

Gulf war may draw U.S., Soviets into shaky alliance

Knight News Service

WASHINGTON — The United States and the Soviet Union have long viewed each other with suspicion and hostility when it comes to sailing through the troubled Persian Gulf.

Yet, ironically, the escalating war may force the superpowers into a shaky alliance.

For nearly seven years, the Iran-Iraq war has thundered over the Persian Gulf. The United States and the Soviet Union regularly sail through the gulf to underscore their determination to keep the waterway open to international traffic. Until this month, none of their vessels had been hit.

But within 10 days an Iranian gunboat rocketed the Soviet freighter Ivan Korotoyev at the southern end of the gulf and an Iraqi warplane attacked the guided-missile frigate USS Stark off the coast of Saudi Arabia, with the loss of 37 lives. The strikes came only days

after Kuwait persuaded Moscow and Washington to allow its supertanker fleet to sail under the protection of U.S. and Soviet guns.

More and more, the United States is tilting to Iraq in the war, though it continues to insist on its neutrality. But the officials say the Iranian attack on the Soviet ship appeared aimed at intimidating Kuwait, a major shipping point for war material to Iraq. The Soviet Union is Iraq's major arms supplier.

Iranian strategy appeared designed to force Iraq to abandon the war effort by severing the oil lifeline of Iraqi allies.

Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy insists it is in the vital interest of the United States to limit Soviet influence in the gulf. He said, "We are very conscious of the Soviet's willingness to step in and help protect shipping in the gulf in order to get a strategic foothold."



Richard Murphy
Vital to limit Soviet influence