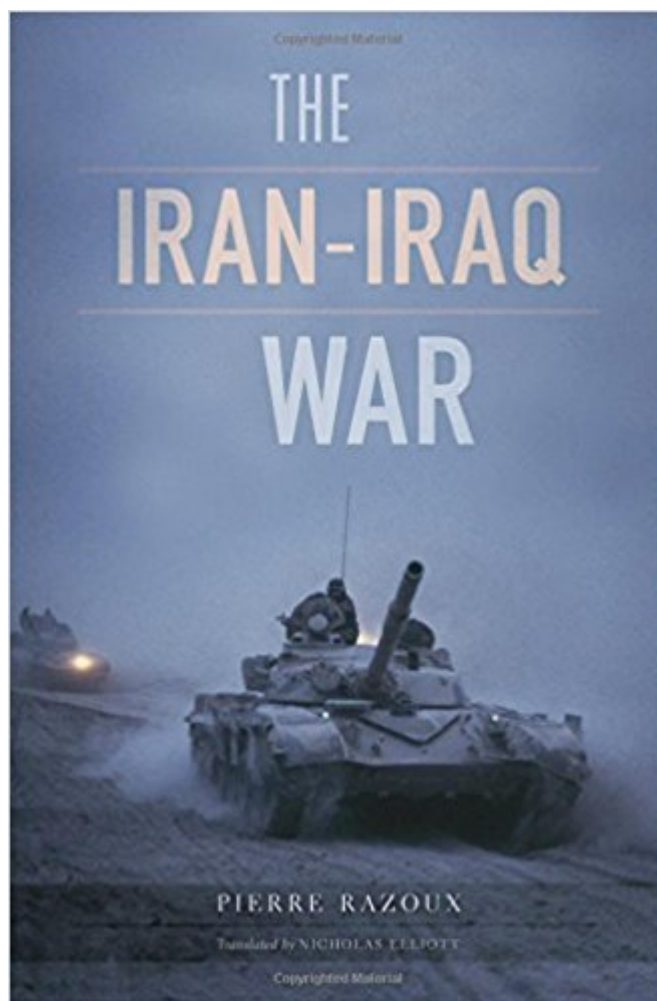


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The Iran-Iraq War



Synopsis

From 1980 to 1988, Iran and Iraq fought the longest conventional war of the twentieth century. The tragedies included the slaughter of child soldiers, the use of chemical weapons, the striking of civilian shipping in the Gulf, and the destruction of cities. The Iran-Iraq War offers an unflinching look at a conflict seared into the region's collective memory but little understood in the West. Pierre Razoux shows why this war remains central to understanding Middle Eastern geopolitics, from the deep-rooted distrust between Sunni and Shia Muslims, to Iran's obsession with nuclear power, to the continuing struggles in Iraq. He provides invaluable keys to decipher Iran's behavior and internal struggle today. Razoux's account is based on unpublished military archives, oral histories, and interviews, as well as audio recordings seized by the U.S. Army detailing Saddam Hussein's debates with his generals. Tracing the war's shifting strategies and political dynamics—military operations, the jockeying of opposition forces within each regime, the impact on oil production so essential to both countries—Razoux also looks at the international picture. From the United States and Soviet Union to Israel, Europe, China, and the Arab powers, many nations meddled in this conflict, supporting one side or the other and sometimes switching allegiances. The Iran-Iraq War answers questions that have puzzled historians. Why did Saddam embark on this expensive, ultimately fruitless conflict? Why did the war last eight years when it could have ended in months? Who, if anyone, was the true winner when so much was lost?

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Customer Reviews

[A] heavyweight work of history [Razoux] brings a cool, factual approach to a large subject that has hitherto received too little attention [Razoux]’s deep research and analytical style make the book something of a general-staff history [It adds up to something extraordinary. (Bartle Bull Wall Street Journal 2015-11-11)] Once a decade, a book appears in which the creative genius and technical skill of the author perfectly match a vast subject. The French defense expert Pierre Razoux’s book on the 1980–1988 Iran–Iraq war is superb and hugely topical [Razoux has a brilliant and economical way of making what became huge and complex battles intensely readable (the maps are excellent too)] This is a masterwork and anyone interested in where Iran goes next [for Iraq will surely cease to be a unitary state] should read the historian of real genius. (Michael Burleigh The Times 2015-12-26) Pierre Razoux’s The Iran-Iraq War is better by a mile than most of the military history that floods the English market. Very topical too since we will be getting to know Iran much more in future and its history should be required reading. (Michael Burleigh Evening Standard 2015-11-19) What emerges in illuminating detail from Razoux’s study is the impact of the power struggle between Ayatollah Khomeini’s two protégés, the men he promoted and protected till the end of his life in June 1989, and left in charge of a house divided by their rivalry: Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ali Hosseini Khamenei. (Joost Hiltermann London Review of Books 2016-02-04) Oddly this war isn’t discussed much any more, even though it is arguably the breakthrough event for the ongoing collapse of parts of the Middle East [I found Pierre Razoux’s The Iran-Iraq War to be a highly readable and useful account. (Tyler Cowen Marginal Revolution 2015-11-21)] This is an impressive, well-researched account of a conflict that helped define the modern Middle East, and it explains, as Razoux shows, much subsequent Iraqi and Iranian history [Razoux brilliantly links the conflict to the regional and Great Power politics of the period] Thus the Iran–Iraq war led directly into post–Cold War geopolitics and conflict. Razoux has produced the best book available on this important war. (Jeremy Black Military History 2016-03-01) Although it was the longest war of the 20th century and caused over a million casualties, the Iran-Iraq War is largely forgotten by the Western world outside of a few military analysts and Middle East scholars [In spite of the ramifications of this war, a complete and readable single volume narrative has not been written in the West, until now. Razoux has written a comprehensive and engrossing account of this war. Using a wealth of new or untapped sources, including the complete set of transcripts of the American debriefing of Saddam Hussein after his capture in 2004 and numerous interviews with Iranian and Iraqi commanders, Razoux provides unique insights into the strategic and operational thinking of both

sides throughout the war. What makes this book so useful to both military historians and students of Middle Eastern politics is that Razoux is able to incorporate a complete look at the ripples caused by this conflict throughout the Middle East and within the Cold War as a whole. There is almost nothing occurring in the Middle East today that wasn't somehow influenced by this virtually unknown war. It has been long overdue for a comprehensive single-volume history, which this book ably fulfills. This is definitely a volume that both military historians and Middle Eastern scholars should have on their bookshelf. (Jerry D. Lenaburg New York Journal of Books 2015-11-17) The Iran-Iraq War marked a turning point in the history of the Middle East. One cannot comprehend the situation in the Gulf today or the Iranian nuclear program or the political crises in Baghdad and Tehran without understanding the frustrations and fears that sprang from that war. (Diplomatie) This is an important book, not least for the time devoted to it: ten years' work by the author, with hundreds of meetings and interviews, unpublished archives, and the deciphering of the famous audiotapes of Saddam Hussein and his staff. And for the first time, Iranian sources are included as well. Razoux examines the military dimension with a knack for detail and a commanding narrative sense, but also addresses the political, diplomatic, and economic aspects. (Libération Week-End) The chapter on the tribulations of the Iranian child-soldiers is poignant, the one on the torment of the Kurds gassed at Halabja overwhelming. It is impossible to grasp the Iraqi and Iranian crises of the twenty-first century without going back to this first, brutal war in the Gulf. (Le Monde) Razoux's detailed, wide-ranging and elegantly written account is the best hope we have of seeing this epoch-defining conflict for what it was. Drawing on a decade of research, during which he accessed Saddam's audio records of military and political meetings, investigated Iranian sources and conducted countless interviews with military, political and business figures from around the world, Razoux gives the reader a uniquely broad and deep look at the conflict. One of the most fascinating insights this book offers is its illustration of the impact the conflict had on the Islamic Republic of Iran and how that nation moved from fledgling revolutionary state to an established Islamic theocracy. Razoux's excellent and lucidly translated study does this awful conflict justice in an even-handed and professional manner. It is a must read for anyone with an interest in Iran, Iraq and the region as it stands today. (C. P. W. Gammell Literary Review 2016-04-01) Using published Western sources, interviews, still-classified French intelligence reports, and the translated transcripts of the audio tapes Saddam kept of all his meetings, Razoux has produced a blow-by-blow military history which is the first significant reappraisal of the war since the downfall of Saddam. Razoux writes well on the interplay of war and

politics (and has been translated well and sympathetically); there are many insights and telling anecdotes. (James Barr Times Literary Supplement 2016-07-22)

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After reading this book, I thought I'd write a review about the actual book, rather than its price, as the other two reviewers (as of the time of this review) have done. Although I read a favorable review of this book somewhere, I was hesitant to read such a long book about the Iran-Iraq War--what little I remembered about the war did not sound promising: stalemate, trenches, gas warfare, child soldiers, rocket attacks on cities, difficult to root for either side...I am very glad that I decided to read the book anyway--it is one of the best military histories I've read in a long time. While the war was indeed a sordid, botched affair marked by all of the factors listed above, and plenty of incompetence by both sides, the book is well-written with a wealth of detail...the author has done a fine job of making this terrible war interesting. The author seems to have done an astonishing amount of research, including listening to the tapes that Saddam Hussein made of all of his important meetings (apparently for posterity...). The author succeeds in turning what could have been a very dull history into a fascinating read full of interesting details, from specific aircraft loadouts and battle tactics to illegal arms trading rings and terrorist tactics. As just one (very sad) example, the author describes how Iran sent its child soldiers into battle with plastic "golden keys" (ordered by Iran from a toy company), telling them that the key would allow them into heaven if they died in battle; Iran also sent its child soldiers--armed only with their plastic keys and copies of the Koran--into minefields to clear the way for regular troops. Very grim stuff...The maps are pretty good, but as usual, difficult to read on a Kindle. In addition to the military aspects of the war, the author does a very good job describing the war's political/diplomatic/economic context, including terrorist bombings, kidnappings, arms traders, how the war helped cause the fall of the Soviet Union, etc. Both superpowers (the US and USSR), France, the UK, and all of the regional powers (Turkey, Syria, Saudi Arabia, etc.) had difficulty adopting coherent positions towards the belligerents because of conflicting internal priorities stemming from cold war issues, oil price, arms trading profits, religion, terrorism, personal animosities, bureaucratic infighting, etc. The author, who is French, points out several instances where one branch of the French government deliberately undermined other branches in dealings with Iran/Iraq. What didn't I like? My only quibble regards the translation: overall the translation is very good and the text flows very smoothly, but there are some odd turns of phrase--for instance, the term "layouts" is used very often in a military context, although presumably a better English

translation would have been something like "positions" or "formations" (difficult to tell from the usage). But this is a very minor issue in what is otherwise an outstanding work of history. Finally, while this is probably obvious, I should point out that this is not the book for someone looking to read about brilliant feats of arms...while a few impressive military achievements are described in the book (as well as some examples of reckless courage), examples of gross military incompetence (by both sides) are encountered much more often. Overall, this is a very good book on the topic, and I highly recommend it to anyone with the slightest interest in Middle Eastern or contemporary warfare.

Very good book about the "forgotten War" of 20 century. A lot new information, specially about "Karbala" 5, the Iranian offensive against Basrah, perhaps the biggest battle since WWII, unknown for most of the World.

Pierre Razoux is masterful in providing political/military strategic planning for both Iran & Iraq. He also detail tactical battle events, but these were not important to my reading. Lessons learned and unique value is found in his surfacing major powers around the globe posturing for National triff power and economic advantage. One cannot escape concluding US gave Iran what it could not gain with military power. Iraq. The author goes far in preparing one for intellectual reflections on Iran's regional and international role in our future. Excellent writing & important reading.

Pierre Razoux's *The Iran-Iraq War* is an interesting account of one of the largest conventional military conflicts of the past half-century, and one that is little understood. His book is better than the other recently published work on the subject by Williamson Murray and Kevin Woods, which is thin and hastily-written. Both make use of a key information source not available to earlier writers on the subject: the transcripts of recorded conversations between Saddam Hussein and his generals, seized following the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, Razoux's book is perhaps at its best when it is away from the front lines, when it explains how the two combatants funded their war and found the materials with which to fight it, when it explains the internal dimensions (especially for Iran, which were quite complicated), and in its discussion of the complicated diplomacy (or "diplomacy," one might say, since Iran frequently used terrorism as a diplomatic tool). For the general reader, then, this is a readable and interesting account, even though idiosyncratic in a few ways, such as consistently referring to artillery pieces as "cannons." However, the book has one large and one very large weakness. The large weakness is that, so far as I can tell, the author does not read Farsi or Arabic--or at least he does not utilize any Farsi or Arabic sources that I can find in

his bibliography or endnotes. His bibliography consists entirely of works published in English or French (unless some of the interviews he conducted were in Farsi or Arabic). This is a really serious limitation--I do not see how someone can do a full history of the Iran-Iraq war without using Farsi and Arabic language sources. It would be like writing a book on the Sino-Japanese War without any Chinese or Japanese language sources. The second and even larger weakness is that this book is extremely poorly cited--in fact, basically only direct quotations have citations. Virtually all of the content about military operations, for example, is completely unsourced. Where did Razoux get his information about operational details, about casualties and losses, about planning? I don't know. You won't know. Nobody knows. He doesn't cite any of it. There is no way to check his facts, to understand how reliable his information is, to use his book as a starting point for more information on those subjects. This book was published by Harvard and I honestly don't understand how Harvard, of all publishers, could let something like this slide. Constantly while reading the book I found myself asking "Well, how the heck does he know *that*?" I never could find an answer. Consequently, for serious readers and researchers, it is really hard to take much of the book seriously.

Cant recommend this book enough. Tells the story of all levels of the conflict.

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