

# Persian Gulf region "tightly stretched rubber band"

by robert danner

staff writer

Dr. Mehran Tamadonfar, UNLV Assistant Professor of Political Science specializing in Middle East affairs, compared the conflict between Iran and Iraq to a tightly stretched rubber band ready to snap at any moment.

"The seven-year war," he said, "is a complex economic and political struggle whose historical, cultural and religious problems will not be easily resolved. The dynamic implications, regionally as well as globally, are so enormous that both superpowers have been brought together to find an end to this conflict."

Tamadonfar said Iran and Iraq have always disagreed over the Khuzestan Province which is located in the Southwest part of Iran.

Iranian oil fields are located in this area and much of the world supply of oil flows from here. Abadan, a city in the Khuzestan Province, contains the largest oil refinery in the world.

Iraq has always had a claim to this area of Iran. Iraqis argue that since many Arabs live in this province, it rightfully belongs to the Arabs.

"The Iraqis miscalculated when they invaded Iran," he said. "Believing the Khomeini regime was weak, they felt they could invade Khuzistan and seize that piece of land. This was the beginning of the war."

"There is no question that this war is draining both countries of their economic resources."

Tamadonfar said that Iran has poured a greater amount of money into the war effort because she

has not received much financial support from other Middle East countries.

Consequently, the Khomeini regime has had problems dealing with its economic policies because all efforts have been thrust into winning the war.

Iraq, on the other hand, has been helped by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, two conservative neighbors within the Arab world.

Some Khomeini loyalists intend to win the war by exporting the Islamic revolution to Iraq and other Moslem countries.

"However," Tamadonfar said, "I do not believe that anyone can win that war. Certainly, there are those within the regime that want to see an end to the conflict while there are others who want the war

to continue.

"Obviously, there is no consensus among the Iranian leaders to end the war."

He said that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait should be concerned about an Iranian victory.

"If Iran were to win the war, there would be a domino effect. Iran would then go after other conservative Arab countries to stamp its own Islamic form of revolutionary government."

"The political impact of such a victory would be very drastic to the conservative Arab countries whose economic well-being depends upon the exportation of oil."

Syria and Libya, in the past, had given support to the Iranian cause. However, that has diminished because Iraq has since mended its

fences with the more radical elements of the Arab world.

"As far as the role of the United States is concerned," Tamadonfar said, "the significance of the war is not only related to the vital oil importance, but also to the crucial geographical location

and proximity to the Soviet Union."

He said the United States should be concerned with the Soviet goals within this region and how they will become involved.

"Now that Iran and Iraq are fighting with each other, Russia really wants to be close to both countries. This puts the Soviet Union in a very precarious position."

"That the United States should have brought in its enormous number of ships and soldiers into this region is debatable. There is no question that since there are so many concerns over there in such a small area, there will be the potential for confrontation," he said.

While the Iranian government has shown it does not have the ability to fight the United States, it does know its limitations.

"Therefore," he said, "it is possible that Iran would try to threaten here and there just for domestic consumption."

"The Iranian government, feels that if it makes peace now, the people are going to wonder what they have gained from this war, from losing so many people and putting so much

economic resources into this effort which would be lost if they made peace now.

"It would certainly be to the benefit of the Iranian people to end the war. But, one must look one step further and ask whether the Iranian leaders would benefit from a resolution to the conflict.

"They would, providing they could save face with an explanation which they could sell to their people. That is the sticking point of the whole problem."

He said there is no question that the Iranian people are tired of fighting. Since they have lost so much, they feel a peaceful solution would satisfy some of their needs.

"Again," he said, "I think it is very difficult to say what will happen. If the Khomeini regime were to be toppled, those then assuming leadership could admit that it was a mistake to continue the fighting. The same could be said about the Iraqi government."

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