

bothering about the Russians!
 Another important distortion was on the role of the Church. While it is true that the Church occupies a very important position, and many workers are religious, this should not surprise socialists. Where there is poverty and oppress-



GULF WAR

Union Place Collective

The border conflict between Iran and Iraq began before I was in Iran in the Spring, and threatened to explode while I was there. Iran was accusing Iraq of supporting the Kurdish struggle for autonomy, and of inciting the Arabs in the oil region of Khuzestan. Iraq was accusing the Islamic revolutionaries in Iran of inciting the large Shi'ite population to rise up against its government in Iraq. Khomeini lived in Iraq for 15 years of exile and retains considerable support among the Kurds there.

It seemed then that the war could start at any moment or that the tension could continue to simmer for years without ever reaching boiling point. Both had justifiable grievances, both feared the other's capacity to retaliate.

What prompted the war to start when it did? The Iraqi regime saw the Iranian regime's popularity declining both at home and around

the Arab world; it saw the Iranian armed forces in disarray and unable to cope with the war in Kurdistan; and its power-hungry leader, Saddam Hussein, saw an ideal opportunity to topple the Khomeini regime, to boost his own prestige in the region and to win back territory lost to Iran five years ago.

The territory, around the Shatt-al'Arab, was not the main issue

initially. Though its loss — a bargain struck with the Shah in 1975 to win his support against the Iraqi Kurds—has been an inconvenience, it has not stopped Iraq becoming the second main OPEC exporter of oil, nor rapidly developing its economy.

CONFLICTING AMBITIONS

More important were the ambitions of the new Iraqi elite, led by Hussein, which rose to power last year through the ruthless suppression of both Governmental and mass opposition, and now sits prettily at the helm of one of the most dynamic economies in the region. Their political ideology leans neither to Washington nor to Moscow; their ambitions aim high, seeking as they do to extend their power and influence and to replace the Shah's Iran as the policeman of the rich and vulnerable Gulf.

Nevertheless, the plan looks like misfiring. For the Iranian regime has ambitions too, including the overthrow of all non-Shi'ite Moslems by fellow Shi'ites inspired by the Iranian example. If this ambition had sagged of late, it is now revived in a desperate bid to reunite the people around an ailing regime that is increasingly unable to cope.

Though Iran's armed forces have lost strength and firepower since the days of the Shah, they are still a force to be reckoned with. The airforce, in particular, has been able to wreak considerable damage on Iraqi oil centres.

FRAGILE REGIMES

The Iranian counterattack has thwarted Iraqi plans to topple

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The Peruvian women's group, the Manuela Ramos movement,

Khomeini's regime, and probably helped to strengthen it. Hussein now faces the prospect of being toppled himself, and it is hardly surprising that he has opted for peace negotiations at a time when he still has the upper hand, and the chance of gaining territory.



Khomeini, if he sees the chance of toppling Hussein, will want to pursue the war, confident as ever as to the rightness of his cause. But he, too, will have to call a halt at some point, as oil is the only real source of revenue for his regime, and discontent is high enough already as a result of economic sanctions and revolutionary disarray.

For the West, it has been a harrowing experience. After the early

hoping of the Khomeini regime being toppled and replaced by Iranian exiles standing by in Iraq, the Western Governments have concerned themselves primarily with the threat to oil supplies. 'Public opinion' has been drummed up in the States to accept an attack by America's special imperialist strike force should Arab oil exports be blocked, and the news here has been full of gold price rises and the burning oil refineries. Arab and Iranian deaths, it seems, count for nothing.

These cards are available at 20 pence each from: Peruvian Women's Support Group, c/o 40, Binley Road, Stoke, COVENTRY.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Any account of the Gulf war will be incomplete since there are new developments from day to day. At the time of going to press it looks as though the major Arab states are poised on the brink of increased intervention. Already, according to a report in the Guardian, Jordanian, Saudi and Kuwaiti troops have become involved in small numbers. Jordan has already mobilized troops at the Iraqi rear, thus releasing Iraqi battalions for the fighting around the Shatt al'Arab. On the Iranian side Syria appears to be gearing up for some possible military involvement.

It is becoming more and more clear that the Gulf war is not a simple issue of conflicting Iraqi-Iranian ambitions. The Arab-Persian antipathy and the problem of control of the balance of power in the Middle East seem now to be escalating into a full-scale and protracted conflict.

Written by Ben Johnson, who has recently returned from Iran.