CHAPTER III

THE DYNAMIC OF CONFLICT IRAQ - IRAN WAR 1980-1988

Iraq and Iran have long competition to dominate the Persian Gulf. The defeat of Britain and their withdrawal in 1960 led the decisions of Iraq and Iran to send and use force toward their weak neighbours to dominate the Persian Gulf. Because of that, Iraq and Iran started the war in 1980.[1]

It was complicated conditions, not only focused on one interest, but also bundles of interests that lay behind the Iran-Iraq war. The economic interest was the most visible goal of this conflict. Besides, Khuzestan as the rich oil area owned by Iran had also become the main purpose of Iraq in invading Iran. However, the bad relation between Sunni and Shi'a brought the implication to the breakout of this war. The worst condition of this war started with the involvement of a third party (see below).

It formulated the issue of oil between both Iraq and Iran, which gave benefit toward its own international trade. Then, the war came with great of damages, both economic and even in humanitarian. Iraq and Iran would accept the implication from this war.

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[1] Hume, Cameron R. *The United Nations, Iran, Iraq : How Peacemaking Changed.* Institute for study of Diplomacy Georgetown University. 1994. p 3

A. Dynamic of Conflict

Many factors influenced the Iraq-Iran war. According to the historical background, it is mentioned that Shatt Al-Arab contributed to the hostility between both of them. Shatt al-Arab is oil producer for both countries. Iraq and Iran signed a treaty in 1937 to end the dispute. The content of treaty recognized the Iraq and Iran border toward Shatt Al-Arab. But then, the 1937 treaty was not successfully implemented.[2]

A.1.1 Actor of Conflict

The actors of this war cannot simply be defined, because this war did not only involve two countries, but also there were many third parties which were involved through direct interventions to get their own interests. The main actors of this war were Iraq and Iran, and then it produced some supporters. Iraq was supported by USSR, the NATO nations, France, United Kingdom, Brazil, Yugoslavia, Egypt, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Germany, and United States, while Iran was supported by North Korea, Libya, and China. Thus, this war was not only focused on economic causes, but also focused on ideological influences which affected financial condition.

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[2] Hume, Cameron R. *Opcit.* p 8

A1.1.1 Iraq

Iraq became involved in this war because of the policy of Saddam Hussein at that time (1980) to mobilise the civilians. Saddam at that time thought that it was important to defend the territory that look beneficial for the development of Iraq. The territory included Shatt Al-Arab River. That territory unfortunately was being contested by Iran because it was near Iranian territory. In combating Shia people, Saddam Hussein mobilized civilians.

A.1.1.2 Iran

Iran took part in this war because after the Islamic Revolution, Iran tried to be the strongest state in the Middle East. Iran also urgently wanted to secure the Gulf from other states' invention. The war according to the Iran government is a chance to strengthen their position in Middle East and consolidate the government after the Iranian revolution. The war is like the test for Iranian people national character. The society of Iran attempted to help the nation at war as the implementation of total war policy. As a consequence, Iranians who work must give their half of salary per day to help finance the war.[3]

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[3] Karsh, Efraim. *Opcit.* p.1-8

A.1.1.3 The Role of the United States

As well as the involvement of Iraq and Iran, the United States had a significant role in this war. The United States has an influence on the Iraq-Iran war. As we know, the United States became the biggest supporter for Iraq. Several aids were given secretly by the United States to Iraq in terms of military arms, special operations training, and direct involvement in warfare against Iran.[4] The technology of army in Iraq could be developed because of the involvement of the United States.[5]

Of course, there is interest behind the involvement of the United States in the Iraq-Iran war. As we know, the Middle East territory was the biggest oil resource in the world. The United States needed to get maximum stocks of oil. Then, the United States tried to help Iraq because it will get the oil. In addition, oil stocks could be obtained by the member of International Energy Agency led by the United States. Oil was the key of the United States to keep their interests toward the Middle East, including Iraq and Iran.[6]

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[4] Timmerman, Kenneth R. *The Death Lobby: How the West Armed Iraq.* New York. Houghton Mifflin Company. 1991

[5] *Us Secretly Give Aid to Iraq Early in Its War Against Iran.*
http://www.nytimes.com/1992/01/26/world/us-secretly-gave-aid-to-iraq-early-in-its-war-against-iran.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm retrieved on 23rd December 2013 09.30 a.m

[6]
http://www.wpainc.com/archive/reagan%20Administration?WFM%20Papers%20from%20Reagan 520Achieves/Iran-Iraq/Presentation%20on%20Gulf%20Oil%20Disruption%205-22-84.pdf retrieved 23rd December 2013 09.40 p.m

A.1.2 Phase of Conflict

A.1.2.1 Iraq Invasion 1980

Figure 2. Iraq Invasion Map (1980-81)

(Taken from http://www.worldology.com/Iraq/iran_iraq_war.htm retrieved on 18th December 2013 09.09 p.m)

Iraq's invasion of Iran had started by using air force. Iraq had an aim to destroy the air base of Iran. Some parts of Iran's air base were successfully destroyed, but the fundamental part of the base failed to be destroyed. According to Saddam Hussein, the purpose of Iraq's invasion of Iran was to end Khomeini's movement of the Iranian revolution. It could be spread into the Persian Gulf states. The fear of Saddam about the result of the Iran revolution made him think that if he could destroy the air

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base and occupy Khuzestan as the rich-oil region, this would make Iran look weak in the eyes of the world.[7]

The Invasion started on 22nd September 1980. Iraq was so offensive at the first attack and suddenly took control of the Iranian border cities and territories. Both of them, Iran and Iraq, placed their army in the territory of Abadan. Iraq's invasion of Iran reached the deepest penetration in March of 1981.[8] Iraq tried to attack Iran by occupying the important regions. Iraq made their attack in a well prepared way. With 6 military divisions that spread into two poles, 4 divisions in Khuzestan and 2 divisions in north and center of Iran, Iraq succeeded in occupying some important areas of Iran, such as Abadan, Khoramshahr, and Mehran.[9]

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[7] Cruze, Gregory S. (Spring 1988). *Iran and Iraq: Perspectives in Conflict* (http:/ / www. globalsecurity. org/ military/ library/ report/ 1988/ CGS. htm). research. report. U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College.

[8] *Precursors of Iran-Iraq war.* http://www.worldology.com/Iraq/iran_iraq_war.htm retrieved on 18th December 2013 09.09 p.m

[9] *Ibid.*

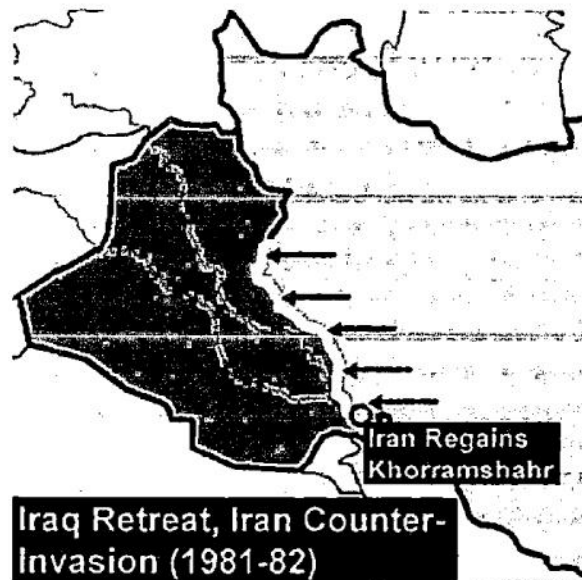### A.1.2.2 Iran Offensive and Iraq Defeated 1982

Figure 3 Iraq Retreat, Iran Counter-Invasion map (1981-82)

(taken from http://www.worldology.com/Iraq/iran_iraq_war.htm

retrieved on December 18th 2013 09.09 p.m)

This happen after two years Iraq's invasion of Iran. The decision to stop the invasion came from Saddam Hussein in 1982 to withdraw all military divisions in Iranian territory. After that, Iran conducted their counter attack toward Iraq. The aim of Iran was to conduct the counter attack to take over the region that was occupied by Iraq. Saddam thought that if Iraq's military did not withdraw from Iran, its condition would get worse. That thought also was supported because Iran got support from the rival Ba'athist regime of Syria and it put financial pressure on Iraq,

because Syria closed the oil import relation with Iraq. Thus, Iraq only had relation to export oil in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the other Gulf States.[10]

Figure 4 Iran Offensive map (1982-84)

(Taken from http://www.worldology.com/Iraq/iran_iraq_war.htm retrieved on December 18th 09.09 p.m)

In this offensive action, it could be seen that ideology could influence both states. Here, Khomeini as the leader of the Iranian revolution and its supporter thought that monarchy regime could not be implemented in Islam. That was why they would erase that regime, and change to an Islamic Republic which would implement the Islamic values. However, the decision which was taken by Khomeini frightened other monarchy leaders, not only Saddam Hussein as the main actor of this war,

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[10] Karsh, Efraim. *Opcit*. p.1-8

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but also the leader of Saudi Arabia. They thought if it was done successfully, it would affect them, and they could be overthrown. It became the reason of Saudi Arabia to support Iraq, and not let Iraq lose in this war. Saudi Arabia gave financial aid to Iraq at that time.[11]

Iraq chose to make a ceasefire with Iran but Iran rejected the peace agreement with Iraq. Iran would make a ceasefire if the Ba'athist regime could be changed by the Islamic Republic. The war started again and Iran succeeded in occupying important regions of Iraq, such as Basra. Because of that, to counter the offensive of Iran, Iraq improved the number of its military, from 6 divisions to 12 divisions.[12]

A.1.2.3 Chemical Weapons as Strategic Stalemate 1983-1984

In this period, Iraq sent its military to attack Iran, but it did not affect the central government of Iran. With good cooperation, Iran was not easy to attack only by big military forces. Even more, Iran succeeded in occupying the vital city of Iraq and made it difficult for Iraq to cooperate in supplying its forces. The Iran offensive ended on 19th March 1984, after Iraq attacked Iran with chemical weapon, which was Iraq's worst decision.[13]

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[11] Karsh, Efraim. *Opcit.* p.1-8

[12] *Ibid.* p.1-8

[13] http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.htm retrieved on 19th November 2013 08.28 a.m

A.1.2.4 The Tanker War 1984

The tanker war started when Iraq attacked Iran's tanker. Then, Iran counter attacked by attacking the Kuwait tanker that brought the oil for Iraq. The tanker war was the starting point of the direct intervention of the West in this war. Iraq and Iran attacked the oil ships as the basic sources of their national income. As their stance, Iran closed the Hormuz strait to stop oil ships or tankers coming from the other states.[14]

The tanker war had two phases. It happened in 1981 and in 1984. In May 1981, Baghdad as the capital city of Iraq was included in the war zone and warned all ships that passed the zone. All ships that passed the territory of Baghdad must stay away.[15]

The second phase of the tanker war started when Iraq conducted marine operations in March 1984. Before that in 1981, Iraq also conducted marine operations by attacking an Iranian oil base and stopping all tankers that entered or moved from Iran territory. French Super-Etendard combat aircraft armed with Exocet missiles were used by Iraq in 1984 as their arms to expand the operation toward Iran.[16]

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[14] http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.htm. *Opcit.*
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] *Ibid.*

A. The Cause of Conflict

The Iraq-Iran war that ran so long is categorized as a "unique" conflict. The war was much longer and more intense than any previous continental conflict in the region. Because it was long, it was complicated. Two main actors in this conflict, Iran and Iraq, were upholding their national interests which are different, and neither would give in. In summary, three aspects why the war between Iran and Iraq was so complicated have to do with territory, ideology, and too many actors.

B.1.1 Territory

Territory or border dispute was one of main reasons why the war between Iraq and Iran happened. The border between Iran and Iraq has been one of the fault lines of history.[17]

Iraq and Iran both claimed the border. And it must be highlighted that the Shatt Al-Arab would be the main triggering factor in the conflict between Iraq and Iran. It is important to notice that Shatt Al-Arab, the territory that was claimed by both Iran and Iraq, took the form of a river. The Shatt Al-Arab river is located on the south of the Iran-Iraq border. Because this river gives access toward the Persian Gulf it is very important for Iran and Iraq. The source of oil that is located at Shatt Al-Arab was important for them. In addition, it is also important for Iran because

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[17] Hume, Cameron R. *Opcit.* p 25

industry is developed in Abadan and Khoramshahr, which are the cities that are near Shatt Al-Arab.[18]

The negotiations for maintaining Shatt Al-Arab River were so complicated. There were a lot of negotiations that were conducted to find the good decision for both actors, Iraq and Iran. Despite the negotiation in the previous century, between Ottomans and Persians, there were also other negotiations that involved third parties. The other negotiations were facilitated by Britain and Russia that produced the Boundary Protocol in 1913. Even though some negotiations were conducted, the main line of Shatt Al-Arab was located in Eastern Bank. Colonel C.H.D Ryder, a British official, wrote:

> *"The Frontier along the Shatt Al-Arab was the left or Persian bank, and the Commission only had to make a trip down to the mouth of the river to make une acte de presence and mark the frontier line on a map"* [19]

The territory conflict or in other words border dispute between Iran and Iraq concerning the Shatt Al-Arab river was ended by the Algiers Agreement in 1975. The agreement was conducted between Iran and Iraq to settle their border disputes and served as basis for the bilateral treaties signed on 13 June and 26 December 1975. Also known as the "Algiers Accord", the context of agreement between Iran and Iraq is about these 3 points:[20]

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[18] Dodds, Joanna and Ben Watson.*The Iran-Iraq War: Unattainable Objectives.* 2009
[19]Kaikobad, KaiyanHomi. *The Shatt Al Arab Boundary Question : A Legal Reappraisal.* Oxford Clarendon Press. 1988. p 7-8
[20]*Algiers Accord – 1975.*http://www.mideastweb.org/algiersaccord.htm retrieved on 25th November 2013 01.53 p.m

a. End the border dispute by land boundaries according to the Constantinople Protocol of 1913 and the Proceedings of the Border Delimitation Commission of 1914;

b. Mark the boundaries according to the Thalweg line (the median course of the Shatt al-Arab waterway);

c. The two actors (Iraq and Iran) have an obligation to start security cooperation and commit to conduct a strong operation to maintain the border.

Iraq and Iran agreed that the Algiers Accord in 1975 cannot be separated from a comprehensive solution. Both of them also decided to build a good relationship by eliminating all negative factors in their relations and promoting mutual cooperation.[21]

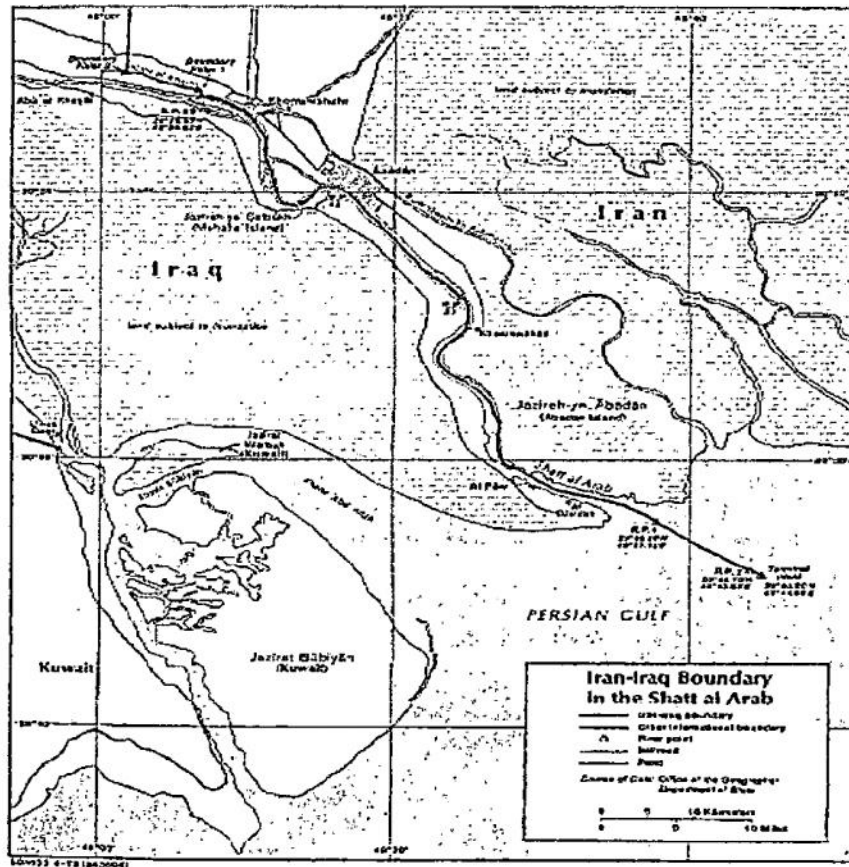[21] *Algiers Accord – 1975. Opcit*

Figure 5 Iran–Iraq boundary along the Shatt al-Arab following the agreements of 1975 (reprinted from *International Boundary* Study no. 164 [Iran–Iraq], United States Departmentof State, p. iii, July 13, 1978).

B.1.2 Ideology

Ideological reasons were also a trigger of conflict between Iran and Iraq. The reason was the conflict between two ideologies in Islam, Sunni and Shia. Sunni represented Iraq and Iran claimed to uphold Shia. The two ideologies that emerged suddenly became conflictual. It was started by the Iranian Revolution in 1979 that made Iraq feel afraid.

The Iranian revolution was also believed to be the root of the conflict between Iraq and Iran. The ideological influences largely contributed to the cause of the war. The Iranian revolution had showed the overthrow of Reza Pahlevi from his governmental throne. A Shia revolution would erase the influence of Ba'athist regime. They claimed to be a secular regime and most of the Ba'athist party was controlled by Sunnis. Even more, the Shia revolutionaries said that they would make revolution in Iraq too. It surprised Saddam Hussein, and Saddam Hussein saw that it was a signal for him. Saddam Hussein's fright was another reason to invade Iran faster.[22]

The emerging of the Iranian revolution made this conflict complicated, as it was not only about borders, and region disputes, but also the most urgent case: ideological influence. In the position of Khomeini as the leader of the Iranian revolution, Shia revolutionaries would give freedom for all the people from oppressed conditions to apply Islamic values purely as the law of the state. On the other hand, the leaders of most countries in the Middle East especially Saddam Hussein were afraid that the power of the Shia revolution would overthrow them.[23]

The Iran military condition at that time was becoming worse. Finally Khomeini took the policy to make every single person in Iran take a military course. Khomeini made all of society militant, so that Iran

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[22] Karsh, Efraim. *Opcit.* p.1-8
[23] *Ibid.* p.1-8

would never run out of troops. This policy finally rejected the assumption of Saddam Hussein when he thought that it would be easier to defeat Iran only in one month because of the unstable condition inside of Iran.[24]

The leader of the Islamic revolution in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, stated that he had a big dream to spread their ideology of revolution in the rest of the Arab region. In the middle of 1980, Khomeini said that Iraq's secular government was designed by Westerners, and Muslim people in Iraq must be united to realize the same revolution like Iran. That statement coming from Khomeini was a response to the statement coming from Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi leader, after the revolution in Iran, that Iran had not successfully taken revenge on the Arabs since Al-Qadisiyah war, the war that took place in the 7th century when the Arabs defeated the Persian kingdom.[25]

B.1.3 Involvement of Third Parties

The involvement of other parties or third parties also influenced the dynamic of the Iraq-Iran war. They had an intention to give support in terms of military or even funding. The third parties in the Iraq-Iran war were the United States and the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union was first involved in the Iraq-Iran war in 1986 with the Tanker War. The Soviet Union tried to send their war ship. That also indicated the interest of the Soviet Union at the Iraq-Iran war. In

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[24] Karsh, Efraim. *Opcit.* p.1-8
[25] *Ibid.* p.1-8

addition, the involvement of the United States made this conflict between

Iran and Iraq complicated. The reason was only one: oil.[26]

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[26] *Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988).* http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/iran-iraq.htm retrieved on 25th November 2013 09.45 a.m