

## Political and Strategic Issues in the Gulf, by Dr. Sayed Hassan Amin

Gary S. Samore

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/mjil>



Part of the [International Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Gary S. Samore, *Political and Strategic Issues in the Gulf*, by Dr. Sayed Hassan Amin, 9 Md. J. Int'l L. 261 (1985).

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/mjil/vol9/iss2/14>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UM Carey Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maryland Journal of International Law by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UM Carey Law. For more information, please contact [smccarty@law.umaryland.edu](mailto:smccarty@law.umaryland.edu).

**POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC ISSUES IN THE GULF.** By Dr. Sayed Hassan Amin. Glasgow, Scotland: Royston Limited, 1984, 327 pp., \$46.95 (cloth), \$29.95 (paper).

When the 1973 Arab-Israeli War disrupted oil supplies and increased oil prices, the West focused its concerns on the Persian Gulf as an unstable area vital to Western interests. Subsequent crises increased these concerns. The overthrow of the Shah in the 1978-79 revolution in Iran removed America's most powerful ally in the region and raised doubts about the domestic stability of remaining allies, such as the royal family of Saudi Arabia. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979 aroused fears of an impending Soviet military thrust to capture Iranian oil fields. Iraq's invasion of Iran in late 1980 directly threatened oil supplies and posed the danger that a victory by either Ba'athist Iraq or revolutionary Iran would leave the Gulf at the mercy of a dominant regional power fundamentally hostile to Western interests.

Thus far, the worst case scenarios have not materialized. The Saudi royal family still rules in Riyadh. Soviet forces are bogged down in the mountains of Afghanistan. Iran and Iraq are trapped in a grinding war of attrition and stalemate. Changes in international oil markets have temporarily removed the sting of OPEC and the Persian Gulf producers. Nonetheless, the Persian Gulf remains an area of important economic and strategic concerns, where the combination of domestic instabilities, regional conflicts, and superpower rivalries creates a frothy brew for future crises.

Western attention on the Persian Gulf since 1973 has produced a series of books which recycle the same basic set of facts, conventional wisdom, and generalizations about the region. Despite its title, *Political and Strategic Issues in the Gulf* is basically a primer on the politics of the Persian Gulf, combined with a more detailed look at selected issues of international law. As a primer, the book is geared for those with no previous knowledge of the area. Dr. Amin surveys the domestic politics of the Gulf countries, regional conflicts in the Middle East, and the policies of the big powers (U.S., U.S.S.R., and the U.K.) in the region.<sup>1</sup> There is a very complete bibliography.

To his credit, Dr. Amin maintains a balanced and objective tone, but his survey is extremely limited and superficial. There is no conceptual framework, original analysis, or penetrating insight. For example, the entire conclusion to the chapter on "Conflicts and Wars in the Gulf" reads:

---

1. The Gulf countries which Dr. Amin covers are Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman, and PDRY (South Yemen).

There have been several instances of armed conflicts in the Gulf and Middle East regions in the past two decades. The major conflicts are the Iran-Iraq War and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Neither of these two conflicts is likely to disappear completely in the foreseeable future.

This is accurate as far as it goes, but it does not go very far.

The book also commits a number of factual errors. When discussing Saudi Arabia, for example, Dr. Amin reports that the present monarch, King Fahd, ascended to the throne upon the death of his brother Khalid in 1980. In fact, King Khalid died on 13 June 1982. More seriously, Dr. Amin asserts that "by the mid-1980s Iran will have available the technology for acquiring at least a rudimentary nuclear weapon capability." However, this reviewer believes that Iran is still at least several decades away from building a bomb for Khomeini and Allah.

Dr. Amin, a Reader in Law at Glasgow College of Technology, is more at home when he reviews cases of international law. There is an original and interesting chapter on regional efforts to control pollution in the waters of the Persian Gulf. In addition, Dr. Amin provides a succinct and useful summary of legal issues involved in various border disputes and the establishment of territorial and jurisdictional zones in the Persian Gulf. As Dr. Amin correctly points out, the origin, development, and outcome of these disputes are less a matter of legal arguments than one of broader political forces. For example, the longstanding dispute between Iran and Iraq over the Shatt al-Arab river is a function of national and ideological rivalries between Tehran and Baghdad to become the dominant regional power. Similarly, Dr. Amin's discussion of the "Constitutional and Legislative Structures in the Gulf" is necessarily limited because domestic politics in the Gulf countries are not dictated by legal norms and institutions. The Gulf countries are ruled by men, not laws.

The book concludes with a lengthy chapter on human rights violations in Iran. As Dr. Amin demonstrates, the reign of terror in revolutionary Iran violates both Islamic law and the Iranian Constitution of 1979. To students of revolutionary regimes in general, and Iran in particular, this is not a surprising conclusion. To remedy the situation, Dr. Amin proposes the establishment of "legally binding and practically enforceable mechanics for the protection of the human rights within the territory of a state such as Iran which is in breach of its duty to respect human rights." These sentiments are admirable, but it is unlikely that a team of international lawyers will force Iran to renounce its revolutionary aspirations when the armies of Iraq have failed to do the job.

*Political and Strategic Issues in the Gulf* may be a useful primer for those unfamiliar with the politics of the Persian Gulf. As a political survey, it is not much better or worse than others of its kind. At its best, the book

provides a good introduction to various international legal issues in the Persian Gulf, such as boundary disputes, jurisdictional agreements, and human rights violations. Dr. Amin makes an effort to place legal issues in their broader political context, but his analysis of the broader political context is often weak.

*Gary S. Samore\**

---

\* Ph.D. in Government (Middle East Studies), Harvard University; International Political Analyst, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.