

The United States Is Unlikely to Desire Conflict with a Formidable Iran

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The failure of the American-led occupation of Iraq has surely not been forgotten in Washington. Against by all accounts a much depleted enemy in Baghdad, America's military and civilian branches were unable to maintain authority in an Iraqi state already devastated by years of Western sanctions prior to the March 2003 invasion.

As the Pentagon finally completed its withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011, they had failed to attain their objectives and, most worryingly, Iraq was developing closer relations with Iran; which had more than a touch of irony to it, and was a disastrous scenario for those in the US capital.

When examining the Middle East nations of Iran or Iraq, it may be important to note that these neighbours are both laden with natural minerals, while they are furthermore located in strategically crucial territories: Among the most important in the world in fact.

Resource-plenty Central Asia lies to the north of Iran and Iraq, with its sprawling, largely uninhabited grasslands and mountains. Situated to the east are Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, further important states, two of which are nuclear-armed. To the south is Saudi Arabia, the biggest oil producer on the planet, and a US ally for the past 75 years.

Iran and Iraq contain the fourth and fifth largest proven oil reserves in the world respectively. Control of these two countries would place a power like the United States in a particularly strong global position. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former US National Security Advisor, noted after the Iraq invasion that command over the Middle East would [allow the White House to have](#) "politically critical leverage on the European and Asian economies that are also dependent on energy exports from the region".

Iran itself lies astride the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. The Persian Gulf constitutes the earth's biggest source of petroleum – while the Gulf is also home to the world's largest offshore oilfield, Safaniya, which was discovered in 1951 and is controlled by Saudi Arabia.

The Persian Gulf nations, which further include Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE, contain almost 66% of the planet's entire crude oil reserves, and over a third of our globe's natural gas sources; ensuring that these areas have been sought after by imperial planners for generations. There are almost 40,000 American soldiers stationed in the above four Persian Gulf states, along with an array of high-tech US machinery and weaponry. In recent months, America has also increased its military presence in Persian Gulf waters, sending a message to Tehran.

The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow and shallow body of water straddling southern Iran, is

likewise of extreme importance. Almost 25% of the world's oil supplies are shipped through this channel. The Strait has been the scene of escalating tensions between Iran and the Western powers of Britain and America. Tehran has threatened to close the Strait to foreign shipping in the unwanted event of military confrontation with America.

The Strait of Hormuz is controlled by Iran's Revolutionary Guard, which by itself provides Tehran with a measure of clout in international affairs. US personnel are permanently stationed within 300 to 400 miles of the Strait of Hormuz: For example in the shape of the famous United States Fifth Fleet, which is based in nearby Bahrain to the west and has an extensive history dating to 1944, as Japanese war veterans may remember.

Vice Admiral Jim Malloy, current commander of the US Fifth Fleet, said in May 2019 that he is "not restricted in any way" towards sending his carrier strike group, USS Abraham Lincoln, through the Strait of Hormuz if required. "I'm not challenged in any way, to operate her anywhere in the Middle East", Malloy said during a telephone interview.

Iran is a country much criticised in the West, by political and media figures. Yet the fact is, rarely mentioned, that Iran [has not been forgiven](#) for removing itself from US control when in early 1979 the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was overthrown by a popular uprising.

The Shah himself, a brutal autocrat, was given dictatorial powers in August 1953 by a US-British designed coup d'état, which ousted Iran's democratically elected leader, Mohammad Mossadegh. Prime minister Mossadegh had nationalised Iran's oil reserves in March 1951, setting off alarm bells in London and Washington.

The Shah's family history was already that of a chequered one. His father Reza Shah Pahlavi, who died in 1944, enjoyed warm relations with Hitler, and the Nazi leader even dispatched a signed portrait to him in March 1936, separately describing the Iranians as "pure Aryans". Summarising the links between the Shah's father and the Nazis, in early August 1941 [Hitler had said](#), "If there is anyone who is praying for the success of our arms, it must be the Shah of Persia. As soon as we drop in on him, he'll have nothing more to fear from England".

Meanwhile, in the post-1979 years, Tehran has continuously pursued policies independent of Washington. Iran is therefore classed as a threat to "stability" and "regional security".

Iran is clearly something of a challenge to US hegemony in the Middle East. Iranian leaders have indeed developed a closer partnership with Iraq, as one could expect from bordering countries that are religiously (Shi'ite) and culturally linked. The Iranians have involved themselves in the wars in Yemen and Syria, acting against the interests of Western powers.

Across the Persian Gulf, growing Iranian influence could even result in a full-blown revolt in the east of Saudi Arabia (the Eastern Province) – where lies most of Saudi Arabia's oil reserves, and in which there has been a history of social unrest. The Eastern Province is home to millions of Saudis of Shi'ite faith, who have been repressed by the despotic nature of the Saudi regime, whose branch of Islam is that of the Sunni faith.

Iranian society remains a somewhat suppressed one, but is appreciably less so than it was under the Shah's reign. Human rights violations by comparison to Iran are significantly worse in Saudi Arabia.

One of the core reasons behind the invasion of Iraq was not as professed in disarming “weapons of mass destruction”; but rather its aim was to institute an American-friendly government that would allow Washington leverage over Iraq’s great oil wells.

In early April 2003, less than three weeks after the US intervention against Iraq began, America’s National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice said [in a press conference](#),

“But I would just caution that Iraq is not East Timor, or Kosovo, or Afghanistan. Iraq is unique”.

Iraq is a major prize, but the US occupation fell to pieces as the country descended into virtual civil war, with sectarian bitterness greatly increasing due to the actions of foreign troops. Following 2003, the Shi’ite majority came to the fore in Iraq, which perfectly suited Shi’ite-dominated Iran to the east. The war in Iraq cost the US government up to \$2 trillion dollars, much of it in vain.

Once Saddam Hussein fled Baghdad in the opening days of April 2003, the George W. Bush administration had little inkling of the difficulties that lay ahead. A mere few weeks after the invasion began president Bush said that, “In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed”. Yet it was only the beginning.

Due to emerging popular unrest among the Iraqi population against the occupying powers, Western multinational corporations were unable to invest in Iraq – despite the Bush administration promising in November 2007 that their government was “encouraging the flow of foreign investments to Iraq, especially American investments”. In the face of increasing Iraqi resistance, a couple of months later the Pentagon had to abandon even this central hope.

Considering the difficulties that America experienced in Iraq, a potential war with Iran would be much more arduous. In terms of landmass, Iran is almost four times larger than Iraq, and it also has a far bigger population now containing over 80 million people.

Iran is also one of the world’s most mountainous countries, with a varying climate ranging from freezing cold in the winter to baking hot in the summer. These factors bring with it a unique set of challenges for any leading power attempting to tackle Iran. The Iranian military is also larger, has superior morale and is better equipped than that which faced America in Iraq.

Iran furthermore has friends in lofty places, such as with regard to China and Russia. Iran’s largest trading partner is the rising China. Approximately 100 major Chinese companies are embedded in Iran’s economy, especially pertaining to the latter’s natural resources and transportation districts.

Amid the decline of Western business in Iran due to growing US financial measures, Chinese corporations have been exploiting Iran’s oil and gas fields. China is defying American sanctions against Iran by continuing to import oil from the Middle East state, and last month China [promised to invest](#) almost \$300 billion in Tehran’s oil, gas and petrochemical divisions. Iran is also a member of the ambitious Chinese-led programs, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Tehran has developed lasting ties with Russia too, forming a military understanding with the

Kremlin in Syria during recent years, by providing crucial support to president Bashar al-Assad – and working alongside Moscow in restricting US influence in Central Asia and inevitably the Middle East. Russia has for years been an important trading partner of Iran, and investments between the countries is rising again, having grown by almost 25% for the first seven months of 2019, reaching well over a billion dollars.

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