

GLOBAL TURMOIL IN THE 1990's

Pax Americana, Iran, and the Future

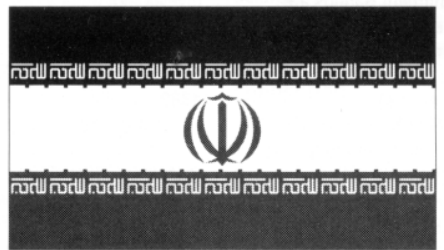
BY MARK HERMAN AND DAVID MARKOV

This is *C3i's* first column on military flashpoints and conflicts in today's world. It is designed to give you analysis and useful information on subjects that may appear as future games from GMT or in new scenarios or modules for existing GMT games.

As the end of the Twentieth Century looms on the horizon, the geo-political landscape has become both familiar and uncertain with the abrupt conclusion of the Cold War. I submit that this recent geo-political cycle began with the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand in July 1914 and ended with the reunification of Germany on October 3, 1989. During this period we have seen global Eurocentric power, as characterized by the *Pax Britannica*, dissipate to be replaced by multiple power centers with only one Superpower. It is this period of a new world order that I will label the *Pax Americana*.

From a US perspective, the bilateral nature of the Cold War obscured and molded our perceptions of regional conflicts into the broader context of our Post World War II struggle with Communism. For all its dangers, the US-Soviet confrontation brought a certain stability to many regions of the world. Each side's allies vied with their traditional regional opponents to manipulate the East West confrontation to further their long term political objectives. The pragmatic side of our foreign policy indulged this practice if it furthered our political objectives *vis-a-vis* the Soviets. Now, looking at the world through a different lens, with a new and evolving set of political objectives, we see many regions of the world violently adjusting to the overnight removal of Superpower restraints.

This new *C3i* column is intended to examine those areas of the globe where America and the UN may be required to employ military forces. The focus will be on the military issues that will dominate



a US power projection into various regional conflicts based on my own personal assessment of the unique characteristics that will dominate the situation. The column will not make determinations on the rightness of such conflicts or devolve into polemics, but will instead focus as dispassionately as possible on the military dimensions of such confrontations.

Although I will write the column, I will be collaborating with a colleague of mine, David Markov, whose extraordinary knowledge of the new arms bazaar and military issues will be a significant portion of this column.

As a last point, I want to make it clear that the opinions and analysis in this column are my own and are not endorsed by anybody.

This first column will look at an evolving world phenomena and one of its leading actors as it unfolds. What I am obliquely alluding to is Islamic Fundamentalism

and Iran. With the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, Iran finds itself transformed from the neighbor of an atheist secular state into one adjacent to several Islamic republics looking to divorce themselves from Moscow's control. Fueling her vision of Islamic leadership are the Iranian oil reserves. What makes Iran truly dangerous, in a way that Iraq never was, is its theocratic oligarchy which will survive any near term change in its top leadership.

Therefore, unlike Iraq under Hussein, Iran has long term political objectives that will endure. This is not to say that Persian Shiite leadership is acceptable to Arab Sunni Muslims, but there are many Muslims in the world who are not Arab. If a military resurgence of Islam on a scale with the 7th and 8th centuries is to occur, then accommodations to the realities of the 21st century will have to be made.

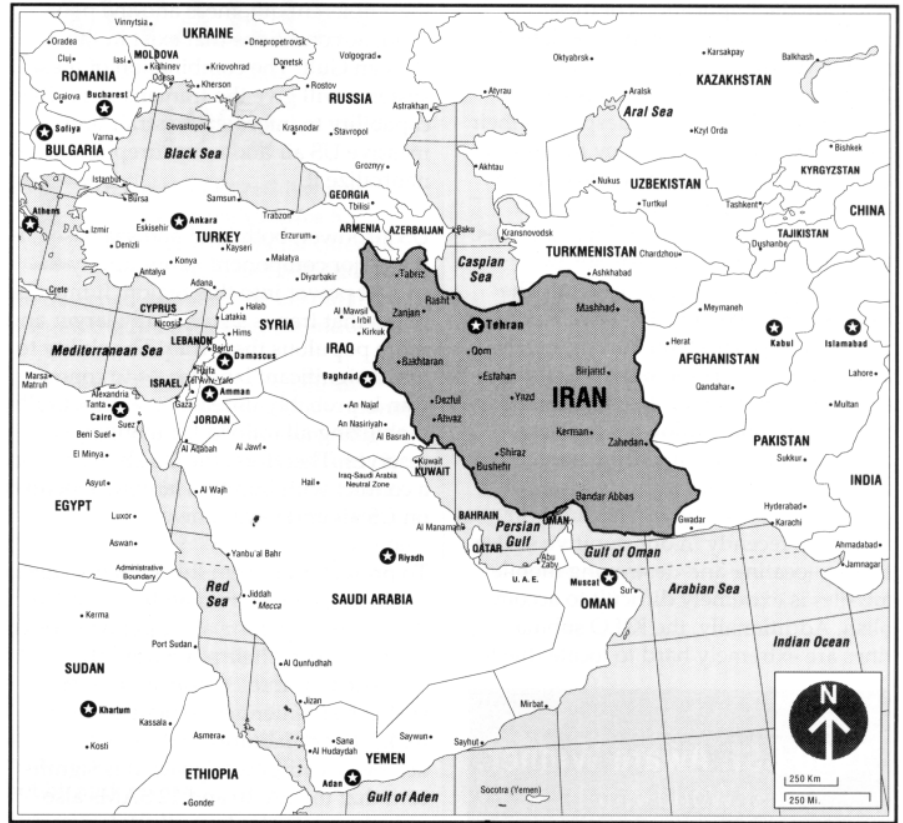
Military power is the final arbiter of conflicting policy objectives. Iran understands this principle and is moving to reestablish itself as a regional superpower. What makes this uniquely dangerous to the US and the West is the proximity of this emerging power to over 50% of the world's known oil reserves. One of the key lessons that the Third World learned from *Operation Desert Storm* is that you do not get into a conflict with the US without nuclear weapons. Although unconfirmed rumors abound that Iran has already acquired a small number of low yield nuclear warheads from Islamic republics in the

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Soviet Union, it is only a matter of time until they have a small inventory of such devices. Therefore we begin this analysis with the assumption that they wouldn't get into a head-to-head confrontation with the US and the world community without them.

What is the implication of Iran possessing a small inventory of nuclear weapons? I believe the answer lies in understanding how this type of weapon would be used to aid Iran in achieving its political objectives. Without saying what those objectives might be, the introduction of US forces can *a priori* be stated to be in direct opposition to Iranian interests. Nuclear weapons, except in two instances, have been used as shields not swords. It has been the threatened use of nuclear weapons which has constrained and modified the potential outcomes from past Cold War confrontations. Therefore these types of weapons could be used to prevent any request for US intervention by threatening our allies, thus removing any legal status from subsequent US military actions. Next, if this did not work, then these weapons could hold the oilfields themselves at risk, which would be the reason the US would use military power in the first place. Although oilfield fires can be extinguished, as occurred in Kuwait, the radiation and the extent of the damage would significantly complicate that effort. Regardless of how the nuclear damage might be repaired, the risk is real and the long term disruption of the international oil market would have major ramifications for the global economy, according to current predictions. Essentially, the US is faced with the conundrum of whether it can even use military power to achieve its policy objectives in this type of scenario.

Proceeding from the political issues which could prevent our using military force against Iran, what are the military issues? Iran could use an array of military weapons to delay US force insertion. By delaying US force insertion timelines, they would hope that they could control the broad outlines of the conflict and perhaps discourage the formation of a UN coalition against



them. We can presume for the near term that the Iranians will be limited in the types of targets against which they could use their nuclear and conventional weapons. Mobile, over-the-horizon targets will be hard to attack unless the Iranians can gain some level of Sea and Air Superiority, but strikes against fixed targets would be within their capabilities to achieve. Likely targets become Diego Garcia or forward deployed US heavy equipment (POMCUS) sites in GCC (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, and Oman) countries upon which early US force insertion depends. Alternate targets would be the GCC support infrastructure which *Desert Storm* utilized (Ports, Airfields, Water Purification, and Fuel) to significantly speed up our deployment timelines. Lastly, they could interdict the Strait of Hormuz to force us to cross overland to reach the Gulf and significantly complicate our logistical support problems.

Focus on Iran:

The Iran-Iraq War began as a dispute over the Shatt al-Arab waterway on Sept. 22, 1980. The War ended when Iran agreed to a UN resolution cease fire in August 1988. A comparison of populations finds Iraq at nearly 19 million, and Iran at over 55 million.

Given these broad strategic outlines, what kinds of weapon systems have the Iranians been buying? David Markov states that Iran has concluded a \$2 billion arms deal with Russia to buy: Twelve TU-22M *Backfire* bombers, 48 MiG-29 *Fulcrum*, 24 MiG-31 *Foxhound* long range interceptors, 24 MiG-27 *Flogger* attack aircraft, 3 KILO diesel submarines, S300V (SA-12 *Giant/Gladiator* strategic SAM), the S-300PMU1 (SA-10C *Grumble* strategic SAM missile), the BOUK (SA-11 *Gladfly* tactical SAM missile), and unknown quantities of advanced Self-Propelled air defense gun systems.

Global Turmoil

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What are the implications of these purchases? At one level, the Iranians need to replace their aging US and Western inventory of weapons with a new source. However, if despite all their efforts the US were to deploy forces into the region, they would need to oppose that deployment directly and defend themselves from US air and naval forces. To this end, their new weapons purchases make a great deal of sense. The KIL0 submarines and TU-22M *Backfire* bombers augment their current inventory of Chinese cruise missiles (*Silkworm* and C-801) and mines. In combination, these units should allow them to close off the Strait of Hormuz from commercial traffic and place military forces at great risk. As we saw in the Gulf War and more recently in our punitive strikes in Iraq, locating and destroying mobile missiles is extremely difficult to accomplish. Additionally, the KIL0 submarines are extremely hard to locate due to

their inherent quietness and the poor acoustic conditions that exist in the Persian Gulf. The combination of these systems will give the Iranians a credible capability to interdict the strait until massive US air and naval firepower can neutralize it.

US airpower, both land and sea based, is the major component in our ability to project power into this region. It must be noted that Iran is significantly larger and more populous than Iraq. The ability to insert significant land forces to conquer Iran is probably unrealistic without fully mobilizing all trained US manpower reserves. Therefore, the US ability to win a conflict with Iran will largely depend on US air and naval power.

To protect itself from this known threat, the Iranians need a capability to prevent the US from gaining air superiority over their country. Their purchases of advanced air interceptors and SAM systems are intended to neutralize or make it very painful for the US to achieve its air power goals. It is significant that the SA-10 and 12 SAMs also give them a limited missile defense capability. The MiG-31's have a look-down, shoot-down capability against cruise missiles. They may also be intended to provide a mobile airborne radar net whereby four MiG-31's flying in a dispersed formation using advanced data transfer can take over the role from the old F-14's in their inventory. This capability would reduce their overall reliance on GCI (ground control intercept). The combination of these systems would restrict the US to using its limited inventory of advanced systems (F-15E, F-117, and B-2) early in a conflict until these advanced air defense systems are neutralized.

In addition to these purchases, there will be an array of advanced armor systems to augment their ground forces and give them regional power projection capabilities to threaten the GCC countries. A significant development in this area would be the purchase of additional naval and air lift assets, which has not yet occurred. Without a significant augmentation in their current logistic lift assets, the ability of Iran to project land

forces any significant distance from its borders will remain outside of their projected capabilities.

Overall, Iran is on the path to significantly augmenting their military capabilities. Technology, though, is a means to an end, not the end itself. The Iranians still show a deficiency in integrating and using this technology as a coherent system of weapons in a manner like the US does. US doctrine is predicated on breaking a large military system into smaller and smaller units and then destroying the individual pieces. The Iranians will have significant problems in preventing the US from achieving these military objectives. Interestingly, a lesson from our recent past gives us a warning for our potential future. It has recently come to light that, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, seven *Luna* tactical nuclear weapons (FROG series) were placed under local command authority due to poor communications and were outside of the control of Moscow, unlike the larger ballistic missiles. If the US had invaded Cuba, it is likely that a nuclear detonation would have occurred and then it is anyone's guess what would have happened next. Our doctrine of dismembering our opponents' C3i capability could mean that Iran's postulated nuclear inventory might be controlled outside of Iranian central authority, with an unknown set of failsafe procedures. We could find ourselves in a situation whereby some local Iranian commander has his hand on a nuclear button. Where that would lead is also anyone's guess.

To close this first column, I am reminded about an Athenian stone stele from the Peloponnesian War period in Greece. It stated, "The following men of the tribe Erechtheis died in the war in the same year in Cyprus, in Egypt, in Phoenicia, in Halieis, in Aegina, and in Megara." It is conceivable that there could someday exist a memorial to the Post Cold War era, "the following men of the United States of America died in the same year in Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq..."

