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**THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR
FAILING TO ADDRESS THE CENTER OF GRAVITY**

BY

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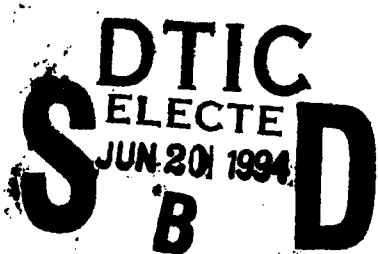
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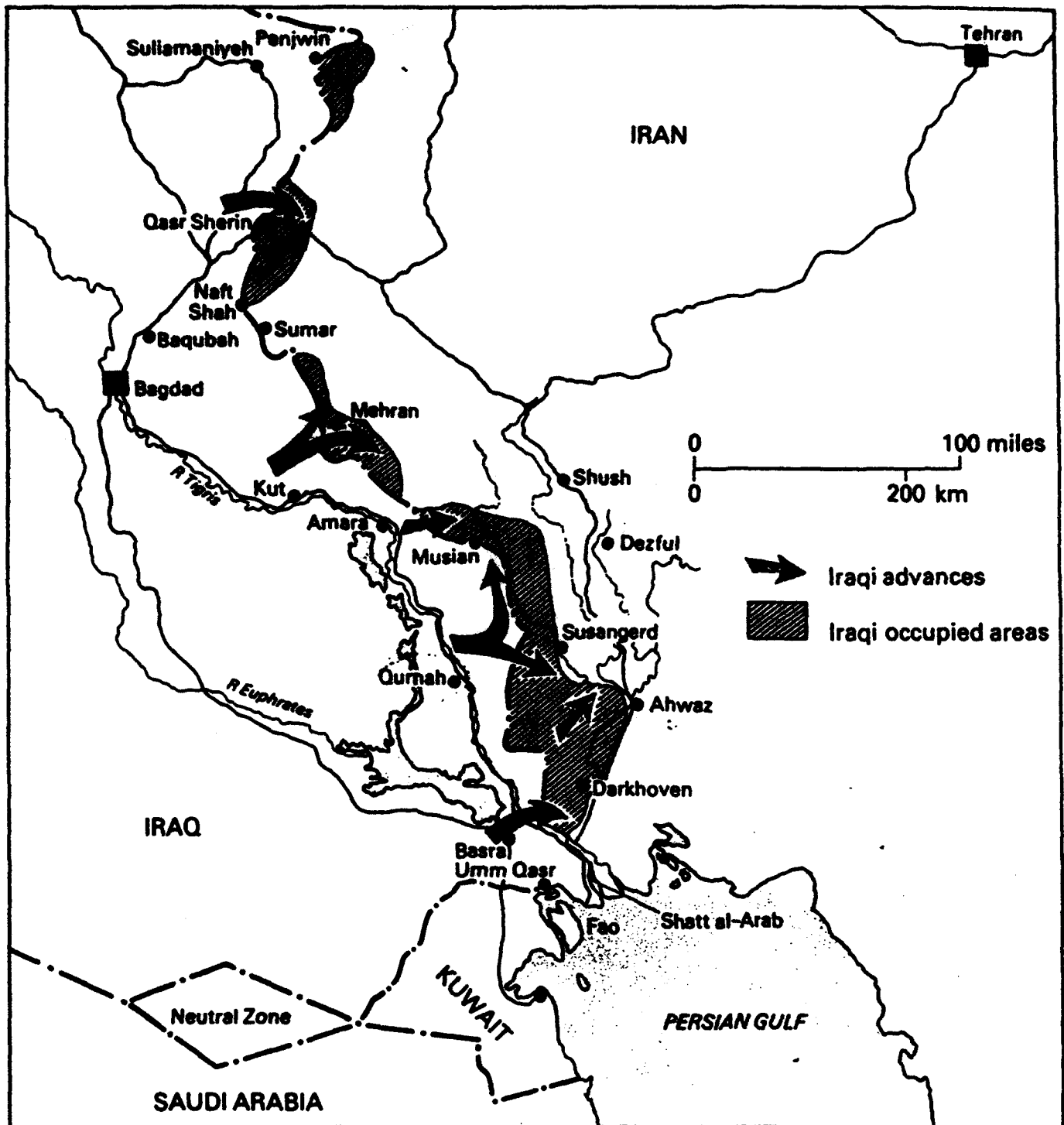
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ABSTRACT

This monograph argues that a strategic center of gravity analysis is the primary task a nation must accomplish before prosecuting a war. The author, LTC Hoffman, uses the Iran-Iraq War as a vehicle to illustrate how such a strategic analysis might be done and what happens when nations fail to make their enemy's strategic center of gravity the object of decisive action in war. In doing so, LTC Hoffman presents a holistic model for a strategic center of gravity that can be used as both an analytic and a heuristic tool. Using this model to analyze the two belligerents in this long and fruitless war, he demonstrates the thought process involved in the employment of his five necessary conditions of a center of gravity. He concludes that strategic centers of gravity are almost invariably composite systems that comprise critical subcomponents of the four elements of national power: the government, the military, the polity, and the economy.

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MAP 1



Iraqi Advances: September-December 1980

MAP 2



The Gulf War Zone

THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR: AN ENDS-MEANS DISCONNECT

No war in recent history better demonstrates the necessity of tying the destruction of the enemy's center of gravity to the achievement of political objectives than the Iran-Iraq War. Lasting nearly eight years and virtually exhausting both countries, this war was a primer on the adverse impact of failing to identify and apply decisively the instruments of national power-- particularly the military-- against the enemy's strategic center of gravity. When warring nations fail to tie their political objectives to the military means they use, they can bring about several different bad outcomes in a war. One such bad outcome is a bloodbath where both parties fight until one or both quit because of physical and moral exhaustion. In the Iran-Iraq War this is exactly what happened. If nothing else, this conflict was a protracted exercise in attrition warfare that gained neither belligerent the satisfaction of achieving its war aims. Both countries were losers in this conflict, in the purest sense.

Iraq and Iran both paid a tremendously high cost in this war because they failed to understand that the design of strategy in any war must be linked inextricably from the top down. Before taking any other steps to prosecute a war, the leaders of a warring nation must determine the political ends they seek and the potential consequences of that decision. They then must determine the military objectives that will achieve these political aims and identify the resources necessary to achieve them. Key in this process is the identification of the enemy's strategic center of gravity, for it will be the linchpin, the essential driving force, of the enemy's war effort. It must be incapacitated, disarticulated or destroyed because it is the greatest enemy threat to their own center of gravity and the most powerful obstruction to the achievement of their overall political aims in the war. Therefore, the design of a coherent

and effective strategy for militarily defeating the enemy and achieving their stated political objectives is contingent upon identifying the enemy's strategic center of gravity and being able to take decisive action against it. It is only at this point that the military can begin its operational design and campaign planning. Military campaign planners must then seek military objectives that directly contribute to the defeat, disarticulation, or paralysis of the enemy's strategic center of gravity. The historians of the Iran-Iraq War give no indication that either country made this connection or attempted to perform any such analysis before or during the war. As a result, both countries paid dearly for this omission.

Before analyzing Iran and Iraq's respective war efforts and determining where they each went wrong, it will be useful to develop a working model that helps identify and define a strategic center of gravity. By understanding what constitutes a genuine center of gravity, national leaders can determine what drives the enemy's war effort and then analyze whether he can be beaten, given their own national resources. If they are either unwilling or unable to assail their opponent's center of gravity, then they probably have no business fighting the war-- unless there is no other option. If they do not or cannot identify the enemy's center of gravity, they risk flailing about without purpose or direction, wasting precious resources and human life that they can ill afford to lose.

CLAUSEWITZ AND THE CENTER OF GRAVITY

While the term "center of gravity" originates from Clausewitz in his book, On War, he is neither especially clear nor precise in defining exactly what criteria an entity must fulfill to be considered a true strategic center of gravity. Instead, he provides us with a metaphor. Clausewitz describes the center of gravity as "the central feature of the enemy's power" and

the "hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends...the point against which all our energies should be directed."¹

Later Clausewitz provides additional clues to the nature of a center of gravity by identifying a number of potential strategic centers of gravity. Here he includes the enemy's army, the enemy's leadership, the enemy's capital, the army of the enemy's stronger ally, and the public opinion of the enemy's citizenry.² This list is by no means all inclusive, but Clausewitz strongly suggests that these are the most likely candidates to target as strategic centers of gravity during war.

STRATEGIC CENTERS OF GRAVITY AND THE REMARKABLE TRINITY

Important to note here is that Clausewitz's examples of potential strategic centers of gravity are all component parts of his "remarkable trinity:" the government, the commander and his army, and the people. Clausewitz appears to be strongly hinting that the strategic center of gravity is found somewhere in the trinity. It is here, he implies, where the "central feature of the enemy's power" is found. This feature should be the focus of all strategic level efforts in the war.

In modern times economic power has also come to be considered as one of the major elements of national power. The rise of huge, industrial-based national economies and the proliferation of multinational corporations have made the sustenance and growth of a healthy economy absolutely essential to national survival and certainly a vital consideration when a nation goes to war. This phenomenon was not so pronounced in Clausewitz's time, so it is

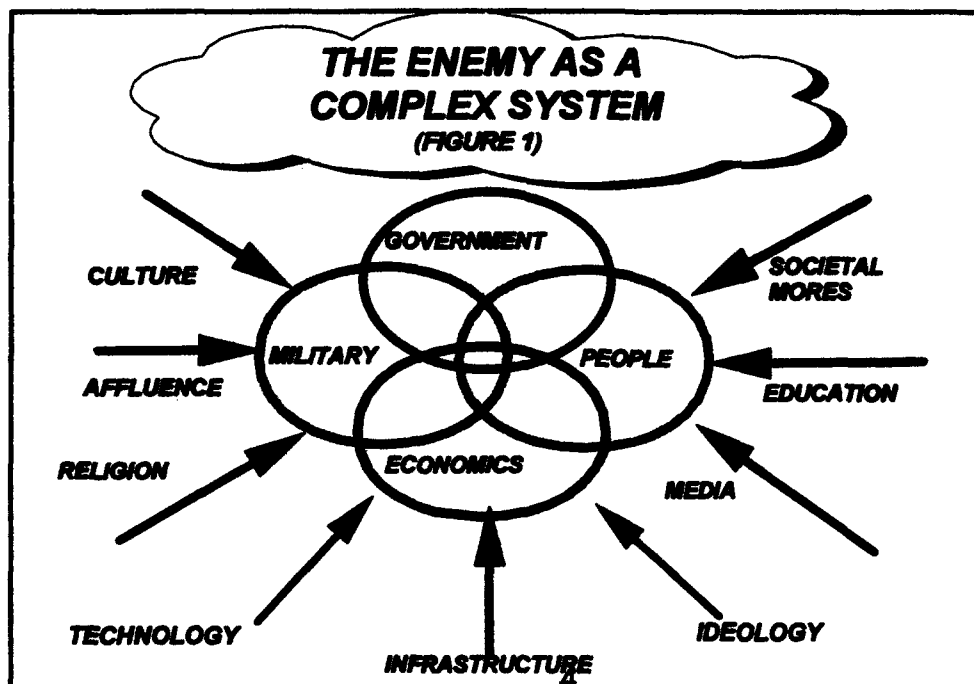
¹Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.:Princeton University Press, 1976), 595-6.

²*Ibid.*, 596.

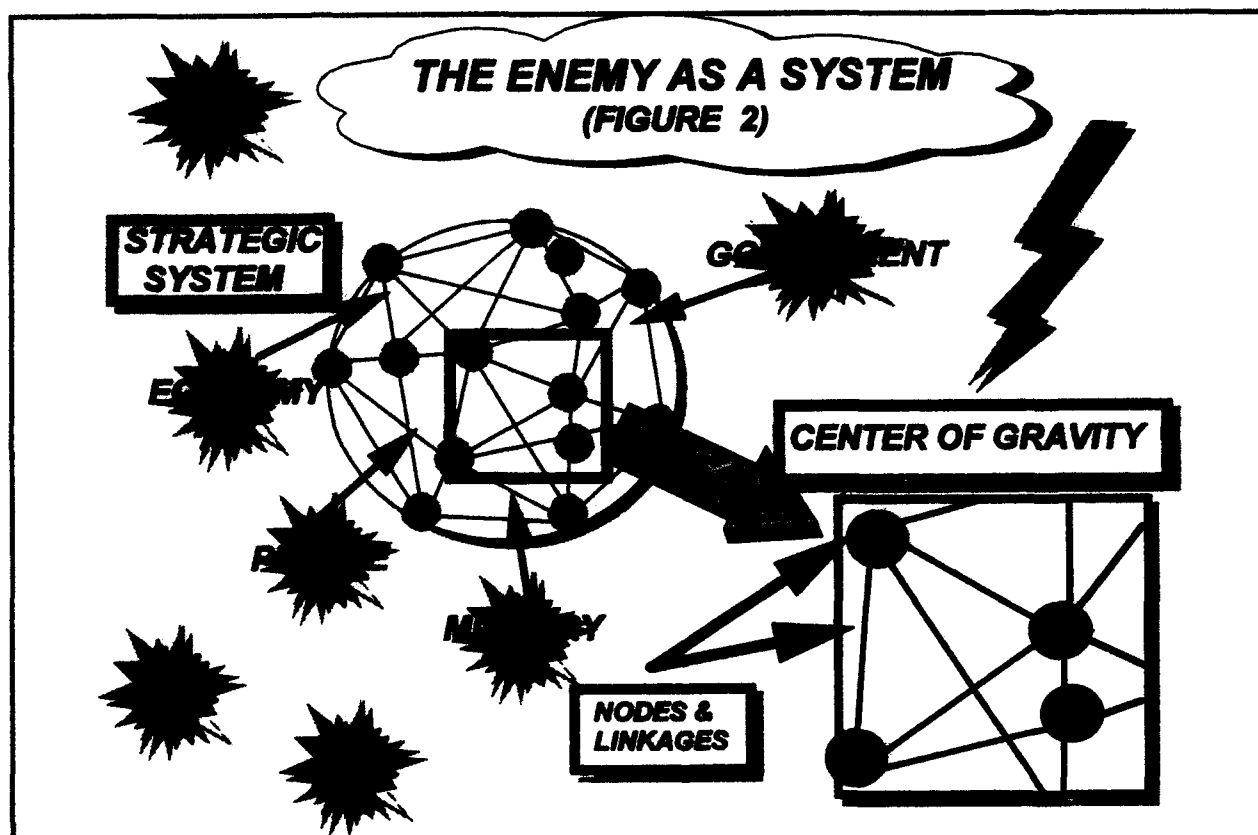
probable that he either did not consider it important enough to be included in his trinity or, more likely, subsumed it under the government, which was the engine of a nation's economy in his day. Nonetheless, it should be included as a separate and coequal element in a modern model.

Four major elements of a nation are required to fight a modern war successfully. They form what could be labeled a modern Neo-Clausewitzian Quadrinity. They all are equally essential to the war effort, and the absence of any one of these elements will make a war untenable for a nation. Instead of a remarkable trinity, we now have a quartet composed of (1) a government willing to prosecute the war, (2) a military capable of fighting it, (3) a populace that will support it or cannot stop it, and (4) an economy or industrial base that can support it.

Each of these elements should be considered as a complex system or structure that, in reality, intersects and interlocks with the other three (see Figure 1). All four elemental



systems are composed of linkages and nodes that give them coherence and their own particular structure. Every elemental system intersects and interlocks with the other three. Thus, linkages and nodes often tie together two or more of the four elemental systems (see Figure 2). As a result, the boundaries between the elemental systems are usually indistinct. In most countries there is much overlap between these systems, so it is difficult to isolate any one of them as a pure entity. As a result, a strategic center of gravity of a country may often be found where one or more of these systems intersect. In fact, this may be the case more likely than not given the nature of modern cybernetic systems, the relationships between governments and their people, the relationship between considerations of government and economy, and so forth.



There are conditions peculiar to each country that define the exact relationship between these four elemental systems of the neo-Clausewitzian Quadrinity. The kind of government and the particular form of economy that are found in a country will certainly affect the interrelationships. Moreover, the social, ethical, cultural, religious, ethnic, and educational values of the polity will affect the nation's political cohesiveness, its economic capacity, and its force structure and warfighting ability. How technologically advanced a country is and the development of its infrastructure will also significantly affect the strength and cohesion of the entire national system. Furthermore, the relationship of the military to both the government and the people will also affect the relationship of the overall system. Finally, the media and modern communications systems can have a major impact on the coherence and cohesion of the nation state's entire system.

The search for a strategic center of gravity begins with an examination of the quadrinity to see what the power relationships are between the elemental systems and which of the systems— or portions of systems— appear to be the source of strength and hence the catalyst for going to war. Invariably the impetus for starting and then continuing the war can ultimately be traced back to a relatively small portion of the overall system. It will be here in this portion of the system— the center of gravity— that the unity, cohesiveness, and coherence of the war effort is generated. It will also be here where the war will take on its particular direction and character. Typically, in modern states this source area, the center of gravity, will be where two or more systems intersect because critical nodes and linkages in this area will tie together and direct the effort of the entire system. For a nation to fight a successful modern war, it has to harness, focus, and preserve all four elemental systems. Without the

center of gravity, the entire national system comes apart, or the war effort comes to a halt and then ceases.

If two or more nations fight together in an alliance, the analyst must look for the dominate source of strength in the alliance. The center of gravity of the alliance may well reside within the national system of the dominant partner, as Clausewitz suggests. However, the center of gravity may also be found in the mutually shared subsystems of the nations committed to the alliance. Alliances require the interweaving of the constituent nations' elements of national power to make the alliance viable. Therefore, they will share economic resources, coalition decision-making responsibilities, command and control capabilities, key strategic weapon systems, and strategic intelligence acquisition systems among others. Moreover, they will meld their armed forces to maximize their collective combat power. Admittedly, the process of analyzing a coalition's strategic center of gravity will probably be more complex and difficult than that for a single nation. Nonetheless, the basic principles for such an analysis will hold true to the model described in this paper.

Often two or more candidates for an enemy strategic center of gravity will present themselves under such an initial analysis. It is at this juncture that the analyst needs a tool to refine his list of candidates and narrow them down to the absolute minimum, hopefully just one. Clausewitz underlines this point when he says that the "first task...planning for a war is to identify the enemy's centers of gravity, and if possible trace them back to a single one."³ A definition gives the analyst a tool to accomplish this task. Hence, it is important to develop a rigorous definition for a center of gravity that will cull all the pretenders and leave

³Ibid., 619.

the genuine article clearly articulated.

DEFINING A CENTER OF GRAVITY

As indicated above, Clausewitz is not as precise as he might be about clearly defining a center of gravity. By describing it as "the hub of all power and movement," he suggests that it is the single most important element of the enemy's power, the element around which he builds his war effort. Without it the enemy's system will collapse and then come apart, much like a wheel under a load when its hub disintegrates. Without the hub the enemy cannot achieve its overall political objectives in the war, and hence probably cannot "win" the war. Destruction, disarticulation or paralysis of the enemy's center of gravity, in all probability, will assure the strategic leaders of a warring nation that they can achieve their aims.

If the enemy's leadership knows that a particular system or element is the hub or linchpin of their war effort, then the recognition of its loss will convince them that the war can no longer be won and will inevitably be lost. Their will to continue the war will be broken if they are rational, or it will become irrelevant to the outcome of the war. If their will to continue fighting has been broken, then they will not be likely to renew the conflict, at least not in the near term after the war. If a secure peace can be obtained from the enemy, then a nation is in a position to disengage once its political aims have been achieved.

The critical element in this disengagement is the attainment of a "secure peace." Obtaining a secure peace is more than merely achieving the stated immediate objectives of the war. It is essentially preventative and proactive in nature in that a secure peace eliminates conditions over the long term that could renew the conflict. Clearly the nexus of this state

will have been decisive action against the enemy's strategic center of gravity. Only the destruction, disarticulation, or paralysis of the enemy's center of gravity has this critical impact on the enemy. B.H. Liddell Hart captured this idea well in his seminal work, Strategy.

The object in a war is to attain a better peace-- even if only from your own point of view. Hence it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire...[T]he prolongation of...policy through the war into the subsequent peace must always be borne in mind. A State which expends its strength to the point of exhaustion bankrupts its own policy and future.

If you concentrate exclusively on victory, with no thought of the after-effect, you may be too exhausted to profit by the peace, while it is almost certain that the peace will be a bad one, containing the germs of another war.⁴

The foregoing discussion can be encapsulated in a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that define a strategic center of gravity. The model below captures the essence of a center of gravity. Any element or system that is a center of gravity ought to fulfill all the listed criteria, and any system that fulfills all the defining criteria ought rightfully be called a strategic center of gravity. A genuine strategic center of gravity needs to meet all five of the following defining conditions.⁵

CONDITION 1: It is an element or subsystem of a nation that is clearly a major national strength, and the nation cannot generate, harness, and control its war effort without it. All the nation's political objectives in the war are predicated upon and driven by its existence as a strength.

⁴B.H. Liddell Hart, Strategy. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1954), 366.

⁵This definition is a composite drawn from my own study and the ideas of Clausewitz, Colonel Lamar Tooke, Colonel William Mendel, and Colonel Lawrence Izzo. See also Lawrence L. Izzo, "The Center of Gravity is Not an Achilles Heel," in Military Review 68 (Jul 88) and William W. Mendel and Lamar Tooke, "Operational Logic: Selecting the Center of Gravity," Military Review 73 (Jun 93).

CONDITION 2: Its destruction, disarticulation, or paralysis causes a cascading and deteriorating effect on the nation's ability to prosecute the war and achieve its strategic objectives.

CONDITION 3: Its destruction, disarticulation, or paralysis allows the nation's enemy to attain its strategic goals.

CONDITION 4: Its destruction, disarticulation, or paralysis either breaks the national leadership's will to continue the war or makes their will to continue the war irrelevant.

CONDITION 5: Its destruction, disarticulation, or paralysis creates the conditions for a secure peace and future regional security that allows a warring nation to disengage without fear of the enemy renewing the conflict.

Once the strategic leaders of a nation have identified the enemy's center of gravity, their project is not yet complete. For now they must determine whether they can actually attack it and in some way destroy, disarticulate, or paralyze it. Here time plays a critical role, particularly if it is a constraint on their actions. Usually time will be a factor in light of the enemy or his allies' capabilities to perform a critical action or actions against them. However, it is also relevant in terms of how long they can pursue the war before they reach their culminating point. Here time is related to how long their physical and moral resources will last. Culmination is critical to consider because when it occurs, the enemy has time to recover and regenerate his center of gravity if it has been damaged.

Also critical to consider is their ability to protect their own strategic center of gravity while going after the enemy's. When considering decisive military action against the enemy's center of gravity, they need to determine whether they expose their own to attack and destruction. If they do, then they must weigh the risk involved. That is, they should make a strategic cost-benefit analysis by weighing the gains they could make against their possible

losses.

Inherent in their analysis should be a close consideration of how their destruction or paralysis of the enemy's center of gravity will affect the enemy and the post-conflict world order. For example, will the destruction of the enemy's center of gravity cause the enemy to collapse worse than they intend? Will a complete collapse of the enemy in the war create a power vacuum in the region and invite another nation even more inimical to their national interests to fill the vacuum? If so, they need to rethink what it is they intend to do to the center of gravity in light of their political goals and envisioned end state. It may be the case that merely rendering the center of gravity ineffective during the war will suffice to achieve their objectives in the war.

Another undesirable effect might be the provocation of other nations to participate in the conflict against them in some way, thereby escalating, widening or prolonging the war. A third party nation need not direct armed force against them-- although it well could-- to bolster the enemy's cause and harm theirs. It could use political or economic measures to undermine their efforts against the enemy or help the enemy in some other tangible way. Accordingly, they must consider the impact of their strategy, not only upon their enemy but also upon any interested third party nation that has not yet become involved in the conflict.

The sum effect of making an analysis like the one just suggested should render a fair idea of their probability of success and the price they will likely have to pay to attain success. If they cannot or will not destroy, disarticulate, or paralyze the enemy's center of gravity for sound military, political, or economic reasons, then they ought to look long and hard at whether they should even enter the war in the first place. Again, this kind of analysis deals

in probabilities and degrees of risk, not in absolutes. So, their best strategic course of action, in many cases, will by no means be clear-cut or exact.

Certainly a nation's inability or unwillingness to destroy, defeat, or paralyze its enemy's center of gravity suggests that it is either confronted by an unwinnable war that it ought not fight, one that is doomed to devolve into a costly war of attrition that will bleed it white, or one that leads to consequences that go beyond its political objectives for the war. Any nation about to embark in a war ought to give this last point close and careful consideration. As Clausewitz has rightly warned, a nation ought to know the kind of war it is contemplating. Certainly Iraq should have clearly understood the kind of war it was starting before launching its September 1980 offensive into Iran and initiating one of the longest and most fruitless wars of this century. Iran, in turn, should have better understood the ramifications of its capabilities and objectives in the war as well, for its particular response to Iraq's invasion escalated and prolonged the war for virtually no political or military gain.

THE ROAD TO WAR: RELIGIOUS FANATICISM AND TERRITORIAL DISPUTES

The Iran-Iraq War was the culmination of several decades of antagonism between the two countries. While they have had sharp cultural, political and religious differences over the centuries, Saddam Hussein's immediate rationale for initiating the war can be discovered in the events that transpired over the two decades that preceded the war. Iraq's justification for going to war really revolve around two main grievances: (1) disputes over territorial claims along the frontier between the two countries, the most important being over the Shatt-al-Arab Waterway, and (2) real and threatened Iranian political and religious interference in the

internal affairs of Iraq.⁶ Several authors have argued that a militant and hostile Shiite government in Iran was the more serious concern of the two as the Iran government had made a number of gestures to indicate that it intended to undermine and bring down the Hussein government. Most notable of these actions were the attempted assassination of Deputy Premier Tareq Aziz in April 1980, Iranian support for the Iraqi Kurds, and material support for the Shiite underground movement in Iraq.⁷

Iraq took a number of immediate measures short of war to thwart the Iranians. Included in these measures were a number of political and security measures to suppress or expel Shiite underground organizations inside Iraq, unite regional Arab support against Iran, and support efforts to undermine the Khomeini regime through propaganda and by attempting to discredit it publicly. Moreover, this period witnessed a significant build-up of Iraqi military capability through major arms purchases and large increases in the number of, size, and strength of its combat formations.

None of the actions mentioned above caused the Iranians to desist. Instead, they had just the opposite effect. They spurred the Iranians to intensify the smoldering conflict. Saddam Hussein's pledge to avenge the assassination attempt against Tareq Aziz prompted Ayatollah Khomeini to publicly encourage Iraqi Shiites to overthrow the Hussein Regime. This openly threatening act was followed by a number of other statements and revelations

⁶Chaim Herzog, "A Military-Strategic Overview," in The Iran-Iraq War: Impact and Implications, ed. Efraim Karsh (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 257. See also Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 31-3.

⁷Efraim Karsh, The Iran-Iraq War: A Military Analysis, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1987), 12.

about Iran's hostile intentions against Hussein's Baathist secular government.⁸ This entire period was punctuated by border clashes of increasing intensity between the two nations. Fearful that he could not win a protracted propaganda war or sustain a seemingly endless series of border clashes, Hussein apparently felt by the summer of 1980 that he had no recourse but to stanch the Iranian threat through the force of arms.

Militarily, Iran looked imminently beatable to the Iraqis. Several factors contributed to this perception. The senior leadership of the Iranian armed forces had been gutted by repeated purges. Moreover, troop strength in existing units had dwindled alarmingly to a little over fifty percent of their pre-revolutionary strength. Much of the decline stemmed from desertions resulting from adverse measures the government had repeatedly taken against the regular army. Understandably, morale was low as well, and training was substandard. Finally, the departure of American maintenance contractors and the drying up of the American repair parts supply system brought about the rapid and debilitating deterioration in operational readiness of the Iranian combat vehicle and aircraft fleets. Expert estimates of the Iranian's overall operational readiness rates vary somewhat, but most estimates hover around the fifty percent figure, certainly a very low figure that indicates that Iran was not prepared to fight a war with Iraq.⁹

The Iranians' malaise was further worsened by the creation of Revolutionary Guard units (the Pasdaran and Basij) as a separate but equal military force that competed with the

⁸Ibid., 11-2. See also Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 26-7. See also Stephen C. Pelletiere, *The Iran-Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 31.

⁹Edgar O'Ballance, *The Gulf War*. (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1988), 20. See also Cordesman and Wagner, 34-5.

regular army. These forces, openly hostile and resistant to the leadership and guidance of the regular army, came under their own command and control structure which fell directly under the Central Revolutionary Committee of the government. They rarely cooperated with the regular army or followed the orders of its leaders. This dysfunctional relationship further exacerbated the Iranian military's plight and made them appear ripe for a quick collapse.

While the Iraqi army was no paragon of military competence and readiness itself, its readiness and wartime potential exceeded that of the Iranians in just about every comparable category. Their relative strength was, in many ways, quite great. So, while their general competence has been called into question since the war by many pundits, they were probably the superior force of the two at the outset of the war. There is no doubt that, by western standards, the Iraqi military structure lacked competence, adequate training, and mastery of basic skills in many ways. The fact remains, however, that they had a number of quantitative and qualitative advantages over the Iranians when they invaded, and those advantages should have made more of a difference in the final outcome of the war than they did. Perhaps the Iraqis' major failings in analyzing the Iranians lay in their fundamental misreading of Iranian objectives in the war and their gross underestimation of the Iranians' resiliency and determination. They did not give full import to the galvanizing effect of attacking a revolutionary government rooted in militant Islamic fundamentalism. Their attack, instead of causing the disintegration of the Iranian political and military systems, strengthened them and hardened their resolve not to be defeated.

THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR: SUMMARY

The war can be delineated into eight or nine operational phases, depending on which

expert one reads. Strategically, however, the war went through three distinct phases that followed the major shifts in strategic initiative between the two belligerents. They can be described as follows: (1) the initial Iraqi offensive to seize and consolidate their limited objectives; (2) the Iranian counteroffensive to drive Iraq from Iran, defeat the Iraqi armed forces and bring down the Hussein Baathist regime; and (3) the static war of attrition in which outside world powers assisted Iraq to prevent its collapse and contain Iran's ability to prosecute an offensive war.

The first phase of the war started with the Iraqi invasion of Iran on 22 September 1980 and continued through May 1981 with Iraq's consolidation of its territorial gains in Iran. It was characterized by a limited strategic offensive followed by a static defense. Invading on three major axes into northern, central and southern Iran, the Iraqis intended only to seize objectives fairly close to the border and then bargain for boundary adjustments that redressed their historical grievances. The objective of their main attack was to sever the strategically important Shatt-al-Arab Waterway from the remainder of Iran. The northern (vicinity Penjwin) and central (vicinity Qasr Sherin and Mehran) fronts were secondary efforts designed to prevent Iranian counterattacks into Iraq along traditional invasion routes.¹⁰

As they invaded Iran, the Iraqis met little coordinated resistance from the Iranians and were able to advance steadily, if very slowly, to seize their territorial objectives (see map 1). Once they secured these objectives, they made no attempt to press the offensive further into Iraq or to pursue the destruction of the Iranian armed forces. In fact, once Iraqi forces had secured their territorial objectives, Saddam Hussein announced that Iraq was willing to cease

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 32-3.

hostilities and negotiate a settlement with Iran.¹¹

At this point, the war shifted into a static stage where each side conducted only desultory ground and air operations against each other. This shift to a static war was a deliberate move by the Iraqis. They clearly believed that this move was consistent with their stated political objectives:

- (1) Iran's recognition of Iraq's legitimate rights over its lands and waters,
- (2) The cessation of Iran's "racist, aggressive and expansionist" policies and the end of its internal interference in the internal affairs of Iraq and the Gulf States,
- (3) Adherence to the principle of good neighborly relations, and
- (4) The return by Iran to the United Arab Emirates of the three Arab islands.¹²

For them, this war was a war of limited objectives. The Iraqis apparently had no intention to cause the collapse of the Iranian Islamic Regime or destroy its armed forces. In this case Iraqi actions substantiated the credibility of their political rhetoric.

By ordering his forces to halt, Saddam Hussein gave the Iranians time to recoup their losses and organize for a general counteroffensive in May 1981. Throughout this first phase the Iranians kept the Iraqis locked in a continuous artillery duel and used their air force to strike at strategic targets deep in Iraq, with marginal success.¹³ Although they conducted a few counterattacks against the Iraqi army, these attacks were neither coordinated nor particularly successful. The low intensity of the conflict during this stage belied the Iranian's determination to impose total war upon the Iraqis. As subsequent events would show, the Iraqis far underestimated the ferocity of the impending Iranian response and their ability to

¹¹Herzog, 259. See also Cordesman and Wagner, 89-90.

¹²Karsh, 18.

¹³Ibid., 21. See also Herzog, 260.

contain the scope of the war.

Beginning in May 1981 the Iranians launched a series of coordinated counterattacks that enjoyed a significant measure of success. During this series of attacks, the Iranians inflicted a succession of embarrassing losses on the Iraqis, particularly along the southern front, that eventually forced the Iraqis back to a line behind the pre-war boundaries. During this period, Saddam Hussein repeatedly modified his offers for peace as the Iranians gradually gained the upper hand and began to threaten the very survival of Hussein's Baathist regime. Ultimately the best the Iraqis could hope for was a cease fire that maintained the political and territorial status quo ante bellum. As the strategic tide shifted, Iraq changed its political objectives to what was possible— holding their ground and achieving reasonable terms in a cease fire truce. Increasingly these offers came with fewer and fewer conditions.

Iran's political goals, other than defense of the homeland, were not clear at the outset of the war, but by 1984 the Iranians voiced three goals for the war. First, they unequivocally sought the removal of Saddam Hussein as the leader of Iraq.¹⁴ Second, they demanded billions of dollars in reparations from the Iraqis to compensate for their losses and the damage done during the war.¹⁵ Finally, they fought to preserve and promote the Islamic revolution. Implicit in these goals was the intent to destroy the secular Baathist government and bring about the downfall of Iraq as a secular state. These goals entailed unlimited war, for as long as Saddam Hussein remained in power, he posed a threat to the faith and, hence, to the

¹⁴Ibid., 25. See also Chubin and Tripp, 49.

¹⁵Ibid., 25

Iranian state.¹⁶

As the Iranians increasingly threatened Iraq with defeat, the two superpowers, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and several other nations, provided arms and economic assistance to Iraq. It appears that they were not so much enamored with Iraq as they were fearful of a hegemonic Iranian state that would spread a militant brand of Shiite Islamism throughout the region. While Hussein's regime was not particularly attractive or savory, it was clearly the lesser of two evils at the time to most nations that had significant interests in the region. Iraq simply did not appear to pose the potential long term regional threat that Iran did.

Outside assistance served to shore up Iraq's faltering economy and give it the revenue that it needed to fight this costly war. Other nations assisted Iraq also by protecting tanker traffic in the Persian Gulf and giving Iraq a conduit through which it could export its oil and obtain revenue. Outside powers— particularly the USSR, China, France, and Egypt— were also helpful in providing arms to replace the losses sustained in the first and second phases of the war.¹⁷ Because Iraq had a much smaller national manpower pool to draw from than Iran, Iraq needed a quantitative and qualitative weapons advantage to sustain strategic parity with Iran and fend off repeated and sustained Iranian attacks into their country.

Failing to capture the Faw Peninsula in 1986 after a major offensive there, the Iranians continuously yielded control of the strategic initiative until the end of the war, at which point they were in no position to pursue anything but a cease fire agreement and a U.N. sponsored

¹⁶Chubin and Tripp, 38-9.

¹⁷Cordesman and Wagner, 50-3. See also Herzog, 264.

peace settlement. Throughout this period, the Iraqis were able to repulse crude, uncoordinated Iranian human wave assaults time after time from behind elaborate and extremely well-constructed barrier defenses. Whenever a point in their defenses was threatened, they were able to reinforce the unit in jeopardy by quickly moving armored forces laterally on interior roads and decisively defeat any Iranian efforts to break through their lines. As a consequence of these successful tactics, the Iraqis were able to inflict huge losses on the Iranians. Ultimately their successes in the defense allowed them to return to offensive operations just before the war ended in 1988.

In 1988 neither country was physically able to win the war outright, but the relative strength of Iraqi manpower, the Iraqis' integration of combined arms operations, their tactical skill and experience, and their morale were all improving while the Iranians found themselves getting weaker and weaker. Iran sustained defeat after morale-sapping defeat until the specter of continued bloodletting with no prospects for victory finally broke the Ayatollah Khomeini's will to proceed with the war. Isolated from the rest of the world community, challenged by an ever more powerful enemy, and faced with a never-ending orgy of death, the Iranians could foresee little chance for victory. Finally in July 1988, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, the Iranian Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian armed forces, was able to persuade Ayatollah Khomeini of the futility of the war and the need to end it. Making no pretense to have won the conflict, the Ayatollah bitterly accepted the terms of U.N. Resolution 598 and, for all intents and purposes, ended the war.¹⁸

Thus concluded one of the longest and most futile conflicts of the Twentieth Century.

¹⁸Herzog, 266.

It was a war that ended with neither country achieving its political objectives. Consisting of a series of tactical operations fought for control of terrain and the defeat of local enemy forces, it suffered on both sides from an absence of a strategy that linked these battles together in a coherent campaign or series of campaigns to achieve strategic ends. The critical missing element in both countries' efforts was the identification and specific targeting of the other's strategic center of gravity. An analysis of what those centers of gravity were will help demonstrate where each country went wrong.

THE IRANIAN CENTER OF GRAVITY

As stated earlier, Iraq's initial political goals for the war were easy to identify and articulate. Their aims were to retake historically and economically important terrain ceded to the Iranians in the 1975 Algiers Agreement and to stop Iran's overt efforts at undermining the Hussein Baathist Regime. To achieve these goals, the Iraqis believed that it would be enough to attack into Iran, seize the contested terrain they believed was rightfully theirs, and then press for a quick peace settlement. Apparently they thought that their seizing of this terrain would collapse the weakened Iranian armed forces and create the conditions that would force the Iranian government to desist from exporting the Shiite Islamic revolution to Iraq. They did not count on the response that they got.

Had either Saddam Hussein or his primary war planners identified the true Iranian strategic center of gravity, he might not have been so willing to go to war or so confident that seizing a few square miles of Iranian territory would bring about Iranian capitulation. For if anything, his invasion of Iran unified a regime beset by internal political conflict and helped

it to consolidate its hold on power.¹⁹ His failure to pursue the Iranian army after his initial successes allowed them to regroup and regain their strength for a counteroffensive. He grossly underestimated the Iranian leadership's resolve and their attendant politico-religious fanaticism. When combined with his failure to eliminate the Iranian armed forces as an instrument of that resolve, these factors led him into a virtually unwinnable war. He did not appropriately appreciate the mutable nature of war and its inherent tendency to escalate if a crushing blow on the enemy's center of gravity is not delivered by one side early in the conflict.

What, then, was the Iranian strategic center of gravity? As mentioned earlier, the center of gravity can probably be found in one of the four elemental systems of the Neo-Clausewitzian Quadrinity or where two or more of these systems intersect each other. Thus, the search can begin by examining the Iranian government, the armed forces, the people, and the economy. The candidate(s) that meets all five defining conditions of a strategic center of gravity should have been the ultimate target of the Iraqis' efforts and the focal point around which they designed their strategy for the war.

The Iranian economy is perhaps the best place to start. It is the easiest to eliminate as a candidate. By all accounts, the Islamic revolution nearly destroyed the Iranian economy. Radical "Islamic economic policies," the purge of "westernized" business managers, the politicization of Iranian workers, and the international economic and political isolation of the Iranian state all combined to severely weaken the Iranian economy.²⁰ Because Iran's economy

¹⁹Pelletiere, 43.

²⁰Ralph King, *The Iran-Iraq War: The Political Implications*. (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1987), 25-27.

was based primarily on its oil industry, its economic woes would be further exacerbated from 1985 on by the glut of oil in the world market that drove oil prices and revenue down.²¹ The Khomeini government's attempt to "Islamify" the Iranian economy and its inability to do so without a coherent and effective strategy only compounded the economic instability brought on by the revolution itself.²²

When the war began, Iran had already imposed austerity measures on itself, a strong indicator that the economy was faltering. The economic situation only worsened throughout the war as Iran steadily ate into its substantial cash reserves and was faced with incurring a substantial foreign debt to sustain the war. So, it is fair to say that pre-war economic conditions in Iran were far from a strength. Moreover, despite the economic straits in which Iran found itself, it nearly was able to win the war before outside powers intervened to assist Iraq. Hence, the economy fails to meet the first of the defining conditions for a center of gravity.

The events of the war also demonstrated that while Iraqi attacks against significant economic targets certainly helped to worsen the Iranian economy, the Iranian leadership's ability and will to continue the war did not abate appreciably until the very end of the war. Some observers believe that as late as early 1988 the Iranians might still have had a chance to win the war. This claim comes in spite of the fact that the economy had deteriorated significantly by then as a result of Iraqi bombing, international sanctions, and the Iranians' own mismanagement.

²¹Chubin and Tripp, 123.

²²King, 25.

The economy as a potential center of gravity does not meet the requirements of conditions three, four, or five of the center of gravity model either. The progress of the war and its eventual outcome indicate that the Iraqis were not able to achieve their initial strategic goals despite Iran's economic woes. In addition, the continual weakening of the economy did not have the cascading and deteriorating effect on the Iranian will and ability to continue the war that the Iraqis desired. Clearly the Iranians were both willing and able to prosecute the war long after the economy had declined significantly. Tied to this last point is the fact the status of the economy did not play the most direct and prominent role in breaking Khomeini and the Iranian Republican Party's will to wage the war. Rather, it was the intervention of other nations on Iraq's behalf that eventually broke their will. Finally, it is likely that the war would have renewed itself had there not been the involvement of third party nations who actively worked to contain the conflict and preclude either side from obtaining a decisive advantage. In sum, the Iranian center of gravity lay elsewhere.

The people and their willingness to support the government's war effort is more difficult to evaluate. Iranian revolutionary and religious fervor appeared to be quite high to outside observers throughout the war, and it was among a substantial segment of the population. Subsequent study, however, has shown that there were significant elements of the Iranian polity that openly opposed the Khomeini regime from the very start. Most significant of these groups were the Mujaheddin-e-Khala, the pro-communist Tudeh party, and the Iranian Kurds.²³ All three of these groups had significant followings and took active steps throughout the war to oppose the Khomeini regime.

²³Karsh, 50.

Equally important to note is that, despite their initial general support for the war, the populace was eventually beset by an ever-increasing war weariness as profligate expenditures of men, material, and money brought the nation no closer to victory and an end to the war. By 1985, elements of the general populace were beginning to manifest their increasing discontent about the war through demonstrations and riots.²⁴ Still, despite this negative trend, the Khomeini regime continued to press the war effort. The government's ability to suppress public dissent and active opposition by taking draconian measures against those who spoke or acted out against the regime was a significant contributing factor in their ability to continue fighting without having to worry about a general uprising against the war.²⁵

All the above having been said, it is important not to discount the effect of commanding a nation of "true believers." The clerics were most adept at harnessing the Islamic values of religious duty and martyrdom for their political purposes.²⁶ Certainly it is much easier to elicit great sacrifices from a society if its members believe that there is a higher order purpose to their self-sacrificing actions and that martyrdom essentially is a free ticket to heaven. To break the will of the people would have been to break their belief in the truth of Islam and the credibility of the clerics who controlled the government. This was not likely to happen. As long as the clerics promulgated self-sacrifice and military service as a religious and moral obligation, the majority of loyal, believing Iranians would continue to join the armed forces and fight.

²⁴King, 23.

²⁵Karsh, 51.

²⁶Chubin and Tripp, 39-41.

Hence, it appears that the polity was not the source of the country's great will and strength to fight. That is, they controlled neither the direction of nor the impetus for the war against Iraq. The catalyst for national direction and motivation for war lay elsewhere. While the people were a great strength throughout most of the war when their efforts were harnessed and focused, they became more and more of a detractor to the war effort at the very end of the war with the onset of extreme war-weariness. To actively oppose the war, however would be to break faith with their God and his representatives on earth in the government. As a result, their simmering discontent did not bring about an end to the war. The government continued to press on.

A significant portion of the populace might not have supported the war in the end, but they neither could nor would stop it for reasons of religious conscience and a lack of political power. The revolutionary system in Iran was designed for public attitude and conscience to be formed and directed through the Islamic revolutionary government and, more particularly, the Iranian Republican Party. Thus, while the public attitude did appear to influence somewhat how the war was fought by prompting the government to halt the costly human wave assaults, they did not ultimately affect the government profoundly on the more fundamental issue— whether the war should be continued at all.

Nor did this erosion of Iranian national support for the war particularly help the Iraqis attain either their initial or subsequent war objectives. Saddam Hussein and his regime hoped to wear down the morale of the Iranian people and undermine the Khomeini government by repeatedly slaughtering large numbers of Iranian soldiers over the course of the war.²⁷ The

²⁷Ibid., 59.

continued defeat and butchery of Pasdaran units and the bombing of Iranian strategic targets simply did not have the cascading and deteriorating effect on the Iranian's ability and will to continue the war that Hussein sought. The Iranians' seeming obstinacy and irrationality in pursuing the war after they reasonably should have quit was both perplexing and maddening to Hussein.²⁸

Despite their enormous losses and many defeats, the Iranian armed forces came exceedingly close to winning the war even as late as the Faw campaign in early 1986. Moreover, the populace still supported the war effort enough to provide fresh troops to support this near victory.²⁹ As stated above, while the waning of public support affected how the war was fought, it was not the primary factor in eventually forcing the Iranians to quit the war. While public pressure was a factor in altering the government's attitude toward how the war should be fought, ultimately it was the Khomeini government's recognition that the war could no longer be won that brought the war to a halt.

A third candidate for the center of gravity is the Iranian armed forces or some element of it. It can be argued that Saddam Hussein and his generals might have in some elemental way thought the Iranian center of gravity lay here. Certainly the war could not be won without in some way destroying, disarticulating, or paralyzing a significant portion of the Iranian armed forces' capability to wage war. Nonetheless, while the armed forces were a definite strength to be contended with, they were not the Iranian strategic center of gravity. For in no way can the sustained generation of the war effort be said to have stemmed from

²⁸Ibid., 56.

²⁹Pelletiere, 95.

the military's initiatives, at least in the strictest sense.

To understand why the armed forces were not the Iranian's strategic center of gravity, their peculiar organization and unusual relationship with the revolutionary government must be examined and understood. The dynamics of the Iranian Islamic revolutionary state and its attempt to solidify its base of power drove it to create an armed forces that to most outside observers appeared completely dysfunctional. However, understood in the context of the Iranian revolution and its goals, the organization makes much more sense. To understand why they were created the way they were is to understand where the true Iranian center of gravity might lie.

As described earlier, the Iranian armed forces and, in particular, the army were in a critically weakened state when the war began. Many senior officers had either been purged or cashiered. Manpower strength was down by one half. The Iranians' combat weapons systems were in a deplorable state of repair. Finally, morale was at a low ebb. The clerics who seized power during the revolution saw the regular forces as an instrument of oppression for the Shah and entirely corrupted by non-Islamic values.³⁰ In short, the regular armed forces, particularly the army, was neither to be trusted nor allowed to garner power to threaten the nascent revolutionary government.

To keep the regular army in check and to cement the clerics' hold on power, the revolutionary government created the Pasdaran, or revolutionary guards, which in turn spawned the Basij. Initially these two organizations were to be the "guardians of the revolution" and the enforcers of revolutionary Islamic ideals, values, and behavior. Their

³⁰Chubin and Tripp, 46.

role, then, was to assist the clerics in consolidating power and converting the nation from secularism to a militantly Islamic state.³¹ Since they were initially more crucial to the survival of the revolutionary state than the army, they received a disproportionate share of the resources, praise, and support from the government. All of this came at the expense of the regular army.³²

From the outset of the war, however, they increasingly took on the army's traditional role of defending the nation from its external threats. They did so to such a great extent that they eventually grew to be a force that rivaled the regular army for the role as the nation's defender. It is easy to see that this bifurcation of the army would create huge problems, not the least of which would be command and control. Essentially the Iranians fielded two separate and distinct armies, neither of which was truly accountable to the other. The non-traditional, revolutionary Islamic army soon gained and maintained favored status with the clerics in the government.

Important to note here was the dominant position of the Pasdaran as an instrument of state and religious politics. With direct political and religious links into the cleric hierarchy of the government, they came to be influenced much more pervasively by religious politics and, in turn, had a much greater influence on governmental decisions than the regular army. The Khomeini government made no secret of demonstrating its preference for the Pasdaran, even in light of the fact that when the regular army designed and controlled military

³¹Pelletiere, 38.

³²Chubin and Tripp, 45.

operations the war generally went better for the Iranians.³³

As a result of the dynamic described above, the Pasdaran eventually became the dominant, if less competent, arm of the armed forces. With the Pasdaran's ascendancy came the "Islamic way of warfare"—a euphemism for "human wave" tactics bereft of any combined arms integration and synchronization. Herein is found one of the great ironies of the war. While the Pasdaran's revolutionary commitment made them a politically and religiously reliable tool of the government in its defense of Islam and consolidation of political power, their efforts divested the Iranians of much of their future productive manpower to build that same Islamic state into a regional power. In fighting to save the Islamic faith, nation and revolution, the Pasdaran—and the government—nearly destroyed it.

This bifurcation of the land forces had a profoundly debilitating impact on the overall strength of the Iranian effort. Those best trained to design and control army operations were more often than not excluded from that process. Moreover, when the regular army and Pasdaran did fight side by side, there was virtually no unity of command, let alone synchronization of effort. Hence, what victories the Iranians did achieve were few and far between, especially after the army was routinely excluded from the military planning and decision-making process.

The Iranian Air Force and Navy need to be mentioned here, if only in passing. Records of the war indicate that their respective roles in furthering the nation's strategic aims were minimal, if not negligible. Able only to muster a small portion of its aircraft at any given time, the air force was only able to make intermittent raids against strategic targets

³³Ibid., 45-6.

deep inside Iraq. These raids did little real damage to the Iraqi infrastructure, and they harmed the Iraqi cause only minimally. Moreover, the air force was virtually ineffective in preventing Iraqi air strikes against Iranian targets.³⁴ They were not a critical or key component in the Iranian war effort.

The Iranian Navy did not contribute any more to achieving the goals of the war than the air force. Playing a relatively small strategic role, they were primarily used to establish a naval blockade of Iraq and interrupt international shipping in the Persian Gulf.³⁵ While they were a considerable nuisance to countries dependent on oil from the region, they had no major impact on Iraq other than to divert Iraqi export routes and invite superpower intervention on Iraq's behalf, primarily from the United States. U.S. intervention served to help the Iraqi economic situation and make the Iranians look like the villains of the war to the international community.

If any part of the armed forces were the center of gravity, it would have been the land force, or some part of them. As shown earlier, however, the regular army was effectively muzzled and neutered by the clerics in the government. By this analysis, only the Pasdaran remains. Given their performance in combat, it may be more accurate to describe their role as the protector of the center of gravity rather than the center of gravity itself. That is, they were a key subsystem of the Iranian nation through which the Iraqis had to go to get to the actual center of gravity. Clearly they were an instrument of the government and a relative strength, but they could not and did not win the war for the Iranians. More

³⁴Ronald E. Bergquist, "The Role of Airpower in the Iran-Iraq War," (Monograph, Air University, 1988), 46-7.

³⁵Karsh, 28-9.

importantly, they were not the catalyst for the war effort. Accordingly, their consistent drubbing at the hands of the Iraqis did not produce a commensurate collapse of the Iranian war effort. Moreover, the Iraqis' ability to best them repeatedly in battle did not bring the Iraqis any closer to their original war objectives. Because the Iraqi second set of war objectives were essentially the status quo ante bellum, it is not saying very much to claim that they "achieved" them through the repeated defeat of the Pasdaran on the battlefield. To say that is only to say that the Iraqis achieved nothing politically or militarily over and above what they started with.

The most important criterium to consider in the analysis of the Pasdaran is Condition Four of the center of gravity definition. Did the successive defeats of the Pasdaran break the will of the Iranian leadership to fight the war? Probably not. The few accounts of the Iranian decision-making process available indicate that while these defeats played a role, the decisive role was played by the external intervention by the superpowers and other third party nations. Ultimately the Iranians saw virtually the entire international community stacked against them. No matter what they could do to the Iraqis, the intervention of third party nations would thwart any appreciable gains they could make toward winning the war.³⁶

The foregoing discussion leads inescapably to the conclusion that the true Iranian strategic center of gravity for the war was located in the religious-political network of the government. Because successful revolutions permeate the entire fabric of a nation, it is probably safe to say that the center of gravity lay in the area of the government that

³⁶Elizabeth Gamlen, U.S. Military Intervention in the Iran-Iraq War, 1987-8. (University of Bradford: School of Peace Studies, 1989), 2.

overlapped with the polity, military and the economy. The Islamification of virtually every facet of the Iranian state points to the group of Muslim clerics who controlled the essential governmental, military, social and economic decisions made by the state. It is this group of Mullahs who gave strategic direction to the entire war effort and gave the Ayatollah Khomeini his closest counsel.

The failure of the Iranian war effort to collapse and come to a halt after the other three elemental systems took a thorough beating indicates that they were not the systems upon which the war was predicated. The will to continue pursuing the war came uniquely from the Iranian Republican Party and most probably from Khomeini himself. Because he was such a remote figure, however, it is difficult to determine precisely whether the impetus came from him alone or he shared decision-making power with his chief lieutenants. Nevertheless, it appears that he provided the spiritual and charismatic foundation of the revolution and the war. Based on how the decision was made to end the war, it appears that a relatively small coterie of close advisors provided options to Khomeini and he accepted or rejected these options after hearing out his advisors as a group. For example, Rafsanjani became the acting commander-in-chief of the armed forces after Bani Sadr was deposed from the position. A Shiite Mullah and also the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, he was one of Khomeini's closest advisors. Only after receiving Rafsanjani's recommendation and then conferring with his inner circle of clerics did Khomeini make the decision to halt the war.³⁷

Short of total destruction of the country and collapse of the entire national system, only Khomeini's decision could bring the Iranian effort to a halt. Khomeini embodied the

³⁷Herzog, 266.

Islamic revolution, and it was his influence that drove the country's political goals, how the military would fight, and the fundamental organization of the Iranian economy. The clerics who ran the political, military, and economic systems turned to Khomeini for guidance and direction. The people of Iran, in turn, turned to the clerics for their direction. In this way Khomeini and his clerics were able to saturate the entire society with Islamic ideals and to motivate the society to take on the mantle of total war.

Throughout the war, the Mullahs painted the conflict as a war to defend Islam.³⁸ This was to be a war to be fought for an ideal, a religious ideology. As such, saving Islam was portrayed as more important than even the country itself and its secular components. Hence, the huge number of casualties incurred and the loss of key infrastructure would be acceptable if they were lost in the holy cause of defending the faith.

It was Khomeini and his chief clerics who galvanized this national religious fervor that permeated all levels of society. As the keepers of the religion, they generated the national will to fight and the willingness to keep sacrificing so much to defeat Saddam Hussein who posed a mortal threat to the radical Shiite Iranian nation being created. According to Khomeini, his chief clerics, and the Koran, it was one's duty and privilege to sacrifice all in the name of Islam.³⁹ Any compromise with the Iraqis, then, would be tantamount to defeat under this conception of the war. In short, it was an all or nothing affair.

Initially Hussein appears not to have thought about what it was he must do to ensure the war ended quickly and decisively. He went after neither the armed forces nor the

³⁸Chubin and Tripp, 38-9.

³⁹Ibid., 40.

leadership of the country. Instead, he seized terrain thinking that this act alone would cause the collapse of the Iranian war effort and will to fight.

As the war progressed, however, Hussein ultimately came to understand that he was fighting a revolution— an entire nation mobilized psychologically, morally, and physically for war. Hussein learned too late that when fighting a revolution the leadership must be disarticulated from its popular support in order to win the war. But of these two potential targets, he chose the wrong one. He thought that by inflicting huge losses on the Iranian armed forces, he could break the morale of the people, discredit the Khomeini regime, and cause the Iranian people to induce the halting of the war. As he found out, striking at a false center of gravity would not produce the effect he desired. The Iranians sustained huge losses and kept on fighting. Hussein did not have the overwhelming combat power to win a prolonged war of attrition, and his enemy was not willing to capitulate because of its tremendous losses— not as long as the Iranian government said that the survival of Islam was at stake. Martyrdom was morally preferable to capitulating to the infidels.

Instead of targeting the populace, Hussein should have focused his efforts on Khomeini and his inner circle if he hoped to win the war. But he did not understand the fundamental power and spiritual relationship between the Khomeini and the people of Iran. He did not understand which of the two elements of the nation was the true source of power.

Had Hussein recognized from the beginning that Khomeini and his inner circle were the strategic center of gravity for Iran, what then? Did Iraq have the resources and operational wherewithal to decisively remove Khomeini from power or disarticulate him from the people of Iran? The answer is probably not, for he had neither the military skill and

resources nor the popular support to fight an unlimited war with Iran. First, there was the question of the resources he could devote. At the start of the war, he could not militarily afford to commit more than six divisions to the invasion.⁴⁰ The remainder were committed to fighting the Kurds in northern Iraq. Six divisions would hardly have been enough combat power to strike as deeply and pervasively as he would have to threaten the Khomeini government, particularly the ruling clerics. As he had no strategic means of striking directly at Khomeini and his closest advisors, he surely would have had to destroy the better part of the Iranian armed forces on Iranian soil to get to Khomeini and his inner circle.

Iran is a large and mountainous country that would have easily swallowed up Hussein's invasion force of six divisions. A major advantage the Iranians' held over the Iraqis was their strategic depth, the majority of strategic forces and cities being located hundreds of miles inside Iran. The deeper they went into Iran, the more vulnerable to counterattack and culmination the Iraqis would have become. Even if they had been able to dispatch the Iranian armed forces, they would have still been faced with a population mobilized for a holy war. As the Pasdaran demonstrated all too well, even a primitive paramilitary force could have given him fits, particularly when the Iraqis did not have the advantage of fighting from well-fortified positions. At the very least, the Iraqis could have expected guerrilla warfare on a very large scale in their march toward to Tehran. In sum, to achieve the kind of military victory they needed to get at Khomeini and his inner circle, they would have needed to expose their forces to the risk of total defeat. Saddam Hussein, as evidenced by the military

⁴⁰Pelletiere, 36. There is some disagreement among experts as to whether the Iraqis actually committed five or six divisions. The majority of experts on the war identified six divisions in the invasion. See also Herzog, 260.

risks he took in his actual invasion, would not have been willing to take that risk.

Equally important, the Iraqi army was not competent enough at the beginning of the war to undertake the kind of deep attack needed to strike at Tehran. It was all they could handle to seize the objectives they took. They neither had the skill to conduct rapid, deep-thrusting, combined arms operations nor the logistical savvy to support large scale offensive operations. Even given the rather minimal opposition they initially faced, the Iraqis quickly got behind their timetables and moved, at best, very tentatively and slowly.⁴¹ It is highly doubtful that the Iraqi army could have gotten much deeper into Iran than they actually did.

In the absence of the ability to conduct decisive strategic offensive operations against the Iranian armed forces, Hussein's army would have been faced with an extended war of attrition, much like the one they actually fought. Had Hussein anticipated such a war from the outset, it is doubtful that he would have initiated it. His actual invasion gives strong clues about his stomach and intentions for a long war of attrition. There is little doubt that Hussein saw a quick and easy victory in his actual invasion of Iran. His timetables planned for the major portion of the fighting to be over inside of a week, and he clearly was surprised when the Iranians did not collapse and turn on the Islamic regime in Tehran.⁴²

As pointed out earlier, Hussein's Sunni-based Baathist Party is a minority ruling party in a nation composed in the main part of Shiites. An all out "holy" war against the Iranian Shiites probably would not have sat well with the Iraqi Shiites and certainly would have risked disaffecting them. The Iraqi Shiites might well support—or at least not openly oppose—

⁴¹O'Ballance, 48-9.

⁴²Pelletiere, 34.

a nationalistic goal of invading Iran to retake lands acquired "unjustly" by Iranian expansionism, but they probably would not support an all out war on their religious brothers. Already faced with trying to keep the Kurds in check, Hussein could not afford to fight the Iranians, subdue the Kurds, and subjugate an alienated Shiite population too. Popular support for an unlimited war against Iran would have been difficult indeed, if not impossible, for Hussein to engender

Added to the problems mentioned above, Hussein did not have the strategic or tactical capability to support a much bolder invasion plan than the one that actually took place. While the air force demonstrated that it could strike deep into Iran and attack strategic targets, it could neither mass its air power nor apply it routinely enough to have a decisive effect on the Iranians in conjunction with the Army's operations. On their best days, the Iraqis were marginally effective at synchronizing all their combat systems, to include air support.⁴³ In short, it is unlikely that the Iraqis could have applied their air power any more effectively than they actually did. Their best simply would not have been good enough for an offensive war that struck deep into Iran.

Next, it is not clear that Iraq would have received the outside support that it did had it pursued a general, unlimited war against Iran. Most nations with significant interests in the region seek a regional balance of power between Iraq and Iran. They do not want one or the other of these two countries to attain regional hegemony. Any attempt to bring down the Iranian government would have probably been seen as an attempt to gain control of the region. Given Iran's hostile and unremitting actions against Iraq before the war, Iraq might

⁴³Cordesman and Wagner, 60-1.

have elicited a modicum of international sympathy when it conducted a limited attack against Iran in 1980, but an all out invasion would have been a different story. Iraq probably could not have expected as much outside support as it got during the actual war, if any at all.

During the actual Iraq-Iran War, Iraq needed considerable outside support just to fend off the Iranians and continue the war. Without that support, Iran would likely have eventually gained the upper hand and defeated Iraq. An unlimited war would have probably alienated the nations that eventually supported Iraq in the actual war. Some of these nations might possibly have thrown their support behind Iran if Iraq had been able to seriously threaten Iran with defeat. Iraq could not afford to risk widening or escalating the war to include the superpowers. Winning would have been out of the question once other nations intervened on Iran's or their own behalf.

The final issue is the tremendous difficulty of making war on a revolution. As Hussein learned, it is no easy thing to defeat a nation galvanized by revolutionary fervor and faith. Even with more impressive opening victories than he actually achieved, Hussein would still have had to face a nation fully mobilized against him. Even if Hussein would have been able to destroy much of the Iranian army, it is not clear that his forces could have reached a point where they could actually strike at Khomeini and his lieutenants. Moreover, as the war demonstrated, the Iranians were able to churn out Revolutionary Guard units in large numbers and with great regularity. The likelihood of the Iraqi Armed Forces withstanding the kind of warfare they faced against the Pasdaran while deep inside of Iran is not very high. Without their entrenchments and interior lines of communication, they would have been hard pressed to beat off the Iranians like they did in the actual war.

Had Hussein truly understood that Iran's center of gravity was Khomeini and his chief lieutenants, he would have seen that any invasion would have risked escalation into an unlimited war. The war could not be won until (1) Khomeini and his inner circle of clerics were removed from power, (2) they decided to stop the war because they saw the war as unwinnable, or (3) they were completely discredited by the Iranian people themselves. None of these events would have happened without at least as much sacrifice, bloodshed, and wasting of national resources as occurred. Had Hussein forecasted this kind of war, the kind of war he actually ended up fighting, he probably would not have undertaken the invasion in the first place. In a war against a revolutionary state there is no quick, cheap victory.

THE IRAQI CENTER OF GRAVITY

To accuse the Iranians of failing to identify and decisively attack the Iraqi center of gravity, at least initially, is at best a gratuitous cheap shot. As much as the Iranians might have done to provoke the Iraqis, it is relatively clear that they had no direct intention of taking any overt military action against the Iraqis at the outset of the war. The Iranian leadership's attention was focused internally to ensure the consolidation of the Islamic clerics' hold on political power. As mentioned earlier, they were busily dismantling the regular armed forces to ensure they could not again become an instrument of state oppression like they had been under the Shah. The Iranian armed forces, as a result, were in no shape to fight a major war.

Perhaps it is more indicative of Iranian revolutionary arrogance than any immediate hegemonic intent that they took active steps to antagonize Hussein's Baathist regime by committing or supporting any number of acts that were directly threatening to the well-being

and stability of the Hussein Regime. At any rate, the Iranians were both unprepared for and surprised by the war that came in 1980. For the Iranians, the initial portion of the war was nothing more than a struggle for survival. Their focus was on stopping the Iraqi invasion and then ultimately throwing them back across the pre-war border. Eventually, however, Iran's strategy matured to encompass the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and his Baathist regime.⁴⁴ By the third week after the invasion, the Iranians were beginning to characterize the war as a Jihad for the defense and survival of Shiite Islamism.⁴⁵ Later, Saddam Hussein himself came to be personified as the single most immediate and critical threat to Shiite Islamism and the Iranian religious revolution. Hence, the war could not be brought to a successful conclusion without his ouster.

Other Iranian political, religious, economic and military aims were, at best, unclear. Since their war aims were always couched in religious terms, the conflict took on the character of total war-- a fight to the death of a righteous, politico-religious system against one dominated by evil infidels. What this meant in terms of territory, the ultimate political fate of Iraq, and the eventual disposition of the Iraqi armed force is an open question. Nonetheless, the Iranians actual military operations indicate that they intended to retake the Shatt-al-Arab and seize the key southern Iraqi cities of Basra and Umm Qasr.⁴⁶ This move would have cut off Iraq's access to the Persian Gulf and greatly complicated Iraqi efforts to export oil, their key source of national revenue. Apparently they believed that the seizure of

⁴⁴King, 20. See also Chubin and Tripp, 80.

⁴⁵Chubin and Tripp, 38.

⁴⁶Pelletiere, 100.

this strategically critical area, in combination with a prolonged war of attrition, would ultimately undermine popular support for the Hussein Regime and cause its overthrow or collapse.

It seems reasonably clear, then, that the Iranian leadership saw Saddam Hussein himself as the key to defeating the Iraqis. While the Iranians most likely would not use the terminology "center of gravity," they would undoubtedly agree that Saddam Hussein was the central and most important Iraqi impetus for war. For without him, there probably would not have been a war at all. The critical issue at stake here is whether the Iranians were correct in this assessment.

That the Iranians were only partially correct in their identification of the Iraqi strategic center of gravity is significant in explaining their inability to bring the war to a successful closing. In short, they only identified a portion of the center of gravity initially. Saddam Hussein was only one part of a more extensive system that would more appropriately delineate the full center of power relationships in Iraq. Moreover, the Iranians did not later see how the center of gravity would be strengthened by the acquisition of military equipment and financial assistance from other nations.

The Iranians' inability to understand clearly the power relationships between the elements of the Neo-Clausewitzian Quadrinity in Iraq led them into a war characterized by the profligate waste of human life, national treasure, and military equipment. Khomeini and his inner circle underestimated Hussein's ability to bring his nation together as a cohesive entity and the Iraqi peoples' willingness to fight for the survival of the Iraqi state. The Iranians believed that the Iraqi populace undergirded the Baathist government and that they

ultimately possessed the political power to change national policy or bring down the Hussein Regime. An unlimited war of attrition, in the clerics' eyes, would cause so many Iraqi casualties and such a great drain on the Iraqi economy that eventually popular support for the war would give out. Once that happened, the populace would force the government to capitulate and then quit power. This reading of the political relationships in Iraq was fundamentally wrong, and it caused the Iranians to go after only a portion of the overall center of gravity in the wrong way. Moreover, it failed to take into account the lengths many interested nations outside of the conflict would go to preserve Hussein's regime and, hence, regional balance of power.

The Iraqi strategic center of gravity, like that of the Iranians, can be found in the quadrinity. As with the search for the Iranian center of gravity, it is perhaps best to go through a process of elimination and refinement to identify the true Iraqi center of gravity using the five defining conditions of the model. The final candidate ought to have been the target of the Iranian war strategy.

Iraq's economy was exceptionally strong before the war largely because of huge foreign exchange reserves.⁴⁷ These reserves were gained almost solely through the oil industry, the primary economic engine of Iraq. As the war progressed, however, the Iraqis first suffered the loss of their oil terminals in the Gulf and then their pipelines through Syria. These setbacks caused a massive cutback of oil exports from some 1.3 million barrels a day to some 700,000 barrels a day by 1982.⁴⁸ Experts have estimated that this precipitous drop

⁴⁷King, 19.

⁴⁸Pelletiere, 71.

off in exports barely enabled the government to run the country and put the country's ability to finance the war in dire jeopardy. Indicative of Iraq's economic woes was the drop from a \$14.7 billion surplus in 1980 to a \$10.9 billion deficit in 1982.⁴⁹ For the next five years Iraq would be dependant on the financial largesse of the Gulf States and several other western nations to fund the war.⁵⁰ Iraq in the intervening years was able to continue the war only through massive infusions of foreign aid (an estimated \$25-30 billion), cutbacks in domestic expenditures, severe debt rescheduling, the promise of arms for future oil exports, and the opening of new oil pipelines through Saudi Arabia and Turkey.⁵¹ This is not the picture of a robust economy. Rather, it suggests a country dependent on others and faced with extreme internal austerity measures to survive economically. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assert that the economy, while a strength at the beginning of the war, increasingly declined until it became a weakness.

All this having been said, it does not appear that Iraq's economic decline lessened the Iraqi's determination to keep fighting. While the Hussein Regime repeatedly sought peace settlements throughout the war, it was prepared to continue fighting in the absence of an acceptable Iranian response to its peace overtures brokered through the United Nations and other agencies. The role of the economy can be best characterized as an element of national power that initially allowed the Iraqis to fight but did not drive the war effort as the single

⁴⁹Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Iran-Iraq War and Western Security, 1984-87: Strategic Implications and Policy Options*. (London: Jane's Publishing Inc., 1987), 44.

⁵⁰Pelletiere, 72. Major Gulf State contributors were Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. Other nations that assisted Iraq were France, the Soviet Union, China, and the United States.

⁵¹Cordesman, 44, 46-7. See also King, 18.

most critical component. Its subsequent role was that it limited the scope of the Iraqi war effort, but did not jeopardize the actual impetus for war itself. Given Saddam Hussein's limited objectives at the outset of the war, it is fair to say that the state of the Iraqi economy certainly allowed him to initiate the war but it was not the single most important component of the national system upon which the entire war effort was predicated. Other factors pointed out earlier in this paper seem to have encouraged Hussein's aggression. His assurance and confidence that he could successfully fight the war, then, came from another source of strength. Hence, the economy does not meet the first condition of the center of gravity definition.

It is questionable whether the economy meets any of the other four conditions of the model either. While a complete collapse of the Iraqi economy might have caused "cascading and deteriorating effects" in the Iraqi war effort, a partial collapse did not bring about a critical deterioration in the Iraqi's actual war effort. In Iraq's case, the domestic scene remained relatively tranquil with little overt evidence of major political dissatisfaction or social upheaval among the general Iraqi populace.⁵² The military was able to continue operations, and they never appeared to approach collapse, even after major military setbacks. The fact that the Iraqi state held together in spite of its economic hardships is indicative that

⁵²This comment is not meant to downplay the Kurdish problem which was a significant problem for the Hussein Regime throughout the war. Nevertheless, the Kurdish separatist movement pre-existed the conflict and did not appear to deteriorate popular support for the war any further than it would have deteriorated as a result of other factors. The author recognizes that there were periodic demonstrations and strikes during the later part of the war, but they appear not to have had a major impact on Hussein's will to continue the war. This is not to say that Hussein was unconcerned about these events and that he did not alter how he fought as a result.

the major strength of the Iraqi state lay elsewhere. Moreover, the Iranians did not approach achieving their political goals for the war, even when the Iraqi economy was in danger of failing. While Hussein was willing to negotiate for the status quo ante bellum, he was neither willing to relinquish his hold on power nor forced to do so. As evidenced by how the war ended, Iran was unable to cause the collapse and removal of the Iraqi Baathist Regime headed by Saddam Hussein. They neither broke Hussein's will through the economy nor forced him into a better peace that recognized their long-term interests. That Saddam Hussein remained in power and even strengthened his political control over Iraq during the war certainly thwarted that Iranian aim.

The elimination of the Iraqi national economy as a candidate for the center of gravity leads to the next element of the quadrinity: the Iraqi populace. One author has characterized Hussein as having "to pay careful attention to two different fronts."⁵³ The first, of course, was the war with Iran. The second was the home front. It was the second front that could undermine Hussein's entire war effort if he did not bind the diverse elements of the Iraqi polity into a single cohesive entity that would support his war effort, or at least not derail it. Hussein readily saw the need to create a sense of nationalism and national unity where little or none existed before.⁵⁴ That he had to do so strongly indicates that the Iraqi people were not the Iraqi center of gravity. Instead, they were a potential weakness that could be exploited if Hussein failed to create the conditions where they could be controlled or manipulated to do his bidding.

⁵³Chubin and Tripp, 53.

⁵⁴King, 14-5.

Hussein, as head of the ruling Baath Party, was a minority leader who well understood the potentially fractious nature of Iraqi society. Religiously delineated between Sunnis and Shiites and ethnically between Arabs, Turkomans, Assyrians, and Kurds, Iraqi society had great potential to come apart at the seams. Hussein, accordingly, was careful to use a variety of techniques to coerce or cajole the public into supporting his regime. He was either ruthless or generous depending on the dictates of the political situation.

Foremost among his techniques was his establishment of himself, symbolically and actually, as the nation's leader. Important in this political process was his tying of the nation's fortunes in the war directly to his own survival and well-being.⁵⁵ While the Iraqi war effort did have a short-lived period of broad popular support in the beginning after the Iraqi Army's initial successes in 1980, it is more accurate to say that the populace's compliance with the requirements inherent in fighting the war stemmed more from a sense of patriotic duty than national fervor, particularly after the Iranians went on the offensive. It was this tacit public acceptance of Hussein's leadership and the requirements established by the government rather than national consensus for war that kept the public from short-circuiting the war effort.

To Hussein's credit, he was particularly adept at manipulating the political environment in which he operated to achieve his ends of maintaining total political power and complete control of the war effort. He achieved these ends by eliminating serious threats to his power, convincing the populace that the "defensive" war with Iran was necessary for national survival, and courting favor with the disenfranchised elements of Iraqi society

⁵⁵Chubin and Tripp, 94. See also King, 12.

(particularly the Shiites) through a number of social initiatives and benefits.⁵⁶

It has been no secret that Hussein used both his own internal security apparatus and the armed forces itself to identify and eliminate serious political opposition. This sort of action was most evident in the Hussein government's handling of the Kurds. Various Kurdish political and guerilla organizations were openly active in their opposition of the Baathists and united in their call for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. The diversion of the war with Iran gave them the opportunity to sustain a prolonged guerilla campaign that harassed and tied down significant portions of the Iraqi armed forces.⁵⁷ Hussein, in response, alternated between policies of force, bribery, intimidation, and exploitation of Kurdish rivalries to keep them in check. His efforts met with little success.

Working in Hussein's favor, however, was the Kurds' inability to engender any sympathy or support from other groups in the general Iraqi population. As a result, their threat was localized, if not eliminated. Nonetheless, they presented a persistent threat to the autonomy of Hussein's state apparatus. Attesting to the virulence of the Kurdish problem has been the Kurd's continued survival and threat to the Iraqi state up to the present.

If Hussein was not able to placate, subjugate, or subdue the Kurds, he fared better with the Iraqi Shiites. Composing nearly sixty percent of the Iraqi population, the Shiites saw themselves more as members of local tribes than as Shiites with common bonds in Iran. In Iraq, unlike Iran, the Shiite people have increasingly become urbanized and educated, thereby seeing their future tied to the economic well-being of their towns and tribes. Hence, their

⁵⁶King, 11-3. See also Chubin and Tripp, 97, 100.

⁵⁷King, 16. Estimates are that Kurdish rebels tied up two of Iraq's seven armies during the 1985-86 time frame. Essentially, Iraq was fighting a two front war.

loyalties lay with their employers and kinsfolk much more so than with Shiite religious leaders.⁵⁸ Because they harbored no particular enmity to the predominantly Sunni Baath Party, they were fertile ground for recruitment by the Baathists. In fact, the economic success of the Hussein Regime in the late 1970's and early 1980's did much to improve national living standards and economic opportunities. This upward economic trend, in turn, served to engender tacit acceptance of the Takriti and Baathist leadership— if not wholehearted support.

Whenever Shiite religious leaders attempted to unite Shiites in opposition to the Hussein Regime, the regime's response was swift and ruthless. Al Dawa, a leading Shiite opposition movement, felt this quick retribution after its unsuccessful assassination attempt against Tareq Aziz in 1980. Immediately the government imposed major restrictions on Shiite political activities and authorized the severest of sanctions against those who violated these restrictions. These sanctions included the expulsion of thousands of Shiites and imposition of governmental control over Shiite revenues.⁵⁹

Shiite leaders like Imam Muhammed Baqr al-Sadr and Ayatollah Khoi who could potentially unify the Shiite community were arrested and essentially silenced. Imam al-Sadr presumably was later executed.⁶⁰ The overall result of these actions was the fractionalization of any internal Shiite unity and the driving of the more radical Shiites into the Iranian camp. As a consequence, the most radical anti-government Shiite elements like Al Dawa were marginalized and associated with a national enemy, Iran. This result, in turn, reduced their

⁵⁸Chubin and Tripp, 99.

⁵⁹Ibid., 99.

⁶⁰O'Ballance, 27.

influence inside Iraq.

Another factor in the diffusion of the internal Shiite threat was the government's appeal to "pan-Arabism."⁶¹ The Baathists placed particular emphasis on the cultural differences between Iran and Iraq. They portrayed the people of Iraq as having a common Arab cultural heritage distinct from the Persian culture of the Iranians. In this regard, Hussein took great pains to paint militant Shiite Islamism as a cover for Iran's (read "Persian") extreme nationalism and historical intimidation of the Iraqi people. This strategy, of course, was designed to convince the Iraqi Shiites to choose cultural and nationalistic ties over religious ones. To the extent that the Baathists experienced little opposition to the war from the Shiites, their strategy appeared to be successful. The collective Iraqi Shiite failure to side with the Iranians during the war effectively thwarted Iran's overall strategy to bring down Hussein and his government.

The foregoing discussion presents the picture of a people who had to be managed, manipulated and coerced into supporting the war effort. The impetus for war did not come from the Iraqi government's secure feelings about the Iraq peoples' loyalty and enthusiasm for war against Iran. Throughout the war Hussein was careful to play up the themes of nationalism and national survival, for he knew his people were not his great strength. In this regard, it is relatively safe to claim that his political objectives were pursued in spite of the potential problems he could encounter from his people. Hence, the Iraqi people fail as a candidate for Iraq's strategic center of gravity because they do not meet the requirements of condition one of the center of gravity model.

⁶¹King, 14.

Further analysis of the Iraqi populace under the center of gravity model supports the foregoing conclusion. The large number of Iraqi casualties did have a negative impact on national morale, and they did tend to undermine popular support for the war. Nevertheless, by tying the survival of his government to his own personal survival and the well-being of the nation in general, Saddam Hussein was able to administer major political damage control when the tide of the war turned against Iraq and the Iraqi Army began to take large numbers of casualties. Hussein took a number of initiatives to placate the populace to include both material and symbolic incentives. Materially, he ensured that the families of slain soldiers were financially well-cared for by government pensions, consumer products were reasonably available, and money was made available for municipal projects, particularly in Shiite cities.⁶² Symbolically he widened the composition of the National Assembly to include many more Shiites. Moreover, he made a point of publicly praising heroes of Shiite history and declaring Shiite festivals as public holidays. Finally, students in Shiite seminaries were exempted from military service.⁶³

Cumulatively these kinds of actions, in conjunction with selected repressive measures dampened any overt public opposition to the war. As a result, Iraqi losses never touched off a "cascading and deteriorating effect" with respect to the populace. Since political support for the regime never disintegrated, the government was able to continue pursuing its war aims. Because the Iranians were never able to cause the disintegration of Iraqi support for the war effort, they were unable to undermine and bring down the Hussein Regime, one of

⁶²King, 13. See also Chubin and Tripp, 100-1.

⁶³Chubin and Tripp, 100-1.

their clearly stated objectives in the war. In fact, Hussein's will to pursue the war appeared to harden as Iraq experienced setbacks. It is testament to Hussein's political prowess and ruthlessness that the Iranians were unable to bring down the Iraqi government through the disaffection of its populace. That the Iranians could not do so strongly indicates that another element of the quadrinity was the real strategic center of gravity.

The armed forces, then, is the next element to examine. Here there is a stronger case to be made for its being a part of the Iraqi center of gravity. Little can be said against the fact that the military was one of Iraq's great military strengths at the beginning of the war. Clearly, the armed forces were responsible in great measure for ensuring the entire war effort did not collapse even when Iraq experienced major military setbacks. As the war progressed and their skill increased, they became a formidable opponent to the Iranians and repelled all serious threats against Iran from 1986 until the end of the war.

Still, it would be a mistake to characterize the military uniquely as Iraq's strategic center of gravity during the war. Given the relationship of the Iraqi armed forces to the Iraqi government and Saddam Hussein himself, a more accurate description of their role would be that elements of the military system were a part of the center of gravity that lay in the border area between the government and military systems. This politico-military network sustained power for Hussein, protected the nation from defeat, and gave Hussein the assurance that he could initiate and fight a successful war against Iran.

Without the loyalty and support of the military, Hussein and his regime would not have ascended to power in the first place. Hussein understood all too well that an ambitious and competent general could well seize power for himself if Hussein did not control the

military hierarchy and selected key units whose explicit primary function was to safeguard the regime.⁶⁴ With this in mind, Hussein set out after taking power to expel, and in some cases liquidate, those military officers whom he believed would pose a threat to him and his regime. Many were Baathists like himself. Hussein replaced these officers with more reliable kinsmen and those who would owe him their loyalty as a direct result of his patronage of them. In addition, he supplemented these activities with the addition of the Baathist Military Bureau, responsible for politically indoctrinating of all officers in units and recommending or denying promotion as result of their political reliability.⁶⁵ The result of this process was an officer corps— particularly senior officers— indebted to him for their positions and influence. Moreover, they were imbued with Baathist ideology, the deviation from which would result in the termination of their careers, if not their lives. Many of these officers were either related to Hussein or from a small Takriti elite who virtually made up Hussein's government. Hence, Hussein held power through a system that ensured the greatest potential internal threat to his power, the military, could be controlled and directed as he wished. The product was a politically reliable military that Hussein resourced to be militarily effective as well.

It is no accident that Hussein appointed himself as a field marshal when he took power in 1979, for he wanted to ensure the amalgamation of political and military power in a seamless whole with him at its center.⁶⁶ Any political bent the military would take, by

⁶⁴Cordesman and Wagner, 61.

⁶⁵Karsh, 15. See also Chubin and Tripp, 115, and Herzog, 258-9.

⁶⁶Karsh, 17.

necessity, would be that of the central government. Thus, it was very difficult to delineate political from military power in Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War.

Supplementing this process was the creation of specialized and elite units that ostensibly were formed to ensure Hussein's maintenance of power. Among these units were the Republican Guard, the Iraqi Special Forces, the armored brigades of the Baghdad Garrison, and the militia of the Popular Army. All of these units were commanded by Hussein's close personal associates or members of the Takriti elite who also controlled the Baath Party.⁶⁷ The fallout from this interweaving of the military and political systems, of course, was to mesh the defense of Iraq with the defense of the Hussein Regime. The implications of this connection were both insidious and effective. Because the military was so closely tied to the regime and Hussein, their survival in the war and afterward was tied directly to Hussein and the Baath Party's fortunes. If the Hussein Regime failed and the war was lost, they would meet the same fate as Hussein. In light of Iranian pronouncements in this regard, they had plenty of incentive not to lose the war.

In sum, the military played an integral role in establishing and maintaining the Baath Party's hold on power. Because Hussein surrounded himself with kinsmen or individuals politically indebted to him through party ties, Hussein's power structure had an essential military component that was essential to his power and survival. Hence, if Hussein was the essential driving force behind Iraq's initiation and prolongation of the war, as most experts have argued, then he could only be that force with the full confidence that he controlled and enjoyed the full support of a capable military machine.

⁶⁷Chubin and Tripp, 115.

It seems then that while Hussein was the central political figure who was the catalyst for war, his confidence for initiating the war was derived from a network of senior officers and elite units that were loyal to him and capable of imposing a military defeat on Iran. The fact that the exigencies of the war caused Hussein to replace militarily incompetent but loyal officers and relinquish much decision-making autonomy to his more capable generals does not undermine the foregoing discussion.⁶⁸ If anything, these actions forced Hussein to forge a common cause with his generals, for they understood that the Baathist Regime's survival was in their own best interest. Hence, purely military decisions appear to have devolved to a great degree down to military leaders while Hussein retained overall political control of the war and the country. Accordingly, the military direction of the war, at least, was the result of the decisions made by a coterie of reliable generals and Hussein's political inner circle.

Iraq's strategic center of gravity appears, then, to have lay on the governmental-military interface of the model. To understand what part of the Iraqi government should be included in the system considered as the center of gravity, Hussein's government must be examined. An investigation into the nature of the Iraqi political system should give full definition to the center of gravity and provide insight on how difficult and complex the destruction, disarticulation, or paralysis of a modern center of gravity can be.

From the very start, Saddam Hussein characterized the Iran-Iraq as his war. This characterization is symbolic of the autocracy he endeavored to create from the earliest days of his assuming power. Hussein succeeded in becoming the locus of power in the government through a variety of means, many already articulated in the preceding discussion.

⁶⁸Pelletiere, 105-7. See also Chubin and Tripp, 119.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to assume that Hussein could autonomously wield power without careful consideration of the political dynamics ongoing in his Baathist Party. Fully understanding that the Baath Party was designed for collective decision-making and that it historically has imposed restrictions on the extent of power held by Iraqi Presidents, Hussein consistently worked to play the divergent factions inside the party against each other to his advantage. He was extremely adept at identifying specific key individuals for special favor or disgrace, thereby underscoring their dependence upon him for their particular station in life. Still, he was dependent upon a close inner circle of family members, kinsmen, and Takriti elites to ensure his policies and programs were carried out. It is this group of people who personified the limitations and obligations Hussein had to abide by to retain their support and services. One writer has described their relationship as "more like a bargain between equals than any of his other political relationships in Iraq. The traditionally based nexus of trust and blood loyalty lies at the heart of the regime and has in many senses been untouched by the war."⁶⁹

Saddam Hussein, then, was ultimately dependent upon and restrained by this relatively small inner circle of political elites. They were both a source of his power and a threat to it. Accordingly, Hussein did not go unchallenged during the war. In 1982, as the war was going badly and Iraq forces were collapsing back into Iraq in a near rout, Hussein received pressure from insiders in the government to step down.⁷⁰ Sensing the precariousness of his political

⁶⁹Chubin and Tripp, 92.

⁷⁰Chubin and Tripp, 89. One individual from the government's inner circle who called for Hussein to step down was the Minister of Health, Riyadh Ibrahim Hussein. The good minister was executed in October 1982 for this act of "treason." Others who joined him in openly stating this sentiment either met the same fate or were purged from the hierarchy of

power at that point, he responded quickly and ruthlessly by dismissing the seventeen man Revolutionary Command Council and reappointing a smaller nine man version, purging both the cabinet and the Baath Party, and executing twelve of his generals for poor performance in battle.⁷¹ Later, in 1983, Hussein successfully put down a rebellion fomented and led by his half brother, Barzan al-Takriti, who was the head of Iraqi internal security at the time.⁷² Takriti paid with his life for his attempt to seize power. While Hussein obviously survived these threats to his leadership and subsequently tightened his hold on power, they were clear reminders that his position of power could and would be put in jeopardy when his judgment proved fallible or wrong.

The point of the foregoing analysis is that Hussein did not constitute the entirety of the governmental apparatus, as much as he would have liked for that to be the case. There were a number of other key individuals with whom he had to share power and who were both desiring and capable of assuming power should Hussein be eliminated or forced to step down. Hence, it was in his utmost interest to coopt the members of the government's Revolutionary Command Council who survived his purges. One way was to link their survival and his to the survival of the state in the war with Iran. In that way he could ensure their support of him and his policies.

Over the years of the war Hussein sufficiently reduced the number of members of his Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) to assure their loyalty to him and his ability to

the Baath Party.

⁷¹Cordesman and Wagner, 141-2.

⁷²King, 12.

control them. The elite of the elite in the ROC were members of the National Defense Council along with several others who were probably related to Hussein. It was in this forum that the most important national issues were decided upon. In all likelihood, the major strategic decisions of the war were made in this forum, and it was here that the direction and will to wage the war emanated. Undoubtedly Saddam Hussein's opinion held sway, but it is likely that this elite group had the entree to speak more candidly with Hussein and a greater say in the decisions made. As already indicated, however, such candor always entailed a large degree of personal risk.

This politico-military system that Saddam Hussein deliberately created ensured that he had a secure base of power and that any potential rivals had their interests tied to his. This system included the senior officer corps, selected elite units in the armed forces, and most probably the members of both the Revolutionary Command and National Defense Councils. As long as this network remained in place, the war would continue to be prosecuted as Hussein saw fit. While Saddam Hussein was undoubtedly the most important component of this system, he was probably replaceable. For the Iraqi war effort to come apart or come to a stop, the entire network had to be destroyed, disarticulated, paralyzed, or otherwise rendered ineffective. For this reason, they collectively were the Iraqi center of gravity.

This system of military and governmental elites molded and manipulated public opinion from the top down. Moreover, they used the internal security apparatus to its fullest extent to ensure that the disaffected elements of Iraqi society were held in check. Moreover, they both controlled the economy and took extreme measures to bolster it to attain their ends in the war. In sum, this part of the Iraqi quadrinity generated, harnessed, and controlled the

overall war effort. Without the particular relationships the elements of this network held with each other, the war would neither have been fostered nor feasible.

The removal of most or all of this system would probably have caused the collapse of the entire Iraqi political and social structure, for there would have been no strong central power to hold the diverse elements of the Iraqi state together. Already the Kurds were in open rebellion, and it probably would not have been long before a major power struggle between the Sunni and Shiite sects would have ensued. Militant Shiite organizations like Al Dawa would surely have moved back into Iraq and actively pressed for a greater Shiite role in the Iraqi power structure. They had already demonstrated a predilection to use violence that could have ignited into open civil war between the two sects.

In addition, the traditional tension between the military and the civilian leadership could easily have erupted into a full-blown power struggle had the center of gravity been seriously damaged or destroyed. Iraq has had a recent history of military coups, the most recent of which brought Hussein himself to power. So, it is not unreasonable to envision some form of civil war or open, violent struggle between the military and the Baathist government or some other element of the military. Such an event would surely have doomed the Iraqi war effort and forced them to sue for peace. The only major questions remaining would be how far the Iranians would press their military defeat of the Iraqis, how much Iraqi soil they would occupy, and what kind of reparations they would impose on the Iraqi government.

While it is difficult to define precisely the boundaries of the Iraqi center of gravity suggested above, it is relatively clear that the key elements of the Iraqi center of gravity

system would come from the elements of the military and government inner circle already identified. They were the central cohesive forces that pulled the country's extremely diverse elements together in a unified whole. Moreover, they composed the central power base that ensured Hussein's autarky and gave him the confidence and ability to initiate and fight a war. The fact that neither significant casualties nor severe economic problems were enough to bring about an Iraqi capitulation points to the strength and resiliency of Hussein's politico-military system. The government's will to pursue the war directly radiated from the Takriti/Baath elite, particularly Saddam Hussein, and certain key elite units like the Republican Guard.⁷³ While this politico-military network did not greatly motivate or galvanize the nation, they were able to make sure that public opinion and economic problems did not adversely effect the war effort in a debilitating way.

Important to note here is the impact that external financial and military hardware assistance had on the delineation and strength of the Iraqi center of gravity. Initially, one might be tempted to think that this outside assistance somehow expanded or changed the Iraqi center of gravity. This would be a mistaken presumption. A more accurate depiction of the role of outside assistance was that it shored up key weaknesses and bolstered flagging strengths in the Iraqi national system. Most importantly, outside assistance kept Iraq's weaknesses from degenerating to the point where they ultimately sapped the strength of the component elements in the Iraqi center of gravity. Moreover, it replenished the military hardware that the Iraqis needed to beat off a successful Iranian offensive into Iraq. That is,

⁷³Cordesman and Wagner, 44.

outside assistance prevented Iraq from losing rather than helping it to win.⁷⁴ This is an important distinction to keep in mind, for it appears that no nation external to the conflict wanted to see a clear-cut winner in the conflict. Essentially outside assistance allowed Hussein to pay for the war, gave him a way to transport his key moneymaker— oil— to market, and allowed him to replenish his diminished war stocks.

There seems to be little doubt that Hussein saw external assistance, both militarily and politically, as a zero sum game. Exclusive outside support for Hussein's Iraq, particularly from the nations of the Gulf Region and the two Superpowers, ensured a politically isolated Iran. Hussein well understood the strategic advantages that Iran possessed, and denial of external support to Iran could offset those advantages significantly enough to affect the outcome of the war. Hence, external support would not only shore up Iraq's position, but it would also undermine that of Iran. While Iran had no difficulty isolating itself from the rest of the nations of the world, Hussein was more than willing to do what he could to help that process along. Seen in this light, Hussein's zealous pursuit of "Pan-Arab Unity" and courting of the Soviet Union and the United States made eminent sense, for it gave him the wherewithal to withstand the Iranian onslaught in the period when the war went badly for Iraq.

Could the Iranians have effectively struck at the Iraqi center of gravity? Probably not. Given their significant military and political deficiencies, it is unlikely that they could have done much more than they did. First, given the security that surrounded members of the Iraqi power elite, it is doubtful that any assassination attempt would have been successful at

⁷⁴Chubin and Tripp, 193.

killing more than one or two of these people at any given time. Any such attempt would have only increased an already intense and effective security apparatus. Moreover, attempting to disarticulate the Iraq inner circle from the fight at the front by destroying its command and control facilities or otherwise disrupting or destroying its communications networks required a level of sophistication well beyond the Iranians' limited means. They neither had the intelligence apparatus nor the targeting capability to accomplish this task. The Iranian Air Force, for example, was largely ineffective throughout the war, even when targeting much larger and more vulnerable targets. As the United States found in a later war against Iraq, Saddam Hussein proved maddeningly difficult to locate and neutralize, even with far more sophisticated and capable intelligence gathering assets and weapons systems than the Iranians had. In short, Iran had no strategic means of striking directly at Hussein and his inner circle.

Moreover, directly striking at the inner circle of leadership in the Iraqi government and military would more than likely have proved counterproductive. Such an act might well have served to harden the Iraqis' will to fight rather than weaken it. More importantly, it probably would have caused greater support forthcoming from the Gulf States. These nations feared an hegemonic Iran in the region because of the potential threat that Iran's militantly Islamic revolution posed to their own vulnerable regimes.⁷⁵ If anything, Iran needed to reassure the nations of the region rather than further antagonize them.

Perhaps a more clear cut way to get at Hussein and his Takriti elite would have been to destroy or disarticulate those military units that ensured his hold on power. Unfortunately the strategy would probably have been beyond Iran's capability. First, this strategy would

⁷⁵Ibid., 152-3.

have required that Iran could effectively locate these units, bring them to battle, and then defeat them. This option would have required a much more sophisticated intelligence apparatus than Iran possessed. Iran had no electronic means of surveying the battlefield, and its HUMINT capabilities were both limited and highly politicized.⁷⁶

Second, Hussein was reluctant to commit these elite forces to actual battle unless they were absolutely required. They tended to fill the role of a strategic reserve, being committed only when the situation went badly.⁷⁷ This was especially true of the Republican Guards and the armored brigades of the Baghdad Garrison until the final months of the war when Iraq resumed the offensive. Typically, an Iranian offensive would be nearing culmination when Republican Guard and other elite armored formations were committed. This methodology ensured two ends: (1) the Iranian attack could effectively be stopped, and (2) these elite Iraqi forces could be preserved to fight another day or preserve the regime, as the case dictated.

It is unclear whether the Iranians even understood the full political and military importance of these particular units or even knew who they were. Nevertheless, they must have understood at some level that the Iraqi armored and mechanized units were the creme of the armed forces. Since the Iranians would have been hard pressed to effectively pinpoint these forces and bring them to battle as part of any deliberate strategy, they would have been then forced to draw them into battle as part of a larger operational plan. First, it is doubtful that the Iranian military leadership had any inkling of campaign planning. If they did, however, such campaign planning would have required the sequencing of battles toward a

⁷⁶Cordesman and Wagner, 414.

⁷⁷Ibid., 61. See also Pelletiere, 97, and Chubin and Tripp, 19, 115, and 117.

common end and the rapid exploitation of any immediate tactical breakthroughs by highly mobile, combined arms forces. As the Iranians demonstrated repeatedly throughout the war, their repertoire was primarily confined to frontal, human wave assaults that employed few, if any, of the other arms or services in the Iranian military. Iranian military leaders demonstrated little predilection, let alone aptitude, for combined arms, maneuver warfare. More importantly, though, they showed no understanding of how to develop operational level plans that achieved any degree of simultaneity or synchronization to achieve operational or strategic ends. Simply stated, the Iranians did not have a military to achieve their stated goals through modern maneuver warfare.

The question remains, then, whether the Iranians could have brought down the Hussein regime through a strategy of attrition-- the strategy they actually undertook. Again, given the limitations of their military apparatus and their inability to generate any external support, that possibility seems remote. To win a war of attrition, Iran would have needed benefactors that would assist it economically and resupply it with modern warfighting equipment. In turn, Iran needed to cut Iraq off from its source of income-- the export of its oil and financial loans from other nations-- and prevent Iraq's import of arms. Given the real political and military threat that Iran posed to the region, that option does not seem likely either. A strategy of attrition requires a nation to outlast its opponent. Iran did not have the internal resources or military capability to accomplish this end. More critically, it was both unwilling and unable to generate external support through diplomacy. In short, Iran did not have the means to win an unlimited war with Iraq. It only had the means to fight a war of limited ends, the restoration of its boundary.

To win the war, the Khomeini Regime would have needed to destroy or decisively neutralize in some effective way the Iraqi strategic center of gravity. Their failure to win the war and accomplish their stated strategic objectives stemmed ultimately from their incorrect identification of the Iraqi center of gravity and their subsequent choosing of the wrong strategy for the war. A realistic assessment of the means they possessed and a better analysis of the nature of the Iraqi center of gravity would probably have convinced them that an unlimited war was not winnable, at least not in the way that they chose to fight the war. This last point, particularly in light of their political relations with the Superpowers and the other nations in the region, should have cued them to the great risk they were taking and caused them to seek more limited objectives in the war.

CONCLUSIONS

In the end Iraq was faced with a war it could not win, and Iran was faced with a war it probably would not lose. Both nations realized far too late in the war that their strategic objectives were not obtainable. In the interim the war devolved into a senseless slaughter that accomplished almost nothing politically for either side. If war is nothing but the continuation of politics by other means, then both sides, by ultimately failing to achieve their political objectives in the war, lost the war.

The conclusions to be taken from this conflict should be fairly evident. First, a nation must have clear and achievable objectives in a war. Those objectives must be looked at critically in light of the enemy's own goals. If a nation intends to fight a limited war and its enemy is willing to fight an unlimited war in response, then the nation with the limited objectives had better be prepared to fight with unlimited means to secure those limited

objectives. The means it uses had better be directed at the most effective way of achieving its limited ends while at the same time parrying what the enemy can and will do in return to prevent their achievement.

This consideration has important ramifications for the next conclusion. The means for achieving these objectives must include a determination of what the enemy's strategic center of gravity actually is and then what must be done to that center of gravity to achieve those ends. The Iran-Iraq War, if nothing else, unequivocally demonstrated that a nation's strategic objectives must be inextricably tied to what it can and must do to the enemy's center of gravity. Faced with an enemy that is fighting an unlimited war, a nation must be prepared to take decisive action against the enemy's center of gravity as early as possible in the conflict. Otherwise, the war promises to go on and on until both sides exhaust themselves or they lose their resolve to carry on with the war. The war, by necessity will devolve into a war of attrition. Nations that fight for limited objectives typically do not want to be drawn into extended wars of attrition because the time and resources required to fight such wars work inexorably against the achievement of their limited ends.

The lesson here is unmistakable. In conventional wars where a nation fights an enemy with unlimited goals, political signalling through the seizure of terrain and an incrementalist approach to committing forces lead only to an expansion of the conflict rather than a narrowing of it. It is an empty gesture to threaten the use of ever greater force against an enemy committed to fighting back with all possible means to achieve total victory. Such threats probably will work only in the arena of nuclear deterrence. What is paramount in limited wars is keeping the enemy from preventing the achievement of one's own objectives.

Only destruction, defeat, or disarticulation of the enemy's center of gravity will make this happen. The enemy's strategic leadership must be convinced that a continuation of the conflict is futile. Most convincing to them will be the loss of their center of gravity— the element of national power upon which their war effort is predicated.

The third conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War is that a thoroughgoing analysis of the enemy's center of gravity can give strong clues about (1) what specific elements of enemy's overall national system must be targeted to destroy, defeat or disarticulate his center of gravity, (2) what appropriate national strategy(s) might be used to get at these targets, and (3) whether the costs and risks involved in attacking a particular center of gravity warrant fighting according to the proposed strategy. The heuristic model proposed in the first section of this paper is designed to give the strategic leader a methodology that leads him to the analysis suggested above. Admittedly this paper has the advantage of hindsight; the historian knows much about the two belligerents that they did not know about each other. Nevertheless, the center of gravity model proposed in this paper should take the analyst through a mental process that leads to the asking of the right questions about the enemy. This insight then leads to the next conclusion.

The study of the Iran-Iraq War suggests that nations about to go to war need to know as much about the politics, economy and culture of a nation they are about to fight as its military capabilities. Moreover, they must understand how the politics, culture, economy, and military all interrelate. That is, they must understand the potential enemy holistically— how he operates as a system rather than what the individual component parts of his system can or cannot do. This is important for several reasons. First, systems are self-compensating in

that often one component of the system often regenerates the functions of or replaces another component that has been damaged or destroyed. Second, the elements of national power are frequently so interwoven with each other in a given state that one cannot truly understand one component except in terms of how it is interrelated with the others. Third, understanding the dynamic relationships between the individual components of the enemy system can help with the identification of critical nodes and linkages that affect the well-being of the entire system. Finally, understanding the enemy holistically can lead to the collective use of all a nation's own instruments of national power in the most efficient and advantageous way to achieve its strategic objectives in the war.

The recognition of the need for a holistic evaluation points the way for intelligence collection and analysis. Certainly the operational characteristics of the enemy's armed forces are crucially important, but they are only a part of the equation. Equally as important is knowledge about political power relationships within the government, the relationship between the military and the government in power, cultural mores and attitudes that effect how soldiers will fight, how economic factors impact on public support for the war, what kind of human losses the people of a nation are prepared to withstand for a particular government, which industries are most critical to the war effort, and so on. These are only a few of the relationships that may be critical for intelligence analysts to consider.

Notice also that these relationships cannot readily be captured by cameras and other electronic eavesdropping devices. They are intangibles that require HUMINT collection and subjective analysis, not merely order of battle statistics. While space platforms and ULTRA devices can tell a nation much about the objective nature of the enemy, they cannot tell

nearly as much about its subjective nature. This conclusion certainly argues for the establishment of extensive and well-established HUMINT systems within the borders of all potential enemy nations. Understandably, this task is extremely time consuming, politically and physically risky, and subject to a fairly low success rate.

This last consideration leads to still another. Nations must be careful not to confuse operational centers of gravities with strategic ones. While delineating a rigorous and complete distinction between the two is well beyond the scope of this paper, the following can be said safely. The destruction, defeat, or destruction of operational centers of gravity should always lead to the dissolution of the strategic center of gravity. They are contributory in nature. By necessity they will primarily be military targets. Often, but not always, they will be a key unit or element of the enemy's armed forces that protects some vital component of the national system still more important to the national war effort. While destruction or defeat of these military targets can lead ultimately to the downfall of the strategic center of gravity, they are not the same entity-- at least not the entirety of it. The lesson to be learned from the Iran-Iraq War is that the armed forces of a nation may well not be its strategic center of gravity but instead merely its protector. Hence, the defeat of key military units or the destruction of critical industries and communications networks may lead to tactical or operational level success but not necessarily to strategic success. The model in this paper is designed to help the strategic leader begin making the important distinction between operational centers of gravity and strategic ones so he can design a strategy with the proper linkage between them.

The model presented in this paper also helps the strategic leader differentiate between

strategic targets or objectives that can decisively affect the strategic center of gravity and the center of gravity itself. Under this model the center of gravity is best understood as a system composed of nodes and linkages. Center of gravity systems will have many component parts and relationships, each of which could be a potential target or objective. These nodes and linkages may be attacked directly or indirectly through other more vulnerable or weak parts of the overall national system. The conceptual advantage of the model is that it helps the analyst distinguish between strengths, weaknesses, vulnerabilities and the actual center of gravity itself. Strategic targets or objectives then can be evaluated in light of the role that they play in decisively affecting the center of gravity. The model therefore eliminates the muddled and fundamentally wrong thinking that all strategically important targets can be centers of gravity or that a strategic vulnerability can be one. What counts ultimately is choosing the key subsystem that best captures the fundamentally most powerful relationships in the enemy's entire national system.

Finally, the role of third party nations in the Iran-Iraq War suggests that a center of gravity could indeed be mutable. If nations external to the Iran-Iraq War could strengthen Iraq's center of gravity through financial and military aid, then why not cause it to change through the introduction of other variables? The entertainment of this possibility naturally leads to some provocative thoughts about how a strategic center of gravity could mutate or shift. One fairly obvious way it could shift would be through a significant change in one or more of the political, military, economic, and social power relationships within a country. Still another way would be through the gain of an ally that possesses some strength that transforms the power relationship between the two countries. This transformation of power

would then forge a new center of gravity, most probably a composite system between the two countries. Finally, radical innovations or breakthroughs in technology, doctrine, training, production, sources of revenue, or the like could also cause significant alterations in a country's center of gravity. One only needs to think about the introduction of the atomic bomb to the Second World War to give this possibility credence.

The strong possibility that centers of gravity are mutable also points to the problem of clearly delineating the full scope of a strategic center of gravity. If one accepts that elements of a strategic center of gravity can pass in and out of its "systemic boundaries" or change their relationships with each other, then it is plausible that the boundaries themselves may be more than a little fuzzy. Moreover, it will always be difficult to determine how far out a center of gravity's radius of strength extends. Therefore, it appears that the exact determination of the center of gravity's systemic boundaries will always be somewhat arbitrary. The important task, then will be to capture as much of the center of gravity system in the initial analysis as possible. While the strategic leader will not have to capture it perfectly, he will have to get enough of it right to design an appropriate strategy for his own country.

The preceding analysis suggests very strongly that centers of gravity may be complex, non-linear systems that may be very difficult to isolate, target and destroy in modern warfare given a state's ability to disperse, hide, and harden its critical assets. Moreover, because of their complex nature, prediction of their failure based on the actions taken against them will also be troublesome. As mentioned earlier, their ability to self-compensate or change to protect themselves makes an assessment of how much damage has been done to their

cohesiveness and overall strength an educated guess at best. As in all forms of conflict, a belligerent will always attempt to hide or disguise its injuries and weaknesses that result from his opponent's actions. In addition, the sheer complexity and vastness of an entire national system will probably degrade its enemy's ability to make a complete and thorough damage assessment. Critical nodes and linkages that allow the center of gravity to survive may go undetected and thus may not be engaged. Moreover, other variables not previously seen or considered may play a critical role in the survival of the center of gravity.

All of the above should point forcefully to the fact that center of gravity determination and analysis is a terribly inexact and messy business. Moreover, it is fraught with risk because one's knowledge of the enemy is always imperfect. Nevertheless, the model used in this case study should at least take the literature one step closer to a useful product that clarifies and unifies thinking about the nature of this elusive and difficult concept. Hopefully it will help to put more rigor and discipline into the debate about what constitutes a center of gravity, for at least now the doctrine community has a distinctly articulated set of conditions from which it can adjust to arrive at a closer approximation of the truth.

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