Iranian airfields in a number of Iranian cities and that her troops had penetrated into Iranian territory. Thus a full-scale war had begun between the two countries. The ferocity and viciousness of the war was pointedly illustrated by each state's bombardment of the other's vital oil installations and key economic facilities.

Iraq's motives for her military incursion into Iran are complex and multi-dimensional. Iraq saw her action as a pre-emptive move designed to blunt the edge of Khomeini's fundamentalist movement and to thwart his attempt to export his Islamic revolution to Iraq and the Arab Gulf states. Thus Saddam Hussain termed Iraq's invasion of Iran 'a battle in defence of the honour, sovereignty, constant historical rights, and legitimate vital interests of our country . . . [I]t has been a decisive battle for the Arabism of the Gulf, [and] for deterring the expansionist, Persian ambitions.'<sup>199</sup> Sa'doun Hammadi also described the invasion as legitimate 'self-defence in accordance with international law', designed to protect 'the safety, security and vital interests of Iraq'.<sup>200</sup> Thus from Iraq's perspective, the war started not on 22 September 1980, but on 4 September, when Iranian troops shelled the Iraqi towns of Mandali and Khanaqin.<sup>201</sup>

Iraq's incursion into Iran was also a function of the prevailing military balance of power between the two states. Detecting a shift in this balance of power in Iraq's favour — a shift precipitated by the decimation of the Iranian military and the revolutionary upheaval which had swept Iran following the fall of the Shah — the Iraqi leadership decided to push home its advantage by launching a full-scale invasion. Iraq's objective was probably to expose Iran's military weakness and to project Iraq as the leading power in the Gulf. This was clearly reflected in a statement by Adnan Khairallah, Iraq's Defence Minister, when he stated that Iraq had destroyed the 'myth of Iranian hegemony' in the region.<sup>202</sup> Similarly, Tariq Aziz pointed out that among Iraq's objec-

tives was the destruction of Iran's military machine, which was threatening 'our homeland'.<sup>203</sup> He maintained that one of Iraq's objectives was 'to prove in battle that it [Iraq] is stronger than Iran and fully capable of defeating it. And this is what Iraq has actually achieved.'<sup>204</sup>

Portraying the war as necessary for the defence of the entire Arab homeland, Saddam Hussain stated on 28 September 1980 that Iraq was fighting 'on behalf of the Arab nation and the citizens of the Gulf'.<sup>205</sup> He termed the war 'a decisive battle for the Arabism of the Gulf', since Iraq was 'defending the sovereignty, honour and rights of the Arab nation'.<sup>206</sup>

Saddam Hussain may also have found in the chaotic situation in Iran an opportunity to rid himself of the 1975 Algiers Agreement, which he saw as humiliating, since Iraq had been forced to make substantial concessions in return for Iran's ending her aid to the Kurdish insurgency in Iraq. Saddam's pivotal role as the architect of the 1975 Algiers Agreement made him all the more determined to abrogate it, since he believed it had been signed under duress.<sup>207</sup> He also justified Iraq's incursion into Iran as a move designed to prevent Iran shelling Iraqi border towns, which were within range of Iranian artillery.<sup>208</sup> Iraq may also have hoped to defeat the regime by creating such frustration within Iran's military ranks that they were prompted to overthrow the clerical regime. Iraq's collaboration with ex-Premier Shahpour Bakhtiar<sup>209</sup> and some pro-Shah Iranian exile groups may also have influenced her calculations regarding the internal situation in Iran.

Iraq's decision to launch the war may also have been conditioned by the following factors:

- (1) Iran's international isolation, precipitated by the seizure of the American embassy hostages in Tehran;
- (2) the growing tension between the central government and the various ethnic and religious minorities in Iran (Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis);
- (3) the perceived demoralization and fragmentation of the Iranian military;
- (4) Iraq's strong relations with the Gulf states, who shared her security fears over Iran;
- (5) Iraq's underestimation of the Iranian regime's ability to manipulate religious symbols, such as the motif of martyrdom in Shi'ism, and to whip up Iranian patriotism, both of which served as foci of resistance.

Vowing to continue the war until every inch of usurped Arab land was liberated, Saddam nonetheless made several conditions for ending the war. These included:

- (1) Iran's recognition of Iraq's legitimate rights over her land and waters;
- (2) Iran's cessation of her 'racist, aggressive and expansionist' policies and the end of her interference in the internal affairs of Iraq and the Gulf states;
- (3) adherence to the principle of good neighbourly relations;
- (4) Iran's return of the three Arab islands to the UAE.<sup>210</sup>

Iran, on the other hand, perceived Iraq's invasion as an attempt to destroy the Iranian revolution.<sup>211</sup> Bani Sadr accused Iraq of co-ordinating her action with the US, and asserted that her objective was 'the overthrow of the revolutionary regime in Iran. They want to replace us with American puppets.'<sup>212</sup> Echoing the same theme, the then Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Rajai told the UN Security Council on 17 October 1980 that:

The true aim of the Iraqi regime and its masters is not to gain a few kilometres of territory. What they are trying to do is mutilate the revolutionary movement of the Islamic Iranian people. They wish to destroy the Islamic Republic. They want to prevent the completion of the bond that mankind has begun to forge in Iran. They are trying to prevent us from building a free Iran on the foundation of Islamic and humanitarian values, for any victory for Iran spells the defeat of all the forces of evil throughout the world.<sup>213</sup>

Using Iraq's invasion as a rallying cry to galvanize Iranian public opinion in support of the clerical regime, and to divert attention from the mounting internal political chaos, the Iranian regime began waging an ideological crusade calling for the overthrow of the Ba'athist government in Baghdad. In a message to the Iraqi people on 24 September 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini exhorted the Iraqis to overthrow what he described as 'the blasphemous Ba'athist Party'. Portraying the war as one 'between Islam and blasphemy' and 'between the glorious Koran and pagans', Khomeini stated that all Iraqis and Iranians, as well as all Muslims, 'are duty-bound to defend dear Islam and the glorious Koran and dispatch these traitors to hell'.<sup>214</sup> He called on the Iraqi army to mutiny against 'the illegal and blasphemous government' in Baghdad.<sup>215</sup>

Ayatollah Mohammad Shirazi and the Iranian Joint Military Staff made similar appeals to the Iraqi army,<sup>216</sup> urging it to:

Rise up and free yourselves from the yoke of the government of Saddam, rebel against it and serve the interests of the Muslim people of Iraq. Do not stain your hands with the blood of the beloved peoples of Iraq and Iran, as God will not forgive you for that.<sup>217</sup>

Khomeini and Iran's Islamic fundamentalists saw the Iraqi invasion as 'God's mercy' to the Islamic Republic, since it whipped up Iranian patriotism, bolstered by 'passionate Shiite faith', and focused attention on an external enemy — factors which strengthened the grip of the clerical forces in Iran.<sup>218</sup> Bani Sadr stated, for example, that the war served to 'consolidate our republic'.<sup>219</sup> In an attempt to revive and instil Iranian patriotism in the Iranian military, Bani Sadr was quoted as telling a large number of Iranian military officers, imprisoned after the fall of the Shah, that 'competence and patriotism come before fidelity to the regime'.<sup>220</sup>

Thus the war became inextricably linked with internal factional strife in Iran. The radical fundamentalists saw it as a mechanism by means of which to neutralize the centrifugal forces and opponents of the clerical regime and to acquire a sorely needed legitimacy. Accordingly, Bani Sadr, in a letter to the UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, rejected a cease-fire with Iraq and saw 'no use in any discussion, directly or indirectly, concerning the conflict between the two countries'.<sup>221</sup> Following a meeting with Ayatollah Khomeini, General Fallahi said, 'I will never agree to negotiate to end the state of war with the Iraqi regime', adding that Iran believed in total victory over the aggressors.<sup>222</sup>

Increasingly, Iranian leaders began declaring that Iran's objective was not only to repel Iraqi troops and expel them from Iranian territory, but also to punish the 'criminal Baath Party regime for its crimes'.<sup>223</sup> This goal was eloquently articulated by the Speaker of the Iranian parliament, Hojat al-Islam Hashemi Rafsanjani, when he declared on 23 March 1981 that 'the removal of Saddam's regime is our strategic goal on which we will not compromise'.<sup>224</sup>

In an attempt to isolate Iran and solicit Arab support, Iraq sought to polarize the war into an Arab-Persian confrontation by portraying it as a clash between Arab nationalism and Persian nationalism. This was clearly illustrated by Iraq's conjuring up the memory of the Arab con-