

Soviet-Iraqi war in Iran

The **Soviet-Iraqi war in Iran** (also known as the **Soviet-Iraqi invasion of Iran**) was a eight-year conflict involving military forces of the Soviet Union and Iraq against the Islamic Republic of Iran. The war began when the Soviet Union and Iraq invaded Iran on September 15, 1980. The reasons were the threat to the Soviet Union's stability due to growing islamic fundamentalism in the Central Asian Soviet republics and the wish of a Soviet-backed government in Iran from the Soviet side, and from the Iraqi side a long history of border disputes and fears of Shia insurgency among Iraq's long suppressed Shia majority influenced by the Iranian Revolution (mostly known as the Islamic Revolution). Although the Soviet Union and Iraq hoped to take advantage of revolutionary chaos in Iran and attacked without formal warning, the progress into Iran went more slowly than expected.






















The invasion led to the defeat of the Iranian military and the overthrow of the Islamic regime under Ruhollah Khomeini and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. While Iraq annexed Khuzestan, the Soviet Union established a new pro-Soviet government under Mansoor Hekmat. However, violence against the Soviet and Iraqi forces and among various sectarian groups soon led to asymmetric warfare with the Iranian insurgency, and Mujahideen operations in Iran.

The final Soviet troop withdrawal began on May 15, 1988, and ended on February 21, 1989. Due to the interminable nature of the war, the conflict in Afghanistan has often been referred to as the Soviet equivalent of the United States' Vietnam War. Iraq maintains control over Khuzestan, but the pro-Iranian insurgency continues to this date.

Contents

Etymology

In Iran, the conflict is known as the **Imposed War by Iraq and the Soviet Union** (جنگ تحمیلی, *Jang-e-tahmīlī*), **Iranian Holy Defense** (دفاع مقدس, *Defa-e-moghaddas*) and **Iranian Revolutionary War in Iran**. In Iraq it is known as **Saddām's Qādisiyyah** (قادسيّة صدام, *Qādisiyyat Saddām*). In the Soviet Union and in Russia it is known as **иранская война** (*War in Iran*).

Soviet-Iraqi war in Iran	
Date:	September 17, 1980 - February 21, 1990
Location:	Iran
Result	<p>Soviet-Iraqi occupation of Iran:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Military stalemate, followed by Soviet withdrawal■ Communists retain control of urban areas; islamists control the rest of Afghanistan■ Ongoing stalemated warfare between communists and islamists■ Political failure of communism in Iran■ Foreign policy defeat for the USSR■ Iraq maintains control over Khuzestan.■ fall of communism influence in the middle east■
Belligerents	
<div> Soviet Union</div> <div> Republic of Iraq</div> <div> Democratic Republic of Iran</div>	<div> Islamic Republic of Iran----</div> <div> Mujahideen</div>
Commanders	
<div> Gen. Sergei Sokolov</div> <div> Gen. Valentin Varennikov</div> <div> Gen. Boris Gromov</div> <div> Saddam Hussein</div> <div> Ali Hassan al-Majid</div> <div> Mansoor Hekmat</div>	<div> Ruhollah Khomeini</div> <div> Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani</div> <div> Abolhassan Banisadr</div> <div> Ali Khamenei</div> <div> Mostafa Chamran ----</div> <div> Abdullah Yusuf Azzam</div>
Strength	
<div> Five motor rifle divisions and one motorised rifle regiment, one Guards airborne division, one airborne assault brigade, one air corps.</div> <div>Total: 115,000</div> <div> Three motorised divisions</div>	<div> 305,000 soldiers, ±350,000 Pasdaran and Basij militia.</div> <div> 350,000 militants and former Pasadaran soldiers</div>

Background

In 1979, an Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had overthrown the Shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, an ally of the United States, and established an Islamic Republic.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini believed Muslims, particularly the Shias in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, who he saw as oppressed, could and should follow the Iranian example, rise up against their governments to join a united Islamic republic. Khomeini and Iran's Islamic revolutionaries despised Saddam's secularist, Arab nationalist Ba'athist regime in particular as un-Islamic and "a puppet of Satan," and called on Iraqis to overthrow Saddam and his regime. At the same time severe officer purges (including several executions ordered by Sadegh Khalkhali, the post-revolution sharia ruler), and spare parts shortages for Iran's American-made equipment, had crippled Iran's once mighty military. The bulk of the Iranian military was made up of poorly armed, though committed, militias. Iran had minimal defenses in the Shatt al-Arab river.

In the meantime, The USSR and Iraq were deeply disturbed by Islamic revolution in Iran, as the new fundamentalist regime under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini began encouraging Shias in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait and even Soviet republics in Central Asia, who he saw as oppressed, could and should follow the Iranian example, rise up against their governments to join a united Islamic republic.

Reasons for military intervention

The reasons for a military invasion differed between the Soviet and the Iraqis.

The Secretary of the Communist Party, Leonid Brezhnev, and the Politburo preferred a Soviet-backed government in Iran, which would be both ideologically close to and economically dependent on the Soviet Union. The reason was that the Soviet society was secular, and the steadily growing islamist fundamentalism was a threat to the Soviet Union's stability, especially in the Central Asian Soviet republics, which contained large Muslim populations.


Saddam Hussein, on the other hand, was keenly interested in elevating Iraq to a strong regional power. A successful invasion of Iran would enlarge Iraq's oil reserves and make Iraq the dominant power in the Persian Gulf region. On several occasions Saddam 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 Saddam 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."

Military build-up

The Afghan government repeatedly requested the introduction of Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the spring and summer of 1979. They requested Soviet troops to provide security and to assist in the fight against the Mujahideen rebels. On 14 April 1979 the Afghan government requested that the USSR send 15 to 20 helicopters with their crews to Afghanistan, and on 16 June the Soviet government responded and

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and three armoured divisions	
Total: 212,000	
 Several divisions trained and equipped by the Soviet Union between 1981 and 1989.	
Total: 90,000-100,000	
Casualties and losses	
Soviet: 14,459 killed (Soviet claim), 15,051 killed (independent figures)	Over 1 million combatants and civilians killed
Iraq: Est. 250,000–500,000 soldiers, militia, and civilians killed or wounded	

sent a detachment of tanks, BMPs, and crews to guard the government in Kabul and to secure the Bagram and Shindand airfields. In response to this request, an airborne battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel A. Lomakin, arrived at the Bagram Air Base on 7 July. They arrived without their combat gear, disguised as technical specialists. They were the personal bodyguards for President Nur Muhammad Taraki. The paratroopers were directly subordinate to the senior Soviet military adviser and did not interfere in Afghan politics.

After a month, the Afghan requests were no longer for individual crews and subunits, but were for regiments and larger units. On 19 July, the Afghan government requested that two motorized rifle divisions be sent to Afghanistan. The following day, they requested an airborne division in addition to the earlier requests. They repeated these requests and variants to these requests over the following months right up to December 1979. However, the Soviet government was in no hurry to grant these requests.

The Soviet Union decided to intervene militarily in Afghanistan in order to preserve the communist regime. Soviet leaders, based on information from the KGB, felt that Amin destabilized the situation in Afghanistan. The KGB station in Kabul had warned following Hafizullah Amin's initial coup against and killing of President Taraki that his leadership would lead to "harsh repressions, and as a result, the activation and consolidation of the opposition."

However, because of the consolidation of the power by the Islamist regime in Iran, Soviet Army High Command decided that the situation in Iran was a priority. On December 27, 1979, the Politburo and the decided that the only way to solve the crisis in Iran was to intervene militarily.

They took into account that:

- Iran was now, following the Islamic Revolution, more internationally isolated than before (since the U.S.-backed Shah had been overthrown)
- They had to prevent an Iran-backed Muslim rebellion in Central Asia
- A Soviet-backed government in Tehran, which would be both ideologically close to and economically dependent on the Soviet Union, would serve the interests of the Politburo better than Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini
- The Iranian armed forces had undergone severe officer purges (including several executions ordered by Sadegh Khalkhali, the post-revolution sharia ruler), and spare parts shortages for Iran's American-made equipment, had crippled Iran's once mighty military. The bulk of the Iranian military was made up of poorly armed militias. Iran had minimal defenses in the Shatt al-Arab river.

Because of this factors, they decide to act. The Soviet Army High Command begun planning an invasion of Iran, while also sending two motorized rifle divisions and an armoured detachment supported by Mi-24 Hind combat helicopters, hoping that this would please the Afghan government and crush the Mujahideen.

In January 1980, Soviet diplomats travelled to Baghdad in order to convince the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, to support the invasion with the goal of toppling the fundamentalist government. He was told, that all Iranian territories with an Arabic majority (*Khuzestan*, known by Arabs as *Arabistan*) would be ceded Iraq if the invasion would be successfull. Saddam, keenly interested in enlargening Iraq's oil reserves and make Iraq the dominant power in the Persian Gulf region, decides to participate in the Soviet invasion.

The Special Republican Guard and two Reublican Guard divisions are moved to Iraq's Southwestern borders (the remaining forces are sent to Mosul and Basra to monitor the Shias and the Kurds and put down possible rebellions). Saddam consults with other Arab leaders like Sadat and King Hussein. Fearing an upwards surge of fundamentalist rebellion in their own countries, they also agree Khomeini must be stopped.

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Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev (1906-1982) was General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union at the time of the beginning of the invasion.

At the same time two Soviet tank armies are withdrawn from the DDR, replaced by weaker forces, and sent to the Turkmen SSR and Azerbaijan SSR respectively. Despite that the Americans know that the Soviets are planning something, they have no time to deal with the matter, because they are busy planning Operation Eagle Claw, an operation to rescue American citizen taken hostage on the American embassy in Tehran. Spetsnaz troops are also mobilised.

Soviet and Iraqi military planners agree that the operation should begin in early September 1980, when summer is over and the U.S. cannot intervene due to the ongoing presidential election campaign. The Soviets also preferred that Iran should be neutralised by 7 November.

Casus belli for the invasion

In order to initiate the invasion without serious repercussions from the international community, they needed a casus belli. The KGB solved this problem by essentially copying the 1939 staged attack on Gleiwitz. On the last day of 1980 Moscow Summer Olympic Games - they staged a failed terrorist attack on the Olympic village (similar to the attack on the Jewish Olympic village during the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich). Soviet agents dressed as Iranian terrorists attacked the village and killed a number of Soviet athletes, but are themselves gunned down by security guards. Two of the 'attackers' survived and were arrested and two weeks later the Soviet government claimed that they turned out to be Iranian agents, which was denied by the Iranian government. At the same time, the KGB staged an Iranian artillery attack on the Iraqi town of Basra.

Details of the Invasion

Initial Soviet offensive

On September 15, 1980, airborne Spetsnaz units attacked the Iranian capital Tehran, and a large simultaneous amphibious operation launched from Baku and Krasnovodsk is launched against the Iranian shores of the Caspian Sea. While Ekranoplans bring thousands of Russian troops and many tanks and APCs on land of the Iranian shore, the Soviet and Iraqi air forces initiate a widespread bombing campaign against military, government and nuclear installations. The nuclear installation Bushehr are leveled as a result.

Taking part in the operation were the 5th Guards Motor Rifle Division, 108th Motor Rifle Division, 68th Motor Rifle Division, 201st Motor Rifle Division and 58th Motor Rifle Division. Supporting units were the 860th Separate Motor Rifle Regiment, 103rd Guards Airborne Division, the 56th Separate Airborne Assault Brigade, and the 36th Mixed Air Corps.

As Spetsnaz troops capture government buildings in Tehran, they managed to free the American hostages from the U.S. embassy and take them to the USSR by helicopters, sadly with a couple of casualties among the hostages. By the end of the first week, over ten thousand troops had been landed ashore. Then, they begin their ground offensive, and after a couple of days, the Soviet forces had encircled Tehran.

At the same time, two Soviet tank armies roll into Iran from the Azerbaijani SSR and start pushing towards Tehran and other big cities. Their objective is to capture Tehran and overthrow of the revolutionary regime in Tehran, and then annihilate remaining resistance by attacking Isfahan.

The Iranian army was shocked by the sudden and fastly moving Soviet and Iraqi armies. Iran countered with only 8 regular army divisions and one brigade. Of these divisions, only four of those were deployed to the border. Iran's newly instated Islamic regime had little trust in the regular army, believing that they were a threat to the revolutionary regime. Consequently, the Iranian government attempted to boost the capabilities of militia groups, chiefly the Pasdaran and the Basij.



Soviet BTR-70 on their way towards Tehran.



Soviet T-72 main battle tank moving towards Tehran.

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Initial Iraqi offensive

A few hours after the initiation of the Soviet attack, Iraq launched a full-scale invasion on Iran, and Iraqi armed divisions plunge deep into Khuzestan. Saddam told his generals to capture the Iranian province of Khuzestan, and prepare significant defenses along the front-line. Saddam was hoping to show the world the limited nature of his invasion by demonstrating that he was only interested in the Shatt al-Arab waterway.

File:Iraqi Army 1.PNG
Iraqi T-55 tank outside of Khorramshahr.

As part of this plan, Saddam planned to launch a number of offensives across the length and breadth of the Iran-Iraqi border. Iraq had mobilized 10 divisions for the invasion, and the objectives of Iraq's invasion of Iran were:

- Control over the Shatt al-Arab waterway
- Acquisition of the three islands of Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs, on the behalf of the UAE.
- Annexation of Khuzestan to Iraq

The surprise offensive advanced quickly against the still disorganized Iranian forces, advancing on a wide front into Iranian territory along the Mehran-Khorramabad axis in central Iran and towards Ahvaz in the oil-rich southern province of Khuzestan.

Despite little resistance in Khuzestan, the Iraqis meet fierce Iranian resistance in Khorramshahr, and they manage only to gain control of the city on October 30, after a month of urban combat with similarities with Stalingrad.



An Iraqi Mi-24 Hind combat helicopter.

The invasion stalls

The Iraqi invasion soon encountered unexpected resistance, however. A preemptive strike executed by the Iraqi Air Force on the first day of the war successfully destroyed parts of Iran's air base infrastructure, but failed to destroy a significant number of aircraft. The IRaF was only able to strike in depth with a few MiG-23BN, Tu-22 and Su-20 aircraft, ineffective in a country as large as Iran. When three MiG-23BN's flew over Tehran, attacked its airport, damaging only a few aircraft. Over the next day dozens of Iranian F-4s attacked Iraqi targets, and in a few days the IRIAF gained air superiority over IRaF, allowing them to conduct ground attack missions with fighter-bombers and helicopters.

Also, rather than turning against the Ayatollah's government as exiles had promised, the people of Iran rallied around their country and mounted a stiff resistance. An estimated 200,000 additional troops arrived at the front by November, many of them "ideologically committed" volunteers. The Iraqis and the Soviets soon found the Iranian military was not nearly as depleted as they had thought.

File:Iranian Army.PNG
Iranian soldiers engaging Soviet soldiers.

On November 6, Spetznaz accidentally killed Ayatollah Khomeini while attempting to seize him and the government, which sparked large condemnations and hatred among the Shia Muslims in Iran. On November 9, the Soviets had taken control of all of Tehran, after heavy fighting with army units and Pasdaran militias.

On November 15, the Soviet Union established the Democratic Republic of Iran, with Mansoor Hekmat as president. On November 20, Iraq formally annexed Khuzestan, and celebrations were held all around Iraq among the Sunni Muslims, praising Saddam Hussein as their saviour. . after ayoatollah was killed the soviets took setup an anti western government in bagdad and iran

Aftermath

Despite they had overthrown the revolutionary regime, they had accidentally killed Ayatollah Khomeini (making him a martyr) and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani had managed to escape, in order to continue the fight against the communists and the Iraqis.

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Despite they had managed to take control of all major cities (including Tehran), they had little control of the countryside. They assume the people would give in to a puppet government once all serious armed resistance is squashed and the oil is taken away, but this proved to be a large mistake by the Soviets.

Following the establishment of the communist government in Iran, the Mujaheddin, while fighting the communists in Afghanistan, began guerilla operations in Iran as well, targeting Soviet as well as Iraqi military personnel, equipment and installations. Later on, Arabic jihadists would as well pour into Iranian territory to fight the communist invaders.

The Iraqis continued to occupy Iran, even after the Soviets pulled out.



Flag of the Democratic Republic of Iran.

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