

The New Republic
April 27, 1987

Daniel Pipes and Laurie Mylroie
Argue for military assistance
to Saddam Hussein

It's time for a U.S. 'tilt.'

BACK IRAQ

IRANIAN TROOPS entrenched in southern Iraq threaten more than Basra, Iraq's second largest city. They challenge the entire political order of the Middle East. The fall of the existing regime in Iraq would enormously enhance Iranian influence, endanger the supply of oil, threaten pro-American regimes throughout the area, and upset the Arab-Israeli balance.

And now we know that, for over a year, the United States was secretly helping the wrong side. HAWK missiles sold to Iran blunted the effectiveness of the Iraqi air force, Baghdad's most important offensive force. This permitted more Iranian oil exports, which will bring in the revenue Iran needs to purchase new weapons. TOW anti-tank missiles and spare parts for F-4 aircraft added significantly to Iran's offensive capability. Furthermore, the Reagan administration's breach of its own arms embargo on Iran opened the door for other nations to cut arms deals with Iran. The equipment they have sent increases the Ayatollah's chances for victory.

American actions also helped to legitimize other kinds of help for, and capitulation to, the Ayatollah. Premier Jacques Chirac of France recently bought back two French hostages by repaying \$333 million of a loan the Shah had

made to France. Even Saudi Arabia, generally seen as an Iraqi ally, is hedging its bets by helping Iran. After firing Sheikh Yamani, the oil minister unwilling to appease Iran, the Saudis endorsed a 20 percent rise in oil prices eagerly sought by Iran. Meanwhile, international lenders, taking their cue from the covert U.S. dealings with Iran, are shying away from Iraq.

Far from bolstering American influence, our craven hostage-ransoming made the United States an object of derision in Tehran. The "Black House," Iran's leaders credibly assert, begged for relations with the Islamic Republic. Of course, the Iranian rulers are trying to cover their own embarrassment at having dealt with the "Great Satan." But the United States was dealing on Tehran's terms (there are more U.S. hostages in Lebanon now than when the deal began), and the contempt of Iranian radicals seems perfectly justified. More than ever, they believe that they can manipulate American policy and politics. By showing that the United States would allow itself to be suckered into helping reduce the costs of the war to Iran, the U.S. arms sales discouraged those Iranians who want to give up the export of the revolution, end the war, and rebuild their country.

REAGAN'S BID for renewed influence in Iran exposed a profound and chronic misunderstanding of the forces that shape the foreign policy of revolutionary regimes in the Middle East. American politicians persistently delude themselves that goodwill toward a hostile government will lead to friendly relations. But radicals instinctively hate the West. They feel threatened by its wealth, its rule of law, and its democratic procedures. Political necessity also drives radical governments to adopt postures of militant opposition toward the West. To undercut the political base of the old regime and build support for their own, revolutionaries must take on foreign elements identified with the old regime.

Indeed, Reagan's experience with Khomeini recalls previous failed efforts to conciliate Mideast radicals. American leaders initially saw Nasser's overthrow of a pro-Western but decadent monarchy in Egypt as a boost for U.S. interests. As an "authentic nationalist," he would make peace with Israel and help contain the Soviets, or so it was thought. During the Suez crisis in 1956, the United States forced its allies France, Britain, and Israel out of Egypt to save Nasser. Nasser returned the favor by making himself the champion of militant anti-Americanism, the leading Arab enemy of Israel, and eventually the Soviets' main ally in the Middle East. Thirteen years later, when Muammar al-Qaddafi overthrew the politically dormant regime of Libyan King Idris, the U.S. government welcomed the fervent young officer. It encouraged American oil companies to accommodate his demands for price hikes and to accede to their nationalization. Washington even intervened to frustrate a coup against Qaddafi. Now we know what a blunder that was.

The bid to appease Khomeini's regime was almost predictable. How can we undo the damage? President Rea-

gan's efforts to reimpose the arms embargo on Iran are a first step. Yet Reagan still needs to renounce unambiguously the entire policy that was adopted as well as the geopolitical thinking that he claims lay behind it—and he has yet publicly to revoke the intelligence finding that permitted the arms sales to Iran.

But recovering our lost standing in the region takes more than undoing a mistake. The United States must take clear military, economic, and political steps to demonstrate that it opposes the appeasement of Iran and considers an Iranian victory inimical to Western interests.

Ironically, helping Iraq militarily may offer the best way for Washington to regain its position in Tehran. The American weapons that Iraq could make good use of include remotely scatterable and anti-personnel mines, and counterartillery radar. Indeed, Baghdad has already expressed an interest in purchasing American arms, but Washington rejected both the Iraqis' request for C-130 cargo aircraft and a Jordanian proposal to let the Iraqis use King Hussein's U.S.-made counterartillery radar. The Reagan administration still does not seem to understand that, although Khomeini's men will never love us, they could be made to fear us. Only when the Ayatollah begins to worry about Washington will he try to win its favor. Thwarting Iran's war effort is the best way to strengthen the forces of moderation in Tehran.

The United States might also consider upgrading intelligence it is supplying to Baghdad to balance the military damage done to Iraq by the arms-for-hostage swap. We now know that the United States has been providing Iraq with information on Iranian troop concentrations and damage assessments of Iraqi attacks on Iranian targets. It's good this news is out; it gives the Ayatollah pause.

CURRENTLY the United States provides Iraq with commodity credits worth \$500 million annually. Repayment terms could be eased. Opening a line of export-import credits was discussed early in 1986; the United States backed down at the time, but should move forward now. Other economic steps (such as reducing tariffs on Iraqi goods) should be explored as well. Such measures would assert U.S. confidence in Iraq's political viability and its ability to repay its debts after the war's end, and would encourage other countries—especially Iraq's Arab allies and European creditors—to continue financing Iraqi war efforts.

The United States and its European allies should mount a sustained campaign to isolate Iran. Last year's efforts against Libya for its support of terrorism can serve as a model. The arms embargo needs to be resurrected with real determination. But it is not only the lack of weapons that makes Iran vulnerable. Iran imports up to 250,000 barrels per day of gasoline, kerosene, and other refined petroleum products, most of which goes straight to the battlefield. A large part of this comes from Saudi Arabia via Abu Dhabi. Pressure on the Saudis from America, Europe, and the Middle East could shut off this key source of supplies.

Some will say the United States should simply pull back

and have nothing to do with either side in the Gulf war. Although it's true that we've bungled our prior involvement, the conflict is too important to ignore. At stake is the possible resurgence of anti-American fundamentalist Islam, the security of Western access to Persian Gulf oil, and potential Soviet predominance in the region. Abdication is not a responsible choice. Many argue that a tilt to Iraq might drive the Iranians into the Soviet Union's arms, yet the Iranian leadership has its own reasons for keeping its distance from Moscow. The Iranians need the United States more than the United States needs Iran, although American cravenness has given Iranian officials the opposite impression.

A MORE SERIOUS argument against a tilt toward Iraq is the danger that a victorious Baghdad would itself turn against pro-American states in the region—mainly Israel, but also Kuwait and other weak states in the Persian Gulf region. Under Saddam Hussein, Iraq has a history of anti-Americanism, anti-Zionism, support for terrorism, and friendliness toward the Soviet Union.

But the Iranian revolution and seven years of bloody and inconclusive warfare have changed Iraq's view of its Arab neighbors, the United States, and even Israel. Iraq restored relations with the United States in November 1984. Its leaders no longer consider the Palestinian issue their problem. Iraq's allies since 1979 have been those states—Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco—most threatened by revolutionary upheaval, most friendly to the United States, and most open to negotiations with Israel. These allies have forced a degree of moderation on Iraq, as Baghdad's silence about the recent meeting between Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres conspicuously showed. Iraq is now the de facto protector of the regional status quo. Iran, the revolutionary state, is more likely to turn its weapons against Israel. It already has 1,000 troops in Lebanon—its so-called "Golan brigade."

The main point is to repair the damage done by the Reagan administration's covert U.S. tilt toward Iran. If our tilt toward Iraq is reciprocated, moreover, it could lay the basis for a fruitful relationship in the longer term. For example, the United States might push for restoration of full diplomatic relations between Iraq and Egypt. Iraqi recognition of Cairo, with whom it has been cooperating since the beginning of the Gulf war anyway, would further legitimize the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and enhance its stability. With the easing of its Arab isolation, Egypt would then feel more confident about improving ties with Israel. This is what Washington should promote, instead of pursuing the chimera of improved relations with Iranian moderates.

DANIEL PIPES AND LAURIE MYLROIE

Daniel Pipes is director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia. Laurie Mylroie is assistant professor of government at Harvard University.