U.S. Involvement In the Iran-Iraq War
War Background

• Hoping to take advantage of the chaos of the Iranian Revolution, Iraq invaded Iran in Sept. 1980 under their leader Saddam Hussein.

• Iraq was worried the revolution might spread to their country.

• Iraq hoped to gain territory & protect their oil interests.
Background Cont.

• By 1982 Iran had pushed Iraq back to its border and began pushing into Iraq
Background Cont.

• It was a very nasty war fought much like WWI—Using trench warfare & Chemical Weapons
  – Iraq used chemical weapons against Iran & against its own Kurdish people in the North
Ethnographic Map of Iraq

KURDS (Sunni)

SUNNI

SHIA

Arab Shia
Arab Sunni
Kurdish (Sunni)
U.S. Involvement

- Complicated
- The official U.S. position was **neutrality** – U.S. had no official diplomatic relations with either country
IRAQ

• As always the chief U.S. concern is always the **SOVIET UNION** & the spread of Worldwide **Communism**

• The Iraqi **Communist Party** began calling for an end to the war in 1981

• Saddam Hussein responded by severely **repressing** the party—having members **jailed** & **killed**
IRAQ Cont.

• The U.S. saw this as a sign that Saddam Hussein was concerned about Soviet influence in the Middle East

• In response the U.S.
  − removed Iraq from the list of countries that sponsor international terrorism
  − restored diplomatic relations with Iraq
  − approved the sale of Boeing jetliners to Iraq
IRAN

• **Remember**: The U.S. was not happy about the Iranian Revolution

• In 1983 a terrorist group called “Hezbollah” took some Western hostages (six of whom were American)
• A moderate group of **Iranian** leaders (who apposed the Ayatollah) secretly approached the U.S. & offered to negotiate with Hezbollah for the **release** of the hostages

• In exchange, the U.S. would sell **arms** to Iran
IRAN Cont.

• The U.S. liked this idea because the Ayatollah was old & they wanted to have good relations with the Iranian government (led by the moderates) when the Ayatollah died.

• If not us, then the Soviets would

  – *Remember*: Everyone’s either with the U.S. or with the Soviet Union.
IRAN Cont.

• So by 1985 the U.S. was secretly selling **weapons** to Iran
  – They were using the $$$ to fund **rebel fighters** in Nicaragua against the **Communist** government there
THE TANKER WAR
THE TANKER WAR Cont.

• By 1984 a large part of the war was taking place in the Persian Gulf

• Iran & Iraq began attacking oil tankers from each other’s countries

• When Iran began attacking Kuwaiti & Saudi Arabian oil tankers however, the U.S. (& Soviet Union) got involved
THE TANKER WAR Cont.

- Kuwait (who was trading with Iraq) offered to “re-flag” its ships as U.S. ships in exchange for U.S. protection.
- The idea being that now these were now American ships & if Iran attacked them, they were attacking the U.S.; then the U.S. could (& would) respond militarily.
THE TANKER WAR Cont.

• The U.S. initially **declined**

• But when the **Soviet Union** said they would do it, the U.S. agreed.

• So the U.S. began patrolling the Gulf & protecting these ships

• Eventually Iran came to believe that the U.S. would stop at nothing to make sure that Iraq won the war
NEGOTIATIONS FOR PEACE

• In 1986 America’s secret arms deal with Iran came to light

• In response, (embarrassed) the U.S. shunned Iran & threw all of its support behind Iraq

• So in the peace negotiations at the U.N. the U.S. stood up for Iraq

• In 1988 the war finally came to an end
Neither side really won but Iraq claimed victory & blamed Iran for the war.

In the end the U.S. had lost what little support it had in Iran & now had a wild dictator “friend” on its hands.

This “friendship” would be short lived however...
Writing Prompt

• Most (if not all) of the foreign policy decisions of the U.S. during the Cold War were made in an attempt to contain the real threat of communism & the Soviet Union. How would you feel as an Iraqi or Iranian citizen about the way the U.S. acted during the war? How might their situation compare a situation that has happened in your life?

• Homework: Give three other examples of how the U.S. foreign policy has been affected by its relationship with the Soviet Union.