

## **IMUN 2024 Research Report**

### **Historical Security Council Issue #2: The question of the situation between Iran and Iraq.**

#### **30 March 1981**

The Iraqi invasion of Iran on September 22, 1980, was a consequence of longstanding tensions and deep-seated animosities between the two nations. This confrontation, characterised by ethnic, religious, and territorial disputes, brought the region into a period full of instability and chaos, marked by both significant human and economic losses ("1975 Algiers Agreement.").

One of the origins of the conflict can be traced back to the contentious Shatt al-Arab waterway, a vital shipping route for both Iran and Iraq. Historically, the area had been a source of intense bitterness, as could be seen in the 1975 Algiers Agreement. This treaty, held in Algiers, Algeria, attempted to settle the dispute once and for all, delineating the border in favour of Iran, and in exchange, having Iran stop financially and militarily supporting the Kurdish population in Iraq ("Iran–Iraq War."). On one hand, this somewhat satisfied both sides as there had been a conflict between the Iraqi people and the Kurds, and the Iraqi's were unable to defeat the Kurds as they were being supported by Iran. Without Iran's support, Iraq quickly crushed the uprising. On the other hand, this agreement was perceived as a humiliating loss for Iraq, which had to accept significant territorial concessions and appear weak as they were unable to defeat the Kurdish community in Iraq. Saddam Hussein, Iraq's leader, viewed the Algiers Agreement as unjust and sought an opportunity to nullify it, aiming to reclaim lost territories and restore national pride (Afary).

It is also important to note how the ethnic and religious differences further fuelled the rivalry between the two countries. Iran, predominantly Persian and Shia Muslim, while Iraq, primarily Arab with a Sunni Muslim government (despite a Shia majority), harboured mutual

distrust. These distinctions were more than cultural; they represented historical competitions and ideological divergences that exacerbated tensions and hatred to the other.

One key event that led to the Iraqi invasion of Iran was the prior Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979. This notable event in Iran's history added another layer of complexity to the already strained relationship. The reason behind this uprising in Iran was due to many factors, including: the people's dislike of the monarchical rule, the increased westernisation the Shah was introducing, and the fact that the economy was extremely unevenly distributed – meaning there were clear extremes (Starr). These reasons all contributed to students, unemployed civilians, immigrants and many others to walk the streets of Iran in 1978 and protest to the government to try and make a change. They were not always met with peace. Most of the time, they were met with brute force – some were even killed. Yet, nonetheless, the people managed to get results (History.com Editors). On April 1, 1979, a national referendum was held, where, with an overwhelming majority, Iran was declared an Islamic Republic. The successful revolution, overthrowing of the Shah and establishment of the Islamic Republic alarmed Saddam Hussein (Afary). He feared that the success of a Shia-dominated uprising in Iran might inspire similar movements among Iraq's Shia majority, threatening his Sunni-led regime. The chaos in post-revolution Iran presented an opportunity for Iraq to strike, hoping to assert its dominance in the Persian Gulf and prevent any spillover of revolutionary fervour.

Furthermore, oil wealth also played a significant role in the conflict's motivations. Both nations, rich in oil reserves, viewed control over oil-rich regions as a crucial part of their economic strength. Saddam Hussein eyed the southern Iranian province of Khuzestan, a region abundant in oil and located by the Shatt al-Arab river, with particular interest. Control over Khuzestan would not only boost Iraq's economic standing, but it would also cripple Iran's (“The Editors”).

In preparation for the invasion, Iraq began rearming in the late 1970s, boasting the largest military in the Middle East outside of Egypt. Subsequently, on September 22, 1980, Iraq launched a surprise air attack on Iran, aiming to incapacitate the Iranian air force and prevent any effective counterattack. While the initial strikes did cause some damage, they failed to achieve the Iraqi's army's primary objective of destroying Iran's air capabilities and therefore, preventing any future rebuttals (Afary).

The following day, Iraq commenced a ground invasion along a 644-kilometre front with six divisions, four of which targeted the strategic, oil-rich province of Khuzestan and the Shatt al-Arab waterway. By October 24, 1980, Iraqi forces had captured the significant port city of Khorramshahr, marking an early success in the campaign. However, the Iranian response was swift and determined (Chambers). Despite the initial shock, the Iranian air force was able to quickly retaliate the day after the invasion began, inflicting substantial losses on Iraqi forces. As Iran's military reorganised, bolstered by revolutionary zeal and a determination to defend the nascent Islamic Republic, they launched a counteroffensive in early 1981. This resurgence led to a stalemate, with neither side able to secure a decisive victory ("The Editors").

As of March 30, 1981, the conflict has settled into a gruelling and destructive deadlock. The initial gains by Iraqi forces have been met with fierce Iranian resistance, resulting in heavy casualties and significant material losses on both sides. The front lines stabilised, and the war has become characterised by attrition, with both nations entangled in a brutal struggle for control and survival.

**Focus of debate:**

Debate should focus on formulating a resolution to the Iran-Iraq conflict that ensures both nations can achieve economic and political stability, which in turn will contribute to greater

stability in the broader Middle East region. Delegates must address the immediate cessation of hostilities and outline steps for a comprehensive peace agreement that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of both countries. The debate should consider the significant human and economic costs of the conflict, as well as the ethnic and religious tensions that have fuelled hostilities. It is crucial to acknowledge the use of violence by both governments towards their citizens and the implications this has for human rights and international law. Additionally, any proposed interventions or peacekeeping measures must consider the geopolitical complexities, including the interests of regional powers and the potential for vetoes from permanent members of the Security Council. Measures involving external military intervention must be carefully deliberated, considering the presence of foreign influences and their impact on the sovereignty of Iran and Iraq. Finally, delegates should ensure that their attitudes and the information they rely on reflect what was publicly accessible as of March 30, 1981, maintaining historical accuracy and context in their deliberations.

**Relevant resolutions and documents:**

[UNSC Resolution 479](#)

- Resolution that was adopted on September 28, 1980, by the Security Council, which called for an immediate ceasefire and urged both Iran and Iraq to resolve their conflict through peaceful means.

[Article providing detail about the Algiers Agreement](#)

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