

Book Review on the Occasion of 40th Anniversary of Iran Iraq War: Iraq's Aggression against Iran and the United Nations Position

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Iraq's Aggression against Iran and the United Nations Position (revised edition). Under the supervision of Djamchid Momtaz.

Authors: Nasrin Mosaffa, Abdollahman Allem, Masoud Taromsari, Bahram Mostaghimi. Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 2016. 252 pages. Softcover.

The proliferation of various scholarly literature about anniversaries and centenaries pertaining to international politics and International Law, specifically concerned with wars and the concept of aggression, often misses one of the pivotal moments of Middle East's legal, regional, security, and political order: the Iraq-Iran War, the longest conventional war of the twentieth century. *Iraq's Aggression against Iran and the United Nations Position*, emanating from a local concern (that, for this book, I define as Iranian academia and society), is an exception within the broader global knowledge production: it is gripping legal documentation of the eight-year war. The main aim of the revised volume, first published in the final years of the war (1987), is updating the history of how the United Nations functioned during the war. The project excels at something else too: in advancing the legal argument and history by tying it into human interests. It showcases the disjuncture between people's experience and suffering

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of the war and aggression, while the international legal and political development goes through its process. The most notable aspect is the volume's account of the use of chemical weapons and the attacks on civilian areas.

The book delivers its promise of being a source for understanding the legal and international institutions dynamic during the Iraq-Iran war. It also offers the chance other researchers to build on this volume to grasp a more global history of aggression in international law. Nevertheless, the updated edition could have extended its analysis by being more critical of evolution the specific international and regional legal order and ensuing consequences for the regional and international politics. The forensic account of the history of war and United Nations could have advanced further contextualisation of histories of international law, a genealogy of views on that within the domestic sphere, and how it shaped the interactions with the United Nations. It takes the first step by including the UN Security Council Resolution 598. Another feature of this book is also expanding its understanding of 'pertinence' of UN bodies regarding the war: in addition to the Security Council, it explores General Assembly, Secretariat and the Secretary-general.

Less well integrated are other voices and studies. The volume's determination to cover the details of the Iraq-Iran war over vast swathes of legal documentations and political statements limits its ability to engage with broader analysis and body of literature. The updated edition could have been an opportunity for a critical review of the extant literature, since the last version, and historiography on Iraq-Iran war: how the aggression and this war were studied in Iran and elsewhere. On a theoretical level, how this precedence shaped the evolution of International Law since then? On a different scale, the book could have also pointed out how some of the events during the Iraq-Iran war were later on transformed further: the example is article

8 of Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The only exception to this in the book is a footnote in chapter 1 on the Kampala review. Since the end of the war and the last edition of this effort, there has been a plethora of new agendas of International Law that could have enriched the book's critical study of the topic. This is not to suggest a revisionist or an ahistorical assessment but comparative exploration of the state of the law back then and now.

A generative reading of this book could lead to a valiant effort to reshape scholarly contribution to the history of Iran and the UN that should be disseminated beyond Iranian academia. The updated edition was published to commemorate the anniversary of the Iraq-Iran war but extending its argument and amplifying its contributions, from different positionalities, are urgently needed. I read it as a rigorous historical engagement with serious historical issues of contemporary relevance, an exemplary methodological study, and a scholarly attempt that broadens knowledge production within International Relations and International Law: these works are vital to have an encompassing view of the international, avoid erasure of histories (and human experiences), and ensure visibility on a global scale.
