



**SECURITY COUNCIL
1980: THE SITUATION BETWEEN IRAN &
IRAQ
TOPIC GUIDE**

MID-AMERICAN HISTORICAL SECURITY COUNCILS
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1980: The Situation Between Iran & Iraq

THE DATE IS 23 September 1980

After years of border skirmishes, open war has erupted between regional rivals Iraq and Iran. While there was a brief detente following the 1978 revelation of a pro-Soviet coup in Baghdad by Iran, Iraqi president Saddam Hussein decided to seize his opportunity to move on the Shatt al-Arab river that has long been contested by the two nations and reverse the 1975 Algiers Agreement.



The 1979 Iranian Revolution provided a critical catalyst for the outbreak of war between the two nations, heightening tensions and providing a strategic opening for Iraq war planners. The Iraqis perceive Iran's Islamic agenda as threatening to the Ba'athist party's pan-Arabism. Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, bitter over his expulsion from Iraq in 1977 after fifteen-years in An Najaf, vowed to avenge Shia victims of Baathist repression and called on Iraqis to overthrow the Ba'ath government.

The revolution crucially weakened the Imperial Iranian Army, which saw its operational readiness depleted and most of its highest-ranking officers executed. The Iraqi government was all too willing to assist in this process, with Iraqi intelligence officers inciting riots over labor disputes in Khuzestan (Arabistan to the Iraqis). Additionally, a new rebellion in the Kurdish region caused the Khomeini government severe troubles. As the once-feared Iranian army disintegrated, President Hussein saw the chance to attack, under the guise of preventing a further spread of Shia Islamic revolution. Not only do the Iranians lack cohesive military leadership, but the Iranian armed forces lack spare parts for their American-made equipment. Baghdad, on the other hand, possesses fully equipped and trained forces, bolstered by arms from France and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Morale in the Iraqi armed forces is running high. Against Iran's armed forces, including the Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guard) troops, which are led by religious mullahs with little or no military experience, the Iraqis can muster twelve complete mechanized divisions, equipped with the latest Soviet weapons and material. President Hussein boasts an army of over 200,000 men and considerable heavy ammunition.

In addition, the area across the Arvand-Roud (Shatt al Arab) poses no major obstacles, particularly for an army equipped with Soviet river-crossing equipment. Crossing sites on the Karkheh and Karoun rivers are lightly defended against mechanized armor, and Iranian forces in Khuzestan, which had formerly included two divisions distributed among Ahvaz, Dezful, and Abadan, now consist only of several ill-equipped battalion-sized formations. Tehran is further disadvantaged because the area was controlled by the Regional 1st Corps headquartered at Bakhtaran (formerly Kermanshah), whereas operational control was directed from the capital.

In the year following the Shah's overthrow, only a handful of company-sized tank units remained combat-ready, while the rest of Iran's armored equipment was poorly maintained and not suitable for immediate action.

For Iraqi planners, the only uncertainty was the fighting ability of the Iranian air force, equipped with some of the most sophisticated American-made aircraft. Despite the execution of key Air Force commanders and pilots, the Iranian Air Force remained brutally effective in quashing local riots and demonstrations before the outbreak of hostilities and was also effective during the United States' failed Desert One raid in April 1980. This show of force impressed Iraqi decision-makers to such an extent that the Iraqis initial assault featured a massive pre-emptive air strike on Iranian air bases, modeled on Israeli tactics during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The Security Council has been convened for an emergency session today, 23 September, 1980, to determine an international course of action for this war.

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