

**Research Report - 7th Annual Session**

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# **Historical Security Council**

**Iran - Iraq war (1980-1988)**



**Forum:** Historical Security Council

**Issue:** Iran - Iraq war (1980-1988)

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## Introduction

The Iran - Iraq war spanning from the 22nd of September 1980 till 1988 is known to be one of the longest and most violent wars of all time, with approximately 500,000 lives being lost as a result and another estimated 500,000 injuries as well (Burch). The war began due to various political and territorial tensions, notably control over the Shatt Al- Arab being in question as well as the Islamic revolution in Iran opening an opportunity for Iraqi leader Saddam Hussain to take advantage of the situation and assert Iraqi dominance. The following events, including attacks by Iraq as well as Irani responses, led to an extremely harsh conflict between both countries (Burch).

The war took a significant toll on both countries in terms of their political state as well as their economies which in totality faced a loss of around \$500 billion and possibly even more. As a result, neither country claimed a victorious position due to the ceasefire agreed upon by both sides in 1988 (Ronen Zeidel).

## Definition of Key Terms

### Chemical Warfare

Chemical warfare is a war strategy which involves making use of chemical-based weapons such as various gasses, substances, etc. Instead of the standard bullets and guns (Merriam Webster).

### Dawn Operations

The dawn operations were a series of 6 attacks that Iran released onto Iraq during the war. These operations were mostly targeting various locations in Iraq (to).

### Genocide

A genocide is when acts are committed against a certain racial, religious, ethnic, etc. group. These acts can be causing severe harm to the members, killing them etc. These acts are done in order to destroy the targeted group (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum).

## **Guerilla Group**

A guerilla group is a group of people that are separate from the military. These groups aim to go against the country's military and often stage attacks in attempts to change the leading figures such as the government, into something that they prefer (Cambridge Dictionary, “Guerrilla”).

## **Human Wave Attack**

A human wave attack is a strategy in a war that involves sending a very large number of troops running towards a target in the form of a wave made of humans, with no external aid such as tanks, etc. This is usually done in order to take down a targeted location, and ends up in an extremely large number of deaths of members of the wave (Writer).

## **Islamic Revolution**

The Islamic revolution or Iranian Revolution occurred in 1978-1979 which was done in order to replace the preexisting leadership of Mohamed Reza Shah Pahlavi, into an Islamic focused leadership lead by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Afary).

## **Kurds**

The Kurds are an ethnic group that normally live in places such as; Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, however, they are present in other countries (Britannica, “Kurd | History, Culture, & Language”).

## **Operation Badr**

Operation Badr was one of the attacks that Iraq set towards Iran. This operation targeted the Khuzestan region of Iran, however, was unsuccessful for Iraq (“Operation Badr - Iran–Iraq War - Historydraft”).

## **Stalemate**

A stalemate in the context of war is when neither side is able to make any winning moves which means that no side can achieve victory. This means no progress can be made anymore in the war (Collins).

## **Tanker War**

The tanker war began in 1980 when Iraq started attacking ships that were importing and exporting for Iran, it began a series of events where many shipping vehicles were set as the target of attacks in order to cut imports and exports for Iraq and Iran (O’Rourke).

## **War of Attrition**

War of attrition is when a war is fought for a large amount of time and ends when either side does not have the resources and ability required to continue fighting (Cambridge Dictionary).

## General Overview

### Causes

In 1932, following the independence of Iraq from the British (Tripp), control over the Shatt Al- Arab was frequently in question between the two countries Iran and Iraq. The Shatt Al- Arab was a river placed at the border of both countries and had significant importance to both sides, being Iraq's only entrance to the Persian Gulf, and similarly being a source of import and exports for Iran (Context History). In 1975 A treaty was signed between the leader of Iran Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, and the vice president of Iraq Saddam Hussein, known as the Treaty of Algiers (Britannica). This treaty was put in place in order to move the boundary of Iraq and Iran to a position where the Shatt Al- Arab is owned equally by both countries, in return Iran would have to end its support to the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq (Context History)(Britannica). Saddam Hussein saw this as a humiliation for Iraq, leading him to see Iran as a possible enemy.

Moreover, in 1979 the Islamic revolution in Iran led by Ruhollah Khomeini left Iran in an unstable state of chaos (Britannica). Saddam Hussein made use of this vulnerability and launched an attack on Iran in order to recover their territorial position over the Shatt Al- Arab, as well as prevent the Islamic revolution from creating any revolt in Iraq. This marked the start of the 8 year-long war between both sides (Britannica)(Nelson).

### The war

The war began with an initial attack by Iraq which was aimed specifically at the airfields, this was done through the use of attack from the air where bombs were dropped on the targeted airfields. Not long after, Iraq sent troops to attack Iran on foot, this was done in order to take Iran by surprise (Britannica). The Iraqi troops then attacked the Irani city of Khorramshahr which is known now as the Battle of Khorramshahr, Iraqi troops were successfully able to take control over the city. Alongside Khorramshahr, Iraq had also attacked the Irani cities of Susangerd and Abadan, these three attacks marked the initial attack by Iraq (Britannica)(Context History)(to).

In 1981, Iran began its counterattack to take control of Abadan and Khorramshahr. This was after Saddam's attempts to create peace due to the fact that Iraq was struggling in terms of financing. The Irani counterattack ended up being successful, and a large number of Iraqi troops were required to

surrender (Context History). Iran's objective was now to take over Saddam's leadership of Iraq and spread their Islamic beliefs into Iraq (Context History)(to).

Towards 1988 both sides had done various attacks, including Iraq's use of chemical weapons, however both Iraq and Iran struggled to maintain their positions and decided to end the war and call for a stalemate. The war ended with UN Resolution 598 which returned everything as it was before the war began (UN security council).

## Impacts

The impacts of the war were very severe; during the war, the Irani troops allied themselves with Kurdish guerillas in Iraq in order to try to take control over locations such as Iraqi military bases (Ronen Zeidel). The Halabja base was taken over by the Irani troops and Kurdish guerillas in 1988 towards the end of the war, this led Iraqi troops to use chemical warfare against the Kurdish population of Iraq, including innocent Kurdish civilians. This was a part of the Al Anfal campaign, a genocide done by Iraq against Kurds as a result of the war, which killed approximately between 100,000 - 200,000 Kurds (The Kurdish Project).

Moreover in Iran at the end of the war, with the Islamic republic in power and loyalty being a large focus in Iran's leadership, large numbers of political prisoners were put under questioning regarding their loyalty and beliefs which then led to the 1988 mass prisoner execution of Iran ("Iran's 1988 Mass Executions: Evidence & Legal Analysis of "Crimes against Humanity"). The executions killed up to 5,000 prisoners all over Iran in order to remove any trace of the MKO which was an organisation based in Iraq going against Iran, making it an extremely violent impact of the war ("Iran's 1988 Mass Executions: Evidence & Legal Analysis of "Crimes against Humanity").

## Major Parties Involved

### Iran

Iran was one of the two sides of the war, it initially got attacked by Iraq following the Islamic revolution. Iran was initially led by a monarchy with Mohamed Reza Pahlavi as the Shah however was taken over by the Islamic revolution (Afary). Iran was also directly connected to the river Shatt Al- Arab (Context History).



## **Iraq**

Iraq was the second of the two sides in the war. Iraq was led by Saddam Hussein, and aimed to overthrow the Islamic regime of Ruhollah Khomeini after feeling threatened by the Islamic revolution (E. Woods). Moreover, Iraq aimed to take full control of the River Shatt Al- Arab from Iran as it was also directly connected to the river, and for Iraq the river acted as the only source towards the Persian Gulf (Context History).

## **Kurds**

The Kurds were an ethnic group that was primarily in Iraq. This group was mostly the minority and aimed to form a rebellion against the Iraqi leadership. Moreover, the Kurds acted as a vital part, as they often collaborated with Iran to take control over parts of Iraq. Towards the end of the war, the Kurds were victims of the Al Anfal campaign which was an Iraqi genocide killing many of them (The Kurdish Project).

## **IRGC**

The IRGC or Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was the Irani armed forces that were fighting with the Islamic revolution. These forces were separate from Iran's standard military, however they worked alongside each other in fighting Iraq during the war (NCTC)(Afary).

## **Ba'athist regime**

The Ba'athist party was the party leading Iraq during the war. This party had Saddam Hussein as the leading figure and initiated the first attack against Iran during the Islamic revolution, which resulted in the beginning of the war (Khadduri).

## **Shatt Al- Arab**

The Shatt Al- Arab was a river formed by the connection of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers at the southern border of Iran and Iraq. This river connected directly to the Persian Gulf, making it very important for both countries.

## Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of Event
September 1988	End of the Al- Anfal campaign.
August 1988	End of the Iraq-Iran war - ceasefire between both sides has gone into effect (Wilsoncenter).
July 1988	Iran mass prisoner executions - the Islamic Republic began their executions of political prisoners including MKO members in order to remove disloyal people (“Iran’s 1988 Mass Executions: Evidence & Legal Analysis of “Crimes against Humanity””).
February 1988	Beginning of Al- Anfal campaign - Large number of Kurdish people in Iraq were subjected to genocide with the use of chemical weapons etc.
September 1980	Iraq sends the first attack on Iran - this marks the start of the eight-year war (Wilsoncenter).
January 1979	Islamic revolution begins in Iran - Ayatollah Khomeini aims to take over the Irani monarchy (Wilsoncenter).
March 1975	Algiers agreement is signed - divides ownership of Shatt Al- Arab equally between Iran and Iraq, ends Irani support towards Iraqi Kurdish rebellion (Wilsoncenter).

## Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

- UN resolution 479 was a resolution released by the security council in 1980 which urged Iran and Iraq to accept any offer made to and conflict by each side, and refrain from using more force (Security). This resolution naturally did not work.
- Un resolution 582 was released in 1986 and called for a ceasefire and to release any prisoners of war held by each side (UN). This resolution also failed.

- UN resolution 598 ended the war in 1988 which caused a ceasefire between both sides making it the first successful resolution regarding this war (UN security council).
- Saddam Hussein offered a ceasefire proposal towards Iran in 1982 due to the fact that Iraq was running low on resources (New York Times). Iran however saw this as a sign of weakness and a possibility to win the war, hence they declined the ceasefire and continued the war for 6 more years (Context History).

## Possible Solutions

- **Implement UN Monitoring onto the Shatt Al- Arab river.** This ensures that the Shatt Al- Arab is a military free zone and prevents the issue of tanker war where ships making imports and exports are not attacked. This can also prevent either side from breaking pre-existing treaties regarding the waterway, hence reducing the need for conflicts.
- **Call for a renegotiation of the 1975 Algiers treaty.** This solution would require the distribution of the Shatt Al- Arab between Iraq and Iran to change. The renegotiation can potentially create a distribution in which both sides of the river are satisfied, leading to a smaller likelihood of the treaty being broken and hence a lesser need for war. Moreover, it prevents Iraq from launching an attack in Iran in order to claim the river again.
- **Monitor the use of chemical weapons throughout the conflict.** As chemical weapons were a large part of Iraq's strategy throughout the war, monitoring the use might lessen the damage done by the war itself on both sides of the conflict. Moreover, it might reduce the severity of the Al Anfal campaign which made much use of chemical weapons against large numbers of Iraqi Kurdish civilians.
- **Encourage the mitigation of Islamic revolutionists in Iraq,** in order to prevent an Iraqi attack on Iran following the Islamic revolution. One of the main reasons the initial attack on Iran was done in 1980, was due to Saddam Hussein's fear of the new Islamic Republic of Iran to set forward an Islamic revolution within Iraq. Managing any possible rebel groups can reduce that fear and prevent further attacks from occurring.



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