

# Why Iran's sudden about-face?

Iran's unconditional acceptance of a UN resolution for an immediate ceasefire in the Gulf War has stunned the world.

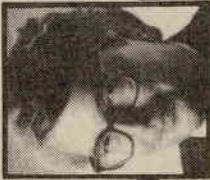
After eight years of indecisive fighting, in which the two nations have suffered close to one million casualties, one of the 20th century's longest wars may finally be over.

Just last week, Iranian spokesmen were predicting the war would drag on until Iraq was finally defeated and President Saddam Hussein's regime overthrown. What caused Iran's dramatic about face?

□ First, new military leadership led by the increasingly powerful Majlis Speaker, Hashemi Rafsanjani, finally faced what has been apparent for months: The war had gone from a stalemate to a situation where Iran was on the strategic defensive. All chances of a decisive knock-out blow against Iraq were gone.

□ Iraq's mounting economic war against Iran was having a telling effect. Oil production, refining and exports were all sharply down as a result of growing Iraqi attacks on Iranian refineries, pipelines, loading terminals and tankers. Thanks to the intervention of the U.S. Navy in the Gulf, Iran lost the chance to blockade shipping of Iraq's Arab allies.

□ After eight years and no victory in sight, Iran is not only war weary but war exhausted. Money, arms and manpower, the sinews of war, are all in desperately short supply. Many Iranians are fed up.



## ERIC MARGOLIS

with the war. Those willing to martyr themselves in battle have already been killed, leaving only the cynics alive. The downing of Flight 655 by the U.S. did nothing to improve Iranian morale.

□ Iran realizes it can no longer fight the combined power of the Arab states, the U.S., the Soviet Union and France. It's possible a secret U.S.-Soviet pact was made two months ago to choke off arms to Iran.

□ The ceasefire merely confirms the de facto withdrawal to pre-war borders in recent weeks. There is some evidence that Iran allowed itself to be pushed out of the last slices of Iraqi territory that it held.

### What happens now?

All this means that a peace agreement will — at least from a tactical viewpoint — be easy to achieve. If Iran drops its demands for Iraqi admission of guilt and reparations, a treaty could be swiftly concluded. Soon after, look for "spontaneous" offers of Arab aid.

to Iran. To assure the peace, there must also be a long-term agreement on use of the contested Shatt el-Arab waterway between the two nations that was the cause of the conflict.

An end to the terrible Gulf War will have an extremely important effect on the geopolitics of the Mideast and southwest Asia: Iran's influence will decline while it rebuilds — except in Afghanistan, to which Tehran will now be able to turn its attention.

Iraq's influence will surge. With 700,000 well-trained and heavily armed troops, Iraq will change the power-balance in the Gulf and challenge Egypt for leadership of the Arab world. The rich Gulf Arabs and the Saudis will now quail before Iraq — instead of Iranian — power. Iraq, don't forget, still claims Kuwait.

Syria, a bitter foe of Iraq, will feel the flames of Saddam Hussein's thirst for revenge. This means big trouble for Syria's President Assad. Pro-Iranian Shia militants who were gaining the upper hand in southern Lebanon may now be set back.

For Israel, who wanted the Gulf War to go on forever, the victory of its sworn enemy, Iraq, is bad news. This will spur development of Israel's nuclear missile program, one of whose targets would be the Iraqi army's routes towards the Jordan River.

All this applies only if the Iranian regime that signed the ceasefire remains in power. The Gulf War has been full of nasty surprises. We may see more yet.