



## Armed Conflicts Report

### Iran (1979 - first combat deaths)

Update: December 2003

#### Summary

#### Type of Conflict

#### Parties to the Conflict

#### Status of the Fighting

#### Number of Deaths

#### Political Developments

#### Background

#### Arms Sources

#### Summary:

**2003** *There were no reported deaths due to fighting between Iranian government fighters and armed rebels for the second consecutive year. The US-led invasion of Iraq in March resulted in the disarming of the Mujahedeen Khalq rebels based in that country.*

**2002** Sporadic reports suggest there was little or no fighting or attacks this year. The Iraqi government's support for the Mujahedeen Khalq rebels remained an impediment to Iran-Iraq relations.

**2001** Following Iranian missile attacks on rebel camps in Iraq, the Mujahedeen Khalq continued mortar attacks and raids against Iranian government targets. According to Iranian and rebel sources at least 50 people died as a result of the conflict in 2001.

**2000** Mujahedeen Khalq rebels carried out numerous attacks on government targets in Iran, in some cases in retaliation for executions and sentences passed by the state judiciary. In response, government forces stepped up their attacks on Mujahedeen Khalq positions in Iraq. Independent figures on the number of conflict deaths were unavailable.

**1999** The government and opposition rebels stepped up their campaigns in 1999, as the government mounted attacks on rebel bases in Iraq and both groups conducted political assassinations. There were many conflict-related deaths during the year, but independent figures were unavailable.

**1998** An Iraqi border clash between Iranian troops and Mujahedeen rebels, a rebel attack on government buildings, and foreign and domestic political assassinations by government security agents left at least 20, and possible dozens, dead in 1998.

**1997** Reports of clashes between rebels and Iranian troops on the Iraq-Iran border in January and an Iranian air force raid on rebel camps inside Iraq in September provided evidence that the conflict continued in 1997, but out of the international limelight.

**1996** Although there were no reports of clashes between rebels and government troops, the Iranian government continued the execution and assassination of political opponents inside and outside the country and security forces killed civilian demonstrators.

**1995** The government continued attacks on rebel border camps and execution of political opponents. Government security forces also killed civilian demonstrators.

**Type of Conflict:**

State control

**Parties to the Conflict:**

## 1) Government:

under Prime Minister Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Mohammad Khatami.

"Several government agencies are responsible for internal security, including the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the Ministry of Interior, and the Revolutionary Guards, a military force established after the revolution which is coequal with the regular military.... Paramilitary volunteer forces known as hezbollahis or basijis also conduct vigilante actions." [*Iran Report on Human Rights Practices for 1995*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US Department of State, March 1996]

## 2) The Armed Opposition:

The Mujahedeen Khalq Organization (MKO), led by Maryam Rajavi and her husband, Massoud Rajavi. The MKO were supported by Iraq during its eight year long war with Iran and continued operating from bases in Iraq until the March 2003 US/UK invasion. Following the invasion Mujahedeen Khalq fighters surrendered to, and were disarmed by the coalition forces. The MKO is classified by both the US State Department and the European Union as a terrorist group.

"Since the Mujahedeen Khalq capitulated to U.S. forces, troops confiscated more than 2,100 vehicles and destroyed weapons caches, the U.S. Central Command said." [*Associated Press*, October 29, 2003]

"The MKO fighting force included an estimated 6,000-8,000 personnel organised as a brigade, which operated mainly from bases in central-east and southeast Iraq." [*Jane's Defence Weekly*, April 30, 2003]

"In the past, Iraq has accused Iran of providing refuge for Shi'ite dissidents who mount attacks in southern Iraq. Iran, for its part, accuses Baghdad of arming the exiled Iranian People's Mujahedeen organization and providing it with military camps along its border." [*BBC News*, June 28, 2002]

"The Mujahedeen complex near Baghdad, which is not yet operating, was begun in late 1998 on the site of an Iraqi military area and is said to include lakes, farms, barracks and administrative buildings that can accommodate 3,000 to 5,000 people..." [*The PointCast Network*, 24 March 2000]

"The NLA is reported to have 30,000 soldiers at its Ashraf camp within Iraq."

["Iran - 1997," [www.webcom.com/hrin/parker/country/iran.html](http://www.webcom.com/hrin/parker/country/iran.html)] Also, "Mujahideed Khalq uses Iraq as a springboard for attacks against Iran. It has several camps, equipped with tanks, heavy guns and helicopter gunships, close to the borders with Iran." [*Reuters*, September 29, 1997]

**Status of Fighting:**

**2003** There were no reports of fighting between the armed opposition fighters and Iranian government forces in 2003.

**2002** Sporadic reports suggest there was little or no fighting or attacks by rebel or government forces.

**2001** Following Iranian missile attacks on rebel camps in Iraq in April, the Mujahedeen Khalq launched mortar attacks and raids against government targets.

"Five mortar shells exploded in northern Tehran near a military base belonging to Iran's elite Islamic Republic Guards Corps, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported. The rebel group Mujahedeen Khalq, in a call to The *Associated Press* in the neighbouring United Arab Emirates, claimed responsibility for the mortar attacks, saying the target was the base. The official Iranian agency reported no casualties. But the Mujahedeen Khalq said the explosions inflicted many casualties among Iran's security forces and caused damage to the military compound and vehicles in it. The conflicting casualty reports could not be independently verified." [*The Associated Press*, January 7, 2001]

"Eight members of the rebel Mujahedeen Khalq were killed in a fire in western Iran, the Iranian army said. A ninth rebel was captured in the battle near Qasr-e Shirin in the border province of Kermanshah, the army said in a statement." [*The Associated Press*, April 28, 2001]

**2000** Mujahideen Khalq rebels carried out numerous attacks on police, military and government targets in Iran, in some cases in retaliation for executions and sentences passed by the state judiciary. In response, government forces stepped up their attacks on Mujahideen Khalq positions in Iraq.

[Sources: *BBC News*, 21 January 2001, 25 October 2000; *The PointCast Network*, 24 March 2000; *Reuters*, 22 March 2000]

"The exiled Iranian opposition group Mojahideen-e-Khalq (People's Mujahideen) has claimed responsibility for the recent mortar attacks in Tehran. The

group targeted the headquarters of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) general command and the IRGC headquarters responsible for the security of Tehran on 21-22 October." [*Janes Defence Weekly*, 1 November 2000]

"Mortar bombs slammed into a Tehran residential district Monday near a base of the hard-line Revolutionary Guards in Iran's second act of violence in as many days... Mujahideen Spokesman Ali Safavi, speaking to Reuters in Dubai by telephone from Paris, said the group's forces inside Iran had attacked the guards complex. The same group carried out a similar assault in the presidential palace and nearby government buildings in early February, killing one person and injuring several others." [*The PointCast Network*, 13 March 2000]

"The Mujahideen has claimed responsibility for more than 12 attacks inside Iran in recent weeks, including several in Tehran." [*Jane's Defence Weekly*, 16 February 2000]

**1999** Government forces increased attacks on Mujahideen Khalq positions in Iraq after the rebel group claimed responsibility for the assassination of the Iranian armed forces' deputy joint chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Ali Sayyad Shirazi, in Tehran in April. The Mujahideen became more active, stepping up attacks on the government. Both sides conducted political assassinations.

"The Mujahideen, Iran's main exiled opposition group, has in the past year intensified its attacks. The group claimed responsibility for the assassination of Iran's armed forces deputy joint chief of staff in Tehran in April and said it was behind the killing of a former prison director in August. Iraq and the Mujahideen have blamed Iran for several recent attacks on the group's forces inside Iraq." [*Reuters*, July 2, 1999]

**1998** Border clashes between rebels and government forces continued.

"The Iranian rebel Mojahedin-e Khalq organisation (MKO) admitted on 3 March that five of its men had been killed in a clash with Iranian border guards in the Ilam border strip. According to Iranian government sources, in the same incident nine MKO fighters were killed and several wounded in a clash in the border town of Mehran..." [*IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin*, Spring 1998, p26]

**1997** There were reports of clashes between rebels and Iranian troops on the Iraq-Iran border in January and an Iranian air force raid on rebel camps inside Iraq in September.

"In January 1997, Iran and Iraq began massing troops along the border in anticipation of an expected large-scale assault by Iran on NLA positions." ["Iran - 1997," [www.webcom.com/hrin/parker/country/iran.html](http://www.webcom.com/hrin/parker/country/iran.html)]

"Earlier on Monday, the Iranian opposition group Mujahideen Khalq said the raids targeted their two camps, one near the city of Kut, 172 km (103 miles) southeast of Baghdad, and the other near Jalwala, 130 km northeast of Baghdad." [*Reuters*, September 29, 1997]

**1996** The Iranian government continued to execute political opponents and rebel leaders at home and assassinate those abroad. Government Security Forces and Revolutionary Guards anti-riot units opened fired on civilian protestors in at least two cities, killing and wounding several people. The Baghdad-based rebels staged military exercises near the Iraq-Iran border in March.

"Several thousand rebels of the exiled Iranian opposition group Mujahideen Khalq staged military exercises on Wednesday on a piece of scrub land in Iraq close to the border with Iran.... the exercises... included a show of infantry troops, rocket launchers, British-made Chieftain tanks, ZSU-23 anti-aircraft guns, 155-mm howitzers and 130-mm field guns." [*Suddeutsche Zeitung*, March 29, 1996, as cited in *News on Iran*, #70, April 1, 1996]

"The press reported significant antigovernment unrest in the western city of Kermanshah following the death of a Kurdish Sunni Muslim cleric in early December. Protests over the next week were violently suppressed by security forces, resulting in several deaths, many persons injured, and perhaps hundreds arrested." [*Iran Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US Department of State, January 30, 1997]

**1995** During the year, there were persistent reports of government assassination of opposition figures abroad and execution of political opponents within Iran. There also were reports of attacks on civilians by government security forces. In February, using helicopter gunships, security forces opened fire on a crowd that had gathered to protest government destruction of a Mosque in the city of Zahedan. In April, many people died (estimates range from one dozen to 100) when government forces opened fire on crowds of demonstrators protesting high fuel and water prices in Islamshahr and Akbarabad, two poor suburbs of Tehran. In August, authorities sent troops to quell a demonstration in the city of Qazvin after the city's request to become a separate province was rejected.

"The Mujahadeen Khalq also claimed that Iranian forces rocketed their rebel base at Ashraf in northeastern Iraq near the Iranian border in July." [*Voice of America*, July 10, 1995]

## Number of Deaths:

**Total:** Since 1979 over 10,000 people have died in the conflict.

**2003** There were no reported deaths due to fighting throughout 2003.

**2002** There were no available reports of death due to fighting this year.

**2001** According to official Iranian reports and rebel claims, at least 50 people were killed in the fighting. However, these reports could not be independently verified.

"The People's Mujahedeen had reported on its Paris-based web site that dozens of Iranian government servicemen had been killed in attacks in Ilam Province on the Iraqi border, during which two rebels also died." [BBC, April 23, 2001]

**2000** Independent figures on the number of conflict deaths were unavailable.

"In February, an attack on the offices of President Mohammad Khatami left one person dead." [BBC News, 25 October 2000]

"The official Iranian news agency says a policeman was killed and two others wounded in a grenade attack in Tehran...The Iranian opposition group, Mujahideen Khalq -- which is based in Iraq -- said it was responsible." [CBC News, 28 August 2000]

"In a statement faxed to The Associated Press in Cairo, the Iraq-based Mujahideen Khalq said an unspecified number of Iranian soldiers and commanders were killed when its forces 'pounded with mortars' the headquarters of the Revolutionary Guards' Joint Chiefs of Staff in eastern Tehran." [Associated Press, 30 May 2000]

"It (a report by an Iranian news agency) said the rebels attacked a village in Ilam province on January the 8th, killing three villagers and wounding five more." [BBC News, 23 January 2000]

**1999** Although there were several deaths attributable to the conflict during the year, independent figures were unavailable. Government executions included MKO activists.

"According to information received by the Special Representative, Iranian media and Tehran-based foreign wire services reported 138 executions from 1 January 1999 to mid-August 1999. In his report to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, the Special Representative noted that the Iranian authorities had agreed to cooperate with him in the provision of official statistics on the number of executions. No such statistics have yet reached the Special Representative's attention. The crimes for which most of the executions were carried out are unknown, although a number of those put to death were said to be supporters of or activists in the illegal opposition Mojahedin Khalq Organization." [Interim report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, prepared by the Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights, September 21, 1999]

**1998** At least 20 and possibly dozens killed.

**1997** Iran claimed more than 30 MKO deaths and the MKO "hundreds" of Iranian border guard deaths in armed clashes in January.

**1996** As many as 100 deaths from the state's summary execution of imprisoned political opponents, and assassination of exiled party members. Likely dozens more killed in anti-government demonstrations by security forces.

**1995** Dozens were reported killed in anti-government demonstrations and possibly hundreds more died as the result of government execution of political prisoners.

"Although the domestic press stopped reporting most executions in 1992, executions appear to continue at a rate of several hundred a year. Exiles and human rights monitors report that many of those executed for alleged criminal offenses were actually political dissidents." [Iran Report on Human Rights Practices for 1995, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US Department of State, March 1996]

## Political Developments:

**2003** The lingering conflict between the MKO opposition group and the Iranian government was deeply affected by the US-led invasion of Iraq in March. In April, the Mujahedeen Khalq surrendered to US forces following a bombing campaign targeting their bases in Iraq. After the MKO disarmament, the Iranian government expressed interest in assisting the repatriation of rebel fighters, although the amnesty was not extended to the leadership. In spite of this offer, the vast majority of Mujahedeen Khalq fighters remained in their camps in Iraq, supervised by US/UK coalition forces. In December, the Iraqi Governing Council indicated it would expel members of the MKO from Iraq, possibly to Iran.

"Representatives of an Iranian opposition group are appealing to the Pentagon to overrule an order this week by the Iraqi Governing Council that would expel its members from Iraq by the end of the year, possibly to Iran." [The New York Times, December 13, 2003]

"An Iranian opposition group... has agreed to a cease-fire and has begun moving its vehicles into US-controlled areas, a US military spokesman said Monday. The move by the Moujahedeen Khalq came after the US military bombed the militia's bases and worked to negotiate the surrender of its members." [Associated Press, April 22, 2003]

"[Iranian] Intelligence Minister Yunessi last week called on [MKO fighters] to 'abandon your movement's terrorist leaders and return to Iran', adding that the 'Islamic Republic will forgive those who repent'. But the Mujahedeen leaders will get no such tolerance." [Agence France Presse, April 1, 2003]

**2002** The Iraqi government's support of MKO rebels continued to be an obstacle to establishing normal Iran-Iraq relations.

"Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri was in Iran Saturday for talks aimed at normalizing relations with its longtime enemy... One of the main problems is Iraq's support of opposition groups in Iran and the Iranian government's support for Iraqi opposition figures." [CNN, January 26, 2002]

**2001** There were no reported political developments related to the conflict.

**2000** Using illegal oil revenues, Iraq reportedly spent tens of millions of dollars to build a military headquarters for the Mujahideen Khalq, increasing tension with Iran.

**1996** Leaders of the KDPI met on at least two occasions in 1996 with the Baghdad-based leader of the Mujahideen Khalq, Massoud Rajavi. The meetings signalled "a new level of cooperation between Mujahideen Khalq and the Iranian Kurdish oppositions." [Reuters, August 22, 1996]

## Background:

The Mujahideen Khalq Organization (MKO), based on Marxist and Shi'ite principals, has sought the overthrow of the Iranian government since 1970. Although the MKO was part of the 1979 Islamic revolution, shortly afterwards it was forced into exile and it sided with Iraq in the 1980s Iraq-Iran war. Since the 1980s the MKO had operated from bases near Baghdad and the Iraq-Iran border; however, the 2003 US/UK invasion of Iraq resulted in the disarming of the Mujahideen Khalq fighters at the hands of the US forces.

## Arms Sources:

The Government:

In addition to internal arms production, the Iranian government has recently received weapons from China and Russia.

"The United States has placed sanctions on nine Chinese companies. The US Government said the companies sold goods and technology to Iran that were then put to use in the country's chemical and conventional weapons programmes." China has denied the allegations. [BBC News, July 22, 2002]

The Rebels:

The rebels had a substantial number of weapons captured from Iran at camps near Baghdad. They received financial, logistical, and military assistance from the Iraqi government. They also received money for arms from the Iranian diaspora in North America and Europe. However, their classification as a terrorist organization by the US and the European Union hindered their international funding network.

"French police launched a major crackdown yesterday on the leading Iranian armed opposition group, the People's Mujahideen, detaining more than 150 people and seizing up to \$9-million in raids in the Paris region." [Agence France Presse, June 18, 2003]

"In 2001, the Justice Department accused seven Iranians living in the United States of collecting between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per day in donations at Los Angeles International Airport, supposedly for starving children in Iran but actually for MEK. According to the FBI, the money was used to buy arms."

[Council on Foreign Relations, [www.terrorismanswers.com/groups/mujahedeen2.html](http://www.terrorismanswers.com/groups/mujahedeen2.html)]

"The group turned against the new government and continues to wage an armed struggle against the Iranian state from Iraq, which provides the group with financial and logistical support and military equipment. The people's Mujahideen remains the most powerful opponent of the Islamic Republic, attacking targets in Iran and assassinating Iranian officials. It is generally believed to have 15 to 20 bases in Iraq." [Reuters, March 24, 2000]

Also, "The NLA was able to amass huge supplies of weapons and war materiel by raids in Iran in the closing years of the Iraq-Iran war, including US and British-made tanks and personnel carriers." ["Iran - 1997," [www.webcom.com/hrin/parker/country/iran.html](http://www.webcom.com/hrin/parker/country/iran.html)]

Project Ploughshares  
57 Erb Street West  
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 6C2  
tel (519) 888-6541 fax (519) 888-0018 Email: [plough@ploughshares.ca](mailto:plough@ploughshares.ca)