

Editorial

The Gulf War

Since the beginning of the latest Iranian invasion of Iraq, Feb. 9, perhaps over 75,000 persons have died, mostly Iranians, in a military carnage whose international context is, roughly, as follows:

Both the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. are agreed, since the days of the Carter administration, to keep the Iran-Iraq conflict going forever, and ensure that neither side wins. Within this framework, Moscow is pursuing a policy of "minimum effort/maximum advantage," befriending both sides. Washington is pursuing "minimum effort/minimum advantage."

Israel and Great Britain are the other two outsider powers which are playing a very significant role in the Gulf War. Israeli policy is that Khomeini's Iran should be buttressed to be a perpetual military menace to all Arab governments. London, over the last three to four months, has been attempting to transform Iran into a military battering ram against Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, for reasons having to do with London's "oil price war" against these two nations.

These outside influences are so overwhelming, that they have been controlling the fortunes of this war through the five-and-a-half years of its conduct so far. Its latest flareup, the Iranian invasion of Feb. 9, was a slight departure from the norm: The British influence over the conduct of the war was much more noticeable than in earlier times. In fact, as virtually all specialist observers of this situation would agree, the latest Iranian move was almost exclusively British-inspired and was, in fact, London's greatest hope in the drive to break Kuwait's and Riyadh's petroleum policy.

The actual protagonists of this war, Iran and Iraq, are like two gladiators who are fighting each other and, at the same time, keeping an eye out for the impression they are making on their audience. Each seems to be deriving his ability to go on fighting from the impression he is making on the spectators. In more than one way, the Gulf War is governed more by the exigencies of public relations than by the laws of war.

The two combatants are very different from each other, and if the laws of war were to determine the conflict, Iraq should be the winner.

Iraq's failing, so far, has been that it has fought by the rules of the game of international opinion, as that opinion is interpreted by the Delphic oracles of cynical foreign ministries. To be precise:

Iraq has an absolutely overwhelming supremacy over Iran in armor, artillery, and air power, and a very considerable advantage in financial resources. Iran has large numbers of inferior-quality soldiers led by inferior-quality officers, with nothing approximating Iraqi firepower.

To compensate for its professional military inferiority, Iran has emphasized a lavish expenditure of raw manpower and the factor of religious fanaticism. Khomeini and most of the theocratic leadership have time and again stressed that theirs is a *religious* war.

And how has Iraq responded?

In the battlefield, by a straightforward defensive deployment and posture. In the war of ideas, also by a defensive posture of obligingly trying to prove to world opinion that Iraq is not quite the "satan" that Qum's Ayatollahs are accusing it of being. It is this psychological and military defensiveness which is doing Iraq a disservice.

If, as the Ayatollahs insist, this is a religious war, should not the number one military priority of the Iraqi military command be to destroy the enemy's command structure?

Baghdad's only winning strategy is to execute a decapitating assault against the religious command of Iran, beginning by destruction of the city of Qum. The Shi'ite believers always held that Allah is on the side of the winning commanders. Dead commanders are disgraced in the eyes of Allah. A morally aggressive Iraqi stand would translate into aggressive combat deployment, before the outside players can act to salvage their cruel joke, Ayatollah Khomeini.