

# Senior Army commander: Iran stood alone in Iraqi-imposed war

## Saddam enjoyed support from 36 countries



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Iranians have all heard the tales of the bravery and sacrifice of their soldiers during the Iraqi-imposed war on Iran countless times. However, the voluminous book of the Holy Defense era still holds many unread and unheard pages — a book whose every line is filled with numerous major and minor events, carrying invaluable experiences and lessons.

The eight-year imposed war, with all its hardships, bitterness, and destruction, came to an end — thanks to the sacrifices of thousands of martyred, wounded, captured, and missing soldiers — without even an inch of our country's soil falling into the hands of the Ba'athist enemy. The events of that era were recorded as a proud and memorable document in the long history of this land.

Nearly 36 years have passed since the end of the imposed war, yet we can still hear narratives and untold stories from the warriors who were at the heart of those events. By analyzing these accounts, we can uncover new and educative points that have remained sealed until now.

Brigadier General Masoud Bakhtiari is a retired military officer, university lecturer, and historian of the war who was one of the senior commanders of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army during the Iran-Iraq War. Due to his close association with Major General Ali Sayyad Shirazi, then-commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army's Ground Forces, he was called upon to collaborate in his headquarters from the early months of the war. Thus, he played a role in planning and commanding major victorious operations such as Beit al-Moqaddas and Tariq al-Quds.

Given his effective and prolonged presence on the frontlines and in operations, General Bakhtiari is the black box of many operations and events of the imposed war. Today, he teaches his experiences from the eight-year war in the form of military lessons to future commanders of the Army in this exclusive interview with Iran Daily.

**IRAN DAILY:** First, could you kindly provide a brief biography and combat history in your own words?

**GENERAL BAKHTIARI:** I am a retired brigadier general of Iran's Ground Forces with about 42 years of service in various branches of the Army. I was born in Tehran in 1941. I entered the Officers' Academy at 18, graduating three years later in 1962. I then progressed through various scientific and combat ranks in different units of the Army in Iran and completed my advanced studies and military courses, like many pre-Revolution military personnel, in the US. Since retirement, I have served as a professor and faculty member at the AJA University of Command and Staff of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army.

**Could you elaborate on the AJA University, its level, and the courses taught there?**

This university is the oldest command and staff college in the region. AJA University was established in 1933 and began admitting students a year after the University of Tehran, in 1935. In this regard, we were pioneers in the region. In 1933, many countries in the region did not even exist on the map.

As the name suggests, AJA University operates in the field of command issues during war and peace, as well as staff matters, which essentially involve high-level military management. In this university, where students hold the rank of major (battalion commander) and above, they learn how to interact with personnel and advisory groups and utilize their consultations. Essentially, the commander presents an issue to the staff, then members and advisors offer their opinions, and decision-making takes shape, with the commander making the final call. The responsibility for decision-making ultimately lies with the commander.

Command in war and staff management involves specific techniques and globally recognized scientific principles. One of the requirements for attaining the rank of general in the Army is completing this university course.

**As far as I know, "The Art of War" is one of the courses you have taught for years to commanders of various ranks. If**



Brigadier General Masoud Bakhtiari, retired military officer and one of the senior commanders of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army during the Iraqi-imposed war on Iran in the 1980s  
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**you were to define it in a few sentences, what is the art of war in your view?**

Generally, we consider any task performed with creativity, beauty, and skill to be an art. If you give a pen to anyone literate, they can write, but a calligrapher writes so beautifully and skillfully that their work is displayed in art galleries. Now, if you conduct war — an inherently brutal act — with art, meaning you achieve military objectives with minimal casualties and damage, you have mastered the art of war.

Moreover, the art of war lies in surprising the enemy and, even if the enemy has superior equipment and resources, compensating for your shortcomings creatively.

**Based on your definition of the art of war, how well did the eight-year war align with it?**

Answering this requires understanding the unique characteristics and conditions of the imposed war. No war is without casualties and destruction because war is fundamentally a violent and hostile clash between two states, countries, or factions. Such a confrontation cannot occur without losses.

We say the art of war lies in achieving military objectives

with minimal casualties — meaning, as I mentioned, the commander consults with staff members and military advisors to select and execute an operational plan that aligns closer with this definition. However, no war is possible without casualties, especially in our era, where technology has advanced to the point that military equipment is highly destructive and precise, often resulting in high casualties.

I tell you honestly: the art of war was fully observed by our forces throughout the Holy Defense era. When Iraq invaded our country, the Army was not in full readiness due to post-revolutionary issues. When a revolution occurs in a country, everything undergoes change — norms, behaviors, organizations, etc. The Army was no exception. After the Revolution, a new way of thinking took hold in the country, and expectations from the Army changed. The Army had to align itself with these new ways of thinking. At that time, our Army followed an American-style structure, which was unacceptable to the domestic and regional political climate.

**Could you elaborate on what factors led to this situation for the Army?**

ist and communist groups inside Iran believed that military spending was against the country's interests and that funds should instead be allocated to infrastructure like schools. They overlooked the fact that the most precious asset armies provide is security. Strengthening the military does not increase the likelihood of war; rather, a strong Army can prevent war.

**So, all these factors led the Army to experience unique conditions during the Revolution and the start of the war?**

There was an almost two-year gap between the Islamic Revolution (early 1979) and the war's start (late 1980). During this period, the Army had to adapt its ideas, structure, and form to the new system's demands, naturally undergoing organizational changes.

The Army was transitioning from the imperial era to the Islamic Republic. Though the war had not yet begun, the country faced insecurity in various regions. Opposition groups — from the Tudeh Party to the People's Mojahedin — began destabilizing cities in western Iran. Unrest emerged in Kurdistan. In Khuzestan, a group tried to incite ethnic tensions among Arab communities. In the northeast (Turkmen Sahra region) and southeast (Baluchestan Province), separatist movements also emerged. However, the most significant unrest was in western Iran. In the first week after the Revolution (late February 1979), the Mahabad garrison was seized and looted by conspirators.

At this point, military force had to be used to restore security. The only military power in the country at the time was the Army — an army undergoing organizational purges and restructuring. Yet, the Army successfully handled the situation: Kurdistan was not seceded, and cities like Paveh and Mahabad did not fall to groups like Komala. The Army also quelled unrest in Turkmen Sahra, Khuzestan, and cities like Khorramshahr and Abadan. The Army's casualties in this two-year period before the war reached 2,000.

**Let's turn to the Iraqi-imposed war. What led Saddam to consider a military invasion of Iran?**

In the two years following the Revolution, Iran championed



Influenced by the Ba'ath Party's Arab nationalist ideology, Saddam's Iraq positioned itself against Iran. Amid this, the US embassy hostage crisis in Iran occurred, souring Iran-US relations. The USSR expected Iran to align with it, but the Tudeh Party (linked to the Soviets) was banned. Thus, neither the Eastern nor Western Bloc favored Iran. Saddam was seeking a pretext to invade Iran. Seeing the situation as opportune, he used border disputes to justify starting the war.