

Carter and Israel try to salvage their Iran card

by Robert Dreyfuss

Well into the second week of the fighting between Iran and Iraq, the Carter administration seemed prepared to risk even a U.S.-Soviet direct confrontation to prevent the Iraqi government from defeating the Iranian regime of Ayatollah Khomeini.

The deployment of four AWACS radar and communications planes to Saudi Arabia on Sept. 30, and statements from leading officials of the Carter administration, underlined the readiness of Washington to up the ante in the Persian Gulf fighting to a superpower level. Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher said on Sept. 28 that the United States "would not condone" the seizure of Khuzestan in Iran by Iraq's forces, and the following day in Alabama Zbigniew Brzezinski declared that the U.S. "supports the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iran," and he added that the U.S. "has the ability to project its military power into the Gulf."

The tough talk from the administration, and the AWACS mission, ran counter to explicit requests from Iraq that the conflict be kept limited without superpower involvement; from the West Europeans, who also opposed the introduction of U.S. and Soviet forces; and from the U.S.S.R. itself, which warned against Washington involvement in the crisis. It is not clear exactly why Saudi Arabia, which earlier this year pledged its support to an Iraqi-proposed Arab Charter for non-alignment, accepted the AWACS.

But since the fighting began Washington had been scrambling for some opening in a situation in which most analysts agree the United States has few levers. At a series of White House meetings that began on Sept. 26, the only agenda item was: how could the United States prevent the defeat and toppling from power of the Khomeini regime?

By the end of the first week of the war, the situation on the ground was overwhelmingly favorable to Iraq, which had effectively seized control of the oil-rich province of Khuzestan in Iran, and, according to the Iraqis themselves, had achieved virtually all of Baghdad's initial military objectives. Immediately, Iraq accepted the United Nations ceasefire proposal and pressed for an end to the fighting.

Exactly at that point, Iraq launched its second, political program. That program, informed sources say, involves the establishment of an Iranian government-in-exile, possibly to be based in the areas of Iran liberated by Iraqi troops. Then, during the period of the ceasefire, Iraqi officials hint, Baghdad will encourage the rebellion of Iran's tribes and ethnic groups, particularly the Iranian Arabs and Kurds, against the Khomeini regime. Perhaps a majority of the Iranian armed forces will be prepared to support the exiles.

Intensive negotiations are reportedly underway among various Iranian exile factions concerning the mooted exile government. The forces of Shahpour

Bakhtiar, the ex-premier based in Paris; the Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, in Cairo; and Iranian military officers associated with General Bahram Aryana, also in Paris, are discussing the eventual shape of the regime that will follow Khomeini.

IMF makes policy for Iran

The coming to power of a regime in Teheran linked to France and Iraq, with the support of Saudi Arabia, would deal a fatal blow to the strategy of the Anglo-American financial faction in control of the Carter administration. In that case, Iran would form a bloc within OPEC with Iraq and Saudi Arabia allied to the Franco-German European Monetary System.

The state of mind of the Anglo-American financial elite was revealed perhaps most clearly at the ongoing meeting of the International Monetary Fund in Washington this week. Speaker after speaker there, including Jacques de Larosière, Robert McNamara, and U.S. officials, warned OPEC to drop its plans for high-technology economic development and instead to funnel their petrodollars through the IMF. That plan—which coheres completely with the antidevelopment bent of the Iranian regime of Khomeini—would then allow the IMF to impose draconian austerity “conditions” for IMF credit on developing nations like Brazil, Turkey, Zaire, and so forth.

In addition, a victory by Iraq over Iran, if it should stand, would represent a major setback to Washington's plans for building a new military pact linked to NATO in the Middle East and South Asian region.

For that reason, Washington has moved into almost overt support for the Khomeini regime—and, as the excerpts on page 39 show, has carefully mobilized the press to that end.

At a Sept. 30 meeting between Secretary of State Ed Muskie and Iraqi Foreign Minister Saadun Hammadi, the possibility of a U.S. “tilt” toward supporting Khomeini was raised, according to informed sources. After the meeting, Hammadi said that Iraq was worried about rumors that Washington might begin supplying spare parts and ammunition to the Iranian armed forces in exchange for the release of the U.S. hostages. When reminded that Muskie had earlier said the U.S. was “neutral,” in the conflict, Hammadi replied: “He was speaking of the past. We are talking about the future.”

Iraqi strategy: Iran collapse

The question of American resupply of Iran is critical because the Iraqi strategy is based solely on whether or not the Iranian regime will collapse internally after a certain duration of the war.

According to many reports, the Carter administra-

tion is orchestrating a worldwide bailout of the Khomeini regime. With American coordination, spare parts for Iran's American-made weapons are reportedly coming from Israel, South Korea, Italy, Pakistan, Turkey, Japan, Great Britain, and the United States itself.

In addition, despite heavy losses and strategic defeats that in a normal war situation would require Iran to sue for peace, the Khomeini regime is desperately refusing all pleas of a ceasefire and pledging to fight to the bitter end. Inside Iran, a mobilization of all men aged 12 to 18 is underway, and each mosque in Teheran is required to send 22 men to the battle front. In this way, Iran is hoping to be able to prolong the war until the Anglo-Americans can somehow “internationalize” the conflict and prevent their defeat.

From all available evidence, however, Iran will simply be unable to carry on the war against Iraq indefinitely. Iran is desperately short of food and fuel already, and its armed forces are fighting with “hand guns and Molotov cocktails,” in the words of Premier Rajai. The Iranian air force has been conspicuously absent in the current fighting, and from Sept. 27-29 almost entirely halted its raids on Iraq, reportedly due to shortages of maintenance personnel and spare parts. What Iranian strikes have occurred are largely confined to targets designed for maximum publicity and propaganda value.

But there is also mounting evidence that, when backed against the wall, Iran may consider what one U.S. military source called “lunatic raids” against Saudi Arabia and other states of the Arabian Gulf. Iran has officially accused the Arab states of the Gulf of providing support and refuge to Iraq in the war, and the Iranian foreign ministry has called eight Arab ambassadors to warn them against further aid to Iraq. One Iranian official even declared that Iran would “blow up the Persian Gulf oil fields” if the Iraqi advance was not halted.

In so doing, Iran may calculate that such attacks will force the United States to display its muscle in the Gulf more visibly. Then, the Iranians hope, the resulting U.S.-Soviet crisis will so alarm both big powers that they will intervene to halt the fighting and even force an Iraqi withdrawal. That is a scenario actively under consideration in Washington, according to Iranian sources.

Meanwhile, there are also signs that the internal situation in Iran is deteriorating fast. Rumors in Europe say that the U.S. administration is seeking to push Khomeini aside, perhaps into semi-retirement in favor of an alliance between President Bani-Sadr and the military. Other possibilities involve the crumbling of Iran completely under the Iraqi pressure. So far, there is no one willing to state unequivocally what will be the final result inside Iran of the Iraqi offensive.