

“America Did Not Start the War!”

September 14, 2008

“After operation Fat’h al-Mobin (March 22, 1982), Mr. Montazeri called me at midnight asking, ‘What the armed forces are waiting for? Why aren’t they entering Iraq? Iraq is in a state of disarray; you must march all the way to Baghdad and take care of the situation. Some are waiting for your arrival to stage a coup [against Saddam]....’ I’m not saying that this war was ordered by America; I don’t believe any sane person could possibly subscribe to this view.”

Hitherto untold stories by the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces in the latter years of the war are often so unique that they bear repeating a thousand times, if not for extracting important historical lessons, then certainly for sheer enjoyment.

Mr. Rafsanjani recounts some of these stories in a recently published book entitled, *Hashemi Uncensored*, according to *Tabnak News*.

When asked about the predictability of the outbreak of war with Iraq, Mr. Rafsanjani interestingly responds: “Whether the outbreak of war was predictable or not, it was certainly probable. But in terms of what we needed to do in order to prevent the outbreak of war, there was a lot to be done. You must keep in mind the [even more important] point about how we could have controlled the factors which led to war [...]

The possibility of us doing anything to stop the outbreak of war was very small indeed; the way in which the revolution – in the way that it was carried out – and our stance toward the United States, and our foreign policy at the time – all these factors made war unavoidable because the opponents of the revolution, in their repeated attempts to undermine its goals and ideals, failed to achieve their objectives, and in the end settled on the idea of war in order to defeat the revolution. Maybe if in our foreign relations and domestic circumstances we had arrived at a different set of imperatives, then perhaps it would have been possible to avoid war. But whether we could have or not, well that’s another debate.”

When asked whether he believes Saddam attacked Iran at the urging of America or not, Mr. Rafsanjani responds: “I have said before that I do not believe that America did not directly play a role in starting the war. I don’t believe any sane person could possibly subscribe to this view. Rather, I believe that America was happy with the outbreak of war against Iran, and perhaps even played an indirect role in bringing it about. Indeed, some documents have surfaced since that show the Americans were very much persuading Saddam to attack, but I do not believe that they ever ordered Saddam to do so. [...]

Of course, in this respect, the Soviet Union was not inconsequential either – it could have prevented Iraq’s aggression towards Iran. [...]

Saddam alone had many reasons for starting the war: first, because he feared the appeal of revolution to the Iraqi people – especially the Shi'a – he falsely claimed that Iran was interfering in Iraq's domestic affairs. He then attributed the assassination attempt against Tariq Aziz in March 1980 to Iran. A few days later he again attributed a bombing at an Iranian school in the Vazirieh district in Baghdad to Iran. In July of the same year he again blamed Iran for an explosion in front of the Iraqi culture and intelligence ministries. In a later speech in 1984, Saddam stated that 'In the weeks following the takeover of government in Iran by Ayatollah Khomeini, a series of bombs and explosions took place across Iraq.'"

When asked about the suggestion that, after the start of the war by Saddam, Imam Khomeini became willing to view the continuation of the war as a means to overthrowing a dictatorial regime in Iraq, Mr. Rafsanjani said, "I agree with the suggestion; but it is not correct to say that he felt like this at the bottom of his heart. And he would talk about it too; he wouldn't hide it. He would say many times: 'Saddam is a type of criminal who took the bait, and so we must not let him roam freely....' It was not unclear to anyone that the Imam believed that we must fight and defend ourselves. He would say that at the very least the objective is to try Saddam and to bring him to justice since he cannot remain as the head of the Iraqi government, so that the Iraqi people would be freed. [...] So he was very openly content with the possibility of eliminating [ساقط – *saaghet*] Saddam. Of course, he was deeply disturbed by the collateral damage and the human toll that the war brought."

In response to the suggestion by some that after the liberation of Khorramshahr in 1982 Iran should have ended the war and accepted the terms of the ceasefire as proposed by Saddam – which was a far better set of circumstances than that in which Iran found itself in 1988 – (and this was the same point raised by the late Ahmad Khomeini, the Imam's son, in an interview with *Jomhouri-e Eslami* newspaper, where he expressed his disagreement over the continuation of the war and led many to believe that Rafsanjani was the main proponent of war in 1982), Mr. Rafsanjani responded: "I will give you the facts, which are quite different from those uttered in the interview with Mr. Ahmad Khomeini... First off, when we proved victorious in Khorramshahr there was no one who came forward and urged us to stop the war; to the contrary, everyone was in favor of continuing the war. For instance, Mr. Montazeri called me at midnight asking, 'What are the armed forces waiting for? Why aren't they entering Iraq? Iraq is in a state of disarray; you must march all the way to Baghdad and take care of the situation. Some are waiting for your arrival to stage a coup [against Saddam].'"

"Three days after the liberation of Khorramshahr, meaning May 27, 1982, a few war commanders, among them Mr. Mohsen Rezaie and Mr. Sayad Shirazi – the respective heads of the Revolutionary Guards and the Army – came to Tehran to inquire about next steps. Because there wasn't anyone there at the time to issue an order, we convened a formal meeting of the Supreme Defense Council at the Imam's compound in Jamaran. Myself and Mr. Khamenei were present at that meeting, but we did not speak; instead we observed the conversation between the Imam and the military commanders. After a few pleasantries, the Imam asked the commanders: 'What do you wish to do with respect to

the war?' The commanders responded that if we are to continue the war then we must cross over into Iraqi territory. First they asked of the Imam, 'Should we continue the war or not?' The Imam responded, 'You must continue the war, and no one should speak of stopping the war or a ceasefire; if any one dares speak against it, I will have to deal with them personally.' Because the Imam's response was firm, they [commanders] moved on; even though they, too, were of the same opinion as the Imam. That anyone should say I wanted the war to continue in order to consolidate my grip on power, well, it is a childish assertion. In actuality, if there was anyone who urged caution instead, it was me."

When asked about his own views in his capacity as the central planner of the war as regards its continuation, Mr. Rafsanjani added: "The moment when Imam Khomeini gave me the orders, when I wrapped up my meeting with the Imam, I told him that my assessments were based on the decisions made by the five members of the Supreme Defense Council (Mr. Khamenei, Mr. Mousavi Ardebili, Mr. Rafsanjani, Mr. Mir Hossein Mousavi, and Mr. Ahmad Khomeini), which had collectively reached the conclusion that they [the world powers] won't let us win the war. But my advice was that we capture some strategic areas in Iraq so that we could force the Iraqis to come to the table and bargain with us [...] Therefore, my position always rested alongside those friends' [the five SDC members], who believed we must take hold of some strategic assets and then accept a ceasefire."

[Source: Interview, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, "The Americans Were Not Behind the War with Iraq," Tabnak Newsmagazine, September 14, 2008.]