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# The Effectiveness of Resort to Military Force: The Case of Iran and Iraq*

*by*
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## INTRODUCTION

There has been a general tendency on the part of most strategists and defense specialists to measure a state's capability in terms of a meticulous calculation of the quantities and qualities of the armed forces and weapons systems. Some have gone so far as to claim that the study of power in the last analysis is "the study of the capacity to wage war."[1] Furthermore, it is assumed by most of these specialists that leaders of nations-states are rational and that rational leaders do not resort to war if they think that they will lose. Bueno de Mesquita, for example, argues that "By assuming that leaders of nations are strong, rational calculators of expected utility, I showed that nations initiate war only if there is the expectation of a net increase in utility from war as compared to the utility derived from maintaining the status quo...."[2]

From these assumptions, such specialists draw the seemingly logical conclusion that the only sure method of preventing a challenge or ensuring the attainment of goals in interstate relations is to build bigger and better military forces and armaments, that is, divisions, tanks, military aircraft, anti-aircraft systems, missiles, bombs, etc.

It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that there are some fundamental difficulties involved with these assumptions and, consequently, with the conclusion predicated upon them. The Iran-Iraq War will be used to shed some light on the nature of these difficulties, but the empirical evidence against the stated conclusion is already impressive in a number of benchmark cases. The United States' overwhelming economic and military superiority did not prevent either a challenge by the forces of North Vietnam and Vietcong or the U.S. inability to achieve its goals despite a long and costly war. Nor has the overwhelming superiority of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan so far prevented the mounting of a persistent challenge from a band of irregular and poorly armed Mujahedeen and their frustration of the Soviet objectives. The United States and Israel were not able to attain their goals in Lebanon despite their overwhelmingly military power, just as the United States was not able to use its clear military superiority to resolve the Iranian hostage crisis and to prevent it from contributing to the election defeat of an incumbent American president.

Even in the cases where the difference in military power is immense, the superiority of one side over the other is not subject to doubt, and the territories to be invaded in close physical proximity of the invader, the weaker states have not proven "rational" in the above sense by rolling over and foregoing challenge to the superior forces.[3] In 1971, Iran invaded and occupied three small islands in the Persian Gulf. These were Abu Musa, with a population of 300 fishermen, belonging to the Emirate of

Sharjah, and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs, with a total population of 70, belonging to the Emirate of Ra's al-Khaimah. The combined population of the two Emirates was 56,000. According to Muhammad Reza Shah, Britain, which was abandoning its protectorate over the Trucial Emirates or Sheikhdoms (now the United Arabs Emirates) had agreed that Iran would receive these islands in lieu of relinquishing its long historical claim to Bahrain in 1970. The Shah's version of negotiations was later denied by the British officials.[4] In any case, the few policemen on the Greater Tunb did resist the indisputably overwhelming Iranian forces, there were casualties on both sides, and a good deal of anti-Iranian sentiment was generated on the part of the Arabs. In 1983, the United States, by all accounts the greatest military power in the world, invaded Grenada — a small island of 100,000 people, with no air force or navy, and with a divided leadership. But Grenada, too, resisted the far superior forces and there were losses to both parties. The invasion also occasioned condemnation by an overwhelming majority of the United Nations.

## THE CAUSES OF THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

A number of causes for the Iran-Iraq War have been offered by Western scholars and journalists. These consist of border disputes, particularly the status of the Shatt al-Arab; religious and national differences; competition for prestige; and ancient animosities.[5] Two sets of problems tend to characterize such arguments. First, the authors are rather selective in the data they present or perceive. For example, in presenting the idea of ancient animosities, they conveniently overlook the considerably longer periods of cooperation. In stressing cleavages, they neglect religious and cultural affinities that have existed between the two countries. In emphasizing the policy differences, they tend to underestimate the common interests of the two states in oil and in OPEC, in modernizing their economies, in resolving their respective Kurdish problems and winning the loyalty of their populations, and in maintaining their independence from incursions by the great powers. Consequently, it is not surprising to find many references to previous differences on the Shatt al-Arab but almost no reference to the Sa'dabad Pact of 1937, which was concluded between Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Afghanistan to bring about non-aggression, mutual consultation, and cooperation for ensuring internal and external security among the signatories. Neither has there been much reference to Iran's assistance of the nationalist government of Rashid Ali al-Gailani in Iraq in 1941, even after that government was overthrown through the use of military force by Britain and replaced by the latter's supporters. Further, there is seldom any comment regarding Iran joining with the other oil producers after the nationalization of Iraq Petroleum Company — owned by British, Dutch, and American interests — to declare in 1972 that it would not allow isolation of Iraq nor would it cooperate with retaliatory measures against the latter by the Western oil companies.

Second, all of the proposed causes of the War had existed between the two countries for a long time, certainly for half a century since the

independence of Iraq in 1930, but there was no resort to war, despite occasional tensions and border incidents. On the contrary, Muhammad Reza Shah and Saddam Hussein had managed to resolve their differences through the Algiers Agreement of 1975, and the relationship between the two countries had improved substantially by the time of the Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979.[6] The most important specific sources of conflict between the two states during the Shah's regime consisted of the status of the Shatt al-Arab and Iran's military occupation of three islands in the Gulf in 1971. Their resolution was for awhile complicated by a third and more significant issue, namely, personal frictions and ideological differences between the respective elites and their contributions to each other's internal revolutionary and subversive movements.

The Shatt al-Arab is formed of the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers for a distance of 120 miles before reaching the Gulf. The upper part, approximately 65 miles long, is entirely within Iraqi territory, while the lower part constitutes the frontier of the two states. The Ezerum Treaty of 1847 granted the Ottoman Empire sovereignty over the Shatt, while Iran (then known as Persia) was recognized sovereign over the east bank and the town and anchorage of Khorramshahr (then known as Muhammarah). Although this treaty did not follow the normal rule of international law, the *thalweg* (deep water line) establishing the boundary between two states occupying opposite banks of a river, it did provide for the free navigation in and use of the river by both parties. With the discovery of oil in high quantities in Iran's province of Khuzistan (then known as Arabistan) on the east bank of the Shatt, new protocols were signed by Britain (which had an interest in the Iranian oil), Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Iran. These protocols again recognized Ottoman sovereignty on the entire river and its islands, except for Abadan which later became an oil terminal and the site for the largest refinery in the world, two other islands, and the port and anchorage of Khorramshahr.

With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, Iraq, first as a British mandate and subsequently as a independent state, inherited the Ottoman rights in the Shatt and in fact exercised them more meaningfully than in the Ottoman period. After Reza Shah (1926-1941) unified Iran and reduced foreign influence, the dispute between the two countries about the Shatt was submitted to the League of Nations in the 1930s. Iraq insisted that treaties must be respected under international law, and Iran argued for the application of the *thalweg*. The dispute was resolved by the Treaty of 1937 which recognized Iraq's sovereignty over the river but applied the *thalweg* in the area of Abadan for a distance of five miles.[7] The relationship between the two countries improved greatly and no major conflict about the Shatt arose for the next two and half decades, until after the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy by a revolution in 1958 and the emergence of a Republican regime in Iraq. As personal frictions and ideological and alliance differences between the Shah and the Iraqi elite mounted, the dispute on the boundaries in the Shatt also re-emerged. After the construction of the Kharg Island terminal in the Gulf in 1965, the Shah no longer depended on the Shatt for

oil export and was more willing to engage Iraq. With a large part of the countries' troops concentrated along the southern part of their border, the Shah's government condemned the Treaty of 1937 on the ground that it was "imposed" on Iran under conditions that no longer existed and declared it "null and void" in April of 1969. Iran subsequently escorted a freighter with naval units through the waterway to demonstrate its "rights." Iraq did not interfere with the movement of Iranian ships but refused to recognize the Iranian claims.[8]

Another source of conflict was Iran's occupation of the three islands at the entrance of the Gulf in 1971. This action was justified by Iran on "historical and sentimental" grounds by claiming that Qawasim Sheikhs had used the islands in return for payment of tribute to the Iranian government and that *de jure* exercise of Iranian sovereignty had not lapsed. The Iraqi government rejected this claim by maintaining that the funds paid in the late eighteenth century had been for the privilege of using the Iranian ports on the eastern shore of the Gulf, not the three islands. Furthermore, Iraq severed diplomatic relations with Iran and Britain, because of the role assumed to have been played by the latter in facilitating the occupation through prior negotiations.[9]

The two regimes have, particularly in recent years, posed a threat to each other. Iran not only supported the Iraqi Kurds in their war with the central government in the late 1960s, but also announced after their cease-fire of March 1970 that it was ready to assist them again should they decide to resume their uprising against the Iraqi government. When clashes with the Kurds resumed in 1974, Iraq accused Iran, Israel and the United States of arming and inciting the Kurds, an accusation which was subsequently denied by the United States. The Shah's government, however, was playing a delicate game as Iran has a large Kurdish minority of its own that has also aspired to autonomy and had established the short-lived Kurdish Republic of Mahabad (1945-1946) during the Soviet occupation of northern Iran.

Iraq also maintained that there were several espionage rings, manned by Israeli, American and Iranian agents, operating against Iraq from Tehran. One of the cases presented by Iraq to support this allegation was the 1970 assassination of General Timour Bakhtiar who had been the director of SAVAK and had worked as the right hand of the Shah until he defected to Iraq and became active against the Shah's regime. According to Iraq, the assassination was carried out by three Israeli-trained Iranian intelligence agents who, posing as students, had hijacked an Iranian plane, landed it in Baghdad and had sought and received political asylum.[10]

Iraq also accused the Shah's regime of suppression and maltreatment of political opposition and ethnic minorities, especially the Arabs who inhabit Khuzistan and are scattered along the Gulf coast of Iran. It referred to what it regarded as the general Arab character of the Gulf and Arabistan (Khuzistan), a term which was in common use before Reza Khan (later the Shah) removed Sheikh Khaz'al in the early 1920s and re-established the authority of the Iranian government over the province.

The Iranian government, in turn, pointed out the Iraqi

government's support for the rural and urban guerrillas in Iran, who then constituted the only source of active opposition to the Shah, and noted such behavior as the Iraqi authorities' open call to the guerrillas to demonstrate the existence of opposition to the Shah's regime by acts of sabotage during the visit of President Richard M. Nixon to Iran in 1972. Iran was also incensed about the fostering of Arab separatism in the south by Iraq and complained about Iraq's expulsion in 1971 of more than 50,000 Iranians, who had allegedly been living and working in Iraq illegally.

In addition to the common interests and affinities previously noted, however, the two countries had a compelling national interest in preventing a large-scale military clash which might have resulted in a war and spelled disaster for both, particularly since most of their wealth — oil and gas fields, refineries, petrochemical complexes and ports — was located in the most likely war zone. Consequently, the Algiers Accord was by no means surprising.

This paper maintains that the critical factor in the relationship between the two countries was then, as it has been during the regime of the Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini, the threat the respective elites posed to each other and their sponsorship of subversive activities in each other's domain. When the two governments agreed to halt the threats and acts of subversion against each other during the Shah's regime, other disputes were easily resolved. Iran ceased its support to the rebellious Kurds, who subsequently accepted an amnesty granted by Iraq, were defeated, or crossed the border into Iran. Iraq, in turn, accepted the *thalweg* as the boundary between the two countries in the Shatt.[11] It is clear from the data that, whatever their substance, neither ancient animosities, nor competition for prestige, nor a combination of the two prevented an agreement and subsequent cooperation between the two states in either 1975 or 1937.

Since the nature of the disagreements between the two countries in 1980 was not different from what it had been in the early 1970s and the structure of the Iraqi government was practically the same in the two periods, the major difference between the relatively long period in which war was avoided and the time it started must be sought in the changed nature of the Iranian regime. Iran never agreed to changing its policy of attempting to establish an Islamic Republican regime in Iraq, the prerequisite for which was the overthrow of the Ba'th government and its leader, Saddam Hussein. It is instructive to note that Iraq sent a congratulatory telegram to Khomeini upon his arrival in Tehran and Iraqi President Ahamd Hassan al-Bakr indicated willingness to pay him a courtesy visit before there was any serious reference to revising the Algiers Accord. Both of these gestures were rebuffed by Khomeini. Instead, the Iranian government was implicated in the sponsorship of the al-Da'wah (the Call, or Invitation) party, in assassination attempts and uprisings by the Shiites, and in the designation by Khomeini of the Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir Sadr and, after his execution by the Iraqi government in 1981, of the Ayatollah Muhammad Reza Hakim, as the future theo-political leader in Iraq.[12] The Iraqi government, for its part,

also began to press its sponsorship of the pan-Arab and separatist movements in Khuzistan and to turn its propoganda apparatus against the Khomeini regime. Despite these developments, a war was avoided as long as the moderate cabinet of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan continued, mainly because deliberate efforts were made to keep the lines of communication open and to allay the Iraqi government's apprehensions about an Iranian sponsored attempt directed toward its overthrow. However, the Bazargan government fell because of the hostage crisis, a move planned and executed by his domestic political competitors. Thus, one of the major obstacles blocking further deterioration of Iran-Iraq relations and the occurrence of war between the two countries was eliminated.[13]

## COSTS, RATIONALITY AND FUNCTIONALITY OF RESORT TO FORCE

The Iraqi invasion of Iran on September 22, 1980 was the formal beginning of a long and major war which is currently in its fifth year. The course of the war may be divided into five rather distinct phases for the purpose of analysis.[14]

The first phase, September 22 to November 15, 1980, was characterized by Iraq's military initiative which enabled it to penetrate into the Iranian territory. The three main theatres of activity consisted of: the northern sector, in Kurdistan; the central sector, in Kermanshah and Luristan (between Qasr-e Shirin and Mehran); and the southern sector, in Khuzistan. The penetration of Iranian territory in the first two sectors did not exceed ten miles at its advanced positions. In the south, or the main theatre of this war, Iraqi forces captured a land area about sixty miles wide. This area included the port city of Khorramshahr, which fell after a month of desperate house to house fighting and constituted the main Iraqi accomplishment.

The second phase, November 15 to May 1981, was a short-term stalemate characterized by the rainy season of November to March and the Iraqi efforts to capture Abadan island. These efforts failed because of the nature of the terrain, the overwhelming superiority of the Iranian navy, and the apparent unwillingness of Saddam Hussein to risk the estimated losses of manpower and *matériel*. The invading forces were also unable to complete their siege of the city or shell it into surrender.

The third phase, June 1981 through May 1982, consisted of Iran's counter-offensive to expel the invading forces from its territory. Fighting on its own soil, Iran managed to acquire an advantageous military position in early 1982 and by May 25 Khorramshahr was regained and an estimated 12,000 Iraqi military personnel were taken as prisoners. The counter-offensive was thus quite successful and along most of the front the Iraqi forces were driven back to the border. In some instances, the Iranian forces entered Iraqi territory and in others the Iraqis remained on Iranian soil, but the extent of penetration in these cases was insignificant.

The fourth phase, June through October 1982, was characterized by Iran's invasion of Iraq's territory in order to defeat the enemy and

change its government. The first major offensive of this phase was launched against the port city of Basra on July 14, employing the previously successful human wave tactic, through the use of which inexperienced volunteers attempted to clear the minefields and bore the brunt of the Iraqi punishment before the Pasdaran-e Enghelab (Revolutionary Guards) and the army regulars entered the battle. Yet, the Iraqis had learned well from their previous experiences with this tactic and showed much more capability in defending their homeland than they had demonstrated in Iran. Even the Shiite soldiers proved to be considerably more dedicated in defense than they had been in invasion. This Iranian offensive, as well as the five subsequent attacks in as many weeks, failed to crumble the Iraqi defenses. On September 30, another major offensive was launched in the central sector of the front, relatively close to Baghdad. This offensive, too, soon ground to a halt without resulting in any meaningful gain. Although Iran did not achieve its military objectives, it suffered heavy casualties, mostly in the ranks of the volunteers and Pasdaran who were reluctant to follow the plans and directives of the professional officers and threw themselves into the battles and superior fire-power of the Iraqi forces.

The fifth phase, November 1982 to the present, has been a long-term stalemate. By the beginning of 1983 Iraq had acquired air superiority and found it easier than Iran to acquire arms from abroad. Through a foreign policy which ignored even minimal consideration for factors of interdependence and whose main function seemed to be making enemies, Iran had managed to alienate the overwhelming majority of the international community and to create a tacit cooperation against itself and in favor of Iraq even between such adversaries as the United States and the Soviet Union, despite the fact that during most of the period the latter governments were so suspicious of each other that they refused to negotiate on a number of issues of mutual concern.

The costs of the war have been enormous by any standard. More than 300,000 soldiers and civilians have been killed in the battlefields or in bombardments. The author estimates that a minimum of 1,000,000 have been wounded and maimed and there are already more than 3,000,000 refugees.[15] The cohort of boys and young men is decimated, and those of this group who have so far survived have received little or no meaningful training and education, a matter which will be highly detrimental to the future of the two countries. Much of the mining, industrial and service enterprises and infrastructure are either totally ruined or substantially damaged. It is difficult to estimate the actual and the lost opportunity costs of this war, but the range of $550 to $600 billion appears reasonable for the economic costs. This implies that even if the war ends in late 1985-early 1986, which is likely because of war weariness and fatigue, it will take the countries until the year 2005 to return to where they were in 1980, if every man, woman and child saves $500.00 per annum to be devoted solely to rectifying the damages of the war.[16] Furthermore, the war has contributed to reducing world dependence on the Persian Gulf oil and has substantially increased production by Britain and Mexico (from less than 1.8 million barrels daily in 1977 to more

than 5.5 million in the first half of 1984) in a shrinking market. Such production is likely, at least in the short run, to reduce the need for the Gulf supplies even further and seriously damage the capability of Iran and Iraq to reconstruct their economies.[17]

Despite its immense costs, the war has not been productive in terms of the objectives initially sought by the belligerents. There is little probability that Iran's objective of overthrowing the Ba'th regime and replacing it with a government of the Ayatollah's choosing, which was the main cause of Iraq's decision to invade Iran, can be achieved. By the summer of 1982, when Iran had expelled the invading forces from its territory and Iraq and its Persian Gulf allies had indicated willingness to honor the Algiers Agreement and pay reparation to Iran, the war could have ended on terms rather favorable to the latter.[18] But, instead of ending the war, Iran decided to invade Iraq and bring about a change of government in that country by direct use of Iranian armed forces. Consequently, it made the clearly unacceptable demands of $150 billion (rather than the proposed $30 to $50 billion) in reparation and the removal of Saddam as preconditions to a cease-fire. The Iranian leaders assumed that since their military, disarrayed as a result of periodic purges of the officers and arbitrary decisions about weapon systems by the revolution, had been able to defeat the Iraqi forces in Khuzistan, it would have little difficulty, with its improved morale and organizaton, in defeating a weakened and more disabled Iraqi military on the other side of the border. This reasoning by the Iranian leadership, developed along the same line as that of the Western military specialists stated at the outset of this paper, proved wrong and disastrous.[19]

Two major difficulties beset this type of reasoning. The first arises from the fact that the usual estimates of military capability do not take the nature of the objectives sought into account. This, in turn, means that all meticulous estimates of power are likely to be deficient, because one unit of a given military force on one side does not necessarily equal one unit of the same force on the other side. The side whose objective is the defense of its own homeland, for example, has superiority over the side which is engaged in invasion. This proposition is verified not only by the Iran-Iraq War, but also by the Vietnam and the Afghan Wars. While it was unfathomable for the forces of North Vietnam and Vietcong to have even contemplated an invasion of the United States, they were strong enough to defend themselves against the United States in their own territory. The Mujahedeen, too, organized in the present form could not pose the slightest threat to the Soviet territory, although they have so far been able to frustrate Soviet objectives and to inflict fairly substantial casualties on the Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

The second difficulty arises from insufficient conceptual focus on the changed nature of the international context in assessing the utility of resort to military force. Increasing interdependence, reflected in the networks of mutually beneficial transactions among states, has made resort to military force more dysfunctional and counterproductive than ever before. This counterproductiveness prevails not only because of the

strategic dimension of interdependence and the cost and questionable utility of resort to military force for the achievement of objectives, but also because resort to force severs many mutually beneficial transactions with the adversary and strains relations with a number of third parties that have mutually beneficial relations with target states.[20] Iran, for example, had a greater probability of defeating Iraq in the period after the summer of 1982, if the two states had been left alone or received equal access to arms from abroad. But this assumes a different international context than the prevailing one. In view of the strategic and economic dimensions of interdependence, the rest of the world, particularly the Arab states of the Gulf and their friends, would not let Iraq be defeated. These dimensions of interdependence also, to a great extent, account for the support received by the Vietcong during the Vietnam War and by the Mujahedeen in the current Afghan war.

Iran's inability to achieve its objectives has already been noted. In assessing elite rationality, it should be considered that Iraq, too, has been unable — and has no prospects at present or in the foreseeable future of being able — to achieve its expressed invasion objectives, which consisted of changing the regime of Khomeini and "liberating" Khuzistan. To the extent that rationality means the efficient use of resources for the attainment of objectives, there is little comfort in the behavior of the Iranian and Iraqi leaders regarding Buena de Mesquita's assumption of rationality, which has been accepted *a priori* by most traditional scholars. It may be argued that the leaders of Iran and Iraq are aberrations and that those of the rest of the world have been rational in their resort to military force. An examination of the empirical data does not appear very promising for this position. Aside from such clear cases as World War I, Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor (despite Russett's illuminating contribution in this connection),[21] and the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, as many states, if not more, have lost wars as have won them, with other wars becoming stalemates after heavy costs. This implies that the probability of governments being rational (in the sense used by Buena de Mesquita and traditional scholars) has been less than a probability based on a toss of a coin. Hopefully, other leaders are somewhat more rational than their Iranian and Iraqi counterparts, but given the latter's level of rationality, this would not constitute a great feat. The assumption of elite rationality is even more curious in view of the mushrooming psychological studies regarding the effects of ethnocentrism, misperception, motivation and stress on the leaders[22] and their reluctance, even where feasible, to increase their rational capacity by the greater use of such available models as those proposed by Graham Allison and Alexander George.[23]

The course of the Iran-Iraq War suggests that despite its general dysfunction, the utility of resort to military force remains high for the achievement of one set of objectives, that is, the defense of one's territory and regime against external invasion. This type of objective also seems to have a multiplier effect upon the available military resources in favor of the defender and against the invader. It is essential, however, to distinguish the defense of one's territory, as proposed here, from the way

in which the term "defense" has been used by the United States and the Soviet Union in justifying their intervention in such areas as Vietnam and Afghanistan.

Military force can still be successful in invading the territories of other states, provided that the territories to be invaded are within easy access and the military disparities are immense and, therefore, that the multiplier effect of defense of territory upon military resources can be easily overcome. The cases of Iran's invasion of the three islands in the Gulf and of the United States' invasion of Grenada are illustrative examples. The Falklands War also seems to substantiate these propositions. First, the Falklands War eventually ended in favor of the defender. Second, while Argentina was close to its invasion target and enjoyed sufficient superiority over the meager resources of the Islands, it did not enjoy such superiority over the forces of the United Kingdom and the Islands combined. Third, the war was costly and caused substantial losses to both parties. Argentina was unable to achieve its objectives despite its human and economic losses; and Britain's objective was achieved at the cost of billions of dollars, a cost which still continues to sap British economic resources.[24]

Finally, it is useful to address briefly the issues of "resolve" or commitment, which is usually offered as the cause for failure of the superior military power, measured in the traditional manner, to achieve its objectives. Aside from the fact that the exact nature of this resolve is not adequately explained by those who propose it, there are three main points worth noting. First, it is not shown how this resolve can be generated when the people of a country do not support the policies of their elites. It is very doubtful, for example, that Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson or Richard M. Nixon lacked resolve in Vietnam, nor has the Ayatollah shown the slightest lack of resolve in his wish to overthrow the Ba'th regime in Iraq. Yet, while his much mentioned *gateiyat* (decisiveness) was good enough without any armies for the overthrow of the Shah and was sufficient, with his disarrayed forces, for defense against the Iraqi invasion, it has not been good enough, even with improved armed forces and organization, for achieving his objectives in Iraq. Second, resolve is not limited to one side in a war, it can be increased by the other side as well. Third, resolve can be counterproductive and disastrous if the resources are not appropriate for the objectives sought in the existing international and domestic contexts. As David Baldwin has demonstrated, power is not fungible in politics as money is in economics.[25] In politics, resources that can be functional in one case may be inappropriate or even counterproductive in another. To use an analogy, four deuces, or four threes, constitute a powerful hand if one is engaged in a game of poker, but they constitute the weakest cards if one plays bridge. The best resolve in the latter case is restraint.

## CONCLUSIONS

By examining the Iran-Iraq War from a comparative perspective, this paper has raised a number of questions regarding the prevailing

method of assessing capability in terms of meticulously calculated military forces and weapon systems.

The common methods of calculating military force have been deficient for at least three reasons. First, they do not relate resources to the nature of the objectives sought. In this connection, it has been illustrated that the same unit of military force has considerably more weight when it is used for the defense of one's territory against external invasion than when used offensively for invasion. This may be primarily attributed to the role of beliefs and values. Whether because of nationalism or religion, the defense of one's territory evokes greater commitment and sacrifice than fighting and dying in a remote land and culture, even if it is done in the name of defense.

Second, the common modes of calculating military force do not adequately account for the changing nature of the international context. It appears that not only the strategic, but also the economic, dimension of interdependence has substantially affected the utility of resort to military force. Its costs have increased and its benefits do not in most instances seem commensurate with the costs.

Third, the effectiveness of superior military force is based on the assumption of rationality of the states, which implies the rationality of their foreign policy elites. To the extent that rationality means the efficient use of resources for the purpose of achieving objectives, it was noted that the *a priori* assumption of the rationality of governments cannot be empirically sustained. The persistence of this assumption seems particularly puzzling in light of the burgeoning psychological studies on the effects of such factors as ethnocentrism, misperception and motivation. The best that can be said is that the degree of elite rationality, or irrationality, may vary from state to state and from decision to decision in the case of the same elite.

*Author's Note*

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**Footnotes**

1. Ray S. Cline, *World Power Assessment 1977* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977), p. 11.
2. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "The Costs of War: A Rational Expectation Approach," *The American Political Science Review* (1983), p. 348. See also, "An Expected Utility Theory of International Conflict," *The American Political Science Review* (1980), pp. 917-931.
3. The proposition that the militarily less powerful state is not likely to challenge the more powerful one has also been inherent in the writing of the "realist" as well as a number of the more contemporary scholars. See, for example, Bueno de Mesquita, *The War Trap* (New Hazen: Yale University Press, 1981); Cline, *Assessment;* and, Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Weley, 1979). For more balanced analyses, see Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900 to 1980," *World Politics* (1984), pp. 496-526; and, Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

4. For an extensive account, see John D. Anthony, *Arab States of the Lower Gulf: People, Politics, Petroleum* (Washington, D.C.: The Middle East Institute, 1975), pp. 26-29.
5. See, Stephen R. Grummon, *The Iran-Iraq War: Islam Embattled* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center for Strategic Studies, 1982); Shirin Tahir-Kheli and Shaheen Ayubi, eds., *The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons, Old Conflicts* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Tareq Y. Ismael, *Iran and Iraq: Roots of Conflict* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982); John W. Amos II, "The Iran-Iraq War: Calculus of Regional Conflict," in David H. Partington, ed., *The Middle East Annual: Issues and Events: Volume 1 — 1981* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982); and, Claudia Wright, "Implications of the Iraq-Iran War," *Foreign Affairs* (Winter 1980-1981), pp. 28-38.
6. It should be noted that Saddam Hussein's reference to the Algiers Agreement did not occur until October 30, 1979, long after the departure of the Shah and the return of Khomeini. The Agreement was renounced in September 1980, before the invasion of Iran.
7. For the legal history of the Shatt see Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf: Iran's Role* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1972); and, J.B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).
8. See G.H. Razi, "The Persian Gulf Region: Emerging Wealth and Power in the Middle East," *Studies in Comparative International Development* (1976), pp. 100-120; and "Developments in the Persian Gulf," in Abid al-Marayati, ed., *International Relations of the Middle East and North Africa* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenkman, 1984), pp. 393-430.
9. Anthony, *Arab States...*, p. 27.
10. Razi, "The Persian Gulf...," pp. 106-109, and "Developments...," pp. 410-412.
11. Razi, "Developments...," p. 413.
12. When the Ayatollah Sadr was urged by Khomeini to lead a revolt against the Iraqi government, he informed the latter of the differences of conditions between Iraq and Iran, of the last years of the Shah's regime and the inadvisability of openly challenging the government. He was urged by Khomeini to show decisiveness. His heeding of Khomeini's advice led to his execution by the Iraqi government in April 1980.
13. During a discussion with Bazargan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Ebrahim Yazdi, in June 1979, this author emphasized the very strong probability that in view of Iran's constant purges of its armed forces and the threats to the Iraqi regime, Iraq might invade Iran and the war would have disastrous consequences for both countries, as even the nominal winner would be a heavy loser. The author was subsequently informed that, after his departure from Iran, Yazdi had prepared an extensive report to this effect and submitted it to the Revolutionary Council and Khomeini.
14. The author has developed these phases and dates on the basis of the reports of the Iranian and Iraqi authorities and Western reports. Obviously, one could provide a different set of phases. For instance, the cited second phase could be incorporated with the third.
15. It should be noted that the estimate of those killed in the war has been placed as high as 500,000 by U.S. Department of Defense specialists appearing on the mass media. The author's estimate may be on the low side, but it is perhaps more credible, because of Iran's and Iraq's tendency toward more than the usual amount of exaggeration associated with belligerents' claims in wars. Furthermore, the ratio of casualties (maimed and wounded) to the killed is lower than the comparable figures for the United States in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, because the existing medical facilities and communication and transportation networks of Iraq and Iran, and hence their handling of war casualties, have been inferior to those of the United States.
16. These figures are the result of the best estimates that could be made by this author. It will require $250-$300 billion to rebuild the war zone alone. For a similar estimate made in the summer of 1984, before the latest rounds of destructive military activity in 1985, which included the bombardment on an unprecedented scale of civilian targets by military aircraft and missiles, see Nehzat-e Azadi-e Iran (The Freedom Movement of Iran), *Tahlili Piramoon-e Jang va Solh* (Tehran: Entesharat, 1984), pp. 58, 95. This analysis of the Iran-Iraq War, prepared by some of the ministers and high

administrative officials in the Bazargan Cabinet (1979), estimates that the cost of rebuilding the war zone (to the extent of damages done by the summer of 1984) would range between $200 and $300 billion. The current expenditure on the war has averaged over $2 million a month. Nevertheless, the two belligerents, especially Iran, have been unable to replace a good part of their expensive military equipment. The actual war outlays and the replacement cost of the lost arms amounts to $150-$180 billion. The remainder of the total estimate accounts for all other costs of the war.

17. The time frame estimated here obviously does not take into account the effects of external aid for reconstruction. It should be noted, however, that the Gulf states, which are expected to be the main source for such assistance, are facing substantial reductions in their revenues because of the lower demand for their oil.
18. The Iraqi government had proposed as early as April 12, 1982, that it would withdraw its remaining forces from Iran if the latter would respect borders and stop fighting. A unilateral cease-fire was offered on June 9. Both of these were summarily rejected by Iran.
19. There was a major division within both the military and the civilian command structures in Iran about the wisdom of negotiating with the Iraqis or continuing the war by invading Iraq. Both Khomeini and the Speaker of the National Consultative Assembly Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, the second most powerful leader in Iran, were urged by a number of members of the government, some members of the Assembly (for example, Dr. Yadollah Sahabi, and several former cabinet ministers in Iran and abroad (including the First Minister of War Admiral Ahmad Madani, and Ebrahim Yazdi) to settle the conflict at this junction. The advice was rejected by Khomeini who personally assured the government members that Iran would conquer Basrah. Khomeini and those in Iranian leadership who genuinely agreed with him were not alone in their optimism. Most Western journalists seemed to be of the same opinion. The *Economist* of May 29, 1982, for example, stated, somewhat prematurely, that "Iran has won its war with Iraq."
20. For the best available analyses of interdependence and the difficulties of the realist notion of power see, Klaus Knorr, *The Power of Nations: The Political Economy of International Relations* (New York: Basic Books, 1975) and *On the Uses of Military Power in the Nuclear Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977); David A. Baldwin, "Power Analysis and World Politics: New Trends Versus Old Tendencies," *World Politics* (1979), pp. 161-194; Oran R. Young, "Interdependence in World Politics," *World Politics* (1969), pp. 726-750; and, Edward L. Morse, "Interdependence in World Affairs," in James N. Rosenau, Kenneth W. Thompson, and Gavin Boyd, eds., *World Politics: An Introduction* (New York: Free Press, 1976).
21. Bruce M. Russett, "Refining Deterrence Theory: The Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbor," in Dean G. Pruitt and Richard C. Synder, eds., *Theory and Research on the Causes of War* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), pp. 127-135. It may be noted here that the leaders of the Axis Pact frequently duped each other and did not display the minimal rationality of coordinating their efforts against a common objective. Thus Hitler kept the Japanese leaders in the dark while preparing to invade the Soviet Union. The Japanese, who were furious and had signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviets, instead of attacking the Soviet Union, invaded the United States, which Germany had tried so hard to keep out of the war.
22. See, for example, Jerome Frank, *Sanity and Survival: Psychological Aspects of War and Peace* (New York: Vintage, 1967); Joseph de Rivera, *The Psychological Dimensions of Foreign Policy* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1968); Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972); Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (London: Pan Books, 1970); Ole R. Holsti and James N. Rosenau, "Vietnam, Consensus, and the Belief Systems of American Leaders," *World Politics* (1979), pp. 1-57; Ole R. Holsti, Robert C. North, and Richard Brody, "Perception and Action in the 1914 Crisis," in J. David Singer, ed., *Quantitative International Politics: Insights and Evidence* (New York: Free Press, 1969); John C. Brigham, "Ethnic Stereotypes," *Psychological Bulletin* (July 1971), pp. 15-38; Loren J. Chapman and Jean R. Chapman, "Genesis of Popular but Erroneous Psychodiagnostic Observations," *Journal*

*of Abnormal Psychology* (June 1967); and, Steve Chan, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Lore-Based Correlations in International Relations," *International Interactions* (1982), pp. 179-206.

23. Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); and, Alexander L. George, "The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy," *The American Political Science Review* (1972), pp. 751-785.
24. This author does not find convincing the argument that potential oil deposits around the Falklands were the main, or even a major, contributing factor to the war. First, it is not at all certain that oil in commercial quantities can be found in that remote and difficult environment. Second, even if such quantities are found, it is doubtful that they will result in so much income as to cover the billions of dollars that war cost Britain. The Argentine leadership was not very rational in assuming that Britain would not defend the Islands. Even if such probability existed, the behavior of the Argentine leadership, particularly in displaying through the mass media of the world the captured British soldiers lying down on their stomachs under the bayonets of the Argentine soldiers, was enough affront to British nationalism to ensure British resort to force.
25. Baldwin, "Power Analysis...,"