
36 YEARS ON, THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR IS STILL RELEVANT

- 23.09.2016

Middle East Monitor, September 22, 2016

It has been 36 years since the Iran-Iraq War erupted, engulfing the entire Middle East region in uncertainty, destabilising markets and causing immense loss of life and permanent impairment to millions of Iraqi and Iranian troops and civilians. The echoes of that war can still be heard today.

The Iran-Iraq War lasted for almost eight years, only concluding in 1988, and was a defining epoch in the history and the making of the modern Middle East. It had consequences that dictated the balance of power in the region from the wars beginning until the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein was toppled by US-led forces in an illegal invasion in 2003. It also very much dominates the present situation in Iraq, now an ever crumbling shadow of its former self, its regional power not only sapped but utterly shattered by a combination of Western military misadventure and Iranian indirect imperialism.

Sometimes known as the First Gulf War, to distinguish it from the second in 1990 and the third in 2003, few realise that many of the major players in Iraq today, including the leaders of virulently sectarian political parties and horrifically brutal Shia militias, saw their genesis in the primordial soup that was steeped in the blood spilt by that conflict. Irans proxies in Iraq today largely adopted Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeinis political doctrine of Wilayat Al-Faqih, or Guardianship of the Jurist, that replaced the secular nationalism of the Shah after the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

Video footage recently emerged showing so-called Iraqi patriot Hadi Al-Amiri, a former minister of transport in the post-2003 Iraq, fighting against his country on behalf of Iran during the war. Al-Amiri is also the leader of the Badr Organisation that is so tightly entwined with Tehran that it is difficult to know where Irans Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) ends and they begin.

Iraqs former Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki hails from the Iran-backed Dawa Party that was responsible for terrorist attacks in Iraq and around the Middle East during the Iran-Iraq War. Al-Maliki is an infamous and unrepentant sectarian politician who once compared peaceful Iraqi demonstrators tired of his persecution to people who killed the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)s grandson in the 7th century, widely viewed as an incitement to political and religious violence

against the protestors.

The Iranian leadership is a direct product of the Iran-Iraq War. Ubiquitous faces representing the Iranian regime that are seen in the media were all largely present during the war. Khomeini's heir and Iran's current Guardian Jurist, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was a part of the Khomeinist cabal that overthrew the equally repressive Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, and had Khomeini's ear throughout the war.

The IRGC's Quds Force, an organisation that seems to have a finger on the trigger of any number of terrorist groups, is led by a man who built his career in the Iran-Iraq War. General Qassem Soleimani began his career in the IRGC as a soldier in 1979, but rapidly ascended the ranks after taking part in suppressing Iranian Kurds as well as leading and organising irregular forces inside Iraqi territory throughout the war. He has earned his reputation for deadliness, with a former CIA officer who would have had knowledge of Soleimani's activities in Iraq describing him as the most powerful operative in the Middle East today. Perhaps Soleimani can credit that reputation to the fact that he was forged in the crucible of the Iran-Iraq War.

There has been a lot of misinformation in terms of the actual war itself, even from a historical perspective. For instance, most historians believe that the war began on 22 September because that is the date that Iraq crossed the Iranian border and began its invasion. What people do not know is that arguably the war began before this date, with Iranian bombardment of Iraqi villages earlier that month. Indeed, Iraq shot down Iranian aircraft on 7 and 9 September, as reported by the Al-Iraq newspaper on 9 September 1980. The Iraqi invasion was partially a response to these and other Iranian acts of aggression.

While the world is generally happy to stay in the bliss of ignorance and vilify Saddam Hussein beyond the opprobrium that he actually deserves, they tend to skip over how he did his utmost to preserve the status quo with Iran after Khomeini overthrew the Shah. Saddam even sent a diplomatic cable to the ayatollah, expressing his congratulations and his wishes for Iraqi-Iranian relations to continue to develop after they had improved following the 1975 Algiers Accord. That agreement brought an end to Iranian support for Kurdish militants and split the strategic Shatt Al-Arab waterway between the two countries.

What was Khomeini's response? He began to incite Iraq's Shia population to rise up, and supported terrorist organisations, including the aforementioned Dawa Party, in their attempts to assassinate Iraqi leaders and politicians. Tariq Aziz, a Christian Arab and one of Saddam's closest aides, was targeted for assassination in April 1980. The assassination attempt involved Iran-backed terrorists lobbing a grenade at Aziz in central Baghdad, who failed to kill him and instead managed to murder innocent civilians. Khomeini's resistance to peaceful coexistence could be related to Saddam being forced to expel him from Iraq as part of his 1975 agreement with the Shah, and so

Khomeini harboured a grudge despite being a guest of Iraq for 13 years in the city of Najaf.

Saddam may be gone and Khomeini may be buried, but the repercussions of that conflict have outlived their instigators. Saddam failed in his war aims to restore Iraqi sovereignty over the Shatt Al-Arab and to overthrow the mullahs, and Khomeini failed to oust Saddam. However, Saddam did succeed in sealing away the Iranians and the exportation of the Khomeinist revolution for 23 years. It was not until the US smashed down the Arab and Islamic worlds gatekeepers in 2003 that the Pandora s Box of Iranian hegemonic and sectarian ambition was unleashed, with a veritable army of Iran-Iraq War veterans ready to finish off what they had started in 1980.

Sadly, the indirect Iranian occupation of Iraq and the brutal mistreatment that the Iraqi people have suffered under the new regime that eclipses anything the Baathists ever inflicted upon Iraq has created an environment of hatred, mistrust and anger that will lead to another war with Iran. This war will happen, and it may or may not involve a sovereign Iraq, but it is clear that it will be costly both in terms of lives and wealth, and a regrettable outcome that can only be avoided if the world acts now to force Iran to respect its neighbours and stop its attempts to export its ideology and political system across the region.

The alternative is a nightmarish scenario of death, atrocities, economic stunting and political stagnation that will damn the people of the Middle East to many more years of strife and misery.

Kaynak/Source: