

to provide an escort of warships for eleven Kuwaiti tankers which were already registered under the US flag. Shortly before this the Soviet Union had lent Kuwait several Soviet tankers. Italy, France, Great Britain and the Netherlands backed up the United States by also deploying warships and minesweepers in the area. The fact that Iran has missile launching pads near the Strait of Hormuz, at the entrance to the Gulf, has been a particular source of concern to the Americans. In addition Tehran has stepped up the naval war by making greater use of fast patrol boats armed with missiles and grenade launchers. These developments have led to several encounters in the Gulf between Iran's forces and those of the United States.

The war in the Gulf is fraught with paradoxes and this applies equally to the way in which hostilities have developed. Since 1981 Iraq has proposed a cease-fire on several occasions, and as the years pass these proposals have been accompanied by fewer and fewer conditions. Baghdad has appealed to the UN and to other organizations to act as mediators. Iran, on the other hand, has made any cease-fire conditional on the payment of billions of dollars (US) in reparations, and has also been insisting for some time on the removal of Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein. Iraq's determination to end the war has not prevented it, however, from resorting to tactics which have serious consequences from several points of view. These include its use of chemical weapons³ and its attacks on Iranian cities as well as on the shipping in the Gulf. Given the ill effects of these strategies and the fact that the naval attacks have led to third party intervention, such behaviour can only make any settlement of the conflict all the more difficult to achieve. If Iraq hoped — as some have suggested — to hasten the end of the war by adopting these tactics, then it seems to have failed to appreciate the essential nature of Iran's fundamentalist regime for which a growing number of martyrs serves rather as an incentive to continue the struggle.

THE ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES

Since the war began both Iran and Iraq have tried to obtain arms from a wide variety of sources. In its 1987 annual report the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) lists fifty-three countries as arms suppliers to either Iran or Iraq, of which twenty-eight have delivered arms to both of the two belligerents in the Gulf. Some of these sales, whether of arms or equipment, are open transactions between governments; others take place between private dealers and often their governments are unaware of what is going on. It is clear, therefore, that in this particular conflict the sales of arms do not necessarily correspond to political or ideological sympathies on the part of the suppliers.

Iraq's two main sources of supply are the Soviet Union and France. The former provides mainly fighter planes, tanks, and AAM, ASM, SAM and ALCM missiles,⁴ while France provides various kinds of missiles and *Mirage* F-1 fighters. Other countries which supply Iraq with arms or military equipment include Brazil, Argentina, Egypt, Jordan and Italy. As far as Iran is concerned the transactions involved have less official sanction and are thus more difficult to verify; several of them involve private dealers on the international market. It is known, however, that arms and spare parts manufactured in the Soviet Union are provided by Syria, Libya and North Korea. Iran also buys auxiliary systems and spare parts from Israel and Western Europe in order to supplement an arsenal which includes many items manufactured in the United States. China is now one of its important suppliers, providing Iran with tanks, missiles and planes, although China does not officially admit this.

At the very beginning of the Gulf War the United States declared itself neutral and emphasized its determination to keep the Strait of Hormuz opened. Washington appeared to be abiding by this policy of non-intervention until it was revealed in November 1986 that it had in fact been supplying Iran with arms. It was then discovered that, with the help of Israel, the United States had supplied Iran with twelve million dollars worth of arms over an eighteen-month period. The official reason used by Washington to justify these sales was that the United States was seeking *rapprochement* with the moderates in Iran. It seemed clear that its ultimate objective in improving its relations with Tehran was to obtain the latter's help in securing the liberation of the US hostages in Lebanon. The US deployment of both air and naval forces in the Persian Gulf, which was the object of bitter opposition in the Congress, has added a new dimension to American intervention in this dispute, and if one studies the reasons used by officials to justify this operation one is likely to be skeptical concerning its chances of success. Washington's initiative has not succeeded in discouraging naval attacks in the Gulf; navigation continues to be disrupted and the Arab monarchies feel that there is an even greater threat than before that the conflict will spread. If one tries to draw up a balance sheet of what Washington has lost and gained by this policy, it would seem that the risks of armed conflict with Iran far outweigh any benefits which it derives from increasing its presence in the area. The idea of defending the Persian Gulf and its vital resources was part of the Carter Doctrine which led to the creation of a Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) for the region. The Reagan Administration has continued the project even though it has become more and more expensive.

In 1980 the Soviet Union announced its intention of