

The iran-iraq war (1980-1988) essay sample



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The Iran-Iraq War was one of the numerous armed conflicts between these historic countries. Conflict dates back centuries to the days of the Ottoman Turkish Empire and the Persian Empire under the Safavids. Iraq was the easternmost province of the Ottomans and Iran, the center of the Persians. Disputes then stemmed from many of the same things that conflict arises from today. This includes border disputes, religious animosity, cultural differences, and interference in each other's internal affairs.

Leading up to this conflict, the Iranian revolution had just taken place, making Iran an Islamic republic. The leader of the revolution, Khomeini, took the reigns of Iran. The Iranian Revolution put fear into Iraq because they felt Iraqi Shias could turn against them, motivated by the Islamic revolution in Iran. Iraqi Shias have long been considered second-class citizens because Sunni Baathist Party leads Iraq. Border disputes were also a main factor in the dispute leading up to the war. The Shatt-al-Arab, which is the river that forms the lower border between Iran and Iraq, was the main area in question. The country this River belongs to has long been disputed. As recently as five years prior to the start of the war, each side signed off on the Algiers Accord, which stated that the River would essentially be partitioned in half. Another area, which Iraq was interested in, was the western Iranian region of Khuzestan because of its extensive oil fields.

In 1980, before the official start of the war, a devout Shia group known as Al Dawah, which was supported by Iran, was responsible for the assassination attempt of Iraqi foreign minister Tariq Aziz. After the failed attempt on Aziz, Al Dawah tried to assassinate another ranking member of the Iraqi government: Minister of Culture and Information, Latif Nayyif Jasim. In

response to this, the president of Iraq, Saddam Husain, gathered all members of the Al Dawah party and had thousands of Iranian Shias deported back to Iran. In the summer of 1980, Hussein ordered the executions of suspected Al Dawah leader, Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Bakr as Sadr and his sister (Pelletiere 31). Following these events, Hussein felt that it was the right time to go into war with Iran. He thought that after their recent revolution, Iran in general, including its military would be in a weakened state. Also, he suspected that Arabs in Iran who were unhappy about the revolution would rally behind the Iraqi troops and help lead them to victory. One thing that Hussein was concerned about was the Iranian air force, which held state of the art aircrafts from the United States.

However, these concerns were lessened because of the fact Iran was holding American diplomats hostage, therefore America would not supply Iran the necessary parts to service their aircrafts. On the official start of the war, September 22, 1980, the Iraqi air force bombed every Iranian airbase in western Iran (Pelletiere 35). These attacks did not have their desired effect because of poor strategy and lack of intelligence. The Iraqis, as ordered by Hussein, did a high-altitude bombing mission, rather than low-altitude, which would have had a greater chance for accuracy. In the water, Iran held a superior naval arsenal. In the first week of the war, Iraq conceded control of the Gulf to the Iranian military. These factors would loom large in the fact that this war would last eight years. Iraq planned to end the war quickly by crippling Iran's air capabilities and controlling the ground with infantry and artillery. Yet, after Iraq failed to do this, Iran quickly countered with bombings deep inside Iraqi territory. Strategic targets included several oil

refineries, the hydroelectric plant at Darbandi Khan, Iraq's nuclear facility, which was damaged, and the capital of Iraq, Baghdad.

The Iranian navy also attacked the oil refinery at Al Faw, which caused extensive damage and greatly reduced Iraq's ability to export oil. The initial Iraqi assault consisted of 70, 000 troops and 2, 000 tanks and was on three areas (Pelletiere 36). Two areas in the north of Iran were essentially strategic positions to prevent counterattacks on Baghdad. Iraq concentrated most of its troops on the Khuzestan region. Half of the troops were sent north and the other half south. In the southern region, it was Iraq's plan to capture Khoramshar and Abadan to prevent the Iranians from having access to the Shatt-Al-Arab. Iraq's first major victory of the war was the capture of Khormanshar, but it came at a cost. Iraq lost 1, 500 troops capturing the city, so Hussein did not want to continue the offensive to capture the other strategic cities that they initially set to obtain. Instead, he ordered them to settle into position and prevent supplies into the other southern city, Abadan. After the initial Iraqi offensive and the Iranian retaliation, Iran decided that it would not win the war fighting with traditional tactics.

Even though at the beginning of the war Iraq's army outnumbered Iran's, Iran still outnumbered Iraq's population four to one (Pelletiere 40). Knowing this, Iran made it a " peoples war" and started gathering up civilians at mosques across the country. With these newfound personnel, Iran would implement a strategy known as the human wave attack. The human wave attack sent groups of 22 men charging at the enemy to give the impression that the attack was much larger than it really was. When these waves were implemented on particular areas, it disoriented the Iraqis and led to more

success for Iran. Along with the wave attacks, Iran also implemented another disturbing strategy, which was using children as human mine detectors. They were given a small silver key, which they were assured would give them immediate entry into paradise (Pelletiere 41). Another tactic the Iranians used was night attacks. This was done to offset the advantage the Iraqis had in the air. Iran also started to concentrate attacks on the Iraqi Popular army that was comprised of men sought after to do military functions but who were not properly trained.

It consisted of Baath party extremists who Saddam Hussein thought he could trust more than the professional soldiers, of which some were Shia. Iran took advantage of the fact that these men were not properly trained for war and exploited their weaknesses. As the war went on, Iraq realized that this would not be the quick war they had hoped for. Iranian citizens rallied behind the military and strategies Iran used were working against the superior Iraqi army. This led to an agreement of an UN-mediated agreement on February 18, 1984 (Hiro 129). The agreement stated that neither Iran nor Iraq would attack population centers. So, Iraq then began to strike Iranian oil tankers. This began on April 18, 1984, when an air strike struck a Panamanian tanker which was carrying Iranian oil (Hiro 129). Iran responded by attacking ships that were trading with Iraq, including ships from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. On March 5, 1985, Iraq bombed a steel factory in Ahvaz and an unfinished nuclear plant in Bushahr, which Iran argued breached their UN-mediated agreement from the year before (Hiro 134). This led to an exchange of bombing between Iran and Iraq. Iran used Soviet-made Scud-B surface-to-surface missiles with a 1000-pound warhead and a range of 185 miles. Iraq

deployed Mirage F-1s armed with infrared Matra-530 and Magic 1 air-to-air missiles.

They claim to have shot down twelve Iranian F-14s (Hiro 135). These bombings preceded the Iranian Badr offensive in the Haur al Hawizeh marshlands on March 11, 1985 (Hiro 136). This offensive was aimed at gaining control of the Basra-Baghdad highway just across the Tigris River. Iran used the marshlands to their advantage because Iraq's superior tanks could not negotiate the swampy conditions. On March 17, the Iranians sent about 5000 troops across the Tigris and captured the highway (Hiro 137). In response to this, Saddam Hussein ordered the elite Presidential Guard division to the front lines, which brought the total number of Iraqis on the counter-offensive to 60,000 (Hiro 137). Hussein also unleashed chemical weapons on the Iranians, which have been used before by the Iraqis in combat. The Iraqi army forced the retreat of the Iranians back to the Haur al Hawizeh marshes by March 20. Casualties were high on both sides with Iran losing 20,000 and Iraq losing 14,000 (Hiro 137).

This battle was another example of the continued stalemate between these two sides, which caused this war to last as long as it did. In 1987 Iran began a final major offensive aimed to end the stalemate and end the war named Karbala-Five, aimed at capturing Basra. This offensive will last from January 6 to February 26 (Hiro 180). Throughout the war Iraq was well aware that Iran might eventually strike Basra, Iraq's second largest city. So, Iraq made elaborate defense barriers around Basra. They dug a trench three yards deep, 18 miles long, and three-quarters of a mile wide between the Shatt-al-Arab and the mainland (Hiro 180). Using the Jasim River, which connected to <https://assignbuster.com/the-iran-iraq-war-1980-1988-essay-sample/>

the Shatt, Iraq used giant pumps to make a manmade lake in front of the city of Basra. Iran had trouble advancing on the well-fortified area, so Iraq aerielly bombarded major Iranian cities to compel Iran to retreat. By the end of January, these bombings left 1, 800 dead and 6, 200 wounded. Iran responded by hitting Baghdad with short-range missiles.

This battle continued until Iran finally decided to cut its losses and retreat back from Basra. In one of the final deciding battles of the war, Iran staged an offensive with its Kurdish allies and captured the town of Halabja, with a population of 70, 000 people. In retaliation, on March 16, the Iraqi air force attacked the town with bombs of cyanide and nerve gas, killing at least 4000 people, many of whom were civilians (Hiro 201). Iran attempted to use this as means to rally Iran, but it backfired. The Iranian population became worried that if the war continued to escalate that Hussein may unleash these chemicals on the main cities of Iran. Iraq would also use this later in the Mehran region and on the Majnoon Islands with much success.

Iran accepted the United Nations Security Council Resolution 598, leading to a cease-fire on August 20, 1988 (Hiro 250). The affects of the war were felt heavily on both sides with casualties estimated at over one million (Hiro 250). In the end, Iraq's superior military and Saddam Hussein's willingness to engage in chemical warfare eventually forced Iran to accept the cease-fire. The fact that Iran had stayed in the war as long as they did was a testament to Khomeini's making it a holy war which helped recruit untrained men to join the military to perform tactics, such as the human wave attack and human mine detection. Ironically, the cease-fire had ended military action,

with Iraq being victorious, but it had not resolved the conflicts that Iran and Iraq had initially set out to resolve.

Works Cited

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