

# Iran–Iraq War

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The **Iran–Iraq War**, also known as the **Imposed War** (جنگ تحمیلی, *Jang-e-tahmīlī*) and **Holy Defense** (دفاع مقدس, *Defā'-e-moqqaddas*) in Iran, **Saddām's Qādisiyyah** (قادسیّة صدّام, *Qādisiyyat Ṣaddām*) in Iraq, and the **(First) Persian Gulf War**, was an armed conflict between the armed forces of Iraq and Iran, lasting from September 1980 to August 1988, making it the longest conventional war of the twentieth century.<sup>[1] [2] [3]</sup> It was initially referred to in English as the "Persian Gulf War" prior to the "Gulf War" of 1990.

The war began when Iraq invaded Iran, launching a simultaneous invasion by air and land into Iranian territory on 22 September 1980 following a long history of border disputes, and fears of Shia insurgency among Iraq's long-suppressed Shia majority influenced by the Iranian Revolution. Iraq was also aiming to replace Iran as the dominant Persian Gulf state. Although Iraq hoped to take advantage of the revolutionary chaos in Iran and attacked without formal warning, they made only limited progress into Iran and within several months were repelled by the Iranians who regained virtually all lost territory by June 1982. For the next six years, Iran was on the offensive.<sup>[4]</sup> Despite calls for a ceasefire by the United Nations Security Council, hostilities continued until 20 August 1988. The war finally ended with a United Nations brokered ceasefire in the form of United Nations Security Council Resolution 598, which was accepted by both sides. It took several weeks for the Iranian armed forces to evacuate Iraqi territory to honor pre-war international borders between the two nations (see 1975 Algiers Agreement). The last prisoners of war were exchanged in 2003.<sup>[4] [5]</sup>

The war came at a great cost in lives and economic damage—half a million Iraqi and Iranian soldiers as well as civilians are believed to have died in the war with many more injured—but it brought neither reparations nor change in borders. The conflict is often compared to World War I,<sup>[6]</sup> in that the tactics used closely mirrored those of that conflict, including large scale trench warfare, manned machine-gun posts, bayonet charges, use of barbed wire across trenches, human wave attacks across no-man's land, and extensive use of chemical weapons such as mustard gas by the Iraqi government against Iranian troops and civilians as well as Iraqi Kurds. At the time, the UN Security Council issued statements that "chemical weapons had been used in the war." However, in these UN statements it was never made clear that it was only Iraq that was using chemical weapons, so it has been said that "the international community remained silent as Iraq used weapons of mass destruction against Iranian as well as Iraqi Kurds" and it is believed<sup>[7] [8] [9]</sup> that the "United States prevented the UN from condemning Iraq".<sup>[7]</sup>

## Background

### History of war's name

The war was commonly referred to as the **Gulf War** or **Persian Gulf War** until the Iraq–Kuwait conflict (Operation Desert Storm Jan–Feb 1991), and for a while thereafter as the **First Persian Gulf War**. The Iraq–Kuwait conflict, while originally known as the Second Persian Gulf War, later became known simply as "**The Gulf War**." The United States-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the following occupation of the country from 2003–2010 has since been called the Second Persian Gulf War.

Iraqi president Saddam Hussein initially dubbed the conflict "The Whirlwind War".<sup>[10]</sup>

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## Origins

### Post-colonial era

One of the factors contributing to hostility between the two powers was a dispute over full control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway (known as *Arvand Rud* in Iran) at the head of the Persian Gulf, an important channel for the oil exports of both countries. In 1937, Iran and Iraq signed a treaty that settled the long-standing dispute, which dated back to the Ottoman-Persian wars of the 16th and 17th centuries over the control of the Shatt al-Arab.<sup>[11]</sup> In the same year, Iran and Iraq both joined the Saadabad Pact, and relations between the two nations remained good for decades afterwards.<sup>[11]</sup> In 1955, both nations joined the Baghdad Pact.<sup>[11]</sup> The 1937 treaty recognized the Iranian-Iraqi border as along the low-water mark on the eastern side of the Shatt al-Arab except at Abadan and Khorramshahr where the frontier ran along the *thalweg* (the deep water line) which gave Iraq control of almost the entire waterway; provided that all ships using the Shatt al-Arab fly the Iraqi flag and have an Iraqi pilot, and required Iran to pay tolls to Iraq whenever its ships used the Shatt al-Arab.<sup>[12]</sup>

The overthrow of the Hashemites in Iraq in 1958 brought to power a new regime that was more stridently nationalist, and which promptly left the Baghdad Pact. On 18 December 1959, the new leader of Iraq General Abdul Karim Qassim, declared: "We do not wish to refer to the history of Arab tribes residing in Al-Ahwaz and Mohammareh [Khorramshahr]. The Ottomans handed over Mohammareh, which was part of Iraqi territory, to Iran." The Iraqi regime's dissatisfaction with Iran's possession of the oil-rich Khūzestān province (which Iraqis called Arabistan) that had a large Arabic-speaking population was not limited to rhetorical statements; Iraq began supporting secessionist movements in Khuzestan, and even raised the issue of its territorial claims at the next meeting of the Arab League, without success. Iraq showed reluctance in fulfilling existing agreements with Iran—especially after the death of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970 and the rise of the Ba'ath Party which took power in a 1968 coup, led Iraq to take on the self-appointed role of the "leader of the Arab world". At the same time, by the late 1960s, the build-up of Iranian power under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who had gone on a gargantuan military spending spree, led Iran to take a more assertive stance in the Near East.<sup>[11]</sup> In April 1969, Iran abrogated the 1937 treaty over the Shatt al-Arab, and as such, Iran ceased paying tolls to Iraq when its ships used the Shatt al-Arab.<sup>[13]</sup> Iraq threatened war over the Iranian move, but when on 24 April 1969 an Iranian tanker escorted by Iranian warships sailed down the Shatt al-Arab, Iraq being the militarily weaker state did nothing.<sup>[12]</sup> The Iranian abrogation of the 1937 treaty marked the beginning of a period of acute Iraqi-Iranian tension that was to last until the Algiers Accords of 1975.<sup>[12]</sup> In 1969, the deputy prime minister of Iraq stated: "Iraq's dispute with Iran is in connection with Arabistan (Khuzestan) which is part of Iraq's soil and was annexed to Iran during foreign rule." Soon Iraqi radio stations began exclusively broadcasting into "Arabistan", encouraging Arabs living in Iran and even Balūchīs to revolt against the Shah of Iran's government. Basra TV stations even began showing Iran's Khuzestan province as part of Iraq's new province called Nasiriyyah, renaming all its cities with Arabic names.

In 1971, Iraq broke diplomatic relations with Iran after claiming sovereignty rights over the islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb in the Persian Gulf, following the withdrawal of the British.<sup>[14]</sup> Iraq then expropriated the properties of 70,000 people it said were Iraqis of Iranian origin and expelled them from its territory, after complaining to the Arab League and the UN without success. Many, if not most of those expelled were in fact Iraqi Shias who had little to no family ties with Iran, and the vast majority of whom spoke Arabic, rather than Persian.<sup>[15]</sup> In retaliation for Iraq's claims to Khuzestan, Iran became the main patron of Iraq's Kurdish rebels in the early 1970s, giving the Iraqi Kurds bases in Iran and providing the Kurdish groups with weapons.<sup>[12]</sup> In addition to Iraq's fomenting of separatism in Iran's Khuzestan and Iranian Balochistan provinces, both countries encouraged separatist activities by Kurdish nationalists in the other country. In the winter of 1974–75, Iran and Iraq almost went to war over Iran's support of the Kurds in Iraq.<sup>[12]</sup> However, given Iran's greater military strength and population, the Iraqis decided against war, and chose to make concessions to Tehran to end the Kurdish rebellion.<sup>[12]</sup> In the 1975 Algiers Agreement Iraq made territorial concessions – including the waterway – in exchange for normalized relations.<sup>[12]</sup> In return for Iraqi recognition that the frontier on the Shatt al-Arab run along the entire *thalweg*, Iran ended its support

of the Iraqi Kurdish guerrillas.<sup>[12]</sup> The Algiers Agreement was widely seen as a national humiliation in Iraq.<sup>[12]</sup> [16] However, it meant the end of Iranian and US support for the *Peshmerga*, who were defeated by the Iraqi government in a short campaign that claimed 20,000 lives.<sup>[17]</sup> The British journalist Patrick Brogan wrote that "...the Iraqis celebrated their victory in the usual manner, by executing as many of the rebels as they could lay their hands on"<sup>[17]</sup>

The relationship between the Iranian and Iraqi governments briefly improved in 1978, when Iranian agents in Iraq discovered a pro-Soviet coup d'état against the Iraqi government. When informed of this plot, Saddam Hussein, who was vice president at the time, ordered the execution of dozens of his army officers, and to return the favor, expelled Ruhollah Khomeini, an exiled leader of clerical opposition to the Shah, from Iraq.

## After the Islamic Revolution

Iran's Pan-Islamism and revolutionary Shia Islamism and Iraq's Arab nationalism were central to the conflict. Initially, the Iraqi government welcomed the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1978–79, having had a common enemy with them in the deposed Shah.<sup>[18]</sup> The call, first made by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in June 1979 for Iraqi Shias to overthrow the Ba'ath regime was therefore received with considerable shock in Baghdad.<sup>[18]</sup> On 17 July 1979, despite Khomeini's call, the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein gave a speech praising the Iranian revolution, and called for Iraqi-Iranian friendship based upon non-interference in each other's internal affairs.<sup>[18]</sup> When Khomeini ignored Hussein's overture, and continued with his call for a Shia revolution in Iraq, the Iraqi regime was seriously alarmed.<sup>[19]</sup> The new Islamic regime in Iran was regarded in Baghdad as an irrational, existential threat to the Ba'ath regime.<sup>[20]</sup> This was especially the case as the Ba'ath regime, despite its secular nature, was dominated by Arab Sunnis, with the Arab Shia majority together with the Kurdish minority being assigned the status of an underclass.<sup>[21]</sup>



Iraqi 25-dinar note, as with the Battle of al-Qādisiyyah depicted in the background

Above all, Hussein was keenly interested in elevating Iraq to a strong regional power. A successful invasion of Iran would enlarge Iraq's petroleum reserves and make Iraq the dominant power in the Persian Gulf region. With Iran engulfed in chaos, the chance for Iraq to annex the oil-rich Khūzestān Province seemed too good for Hussein to pass up.<sup>[22]</sup> In addition, Khuzestan's large ethnic Arab population would allow Hussein to pose as the liberator of the Arabs from Persian rule.<sup>[16]</sup> In 1979–80, Iraq was the beneficiary of an oil boom that saw it take in \$33 billion US, which allowed the Iraqi government to go on a lavish spending spree on both civilian and military projects.<sup>[20]</sup> On several occasions Hussein alluded to the Islamic conquest of Iran in propagating his position against Iran. For example, on 2 April 1980, half a year before the outbreak of the war, in a visit by Hussein to al-Mustansiriyyah University in Baghdad, drawing parallels with the 7th century defeat of Persia in the Battle of al-Qādisiyyah, he announced:

In your name, brothers, and on behalf of the Iraqis and Arabs everywhere we tell those Persian cowards and dwarfs who try to avenge Al-Qadisiyah that the spirit of Al-Qadisiyah as well as the blood and honor of the people of Al-Qadisiyah who carried the message on their spearheads are greater than their attempts.<sup>[23]</sup>

In turn the Ayatollah Khomeini believed Muslims, particularly the Shias in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, whom he saw as oppressed, could and should follow the Iranian example, rise up against their governments to join a united Islamic republic.<sup>[24]</sup> Khomeini and Iran's Islamic revolutionaries despised Hussein's secularist, Arab nationalist Ba'athist regime in particular as un-Islamic and "a puppet of Satan,"<sup>[25]</sup> and called on Iraqis to overthrow it. In 1979–1980, there were anti-Ba'ath riots in the Shia areas of Iraq, and the Iranian government extended its support to Iraqi Shia militants working for an Islamic revolution in their country.<sup>[26]</sup> In April 1980 alone, 20 Ba'ath officials were assassinated by Shia militants with Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz being almost killed in an assassination attempt on 1 April 1980.<sup>[18]</sup> Later in April, the Information Minister Latif Nusseif al-Jasim barely survived an assassination attempt by Shia militants.<sup>[18]</sup> The repeated calls for the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime and the support extended to Iraqi Shia groups by the new regime in Iran led Hussein to increasingly perceive the Iranian regime as a mortal threat that if ignored, might one day overthrow him.<sup>[20]</sup> In April 1980, Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr and his sister Amina Haydar (better known as Bint al-Huda) were hanged as part of the crack-down on Iraqi Shia activists.<sup>[27]</sup> The hanging of Iraq's senior most Ayatollah caused outrage throughout the Shia world. Starting in May 1980, skirmishes on the Iranian-Iraqi border became a daily event.<sup>[20]</sup> At the same time in Iran, severe officer purges (including several executions ordered by Sadegh Khalkhali, the post-revolution *sharia* ruler), and spare parts shortages for Iran's US-made equipment, had crippled Iran's once mighty military. Between February–September 1979, the Iranian government shot 85 senior generals while forcing all major-generals and most brigadier-generals into early retirement.<sup>[28]</sup> By September 1980, the Iranian government had purged 12,000 army officers.<sup>[28]</sup> The effects of this purge was a drastic decline in the operational capacities of the Iranian military.<sup>[28]</sup> The bulk of the Iranian military was made up of poorly armed, though committed, militias. Iran had minimal defenses at the Shatt al-Arab river.

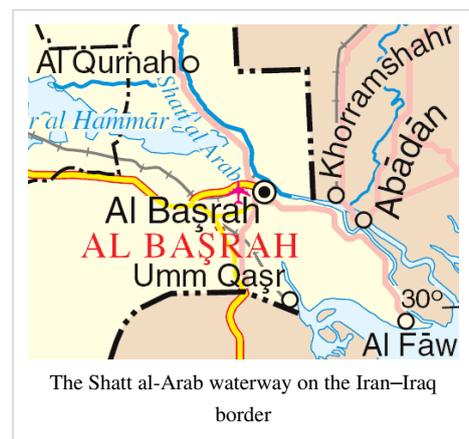
The UN Secretary General report dated 9 December 1991 (S/23273) explicitly cites "Iraq's aggression against Iran" in starting the war and breaching international security and peace.<sup>[29]</sup>

## War

### Iraqi pretext for war and Iraqi war aims

Iraq's pretext was an alleged assassination attempt on Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz in southern Iraq, which Hussein blamed on "Iranian agents", in one of his speeches.

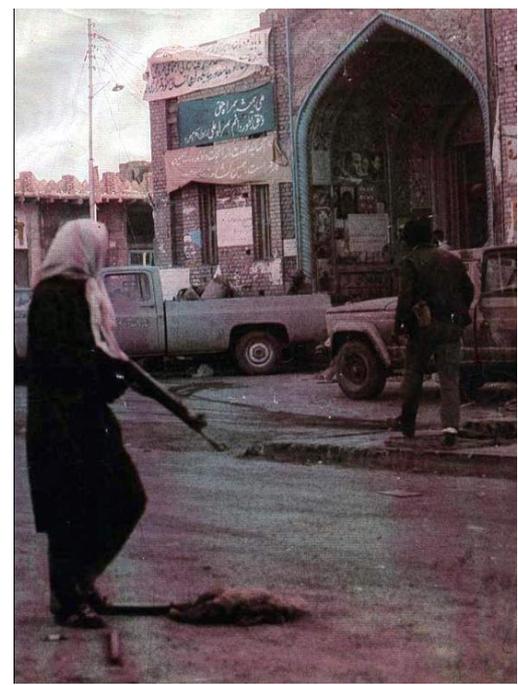
Relations deteriorated rapidly until in March 1980, Iran unilaterally downgraded its diplomatic ties to the charge d'affaires level, withdrew its ambassador, and demanded that Iraq do the same. The tension increased in April following the attempted assassination of Aziz and, three days later, the bombing of a funeral procession being held to bury students who had died in an earlier attack. Iraq blamed Iran, and in September, attacked.<sup>[30]</sup>



On 17 September, in a statement addressed to the Iraqi parliament, Hussein stated that "The frequent and blatant Iranian violations of Iraqi sovereignty...have rendered the 1975 Algiers Agreement null and void... This river...must have its Iraqi-Arab identity restored as it was throughout history in name and in reality with all the disposal rights emanating from full sovereignty over the river."<sup>[31]</sup>

The objectives of Iraq's invasion of Iran were:

1. Control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway by Iraqis
2. Acquisition of the three islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs, on behalf of the UAE
3. Annexation of Khuzestan to Iraq
4. Prevent the spread of the Islamic Revolution in the region



An armed Iranian militia woman in front of a mosque during the Iraqi invasion of Khorramshahr, September–October 1980

## 1980: Iraqi invasion

Iraq launched a full-scale invasion of Iran on 22 September 1980. The Iraqi Air Force launched surprise airstrikes on ten Iranian airfields with the objective of destroying the Iranian Air Force on the ground.<sup>[32]</sup> The attack destroyed some of Iran's airbase infrastructure, but failed to destroy a significant number of aircraft. The Iraqi Air Force was only able to strike in depth with a few MiG-23BN, Tu-22 and Su-20 aircraft, largely ineffective due to Iran's sheer size. Three MiG-23s managed to attack Tehran, striking its airport but damaging only a few aircraft.<sup>[33]</sup> The next day, Iraq launched a ground invasion of Iran along a front measuring 644 kilometres, in three simultaneous thrusts.<sup>[32]</sup> The purpose of the invasion, according to Saddam Hussein, was to blunt the edge of Khomeini's movement and to thwart his attempt to export his Islamic revolution to Iraq and the Persian Gulf states."<sup>[30]</sup> Saddam hoped that by annexing the oil-rich province of Khuzestan that he would send such a blow to the prestige of the Islamic Republic, that it would lead to the downfall of the new government, or at very least put an end to Iranian calls for his overthrow.<sup>[34]</sup>



Khūzestān Province of Iran, native name, استان خوزستان

Of the six Iraqi divisions that were invading, four were sent against the Iranian province of Khuzestan, which was located near the southern end of the border, to cut off the Shatt al-Arab from the rest of Iran, and to establish a territorial security zone.<sup>[32]</sup> The other two divisions invaded through the northern and central part of the border, to prevent an Iranian counter-attack into Iraq.<sup>[35]</sup> Two of the four Iraqi divisions operating near the southern end, one mechanized and one armored, began a siege of the strategically important towns of Abadan and Khorramshahr.<sup>[32]</sup>

The other two divisions, both armoured, secured the territory bounded by the line Khorramshahr-Ahvaz-Susangerd-Musian, due to an enveloping movement.<sup>[32]</sup> On the central front, the Iraqis occupied Mehran, advanced towards the foothills of the Zagros Mountains; and were able to block the traditional Tehran–Baghdad invasion route by securing some territory forward of Qasr-e Shirin.<sup>[35]</sup> On the northern front, the Iraqis attempted to establish a strong defensive position opposite Suleimaniya to protect the Iraqi Kirkuk oil complex.<sup>[35]</sup> Iraqi hopes of an uprising by the ethnic Arabs of Khuzestan failed to occur, and most the ethnic Arabs, who were Shiite remained loyal to Iran.<sup>[34]</sup> The Iraqi troops advancing into Iran in 1980 were described by the British journalist Patrick Brogan as "badly led and lacking in offensive spirit..."<sup>[22]</sup>

The Iranian regular military and the Pasdaran resisted, but conducted their operations separately. As a result, the Iraqi invading forces did not face co-ordinated resistance.<sup>[35]</sup> The Pasdaran fought against the Iraqi invasion with "great fervour and tenacity",<sup>[36]</sup> and bore the brunt of the invasion.<sup>[37]</sup> By the second day of the invasion, dozens of Iranian F-4s attacked Iraqi targets, and in a few days the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force gained air superiority over the Iraqis, allowing them to conduct ground attack missions with fighter-bombers and helicopters against Iraqi forces. The Iraqi Army was also subjected to attacks by entrenched Iranian artillery.<sup>[38]</sup> On 24 September, though, the Iranian Navy attacked Basra and, on the way, had destroyed two oil terminals near the Iraqi port of Fao, which reduced Iraq's ability to export oil.<sup>[39]</sup> The Iranian Air Force also began air strikes in September against strategically important Iraqi targets, including oil facilities, dams, petrochemical plants, and a nuclear reactor near Baghdad.<sup>[39]</sup>

On 28 September, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution urging Iran and Iraq to stop the fighting and accept mediation. The Iraqi invasion encountered unexpectedly fierce resistance, however, and by December 1980 it stalled. Also, rather than turning against the Islamic Republic as some experts had predicted, the people of Iran rallied around their country and resisted. An estimated 200,000 additional troops arrived at the front by November, many of them "ideologically committed" volunteers.<sup>[40]</sup>

Baghdad was subjected to eight air attacks by 1 October.<sup>[39]</sup> In response to these air attacks, Iraq launched a number of aerial strikes against Iranian targets.<sup>[39]</sup> In October 1980, a prolonged urban battle took place for Khorramshahr with both sides losing about 7, 000 dead.<sup>[34]</sup> Reflecting the bloody nature of the struggle, both sides came to call Khorramshahr "Khunistan" (City of Blood).<sup>[34]</sup> On 24 October, Khorramshahr was finally captured<sup>[36]</sup> and by November, Saddam ordered his forces to advance towards Dezful and Ahvaz,<sup>[39]</sup> but their thrusts were repulsed.<sup>[39]</sup> On 7 December 1980 Saddam announced that Iraq was going on the defensive.<sup>[41]</sup> For the next eight months, both sides were with the exception of the Battle of Dezful to be on the defensive as the Iranians needed more time to reorganize their forces to undo the damage inflicted by the purge of 1979–80.<sup>[12]</sup> During this period, the war consisted mainly of artillery duels and raids.<sup>[41]</sup> Iraq had mobilized 21 divisions for the invasion, while Iran countered with only 13 regular army divisions and one brigade. Of these divisions, only seven were deployed to the border.

## 1981: Stalemate

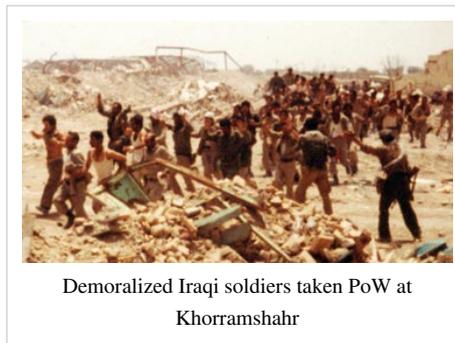
On 5 January 1981 the Iranians launched an armoured offensive at Susangerd that saw the Iranians break through the Iraqi lines.<sup>[42]</sup> However, the Iranian tanks raced through the Iraqi lines with their flanks outprotected, and as a result, the Iranian armoured division was cut off by Iraqi tanks.<sup>[43]</sup> In the ensuing battle, the Iranian division was almost totally destroyed in one of the biggest tank battles of the entire war.<sup>[43]</sup> The Iraqis lost 50 T-62 tanks while the Iranians lost 100 Chieftain and M-60 tanks.<sup>[43]</sup> The Battle of Dezful had been ordered by President Abulhassan Baniadr who was hoping that a victory might shore up his deteriorating political position; instead the failure of the offensive helped to hasten his fall.<sup>[44]</sup> A major distraction for Iran was the internal fighting between the regime and the leftist *Mujaheddin e-Khalq* group on the streets of Iran's major cities in June 1981 and again in September.<sup>[45]</sup>

In May 1981, the Iranians retook the high ground above Susangerd, and in September 1981, the Iranians put an end to the Iraqi Siege of Abadan, which had commenced in November 1980.<sup>[46]</sup> By the fall of 1981, serious morale problems had developed in the Iraqi Army with many Iraqi soldiers seeing no point to the invasion of Iran.<sup>[47]</sup> On 29

November 1981 Iran began Operation Tariq al-Qods (Operation Jerusalem Way) with three Army brigades and seven Revolutionary Guard brigades retaking the town of Bostan from the Iraqi division that was holding it by 7 December.<sup>[47]</sup> Operation Jerusalem Way saw the first use of the Iranian "human wave" tactics with the Revolutionary Guard charging the Iraqi positions time after time without the support of artillery or air power until victory.<sup>[48]</sup> The fall of Bostan massively increased the Iraqi logistical problems as to supply their troops, Iraq was forced to use the roundabout route from Ahvaz far to the south.<sup>[48]</sup>

## 1982: Iraqi retreat, Iranian offensive

For about a year after the Iraqi offensive stalled in March 1981 there was little change in the front, but in mid-March 1982 Iran took the offensive and the Iraqi military was forced to retreat. By June 1982, an Iranian counter-offensive had recovered all the areas lost to Iraq earlier in the war. In Operation Jerusalem launched on 24 April 1982, 70,000 Revolutionary Guardsmen using infiltration tactics at night and human wave attacks by day had by 12 May drove all Iraqi forces out of the Susangerd area.<sup>[49]</sup> On 20 May 1982 the Iranians began the drive towards Khorramshahr.<sup>[49]</sup> An especially significant battle of this counter-offensive in the Khuzestan province was the Liberation of Khorramshahr from the Iraqis on 24 May 1982. A total of 7,000 Iraqis were killed or wounded in Khorramshahr<sup>[50]</sup> and 19,000 taken prisoner, while the Iranians had suffered 10,000 casualties.



Demoralized Iraqi soldiers taken PoW at Khorramshahr

Saddam decided to withdraw his armed forces completely from Iran, and that they should be deployed along the international border between Iraq and Iran.<sup>[35]</sup> Efraim Karsh states that Saddam made this choice because the Iraqi leader believed that his army was now too demoralised and damaged to hold onto any territory in Iran, and that Iran could be successfully resisted through a line of defence on Iraqi land near the border.<sup>[35]</sup> Equally important, in April 1982 the rival Baathist regime in Syria at the request of Iran closed the Kirkuk–Banias pipeline that allowed Iraqi oil to reach tankers on the Mediterranean, which reduced the Iraqi budget by \$5 billion US/month.<sup>[51]</sup> The effects of the Syrian move was to place Iraq under dire financial pressure.<sup>[51]</sup> The British journalist Patrick Brogan wrote:

"From the time the southern front stabilized at the end of 1980, Iran was able to prevent all Iraqi oil exports through the Shatt. In April 1982, as the tide of war turned against Iraq, Syria closed Iraq's pipeline to the Mediterranean, and it appeared for a while that Iraq would be strangled economically before it was defeated militarily".<sup>[52]</sup>

After Syria closed the pipeline, Iraq's only means of exporting oil was the pipeline to Turkey that had a capacity of only 500,000 barrels/day that was quite insufficient to pay for the war.<sup>[53]</sup> Only generous financial support from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the other Gulf states, who feared the consequences of an Iranian victory saved Iraq from bankruptcy.<sup>[54]</sup> It was estimated that the Gulf states provided Iraq with an average of \$60 billion US in subsidies/per year.<sup>[52]</sup> Brogan wrote in 1989:

"The other Arab states came to the rescue. Iraq has one of the most unpleasant governments in the region and had shown constant hostility to the monarchies in Jordan, the Gulf and Saudi Arabia. However, the threat of Persian fundamentalism was far more to be feared, and thus the conservative Arab states could not afford to let Iraq be defeated."<sup>[52]</sup>

The Gulf states were especially inclined to fear an Iranian victory after Khomeini announced that monarchy was an illegitimate and un-Islamic form of government.<sup>[54]</sup> Khomeini's statement was widely understood as a call for the overthrow of the Gulf monarchies.<sup>[54]</sup> Both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia had less than friendly relations with Iraq before 1982, and the reluctant decision to support Iraq was taken only because the consequences of an Iranian victory were considered worse than the continued existence of Saddam's regime.<sup>[55]</sup> The British journalists John Bulloch and Harvey Morris wrote:

"The virulent Iranian campaign, which at its peak seemed to be making the overthrow of the Saudi regime a war aim on a par with the defeat of Iraq, did have an effect on the Kingdom, but not the one the Iranians wanted: instead of becoming more conciliatory, the Saudis became tougher, more self-confident, and less prone to seek compromise".<sup>[56]</sup>

Saudi Arabia was said to provide Iraq with \$1 billion US/month.<sup>[53]</sup>

On 20 June 1982 Saddam announced that he was prepared to accept a ceasefire on the basis of the pre-war *status quo*.<sup>[49]</sup> Khomeini rejected the Iraqi peace offer, and announced that only the overthrow of the Baath regime and its replacement with an Shia Islamic republic were the only peace terms he would accept.<sup>[49]</sup> Given that Saddam's offer of 1982 served as the basis of the 1988 ceasefire, Khomeini's decision to reject Saddam's offer, and instead invade Iraq extended the war for the next six years.<sup>[57]</sup> The British historians John Bulloch and Harvey Morris wrote:

"If the leaders in Tehran had accepted [the Iraqi ceasefire offer], they might have gained at the conference table what over six years they failed to achieve at a huge cost in men and material; but true to the bitterness and intransigence shown by both sides, Ayatollah Khomeini rejected the ceasefire offer and the Iranian troops fought on. Iran would remain at war until all of its demands were met, the Ayatollah said-and one of those demands was the removal of Saddam Hussein, the one condition which the Iraqi President could never accept"<sup>[58]</sup>

On 21 June 1982 Khomeini proclaimed in a speech that Iran would invade Iraq and would not stop until an Islamic Shia republic was set up in that country.<sup>[49]</sup> The decision to invade Iraq was taken after much debate within the Iranian government.<sup>[59]</sup> One faction comprising Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, President Ali Khamenei and the Army Chief of Staff General Ali Sayad Shirazi urged that now that all of Iranian soil had been liberated to accept the Iraqi ceasefire offer rather embark upon an invasion that was likely to take a heavy toll on Iran's youth and with uncertain prospects for victory.<sup>[59]</sup> In particular, General Shirazi was opposed to the invasion of Iraq on logistical grounds and said he was considering resignation if "unqualified people continued to meddle with the conduct of the war".<sup>[59]</sup> On the other side, there was a hardline faction led by clerics on the Supreme Defence Council, whose leader was the politically powerful Speaker of the *Majlis* Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani who favored continuing the war until the Baath were overthrown.<sup>[59]</sup> Khomeini sided with the hardliners.<sup>[59]</sup> In Baghdad, at a cabinet meeting, the minister of health Dr. Riyadh Ibrahim Hussein suggested that Saddam step down temporarily as a way of easing Iran towards a ceasefire.<sup>[58]</sup> An annoyed Saddam asked if anyone else in the Cabinet agreed with the Health Minister's idea. None raised their hands in support, and Dr. Hussein was shot later that day for treason.<sup>[58]</sup>

Under the slogans "War, War until Victory" and "The Road to Jerusalem Goes through Karbala",<sup>[60]</sup> Iran advanced. A tactic used in this advance noted throughout the world was the encouragement of heroism among young Iranian *basij* volunteers who launched suicidal human wave attacks on Iraqi positions. The volunteers were inspired before battle by tales of Ashura, the Battle of Karbala, and the supreme glory of martyrdom, and sometimes by an actor (usually a more mature soldier), playing the part of Imam Hossein himself riding a white horse, galloping along the lines, providing the inexperienced soldiers a vision of "the hero who would lead them into their fateful battle before they met their God."<sup>[61]</sup> The "martyrs" signed "Passports to Paradise" as admission forms to the *Basij* were called, given a week of basic military training by the *Pasdaran*, and then were sent to the front.<sup>[59]</sup> The *basij* volunteers who were usually in their early teens wore wooden keys around their necks (to open the doors of Heaven when they "martyred" themselves). These attacks cost Iran massive casualties, as they were met with fierce resistance from defensive positions, along with artillery and rocket fire.<sup>[38]</sup> A great advantage that the Iraqis were to enjoy in the defense of their country was logistical.<sup>[62]</sup> The front was close to all of the main Iraqi bases and arms depots, and Iraq's excellent roads allowed the Iraqi Army to be efficiently supplied.<sup>[16]</sup> By contrast, the front in Iraq was a considerable distance from the main Iranian bases and arms depots, and as such, Iranian troops and supplies had to travel through difficult roads across several mountain ranges before arriving at the front.<sup>[16]</sup>

On 13 July, the Iranian units crossed the border in force, aiming towards the city of Basra, the second most important city in Iraq. However, the enemy they encountered had entrenched itself in formidable defenses.<sup>[63]</sup> Unlike the hastily improvised defenses that the Iraqis had manned in Iran during the 1980–1981 occupation of the conquered territories, the border defenses were, by necessity, well developed even before the war, and the Iraqis were able to utilize a highly-developed network of bunkers and artillery fire-bases.<sup>[63]</sup> Unlike the fighting in Iran, Iraqi morale improved in 1982 when the Iraqis were fighting in the defense of their nation.<sup>[54]</sup> Saddam had also more than doubled the size of the Iraqi army from 200,000 soldiers (12 divisions and 3 independent brigades) to 500, 000 (23 divisions and nine brigades).<sup>[63]</sup>

Saddam's efforts bore fruit. Iran had been using combined-arms operations to great effect when it was attacking the Iraqi troops in its country, and had launched the iconic human-wave attacks with great support from artillery, aircraft, and tanks. However, lack of ammunition meant that the Iranians were now launching human-wave assaults with no support from other branches of the military. The superior defenses of the Iraqis meant that tens of thousands of Iranian soldiers were lost in most operations after 1982, and the Iraqi defenses would continue to hold in most sectors. During the advance on Basra, the Basij were used to clear the Iraqi minefields with their feet in order to allow the Pasdaran to advance.<sup>[63]</sup>

In the Basra offensive, or Operation Ramadan, five human-wave attacks were met with withering fire from the Iraqis. The boy-soldiers of Iran were particularly hard-hit, especially since they volunteered to run into minefields, in order to clear the way for the Iranian soldiers behind them. The Iranians were also hard-hit by the employment of chemical weapons and mustard gas by the Iraqis.

In 1982 with Iranian success on the battlefield, the U.S. made its backing of Iraq more pronounced, supplying it with intelligence, economic aid, normalizing relations with the government (broken during the 1967 Six-Day War), and also supplying "dual-use" equipment and vehicles. Dual use items are civilian items such as heavy trucks, armored ambulances and communications gear as well as industrial technology that can have a military application.<sup>[64]</sup> President Ronald Reagan decided that the United States "could not afford to allow Iraq to lose the war to Iran", and that the United States "would do whatever was necessary to prevent Iraq from losing the war with Iran."<sup>[65]</sup> President Reagan formalized this policy by issuing a National Security Decision Directive ("NSDD") to this effect in June, 1982. The Security Council passed Resolution 552 condemning attacks on commercial ships in the region.

## 1983–84: Strategic stalemate

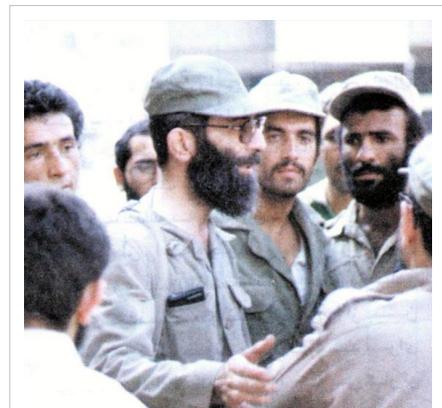
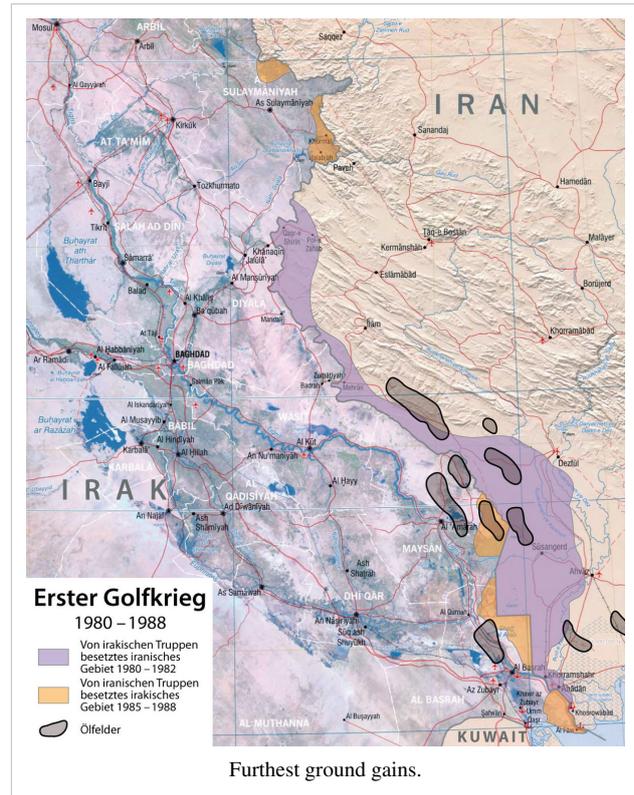
In January 1983, an Iraqi-Soviet arms deal was signed in Moscow, which led to the Soviet Union supplying Iraq with T-62 and T-72 tanks; Mig-23 and Mig-25 jets; and SS-21 and Scud-B missiles.<sup>[67]</sup> By 1987, the Soviet Union had provided Iraq with 800 T-72 tanks, and dozens upon dozens of modern fighters and bombers.<sup>[67]</sup> Between 1980–82, France had supplied Iraq with \$5.6 billion US worth of weapons such as fighters, tanks, self-propelled guns and helicopters.<sup>[67]</sup>

After the failure of their 1982 summer offensives, Iran believed that a major effort along the entire breadth of the front would yield the victory that they desired. Iranian numerical superiority might have achieved a break-through if they had attacked across all parts of the front at the same time, but they still lacked the organization for that type of assault. Iran was getting supplies from countries such as North Korea, Libya, and China. The Iraqis had more suppliers such as the USSR, the NATO nations, France, United Kingdom, Brazil, Yugoslavia, Spain, Italy, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Germany, and the United States.

During the course of 1983, the Iranians launched five major assaults along the front.<sup>[68]</sup> None met with substantial success as the Iranians staged massive "human wave" attacks on well-dug Iraqi positions without artillery, air or armored support.<sup>[68]</sup> Khomeini's position on a truce remained unchanged.

On 7 February 1984, Saddam ordered aerial and missile attacks against the eleven cities that he had designated.<sup>[69]</sup> The bombardment ceased on 22 February 1984. Iran soon retaliated against Iraqi urban centers, and these exchanges become known as the first "war of the cities". There would be five such exchanges throughout the course of the war.

The attacks on the Iranian cities did not destroy the Iranian government's resolve to fight. On 15 February, 1984 the Iranians launched a major attack against the central section of the front where the Second Iraqi Army Corps was deployed with 250,000 Iranians faced 250,000 Iraqis.<sup>[69]</sup> The Iranian "final blow" offensives entitled Operation Dawn 5 (5–22 February 1984) and Dawn 6 (22–24 February 1984) saw the Iranians attempting to take Kut al-Amara and sever the highway connecting Baghdad to Basra. From 15 to 22 February, in Operation Dawn 5, and 22 to 24 February, in Operation Dawn 6, the Iranians attempted to capture the vital town of Kut al-Amara and to cut the key highway linking Baghdad and Basra. Capture of this road would have made it extremely difficult for the Iraqis to supply and co-ordinate the defenses, but the Iranian forces only came within 15 miles (24 km) of the highway. After advancing to within 15 miles (24 km) of the highway after much heavy fighting, on 24 February, the Iranians began Operation Khaibar, the offensive intended to take Basr, which ended in failure as the Iraqi trenches proved to be too



Ali Khamenei, with Iranian soldiers on the front-line. Khamenei opposed Khomeini's decision to extend the war into Iraq.<sup>[66]</sup>

tough of a nut for the Iranians to crack.<sup>[70]</sup>

However, Operation Khaibar met with much greater success. The Iranians fought their way through the marshes of southern Iraq to take Majnun Island, 40 miles (64 km) to north of Basra.<sup>[70]</sup> Involving a number of thrusts towards the key Iraqi city of Basra, the operation started on the 24 February and lasted until 19 March. The Iraqi defenses, under continuous strain since 15 February, seemed close to breaking conclusively. The Iraqis were saved by use of a defense-in-depth with one defensive line after another; even if the Iranians stormed through the first line, they were usually so exhausted and had taken such heavy losses that attempts to storm through the second line resulted in failure.<sup>[71]</sup> The Iraqis successfully stabilized the front but not before the Iranians captured part of the Majnun Islands. Despite a heavy Iraqi counterattack coupled with the use of mustard gas and sarin nerve gas, the Iranians held their gains and would continue to hold them almost until the end of the war.<sup>[40]</sup> The Iranian offensive ended on 19 March 1984 after much desperate fighting in the marsh land with the Iraqis making heavy use of chemical weapons to halt the Iranian advance on Basra, through the Iraqis failed in their attempts to re-take Majnun.<sup>[70]</sup> At least 3,000 Iranians were killed in the fighting in the marshes with Iraqi helicopter gunships being deployed to "hunt" the Iranian troops in the marshes.<sup>[70]</sup>

### 1984: 'Tanker War' in Persian Gulf

The Tanker War started when Iraq attacked Iranian tankers and the oil terminal at Kharg Island in early 1984.<sup>[72]</sup> Iran struck back by attacking tankers carrying Iraqi oil from Kuwait and then any tanker of the Persian Gulf states supporting Iraq. Both nations attacked oil tankers and merchant ships, including those of neutral nations, in an effort to deprive the opponent of trade. Iraq declared that all ships going to or from Iranian ports in the northern zone of the Persian Gulf were subject to attack.<sup>[72]</sup> Saddam's motive in beginning the "tanker war" was to bring about western intervention against Iran, and thus end the war.<sup>[72]</sup>

Saddam's hope in beginning the "tanker war" was that in response to Iraqi attacks against its shipping, the Iranians might do something extreme in retaliation such as closing the Strait of Hormuz to all shipping.<sup>[72]</sup> The United States had threatened several times to go to war if the Strait of Hormuz was closed.<sup>[72]</sup> For this reason, the Iranians refused to rise to the bait, and so limited their attacks in retaliation to Iraqi shipping.<sup>[73]</sup> Iran attacked tankers carrying Iraqi oil from Kuwait and then any tanker of the Persian Gulf states supporting Iraq. The air and small boat attacks did very little damage to Persian Gulf state economies and Iran just moved its shipping port to Larak Island in the strait of Hormuz.<sup>[74]</sup>

Iraq used its air power to enforce its threats, primarily helicopters, F-1 Mirage and MiG-23 fighters armed with Exocet anti-ship missiles. After repeated Iraqi attacks on Iran's main exporting facility on Kharg Island, Iran attacked a Kuwaiti tanker near Bahrain on 13 May 1984, and a Saudi tanker in Saudi waters on 16 May. Attacks on ships of noncombatant nations in the Persian Gulf sharply increased thereafter, and this phase of the Iraq-Iran war was dubbed the "Tanker War." The Iranian attacks against Saudi shipping led to Saudi F-15s shooting down an Iranian aircraft on 5 June 1984.<sup>[73]</sup>



An Iranian frigate during the tanker war

Though the "tanker war" alarmed the United States, it was not followed up with any significant American action until 1987.<sup>[73]</sup> After several Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti shipping, the American Navy started in March 1987 to escort Kuwaiti tankers provided that they flew the American flag.<sup>[73]</sup> In April 1987, the Soviet Navy also started escorting Kuwaiti tankers.<sup>[73]</sup> A US Navy ship, the USS Stark was struck on 17 May 1987, by two Exocet antiship missiles fired from an Iraqi F-1 Mirage<sup>[75]</sup> <sup>[76]</sup> plane. The Iraqi fighter fired the Exocet missiles at about the time the fighter was given a routine radio warning by the *Stark*.<sup>[77]</sup> The frigate did not detect the missiles with radar and warning was given by the lookout only moments before the missiles struck.<sup>[78]</sup> The missiles hit the ship and one exploded in crew quarters, killing 37 sailors and wounding 21.<sup>[78]</sup>



Cargo Ship under attack

### Attacks on shipping

Lloyd's of London, a British insurance market, estimated that the Tanker War damaged 546 commercial vessels and killed about 430 civilian sailors. The largest portion of the attacks were directed by Iran against Kuwaiti vessels, and on 1 November 1986, Kuwait formally petitioned foreign powers to protect its shipping. The Soviet Union agreed to charter tankers starting in 1987, and the United States offered to provide protection for tankers flying the U.S. flag on 7 March 1987 (Operation Earnest Will and Operation Prime Chance).<sup>[79]</sup> During the course of the war Iran attacked two Soviet Navy ships which were protecting Kuwaiti tankers.<sup>[80]</sup> One of the ships which was damaged as a result of an attack during the war was the *Seawise Giant* carrying Iranian crude which was struck by Iraqi Exocet missiles, resulting in the damage of the largest ship ever built in history.<sup>[81]</sup>

### 1985 – 86: Offensives and retreats

With his armed forces now benefiting from financial support from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Persian Gulf states, and substantial arms purchases from the Soviet Union, China and France (among others), Saddam went on the offensive on 28 January 1985, for the first time since early 1980. This offensive, however, did not produce any significant gains, and the Iranians responded in kind with their own offensive directed against Basra, codenamed Operation Badr, on 11 March 1985.<sup>[82]</sup> The Imam Khomeini urged Iranians on saying, "It is our belief that Saddam wishes to return Islam to blasphemy and polytheism. ... if America becomes victorious ... and grants victory to Saddam, Islam will receive such a blow that it will not be able to raise its head for a long time ... The issue is one of Islam versus blasphemy, and not of Iran versus Iraq."<sup>[83]</sup>

By this time, the failure of the unsupported human wave attacks during 1984 meant that Iran was trying to develop a better working relationship between the army and the Pasdaran.<sup>[82]</sup> The Iranian government also worked on molding the Revolutionary Guard units into a much more conventional fighting force. The attack did succeed in capturing a part of the Baghdad-Basra highway that had proven elusive during Operation Dawn 5 and Operation Dawn 6. Reflecting the improved Iranian tactics, Iraq suffered 10, 000–12, 000 casualties in Badr while the Iranians took 15, 000 casualties.<sup>[82]</sup> Saddam responded to this strategic emergency by launching chemical attacks against the Iranian positions along the highway and by initiating the second 'war of the cities' with a massive air and missile campaign against twenty Iranian towns, including Tehran.<sup>[82]</sup>

On 9 February 1986, the Iranians launched Operation Dawn 8, which saw 100, 000 troops comprising 5 Army divisions and 50, 000 men from the Pasdaran and the Basji advance in a two-pronged offensive in southern Iraq.<sup>[84]</sup> Unlike the earlier offensives, Dawn 8 was planned entirely by professional Army officers, all of whom had began their careers under the Shah.<sup>[84]</sup> The Iranians launched a feint attack against Basra, which was stopped by the Iraqis.<sup>[84]</sup> At the same time with the Iraqis distracted by the offensive against Basra, the main Iranian blow fell on the strategically important Fao peninsula, which fell after only 24 hours of fighting.<sup>[84]</sup> The Iranians launched their

assault on the Fao at night with their men arriving via rubber boats.<sup>[85]</sup> After taking the Fao, the Iranians built a pontoon bridge and began to dig in.<sup>[85]</sup> On 12 February 1986 the Iraqis began a counter-offensive to re-take the Fao, which failed after a week of intense fighting.<sup>[84]</sup> Saddam sent one of his best commanders, General Maher Abd-Rashid and the Republican Guard to begin a new offensive to re-capture the Fao on 24 February 1986.<sup>[84]</sup> A new round of intensive fighting took place with the Iraqis losing 10,000 men and the Iranians 30,000 over the next four days.<sup>[84]</sup> The Iraqi offensives were supported by helicopter gunships, hundreds of tanks and a huge bombing offensive by the Iraqi Air Force.<sup>[86]</sup> Despite having an advantage in firepower and the extensive use of chemical warfare, the Iraqi attempt to re-take the Fao again ended in failure.<sup>[84]</sup> The fall of the Fao and the failure of the Iraqi counter-offensives were huge blows to the prestige of the Baath regime, and led to fears all over the Gulf that Iran might win the war.<sup>[84]</sup> In particular, Kuwait felt menaced with Iranian troops only ten miles away, and increased its support of Iraq accordingly.<sup>[87]</sup> In March 1986, the Iranians tried to follow up their success by attempting to take Umm Qasr, which would have had the effect of severing Iraq from the Gulf and placing Iranian troops on the border with Kuwait.<sup>[84]</sup> The Iranian offensive failed.<sup>[84]</sup> In May 1986, the Iraqis took the Iranian border town of Mehran, and made a proposal for swapping Mehran for Fao.<sup>[88]</sup> The Iraqi offer was rejected and in July 1986 the Iranians re-took Mehran.<sup>[88]</sup>

### 1987 – 88: Towards a ceasefire

1987 saw a renewed wave of Iranian offensives against targets in both the north and south of Iraq. Iranian forces launched Operation Karbala-5 in an attempt to capture Basra, but repulsed after more than two months of fighting which saw 20,000 Iraqi and 65,000 Iranian casualties. Among those killed was Iranian commander Hossein Kharrazi. The Iranians came close to breaking through the Iraqi lines and taking Basra, but in the end, the strength of the Iraqi lines halted the Iranian offensive.<sup>[52]</sup> However, the Iranians came close enough to Basra to bring up their artillery, and in the ensuing bombardments, Basra was largely destroyed.<sup>[52]</sup> The Iranians were met with more success later in the year in the north as Operations Nasr 4 and Karbala-10, threatening to capture the oil-rich Iraqi city of Kirkuk and other northern oilfields. However, the Iranian forces were unable to consolidate their gains and continue their advance, and so 1987 saw little land change hands. On 20 July, the Security Council of the United Nations passed the US-sponsored Resolution 598, which called for an end to fighting and a return to pre-war boundaries.<sup>[89]</sup>



People's Mujahedin of Iran supported by Saddam started their ten-day operation after both the Iranian and Iraqi governments accepted UN Resolution 598. Casualties ranged from 2,000 to 10,000.

In February 1988, Saddam began the fifth and most deadly of the "war of the cities".<sup>[90]</sup> Over the next two months, Iraq was to fire over 200 missiles at Iranian cities.<sup>[90]</sup> In March 1988, the Iranians began an offensive in Iraqi Kurdistan with the aim of capturing the Darbandi Khan reservoir and the power plant at Dukan, which supplied Iraq with much of its electricity.<sup>[91]</sup> Through the Iranians advanced to within sight of Dukan, and captured 400 square miles (1000 km<sup>2</sup>) and 4,000 Iraqi troops, the offensive failed to the Iraqi use of chemical warfare.<sup>[91]</sup> On 17 April 1988, an Iraqi offensive was started which saw the Fao peninsula recaptured after three days of fighting.<sup>[90]</sup> After retaking the Fao, the Iraqis began a sustained drive to clear the Iranians out of all of southern Iraq.<sup>[91]</sup> In May 1988, the Iraqis expelled the Iranians from Salamchech and took Majnun Island.<sup>[90]</sup> During the fighting in the spring of 1988, the Iranians showed all the signs of collapsing morale.<sup>[62]</sup> The British journalist Patrick Brogan reported:

"Reports from the front, both at Faw [Fao] and outside Basra, indicated that the Iranian resistance was surprisingly weak. The army that had shown such courage and *élan* early in the war now broke in a rout, and fled before the Arabs."<sup>[62]</sup>

During the 1988 battles, the Iranians seemed tired and worn out by the nearly eight years of the war, and "put up very little resistance" to the Iraqi offensives.<sup>[92]</sup> At the same time that Iraq was in the process of expelling the Iranians from its territory, a series of American-Iranian naval clashes in the Gulf led Iran to fear American intervention.<sup>[93]</sup> At this point, led by Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, elements of the Iranian leadership had decided to sue for peace.<sup>[94]</sup> On 20 July 1988, Iran announced its willingness to accept a ceasefire by accepting Resolution 598.<sup>[95]</sup> In a radio address, an announcer read out a statement by Khomeini, in which he expressed his deep displeasure and reluctance about accepting the ceasefire by saying:

"Happy are those who have departed through martyrdom. Happy are those who have lost their lives in this convoy of light. Unhappy am I that I still survive and have drunk the poisoned chalice..."<sup>[96]</sup>

Iraq for its turn announced it was not willing to accept Resolution 598 until Khomeini explicitly disallowed his call for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.<sup>[97]</sup> Over the next few weeks, Iraq launched several limited offensives into Iran to seize border territory as a way of pressuring Khomeini to disallow his calls for regime change in Iraq.<sup>[98]</sup> At the same time, Saddam came under heavy pressure from the Gulf states, who were his largest creditors to accept the Iranian offer and finally end the war.<sup>[99]</sup>

In July 1988 Iraqi airplanes dropped chemical cyanide bombs on the Iranian Kurdish village of Zardan (as they had done four months earlier at their own Kurdish village of Halabja). Hundreds were killed at once, and the survivors are still suffering from a variety of physical and mental disorders. Following these major setbacks, Iran accepted the terms of U.N. Security Council Resolution 598 and on 20 August 1988 peace was restored.<sup>[100]</sup> The news of the end of the war was greeted with scenes of wild celebration in Baghdad with people dancing in the streets while in Tehran, the end of the war was greeted with a glum, sad silence as Iran settled for the same terms it had rejected in 1982, thus meaning that the last six years of the war had been in vain<sup>[101]</sup>

The People's Mujahedin of Iran started their ten-day operation (Operation Mersad) after the Iranian government accepted UN Resolution 598. While Iraqi forces attacked Khuzestan, the Mujahedin attacked western Iran and battled the Pasdaran for Kermanshah. Close air support from the Iraqis contributed to whatever gains the Mojahedin made. However, Iranian paratroopers landed behind their lines, and they were met with fierce resistance. Under heavy international pressure for ending the war, Saddam Hussein withdrew his fighter aircraft and the sky opened for the Iranian airborne forces to be deployed behind Mojahedin lines. The operation ended in a defeat for the Mojahedin. Casualty figures range from 2,000 to as high as 10,000.

## Home front

### Iraq

At first, Saddam followed a policy of attempting to ensure that Iraqi population suffered from the war as a little as possible.<sup>[102]</sup> There was little rationing, and civilian projects began before the war continued.<sup>[102]</sup> At the same time, the already extensive personality cult around Saddam reached new heights of adulation while the regime tightened its control over the military.<sup>[103]</sup> After the Iranian victories of the spring of 1982 and the Syrian closure of Iraq's main pipeline, Saddam did a volte-face on his policy towards the home front.<sup>[104]</sup> A policy of austerity and total war was introduced with the entire population being mobilized for the war effort.<sup>[104]</sup> All Iraqis were ordered to donate blood, mass demonstrations of loyalty towards Saddam become more common, and some 100,000 Iraqi civilians were ordered to sever the reeds in the southern marshes.<sup>[104]</sup> To secure the loyalty of the Shittes, Saddam began a policy of allowing more Shiites into the Ba'ath Party and the government, and started efforts to improve Shiite living standards, which tended to be much lower than those of the Iraqi Arab Sunnis.<sup>[105]</sup> As part of the effort to ensure Iraqi Shia support for the war, Saddam had the Iraqi state pay for the costs of restoring the tomb of the Imam Ali

with white marble being imported from Italy.<sup>[105]</sup> Despite the costs of the war, the Iraqi regime made generous contributions to Shia *waqf* (religious endowments) as part of the price of buying Iraqi Shia support.<sup>[106]</sup> The importance of winning Shia support could see that the expansion of welfare services in Shia areas went on at a time when the Iraqi regime was pursuing a policy of rigid austerity in all other fields other than the military.<sup>[107]</sup> Khomeini's behavior during his time in exile in Najaf when he often quarrelled with the leaders of the Iraqi *ulema* helped to explain when many of the Iraqi Shia *ulema* supported the Iraqi regime against him.<sup>[108]</sup> On the whole, Iraqi Shittes supported their country's war effort against Iran.<sup>[109]</sup> The British journalist Patrick Brogan reported:

"Even the Shittes of Iraq preferred the vicious tyranny of Saddam Hussein, Sunni though he was, to the Ayatollah's Shiite paradise: Hussein was an Arab, Khomeini a Persian, and 13 centuries of hostility are not to be dispersed by a Friday sermon".<sup>[92]</sup>

During the first years of the war in the early 1980s, the Iraqi government tried to accommodate the Kurds in order to focus on the war against Iran. In 1983, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan agreed to cooperate with Baghdad, but the Kurdish Democratic Party remained opposed.<sup>[110]</sup> In 1983, Saddam signed an autonomy agreement with Jalal Talabani of the PUK, through subsequently Saddam reneged on his promise of Kurdish autonomy.<sup>[44]</sup> By 1985, the PUK and KDP had joined forces, and Iraqi Kurdistan became the scene of widespread guerrilla warfare right up to the end of the war in 1988.<sup>[44]</sup>

As a counterpart to the new policy of the "carrot", there was a policy of the "stick". A campaign of terror was begun in the summer of 1982 with more than 300 Iraqi Army officers being shot for their failures on the battlefield.<sup>[105]</sup> In 1983, a major crackdown was launched on the leadership of the Shiite community with 90 members of the al-Hakim family (an influential family of Shia clerics whose leading member were the émigrés Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim and Abdul Aziz al-Hakim) being arrested and six being hanged.<sup>[105]</sup> Even more extensive was the crackdown on the Kurds that saw 8,000 members of the Barzani clan, whose leader Massoud Barzani was also the leader of the KDP summarily executed.<sup>[44]</sup> From 1983 onwards, a campaign of increasingly brutal repression was started against the Iraqi Kurds that the Israeli historian Efraim Karsh wrote "assumed genocidal proportions" by 1988.<sup>[44]</sup> The Al-Anfal Campaign was intended to "pacify" Iraqi Kurdistan permanently.<sup>[44]</sup>

## Iran

The outbreak of the war was seen by the Iranian government as a heaven-sent chance to strengthen its position and consolidate the Islamic revolution.<sup>[44]</sup> The war was presented to the Iranian people as a glorious *jihad* and a test of Iranian national character.<sup>[111]</sup> Right from the beginning, the Iranian regime followed a policy of total war, and attempted to mobilize the entire nation for the struggle.<sup>[112]</sup> The war furthered the decline of the Iranian economy that began with the Islamic revolution in 1978–79.<sup>[113]</sup> Between 1979 and 1981, foreign exchange reserves fell from \$14.6 billion US to \$1 billion.<sup>[114]</sup> As a result of the war, living standards dropped quite dramatically in Iran in the 1980s.<sup>[114]</sup> The British journalists John Bulloch and Harvey Morris described 1980s Iran as "...a dour and joyless place" ruled by a harsh regime that "...seemed to have nothing to offer, but endless war".<sup>[115]</sup> As part of the total war effort, the regime established a group known as the Reconstruction Campaign, who enjoyed exemption from conscription and sent into the countryside to work on the farms and replace the men serving at the front.<sup>[116]</sup> Iranian workers had a day's pay deducted from their pay cheques every month to help finance the war, and mass campaigns were launched to encourage the public to donate food, money and blood for the soldiers.<sup>[114]</sup> To help pay for the war, the Iranian government banned the import of all non-essential items, and started a major effort to rebuild the damaged oil plants.<sup>[116]</sup> Iranian oil technicians, "masters of invention and innovation", did much to keep their nation's oil industry going in the face of much difficulty, and thus ensured that Iran could pay for the war.<sup>[116]</sup>

In 1981, a condition of near-civil war took place on the streets of Iranian cities as the left-wing *Mujaheddin e-Khalq* (MEK) attempted to seize power.<sup>[117]</sup> In June 1981, street battles between the MEK and the Revolutionary Guard raged for several days with hundreds killed on both sides.<sup>[118]</sup> The MEK started an assassination campaign that killed hundreds of regime officials by the fall of 1981.<sup>[119]</sup> On June 28, 1981 the MEK assassinated secretary-general

of the Islamic Republican Party, Mohammad Beheshti and August 30, killed the President, Mohammad-Ali Rajai.<sup>[119]</sup> In September 1981, street battles again raged between the MEK and the Revolutionary Guard.<sup>[119]</sup> Thousands of left-wing Iranians (many of whom were not associated with the MEK) were shot and hanged by the government in the aftermath.<sup>[119]</sup> Even after their defeat, the MEK waged a campaign of bombings and assassinations which was met with a policy of mass executions of suspected MEK members that lasted until 1985.<sup>[117]</sup> Other than the MEK, the Iranian government was faced with a rebellion in Iranian Kurdistan supported by Iraq, which was gradually put down through a campaign of systematic repression.<sup>[116]</sup> Besides for the MEK and the Kurds, anti-war student demonstrations took place in 1985, which were crushed by government activists.<sup>[114]</sup>

One of the few exceptions to the repressive policies of the government was the tolerance shown to the anti-war Islamic Liberation Movement led by a former prime minister Mehdi Bazargan.<sup>[116]</sup> In January 1985, Bazargan criticized the war after 1982 in a telegram to the United Nations as un-Islamic and illegitimate, arguing that Khomeini should have accepted Saddam's truce offer of 1982 instead of attempting to overthrow the Baath.<sup>[116]</sup> Khomeini was annoyed by Bazargan's telegram, and issued a lengthy public rebuttal in which he defended the war as both Islamic and just.<sup>[116]</sup> By 1987, there were increasing signs that Iranian morale was breaking as reflected in the failure of several government campaigns to recruit "martyrs" for the front.<sup>[114]</sup> The Israeli historian Efraim Karsh wrote that it was signs of declining morale in 1987–88 that played a major role in Iran's decision to accept the ceasefire of 1988.<sup>[114]</sup> The British journalist Patrick Brogan wrote that by 1988:

"The economy was collapsing. War and revolution had taken their toll. Only war industries survived, and the standard of living was dropping precipitously. There were no longer enough recruits for the Revolutionary Guards; the Iranian war machine was no longer capable of supplying the huge armies that had marched singing to war in the early days...The country was sliding steadily into bankruptcy. Strict Islamic law forbids usury, and Khomeini interpreted that to mean Iran could not borrow against future oil revenues to meet the expenses of war. Iran paid cash, and when the reserves were exhausted, Iran had to rely on income from its oil exports. Oil revenue dropped from \$20 billion in 1982 to \$5 billion in 1988. At an OPEC meeting in June 1988, Saudi Arabia, who had broken diplomatic relations with Iran two months earlier, vetoed a last, desperate Iranian initiative to cut production and thus raise prices again"<sup>[120]</sup>

In a public letter to Khomeini sent in May 1988, Bazargan wrote:

"Since 1986, you have not stopped proclaiming victory, and now you are calling upon population to resist until victory. Is that not an admission of failure on your part?"<sup>[120]</sup>

Bazargan went to criticize Khomeini for the war, which Bazargan stated was bankrupting Iran, and slaughtering its youth for no good purpose.<sup>[120]</sup>

## Comparison of Iraqi and Iranian military strength

At the commencement of hostilities, Iraq held a clear advantage in armour, while both nations were roughly at parity with artillery. The gap only widened as the war went on. Iran started with a stronger air force, but over time, the balance of power flipped towards favoring Iraq. The United States and the United Kingdom sold arms and weaponry to Iraq throughout the eight year war<sup>[121]</sup><sup>[122]</sup> estimates for 1980 and 1987 were:<sup>[123]</sup>

<b>Imbalance of Power (1980–1987)</b>	<b>Iraq</b>	<b>Iran</b>
Tanks in 1980	2700	1740
Tanks in 1987	4500+	1000
Fighter Aircraft in 1980	332	445
Fighter Aircraft in 1987	500+	65 (serviceable)
Helicopters in 1980	40	500
Helicopters in 1987	150	60
Artillery in 1980	1000	1000+
Artillery in 1987	4000+	1000+

## Foreign support to Iraq and Iran

During the war, Iraq was regarded by the West (specifically the United States) and Soviet Union as a counterbalance to post-revolutionary Iran.<sup>[124]</sup> The Soviet Union, which was Iraq's main arms supplier for the entire duration of the war did not wish for the end of its alliance with Iraq, and was alarmed at Hussein's threats if the Kremlin did not provide him with the weapons he wanted, then Iraq would find new arms suppliers in the West and in China.<sup>[125]</sup> The British journalists John Bulloch and Harvey Morris wrote:

"Throughout the war the Soviet Union remained Iraq's main supplier, as it had always been—the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed by Moscow and Baghdad in 1972 was a formalisation of the special relationship between the two countries which had existed from the time of the overthrow of the monarchy, and survived the rift between the Ba'ath and the Communist Party of Iraq, with all the bloodshed that entailed".<sup>[126]</sup>



Donald Rumsfeld as US special envoy to the Middle East, meets Saddam Hussein in December 1983 (video). Rumsfeld would later become US Defense Secretary during the 2003 Iraq War which saw Hussein ousted from power, and ultimately executed.

In addition, the Soviet Union hoped to use the prospect of reducing arms supplies to Iraq as leverage for forming a Soviet-Iranian alliance.<sup>[127]</sup> The basis of American policy was described by Bulloch and Morris as follows:

"Part of the US dilemma in the Gulf was that the United States was committed to the territorial integrity of a state, Iran, whose rulers were implacably hostile to it. Washington wished to protect other states in the region from Iranian expansionism as well as protecting Iran from that of the Soviet Union, so that coupled with a natural and publicly supported wish to do down the Khomeini regime was a more pragmatic need to see the survival of a stable, independent and anti-communist Iran. The central importance of Iran in America's geopolitical strategy, until the advent of the Gorbachev era forced a reappraisal, was outlined by Henry Kissinger in 1982:

"The focus of Iranian pressure at this moment is Iraq. There are few governments in the world less deserving of our support and less capable of using it. Had Iraq won the war, the fear in the Gulf and the threat to our interest would be scarcely less than it is today. Still, given the importance of the balance of power in the area, it is in our interests to promote a ceasefire in that conflict; through not a cost that will preclude an eventual rapprochement with Iran either if a more moderate regime replaces Khomeini's or

if the present rulers wake up to geopolitical reality that the historic threat to Iran's independence has always come from the country with which it shares a border of 1500 miles (2400 km): the Soviet Union. A rapprochement with Iran, of course, must await at a minimum Iran's abandonment of hegemonic aspirations in the Gulf".

Iran, in other words, should be befriended if possible, but must above, be contained."<sup>[128]</sup>

The support of Iraq took the form of technological aid, intelligence, the sale of dual-use and military equipment and satellite intelligence to Iraq. While there was direct combat between Iran and the United States, it is not universally agreed that the fighting between the U.S. and Iran was specifically to benefit Iraq, or for separate, although occurring at the same time, issues between the U.S. and Iran. American ambiguity towards which side to support was summed up by Henry Kissinger when the American statesman remarked that "it's a pity they [Iran and Iraq] both can't lose."<sup>[129]</sup> Richard Murphy, the Assistant Secretary of State testified to Congress in 1984 that the Reagan administration believed that a victory for either Iran or Iraq was "neither militarily feasible nor strategically desirable".<sup>[130]</sup> France, which from the 1970s onwards had been one of Iraq's closest allies was a major supplier of military hardware to Iraq.<sup>[131]</sup> The French sold weapons equal to the sum of \$5 billion US, which comprised well over a quarter of Iraq's total armory.<sup>[131]</sup> China, which had no direct stake in the victory of either side, and whose interests in the war were entirely commercial freely sold arms to both sides.<sup>[132]</sup>

More than 30 countries provided support to Iraq, Iran, or both. Iraq, in particular, had a complex clandestine procurement network to obtain munitions and critical materials, which, in some transactions, involved 10–12 countries. Also, a number of Arab mercenaries and volunteers from Egypt<sup>[133]</sup> and Jordan (called the Yarmouk Brigade<sup>[134]</sup>) participated in the war alongside Iraqis.

Country	Foreign policy	Support to Iraq	Support to Iran
All countries	International aid to combatants in the Iran–Iraq War		
 United States		United States support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	United States support for Iran during the Iran–Iraq war
 United Kingdom		British support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	
 Saudi Arabia		Saudi support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	
 Soviet Union	The Soviet Union and the Iran–Iraq War	Soviet support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	Soviet support for Iran during the Iran–Iraq war
 People's Republic of China		Chinese support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq War	Chinese support for Iran during the Iran–Iraq War
 France		French support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	
 Kuwait		Kuwait support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	
 Israel			Israeli support for Iran during the Iran–Iraq war
 Italy		Italian support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	
 West Germany		West German support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	
 Egypt		Egyptian support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	

 Jordan		Jordanian support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	
 Singapore		Singapore support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	
 North Korea			North Korean support for Iran during the Iran–Iraq war
 Yugoslavia		Yugoslav support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war	Yugoslav support for Iran during the Iran–Iraq war

### Iraqi attack on U.S. warship

On 17 May 1987, an Iraqi Mirage F1 attack aircraft launched two Exocet missiles at the USS *Stark*, a *Perry* class frigate. The first struck the port side of the ship and failed to explode, though it left burning propellant in its wake; the second struck moments later in approximately the same place and penetrated through to crew quarters, where it exploded. The detonation killed 37 crewmembers and left 21 injured. The question of whether or not Iraqi leadership authorized the attack is still unanswered. Initial claims by the Iraqi government (that *Stark* was inside the Iran–Iraq War zone) were shown to be false, so the motives and orders of the pilot remain unanswered. Though American officials claimed he had been executed, an ex-Iraqi Air Force commander since stated that the pilot who attacked *Stark* was not punished, and was still alive at the time.<sup>[135]</sup> The attack remains the only successful anti-ship missile strike on an American warship.<sup>[136] [137]</sup>



*Stark* listing following two hits by Exocet missiles

### U.S. military actions toward Iran

However, U.S. attention was focused on isolating Iran as well as maintaining freedom of navigation, criticizing Iran's mining of international waters, and sponsored UN Security Council Resolution 598, which passed unanimously on 20 July, under which it skirmished with Iranian forces during Operation Earnest Will. During the Operation Nimble Archer in October 1987, the U.S. attacked Iranian oil platforms in retaliation for an Iranian attack on the U.S.-flagged Kuwaiti tanker *Sea Isle City*.<sup>[79]</sup>

On 14 April 1988, the frigate USS *Samuel B. Roberts* was badly damaged by an Iranian mine, wounding 10 sailors. U.S. forces responded with Operation Praying Mantis on 18 April, the United States Navy's largest engagement of surface warships since World War II. Two Iranian oil platforms, two Iranian ships and six Iranian gunboats were destroyed. An American helicopter also crashed.<sup>[79]</sup> (see also Oil Platforms (Iran v. United States))

## U.S. shoots down civilian airliner

In the course of these escorts by the U.S. Navy, the cruiser USS *Vincennes* shot down Iran Air Flight 655 with the loss of all 290 passengers and crew on 3 July 1988. The American government claimed that the airliner had been mistaken for an Iranian F-14 Tomcat, and that the *Vincennes* was operating in international waters at the time and feared that it was under attack, which later appeared to be untrue.<sup>[136] [138]</sup> The Iranians, however, maintain that the *Vincennes* was in fact in Iranian territorial waters, and that the Iranian passenger jet was turning away and increasing altitude after take-off. U.S. Admiral William J. Crowe also admitted on *Nightline* that the *Vincennes* was inside Iranian territorial waters when it launched the missiles. At the time, the captain of the *Vincennes* claimed that the Iranian plane did not identify itself and sent no response to warning signals from the *Vincennes*. Apart from Iran, other independent sources, for example the airport of Dubai, have confirmed that the plane did indeed identify itself to the American naval ship and also confirmed that "the civilian aircraft was ascending and therefore could not have posed a threat," agreeing with Iranian officials.<sup>[7]</sup>



A missile departs the forward launcher of *Vincennes* during a 1987 exercise. This ship later accidentally shot down civilian airliner Iran Air 655.

According to an investigation conducted by ABC News' *Nightline*, decoys were set during the war by the U.S. Navy inside the Persian Gulf to lure out the Iranian gunboats and destroy them, and at the time USS *Vincennes* shot down the Iranian airliner, it was performing such an operation.

In 1996 the U.S. expressed regret only for the loss of innocent life, and did not make a specific apology to the Iranian government.<sup>[136] [139]</sup>

The shooting down of a civilian Iranian passenger plane *Iran Air Flight 655* by the American cruiser USS *Vincennes*, was cited by an Iranian scholar as apparently giving Ruhollah Khomeini reason to withdraw from the conflict.<sup>[140]</sup>

An Iranian scholar present at the conference said a turning point in Iran's thinking came with the shooting down of an Iranian passenger plane in July 1988 by the American cruiser USS *Vincennes*. That incident apparently led Ayatollah Khomeini to conclude that Iran could not risk the possibility of U.S. open combat operations against Iran and he decided it was time to end the conflict.

## Iraq

Among major powers, the United States' policy was to "tilt" toward Iraq by reopening diplomatic channels, lifting restrictions on the export of dual-use technology, overseeing the transfer of third party military hardware, and providing operational intelligence on the battlefield.

As will be seen in some of the country-specific sub-articles of this page, Iraq made extensive use of front companies, middlemen, secret ownership of all or part of companies all over the world, forged end user certificates and other methods to hide what it was acquiring. At this time, the country-level sub-articles emphasize the country in which the procurement started, but also illustrate how procurement infrastructure was established in different countries. Some transactions may have involved people, shipping, and manufacturing in as many as 10 countries.<sup>[141]</sup>

In their documentary *Saddam Hussein-The Trial You Will Never See*, made for European audience, Barry Lando and Michel Despratx claim that United States secretary of state Alexander Meigs Haig Jr. wrote in a secret memo to President Ronald Reagan, about United States previous president Jimmy Carter's green light to Saddam Hussein for launching a war against Iran using Saudi Arabia delivering the go ahead message to Iraqis.<sup>[142] [143]</sup> British support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war especially illustrated the ways by which Iraq would circumvent export controls.

Iraq bought at least one British company with operations in the U.K. and the U.S.

Iraq had a complex relationship with France and the Soviet Union, its major suppliers of actual weapons, to some extent having the two nations compete for its business.

Singapore support for Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war discusses land mines assembled there, as well as chemical warfare precursors shipped from Singapore, possibly by an Iraqi front company.

Another country that had an important role in arming Iraq was Italy, whose greatest impact was financial, through the U.S. branch of the state-owned largest bank in Italy. The Italian article is one example of how Iraq circumvented a national embargo, by, as one example, moving land and sea mine production to Singapore.

Although the United Nations Security Council called for a cease-fire after a week of fighting and renewed the call on later occasions, the initial call was made while Iraq occupied Iranian territory. Moreover, the UN refused to come to Iran's aid to repel the Iraqi invasion. The Iranians thus interpreted the UN as subtly biased in favor of Iraq.<sup>[144]</sup>

## Iran

While the United States directly fought Iran, citing freedom of navigation as a major *casus belli*, as part of a complex and partially illegal program (see Iran-Contra Affair), it also indirectly supplied weapons to Iran.

North Korea was a major arms supplier to Iran, often acting as a third party in arms deals between Iran and the Communist bloc.. DPRK support included domestically manufactured arms and Eastern-Bloc weapons for which the major powers wanted deniability.. Libya and China were arms suppliers and supporters of Iran as well.

## Both countries

Besides the US and the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia also sold weapons to both countries for the entire duration of the conflict. Likewise, Portugal helped both countries: it was not unusual seeing Iranian and Iraqi flagged ships moored side-by-side at the port of Sines.

From 1980 to 1987 Spain sold €458 million in weapons to Iran and €172 million in weapons to Iraq. Spain sold to Iraq 4x4 vehicles, BO-105 Helicopters, explosives and ammunition. A research party discovered that an unexploded chemical Iraqi warhead in Iran was manufactured in Spain.<sup>[145]</sup>

Although neither side did acquire any weapons from Turkey, both sides enjoyed Turkish civilian help during conflict. Having managed to remain neutral and refused to support trade embargo imposed by US, Ankara turned out to be the one upon whom both warring sides developed high degree of economic dependancy, since Turkey was one of their few outlets to the west and source of local goods. Turkey's export jumped from \$220 million in 1981 to \$2 billion in 1985, making up 25% of Turkey's overall exports. Additionally, Turkish construction projects in Iraq totaled \$2.5 billion between 1974 and 1990. These benefits helped Turkey to offset the ongoing Turkish economic crisis, though they decreased with the end of the war and vanished with the Invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and Turkish response to it.<sup>[146]</sup>

## Financial support

Iraq's main financial backers were the oil-rich Persian Gulf states, most notably Saudi Arabia (\$30.9 billion), Kuwait (\$8.2 billion) and the United Arab Emirates (\$8 billion).<sup>[147]</sup>

The Iraqgate scandal revealed that an Atlanta branch of Italy's largest bank, Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, relying partially on U.S. taxpayer-guaranteed loans, funneled \$5 billion to Iraq from 1985 to 1989. In August 1989, when FBI agents finally raided the Atlanta branch of BNL, the branch manager, Christopher Drogoul, was charged with making unauthorized, clandestine, and illegal loans to Iraq – some of which, according to his indictment, were used to purchase arms and weapons technology.

The *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and ABC's Ted Koppel, covered the Iraq-gate story, and the investigation by the U.S. Congress.<sup>[148]</sup> This scandal is covered in Alan Friedman's book *The Spider's Web: The Secret History of How the White House Illegally Armed Iraq*.

Beginning in September 1989, the *Financial Times* laid out the first charges that BNL, relying heavily on U.S. government-guaranteed loans, was funding Iraqi chemical and nuclear weapons work. For the next two and a half years, the *Financial Times* provided the only continuous newspaper reportage (over 300 articles) on the subject. Among the companies shipping militarily useful technology to Iraq under the eye of the U.S. government, according to the *Financial Times*, were Hewlett-Packard, Tektronix, and Matrix Churchill, through its Ohio branch.

In all, Iraq received \$35 billion in loans from the West and between \$30 and \$40 billion from the Persian Gulf states during the 1980s.<sup>[149]</sup>

## Use of chemical weapons by Iraq

In a declassified report, the CIA estimated in 1991 that Iran had suffered more than 50,000 casualties from Iraq's use of several chemical weapons,<sup>[150]</sup> but today the actual number of victims is estimated to more than 100,000, since the long term effects still cause casualties to this day.<sup>[151] [152]</sup>

The official estimate does not include the civilian population contaminated in bordering towns or the children and relatives of veterans, many of whom have developed blood, lung and skin complications, according to the Organization for Veterans of Iran. According to a 2002 article in the *Star-Ledger*:

"Nerve gas killed about 20,000 Iranian soldiers immediately, according to official reports. Of the 90,000 survivors, some 5,000 seek medical treatment regularly and about 1,000 are still hospitalized with severe, chronic conditions."<sup>[153]</sup>

Iraq also used chemical weapons on Iranian civilians, killing many in villages and hospitals. Many civilians suffered severe burns and health problems, and still suffer from them.<sup>[154]</sup>

On 21 March 1986, the United Nations Security Council made a declaration stating that "members are profoundly concerned by the unanimous conclusion of the specialists that chemical weapons on many occasions have been used by Iraqi forces against Iranian troops and the members of the Council strongly condemn this continued use of chemical weapons in clear violation of the Geneva Protocol of 1925 which prohibits the use in war of chemical weapons." The United States was the only member who voted against the issuance of this statement.<sup>[155]</sup> A mission to the region in 1988 found evidence of the use of chemical weapons, and was condemned in Security Council Resolution 612.

According to retired Colonel Walter Lang, senior defense intelligence officer for the United States Defense Intelligence Agency at the time, "the use of gas on the battlefield by the Iraqis was not a matter of deep strategic concern" to Reagan and his aides, because they "were desperate to make sure that Iraq did not lose." He claimed that the Defense Intelligence Agency "would have never accepted the use of chemical weapons against civilians, but the use against military objectives was seen as inevitable in the Iraqi struggle for survival",<sup>[156]</sup> The Reagan administration did not stop aiding Iraq after receiving reports of the use of poison gas on Kurdish civilians.<sup>[157] [158]</sup>

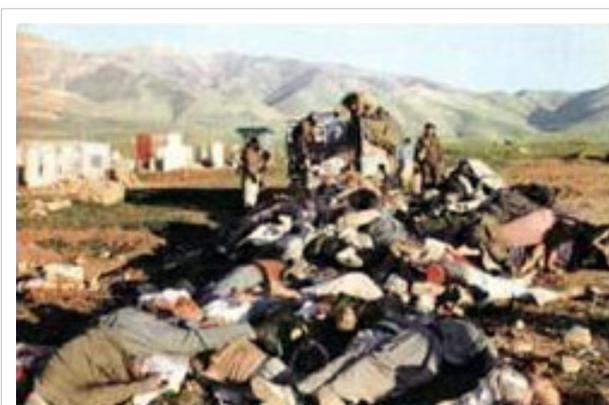
There is great resentment in Iran that the international community helped Iraq develop its chemical weapons arsenal and armed forces, and also that the world did nothing to punish Saddam's Ba'athist regime for its use of chemical



Chemical weapons, used by Iraq, killed and injured numerous Iranians and Kurds.

weapons against Iran throughout the war – particularly since the US and other western powers soon felt obliged to oppose the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and eventually invade Iraq itself to remove Saddam Hussein.

The U.S. also accused Iran of using chemical weapons.<sup>[159]</sup> These allegations however, have been disputed. Joost Hiltermann, who was the principal researcher for Human Rights Watch between 1992–1994, conducted a two year study, including a field investigation in Iraq, capturing Iraqi government documents in the process. According to Hiltermann, the literature on the Iran–Iraq War reflects a number of allegations of chemical weapons use by Iran, but these are "marred by a lack of specificity as to time and place, and the failure to provide any sort of evidence".<sup>[160]</sup>



Aftermath of Halabja poison gas attack by the Iraqi Air Force

Gary Sick and Lawrence Potter call the allegations against Iran "mere assertions" and state: "no persuasive evidence of the claim that Iran was the primary culprit [of using chemical weapons] was ever presented".<sup>[161]</sup> Policy consultant and author Joseph Tragert also states: "Iran did not retaliate with chemical weapons, probably because it did not possess any at the time".<sup>[162]</sup>

At his trial in December 2006, Saddam Hussein said he would take responsibility "with honour" for any attacks on Iran using conventional or chemical weapons during the 1980–1988 war but he took issue with charges he ordered attacks on Iraqis.<sup>[163]</sup> A medical analysis of the effects of Iraqi mustard gas is described a U.S. military textbook, and contrasted with slightly different effects in the First World War.<sup>[164]</sup>

## Distinctions and Peculiarity

Iran attacked and partially damaged the Osirak nuclear reactor on 30 September 1980 with two F-4 Phantoms, shortly after the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq War. This was the first attack on a nuclear reactor and only the third on a nuclear facility in history of the world. It was also the first instance of a pre-emptive attack on a nuclear reactor to forestall the development of a nuclear weapon, though it did not achieve its objective as France repaired the reactor after the Iranian attack.<sup>[165]</sup> It took a second pre-emptive strike by the Israeli Air Force to disable the reactor, in the process killing a French engineer and causing France to pull out of Osirak. The decommissioning of Osirak has been cited as causing a substantial delay to Iraqi acquisition of nuclear weapons, which Saddam announced an intention to develop in response to the Iranian revolution.<sup>[166] [167] [166] [168] [169] [169] [170] [171]</sup>

The Iran–Iraq War was also the first and only conflict in the history of warfare in which both forces used Ballistic Missiles against each other.<sup>[167]</sup>

This war also saw the only confirmed air-to-air helicopter battles in history of warfare with the Iraqi Mi-25s flying against Iranian AH-1 SuperCobra on numerous occasions. The first instance of these helicopter "dogfights" happened when on the starting day of the war (22 September 1980), two Iranian SuperCobras crept up on two Mi-25s and hit them with TOW wire-guided antitank missiles. One Mi-25 went down immediately, the other was badly damaged and crashed before reaching base. The Iranians won another similar air battle on 24 April 1981, destroying two Mi-25s without incurring losses to themselves. According to some unclassified documents, Iranian pilots achieved a 10 to 1 kill ratio over the Iraqi helicopter pilots during these engagements and even engaged Iraqi fixed wing aircraft.<sup>[172] [173]</sup>

As has been the case in many wars,<sup>[174]</sup> this war had an impact on medical sciences. A new surgical intervention for comatosed patients with penetrating brain injuries which was created by Iranian physicians treating Iranian wounded soldiers during the war later on helped make new neurosurgical treatment guidelines for use of civilians who have

suffered blunt or penetrating skull injuries, thereby greatly improving survival rates. The previously used surgical technique and its resultant guidelines developed by US army during World War II and Vietnam War has been replaced by this new treatment module and it has been reported that US congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords benefited from the new guidelines after she was shot in head.<sup>[175] [176] [177]</sup>

## "War of the Cities"

Toward the end of the war, the land conflict regressed into stalemate largely because neither side had enough self-propelled artillery or air power to support ground advances.

The relatively professional Iraqi armed forces could not make headway against the far more numerous Iranian infantry. The Iranians were outmatched in both towed and self-propelled artillery, which left their tanks and troops vulnerable. This led the Iranians to substitute infantry power for artillery.

Iraq's air force soon began strategic bombing against Iranian cities, chiefly Tehran, in 1985. To minimize losses from the superior Iranian Air Force, Iraq rapidly switched to Scud and Al-Hussein improved Scud launches. In retaliation, Iran fired Scud missiles acquired from Libya and Syria against Baghdad. In all, Iraq launched 520 Scuds and Al-Husseins against Iran and received only 177 in exchange. In October 1986, Iraqi aircraft began to attack civilian passenger trains and aircrafts on Iranian soil, including an Iran Air Boeing 737 unloading passengers at Shiraz International Airport.<sup>[154]</sup>

In retaliation for the Iranian Operation Karbala-5, an early 1987 attempt to capture Basra, Iraq attacked 65 cities in 226 sorties over 42 days, bombing civilian neighborhoods. Eight Iranian cities came under attack from Iraqi missiles. The bombings killed 65 children in an elementary school in Borujerd alone. The Iranians also responded with Scud missile attacks on Baghdad and struck a primary school there. These events became known as "the War of the Cities".<sup>[139]</sup>

## Aftermath

The Iran–Iraq War was extremely costly in lives and material, one of the deadliest wars since World War II. Both countries were devastated by the effect of the war. It cost Iran an estimated 1 million casualties, killed or wounded, and Iranians continue to suffer and die as a consequence of Iraq's use of chemical weapons. Iraqi casualties are estimated at 250,000–500,000 killed or wounded. Thousands of civilians died on both sides in air raids and ballistic missile attacks.<sup>[139]</sup>

The financial loss was also enormous, at the time exceeding US\$600 billion for each country (\$1.2 trillion in total). But shortly after the war it turned out that the economic cost of war is more profound and long-lasting than the estimates right after the war suggested.<sup>[178]</sup> Economic development was stalled and oil exports disrupted. These economic woes were of a more serious nature for Iraq that had to incur huge debts during the war as compared to the very small debt of Iran, as Iranians had used bloodier but economically cheaper tactics during the war, in effect substituting soldiers' lives for lack of financial funding during their defense.

This put Saddam in a difficult position, particularly with his



Damage to a mosque in Khoramshahr.

war-time allies, as by then Iraq was under more than \$130 billion of international debt, excluding the interest in an after war economy with a slowed GDP growth. A large portion of this debt was loaned by Paris Club amounting to \$21 billion, 85% of which had originated from seven countries of Japan, Russia, France, Germany, United States, Italy and United Kingdom. But the largest portion of \$130 billion debt was to Iraq's former Arab backers of the war including the \$67 billion loaned by Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and Jordan.

After the war, Kuwait started to over-produce oil in order to keep Iraq's economy down. Iraq also accused Kuwait of slant drilling and stealing oil which led to the invasion of Kuwait, which in turn worsened Iraq's financial situation as the United Nations Compensation Commission awarded reparations amounting more than \$200 billion to victims of the invasion including Kuwait, United States, individuals and companies among others, to be paid by Iraq in oil commodity. To enforce payment of these reparations Iraq was put under a complete international embargo. This put further strain on the Iraqi economy, pushing its external debt and international liabilities to private and public sectors including interest to more than \$500 billion by the end of Saddam's rule. Combined with negative economic growth of Iraq after the prolonged international sanctions, this produced a Debt-to-GDP ratio of more than 1,000%, making Iraq the most indebted poor country in the world. This unsustainable economic situation compelled the new Iraqi government formed after the fall of Saddam to request the writing off of a considerable portion of loans incurred during the Iran–Iraq war.<sup>[179] [180] [181] [182] [183] [184] [185] [186] [187] [188]</sup>



Iranian Martyr Cemetery in Yazd.

The war and its outcome, also had a marked effect on the scientific and technological advancement of the countries involved. In case of Iraq, after the war, its scientific and technological productivity collapsed and has not yet recovered. Kuwait's scientific output on the other hand was slowed initially due to the funding it extended to Saddam and later on became stagnant. Iran on the other hand experienced a scientific revival due to the war and has the fastest scientific growth rate in the world today.<sup>[189]</sup>

Much of the oil industry in both countries was damaged in air raids. Iran's production capacity has yet to fully recover from the damages of the war. 10 million shells had landed in Iraq's oil fields at Basra, seriously damaging Iraq's oil production.

Prisoners taken by both sides were not released until more than 10 years after the end of the conflict. Cities on both sides had also been considerably damaged. Not all saw the war in negative terms. The Islamic Revolution of Iran was strengthened and radicalized.<sup>[190]</sup> The Iranian government-owned *Etelaat* newspaper wrote:

"There is not a single school or town that is excluded from the happiness of "holy defence" of the nation, from drinking the exquisite elixir of martyrdom, or from the sweet death of the martyr, who dies in order to live forever in paradise."<sup>[191]</sup>

The Iraqi government commemorated the war with various monuments, including the Hands of Victory and the Al-Shaheed Monument, both in Baghdad.

The war left the borders unchanged. Two years later, as war with the western powers loomed, Saddam recognized Iranian rights over the eastern half of the Shatt al-Arab, a reversion to the *status quo ante bellum* that he had repudiated a decade earlier.

Declassified US intelligence available has explored both the domestic and foreign implications of Iran's apparent (in 1982) victory over Iraq in their then two-year old war.<sup>[192]</sup>

On 9 December 1991, the UN Secretary-General reported the following to the UN Security Council:

"That Iraq's explanations do not appear sufficient or acceptable to the international community is a fact. Accordingly, the outstanding event under the violations referred to is the attack of 22 September 1980, against

Iran, which cannot be justified under the charter of the United Nations, any recognized rules and principles of international law or any principles of international morality and entails the responsibility for conflict."

"Even if before the outbreak of the conflict there had been some encroachment by Iran on Iraqi territory, such encroachment did not justify Iraq's aggression against Iran—which was followed by Iraq's continuous occupation of Iranian territory during the conflict—in violation of the prohibition of the use of force, which is regarded as one of the rules of jus cogens."

"On one occasion I had to note with deep regret the experts' conclusion that "chemical weapons had been used against Iranian civilians in an area adjacent to an urban center lacking any protection against that kind of attack" (s/20134, annex). The Council expressed its dismay on the matter and its condemnation in Resolution 620 (1988), adopted on 26 August 1988."<sup>[193]</sup>

In 2005, the new government of Iraq apologized to Iran for starting the war.<sup>[194]</sup>

## Notes

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## External links

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## Photo Galleries

- Pictures Iran-Iraq War ([http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/photo\\_galleries/article6844806.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/photo_galleries/article6844806.ece)) Times Online Photo Gallery
- Peter Krogh discusses the Iran-Iraq War and the question of American involvement with Thomas L. McNaugher and Richard Helms ([http://cdm164001.cdmhost.com/krogh/item\\_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/p164001coll21&CISOPTR=143&CISOBOX=1&REC=4](http://cdm164001.cdmhost.com/krogh/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/p164001coll21&CISOPTR=143&CISOBOX=1&REC=4)) On *American Interests*, 1984



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