

Pat Oliphant. Copyright 1979. Universal Press Syndicate.

"Of course I'd resign if I thought that they really meant it."

ened the shah's power and wanted to bring the foreign oil industry under state control. At the time, Pahlavi was a timid, inexperienced ruler. Over the next two decades, U.S. support boosted his confidence and ambitions.

By the early 1970s, Pahlavi imagined that he could rekindle the greatness of ancient Persia in modern Iran. To celebrate the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian Empire, he spent at least \$100 million to host a lavish banquet that featured a 165-person catering staff from Paris and 25,000 bottles of French wine. The rise in oil prices in 1973 permitted the shah to increase his spending on other items as well, particularly on weapons. By the mid-1970s, Iran accounted for half of U.S. arms exports.

The United States and Iran

At the same time as many conflicts in the Arab-Israeli relationship were heating up, the United States was also trying to strengthen its relationship with Iran in order to oppose the Soviet Union. The United States was bound to Iran and its shah, or king, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, by political, military, and oil interests. The shah was tied to Washington through his own complicated past. In 1953, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) helped the shah topple a nationalist prime minister who threat-

How did U.S. policy makers fail to understand the feelings of the Iranian people?

Both Pahlavi and U.S. policy makers underestimated the anger simmering just below the surface of Iranian society. The shah's efforts to modernize Iran's educational system and redistribute land sparked protests among the country's Islamic clergymen because the changes threatened their ideology and power. His push toward industrialization forced millions of peasants to abandon the countryside. Iran's cities were soon overcrowded, while the gap between the rich and the poor widened. Additionally, rampant corruption in Pahlavi's

government and the brutal role of SAVAK (the secret police) in suppressing dissent also increased opposition to his rule. Nevertheless, the United States offered full support to Iran in order to counter Soviet support of other Middle Eastern nations.

“Iran, because of the great leadership of the shah, is an island of stability in one of the more troubled regions of the world.”

—President Jimmy Carter, 1977

Who led the opposition movement?

Islamic clergymen were in the best position to encourage resistance to the shah’s regime. They emerged at the helm of a broad opposition movement that included democrats, nationalists, and communists. In 1978, they began organizing demonstrations against the shah. The shah responded with force, ordering the army and police to smash the protests. In September, they opened fire on a huge crowd in Tehran, Iran’s capital, killing or wounding as many as two thousand demonstrators.

Pahlavi, suffering from cancer, facing hostile public opinion, and losing support from the military for his repressive policies, soon lost the will to hold on to power. In January 1979, he left the country. Two weeks later, the spiritual leader of Iran’s Islamic movement, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, returned to Iran from exile in France.

What were the goals of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini?

Khomeini wanted to transform Iran into his vision of a pure Islamic state. His revolution aimed at purging the country of Western popular culture. He prohibited movies and music from the West. He banned alcohol. He also ordered women to cover themselves from head to toe when in public.

Khomeini branded the United States as the “great Satan.” (He referred to the Soviet Union as the “lesser Satan.”) When Carter permitted Pahlavi to enter the United States for medical

treatment, Khomeini claimed that Washington was plotting a counterrevolution. In November 1979, Iranian university students seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran. For over a year, they held the U.S. embassy staff as hostages. Carter’s attempt at a military rescue failed, leaving eight U.S. troops dead. The U.S. Cold War policy for Iran had clearly failed.

“Our relations with the United States are the relations of the oppressed and the oppressor.”

—Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

How did the Iranian Revolution affect the world oil market?

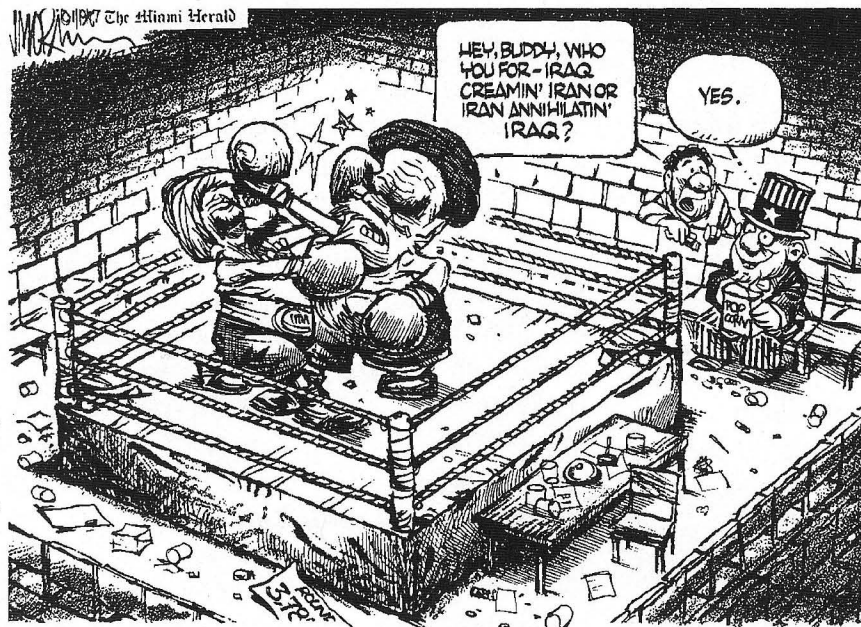
The Iranian Revolution touched off another panic in the oil market. Before the Revolution, Iran had been the world’s second largest oil exporter (trailing Saudi Arabia). By the end of 1978, the foreigners who managed much of Iran’s oil industry had been evacuated and Iranian oil exports had ground to a halt. Again prices soared, nearly tripling in a few weeks.

The Iran-Iraq War

The outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq in September 1980 further limited world oil supplies. Iraq’s leader, Saddam Hussein, hoped to take advantage of an Iranian army weakened by revolution to seize a disputed waterway spilling into the Persian Gulf. He also wanted to prevent the spread of Iran’s Islamist revolution elsewhere in the Middle East.

Saddam Hussein aimed to deliver a quick knockout blow, concentrating on Iran’s oil facilities. Instead, Iraq’s invasion stalled. Iran counterattacked but lacked the strength to defeat Hussein’s impressive military. For the next eight years, the war seesawed back and forth. Iraq had an advantage in air power, missiles, and chemical weapons. Saddam Hussein also benefited from the financial backing of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Arab oil producers. Iran could count on millions of dedicated volunteer soldiers. Tens of thousands were

Jim Morin in The Miami Herald. Reprinted with special permission of King Features Syndicate.



killed charging Iraqi positions in human-wave assaults, often with plastic keys, which they were told would open the gates to heaven, dangling from their necks.

What was the U.S. position in the Iran-Iraq War?

The administration of President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) remained officially neutral during the war but did not want a victory by Iran's Islamist government, which was clearly hostile to the United States. The United States began playing a more active role in 1986, when Iran stepped up attacks against Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf. The United States gave Iraq military intelligence and loans to buy advanced U.S. weapons. Washington also permitted Kuwaiti ships to sail under the U.S. flag and provided them military escorts.

During the Iran-Iraq War, the United States led an international arms embargo against Iran. But in a contradiction of this public policy, the United States secretly sold thousands of anti-tank missiles and military spare parts to Iran. The U.S. government hoped this would improve relations with Iran so that Iran would help to free U.S. hostages held in Lebanon. This goal was only partially met; some hostages were freed, but others were taken. The secret dealings with Iran damaged the credibil-

ity of the United States in the Middle East.

By the time Iraq and Iran agreed to a ceasefire in 1988, the war had claimed more than one million lives. Millions more were injured or became refugees. It also cost each country approximately \$500 million. Neither side could claim victory, and the war did not resolve the disputes which started it.

How did the United States deal with the uncertainty of the Middle East oil industry?

At the same time, the United States and other Western nations learned to live with the uncertainty of the Middle East's oil industry. The oil price hikes of the 1970s spurred energy conservation in wealthy countries. The fuel efficiency of the average U.S. car more than doubled between 1975 and 1985. By 1983, oil consumption in the noncommunist world had dropped by 11 percent from 1979 levels. Higher prices also led oil companies to develop new resources in the North Sea, Alaska, and other sites outside the Middle East. Coal, natural gas, and nuclear power gained a greater share of the energy market. From \$34 a barrel at the beginning of the 1980s, oil prices slid to around \$18 a barrel by the end of the decade.

Civil War in Lebanon

While the Iran-Iraq War dominated events in the Persian Gulf during the 1980s, Lebanon was the main focus of attention in the eastern Mediterranean. Lebanon had long been home to a patchwork of Christian and Muslim groups. Beirut, Tripoli, and other Lebanese ports were centers of Middle Eastern trade and commerce. But beginning in 1975, the country was torn by civil war.

Before the fighting ended in the late 1980s, nearly 150,000 people had been killed. Moreover, because of Lebanon's location and its connections to neighboring countries, the war drew in most of its neighbors as well as the United States. Syrian leaders, who believed Lebanon belonged under their wing, sent in troops to occupy most of the eastern part of the country. The Syrians also directed many of the actions of anti-Israeli militias working in Lebanon.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon to root out the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which was fighting against Israel from Lebanon. PLO units had set up bases in Lebanon after they were expelled from Jordan in 1970. Israel's efforts to crush the PLO resulted in bombardments of the Lebanese capital. The escalating war prompted the United States to try to negotiate peace.

Why did the United States deploy troops in Lebanon?

In hope of stabilizing Lebanon and preventing a wider regional war, the United States sent in troops as part of an international peacekeeping force. But U.S. soldiers were soon caught in the middle. In 1983, a suicide bomber drove a truckload of explosives into the U.S. marine barracks at the Beirut airport. Two hundred and forty-one troops were killed. A few months later, President Reagan pulled out the U.S. peacekeeping force.

In the United States, the Beirut bombing reinforced the Middle East's reputation as a dangerous and hostile region. Most people in the United States favored limiting U.S. involvement in the area. But within a few years the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, a small country with big oil reserves, would pull the United States deeper than ever into the Middle East.

The First Persian Gulf War Reshapes U.S. Policy

On July 25, 1990, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, met with Saddam Hussein at the presidential palace in Baghdad. Their conversation focused on Hussein's claim

that Kuwait was pumping oil that rightfully belonged to Iraq from deposits along the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border. The Iraqi dictator also complained that Kuwait was holding down oil prices to slow Iraq's economic recovery from the Iran-Iraq war. When Glaspie left the meeting, she believed that she had clearly warned Hussein of the dangers of using force to resolve his dispute with Kuwait. The conversation did not make the same impression on Saddam Hussein. Eight days later, 100,000 Iraqi troops poured across the desert border into Kuwait.

How did the end of the Cold War affect U.S. actions toward Iraq?

A few years earlier during the Cold War, the United States might have hesitated to take strong action against Iraq for fear of setting off a wider international crisis. But by the late 1980s, both the world and the U.S. outlook had changed. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev sought to improve relations with the West, and the Soviet Union itself was beginning to teeter under the weight of an ailing economy and political turmoil. Within hours of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Gorbachev stopped arms shipments to Saddam Hussein and joined the United States in supporting a UN Security Council resolution demanding Iraq's immediate withdrawal from Kuwait. With the Soviets on his side, President George H.W. Bush (1989-1993) had an opportunity to steer the international system in a new direction.

President Bush quickly positioned U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia to stop any further advances. The United Nations imposed economic sanctions against Iraq. In the weeks that followed, the United States led an effort to build an international coalition to push Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. The United States' European allies, as well as several Arab states, contributed forces to an international military force.

How did U.S. citizens think the United States should respond to Iraq?

Within the United States, the public was split about how far the country should go in



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its response to Iraq's aggression. U.S. leadership was also divided. Opposition to using force was especially strong from some U.S. military leaders concerned about possible casualties. Many warned that Iraq would turn to chemical weapons or international terrorism if attacked. There were worries that Iraq might even possess nuclear bombs. Some argued that economic sanctions should be given more time to take effect. Other experts noted that with Iraqi control of the Kuwaiti oil fields, Saddam Hussein controlled one-quarter of the world's oil resources.

“Our jobs, our way of life, our own freedom and the freedom of friendly countries around the world would all suffer if control of the world's great oil reserves fell into the hands of Saddam Hussein.”

—President George H.W. Bush, 1990

President Bush favored attacking Iraq quickly. He doubted that economic sanctions alone would pressure Saddam Hussein out

of Kuwait. He also felt that the coalition of nations he had assembled would not hold together long. Particularly worrisome was Saddam Hussein's appeal in the Arab world. He sought to rekindle Arab nationalism and called for Arabs to unite against Israel and its ally, the United States. U.S. officials feared that his message would deepen hostility toward the United States throughout the Middle East.

In November 1990, Bush won UN approval to use “all necessary means” to force Iraq out of Kuwait. A deadline was set—January 15, 1991—for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. By January there were 540,000 U.S. troops in the Gulf and an additional 160,000 from other countries. When President Bush asked the Senate in early January to approve military action to drive Iraq out of Kuwait if the deadline was not met, his request passed by five votes.

What happened in the Persian Gulf War?

After the assault against Iraq began in mid-January 1991, the U.S. public quickly rallied behind the war effort. Despite Sad-

dam's prediction of "the mother of all battles," his army proved no match for the United States and its allies. For over a month, warplanes pounded Iraqi targets. By the time allied ground troops moved forward in late February 1991, communication links within Iraq's army had been shattered. Coalition forces, who came from twenty-eight nations and acted with UN approval, retook Kuwait's capital with little resistance.

After one hundred hours, President Bush brought the ground war to a halt. The president and his advisors, worried about the consequences of controlling a completely destabilized Iraq, objected to totally destroying Iraq's retreating army and toppling Saddam Hussein. Instead, they allowed the remnants of Iraq's front-line divisions to limp northward.

The Persian Gulf War was one of the most lopsided conflicts in history. Iraq's military presented few obstacles to the advance of the half-million coalition forces. In all, 146 U.S. troops were killed during the war. (Coalition forces suffered a total of 260 deaths.) Iraq lost as many as 100,000 people, both soldiers and civilians, in the war. Saddam Hussein also inflicted a heavy blow against the environment by ordering retreating Iraqi troops to set hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells on fire and to spill thousands of barrels of oil into the Persian Gulf.

What were the effects of the Persian Gulf War on the U.S. role in the Middle East?

Through a combination of power and persuasion, the United States had won greater



U.S. Air Force jets flying over burning oil wells during the Persian Gulf War.

United States Air Force.

influence in the Middle East as a result of the war. At the same time, there were fresh responsibilities. Once the fighting in the Persian Gulf ended, governments there looked to the United States to provide leadership on regional issues.

The war against Iraq brought the region once again to the forefront of discussion in the United States, particularly as events were broadcast live on television. The war also convinced Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the smaller states of the Persian Gulf that a U.S. military presence was needed in the region to safeguard their own security.

Yet the presence of more than fifteen thousand U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf created tensions of its own. For the United States, increased involvement in the Middle East has not been without cost.

The U.S. military presence reminded the Arab world of its own weaknesses and divisions. It also angered many people, including extremists like Osama bin Laden and his followers.