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# Moscow's Tilt Toward Baghdad: The USSR and the War Between Iran and Iraq



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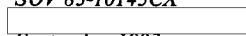
An Intelligence Assessment

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SOV 83-10145CX

September 1983

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# Moscow's Tilt Toward Baghdad: The USSR and the War Between Iran and Iraq



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**An Intelligence Assessment**

This paper was prepared by [redacted] of the  
Office of Soviet Analysis. The statistics were compiled  
by [redacted] the Office of Global Issues.  
The paper was coordinated with the Directorate of  
Operations. [redacted]

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be  
directed to the Chief, China-Third World Branch,  
SOVA, [redacted]

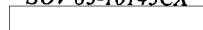
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**Moscow's Tilt Toward Baghdad: The USSR and the War Between Iran and Iraq**



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**Key Judgments**

*Information available as of 26 August 1983 was used in this report.*

The USSR has altered its policies toward Iran and Iraq in Baghdad's favor during the past year and a half. In spring 1982 Moscow began a major effort to improve ties with Iraq, emphasizing closer military cooperation—particularly arms sales and deliveries. In 1982, for example, the number of Soviet seaborne arms deliveries to Iraq tripled, and the tonnage delivered set a record for Soviet equipment received by a Third World country. The Kremlin also has supported Baghdad's call for a negotiated settlement of the war between Iran and Iraq. Relations have improved to the point where Soviet and Iraqi leaders have recently made laudatory public statements about bilateral ties.



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During the same period, Soviet-Iranian relations have steadily deteriorated to their lowest level since the Shah's reign. The most telling indicators of this decline are Tehran's recent abolition of the Tudeh (Iran's Communist party) and expulsion of Soviet officials from Iran and Moscow's counter-expulsion of Iranian officials.



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Moscow's tilt toward Baghdad is a marked departure from its policy of trying to maintain stable relations with the two while probing for better ties with Iran. At the outset of the war in September 1980, the Soviets thought they saw an opportunity to make some gains in Tehran. Their embargo of arms deliveries to both countries benefited Iran because Iraq had been receiving considerably more arms. The Kremlin coupled this with a renewed effort to improve political ties with Tehran. When the gambit produced no immediate results, the Soviets in spring 1981 lifted the embargo but refused to conclude any new arms deals.



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In the spring of 1982, however, Moscow began to take steps that eventually amounted to a clear tilt toward Baghdad. The Soviet move stemmed from various factors:

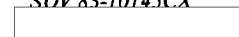
- Iran's major battlefield victories in late 1981 and the first half of 1982 temporarily disadvantaged Iraq. The Soviets may have believed at that time that if they did not aid Baghdad, Iraq might decide it had no choice but to accelerate its turn toward Western Europe, China, and even the United States.
- The USSR feared that an Iranian victory would lead to the spread of Khomeini's type of Islamic fundamentalism near its southern border.



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September 1983




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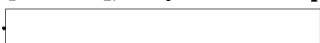
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- The risk that a Soviet tilt toward Iraq would impel Iran to turn back toward the United States seemed much lower in the spring of 1982 than it had earlier in the revolution. By that time, Khomeini had crushed all major opposition, including the relatively pro-Western Bani-Sadr, and the regime's anti-American rhetoric was as shrill as ever.
- The Soviets had concluded that the prospects for the Iranian revolution swinging to the left were becoming slimmer and that the outlook for good bilateral ties was poor. They apparently believed that as long as Khomeini or his supporters remained in power Soviet influence would be minimal. 


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There are, however, some important constraints on the improvement in Soviet-Iraqi relations:

- Mutual distrust between Iraqi President Saddam Husayn and Moscow remains great.
- The Soviets do not want to antagonize Syria—their principal ally in the Middle East—by developing too close a relationship with its archenemy, Iraq.
- Most important, we believe the Kremlin, despite the deterioration of its relations with the Khomeini regime, still considers Iran more important geopolitically than Iraq and will want to avoid providing an opening for the United States in Tehran.

Although the Soviets are likely during the next year to continue supplying political and military backing to Iraq, they will attempt to avoid a complete break in relations with Iran. 

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The course of the war will have a major effect on Soviet policies toward the two countries during the next year. A prolongation of the military stalemate—the most likely scenario—probably would strain Moscow's relations with Iran even further and lead to continued improvement in its ties with Iraq. 

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The Soviets consistently call for an end to the war, even though they realize that cessation of the conflict would yield them liabilities as well as benefits. A peaceful settlement would:

- Reduce the significance of one of the prime irritants in Soviet-Iranian relations—Moscow's weapons sales to Baghdad.
- Probably make the Persian Gulf states less nervous about Iranian expansionism, which would decrease their need and willingness to cooperate militarily with the United States.

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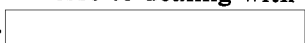


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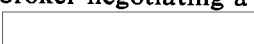
- Result in probably greater contributions from Iran and Iraq to the struggle against Israel, thereby strengthening the pro-Soviet radical Arab states.
- Possibly improve the prospects for a rapprochement between Baghdad and Damascus. 

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The potential liabilities for the Kremlin from an end to the war, however, would be at least as significant:

- Iraq, without as acute a need for weaponry, might accelerate its diversification of weapons suppliers and become less dependent on Moscow.
- Iraq would probably improve its relations with the United States.
- Although a dramatic improvement in Iranian ties with Washington is a remote possibility, Moscow might worry that the absence of the unifying factor of the war could weaken the fundamentalist regime to the point that more pragmatic clerics, who are not as averse to dealing with the United States, would gain the upper hand. 

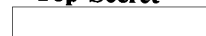
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But the Soviets have learned to live with the war and can continue to do so as long as neither side gains a decisive military advantage. Although Moscow would significantly enhance its position in the Middle East if it became an honest broker negotiating a settlement, the prospects of that occurring are slim. 

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**Contents**

	<i>Page</i>
Key Judgments	iii
Introduction	1
Background: Soviet Policy Before the War	1
The War: Early Soviet Maneuvering	2
Reassessment of Policy: Spring 1981 Through February 1982	3
Moscow Changes Course: March Through July 1982	4
Iraq	4
Iran	5
Soviet Motivations	5
Since Basrah: Intensification of the Tilt	7
The War	7
Other Frictions With Iran	7
Expanding Military Ties With Iraq	8
Limitations to the Soviet-Iraqi Rapprochement	12
Outlook	13
If the Stalemate Continues	13
If the War Ends	15
<b>Appendix</b>	
Chronology of Soviet Policy Toward Iran and Iraq, 1980-83	17

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Figure 1



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Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.

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**Moscow's Tilt Toward Baghdad: The USSR and the War Between Iran and Iraq**



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**Introduction**

The USSR's primary aim in the Persian Gulf region since 1979 has been to capitalize on the windfall it received from the elimination of US influence in Iran without jeopardizing its shaky, though important, relationship with Iraq. The war between Iran and Iraq, which began in September 1980, has created a major impediment to the accomplishment of this objective.



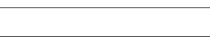
favors Iraq. It briefly examines Soviet interests in each country and the policy the Kremlin followed during the first year and a half of the war. It also points out the factors that will limit Moscow's tilt toward Baghdad—most important of which is Iran's geopolitical significance to the USSR. Finally, the paper discusses different scenarios for the course of the war and how Soviet interests and policies will be affected in each.



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We believe that the Soviet Union has seen the war as, on balance, detrimental to its interests. On the one hand, the conflict has increased Iran's dependence on Soviet and East European trade and transit routes, weakened the position of the anti-Soviet Saddam Husayn, and boosted Soviet hard currency earnings from arms sales. Nevertheless, the Soviets probably believe that these benefits are outweighed by other factors. In particular, Moscow's shifting policy toward the war has angered both Iran and Iraq. Only since spring 1982 has Baghdad's attitude softened as the Soviets have begun to favor Iraq.



**Background: Soviet Policy Before the War**

Moscow's relations with the Shah's regime after 1962 were relatively friendly despite the Shah's deep-seated anti-Communism and suspicion of the USSR. Trade expanded rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s, and, beginning in 1966, Tehran started purchasing Soviet arms. By the time of the Shah's ouster in February 1979, the Iranians had ordered \$1.7 billion worth of Soviet weapons—mostly ground force support equipment. (See table on page 10.)



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Another of the war's liabilities is that it has made a US military presence in the region less objectionable to the conservative Persian Gulf states, who fear Iranian expansionism. As the Soviets have often lamented, the war has also benefited the United States and Israel by bleeding two anti-US countries and by diverting Arab and Iranian energies from the confrontation with Zionism.



Strains began to reappear in Soviet-Iranian relations after 1973, however, when the Shah started to use his oil wealth to build Iran into the predominant military power in the Persian Gulf region. The Shah's strategy involved a much closer alliance with the United States and resulted in a more assertive Iranian policy, which often clashed with Soviet interests in the region. Thus, Moscow, although surprised by the Shah's rapid demise, welcomed it as a major blow to US influence in the area.



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Although the USSR has maintained an official, public policy of neutrality throughout the war, at different points during the conflict it has leaned toward one side or the other depending on its evaluation of the fighting. Up until 1982, however, the Soviets refrained from taking a decisive stance on the side of either belligerent.



The Soviets expended considerable effort after the Shah fell in February 1979 in an attempt to court the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. The Islamic government's decision to allow the previously illegal Tudeh (Iran's Communist party) to operate openly and its espousal of radical "anti-imperialist" and anti-Israeli views presumably bolstered the Kremlin's hopes. Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979,

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This paper analyzes why Moscow abandoned its relatively evenhanded stance toward the two belligerents in spring 1982 and adopted a policy that clearly



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Figure 2. Saddam Husayn (center) and Brezhnev during 1972 talks.

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Soviet officials have complained privately to Westerners that the Iraqis did not consult with the USSR, as they were supposed to according to the Soviet-Iraqi treaty, before invading.

The Kremlin's decision in the early days of the war to cut off direct arms shipments to both sides reflected its opposition to the Iraqi invasion as well as its efforts to curry favor in Iran. Iraq bore the brunt of this decision because it had been receiving substantial amounts of Soviet arms, while Iran had been getting far less. From the start, however, Moscow attempted to attenuate the negative effects of the arms embargo, which it never publicized, on both countries. It allowed small amounts of Soviet arms to filter through to them in the first few months of the war and also permitted, and probably encouraged, countries—such as Libya, Syria, North Korea, Bulgaria, and Poland—to ship Soviet-origin weapons to them.

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however, severely set back whatever prospects existed for genuinely close relations with the Khomeini regime. During 1980 Tehran spoke out often against the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, closed down Iran's natural gas pipeline to the USSR, and reduced the number of Soviet nationals serving in Iran.

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Despite this attempt to soften its impact, Iraq resented the Soviet embargo. A Soviet diplomat in Baghdad told a US official in December 1980 that Saddam was "furious" over the arms cutoff.

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Soviet-Iraqi relations—which had expanded during the first half of the 1970s with the signing of a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty in 1972 and the sale of large quantities of sophisticated Soviet weapons to Baghdad—worsened during the last few years of the decade. Iraq opposed the Soviet-Cuban involvement in Ethiopia in 1977 and 1978, the Marxist coup in Kabul in 1978, and Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan the following year. The Iraqi leaders' growing disenchantment with the USSR convinced them in 1978 to execute some 40 Iraqi Communist Party (CPI) members arrested three years earlier on charges of recruiting among the armed forces. The only CPI member holding a cabinet post was removed. Even more worrisome for the Soviets, however, was Iraq's effort to reduce its overwhelming dependence on the USSR for arms—the only real basis of their relationship—by purchasing major weapons systems from the West.

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The Soviets also signed a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with Syria in early October despite the open hostility between Damascus and Baghdad.

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Moscow's willingness to risk a rupture with Iraq apparently stemmed, in part, from its belief that the Iraqis could not afford to break with the USSR completely and from its displeasure with Saddam personally. In the fall of 1980, an East European diplomat in the Middle East said Soviet diplomats there attributed the embargo to Moscow's desire to

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**The War: Early Soviet Maneuvering**

The Kremlin clearly disapproved of the Iraqi decision to attack Iran in September 1980.

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teach the "ungrateful" Iraqis a lesson. [redacted]

reason to criticize Moscow for arming their enemy and did so frequently. [redacted]

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Perhaps even more important in the Soviet decision to undertake these anti-Iraqi steps was Moscow's apparent perception of Iraq's invasion as an opportunity to make some gains in Tehran. The Soviets began a new effort to court the Khomeini regime. For instance, Soviet Ambassador Vinogradov met with then Prime Minister Rajai and Speaker of the Majlis Rafsanjani on separate occasions in October and stressed Moscow's interest in improving relations. Tehran, however, was not receptive, and the effort foundered. [redacted]

In addition to the resumption of the arms deliveries, the Kremlin sent out other signals that it was interested in mending fences with Baghdad. In April 1981, Brezhnev—for the first time since 1978—signed the annual message to the Iraqi leadership commemorating the signing of the 1972 Friendship and Cooperation Treaty. Shortly thereafter, the Soviets repaired a critical electric-generating facility in Iraq damaged during the war, and they signed a few new economic cooperation agreements. [redacted]

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**Reassessment of Policy: Spring 1981 Through February 1982**

In a major tactical shift, the Soviets lifted the arms embargo in spring 1981. Removing the embargo clearly favored Iraq because it bought much more than Iran did from the USSR. We believe the Soviets apparently feared that continuation of the embargo was prompting Iraq to accelerate its arms purchases from China and the West and could turn Baghdad irrevocably away from the USSR. Their decision was probably also influenced by worries about the growing rapprochement between Baghdad and moderate Arab states, signs that the United States was seeking to improve relations with Iraq, and Moscow's own failure to make immediate headway with Iran. [redacted]

Nonetheless, Soviet-Iraqi political relations remained chilly throughout the rest of 1981. Although Baghdad sent First Deputy Premier Ramadan to Moscow in June, it remained suspicious of the Soviets. [redacted]

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During the next 12 months, until spring 1982, the Soviets delivered over \$1 billion worth of weapons to Iraq—including MIG-23 fighters, T-72 tanks, surface-to-air and air-to-surface missiles, and, for the first time, MIG-25 interceptors. [redacted]

Meanwhile, the Kremlin probably was ambivalent about the course of political developments in Iran. It publicly applauded the ouster in June 1981 of Prime Minister Bani-Sadr, whom Moscow considered anti-Soviet and capable of turning Iran back toward the West. At the same time, it shed no tears over the Iranian clerics' crushing of the Islamic, leftist opposition—the Mujahedin-e Khalq—in the summer and early fall. The Soviets had repeatedly criticized the Mujahedin for refusing to unite with other leftist forces in Iran and were especially skeptical of its attempts to overthrow the Khomeini regime by force. [redacted]

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[redacted] During the same period, Iran, despite its appeals for arms, received from Moscow much smaller amounts of military equipment, including small arms, ammunition, trucks, and spare parts. [redacted]

Lifting the embargo removed a major irritant in the USSR's relations with Iran and Iraq and helped slow Baghdad's shift from Soviet to Western weapons, but it created new problems for Moscow. Both Baghdad and Tehran presumably viewed the move as the righting of a wrong. The Iranians now had good

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[Redacted]

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But some Soviets recognized that the consolidation of clerical control would not necessarily benefit the USSR. For example, *Izvestiya* political commentator Aleksandr Bovin warned in an article in June 1981 and on a Moscow television program in July that the fundamentalist clerics who were becoming dominant in Tehran were virulently anti-Soviet. [Redacted]

Whatever reservations it had, however, Moscow continued to court the Khomeini regime. When Iran's new President, Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister took office late in the summer of 1981, they, unlike many of their predecessors, did not speak out publicly against the Soviets. In addition, trade increased in 1981 to slightly above prerevolutionary levels, the two countries exchanged visits of various low-level delegations, and Ambassador Vinogradov was granted a number of meetings with Iranian leaders. This period, however, turned out to be the calm before the storm. [Redacted]



Figure 3. Tariq Aziz, Iraqi Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. [Redacted] Pictorial Parade ©

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**Moscow Changes Course: March Through July 1982**

In our judgment, the lifting of the arms embargo in spring 1981 was essentially a damage-limiting move by Moscow. Its previous policy, which had been more favorable to Iran, failed to produce benefits for the Soviets in Tehran and further damaged their already poor standing in Baghdad. Ending the embargo, however, slowed but did not reverse the deterioration in Soviet-Iraqi ties, partly because the Soviets continued to court Khomeini. It was not until the spring of 1982 that the Kremlin began to move from this policy of equidistance between the belligerents to one of clear support for Iraq. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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In part because of these moves, political relations with Baghdad also began to improve. [Redacted]

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**Iraq.** The most important indicator of the Soviet tilt toward Baghdad was the conclusion on 21 April of a major new arms contract—the first since before the war began. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Comments by Soviet officials to US diplomats in Baghdad [Redacted] and subsequent Soviet shipments indicate the deal included MIG-25 jets and SU-22 fighter-bombers, T-62 and T-72 tanks, air defense equipment, artillery, and armored personnel carriers. [Redacted]

Between March and June, the Soviets hosted visits from the Iraqi Deputy Trade Minister and Minister of Industry and from Deputy Prime Minister Aziz. During the same period, Iraq received a number

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[Redacted]

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of high-ranking East European officials and the Chief of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Near East Department, Oleg Grinevskiy—the highest level Soviet official to visit Baghdad since before the war. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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In late May Moscow began praising Iraq's publicly expressed willingness to end the war. Moscow Radio, for example, in a broadcast in Arabic on 21 June, welcomed Saddam's announcement that Iraq would withdraw its troops from all Iranian territory, calling it a "positive step" that could lead to "ending the bloody conflict as soon as possible." The Soviets supported the Iraqi-inspired UN Security Council resolution on 12 July calling for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of forces to prewar boundaries. Soviet media commentary on the major Iranian offensive at Basrah that began on 14 July—the first time in the war that Iranian forces crossed into Iraq—was implicitly critical of Tehran and supportive of Baghdad. [Redacted]

Soviet media criticism of Iranian repression of the Tudeh also began to increase. Such complaints, common in broadcasts of the National Voice of Iran (NVOI)—the Baku-based Soviet radio station purporting to be Iranian—now began appearing more frequently in official Soviet media. [Redacted]

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**Soviet Motivations.** Various factors accounted for this clear tilt toward Iraq. In our judgment, probably the most compelling was Moscow's concern over the shift in the war's military balance toward Iran. The shift was occurring at a time when Moscow's own ties with Iran were fraying. [Redacted]

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**Iran.** Moscow's frustration with the Khomeini regime's failure to respond to its continual overtures for closer relations and with Tehran's recurrent anti-Soviet gestures was an important factor in the decision to tilt toward Iraq. The Soviets began to voice these frustrations publicly at about the same time this tilt toward Iraq was becoming evident. On 9 March 1982 *Pravda* published an authoritative article by its senior Third World commentator, Pavel Demchenko, who listed in stark detail Moscow's grievances against Iranian policy toward the USSR. Demchenko charged that there were "extreme right" factions, opposed to improving Soviet-Iranian relations, operating around the Ayatollah. He also warned that criticism of the Soviet presence in Afghanistan was "futile" and that Moscow would not withdraw its troops until outside intervention—"including intervention from Iranian soil"—ended. [Redacted]

Statements by Soviet officials indicate Moscow was wary of an Iranian victory. Iran's impressive string of triumphs on the battlefield beginning in September 1981 made the threat of overall victory a reality. In our judgment, the Kremlin probably thought an Iranian defeat of Iraq and establishment of a pro-Iranian regime in Baghdad would have undermined Soviet influence in Iraq and strengthened the Khomeini regime, making it even less susceptible to Soviet inroads. Furthermore, Moscow did not want to see an anti-Soviet Iranian regime, whose Islamic fanaticism might potentially attract adherents among the USSR's own 43 million Muslims, spread its influence beyond Iranian borders. One of the USSR's leading Middle Eastern specialists said as much—we believe candidly—to a US official in May 1982. [Redacted]

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Soviet leaders also probably feared that a threatened Iraq would accelerate its turn toward the West, China, and moderate Arabs. If Moscow would not come to its aid, Baghdad might even appeal to Washington. [Redacted]

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**Soviet Reassessment of the Iranian Revolution**


An article in the CPSU journal *Kommunist* (published in the July 1982 issue but probably written before May) is a landmark in the Soviets' reassessment of the Iranian revolution. It criticized the Iranian clerics' consolidation of power in the summer of 1981 as a negative turning point in the revolutionary process. The author, Rostislav Ulyanovskiy, a deputy chief of the CPSU Central Committee's International Department and one of the USSR's senior experts on the Third World, stated that the triumph of the fundamentalist clerics marked the end of the revolution's "genuinely people's anti-imperialist" nature and the beginning of an "illusory" quest for an Islamic "third path" between capitalism and socialism. 

The article stated that the February 1979 revolution was "bourgeois democratic," and, with the right kind of leadership, could have been turned in an "anti-capitalist" (that is, pro-Soviet) direction. Unfortunately, lamented Ulyanovskiy, the complete triumph


of the Shiite clergy stifled the revolution's "progressive" tendencies. In his words:

The more the new organization's power with its specifically Islamic features (to which the ruling clergy paid paramount attention) strengthened, the more rapidly the foundations of the revolution as a truly people's anti-imperialist and democratic revolution were eroded. . 

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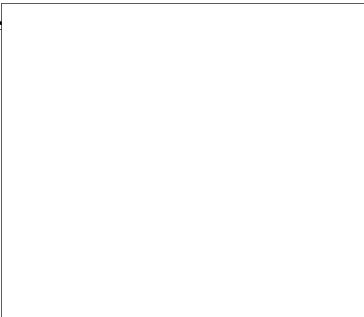
Perhaps engaging in wishful thinking, Ulyanovskiy claimed that the clergy's policies were intensifying the class struggle in Iran and suggested that "sharp turnarounds in the future" were always possible. He admitted, however, that the leftwing forces in Iran were in disarray. 

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The article, which had to have high-level authorization to run in *Kommunist*, was a rationalization and, at the same time, a confirmation of the negative shift in the Soviets' view of Khomeini's Iran. 


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conclusion by spring 1982, as evidenced by an authoritative article in the CPSU journal in July (see box) and by their increasingly frank media criticism of Iranian anti-Sovietism. 

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The blow the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 inflicted upon Soviet interests and credibility in the Middle East also may have contributed to Moscow's tilt toward Iraq. The Soviets may have thought that, if they did not increase support to Baghdad, it would appear to the Arab world that Moscow was failing all its Arab partners. 

All of this was occurring at a time when Moscow concluded that the Iranian revolution was swinging to the right and that, as long as Khomeini or his supporters remained in power, Soviet influence in Iran would remain minimal. The Soviets had come to this

The Soviets apparently concluded, moreover, that Iranian hatred of the United States was still strong. 

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[Redacted] Although the Soviets probably remained wary about a potential improvement in ties with the United States, they evidently thought that a Soviet tilt toward Iraq would not produce an immediate move by Tehran back toward the United States.



The Iranians have responded with harsher public criticism of Moscow's stance on the war. The regime-sponsored Tehran newspaper *Ettela'at* blasted the Soviets in late December for allowing Iraq to use Soviet-made missiles in an attack on Dezful. At a Friday prayer service in January, Speaker of the Iranian Majlis Rafsanjani accused the "Western and Eastern superpowers" of providing arms that allow Iraq to continue the war. Ayatollah Meshkini was even more blunt in the Friday prayer services in Qom on 25 February, when he claimed that Moscow had "spared no effort in assisting our enemy," which had "caused the deaths of our dear youths." Subsequent Iraqi missile attacks on Dezful and other Iranian cities in April and May brought sharp condemnations of Moscow by the clerical leaders.

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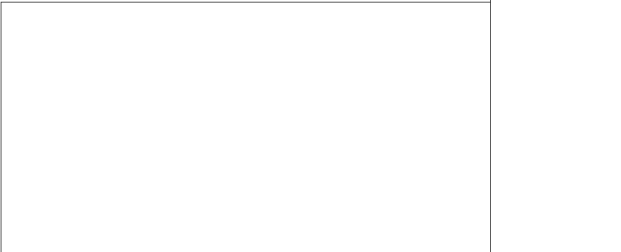
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**Since Basrah: Intensification of the Tilt**

The improvement in the USSR's ties with Iraq and deterioration in its relations with Iran have accelerated since Iranian forces first crossed into Iraq at Basrah in July 1982.

**The War.** While maintaining an official stance of neutrality, Moscow has become increasingly critical both publicly and privately of Iran's refusal to consider a negotiated settlement. The Soviets in October 1982 again voted for an Iraqi-inspired UN Security Council resolution calling for a cease-fire.



**Other Frictions With Iran.** The USSR's relations with Iran have become increasingly strained over a host of other matters in addition to the war. The Khomeini regime, as it had in 1980, allowed Afghan refugees to march on the Soviet Embassy in Tehran on the 27 December 1982 anniversary of the Soviet invasion. They tore down and burned the Soviet flag flying over the Embassy's front gate. Moscow filed an official protest, but the Iranian Foreign Ministry publicly condoned the attack on the Embassy by suggesting it was justified by the USSR's occupation of Muslim Afghanistan.

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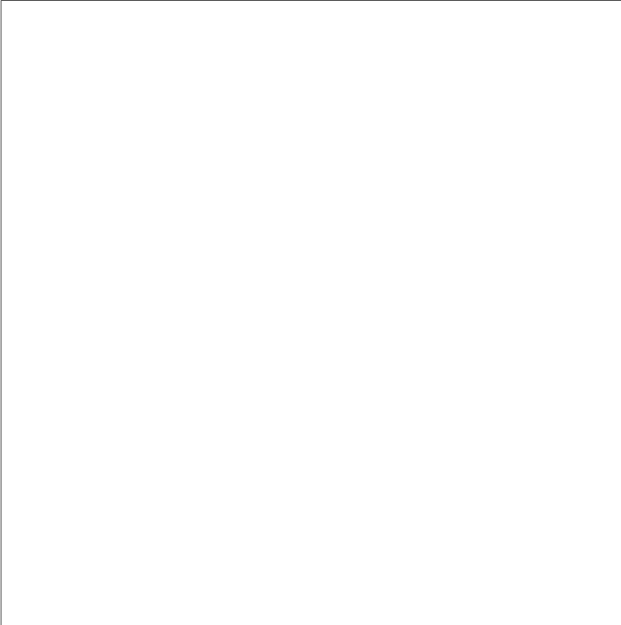
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The Soviets have shown increasing concern over Tehran's aid to the Afghan insurgents and are now publicly and directly criticizing the Khomeini regime over the issue.

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Figure 4. Nureddin Kianuri, imprisoned leader of Iran's Tudeh Party.

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The most telling indicators of the depths to which Soviet-Iranian relations have sunk, however, have been Tehran's arrest of the Tudeh's leaders, dissolution of the party, and expulsion of 18 Soviet diplomats in May 1983. Tudeh General Secretary Kianuri and other party members were arrested by the Khomeini government on 6 February on charges of spying for the KGB. Moscow lodged an official protest and called, thus far unsuccessfully, for their release. In late April and early May, Kianuri and other Tudeh leaders "confessed" on Iranian television to being agents of the USSR, intent upon overthrowing the clerical regime. On 4 May the government dissolved the party, a move Khomeini endorsed publicly. The same day Tehran expelled 18 Soviet diplomats—close to half the officially accredited Soviet diplomats in Iran—for interfering in Iran's internal affairs.

foreign policies. Gromyko, however, in his speech to a session of the Supreme Soviet in mid-June, implicitly warned Tehran that the USSR would respond in kind to any future unfriendly Iranian acts.

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**Expanding Military Ties With Iraq.** In contrast to sharply deteriorating relations with Iran, Moscow's relations with Iraq have been continually improving. Both sides' public rhetoric has reflected this. Gromyko, during the same mid-June speech in which he criticized Iran, stated that Iraq and the USSR "are linked by relations of friendship." In an early July interview with a French newspaper, Saddam lauded the Iraqi-Soviet "rapprochement." The most concrete indicators of the rapprochement, however, are the heavy flow of Soviet weapons to Iraq and the conclusion of a major new arms deal. The number of Soviet seaborne arms deliveries to Iraq tripled in 1982. The 156,000 tons of arms and military support equipment delivered was more than double that received by any other Third World arms client of the USSR and set a tonnage record for Soviet military-related equipment

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Moscow's response to the May actions was restrained, limited to private and media protests and the symbolic expulsion of three Iranian diplomats. This restraint reflects the Kremlin's unwillingness to write off Iran totally and possibly a belief that dissolving the Tudeh had more to do with Iranian internal than with

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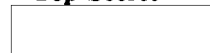


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T-62 tank.

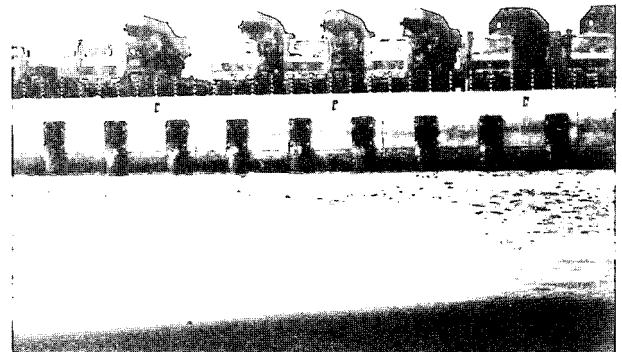


Soviet merchant ship Marneuli.

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MI-8 helicopter.



SA-6-associated equipment delivered by Marneuli.

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Figure 5. Soviet arms in Iraqi inventory.

Figure 6. Soviet ship delivering arms bound for Iraq to port of Ash Shu'aybah, Kuwait.

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received by a Third World country during one year.<sup>2</sup> Among the weapons delivered in 1982 were:

- Over 65 fighter aircraft, including SU-20s, MIG-17s, an improved version of the MIG-21, and MIG-23s.
- More than 20 MI-8 helicopters.
- Over 215 T-72 tanks, some of which were the improved model equipped with laser rangefinders.
- Hundreds of surface-to-air missiles and rockets.



Soviet arms sales to Iraq—at least \$3 billion worth since the war began—have made an important contribution to Iraq's ability to carry on the war. Nevertheless, Soviet arms represent only one-sixth of Baghdad's total purchases since the war started (see table). Baghdad has contracted for \$11 billion from Western countries and an additional \$3.5 billion from China since the war began. Iraq's purchases from Beijing undoubtedly are particularly galling to Moscow.

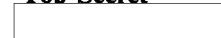
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<sup>2</sup> The estimated dollar value of the equipment delivered, however, was less than twice that in 1981 (\$1.7 billion compared with \$980 million). This is because numerous big-ticket items, such as MIG-25 interceptors, were delivered in 1981. Much of the tonnage of the 1982 shipments consisted of munitions, spare parts, and vehicles.

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**Iran-Iraq: Arms Purchases, 1977-June 1983***Million US \$*

	1977-21 September 1980		22 September 1980-June 1983	
	Iraq	Iran	Iraq	Iran
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,835</b>	<b>5,775</b>	<b>20,816</b>	<b>3,209<sup>a</sup></b>
<b>Communist</b>	<b>3,048</b>	<b>475</b>	<b>9,677</b>	<b>1,570</b>
China			3,822	205
Eastern Europe	191	1	1,957	351
USSR	2,492	474	3,075	238
Yugoslavia	365		823	1
North Korea				775
<b>Non-Communist</b>	<b>2,787</b>	<b>5,300</b>	<b>11,139</b>	<b>1,639</b>
United States		4,679		
France	1,976		4,796	3
Italy	178	452	2,410	15
United Kingdom	53	97	268	9
West Germany	209	22	734	NA
Brazil	152		822	18
Libya				340
<b>Other</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>2,109</b>	<b>1,254</b>

<sup>a</sup> In addition, an undetermined amount of military equipment and support material has been purchased from private arms dealers, perhaps as much as \$1-1.5 billion.

[redacted]

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The most recent Soviet-Iraqi arms deal apparently was agreed upon in principle when two of the most senior members of the Iraqi leadership—Ramadan and Aziz—as well as Army Chief of Staff Shanshal visited Moscow in December 1982. This was the highest level Iraqi delegation to go to the USSR since the war began. Its members had meetings, which were publicized, with Gromyko and CPSU International Department Chief Ponomarev and presumably met with Soviet military leaders. [redacted]

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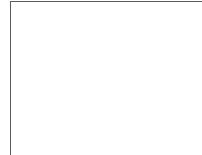


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***Has Andropov Made a Difference?***

*Brezhnev was still at the helm when the Soviets decided in the spring of 1982 to alter their policy toward Iran and Iraq. However, Andropov's rise to the top of the Soviet party began at around the same time. Although we do not know his role in this change in policy, as KGB chief and a Politburo member, he undoubtedly had a say in the matter. The fact that his regime has pursued it even more vigorously suggests that he supported the change.*

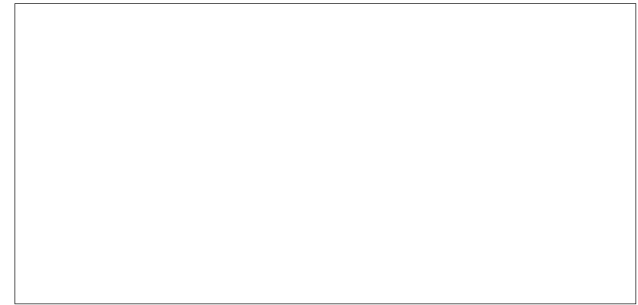
*clerical regime.*



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*The increasingly pro-Iraqi tilt, together with other information, suggests that Andropov may be more inclined to support Iraq and less convinced of opportunities for the Soviets in Iran than was Brezhnev. Andropov has not publicly expressed his views on Iran, but Izvestia commentator Aleksandr Bovin, reportedly one of his advisers, has been a critic of the*



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Figure 7. Saddam and Khomeini: Mutual hatred for each other and distrust of the Soviets. Wide World © [Redacted]

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**Limitations to the Soviet-Iraqi Rapprochement**

Some important constraints will limit the improvement in Soviet-Iraqi relations. First, great mutual distrust still exists between Moscow and Saddam. The Soviets have not forgotten Saddam's execution of Iraqi Communists in 1978 and his continuing tight restrictions on CPI activity in Iraq. [Redacted]

Moscow in February 1982, that Iraq and Syria would end their mutual hostility, but he was at a loss as to how this would be accomplished. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

As recently as 14 June, Saddam publicly condemned the CPI. Moscow also remains wary of Baghdad's increasing military, economic, and political contacts with China and Western powers. [Redacted]

In asking Damascus to moderate its policy toward Iraq, the Kremlin is likely to argue that such a change would foster Arab unity and lure Iraq back into the radical Arab fold. The Soviets' apparent failure to push Syria more forcefully, however, indicates the value they put on their ties with Damascus [Redacted]

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Saddam apparently still deeply resents Moscow's arms embargo early in the war. This sentiment is never far from the surface in his public statements on relations with the Soviets. He also continues in these statements to chastise Moscow on various issues. An article in the Ba'th Party newspaper in mid-August criticized the USSR's foreign policy, sparking a Soviet rejoinder and an Iraqi counter-rejoinder. [Redacted]

Third, and most important, we believe Moscow still considers Iran more important geopolitically than Iraq, if for no other reason than that the USSR and Iran share a border of more than 1,500 miles (and Iran, in addition, borders Afghanistan). The Khomeini regime's virulent anti-Americanism and its growing ties to radical Third World regimes serve Soviet interests. Moscow will want to be careful not to tilt so far toward Baghdad that it convinces some Iranian leaders to rethink their hostility toward the United States. [Redacted]

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Second, the Soviets have to weigh the effects of a full rapprochement with Baghdad on their ties with Syria. They will want to avoid antagonizing President Assad, their most important ally in the Middle East and a strong supporter of Iran, by developing too close a relationship with his archenemy, Saddam Husayn. Optimally, of course, Moscow would like to see Baghdad and Damascus mend fences. According to French Foreign Minister Cheysson, Gromyko expressed the hope, during talks between the two in [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Moscow believed Iran would remain hostile to the United States for a long time, Iran's improving ties with Western Europe and Japan appear to be giving Moscow second thoughts. A Soviet Foreign Ministry official, for example, expressed concern to a US [Redacted]

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Embassy officer in February 1983 that Iran is increasingly turning to Western technology and that its leaders were at heart oriented toward the Western economic system. This is apparently leading Moscow to think that better ties with Washington could come next. A senior *Pravda* editor, for example, voiced suspicion of alleged US encouragement of South Korean military sales to Iran to a US Embassy officer in June. The same theme of military contacts with Iran has been appearing more frequently in Soviet scholarly and media articles. *Krasnaya Zvezda*, for example, claimed on 8 June that the United States is providing Iran arms via Israel. 




Figure 8. Iraqi POWs captured by Iranians in April 1983. 

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To avoid contributing to such an Iranian change of course, Moscow is attempting to prevent its relations with Iran from collapsing altogether. Although it protested the arrest of Tudeh leader Kianuri, the Kremlin has not made that act a major issue in bilateral relations. 



**Outlook**

*If the Stalemate Continues.* The course of the war will have a major effect on Soviet policy toward Iran and Iraq over the next year. 


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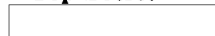
A prolongation of the stalemate on the battlefield is the most likely scenario. A major Iranian breakthrough is now only a very slim possibility. Tehran's fundamental disadvantages in materiel have become obvious as the Iraqis have stabilized the front and bolstered their defensive fortifications. Chances are almost as slim that Iran and Iraq will settle the war at the negotiating table. Despite Iraq's declared willingness to settle the war peacefully and growing weariness of war in Iran, Khomeini's hatred of Saddam impels him to accept nothing less than the Iraqi leader's ouster. Iran's most likely course of action is to fight a war of attrition coupled with increased subversion, hoping thereby to erode Iraqi morale, further strain Iraq's economy, and eventually bring about the overthrow of Saddam. 

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Although the Soviets did not welcome the war and have persistently called for the conflict's end, both publicly and privately, they have learned to live with it and can continue to do so indefinitely as long as neither side gains a decisive military advantage. The Soviets do not want to write off either Iran or Iraq. For at least the next year, however, Moscow, while probably attempting to stabilize relations with Tehran, is almost certain to continue pursuing a policy more favorable to Baghdad. As long as Khomeini and

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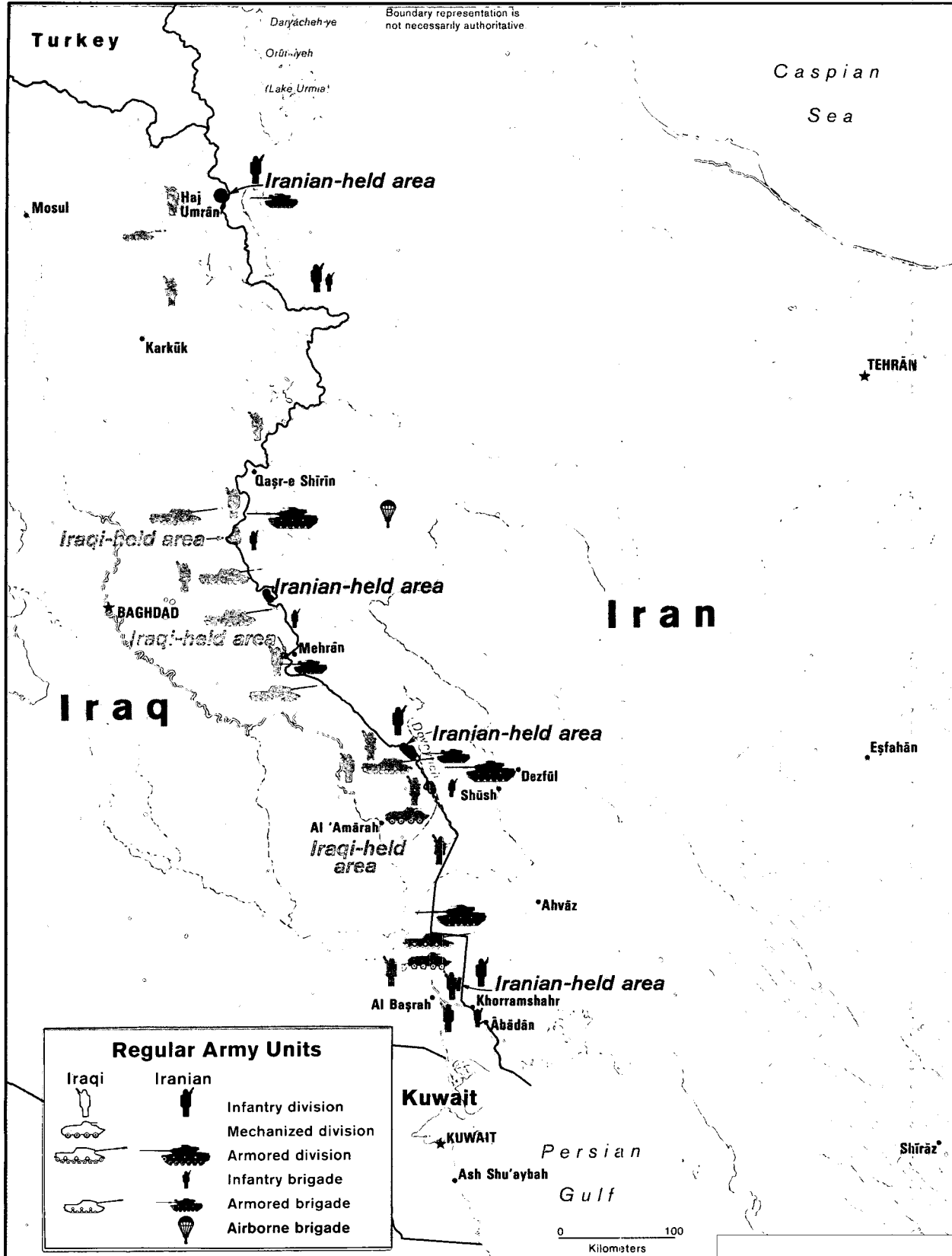


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Figure 9  
Iran-Iraq War Front, September 1983



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his supporters remain in power, the Soviets stand little chance of increasing their influence in Iran. The Soviets have already improved their relations with Baghdad and may believe that their arms sales will increase Iraqi dependence on the USSR and eventually translate into Soviet leverage. [Redacted]

*If the War Ends.* Although the Soviets consistently have called for an end to the war, they probably would view its cessation as a mixed blessing. [Redacted]

The Soviets probably would welcome an end to a major and unpredictable war on their border that could redound to the United States' benefit. A peaceful settlement would:

- Reduce the significance of one of the prime irritants in Soviet-Iranian relations—Moscow's weapons sales to Baghdad.
- Probably make the Persian Gulf states less nervous about Iranian expansionism, which would decrease their need and willingness to cooperate militarily with the United States.
- Result in probably greater contributions from Iran and Iraq to the struggle against Israel, thereby strengthening the pro-Soviet radical Arab states.
- Possibly improve the prospects for a rapprochement between Baghdad and Damascus. [Redacted]

An end to the war, however, would also carry potential liabilities for the Kremlin:

- Iraq, without as acute a need for weaponry, might accelerate its diversification of weapons suppliers and become less dependent on Moscow. Saddam might then have a freer hand to resume his effort to distance Iraq from the USSR.
- Iraq would probably improve its relations with the United States. Saddam, for example, has stated publicly that full diplomatic relations will be re-established as soon as the war ends.
- Although a dramatic improvement in Iranian ties with Washington is a remote possibility, Moscow might worry that the absence of the unifying factor of the war could weaken the present fundamentalist regime. Moscow may be concerned that in these circumstances more pragmatic clerics, who are not as averse to dealing with the United States, would gain the upper hand.

- Iran might have a freer hand to increase its aid to Afghan insurgents. [Redacted]

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Moscow, however, is likely to probe Iran's position to see if the costs of continued stalemate might move it to agree to negotiations and possibly to Soviet mediation. Although Iranian suspicions of the USSR make a Soviet role of honest broker unlikely, it would be the most damaging scenario from the US point of view. A role for the USSR in mediation—akin to that which it played between India and Pakistan at Tashkent in 1965—would be a substantial boost to its objective of becoming a major player in the Middle East, not to mention to its standing with both Iran and Iraq. [Redacted]

Moscow will try to ensure that pro-Soviet Third World states rather than US friends, such as Turkey and Pakistan, play central roles in any mediation. Early in the war, for example, the Soviets backed a mediation effort of the Nonaligned Movement led by Cuba. [Redacted]

The war's end almost certainly also would be accompanied by intensified Soviet efforts to improve bilateral ties with both Iran and Iraq, probably through arms sales, economic deals, and increased political contacts. Moscow, in addition, is likely to work through both diplomatic means and active measures to try to sustain Iran's hostility toward the United States and to forestall a significant upturn in US-Iraqi relations. [Redacted]

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## Appendix

**Chronology of Soviet Policy Toward Iran and Iraq, 1980-83**

Date	Major Events	Iran	Iraq
<b>1980</b>			
22 September	Iraq invades Iran.		Deputy Premier Aziz visits Moscow.
Late September		Soviets embargo arms deliveries.	Soviets embargo arms deliveries.
October	Soviets and Syrians sign Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.		
December		Afghan refugees in Iran, demonstrating on first anniversary of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, inflict minor damage on Soviet Embassy in Tehran.	
<b>1981</b>			
Spring		Soviets lift arms embargo.	Soviets lift arms embargo.
June		Iranians and Soviets agree on some minor arms deals.	First Deputy Premier Ramadan visits Moscow.
June through September		Iranian Prime Minister Bani-Sadr flees country; wave of Mujahedin assassinations of Iranian leaders; President Khamenei and Prime Minister Musavi assume power.	
September	First major Iranian victory at Abadan.		
October through November	Iranian victory at Bostan.	Soviet Ambassador Vinogradov seeks to cultivate new Iranian leaders.	
<b>1982</b>			
March	Iranian victory at Shush-Dezful.	Authoritative <i>Pravda</i> article lists Soviet grievances against Iran.	
April		Soviet troops operating against Afghan insurgents cross Iranian border for first time.	Soviets and Iraqis sign first new arms deal—estimated at \$2 billion—since war began.
May	Battle of Khorramshahr begins.		Oleg Grinevskiy, Chief of Foreign Ministry's Near East Department, visits Baghdad. He is the highest level Soviet official to call since the war began.
June	Iranians win battle of Khorramshahr; they push Iraqis out of all but small pockets of Iranian territory.	Soviets begin publicly criticizing Iran's stance on the war.	Soviets begin publicly praising Iraq's stated willingness to end the war.  Aziz visits Moscow.
June through August	War in Lebanon.		
July	Iranians cross Iraqi border for first time in major battle of the war at Basra.	Landmark article in the CPSU journal <i>Kommunist</i> criticizes the Khomeini regime.	Soviets support Iraqi-inspired UN Security Council resolution calling for immediate cease-fire and withdrawal to prewar boundaries.

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**Chronology of Soviet Policy Toward Iran and Iraq, 1980-83 (continued)**

Date	Major Events	Iran	Iraq
August	Iraqi defenses at Basra hold and Iranian offensive fails.		
September	Front stabilizes.		
October			Soviets support another Iraqi-inspired cease-fire resolution in the UN Security Council.
November	Brezhnev dies and Andropov becomes CPSU leader.	Soviets and Iranians sign \$11 million arms deal.	
December		Demonstrators in Tehran burn the Soviet Embassy flag on the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; Moscow lodges official protest.	Ramadan, Aziz, and Army Chief of Staff Shanshal visit Moscow and negotiate a major arms deal.
<b>1983</b>			
January		Soviets protest Iranians' expulsion of a TASS correspondent.	
February	Iranians' first Doveyrich River offensive fails with heavy casualties.	Tudeh leader Kianuri and other Tudeh members are arrested on charges of spying for the KGB.	Shanshal makes followup visit to Moscow.
March			
April	Second Doveyrich River offensive stalls after early gains.		
May	No major battles. Iranians adopt "war of attrition" strategy of constant, but limited, probes at various points along the front. Iraq steps up its air attacks on Iranian cities, shipping and oil facilities.	Tudeh leaders make "confessions" on Iranian television of spying for Soviets.  Tudeh is dissolved.  Iran expels 18 Soviet diplomats for ties with Tudeh and interference in Iranian internal affairs.  The USSR expels three Iranian diplomats in retaliation.  Gromyko meets with the new Iranian Ambassador to the USSR.	

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**Chronology of Soviet Policy Toward Iran and Iraq, 1980-83 (continued)**

Date	Major Events	Iran	Iraq
June			Saddam Husayn condemns Iraqi Communist Party in interview with Italian journalists.  
July	Iran launches attack in the Kurdistan area in the northern sector of the border.		Saddam lauds the Soviet-Iraqi "rap-prochement" in interview with French journalist.  Aziz makes another trip to Moscow (fifth since war began).
August		Iran protests to Moscow and Kabul over alleged bombing by Soviet or Afghan jets of Iranian village near the Afghan border.	Soviets and Iraqis snipe at each other in their media.



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