

fensive forces on the country's long border with the Soviet Union. Development of improved relations with the latter facilitated important contracts for export of natural gas which had been a wasted by-product of Iranian oil production.

Rocketing revenues following the 1973 oil crisis and the emergence of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries as a powerful bargaining agent were warmly welcomed in Iran. But sudden wealth had disastrous consequences for the national economy. Inflation sent prices soaring. The government was unable to prevent a small minority from monopolizing the inflow of wealth while the mass of the population could see little benefit from it. Profiteering and corruption flourished. Political repression by security police expanded as conscientious critics of the Shah's dictatorial policies combined with the reactionary elements which had opposed the revolution from its beginning to bring pressure on the regime. The Shah's failing health added to his declining effectiveness, seemingly draining his enthusiasm and determination.

The "White Revolution" exposed the Shah to a relentless propaganda campaign abroad inspired by opponents of his reforms. Faults of his regime were magnified and achievements ignored by hostile countrymen who organized anti-Shah demonstrations on the occasion of his state visits to democratic countries. Ironically, the participants usually were students benefitting from the Iranian government's ambitious scholarship programs designed to bring western skills, technology and learning to Iran to accelerate the reform program.

Despite the failure of his "White Revolution" and the Shah's flawed performance in the last years of his reign, critics cannot deny his loyalty to his friends in the West on whom he relied to help defend the independence of his country. The desertion of the Shah by former supporters abroad when he most needed support helped open the Pandora's Box of mischief which led to the hostilities between Iran and Iraq. The refusal of western governments to grant refuge to the Shah when he was dying provided a sorry example of ingratitude and inhumanity.

Power vacuum

The reckless destruction of human life and productive facilities involved in the Iranian-Iraqi warfare, the loss of oil supplies urgently required by an energy-hungry world and the power vacuum in the Gulf provide belated justification for the Shah's costly arms build-up—one of the main targets of his critics in his lifetime. The disastrous decline in Iran's ability to defend its frontiers and maintain normal relationships with its neighbours is attributable directly to the policies of the erratic new regime in Tehran. Internal chaos promoted by them has set back tragically the clock of progress the Shah advanced commendably during his good years.

The Shah returned from a brief exile in 1953 with increased determination to serve his country. The erratic politician, Mohammed Mossadegh, with the enthusiastic assistance of the *Tudeh* (Communist party), had forced him from the throne. Convicted of treason following the Shah's return, the elderly Mossadegh was sentenced to death. The Shah pardoned him. Mossadegh lived out his final years in peace on his estate. Ayatollah Khomeini, the leading Muslim mullah in Iran in 1963, was arrested on a charge of inciting violent opposition to the "White Revolution". The Shah released him, permitting him to seek refuge among his Shi'a brethren in Iraq. His subsequent departure from Iraq is not unrelated to his hostility to Iraq and his regime's efforts to stir up trouble within the Shi'a population there. The sorry contrast between the Shah's leniency toward Mossadegh and Khomeini and the vengeful cleric's relentless pursuit of the dying King and his family has been ignored by the critics of the Shah.

Strategic position

Initial successes of the Iraqi armed forces in penetrating Iranian defences and laying siege to Abadan and Khorramshahr gave promise of an early end to hostilities, but an Iranian population three times as large and a land area four times that of Iraq support Iranian resistance. A strategically superior position in the Gulf waters, based on its control of the shoreline on one side and the islands guarding the Strait of Hormuz at the entrance of the waterway is another factor in Iran's favor. The Shah's earlier decision to occupy the unguarded islands now provides the hard-pressed Tehran regime with a decisive card in regard to shipping, entering and leaving the Gulf. The Iranian naval force in the Gulf, which appears to have been purged of its command personnel less drastically than Iranian land and air forces, should prove capable of keeping the inferior Iraqi navy in check. Iranian resources for defensive warfare and the fanaticism of the revolutionaries suggest the probability of a drawn-out struggle ending indecisively when both Iran and Iraq have exhausted energy and supplies.

Prolongation of the warfare on any scale would spell economic disaster and possible political upheaval for both sides. Oil exports from Iran have already been reduced to a trickle. Iraqi exports would virtually cease if Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz to ships carrying exports from and imports to Iraq. The dangers call for realism, logic and the spirit of conciliation which have been sorely lacking in the Middle East since the establishment of the state of Israel. The outlook for stability in an area vital to western interests becomes gloomier with every day of battle and the threats of direct involvement of the super-powers become more menacing.