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“U.S. involvement in the Iran – Iraq War in the eyes of “Trybuna Ludu”

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“Trybuna Ludu” – the communist daily. Introduction.

U.S. interests, interference, and their attitude to the Iraq-Iran War, was widely described in the Polish daily “Trybuna Ludu” (the “People’s Tribune”). It was a newspaper, issued at the time of communism in Poland, fully subordinated to the Polish United Workers Party. Its influence decreased in the 70s, when Polish Television became the number one mass medium. Nevertheless “Trybuna Ludu” had a few aims. Its role was to present the position of the communist Party, publish Party speeches, back economic plans and inform about personal changes within the Party. Despite its strictly political role regarding internal problems, “Trybuna Ludu”, also must have had an influence on the Pole’s worldview. Each and every international problem was judged by journalists controlled by the authorities. Press is one of the sources, which we can study, and build an idea of the Polish government’s attitude to the changes in the politics of the world. In this article the case of the U.S. participation and interests in the Iran – Iraq War (1980-1988) we be examined.

It is worth analysing what mechanisms the “Trybuna Ludu” used to inform the people about the U.S. involvement and how it presented the development of the U.S. – Iran – Iraq relations in this particular Middle East conflict. In order to confront the perspective of “Trybuna Ludu”, with the actual situation, it was necessary to compare information from the Polish daily with the literature sources, one of which is the newest book of Dr Robert Czulda. This Polish academic from the University of Łódź wrote about Iran history from 1925 to 2014. I also used a collection of articles, devoted to the Iran – Iraq War and the U.S. involvement in this conflict, edited by Nigel Asthon and Bryan Gibson and published in 2013.

The beginning of the Iran – Iraq War

In July 1979 the Iranian Revolution began, nearby in Iraq Saddam Hussein became president. From week to week the tension in the border area was increasing¹. In April 1980, Hussain sent an official letter to the United Nations and called Iran to an immediate leaving of the three disputed islands². On 22 December 1980, the Iraq army

¹ Farrokh, p. 200; Hiro, p. 28-30.

² Czulda, p. 124.

entered Iran at the length of 600 km, attacking in two directions: Khorramshahr and Abadan as well as Ahwaz and Dezful³.

One of the reasons why the war had begun was a territorial problem of the Shatt al-Arab river, which is an estuary of the Tigris and Euphrates to the waters of the Persian Gulf. Additionally Hussein wanted to become the „Arabic leader”. Only the effects of the spreading of the Iranian Revolution could stand in his way. Strengthened Iran could block the export of crude oil export out of Iraq which had only two onshore pipelines. The war was a pre-emptive action for Hussein⁴.

The beginning of the war between Iran and Iraq split public opinion on an international level. Iraq was not the only one afraid of the spreading of the Iranian Revolution. The more Iran became stronger on the frontline, the louder words of Ayatollah Khomeini were heard, about the “ideological mission” and “widening area under the God’s law all over the world”. What is more, Iran could increase its influences in Syria and Lebanon⁵.

Goals of the United States in the Middle East

The Hostage Crisis, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq’s growing rift with the Soviet Union, encouraged a warming in the U.S. – Iraq relations. Nevertheless, throughout the most of 1980, the United States would continue to offer a future strategic relationship to Iranians if only they released the hostages – American diplomats kept in Tehran⁶. It is worth noticing that the United States did not join militarily the Iran - Iraq conflict until 1982, when the operation “Staunch” was initiated. Its goal was to discourage other countries from selling armament to Iran, called by the Secretary of Defence of the Ronald Regan administration, Caspar Weinberger, “a country ruled by madmen”⁷. It was not a secret that the U.S. decided to support Iraq⁸ militarily. The Soviet Union supported Iraq as well with tanks: T-54/55, T-62 and T-72, antiaircraft missiles,

³ Sochacki, p. 73, 74; Czulda, p. 124, 125.

⁴ Czulda, p.125, 126.

⁵ Bakhash, p.233; Czulda, p. 132.

⁶ Emery, p. 171.

⁷ Hume, p. 58.

⁸ Hume, p. 58.

airplanes MiG-23, and MiG-25. Also Egypt, a former ally of Iran sent to Iraq; airplanes and tanks T-55, whilst Great Britain supplied Iraq with spare parts for British tanks gained by Iraqis on Iran⁹. In 1982 at the time of Iran's successes at the battlefield, the U.S. decided to back Iraq more pronouncedly and normalized relations with the government as well as supplied it with economic aid, counter-insurgency training, operational intelligence, and weapons¹⁰.

The real political goals of the U.S. in the Iran – Iraq War were a weak Iran and a weakened Iraq. Leaders of both countries were threatening a regional order. The U.S. finally decided to cooperate with both sides of the conflict and became an observer of the situation in the Persian Gulf with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait on their side¹¹.

U.S. goals in the Middle East according to “Trybuna Ludu”

In 1981 “Trybuna Ludu” was writing about the U.S. goals in the Middle East area. There was a reprinted statement of the State Department's spokesman. William Dyess said that the primary U.S. goal in the Middle East area was "the desire to restore the balance of power" between the U.S. and the USSR, earlier "allegedly imbalanced at the expense of the United States and on the general strengthening of the western countries influences in this region"¹². What is more, Stanisław Głąbiński, one of the Polish foreign correspondents in Washington, commented and reprinted opinion of the Secretary of Defence, Caspar Weinberger, from the television program. Weinberger underlined that the U.S. is going to strengthen its position in the Middle East by expansion and establishment of the new military bases. Głąbiński added that a massive supply of arms and military equipment with a value of \$ 7 billion had been provided¹³.

Polish journalist Krystyna Szelstowska wrote that the Middle East region was under great interest to the U.S. and the other European countries. The biggest treasure of this region, crude oil, met in the 25 % to 30 % needs of these states. She underlined that in times of the Jimmy Carter's presidency the U.S. recognized the Middle East as a

⁹Bulloch, Morris, p. 81.

¹⁰ Friedman; Hiro, p. 84, 85.

¹¹Czulda, p.135; Malik, p. 110, 111.

¹²*Bliskowschodnia polityka USA*, nr 47 from 25 II 1981, p. 7.

¹³*Amerykańskie plany militaryzacji Bliskiego Wschodu*, nr 57 from 11 III 1981, p. 7.

sphere of “very important interests”, and took steps to strengthen its military presence. But Szelestowska also stressed that the Ronald Reagan’s administration came further with establishing of military bases and points of support for the U.S. troops around the Gulf, expanding the military capabilities of the existing ones¹⁴. Zygmunt Słomkowski in his article suggested as well that there was a threat of the U.S. military intervention under the pretext of the Iran-Iraq War and the need to maintain the security of oil routes in the Persian Gulf¹⁵. He also suggested that this conflict created an arena for an Israeli and Arabic clash. Moreover “it has become evident that the winning side of any war are those who do not take part in it. This is Israel, for which the greatest threat is the unity of the Arab countries in the Middle East and the United States, which are facilitated by the war situation in gaining military and political positions in the Arabian Peninsula”¹⁶. What is interesting, “Trybuna Ludu” also reprinted a Weinberger’s stance who accused the USSR of “pushing Iran and Iraq into the war conflict to cause the tension in the region and complicate the situation of the U.S. in the Persian Gulf”¹⁷.

The United States was accused in “Trybuna Ludu”, which printed a stance of the Iranian supreme commander of the armed forces general Fallahi, for an abduction of the Iranian gunboats located on the coast of Gibraltar. According to the general it was a part of the "vast conspiracy against Iran led by the United States" and "we have always stressed that we fight not only with Iraq, but also with such powers as the United States and its European allies"¹⁸.

What is more, “Trybuna Ludu” reprinted the USSR spokesman’s stance. Borys Piadyszew was wondering about the real American goals in the Middle East. He was sure that the U.S. wanted to take control over the Persian Gulf and restore former influences in the region. Piadyszew stressed that the Iran-Contras scandal made the White House’s statements, about the negative relationship to this conflict false, and its policy in the connection with the war - two-faced: "The position of the United States in the Middle East favours increasing of the conflict and adds fuel to the fire”. Additionally he pointed

¹⁴*Próby ingerencji militarnej*, nr 29 from 4 II 1982, p. 6.

¹⁵*Gwałtowny zwrot w wojnie iracko-irańskiej*, nr 124 from 27 V 1982, p. 7;

¹⁶*Jak przelamać impas?*, nr 107 from 7 V 1982, p. 6.

¹⁷*Agresywny kurs polityki zagranicznej USA*, nr 200 from 24 VIII 1982, p. 7.

¹⁸*Nieznany los uprowadzonej kanonierki irańskiej. Teheran oskarża USA o spisek*, nr 191 from 17 VIII 1981, p. 6.

out that the case of supplying Iran with the U.S. arms finally proved that the United States was an uncertain partner. Moreover, Piadyszew asserted that the position of the Soviet Union was clear from the beginning: "the war between Iran and Iraq is a mindless war. It should be ended as soon as possible, without winners or losers"¹⁹. The stance of the USSR spokesman was confirmed by the Soviet journal "Krasnaja Zwiezda" ("The Red Star"), which was reprinted as well on the pages of "Trybuna Ludu". According to the Soviet newspaper secret supplies of the U.S. arms to Iran had no military importance: "their only goal was to tighten the conflict, to introduce dissonance between countries, which were against the Israeli aggression and to take advantage from the Iran-Iraq War to strengthen the military presence of the U.S. and other NATO countries in the Gulf region"²⁰.

More significantly in 1982, the State Department removed Iraq from its list of the "state sponsor of terrorism" and fought off the Congressional efforts to put it back on the list three years later. Such de-listing made Iraq eligible to purchase dual-use equipment and technology in the United States that could be used for either civilian or military purposes. According to declassified documents released under the Freedom of Information Act and published by the National Security Archive, the administration was well aware of Iraq's use of chemical weapons (CW) as early as 1982 and its efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. Despite that knowledge, the United States was the only country to vote against a UN Security Council statement condemning Iraq's use of mustard gas against Iranian troops²¹.

Iran or Iraq?

Perhaps the most significant indicator that change was coming was the visit to Baghdad in late 1983 of Reagan's special envoy, Donald Rumsfeld, to meet with Saddam Hussein and Tariq Aziz. The meeting resulted with a shift in the U.S. policy to sales of more advanced dual-use technology to Baghdad²² and was noticed by "Trybuna Ludu".

¹⁹ Jerzy Kraszewski, *Stanowisko radzieckie w kwestiach międzynarodowych*, nr 276 from 26 XI 1986, p. 7.

²⁰ *Gwałtowne walki na froncie iracko-irańskim*, nr 21 from 26 I 1987, p. 7.

²¹ Yaphe, p. 185.

²² Yaphe, p. 185-186.

Polish daily indicated that the U.S. wanted to renew diplomatic relations with Iraq. It was to be one of the American's steps to restore peace in the Middle East²³. In spite of that in other "Trybuna's Ludu" article, written on the basis of the information from New York, Tarik Aziz protested on the United Nations forum against "insolent threats" to Iraq from the U.S. senior officials of the Department of State as well as Secretary of Defence and the CIA²⁴.

Despite the provision of political, military, and economic assistance by the United States, its NATO allies and the Middle Eastern friends to Iraq, Baghdad could not stop its military advances. In January 1984 the United States informed its friends in the Persian Gulf that Iran's defeat of Iraq would be "contrary to the U.S. interests". There were to be taken steps to prevent this result. Three months later Reagan signed two National Security Decision Directives that enabled the U.S. to provide more sophisticated military equipment to Baghdad and set the stage for a more confrontational stance against Tehran. The Reagan Administration let it be known that it would look "more favourably" upon the sale of weapons to Iraq by friends and allies of the United States government. In May, the Reagan Administration announced that it was prepared to intervene militarily in the Iraq-Iran War in order to prevent an Iranian victory that would install a radical Shi'ite government in Baghdad²⁵.

Which side of the fence? U.S. stance in "Trybuna's Ludu" point of view

President Reagan's decisions were noticed by "Trybuna Ludu", which wrote on the basis of the information from UPI Press Agency that Reagan, stronger than ever, inclined to Iraq's current position in the conflict with Iran, which he directly blamed for the beginning of the war. The U.S. President underlined that while Iraq had been respecting international conventions and attacking only the enemy's ships, Iran had been shooting to the non-aligned units. He admitted that the Iraqi efforts also included the destruction of the foundations of the Iranian economy but, in his opinion, it should be considered as normal behaviour at war time. Reagan asserted, that the U.S. did not intend

²³ *Prezydent Iraku przyjął wysłannika prezydenta USA*, nr 236 from 22 XI 1985, p. 6.

²⁴ *Protest Iraku w ONZ w związku z wrogą kampanią na Zachodzie*, nr 84 from 7/8 IV 1984, p. 1 and 7.

²⁵ Jentleson, p. 42-56; Yaphe, p. 186-187.

to intervene in the conflict. Meanwhile "Trybuna Ludu" reprinted an opposite opinion of Reuters which recalled another Reagan's statement: "the West cannot passively look at the closing of the Persian Gulf to the shipping"²⁶.

Furthermore, "The United States and its allies developed concrete plans for military intervention in the Persian Gulf" – the words of the Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Murphy, were reprinted in the "Trybuna Ludu"²⁷. Additionally "The Guardian" indicated that Washington described the Persian Gulf as a sphere of their vital interests and was going to strengthen its presence and enlarge their sea forces. "The Guardian", reprinted by "Trybuna Ludu", wrote about a conservative British government's military stance to the conflict in the Persian Gulf, which was to be "closely coordinated with the United States". The newspaper reported that the Margaret Thatcher's government was planning to send destroyers and frigates, fighter squadron "Phantom", and the sea planes intelligence called "Nimrod"²⁸. But Krystyna Szelestowska was sure that it was Pentagon who pulled Great Britain and France into the defence of the oil fields and reprinted in "Trybuna Ludu" a fragment of a Reagan's speech: "We are determined to ensure the freedom of oil transportation from the Gulf". Szelestowska summarized that as history had shown, the Reagan's administration did not shy away from any form of interference, military intervention included: "VII U.S. fleet stands at the ready and the U.S. warships are patrolling the waters of the Gulf"²⁹. In a different article Szelestowska underlined that the U.S. did not care about "bleeding out of Iran and Iraq" and, despite the fact that Washington was closely watching the events in the Gulf, this neither elicited their compassion nor the attempt to resolve the conflict. But the "Trybuna's Ludu" journalist was sure that if the situation changed unfavourably to the United States, Washington would be stopped at nothing, neither armed interference in the conflict nor the threat of its internationalization. Szelestowska also pointed out a surprisingly frank account of

²⁶ *Północna część Zatoki Perskiej strefą działań wojennych*, nr 131 from 2/3 VI 1984, p. 1 and 7.

²⁷ *Porozumienie o przerwaniu ognia – ograniczone do obiektów cywilnych*, nr 140 from 13 VI 1984, p. 7.

²⁸ *Awanturnicze plany Wielkiej Brytanii w Zatoce Perskiej*, nr 179 from 22 VII 1984, p. 7.

²⁹ *5 lat wojny iracko-irańskiej. Niebezpieczny płomień*, nr 238 from 11 X 1985, p. 6.

Henry Kissinger, who said that the U.S. was depending on the weakening of the two countries, which were “competing for dominance in the oil-rich Gulf for a long time”³⁰.

The words of the former Secretary of State, reprinted in “Trybuna Ludu”, were in fact true. Henry Kissinger thought that: “It is a pity that two sides of the conflict cannot loose”. The stance of Great Britain was similar as well. In June 1988, the British parliamentary commission wrote: “Hardly anyone wants to either side to win the war”³¹. What is more, the White House while supporting Iraq was starting to include contracts and commercial transactions with Iran in 1985. In return the United States counted on Tehran’s help in freeing of seven American hostages held in Lebanon³². Freeing the hostages outstayed by Hezbollah, Iran’s newly created terrorist surrogate, was a high priority for Ronald Reagan. Although U.S. official policy was not to pay for hostages, the reality was that money and military equipment were traded for releases³³. Profits from selling armament to Iran were to be transferred to Nicaragua, where the U.S. supported Contras partisans who fought with the leftist government. After that the political scandal known as the “Iran-Contras” affair broke out³⁴.

In the Polish press the United States was not only accused of selling arms to Iran, which was of course true, but also to supply Iraq with the secret information about Iran. Zygmunt Broniarek, a Polish correspondent in Washington, wrote on the basis of Bob Woodward’s article from the “Washington Post” that CIA provided Iraq with satellite photos. These secret images enabled precision bombing of Iranian’s power stations and ports. Broniarek stressed that if supplying Iran with arms was considered as a violation of neutrality, CIA cooperation with Iraq would be a double violation of neutrality: "This is not a desire to end the conflict but to drag it forever"³⁵.

³⁰ *Iran – Irak. W pułapce wojny*, nr 47 from 25 II 1986, p. 6.

³¹ Bulloch, Morris, p. 75; Czulda, p. 134; Sciolino, p. 347.

³² Czulda, p. 134; Fayazmanesh, p. 56-62.

³³ Yaphe, p. 187.

³⁴ Czulda, p. 134; Fayazmanesh, p. 56-62.

³⁵ *CIA dostarcza informacji wywiadowczych Irakowi*, nr 293 from 16 XII 1986, p. 6.

Navigating under the U.S. flags in the Persian Gulf

Finally in 1987, Kuwait officially asked the U.S. to protect its tankers. Initially the United States resisted but a threat of Moscow help instead ultimately contributed to a change of American government attitude. Kuwaiti oil tankers had begun to navigate under the U.S. flag. On July 24, 1987 the U.S. Navy started an operation called “Earnest Will” which ended on September 26, 1988. Military presence of the United States in the Persian Gulf was a fact. There were dozens of American ships, aircraft carriers, and the battleship “USS Missouri”. It was the biggest naval operation of the U.S. forces since the World War II³⁶.

Risky engagement

“Trybuna Ludu” also noted the presence of the U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf. For the Polish journalists it meant a higher risk of the international conflict outbreak. The Polish newspaper indicated as well on the U.S. efforts to explain the engagement. Jerzy Górski, a foreign correspondent in Washington, noted Reagan’s speech. The U.S. President was assuring that those “special military steps” were a “necessity” to “ensure the continuity of oil supplies from the Middle East to the U.S.” If the supplies stopped it would cause an apocalyptic situation for American economy, society and politics. Interestingly, Górski wrote that oil supplies from the Gulf accounted only for 10% of the U.S. demands for gas. Nonetheless, Reagan still threatened that the U.S. did not allow “anyone to take control over the Persian Gulf” and declared Iran as the main enemy of the United States, and its policy in this region of the world³⁷.

Zygmunt Słomkowski, a “Trybuna’s Ludu” journalist, noted similarly to his colleague, Jerzy Górski, that the Iran - Iraq War led to a possibility of an international conflict outbreak. Moreover, he indicated on an engagement of the forces which had not accepted losing of the economic and political influences in these countries. Słomkowski compared the war to the Pandora’s Box, which had started from the territorial conflict, forgotten in the end. He underlined that “the War caused War” including other countries

³⁶Czulda, p. 136; Hiro, p. 129-130.

³⁷ Jerzy Górski, *Zatoka Perska. Waszyngton „usprawiedliwia” działania interwencyjne*, nr 126 from 1 VI 1987, p. 7.

of the Persian Gulf as well as the United States. The journalist was sure that this time the U.S. would not use the issue of escorting the Kuwaiti tankers as a pretext to launch the aggression, but to demonstrate its military power, and "to achieve imperial goals, about which we so often hear from Washington". Słomkowski stressed in "Trybuna Ludu" that the U.S. ships entered the Persian Gulf waters after two important events: the release of the United Nations resolution, which was calling for an end of the War and the peaceful Soviet Union proposal³⁸.

In "Trybuna Ludu" there were a few printed articles that praised the USSR proposition of a withdrawal of all of foreign ships from the Persian Gulf as well as a suggestion addressed to Iran and Iraq, who should refrain from actions that would cause the international extension of the war less possible³⁹. "Trybuna Ludu" also suggested that the Iranian president Ali Khamenei backed the Soviet Union offer and stated, according to the Teheran's Radio, that he was against Washington's policy, which "may provoke serious incidents in this part of the world". There was also a reprinted speech fragment of the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, Taha Jasin Ramadan, who used the "Soviet statement as evidence of the efforts made by the government of the USSR in the settlement of the Iran-Iraq War"⁴⁰. Zygmunt Słomkowski even wrote that if the Soviet Union proposition entered into force, the road to the end of the Iran – Iraq War would be opened: "on the dark firmament of the Gulf a possibility of the clear sky finally appeared"⁴¹.

The war of tanks

In reality the United States presence in the Persian Gulf turned in time into the U.S.-Iran War. In September 1987, U.S. forces dispatched army helicopters from the Navy to guide missile frigate USS "Jarrett" and shadow "Iran Ajr" under the suspicion of lying mines. The U.S. commander in the Persian Gulf decided to fire the Iranian ship. Iran answered with damaging of "Sungari" and "Sea Isle City" tankers. The U.S. then started an operation called "Nimble Archer" and on 19 October attacked the Iranian mining platform in the Rashaad field. In April 1988, USS "Samuel B. Brothers" frigate

³⁸ Zygmunt Słomkowski, *Nauki z Zatoki Perskiej*, nr 177 from 1 and 2 VIII 1987, p. 9.

³⁹ *W sprawie Zatoki Perskiej. Oświadczenie rządu ZSRR*, nr 155 from 6 VII 1987, p. 6.

⁴⁰ *Zatoka nie bardzo Perska*, nr 156 from 7 VII 1987, p. 1.

⁴¹ Zygmunt Słomkowski, *Kropla optymizmu w Zatoce*, nr 156 from 7 VII 1987, p. 6.

was seriously damaged by an Iranian mine. 10 sailors were injured and the ship nearly sank. Of course the U.S. decided to launch a new Operation “Praying Mantis”. Two Iranian’s oil rigs were fired and a few ships were sunk as well as a frigate “Sahad”⁴².

The U.S. – Iran confrontation in “Trybuna Ludu”

Krystyna Szelestowska in time of the “Iran Ajr” shelling was in Kuwait. She wrote about feelings and emotions of one of Kuwaitis, as she underlined, “holding away from politics, preoccupied with business and pleasures, not distorted by excessive duties and carefree. Unfortunately he had to forget about carelessness lately”. This carelessness was replaced by anxiety and fear of a "mini state in the desert" situated in a strategic petroliferous place, where the war between Iran and Iraq was taking place. Kuwaiti concluded that the attack of the U.S. helicopters on "Iran Ajr" started a new phase of the war - the U.S. confrontation with Iran. Szelestowska noted as well in “Trybuna Ludu”, on the basis of anti-American speeches of Khamenei and publications in the Arabic press, that the war between Iran and the U.S. had already broken out. She also reprinted opinions heard in the “Arab Times” editorial office that the “Pentagon directed dozens of naval vessels to ensure its interests in the Persian Gulf”. None of her interviewees attacked the United States directly. Nevertheless everyone kept saying that such a war fleet concentration did not lead to calm, but on the contrary – to a higher risk of embittering the conflict. Szelestowska was also under impression that each and every Arabic state wanted to end the Iran – Iraq War as soon as possible and led to lay-neighbourly relations with Iran but: “They fear that these desires are not turned into a pile of ashes as a result of an unforeseen confrontation, which can initiate incidents such as the shooting to <<Iran Ajr>>”⁴³. In a different article Szelestowska underlined in “Trybuna Ludu” that there was no sense of listening to American explanations because: “It is a fact that thousands of miles from the U.S. shores, the U.S. Air Force attacked the Iranian ship”⁴⁴.

Zygmunt Słomkowski noted not only a fear of the U.S. – Iran confrontation, but also a possibility of a dangerous Iranian riposte and use of surface-to-air missiles

⁴² Czulda, p. 136.

⁴³ Krystyna Szelestowska, *Wojna tankowców widziana z Zatoki*, nr 229 from 1 X 1987 p. 5.

⁴⁴ Krystyna Szelestowska, *Alarm w Zatoce*, nr 223 from 24 IX 1987, p. 1 i 6.

“Stinger”. He underlined that the United States were eager to use every pretext to start a war with Iran. Because the area of the Persian Gulf was extremely important for the U.S. businesses, and a return to this country had become one of the American foreign policy goals after the overthrow of the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1979. Słomkowski also stressed the futility of the Iran-Iraq War. Since the beginning of the conflict in 1980, Poland and other socialist countries, were calling for its immediate cessation pointing out that the war harmed both sides⁴⁵.

“Trybuna Ludu” devoted a few articles to the information about destroying of the three Iranian oil rigs by the United States in October 1987 and two more, Sirri and Sassan, in April 1988. In the first case there was a reprinted statement of Marlin Fitzwater, President Ronald Reagan’s spokesman, who recognized the American attack as an element of “tension reduction” in the Persian Gulf⁴⁶. But “Trybuna Ludu” defined U.S. actions as a “flagrant violation of the international law” and reprinted a fragment of Said Radža-Khorasani speech, Iran's representative to the United Nations, who underlined that these actions would not remain without retaliation. What is more, in his opinion patrolling the waters of the Persian Gulf by the U.S. forces, was a threat to stability and security in the region, and noted that they should leave immediately: "the United States are directly drowning into an armed conflict, whereas the American people are drowning into a <<new Vietnam War>>". Also the Libyan leader Muammar Kaddafi and Algeria Foreign Ministry spokesman condemned American attack, which caused only expansion of the Iran – Iraq War that, and should be regulated as soon as possible. Giennadij Gierasimow, spokesman of the USSR government, stressed that the United States as a member of the UN should depend on the maintenance of the international peace and security. Instead of doing so, Americans were to breaking the law by attacking civilian objects: “The reasons for the escalation lied not only in the continuity of the Iraq - Iran conflict but also in the strengthening of the U.S. military presence and the intervention in the affairs of the region. The U.S.’s actions are unacceptable from the international law, politics and morality point of view”. Only the government of the Federal Republic of Germany, according to “Trybuna Ludu”, backed the decision of the

⁴⁵ Zygumunt Słomkowski, *Czy grozi wybuch?*, nr 239 from 13 X 1987, p. 6.

⁴⁶ *USA zniszczyły irańskie platformy naftowe*, nr 245 from 20 X 1987, p. 1 i 6.

United States. Spokesman of the German government, Friedrich Ost, declared that the U.S. military action confirmed its right to self-defence under the UN Charter. Although he stressed that the developments in the Gulf were worrying. The Federal Republic of Germany supported the UN efforts to complete the Iraqi-Iranian conflict as soon as possible⁴⁷.

In the case of the American attacks on Sirri and Sassan oil rigs, “Trybuna Ludu”, drew its attention to an “unusual press conference”. This time Marlin Fitzwater frankly acknowledged that the U.S. attack had taken place and it was a retaliation act on Iranians, who destroyed an American frigate called “Samuel B. Roberts”. But also this time journalists noted that the U.S. action caused an escalation of the warfare in the Persian Gulf⁴⁸. There was also a reprinted fragment of a Ronald Reagan speech, where he underlined that American attacks were a “balanced response” to the applied force against the U.S. ships in the international waters. Moreover, Secretary of Defence Frank Carlucci explained that the U.S. action derived from the right to self-defence⁴⁹.

Iran Air Flight 655

The most dramatic and controversial event took place on 3 July 1988. Iranian Airlines Airbus A300B2-203 was shot down by the USS “Vincennes”. 290 passengers of the 655 flight died. According to the official report, a crew of the missile cruiser, considered the airplane to be the Iranian F-14 Tomcat jet, preparing to attack. USS “Vincennes” tried to protect itself as well as the frigate USS “Elmer Montgomery”. Iran till then was certain that the attack was a targeted operation and was used as an element of the official anti-American rhetoric⁵⁰.

655 Flight according to “Trybuna Ludu”

The general government opinion around the world, about the downing of the Iranian Airbus by USS “Vincennes”, reignited a call for a political settlement of the Iran – Iraq War. In “Trybuna Ludu” there was a reprinted critical view of Michael Dukakis:

⁴⁷ *Jawne naruszenie norm prawa międzynarodowego*, nr 246 from 21 X 1987, p. 1 and 6.

⁴⁸ *Ataki marynarki USA na dwie platformy irańskie*, nr 90 from 19 IV 1988, p. 1 and 6.

⁴⁹ *Pogróżki Waszyngtonu po działaniach w Zatoce Perskiej*, nr 91 from 20 IV 1988, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Czulda, p. 136.

“All Americans are immersed in a grief at the death of so many people in the Gulf. We should end the Iran – Iraq War. The United States and the international community bear responsibility for that”. At the same time he recognized the right of the self-defence of the U.S. Also Tony Coelho, a member of the House of the Representatives, criticized Reagan's policies and stated that this tragedy was a logical consequence. He asked: "If Iran takes retaliation acts who will remember that the purpose of the mission was to protect American shipping in the Persian Gulf?" What is more, “Trybuna Ludu” reprinted opinion of U.S. military experts, who recognized a mistake of Aegis computer system and confuse Airbus 300 with F-14 as impossible. But American stance was irrelevant to the Arabic states. Libyan authorities acknowledged the American attack as a “shameful act of terrorism” and “an example of policy of terrorism pursued by the U.S.” Furthermore the United Arab Emirates, who tried to remain neutral in the conflict between Iran and Iraq, were experiencing a "black day of grief and reflection"⁵¹.

Khamenei, president of Iran, called each and every country to condemn the United States, as “Trybuna Ludu” noted. In his opinion American presence in the Persian Gulf contributed only to the exacerbation of the situation and stressed that Iran had a right to carry out a retaliatory action for the death of innocent people, including women and children. Nevertheless, in the same article “Trybuna Ludu” printed a U.S. vice-admiral F.G. Zeller stance, who stated that Iran deliberately targeted airliners into a warzone. He added that it was difficult to distinguish between passenger and military aircraft, taking off one by one from the airport in Bandar Abbas⁵². Moreover, Secretary of Defence, Robert Dole underlined, what was reprinted in “Trybuna Ludu”, that the tragedy would have not taken place if Iran and Iraq agreed to a ceasefire. Meanwhile, according to Senator Brock Adams, there should have been an immediate review of the U.S. policy in the Middle East⁵³.

What is interesting, “Trybuna Ludu” also reprinted a stance of the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who deeply deplored the victims but with the "iron hand" confirmed solidarity with the United States. According to her the U.S. had a right to self-

⁵¹ Świat wstrząśnięty tragedią w Zatoce Perskiej, nr 155 from 5 VII 1988 r, p. 1 and 6.

⁵² Teheran oskarża, Waszyngton się broni, nr 156 from 6 VII 1988, p. 1 and 7.

⁵³ Waszyngton nie poczuwa się do winy za tragedię, nr 158 from 8 VII 1988, p. 8.

defence. In the meantime, a Member of the House of Commons Robert Adley disagreed with the Prime Minister's opinion. He stressed, what was reprinted in the "Trybuna Ludu", that the U.S. learned nothing from the Vietnam War experience: "You can be the most powerful nation on Earth, holding the greatest firepower and armour, but if you do not have the right skills it can lead you to disaster. Vast incompetence on the part of the U.S. should worry its allies"⁵⁴.

Zygmunt Broniarek stated that the U.S. government wanted to withhold real reasons of the U.S. Navy location in the Persian Gulf from the American public opinion. The answer was to be Reagan's imperial politics. Broniarek reprinted a Senate Committee for Foreign Affairs statement about American short - term goals in the Gulf. One of them was to restore a credibility that was lost after the Iran - Contras scandal: "In other words, the administration - even for the internal purposes, perhaps the election - conducted a policy which was a threat to the world peace"⁵⁵.

The end of the War (1988)

Finally, after the eight years of a struggle, the Iran - Iraq War ended. We need to remember that it did not bring any positive result to any side of the conflict. It was not only internationalised, with the intervention of the U.S., France and Great Britain in many areas, but both actors, Iran and Iraq, terminated at the same military spots as they started in 1980. Until now we do not know how many people died as a result of the fighting. According to the Iraqi sources there were 200 thousand people killed, 400 thousand wounded, and 70 thousand captured. Iraqi debt increased to \$ 80 billion and Iranian to \$ 240 billion. More than 1, 6 million of Iranians lost their homes. The war in Iran is known as the "forced war" and the "holy defence". It has become one of the founding myths of the Islamic Republic, which is a living memory till today⁵⁶.

What is interesting, "Trybuna Ludu" stressed its opposition to the U.S.'s claims that the shooting down of the Iranian aircraft contributed to the decision of Iran to end the war with Iraq: "As we know, the introduction of the U.S. warships did not lead to lessen

⁵⁴ *Waszyngton nie poczuwa się do winy za tragedię*, nr 158 from 8 VII 1988, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Zygmunt Broniarek, *3 minuty kapitana „Vincennes” i 300000 dolarów na minutę*, nr 159 from 9/10 VII 1988, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Czulda, p. 138.

the severity of the conflict, but caused a direct increase of the danger to the lives of innocent people"⁵⁷. The Iran – Iraq War changed little strategically in the American view of Gulf security. Between 1947 and 1991, the U.S. military presence in the Gulf grew from three ships and admiral offshore to re-flagging operations to allow safe passage for oil tankers during the War and deployment of 550,000 personnel to free Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991. The tactics of the final years of the war, the naval battles with the Iranians, the unintended shooting down of the Iran Air civilian plane, and operations to destroy Iran's military infrastructure, were part of the overall strategy laid out under Presidents Carter and Reagan⁵⁸.

Conclusion

At the example of "Trybuna Ludu", we are able to notice the informative clash of the four countries: Poland, United States, Iran and Iraq. Only comparison with the literature based on the documents, or documents themselves, gives us the whole picture of the U.S. interests and intervention in the Iran – Iraq War. But how does it look like in the "Trybuna's Ludu" eyes? We need to notice that the Polish press title showed the U.S. intervention in the Iran-Iraq War, in the negative light. First of all, the Polish newspaper pointed at the U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf: balance of power with the Soviet Union, establishment of the military bases, protection of the oil routes, prolonging and escalating the conflict. The Iran – Iraq War was to be only a pretext to strengthen military presence and to protect the U.S. interests in the Middle East. It was the only state to be blamed for dragging Great Britain and France into the Persian Gulf. In order to highlight the U.S. faults, "Trybuna Ludu", reprinted anti-American speeches of the political leaders from all over the world. It accused the U.S. for preparing plots against Iran. At the other extreme was the Soviet Union's attitude, which wanted to keep peace and end the Iran – Iraq War as soon as possible.

On the other hand, in case of the "Iran Ajr" operation as well as a tragedy of the Iran Air 655 flight, "Trybuna Ludu" printed arguments of the two sides of the events, always indicating on the immediate need to end the Iran-Iraq War. The Polish newspaper

⁵⁷Świat oczekuje rozjemcy irańsko-irackiego, nr 169 from 21/24 VII 1988, p. 1 and 6.

⁵⁸Yaphe, p. 190, 191.

also stressed, by reprinting the stance of Great Britain or U.S. politicians, that the United States had a right to self-defence in the Persian Gulf. Nonetheless, the U.S. actions in the Persian Gulf were incomprehensible and inexcusable for “Trybuna Ludu” because its forces were acting a long way from the U.S. national shores, causing threat to the world peace.

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