



Iraq In Perspective

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Cityview
Flickr / Diyar se

Chapter 1: Geography

Introduction

Desert dominates Iraq's topography. The nation's tracts of fertile land are located chiefly between its two main rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates.¹ In antiquity, the region was called Mesopotamia, which means "land between the rivers" in Greek. This fertile area traditionally defined the boundaries for settled farming and is where most Iraqi people live today.² Much of western and southern Iraq outside the Tigris–Euphrates Basin is dry, hot, and sparsely populated. Except in the northeastern highlands, there are almost no significant Iraqi cities for more than 50 km (31 mi), from either the Tigris or Euphrates. This highly concentrated demographic distribution has had implications for military operations and relief efforts.³

Geographic Divisions

Desert



Desert
Flickr / Rob Bakker

Much of the terrain in Iraq southwest of the Euphrates River consists of rocky desert.⁴ The western portion of this region is an extension of the Syrian Desert.⁵ To the southeast, along the Saudi Arabian border, lie two lower-elevation deserts. The Al-Hajarah lies further to the west, consisting of stony terrain marked by ridges, depressions, and *wadis* (dry riverbeds).⁶ Southeast of it, the Al-Dibdibah is a gravelly plain with scrub vegetation that extends eastward into Kuwait and southward into Saudi Arabia.⁷

Upper Tigris and Euphrates Upland

The Al-Jazirah Plateau is the cardinal feature in this region, between the upper stretches of the Tigris and Euphrates.⁸ Although primarily flat, this arid region contains deep river valleys, the watershed of the two rivers, and some scattered highlands.⁹ The most prominent of these are the Jabal Sinjar (Sinjar Mountains), from which emerges the region's most significant watercourse, the Wadi al-Tharthar.¹⁰

Northeast Highlands

This region runs northwest to southeast, in the northernmost region of Iraq along its border with Iran.¹¹ The Zagros Mountains are the prominent feature of this region, while the Taurus Mountains predominate to the north along Iraq's border with Turkey.¹² Habitable river basins are located between these rivers, which are mostly populated by ethnic Kurds and Turkmen.¹³ Moving southwest from the mountainous areas



Euphrates
Flickr / Arian Zwegers



Countryside
Flickr / Adam Jones



Iraqi Kurdish villagers in field near Turkish border
Wikimedia / jamesdale10

are hilly regions that gradually transition to plains. Larger cities are found in this area of the northeast, such as Kirkuk and Erbil.¹⁴ The Jabal Hamrin marks the southwestern edge of the Northeast Highlands, a low-elevation ridge through which the Tigris River flows.¹⁵

Alluvial Plains

The central and southern parts of the Euphrates-Tigris drainage basin begin north of Baghdad and Balad on the Tigris, and extend westward towards Al-Ramadi on the Euphrates.¹⁶ Southward, towards the Persian Gulf, are low-elevation plains that are subject to poor drainage and seasonal floods. Iraq's two largest cities, Baghdad and Basrah, are in this region.¹⁷ Numerous marshlands and lakes are found here. The largest is Hawr al-Hammar, south of the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates.¹⁸ This marshy lake was once known as the home of many of Iraq's *Ma'dan* (Marsh Arabs), but most moved out of the area when much of the lake was drained following the 1991 Gulf War.¹⁹

Climate

As part of a continental landmass, Iraq's climate ranges from temperate in the north to subtropical in the south. The mountainous areas in the north are cool in the summer and cold in the winter.²⁰ However, summers are long and hot, and winters are short and cool in the south and central areas. The temperature in Baghdad ranges from 2 to 15°C (35 to 60°F) in January. The highest temperature recorded in the city was 51°C (123°F) in July though the average daytime temperature in Baghdad during July and August is 35°C (95°F).²¹

Iraq depends on water from the Tigris and Euphrates because rainfall is insufficient. River water has been used extensively for irrigation, supporting the agricultural foundation of one of the first civilizations.²² Iraq's northern

highlands receive considerable rainfall, including snow from November to April. In some places, precipitation totals 1,000 mm (39 in). Average annual precipitation in the northern foothills is 300–560 mm (12–22 in), dropping to 100–180 mm (4–7 in) in the central and southern alluvial plain.²³

Dust storms and sandstorms are caused by the *sharqi* winds from the south and southeast and the *shamal* winds from the northwest. These storms can occur at any time of the year, but the peak of this season is July.²⁴

Major Rivers

Tigris River



Tigris River
Flickr / David Stanley

The Tigris River, 1,840 km (1,143 mi) in length, is the easternmost of Mesopotamia's two great rivers.²⁵ It originates in the Taurus Mountains of Turkey and forms part of the Turkish–Syrian border before flowing into Iraq. Two of modern Iraq's largest cities—Baghdad and Mosul—lie on the Tigris, as did several of the most famous cities of antiquity, including Nineveh, Calah, and Ashur, the three capitals of ancient Assyria.²⁶

The flow of the Tigris increases substantially after the Nahr Diyala (Diyala River) joins it just south of Baghdad.²⁷ Baghdad and its immediate outskirts are protected from flooding by a series of embankments. Just south of Baghdad and downstream to the city of Al-Kut, the river

frequently floods.²⁸ Over time, this has caused a build-up of high natural levees made of silt deposits, making it impossible to tap the river for irrigation.²⁹

Euphrates River

The Euphrates River is the longest in southwestern Asia. It traverses about 2,700 km (1,678 mi) from its origins in the highlands of eastern Turkey before emptying into



Euphrates
Flickr / Jayel Aheram

the Persian Gulf.³⁰ The river enters Iraq from Syria at the southern edge of Al-Jazirah Plateau and then flows southeast toward Baghdad. The Euphrates passes about 50 km (30 mi) from Baghdad and, before dams were built, floodwaters would reach the city.³¹ Because the Euphrates' riverbed is higher above the alluvial plain than that of the Tigris, it has long been the primary source for irrigation in the Mesopotamia region.³²

None of Iraq's large cities lie along the Euphrates (unlike the Tigris), although several medium-size provincial capitals are located there. These include Al-Armada (Al-Anbar Province), Nasariyah (Dhi Qar Province), and Al-Samawah (Al-Muthanna Province).³³



*Boat on Shatt-al-Arab River
Flickr / Christiaan Briggs*

Shatt al-Arab

The Shatt al-Arab, or *Arvand Rud*, is formed by the convergence of the Tigris and Euphrates in southern Iraq. It flows southeastward for 193 km (120 mi). This river forms the Iraq–Iran border as it flows to the Persian Gulf.³⁴ This tidal river is also a primary source of water for southern Iraq, as well as Kuwait. Before flowing into the Persian Gulf, the Shatt al-Arab forms a swampy marshland that opens up enough to allow shallow-draft oceangoing vessels to travel to Basrah, Iraq's main river port.³⁵ However, it requires frequent dredging to keep the channel navigable.³⁶

Major Cities

Cities	Population ³⁷
Baghdad	5,672,513
Al Basrah	2,600,000
Mosul	1,739,800
Erbil	932,800
Kirkuk	601,433

Baghdad

Baghdad is known as the “Round City” due to its circular shape and the defensive wall that encircles it.³⁸ It was founded in 762 C.E. by the second Abbasid caliph, Abu Jafar al-Mansur, and remained the seat of caliphate power from the 9th through the 13th centuries. During this period, Baghdad achieved stature as a cultural center and



Baghdad
Wikimedia / Robert Smith

commercial hub, reflecting the ascendance of Arab civilization.³⁹ Under the Ottomans in later centuries, the city also served as a Sunni buffer against the Shiite Persian Safavid Empire.⁴⁰ After independence, the city became the country's educational center and focal point for its transportation network and industrial development.⁴¹

In the 1970s, Baghdad saw rapid economic growth due to dramatic increases in the price of oil, which was the result of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.⁴² The government invested in infrastructure modernization and education, and the literacy rate of residents showed significant gains.⁴³

The Iraq-Iran War (1980–1988) caused a shift in spending priorities and Baghdad fell into

disrepair. Coalition air bombardments in 1991, the subsequent UN trade embargo, and the liberation of Iraq in 2003 further damaged the city's infrastructure.⁴⁴

During the Iraq War, Baghdad became a city of walls as neighborhoods were extensively partitioned to reduce ethnic strife and to enhance security.⁴⁵ Even after the last of the coalition pulled out in 2011, many "T-Walls" remained abundant in urban areas.⁴⁶ Additionally, the coalition created a walled-off International Zone, commonly referred to as the "Green Zone," in central Baghdad.⁴⁷ This 10 sq km (3.9 sq m) zone was designed as the governmental center for the Coalition Provisional Authority and was completely surrounded by high concrete blast walls.⁴⁸ In October 2015, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi opened this area to all Iraqi citizens in response to protests to create a more transparent and open government.⁴⁹

Basrah

Al-Basrah, commonly known as Basrah, is the largest city in southern Iraq and is an important port.⁵⁰ It is also the capital of Al-Basrah Province. The local populace primarily consists of Shiite Muslims. Close to 80% of Iraq's proven oil reserves are nearby, and oil pipelines are scattered throughout the region,



Basra
Flickr / University of Salford Press

running from the oil fields to the city's refinery.⁵¹ From there, oil is sent by pipeline to oil terminals on the Persian Gulf.^{52, 53} In addition to being the center of the southern Iraqi oil industry, Basrah serves as an agricultural center for the region, producing wool, grain, and dates.⁵⁴

Mosul (Al-Mawsil)

Mosul (Al-Mawsil) is the capital of the northern province of Ninawa, and is northern Iraq's principal city. The city's older section lies on the west bank of the Tigris River and features the partially excavated ruins of the ancient Assyrian capital of Nineveh.



Mosul
U.S. Army / Sgt. Michael Bracken

⁵⁵ This is also where the Nahr al-Khawsar (Khawsar River) flows into the Tigris.⁵⁶

Mosul has played an important part in Iraq's oil industry. Oil fields are nearby, and roads and pipelines are used to transport the oil to ports on Turkey's Mediterranean coast.⁵⁷ A rehabilitated refinery that was damaged during the Iran-Iraq war is located about one hour's drive south of the city, in the town of Al-Qayyarah.⁵⁸

Northwest of Mosul, on the Tigris River, is Mosul dam—Iraq's largest. This dam is an important part of the country's national power grid. However, it was built on deposits of gypsum, a mineral that dissolves over time

when in contact with water.⁵⁹ An assessment by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers states that “[D]ue to fundamental and irreversible flaws existing in the dam's foundation, [we] believe that the safety of the Mosul Dam against a potential catastrophic failure cannot be guaranteed.”⁶⁰ An ad hoc committee investigating the dam's safety in 2007 recommended that it be drained.^{61, 62}

In 2011, the German engineering company, Bauer Group, was contracted to reinforce the dam's foundations. However, repairs were placed on hold due to political unrest.⁶³ The city of Mosul fell to ISIL militants in June 2014. Then, on 7 August 2014, ISIL captured the Mosul dam, but by 18 August, the dam was retaken. The U.S. military launched no less than 35 air strikes to secure the dam from over 500 ISIL militants. The airstrikes destroyed a significant number of ISIS vehicles and equipment, as well as fighting positions. These attacks enabled Iraqi and Kurdish fighters to retake control of the dam.⁶⁴ However, as of October 2015, Mosul city remains under ISIL control. In response, the U.S. has sent an additional 450 military advisors to assist Iraqi forces, and the coalition continues its air campaign against ISIL militants in the vicinity.

Erbil

Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government, is one of the world's oldest sites of continuous human habitation.⁶⁵ Control of Erbil was the cause of imperial battles over the course of history. In modern times, Erbil is a rail terminus and is linked by road to Turkey. The city is not as tied to the northern Iraq oil industry as Kirkuk to the south, but the recent development of the Taq Taq oil field, 80 km (50 mi) southeast of Erbil, may change this situation.⁶⁶ Historically, the city has been the center of the agricultural region surrounding it. After the overthrow of Hussein, Erbil remained stable with a thriving local economy.⁶⁷



Erbil
Flickr / Volkan YILMAZ

Kirkuk

Kirkuk is known as the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan and is the center of Iraq's northern oil fields, some of the most productive in the country.⁶⁸ Approximately 30% of Iraq's oil production and 30% of its natural gas reserves are in the Kirkuk region.⁶⁹ Prior to the emergence of the oil industry, the city was a regional trading center for agricultural and livestock products, as well as the site of a small textile industry.^{70, 71} The modern city is located on the site of the ancient city of Arrapha, an important Assyrian city during the 10th and 11th centuries B.C.E.⁷²

The city is one of the most ethnically mixed in Iraq, with Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen well represented in and around the city.⁷³ Kirkuk is a Kurdish ancestral home, and the majority of the population is traditionally Kurdish. Smaller populations of Assyrians and Armenians also live in the area.⁷⁴ During Saddam Hussein's regime, up to 100,000 Kurds in the area were involuntarily relocated and replaced by Arabs as a means to weaken Kurdish control of the city.⁷⁵ Since Hussein's overthrow, however, many Kurds have returned. This has created tension with the Iraq central government.⁷⁶ The question of who will control the oil-rich region and how the revenues will be divided remains a contentious issue.⁷⁷

Environmental Concerns



Flood
Flickr / Chris De Bruyn

Some of the most serious environmental hazards in Iraq come from conflict that has degraded pipelines, refineries, and other oil infrastructure.⁷⁸ This has led to groundwater contamination in areas near these structures.⁷⁹ Moreover, an aging and war-damaged infrastructure has greatly increased the number of Iraqis who lack access to safe drinking water.⁸⁰ The destruction of military and industrial facilities has led to significant contamination of groundwater, soil, and the air by heavy metals.⁸¹ In addition to pollution, land mines and unexploded ordnance have injured or killed tens of thousands of Iraqis.⁸²

Furthermore, poorly drained alluvial plain soils make up most of the agricultural land.⁸³

The result is an increase in soil salt levels, which is intensified by seasonal flooding and agricultural irrigation.⁸⁴ Currently, little to no land management practices are in place, so these soils have become increasingly unproductive for farming. Desertification and erosion have also reduced the amount of arable land.⁸⁵

One of the worst legacies of the Hussein era is the destruction of the marshlands in southern Iraq, near the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and the Shatt al-Arab.⁸⁶ The Hussein government effectively drained these marshes by constructing diversion canals after the 1991 Gulf War.⁸⁷ This action came as part of a concentrated assault on the Shiite Marsh Arabs in this swampy region, whom the government regarded as rebels.⁸⁸ Reclamation of the marshes, which support a unique ecosystem, was given high priority after the fall of Hussein's government. However, this project has been complicated by a combination of drought, dam construction, and the expansion of upstream irrigation systems.⁸⁹

Natural Hazards

Wind and water are the cause of Iraq's most frequently occurring natural hazards: dust storms, sandstorms, and floods. Iraq experiences two types of wind patterns that trigger dust storms and sandstorms.⁹⁰ From mid-June to mid-September, dry air masses from the Mediterranean are funneled between Saudi Arabia's high plateau and the mountain ranges north and west of Iraq.⁹¹ The resultant northwesterly winds (called *shamals*) intensify as the summer progresses and the ground continues to heat.⁹² From April to mid-June and again from mid-September to November, the wind pattern changes from

southerly to southeasterly. Known as *sharqis*, these currents produce winds that are gustier than the summer *shamals*, but not as persistent.⁹³ The resulting wind storms are sometimes interchangeably referred to as “sandstorms” or “dust storms,” but technically the two are different.⁹⁴ Because of its smaller particle size, dust can be lifted hundreds of meters into the air. In contrast, sand can be lifted only about 15 m (49 ft). Thus, the wind

storms that produce dramatic, towering walls of uplifted fine particles are dust storms.⁹⁵

Iraq’s other major hazard is flooding. Most of the population is situated near the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which have flooded periodically throughout recorded history.⁹⁶ Numerous dams and canals linked to overflow basins have been built to mitigate the damage during periods of heavy rain and springtime snowmelt in the northern mountains.⁹⁷ In addition, numerous water projects on the two rivers upstream in Syria and Turkey have led to an overall reduction in river flow and a lowered threat of catastrophic flooding.⁹⁸



Oil Fire
Flickr / Airman Magazine

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Geography: Chapter Assessment

1. The Tigris River, 1,840 km (1,143 mi) in length, is the westernmost of Mesopotamia's two great rivers.

FALSE

The river originates in the Taurus Mountains of Turkey and forms part of the Turkish-Syrian border before flowing into Iraq.

2. Erbil is one of the world's oldest sites of continuous human habitation.

TRUE

Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government, is one of the world's oldest sites of continuous human habitation.

3. The walled-off 10 sq km (3.9 sq mi) "Green Zone" in central Baghdad was the governmental center for the Coalition Provisional Authority.

TRUE

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi opened the walled-off International Zone in central Baghdad ("the Green Zone") to all Iraqi citizens in October 2015.

4. Approximately 5% of Iraq's oil is produced in the region around Erbil.

FALSE

Kirkuk is the center of Iraq's northern oil fields. As much as 30% of Iraq's oil is produced in the region.

5. Iraq's marshlands have been completely reclaimed and rehabilitated in recent years.

FALSE

Reclamation of the marshes was given high priority after the fall of Hussein's government; however, progress has been complicated by a combination of drought, dam construction, and the expansion of upstream irrigation systems.



*Temple ruins at Hatra, Iraq
Wikimedia / Victrav*

History

Introduction

The early history of the region that contains Iraq includes the development of some of the ancient world's fabled civilizations. The Mesopotamian cultures of Sumer and Babylonia are associated with several of humankind's earliest advancements. Many centuries later, Baghdad, on the Iraqi plains near the closest approach of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, became the center of the Islamic world. After several centuries of intermittent Ottoman control, Iraq became a British-administered territory after World War I. The nation became an independent kingdom in 1932, but remained under British influence until a military coup overthrew the monarchy in 1958.

The Ba'ath Party assumed power in the 1960s, consolidating its authority under Saddam Hussein, who brutally suppressed internal opposition. Oil revenues funded the country's development in the 1970s. In the following decades, Hussein embroiled his nation

in two costly conflicts: the Iraq–Iran War (1980–1988) and first Persian Gulf War (1990–1991). Subsequent to the Persian Gulf War, Iraq was the target of international sanctions. Hussein was finally removed from power by a U.S.-led coalition of forces in 2003. Iraq’s long-standing ethnic and sectarian divisions, which reflect a complex history of relations, remain prominent in the post-Hussein era.

Ancient Cultures of Mesopotamia

Iraq constitutes an area once known as Mesopotamia (“land between the rivers”)



*Mesopotamia
Flickr / Xuan Che*

that spawned numerous ancient civilizations of considerable complexity.¹ The name refers to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which enter northwestern Iraq and flow southeast toward the Persian Gulf. These river systems and their fertile floodplains fostered the emergence of civilization in a region where human settlement began before 6000 B.C.E.²

³ A vital early achievement in Mesopotamia was the development of agriculture, which involved constructing and maintaining an irrigation infrastructure on the flood-prone Mesopotamian plain.⁴ Farmers built some of the region’s first dikes and canals around 5000 B.C.E., and drained wetlands in other areas.⁵ This paved the way for the eventual growth of city-states.⁶ Four major cultures emerged during

the early development of Mesopotamia: the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians.

Sumerian society emerged in southern Mesopotamia in the fourth millennium B.C.E. Major Sumerian achievements include the plow and cuneiform script, the first system of writing.^{7, 8, 9} The Akkadians of northern Mesopotamia were a Semitic people who laid the foundation for the unification of several Mesopotamian cultures, and the later Babylonian Kingdom.^{10, 11} Babylonian power waxed and waned over centuries until finally losing its foothold when Alexander the Great invaded in 331 B.C.E. Babylon competed with the Assyrians, a northern Mesopotamian power, throughout most of its existence. At the height of its influence, Assyrian authority spanned an area from southern Turkey all the way to Egypt.^{12, 13}



*Um Al-Tubol Mosque, Baghdad
Flickr / Jeff Werner*

Spread of Islam

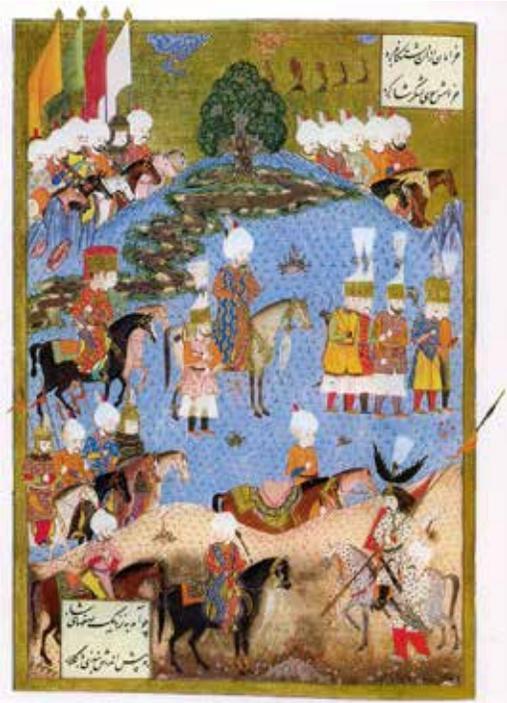
At the time of the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 C.E., Islam had become the dominant religious and political force in Arabia.¹⁴ Abu Bakr, Muhammad's close adviser and father-in-law, was chosen by a Muslim council to be the first caliph, or successor to the prophet. This decision remains controversial in the Islamic world, particularly in Iraq, where the Muslim community today is split between Shia and Sunni branches. Shiite Muslims believe that the caliphate should have passed to a blood relation of Muhammad, in particular to his cousin and son-in-law Ali. These differences have created both a religious and political divide between the two groups.¹⁵

Abu Bakr was caliph for only two years. Yet during that time, he quelled an incipient rebellion within the Muslim tribal alliance and initiated the expansion of Islam to adjacent regions in the Middle East.¹⁶ Under Abu Bakr's successor, Umar, the Arab armies dealt a crushing defeat to the Sassanid forces at the Battle of Qadisiyah (637 C.E.), and shortly thereafter they took control of the Sassanid capital of Ctesiphon.¹⁷

The Umayyad dynasty was the first dynastic Islamic caliphate, and ruled from 661 to 750 C.E. in Damascus, Syria.¹⁸ The Umayyad rulers broadened their empire through the early eighth century, expanding throughout northern Africa and the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) to as far east as China and northern India.¹⁹

The Abbasid dynasty overthrew the Umayyads in 750. They governed from Baghdad, a city founded by Al-Mansur in 762 during the second Abbasid caliphate. From 786–833, Baghdad evolved into one of the world's grandest cities, becoming a cosmopolitan center of power, wealth, and religious study.²⁰ It was during this time that the famed *Bayt al-Hikma* (House of Wisdom), a center of learning, was founded.²¹ The dynasty ultimately fell in the mid-13th century during the Mongol onslaught.^{22, 23}

Ottoman and Safavid Conflict



Miniature of Ottoman-Safavid War
Wikimedia Commons

The Mongols, led by Hulagu Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, invaded and destroyed the Abbasid caliphate in 1258. The Mongols' attack was part of their Asian offensive, partly motivated by a desire to expand their nomadic herding economy.²⁴ The Abbasids' urban cultural achievements were of little value to the Mongols, who massacred the inhabitants and destroyed urban structures and irrigation systems.²⁵

The fall of the Abbasid dynasty ushered in a host of invaders from Mongolia, Turkey, and Persia, with two especially notable competitors: the Shiite Safavids of Persia (Iran) and the Sunni Ottomans of Anatolia (Turkey).²⁶ The Safavids emerged from Azerbaijan in the 14th century and took Baghdad, then Mosul in 1508. Their military conquests culminated in a battle between the Safavids and Ottomans in 1514, with the Ottomans taking northern Iraq shortly thereafter.²⁷ The Ottomans did not capture Baghdad until 1534 when Suleiman the Magnificent reached the city. The political and economic disorder that had characterized the region in the post-Abbasid period finally stabilized during the 400-year rule of the Sunni Ottomans.²⁸

The Ottoman Era

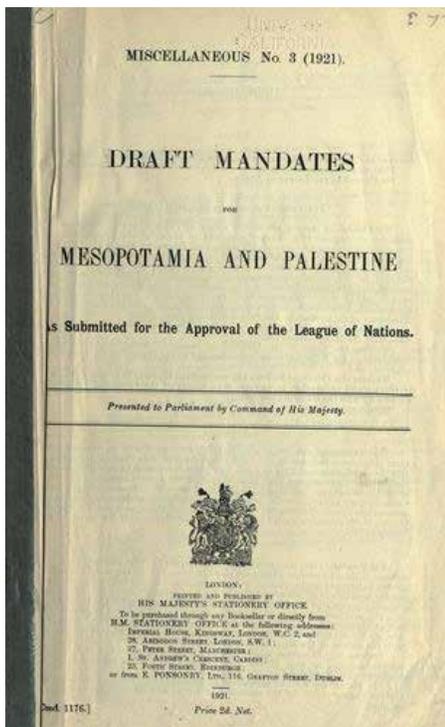
Ottoman control over Iraqi regions deteriorated during the 17th century because of political instability caused by Arab and Kurdish tribal conflicts.²⁹ The situation temporarily improved during the early 18th century when the Mamluks established independent rule over much of the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. The Mamluks maintained this position until 1831, when a huge flood and subsequent plague in Baghdad gave the Ottomans an opportunity to reassert their authority.^{30, 31}

World War I and the British Mandate

At the dawn of the 20th century, the demand for oil became worldwide. Iraq's vast oil reserves, first discovered in the 1870s, drew



Ottoman or Mamluk horseman c. 1550
Public Domain



Draft mandates for Mesopotamia and Palestine
 Wikimedia Commons

increased interest in the region. At first, the British considered Iraq as a trade corridor to their colonial holdings in India.³² The discovery of oil further motivated their designs for a sphere of influence in Iraq. The Germans, under Kaiser Wilhelm II, were equally interested in the region's oil. When the Ottoman government granted Germany a concession to build a railroad from Anatolia to Baghdad, including oil exploration rights along the proposed route, the British strongly objected. In 1912, a consortium of British, Dutch, and German oil companies and investors established the Turkish Petroleum Company.³³ By 1914, the company had been granted the oil concessions in Iraq from the Ottoman Grand Vizier. This occurred the same day as the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, which set off the events that led to World War I.³⁴

The Ottoman Empire allied itself with Germany and the Central Powers during World War I. A British expeditionary force soon established itself at Basrah, but they were unable to dislodge the Ottoman army from Baghdad until March 1917. In November 1918, British forces took control of Mosul a few days after signing an armistice with the Ottomans.³⁵

At the conclusion of World War I, the League of Nations was established to administer the former territories (now referred to as mandates) of Germany and the Ottoman Empire. The Iraqi mandate was entrusted to British administration under the notion that the Iraqis were not ready for self-government.³⁶

Faisal I and the Hashemite Kingdom

Following the 1920 rebellion, the British proposed the establishment of a monarchy in Iraq. Faisal I, who had been a leading figure in the 1916 Arab Revolt against Ottoman forces, would occupy the throne.³⁷ Faisal was a Sunni from the Hashemite clan, which traced its ancestry to the Prophet Muhammad. Faisal had briefly reigned as the King of Syria following World War I until he was deposed by the French, who had been awarded oversight of the Syrian mandate.³⁸



Faisal I, king of Iraq from 1921 to 1933
 Wikimedia Commons

The 1921 conference in Cairo in which Faisal was anointed as the Iraqi king also produced an Anglo–Iraqi treaty. This agreement assured Britain’s continued influence in Iraqi affairs; it also initiated the establishment of the Iraqi military. As a legacy of the Sunni-dominated Ottoman era, the officers in the Iraqi armed forces were Sunni, while Shiites made up the majority of the lower ranks.^{39, 40, 41}

Independence and World War II



Assyrian Refugees on a Wagon
Library of Congress

Iraq’s independence came on 3 October 1932, when it was admitted to the League of Nations as a sovereign state. Prior to independence, the primary objective of Iraq’s political leaders was to end the British mandate of Iraq. Yet, little attention was given to the complex policies needed to govern an independent state, and power struggles among the country’s many factions soon emerged.⁴² In 1933, the Iraqi army’s massacre of Christian Assyrian villagers in Mosul Province demonstrated the deep ethnic fissures in Iraq, particularly in the northern areas.⁴³ King Faisal was in poor health and died soon after the Assyrian massacre in September 1933. He was succeeded by his 21-year-old son, Ghazi I, whose reign was short-lived—he died in an automobile accident in 1939.⁴⁴

As World War II began in Europe, many Iraqi military and political leaders were pan-Arab nationalists who generally viewed Britain negatively because of its past influence in Iraqi

affairs and its continued presence in the Palestine and Transjordan mandates. Four of the pan-Arab military leaders, known as the “Golden Square,” staged a coup in April 1941. This group reinstated nationalist politician Rashid Ali as prime minister several months after his forced resignation.⁴⁵ For the British government, Rashid Ali became the symbol of Iraqi anti-British (and, therefore, potentially pro-Axis) sentiments, so they viewed his government as a threat to British war efforts in the Middle East. As a result, British forces entered Iraq only a few days later from the south, triggering a confrontation with the Iraqi government that quickly escalated into a brief war.^{46, 47}

Within a month, the British military forced the Iraqi army to surrender, and Rashid Ali and the members of the Golden Square went into exile.^{48, 49}

Post-World War II



Leaders of the 14 July 1958 Revolution in Iraq
Wikimedia Commons

In the decade following World War II, the country was beset with numerous socioeconomic problems, including increasing political and social unrest. Iraq's government leaders and the representatives of the monarchy often found themselves on the wrong side of public opinion, which forced them to publicly backpedal on certain policy decisions.⁵⁰ One example was the Portsmouth Treaty, negotiated by the Iraqi Prime Minister Salih Jabr in 1948 to replace the nearly 20-year-old Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. The new treaty contained British concessions for the use of air bases in Iraq. However, by this time, many Iraqis did not want any sort of alliance with Britain.⁵¹ A series of street demonstrations, known as the "Wathbah," (*uprising*) grew in intensity. Deteriorating economic conditions and the government's

failure to hold elections sparked additional protests in 1952, resulting in several months of martial law.⁵²

Foreign policy decisions often seemed to align Iraq's interests with Western powers (such as the United States and Britain), rather than other Arab states. This also contributed to internal dissent. The most notable of these was the 1955 Baghdad Pact, a defense agreement that aligned Iraq with Britain, Pakistan, and Iran, ostensibly to provide a security bulwark against Soviet expansion into these nations.⁵³ But in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East, the Pact was widely viewed as a countermeasure to isolate pan-Arabic Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had come to power in a 1952 coup that toppled the Egyptian monarchy.⁵⁴

The Fall of the Hashemite Monarchy

The Hashemite monarchy ended on 14 July 1958, nearly 37 years after King Faisal I took the throne. A swift, early morning coup was led by Brigadier General Abd al-Karim Qasim, the highest-ranking conspirator, and Colonel Abd al-Salam Arif.⁵⁵ Their actions met with little resistance. After the revolutionary forces captured the palace, the king and the rest of his



Portrait of Shukri al-Quwatli in 1943

Wikimedia Commons



*Abd al-Karim Qasim, Prime Minister of Iraq, 1958-1963
Wikimedia Commons*

family were killed. Nuri al-Said, a veteran Iraqi politician and prime minister of the Arab Federation at the time, was killed the next day after trying to escape, disguised as a woman.⁵⁶

The Qasim Regime

General Qasim headed the republic formed after the coup. He held the position of minister of defense and served as commander of the armed forces. Arif became minister of the interior and took the position of deputy commander of the armed forces, but conflicts began to surface between the two men.⁵⁷ Arif supported the pan-Arab unification movement led by Nasser, and thus favored Iraq's unification with Egypt. Qasim, with the backing of communists and Kurds, argued against Arab unity (especially under Egyptian leadership). Instead, he argued for Iraqi nationalism based on the unity of the country's diverse ethnic and religious groups.⁵⁸ Qasim, the more politically seasoned of the two, quickly outmaneuvered his rival. Arif was ousted from power in October 1958, just three months after the revolution.⁵⁹

Other, formidable rivals to Qasim soon materialized. Several unsuccessful assassination attempts occurred, including one by a young Ba'ath Party member named Saddam Hussein, who was wounded during the attempt but managed to escape to Syria.⁶⁰ Qasim was ultimately removed from power in a February 1963 coup, led by a military faction in collusion with the Ba'ath Party. After the coup, Qasim was shot and his body dumped in a field north of Baghdad.⁶¹

The Arif Brothers and the Baathists

After the 1963 coup, Abd al-Salam Arif, Qasim's old political rival, was selected by the Ba'ath Party leadership to be Iraq's president. Arif was not a Ba'ath Party member, unlike Colonel Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, who was tapped to be the prime minister.⁶² The Baath leadership proved unable to establish broad support within or outside the country. The Baathists lacked a strong base of support within the army and thus relied heavily on the paramilitary National Guard, generating further friction with the military leadership.⁶³

On 17 July 1968, after another relatively nonviolent coup, Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr and the Ba'athists assumed power again. With no

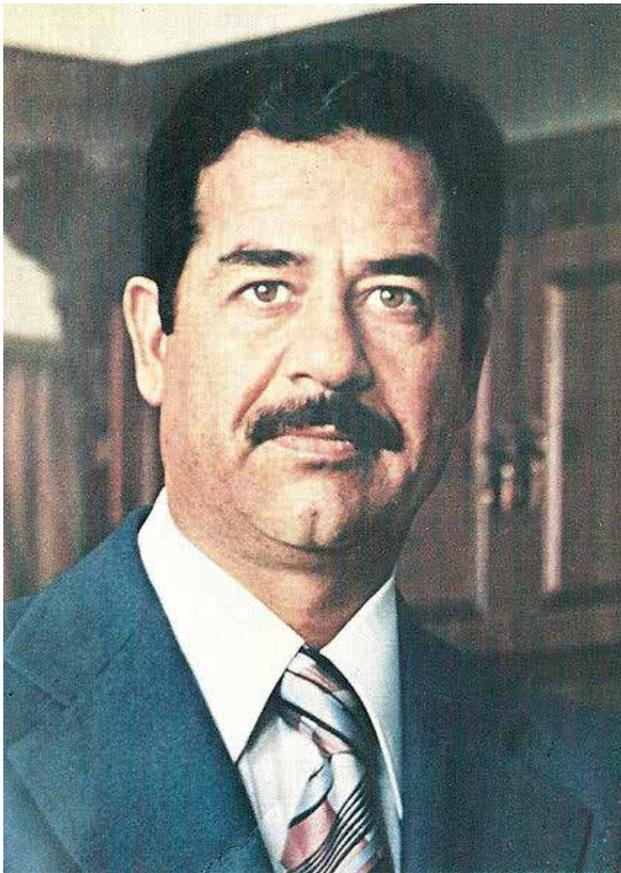


*Abd as-Salam Arif, President of Iraq (1963-1966)
Wikimedia 5a _ a`e*

party structure or other form of popular support, Arif depended solely on the highly factionalized military to sustain his power. Eventually, the Ba'athists convinced one group of officers to support their efforts to remove him.⁶⁴ By September 1968, an interim constitution had been introduced. The strategy behind this move was to allow the civilian political party, under the *de facto* control of Vice President Saddam Hussein, to get rid of the military element within the party to bolster its own power.⁶⁵

The Rise of Saddam Hussein

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Ba'ath Party in Iraq grew from a small political entity (5,000 members in 1968) to a large political organization (30,000 full party members



Saddam Hussein
Wikimedia / Iraqi News Agency

and nearly 1.5 million supporters).^{66, 67, 68} As the party grew, so did its hold on the nation's social, economic, and security institutions. The party's growth helped Saddam Hussein, the leading Baath Party official, to consolidate his power.

From the early 1970s on, Vice President Hussein was the “strongman” within the Iraqi government. President al-Bakr suffered a heart attack in 1976, and thereafter his administrative powers diminished.⁶⁹ On 16 July 1979, al-Bakr resigned, ceding control to Saddam Hussein. Once in charge of the government, Hussein quickly secured his position through various tactics, including a massive purge of real and potential rivals within the Ba'ath Party, the security forces, and the military.⁷⁰

Hussein tightened his grip on power as he worked to elevate Iraq's regional and international status. He understood that for Iraq to play a key role in the global community, especially the Middle East, the country needed to develop rapidly. Using some of Iraq's oil revenues, which had quadrupled during the early 1970s, Hussein implemented several far-reaching socioeconomic policies. His government collectivized the agricultural sector, expanded industry, and invested in the educational system, especially at the secondary level.⁷¹

In language that echoed a famous statement made by a General Motors executive, Hussein stated, “What is good for Iraq is good for the Arabs.”⁷² This theme evolved to equate Iraqi national identity with the country's strong tribal (or “Arab”) traditions. Hussein rewarded loyal tribal sheikhs and their tribes with governmental spoils, whereas tribes considered less trustworthy became the victims of state oppression.^{73, 74, 75}

The Iran-Iraq War

Iraq attacked Iran in 1980, launching an 8-year war that resulted in large-scale loss of life, massive structural damage, and a near collapse of both countries' economies.



Children in Iraq-Iran War
Wikimedia 5a_ _ a`e

For Iraq, fatalities numbered from 150,000 to 350,000, and the economic damage was estimated at nearly USD 160 billion.⁷⁶ A territorial dispute over the Shatt al-Arab waterway is often cited as the war's primary cause. However, there were numerous contributing factors.^{77, 78, 79} The war ended in 1988, essentially as a stalemate with no definitive victor.^{80, 81}

Additionally, by late 1986, much of northern Iraq was under the control of Kurdish separatists.⁸² As the Iran-Iraq war ended, Hussein turned his attention northward where he unleashed a violent campaign known as *al-Anfal* ("the spoils of war") against the Kurdish resistance. The operation was carried out by

Hussein's cousin, Ali Hassan al-Majid, the Ba'ath Party secretary-general of Iraq's northern regions. During the *al-Anfal* campaign, poison gas attacks destroyed entire villages of Kurdish civilians. These attacks created for al-Majid the nickname "Chemical Ali."⁸³

The First Persian Gulf War

At the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq's economy was mired in debt and the nation was in dire need of new infrastructure.⁸⁴ Hussein tried to pressure neighboring Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to forgive Iraq's war debts. He also encouraged them to use their influence within the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to help raise worldwide oil prices by limiting OPEC quotas. Neither country proved responsive to Hussein's requests, agreeing only to provide limited amounts of aid.⁸⁵ By early 1990, Hussein's appeals for assistance became veiled threats suggesting that the Iraqi government was prepared to take action to extricate itself from its economic bind.⁸⁶ The small, oil-rich country of Kuwait, whose territory had been claimed by Iraqi-based powers as far back as 1871, soon became the focus of these threats.^{87, 88}

On 2 August 1990, the Iraqi military invaded Kuwait, an action immediately condemned by the United Nations (UN). Several days later, the UN Security Council imposed economic sanctions on Iraq. Saddam Hussein's response two days later was



*Safwan Iraq, Persiab Gulf War
Flickr / airbornehodan*

to declare Kuwait to be Iraq's 19th province.⁸⁹ In response, the U.S. and a coalition of forces from 28 countries launched a military operation to enforce the sanctions and force Iraqi troops to leave Kuwait by 15 January 1991. Iraq failed to comply.⁹⁰ By 17 January 1991, coalition air attacks began, and full ground operations commenced five weeks later. Within a week of the onset of combat operations, the Iraqi forces were forced to retreat from Kuwait, while the Hussein government was compelled to accept the UN Security Council resolutions.⁹¹

Sanctions

For Iraq, the consequences of the 1991 Gulf War were far-reaching. The conflict destroyed much of the country's urban infrastructure and led to the development of an essentially independent Kurdish region.^{92, 93}

UN sanctions on Iraq continued for more than a decade. In December 1996, with Iraq near economic collapse and Iraqis suffering from shortages of food and medicine, Iraqi oil exports were officially resumed as part of a UN-sponsored "oil-for-food" program.⁹⁴



*Se'nak District
Flickr / Sam Ismail*

Weapons Inspections

As part of sanctions after the Gulf War, the UN Security Council authorized routine weapons inspections in Iraq to ensure that the nation was not developing chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons. Iraq consistently obstructed UN weapons inspectors' efforts to determine Iraqi compliance with the UN-imposed ban on weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).⁹⁵

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 initiated a series of events that culminated in the invasion of Iraq a little over a year and a half later. No direct connection was ever established between the Iraqi government and the al-Qaeda operatives responsible for the 9/11 attacks.⁹⁶ However, the administration of President George W. Bush pressed the case that the attacks exemplified U.S. exposure to state-sponsored terrorism.⁹⁷ The U.S. and its allies (most notably, the United Kingdom), subsequently heightened



*Inspections
Flickr / IAEA Imagebank*

their efforts to confront Iraq about its ties to terrorist groups and its pursuit of WMDs. In September 2002, President Bush addressed the UN General Assembly, urging it to pressure the Hussein regime by enforcing previous resolutions regarding Iraq's WMD program.⁹⁸ On 8 November 2002, the UN Security Council directed Iraq, through Resolution 1441, to allow arms inspectors to return to continue their inspections.⁹⁹

During this new round of weapons inspections, the issue of Iraqi cooperation became a source of international debate. The United States and the United Kingdom insisted that Iraq was impeding the inspections by hiding material. France, Germany,

and Russia wanted to give Iraq more time to comply with the inspectors. The UN Security Council did not pass a resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq. Nevertheless, the U.S. moved forward in its confrontation with Iraq, on the basis of an earlier Congressional bill (passed in October 2002), authorizing the president to use military force "to defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq."¹⁰⁰

Invasion and Subsequent Iraqi Governance



*Operation Iraqi Freedom
Flickr / Expert Infantry*

The U.S. and its coalition partners suspended diplomatic negotiations with Iraq on 17 March 2003 and initiated their air campaign against Iraq 3 days later. By 9 April, U.S. forces had entered Baghdad, while British forces had entered Basrah. Other major urban centers fell days later. In April, the war entered a new phase of rampant violence by sectarian militias and guerrilla insurgency groups using terrorist methods. Prominent among the militias was the Mahdi Army, formed by Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. The most highly publicized of the terrorist insurgency groups was al-Qaeda in Iraq, an organization composed of Sunni fighters from Iraq and other Islamic nations. This group was initially led by the Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Coalition soldiers and Iraqi police forces, as well as Shiite and Sunni civilians, became targets in a wave of terrorist bombings and other attacks by these insurgent groups.¹⁰¹

Saddam Hussein was eventually captured by U.S. forces outside Tikrit in December 2003. Iraqi authorities executed Saddam in December 2006. After the abrupt fall of the Hussein government in March 2003, the urgent tasks of restoring Iraqi governmental authority and rebuild its internal security forces, such as the army and the police, were addressed.¹⁰²

The creation of a new draft Iraqi constitution and the subsequent parliamentary of December 2005 were significant positive developments in the two years following the invasion. The parliamentary elections were the first since the era of the Hashemite monarchy (1921–1958).¹⁰³

Following the December 2005 elections, an alliance of Shiite parties held the highest percentage of seats in the new Iraqi assembly (largely because of a Sunni boycott of the elections).¹⁰⁴ However, the alliance was well short of the two-thirds majority needed to unilaterally form a government. After several months of negotiations between the Shiite alliance and Kurdish, Sunni, secular, and Shiite splinter parties, Nuri al-Maliki was selected as Iraq's prime minister in April 2006.¹⁰⁵ He served until stepping down in August 2014.

Recent Events



Parliament

*Flickr / Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Foreign and Commonwealth*

Al-Maliki's administration was plagued by rampant violence, and was responsible for a number of actions that alienated and angered Iraq's Sunni population.¹⁰⁶ He arrested and imprisoned peaceful Sunni protesters, removed Sunnis from high-level government and military positions, and aligned himself with Shiite militias that targeted Sunnis.¹⁰⁷ As a result, he was criticized for stoking corruption and sectarian tensions, both contributing to Iraq's military collapse as ISIL overran Mosul.^{108, 109}

In response to the growing unrest and the rise of ISIL in Iraq, the U.S pressured Prime Minister Al-Maliki to step down in June 2014.¹¹⁰ In August 2014, Haider Al-Abadi was designated Prime Minister and was approved by the Iraqi Parliament. Today, a major focus of Al-Abadi's

administration is fighting corruption, revising divisive policies, and bringing Shia militias under state control.¹¹¹

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History: Chapter Assessment

1. The Iraqi parliamentary elections in 2005 were the first since the Hashemite era.

TRUE

The parliamentary elections of December 2005 were significant, partly because they were the first since the era of the Hashemite monarchy (1921–1958).

2. Iraq's failure to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1441 was the trigger for U.S. military engagement.

TRUE

On 8 November 2002, the UN Security Council directed Iraq, through Resolution 1441, to allow arms inspectors to return to continue their inspections. The issue of Iraqi cooperation became a source of international debate .

3. In 1990, Saddam Hussein declared Kuwait to be part of Iraq.

TRUE

On 2 August 1990, the Iraqi military invaded Kuwait. Two days later, Saddam Hussein declared Kuwait to be Iraq's 19th province.

4. After the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq was able to successfully circumvent sanctions for years.

FALSE

The Iraqi economy suffered from sanctions for years after the 1991 Gulf War and was brought to the point of near collapse. In 1996, the UN instituted the "oil-for-food" program, which relieved some of the sanction's impact.

5. A territorial dispute over the Shatt al-Arab waterway was the primary cause for the Iran–Iraq war.

FALSE

A territorial dispute over the Shatt al-Arab waterway is often cited as the war's primary cause. However, there were numerous contributing factors.



*Covered Market, Sulaimania
Flickr / David Stanley*

Economy

Introduction

Iraq's abundant hydrocarbon deposits (proved oil reserves), the world's fourth largest behind those of Saudi Arabia, Canada, and Iran, made the development of a single-commodity economy almost inevitable after the discovery of oil in 1927.¹ Iraq gained independence in 1932, with a government characterized by personalized rule and patronage networks maintained and expanded through control of oil revenues.^{2, 3} Consequently, Iraq developed into a "rentier" state, in which the government relies on income from commodity sales, rather than taxation, to finance its priorities.⁴ Iraq had no need to develop a robust private economy because oil revenues provided its operating funds.^{5, 6}

In the post-Hussein era, the public sector continues to dominate the economy, with the Ministry of the Interior serving as the country's largest employer. However, a short-lived hiring freeze was enacted in the wake of plummeting oil prices in 2009.⁷ The freeze delayed the expansion and modernization of security forces and cost the government

credibility.^{8, 9, 10} The hiring freeze was reintroduced in October 2015, underscoring Iraq's numerous political and economic difficulties.¹¹

Agriculture



*Al Basrah, potato plant
Flickr / U.S. Department of Agriculture*

Iraq's agricultural sector was once the envy of its arid neighbors, producing aromatic amber rice and nearly 500 types of dates.¹² Today, the nation imports most of its food because of decades of neglect, international sanctions, and sectarian violence. These have all taken their toll on domestic production.^{13, 14} Under the Hussein government, the Ba'athist policy of draining the southern marshes—the traditional home of the Marsh Arabs—destroyed one of Iraq's historic food-growing regions.¹⁵ By 2002, Iraq already relied heavily on imports for food staples, including wheat, rice, and sugar.¹⁶ Even today, agricultural subsidies from Iran, Syria, and Jordan continue to undermine Iraq's efforts to rebuild its once thriving agricultural sector.¹⁷

A number of factors within Iraq have negatively affected agricultural production. Recurrent drought has reduced the amount of water available to farmers.¹⁸ Further, reliable electricity is needed to pump water through canal systems, but power generation problems have impaired such efforts.¹⁹ Because power remains unreliable, farmers must purchase gasoline to run generators. Bribes (*baksheesh*) are needed to get viable seed.²⁰ All these costs are passed on to the Iraqi consumer, who typically opts to buy cheaper, imported fare. Other obstacles include lack of access to modern technology and equipment, and scarcity in credit and private capital.²¹

Iraq's agricultural sector employed 8.9 million, or 21.6%, of the population in 2015, and contributed 3.3% towards the country's GDP.^{22, 23} Most of Iraq's arable land is located in

the north and northeast where irrigation comes from rainfall, while the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers require year-round irrigation.²⁴ Iraqi agriculturalists mainly produce rice, barley, wheat, cotton, dates, and vegetables as well as cattle, sheep, and poultry. Yet the meager returns from farming have caused a steady exodus to the cities, which are not prepared to employ unskilled laborers seeking non-agricultural work.^{25, 26}



*A man works at an Iraqi leather factory
Flickr / United States Forces Iraq*

Industry

After rapidly expanding in the 1970s, the Iraqi manufacturing sector declined in the wake of the Iraq-Iran and Persian Gulf wars.²⁷ The latter subjected the country to severe economic sanctions.^{28, 29} Even before these events, Iraq's largely state-run manufacturing sector suffered from inefficiencies, and government subsidies served to prop up unproductive operations and maintain jobs.³⁰ After Hussein's removal, efforts to revive destroyed or decaying manufacturing facilities were hindered by security concerns and a lack of resources, including electricity.³¹ Other factories were looted or languished in militant-

controlled areas.³² In 2014, ISIL militants took control of local economies in northern areas, looting and confiscating property.³³ As of September 2015, ISIL continues to maintain control over industry in Iraq's north, including the city of Mosul.³⁴

Iraq's industrial products include petroleum, chemicals, textiles, leather, construction materials, food processing, fertilizer, and metal fabrication/processing.³⁵ In 2015, industry contributed 64.5% to Iraq's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and employed approximately 18.7% of the population. The estimated growth rate was 6.4%.³⁶

Energy

Oil

Iraq has proved oil reserves of 140 billion barrels (bbl), the fifth-largest reserves in the world.³⁷ The largest concentrations of super giant oil fields (over 144 billion bbls) in the world are in southeastern Iraq, around Basrah.³⁸ Several areas have yet to be explored and many deposits remain relatively unexploited. Thus, experts believe the country may possess an additional 45–100 billion bbl of recoverable reserves.³⁹ If these known and potential reserves were fully exploited, Iraq could put an additional 6 to 8 million barrels per day on the market.⁴⁰ (This output would delay the onset of “peak oil”—the point at which global supplies will begin to contract and the price will rise.)⁴¹ Oil accounted for the majority of Iraq's economic output, with exports responsible for more than 84% of



*Oil, Iraq
Flickr / James*

GDP and over 90% of government revenues in 2015.^{42, 43}

Iraq's sectarian conflict hindered development of oil production because oil deposits are not evenly distributed across ethno-religious demographic lines. The majority of the proven reserves are in the Shia-dominated south and the Kurdish north.⁴⁴ In February 2011, after a shutdown of about a year-and-a-half, Iraq began exporting oil from its Kurdish regions after the government partly resolved its dispute with the Kurdish people about the legality of Kurdish contracts awarded to foreign firms.⁴⁵ By 2014, the Kurdish region and Iraq's central government finally completed an oil export agreement that ended years of fighting over oil revenues and control of Iraq's northern oil fields.⁴⁶ This broad

deal also unites Iraqis in their stand against ISIL militants, who have targeted and briefly controlled Iraq's northern oil fields.⁴⁷

In 2013, national production averaged 2.4 million barrels per day (bbl/d); this level has risen in the last few years.⁴⁸ Iraq currently produces 3 million bbl/d. The government had plans to increase production to 12 million bbl/d by 2017, but may reduce that goal because of infrastructure constraints and the ongoing conflict with ISIL militants.⁴⁹

The oil industry currently accounts for about 90% of Iraq's government revenue and 80% of foreign exchange earnings.⁵⁰ Heavy reliance on a single commodity, however, creates boom and bust cycles in the economy. When the price of a commodity (in

this case, oil) is high, revenues flow in and the government can spend lavishly. When the price drops, the government has difficulty meeting the financial obligations it undertook during the boom period.⁵¹ This creates an incentive to print money, which contributes to inflation.

Natural Gas

Iraq has proven natural gas reserves of 3.17 trillion cubic meters (112 trillion cubic feet), the 12th-largest supply in the world.⁵² If measurements were updated, some sources suggest that the reserves (including suspected



*Gas Fire
Flickr / Herald Post*

deposits) may be much larger—in the range of 7.78–8.49 trillion cubic m (275–300 trillion cubic ft).⁵³ Two-thirds of the proven gas reserves are associated resources, meaning they are found alongside oil reserves. In 2012, a large share (58%) of this associated supply was flared (burned off) during petroleum production because of a lack of processing and delivery infrastructure. Gas that is not burned off is used for reinjection into oil wells to increase production.⁵⁴ The government-owned South Gas Company signed a long-term partnership with Shell and Mitsubishi to build liquefied gas facilities for domestic electric power generation and export.⁵⁵

After two rounds of licensing the development of oil, a third round specifically for gas exploration was held in late 2010. By mid-2011, Iraq made 15 gas and oil deals since 2003.⁵⁶ A fourth round took place in November 2011.^{57, 58} Since then, various proposals have been made to export natural gas to neighboring countries, mainly Syria and Turkey, where it could then be delivered to Western markets.⁵⁹ However, exporting natural gas remains controversial because it is used to fuel Iraq's electric power plants.⁶⁰



Electrical wires, Baghdad
Flickr / PB NewsHour

Electricity

Iraq's already deteriorating power grid became a target for insurgents after Hussein's fall, leaving Baghdad residents with less electricity than before.⁶¹ Accordingly, restoring the power grid became one of the highest priorities for reconstruction teams. The situation improved somewhat as violence decreased and some infrastructure was restored.⁶² As a result, Iraq produced more electricity in 2009 than before the war in 2003. Yet, higher demand meant that most Iraqis received only several hours of electricity per day.⁶³ As of May 2014, the government was confident that they would be able to increase electrical supplies to 20,000 MW by the end of 2015.⁶⁴ However, the advance of ISIL severely disrupted those plans and Iraqis have now returned to having only five to eight hours of electricity each day.⁶⁵

Additionally, the government continues to impose unwarranted cuts in electricity in response to high losses, which can be attributed to dilapidated distribution networks, inaccurate metering, billing mistakes, unmetered supplies, and illegal connections.⁶⁶ Weeks of protests were held in August 2015, with demonstrators protesting against government corruption and the poor quality of electrical service.⁶⁷ Rationing remains in place because of ongoing shortages and ISIL attacks.⁶⁸

Mineral Resources

Iraq possesses large deposits of a diverse range of high quality minerals, in addition to substantial oil and natural gas reserves.⁶⁹ These mineral assets have implications for the

development of market opportunities across a range of industries.⁷⁰ Geologic mapping prepared by the Iraqi Geological Survey (IGS) shows significant deposits of gypsum (used in construction) and phosphates (used in the production of fertilizer) across the

country.^{71, 72} Additional deposits of metallic zinc, lead, sulfur, limestone, copper, chromium, nickel, iron, manganese, and borite offer additional investment opportunities.⁷³ The potential for mineral production in Iraq is great; however, further exploration is needed to fully develop this sector.⁷⁴

As of June 2013, Iraq's government expressed hope that it would see an increase in the mining of copper, iron, marble, and phosphate that are abundant in the northern Kurdistan region.⁷⁵ Exploitation of these commodities would add to oil and natural gas revenues, boosting the country's economy. However, one of the chief roadblocks to mineral commodity development has been a 1988 law that essentially gives the central government in Baghdad full control over all aspects of mineral commodities, and this has stunted the sector's growth.⁷⁶ In response, Iraq's government began drafting a new minerals commodity law in April 2015, which aims to establish a "mineral council," similar to the country's "oil council."⁷⁷ Once finalized, the council will be tasked with establishing better resource management practices, licensing practices, and investment opportunities.⁷⁸



*A giant copper teapot
Flickr / nathanm*

Trade and Transportation

Trade

Iraq exported grains and cereals as early as the mid-1800s, and by the 1930s, oil was already its major export.⁷⁹ By the 1990s, however, Iraq's production and export of oil was disrupted by war, economic sanctions, political instability, and mismanagement.⁸⁰ After the U.S. led invasion in 2003, the nation slowly began to reestablish trade relations with various members of the global community.⁸¹

Currently, crude oil and related raw materials account for the vast majority of Iraq's exports, while imports consist primarily of manufactured goods and agricultural products.⁸² The United States is one of Iraq's leading trade partners, particularly for Iraqi



Iraq Trade Sanctions
Wikimedia / United States Navy

exports. Other major export partners include India, Italy, and South Korea. Major import partners include Turkey (which accounted for 24% of all imports in 2009), Syria, the United States, and China.⁸³

In February 2004, Iraq received observer status at the World Trade Organization (WTO), and its WTO accession process began in December 2004.⁸⁴ Iraq passed the first two rounds of WTO review in 2007 and 2008. Iraq finally received enough votes to gain WTO observer status after the third round of reviews in 2011.⁸⁵ As of 2015, Iraq has not yet received enough votes to become a permanent WTO member. This is partly because of its weak currency, which is not yet strong enough to compete internationally.⁸⁶

Transportation

Iraq's diverse transportation system includes a rail system, an extensive road network, and airports.⁸⁷ In the rural mountain and desert regions, inhabitants still rely on camels, donkeys, and horses.⁸⁸

Iraq's rail system links the nation to Turkey and Europe, with connections through Syria.⁸⁹ As of 2014, there were 2,272 km (1,411 mi) of standard gauge track.⁹⁰ However, tracks are poorly maintained, lack signals, and many lines were damaged by looting during the Iraq War.⁹¹ Of the country's 59,623 km (37,048 mi) of roads, 84% are paved.⁹² The condition of roads is generally good, but some roads are in poor condition because of war damage and lack of maintenance.⁹³

New international airports have been built in Iraq recently, in addition to the two major ones in Baghdad and Basrah.⁹⁴ Two of the new international airports were established in Kurdistan in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah, while a third was built in the Shiite holy city of Najaf.^{95, 96} There are over 100 airports in Iraq; yet, only 75 have paved runways.

The old airport in Mosul was rebuilt to international safety standards and reopened



Iraqi Railroad Rolls Back into Taji
U.S. Army / Ray Ragan

in 2008; however, ISIL blew up half of the runway system in 2015.^{97,98} Despite the exceptional circumstances posed by ISIL militants, the country continues to complete major transportation projects throughout the country.⁹⁹

Tourism



*Welcome
Flickr / Volkan YILMAZ*

The collapse of the Hussein regime created the expectation that tourism would flourish in the region.¹⁰⁰ However, security concerns quickly dimmed any optimism that tourism would play a role in Iraq's economic recovery. Tourist activity, aside from regional religious pilgrimages, all but ceased after the war began in 2003.¹⁰¹ Only in 2009 did the country begin to see growth in tourism, which increased 98% during the first nine months.^{102, 103} Iraqi tourism dropped from a high of 1.3 million in 2009 to 892,000 in 2013.¹⁰⁴ Tourism continued to slide in 2015, although no official figures have been released.¹⁰⁵ The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates indicated just 160,500 travel industry related jobs in 2015.¹⁰⁶

The council also forecasts Iraq travel and tourism

will increase only slightly by 2025, generating just 168,000 related jobs. This is an increase of only 0.4% over 2015 levels.¹⁰⁷

In 2009, religious tourism offered the economy potential for substantial near-term growth.¹⁰⁸ Pilgrims come to Iraq to see many of Islam's most revered holy sites, including the Shiite shrines to the Imam Husayn in Karbala and shrines to the Imam Ali in Najaf.¹⁰⁹ Until 2013, the security situation did not deter religious pilgrims who were prevented from visiting during the Hussein era.¹¹⁰ Conditions vastly improved with the opening of an airport in Najaf in 2008.¹¹¹ However, since then, religious tourism has declined.¹¹² Economic experts estimate religious tourism declined 45% in 2015, with a loss of USD 2 million in the first five months of the year.¹¹³

Banking and Finance

Banking System

At one time, Iraq's banking system set the gold standard for the Middle East. In the aftermath of the fall of the Hussein government, two of Iraq's major banks suffered heavy losses when their vaults were looted.¹¹⁴ Other banks suffered from imposed sanctions.¹¹⁵ In the post-Hussein era, reconstruction of the banking system was essential to revitalizing the economy.¹¹⁶ Not only were banks needed to allocate capital, they were necessary for the government to pay civil servants.¹¹⁷

Iraq's economy became increasingly unstable following the spread of ISIL within the country's borders in 2013. Furthermore, Iraq's government failed to address inefficient business regulations, poorly enforced monetary and fiscal policies, and inadequate accounting practices.¹¹⁸ As of mid-2015, Iraq's banking sector remained weak because of widespread corruption and inadequate infrastructure.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the country's legal and regulatory mechanisms do not encourage investment or free trade, and bank liquidity remains low.¹²⁰



*Central Bank of Iraq, Baghdad
Wikimedia / Urizzato*

The Central Bank of Iraq (CBI) conducts the country's monetary policy and operates independently of the government. The state owns seven banks, three of which (Rafidain Bank (merged with Bank of Iraq), Rasheed Bank, and Trade Bank of Iraq) account for 96% of all banking assets.¹²¹ At least 33 private banks (with over 600 branches) and 21 foreign banks operate in the country.^{122, 123} Inter-bank transfers became possible in 2009.¹²⁴ Private banks continue to provide financial transfers as their main activity, rather than lending funds. In June 2011, the government announced that major state-owned banks such as Rafidain and Al-Rasheed banks began providing Islamic banking services in 2015.¹²⁵

The introduction of a new currency occurred without major setbacks. The Iraqi Dinar (IQD) became legal tender in January 2004 after a 3-month exchange period.¹²⁶ In contrast to the cheaply printed Saddam dinars, the New Iraqi Dinar (NID) are made of higher-quality paper and are more difficult to counterfeit.¹²⁷ In 2014, the IQD had an average conversion rate of USD 1160 to IQD 1.¹²⁸ The possibility of stoking Iraqi nationalism was avoided by not "dollarizing" the economy (pegging the dinar's value to, or converting to, the U.S. dollar), as some had recommended.¹²⁹

Foreign Investment

In December 2008, the cancellation of the final USD 7.8 billion of Iraq's debt to the Paris Club (an informal group of creditors representing 19 nations) vastly improved the country's investment prospects outside the energy sector.¹³⁰ Since then, Iraq has taken a number of steps to encourage investment, such as amending its National Investment Law to allow for limited land ownership by foreign firms, creating "one-stop shop" provisional investment commissions, and establishing a commercial court specifically for foreign investment disputes.¹³¹ By 2010, more than 350 firms, mainly foreign



*Bank of Iraq
Flickr / Al Basrawi*

investors, had filed for licenses in Iraq.¹³² Most licenses are filed in the real estate sector, followed by oil, transportation infrastructure, electricity, and industry.¹³³

In 2010, foreign direct investment was valued at USD 1.3 billion, and by 2012 investments had increased to USD 2.9 billion.¹³⁴ However, by 2013 foreign direct investments decreased to USD 2.8 billion and remained flat through 2015 (USD 2.9 billion).¹³⁵ Iraq direct foreign investment outlook continues to be hampered by unclear policy, budget restrictions, bureaucracy, corruption, the declining value of oil, and the ongoing security threat posed by ISIL.¹³⁶

Standard of Living

The World Bank's estimates indicated an overall Iraqi unemployment rate of 15% in 2014, with about 25% of the population living in poverty.¹³⁷ Yet, Iraq's Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Nassar al-Rubaie, released a statement in May 2014 indicating actual unemployment exceeded 46%.¹³⁸ Further, an estimated 80% of households do not have access to treated drinking water, and just 18% of wastewater is treated. Less than 8% of Iraqi homes outside of Baghdad were connected to a sewer system.¹³⁹

Iraq's national healthcare system was once among the best in the Middle East, and students from surrounding countries attended Iraqi medical schools.¹⁴⁰ The economic sanctions introduced in 1991, however, devastated the quality of health care.¹⁴¹ The consequences were especially dire in the south, where water-borne diseases and malnutrition contributed to an increase in child mortality rates.¹⁴²



*Shaimaa Ali and her daughter in Baghdad
Flickr / PBS NewsHour*

After the Hussein regime ended, rebuilding the healthcare system proved more

challenging than anticipated.¹⁴³

Prior to 1991, the Iraqi educational system was a regional model (particularly for access and gender equality) that produced one of the highest literacy rates in the Arab world.¹⁴⁴ Misrule, sanctions, and war caused literacy to plummeted, and current estimates place the adult literacy rate at around 79%.¹⁴⁵

Most housing is privately owned in Iraq. Yet, resettling the more than 4 million Iraqis displaced by violence remains a critical part of stabilization efforts.¹⁴⁶ The rate of housing development has been slow and current estimates of the housing shortfall stand at 4 million units.¹⁴⁷

Economic Outlook



*Iraq's Khawr Al Amaya Oil Platform
U.S. Navy / Nathan Schaeffer*

As of October 2015, the country's largest oil refinery in Baiji is under the control of ISIL. They also continue to occupy and control Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city.¹⁴⁸ Iraq's army offensive against ISIL has stalled, and the economy continues to struggle with internal security, population displacement in the north, corruption, and high unemployment. Additionally, global oil prices fell below USD 49 a barrel, with forecasts of even lower prices in 2016.¹⁴⁹ These factors have contributed to a stalled economy.^{150, 151}

Iraq's economic growth is inhibited by these factors, as well as by insufficient basic services, inadequate infrastructure, and outdated commercial laws and regulations.¹⁵² In response, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi pushed for governmental reform in August and September 2015, which included the dismissal of 123 deputy ministers and general managers.¹⁵³ This addressed, in part, the economic impact of widespread government corruption.

Iraq's draft 2016 budget revealed an economy that will remain flat. The budget includes a deficit of about 10% of GDP, with an oil price forecast of USD 45 and a modest increase in crude oil production to 3.9 bbl/d.¹⁵⁴ The Iraqi government has yet to turn oil profits into a higher standard of living for its citizens.¹⁵⁵

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Economy: Chapter Assessment

1. Iraq's agricultural sector is the envy of its arid neighbors, producing aromatic amber rice and nearly 500 types of dates.

FALSE

The nation once had a vibrant agricultural sector, but now imports most of its food because of decades of neglect, international sanctions, and sectarian violence. These have all taken their toll on domestic production.

2. After Hussein's removal, efforts to revive destroyed or decaying manufacturing facilities were hindered by security concerns and a lack of resources, including electricity.

TRUE

After Hussein's removal, Iraq's factories were looted or languished in militant-controlled areas. Electrical power has been severely disrupted and Iraqis have only 5 to 8 hours of electricity each day.

3. Other than oil and natural gas, Iraq possesses few, if any, high quality minerals.

FALSE

Iraq possesses large deposits of a diverse range of high quality minerals, in addition to substantial oil and natural gas reserves. The potential for mineral production in Iraq is great; however, further exploration is needed to fully develop this sector.

4. In February 2004, Iraq received observer status at the World Trade Organization (WTO), and became a permanent member of the WTO in December, 2010.

FALSE

As of 2015, Iraq has not yet received enough votes to become a permanent WTO member. This is partly because of its weak currency, which is not yet strong enough to compete internationally.

5. Iraq has taken a number of steps to encourage foreign direct investment.

TRUE

Iraq has taken a number of steps to encourage investment, such as amending its National Investment Law to allow for limited land ownership by foreign firms, creating "one-stop shop" provisional investment commissions, and establishing a commercial court specifically for foreign investment disputes.



*Iraqi Family
Flickr / The Gender Agency*

Society

Introduction

Iraqi society is marked by deep ethnic and sectarian divisions. Prior to 2003, the country's major groups—the Shia, Sunni, and Kurds—were held together under the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party. However, Hussein's policies—ranging from politically marginalizing the Shia, to using chemical weapons on the Kurds—compounded the tensions between these groups. Hussein's ouster weakened the central government's authority and Iraq's ethnic and sectarian divisions broke into sustained inter-communal violence. This conflict and other security issues caused a massive shift in population.¹ Between 2003 and 2008, an estimated 2.3 to 2.5 million Iraqis, most of them Sunni, fled to neighboring countries—mainly Syria and Jordan. Another 2.8 million Iraqis, most of them Shiite, were thought to be internally displaced as of 2008.^{2,3} In 2014-2015, sectarian violence escalated as Islamic State (ISIS) rebels seized territory and took over some cities.^{4,5} By June 2015, an additional 2.2 million Iraqis had been displaced.⁶

Ethnic Groups and Languages

Ethnicity



*Iraqi Kurdish woman
Flickr / jan Sefti*

Arabs are the dominant ethnic group in the country accounting for an estimated 75–80% of the population. Kurds form the second-largest group (roughly 15–20%). The remaining Iraqis include Turkmen, Assyrians, and other minority groups.⁷ Arabs are dominant in central and southern Iraq, where the population is concentrated in the east—away from the southwestern deserts. Kurds dominate the highlands of the north, where their ethnic affiliations extend into northeastern Syria, eastern Turkey, northwestern Iran, and southern Armenia.^{8,9} In some northern areas, Arabs and Kurds live in ethnically mixed communities; the north is also home to concentrated populations

of Turkmen. The other minority groups are distributed mainly across northern and central Iraq, especially in the diverse urban centers of Mosul, Kirkuk, and Baghdad.^{10,11}

The Iraqi Shia community is predominantly Arab, with small numbers of Turkmen and Faili Kurds. Shiite Arabs are concentrated in the south and east, whereas Sunni Arabs live mainly in central, western, and northern Iraq. Both groups live in the area surrounding Baghdad, while the city has a Shiite majority.^{12,13,14} Most Kurds and Turkmen are Sunni, following the general pattern of the northern half of the country; Kurdish ethnic differences trump their religious affiliation.^{15,16,17,18,19}

Languages

Iraq's constitution (2005) recognizes Arabic and Kurdish as the country's official languages; the latter language is official in the Kurdish-dominated north. Turkmen and Assyrian Neo-Aramaic have official status in regions where they are used (primarily in the north).²⁰ Arabic is spoken by more than three-fourths of the population, and is the most widely used language in Iraq. There are a number of different Arabic dialects spoken across the country. The most common are Mesopotamian Arabic (spoken in the Euphrates and Tigris river basins) and Northern Mesopotamian Arabic (also called Moslawi, meaning Mosul).²¹ Additional dialects include Gulf Arabic (spoken in the southeast, near the Persian Gulf) and Najdi Arabic (spoken in the southwest).²² Though some dialects may be mutually intelligible, variations among these and other regional dialects may cause confusion between Arabic speakers. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the formal, foundational version of Arabic that is taught in schools and used in media

and official communication.²³ MSA is generally understood in the Arab-speaking community, however, regional dialects are more used and understood more widely. Educated Iraqis are generally proficient in MSA.

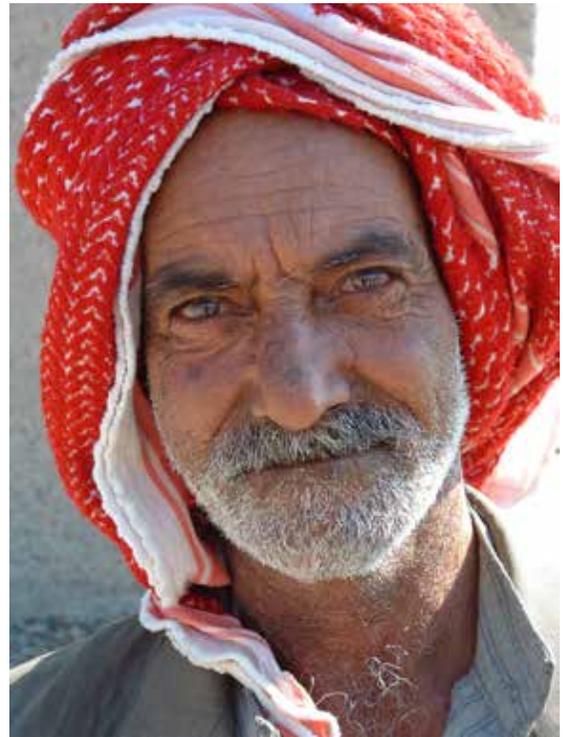
Kurdish is spoken in the Kurdish north and has three major dialects: Northern (also known as Kurmanji), Central (Sorani or Kurdi), and Southern Kurdish.²⁴ Languages associated with minority ethnic groups include Chaldean Neo-Aramaic, Armenian, and Syriac, in addition to Turkmen and Assyrian Neo-Aramaic.²⁵ Many ethnic minorities may speak or understand Arabic, in addition to their first language. English is the most widely spoken Western language, especially in commerce.²⁶

Religion

Demography



*Christians
Flickr / Chris De Bruyn*



*Sabaa Nissan Miltiamaan
Wikimedia / Christiaan*

Islam is the dominant religion, with roughly 97% of Iraqis identifying as Muslim. Estimates suggest that approximately half the population is Shia and another 42% identifying themselves as Sunni Muslims. The nation's Sunni Muslims are concentrated in the west, center, and northern regions of Iraq.^{27, 28} The remaining 3% of Iraqis are Christians or followers of other traditions. Baghdad and the northern cities of Mosul, Arbil, Dohuk, and Kirkuk are home to a large percentage of the Iraqi Christians. Chaldean Christians make up roughly two-thirds of the Christian population, and follow the Eastern Syriac Catholic Church. The remaining thirds of the Christian population are mostly Assyrians,

who belong to the Eastern Rite. Other, smaller Christian groups include Armenians (Eastern Roman Catholic and Oriental Orthodox) and Syriacs (Oriental Orthodox Church). Other small religious groups include the Yezidis, Shabaks, and Sabean-Mandeans.²⁹

Islam in Iraq



Abu Hanifa Mosque
Wikimedia / Zzztriple2000

Iraqi Muslims generally fall into one of two sects: Shia and Sunni. Dating to the seventh century C.E., these two Muslim traditions, and their historical and practical differences, have often caused conflict and social tension within the Muslim community.³⁰ Much of the current conflict in Iraq falls along sectarian lines.^{31, 32} Until the 1960s, most Shiites were members of secular political parties and formed 53% of Saddam's Baathist party. By 1968, they represented only 8% of the party and were soon banned or restricted for many years under the rule of Saddam Hussein. Following Saddam's ouster, the Shia Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) held a parliamentary majority in Iraq's interim government.³³

The hope for a united Iraq did not materialize and the ruling Shia government quickly marginalized Sunnis after years of being repressed by the Saddam's Baathist government.^{34, 35} Sunnis were further marginalized under the administration of Nuri al-Maliki, and an insurgency mounted in the north. Many Sunnis joined the ranks of the Sunni ISIS movement. National elections in 2014, were supposed to end the Sunni-Shia division. A power sharing arrangement was implemented by Shiite Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who promised to name his deputies from the ranks of both Sunnis and Kurds.^{36, 37, 38} Al-Abadi's government has been largely ineffective, however, and true power-sharing has not occurred. Both Sunnis and Shiites are dissatisfied with the government's inability to provide basic services. Sectarian differences continue to loom large and unless the nation can find some way to unite various political, social, and religious factions, the outlook for a prosperous and peaceful Iraq remains gloomy.^{39, 40, 41, 42}

Islam



Mosque in Fallujah.
Wikimedia / Cpl. Ryan M. Blaich, U.S. Marine Corps

Islam is a monotheistic religion and its followers believe in a single deity. The Muslim community, or *umma*, calls this deity Allah. The Arabic term *islam* means “to submit” or “to surrender.” So a Muslim is one who surrenders to the will of Allah.⁴³ Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 C.E. They consider Muhammad as the last in a long line of prophets including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Allah’s message, as relayed by Muhammad, is delivered in the Quran, the sacred text of Islam. Additional doctrinal guides include the *Hadith*, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, and

the *Sunna*, which describes the practices of Islam by way of Muhammad’s example.⁴⁴

Regardless of their sect, Muslims follow the five Pillars of Islam which capture the essential beliefs and rites of the Muslim faith. The first of these is the *shahada*, the declaration of faith, “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is God’s messenger.” The *salat* is the requirement to pray five times a day. *Sawm* is the required fast during the month of Ramadan. *Zakat* is the requirement that Muslims share a percentage of their wealth, similar to tithing. The fifth pillar is the *hajj*, which requires all physically and financially able Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime.⁴⁵

Care and Treatment of the Quran

Muslims regard the Quran as sacred; Treat Islam’s holy book with respect; Do not touch the Quran with dirty hands. Keep the Quran off the floor—if you are sitting on the floor, hold the Quran above your lap or waist. When not in use, protect the Quran with a dustcover and do not place anything on top of it (Muslims keep Quranic texts on the highest shelf of a bookcase). Finally, keep Qurans out of latrines.⁴⁶ Old or damaged copies can be properly disposed of in one of two ways. Burning is acceptable if the process is conducted with respect; texts should not be burned with trash or other items. The second method of disposal is burial; before burying the text, it should be wrapped in something pure and then buried where people do not walk.^{47, 48}

Cuisine

Iraqi cuisine has a 10,000 year history and reflects influences from many countries including Iran and Turkey. Iraqi dishes are spicy, but not hot. Typical spices include cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, cumin, coriander, and paprika.⁴⁹ The Muslim tradition



Lamb Rice
Flickr / Chris De Bruyn

of avoiding pork and pork products is widely observed; the Muslim prohibition on alcohol is publicly recognized, but not universally followed. A typical Iraqi meal consists of a meat or fish course, rice, and bread, either flatbread or *samoon*. Depending upon a family's means, they may also serve appetizers, salad, and soup. Fruits, especially raisins, are often an ingredient in Iraqi cuisine, and are commonly served as dessert. Dates are one of Iraq's most characteristic food products.^{50, 51}

Lamb, mutton, goat, chicken, and beef are the most popular meats. *Dolma* consists of meat (usually lamb) that is finely minced and mixed with rice and spices, and then wrapped in a grape leaf or stuffed in cored vegetables. Other meat dishes include *quzi* (boiled lamb shank stuffed with rice and vegetables), *kebabs* (grilled ground lamb meat), *tikka* (skewered and grilled pieces of lamb), and *kubba* (spiced minced meat patties with raisins and nuts). Another characteristic dish is *masgouf*: a grilled, seasoned fish, which was traditionally caught in the Tigris River. *Turshi* is a popular side dish of various pickled vegetables.^{52, 53, 54, 55}

Desserts, pastries, and candies are popular in Iraq, especially as snacks. Traditional favorites include rice pudding and *lokum*, a confection of starch and sugar that is usually flavored with rosewater or lemon. Another popular dessert is *baklava*, in which thin sheets of dough are layered with honey, rosewater, and pistachios or walnuts. After-dinner desserts primarily consist of fruit. Examples include candied lemon, grapefruit, and orange peels (*g'shur purtaghal*).^{56, 57, 58, 59}

Arabica coffee and tea are the most common beverages; they are typically consumed before and after a meal. Tea is traditionally poured into small glasses and served sweetened, without milk. *Leban arbil* (a yogurt drink) is popular, especially during the summer months; soft drinks and fruit juices are also common.^{60, 61, 62}

Traditional Dress

Urban Iraqis wear contemporary European clothing and appear neat and well dressed in public. For some Iraqi women, wearing the latest fashions is important.⁶³ Iraqi dress is normally conservative.^{64, 65, 66} Appropriate business attire includes suits for men and women. Women's blouses worn under suits should have a high neckline, and jewelry should be modest. Dress shoes should be well polished. In urban areas, formal business attire is worn for meetings and official events. For casual wear, urban men will often wear anything from shirts and slacks to t-shirts and jeans.⁶⁷



*Dressed for Success
Flickr / Chris De Bruyn*

In rural areas, men will often wear a *kaffiyeh* (checkered headscarf) and a *thobe* (an ankle length garment). The *kaffiyeh* covers the head and is a square piece of cloth, folded diagonally. It is usually made of cotton and is held around the head with an *agal* (braided headband). Summer thobes are typically white and are made of cotton, while winter thobes are brightly colored and made of wool.⁶⁸

Iraqi Shiite women traditionally wear an *abaya* (black cloak), while Sunni women wear loose fitting garments and a headscarf (*hijab*).⁶⁹

Traditional Kurdish male clothing is somewhat different. It includes a long-sleeve shirt with a vest, jacket, and baggy trousers that fit tightly around the ankles (*shalwar*). A printed or striped cloth resembling a cummerbund is also worn around the waist. Traditional Kurdish male clothing also includes a turban over a skullcap. Kurdish women traditionally wear bright dresses decorated with sequins or glass beads. This dress is worn with a belt at the waist over wide trousers made from thick cloth and a petticoat. Traditional Kurdish headgear for women is a hat often made from black

velveteen, decorated with amber and turquoise beads. A long vest or gown worn over the dress completes the look.^{70, 71, 72, 73}

Gender Issues

Between 1968 and 2003, women in Iraq gained greater equality under the Baathists.⁷⁴ This was especially true in the 1970s and 1980s, when Iraqi oil was used to support massive social reforms, enabling the government to build a strong public service sector, which included healthcare and education.⁷⁵ In 1976, the Compulsory Education Law came into effect, and education became mandatory for all children, girls as well as boys, up to the age of 16. In addition, the Baathist regime put forth a constitution in 1970 that promised equal rights to all Iraqis, including women.⁷⁶ Women benefitted from this more open environment, which reached its highest point around 1984. After the 1991 Gulf War and the imposition of UN economic sanctions (1990–2003), the position of

women deteriorated. Public education and literacy rates fell. Within this environment, many women took on traditional roles as wives and mothers.⁷⁷

Women today are protected by the Iraqi constitution, and yet, society has become more conservative since the fall of the Baathist regime.⁷⁸ The net effect has been profound in many cases. However, conservative ideals

continue to make it difficult for women to exercise their full constitutional rights.⁷⁹ For example, they have been targeted by extremists for driving cars or wearing clothes that do not reflect conservative practices.⁸⁰

Most women do not venture out without a male escort because of the ongoing conflict⁸¹ More than one-quarter of women over the age of 15 are illiterate, and one-third of girls aged 12-14 do not attend school.^{82, 83}



*Women Empowerment
Flickr / petit1ze*

The Arts

Literature



*Fallujah Blues
Flickr / Steven Zucker*

Iraq has a long literary tradition. Over the centuries, poetry has been an important literary form and today the poetry scene is still thriving. The earliest poems, known as *Muallaqat*, were introduced around the 8th century. Iraqi poetry was strongly influenced by Persian traditions, and often told tales of heroism and romance.⁸⁴ The traditional poetic form (*diwan*) is a collection of poems designed to teach moral and ethical lessons or deal with philosophy, politics, and even metaphysics. By the end of World War II, Iraqi poetry began to show Western influences. Poets such as Buland al

Haidair, Mahmoud al Brekan, and Saadi Yousif are among the most well-known poets to experiment with these new forms. Contemporary poets include Kazim al Hajaj, Muafak Mohammed, Hasa Sheikh Jarar, and Abdul Wahid. Modern poetry tends to be written in local dialects rather than in the older literary Arabic. Poems often deal with important social and political issues.^{85, 86}

Visual Arts

Iraq has a long tradition in the arts. As early as 6000 B.C.E., gold, silver, and bronze statues of regional gods were being produced in the region of modern-day Iraq. The Assyrians (900-600 B.C.E.) were renowned for their stone carving depicting daily life and for their carved ivory. Once Islam arrived in the early 7th century, its influence on artists led them to create elaborate floral and geometric designs in books, and on many buildings and mosques. In the 12th century, painters in Baghdad gained notoriety for detailed elaborate miniature paintings. One of the most acclaimed painters, Yahya al-Wasiti was recognized for his depictions of architecture, weapons, and period costumes.^{87, 88}

Expressionism became popular in the early 20th century; many Iraqi artists adopted this style of painting after studying art in Europe. The modern art movement began in the 1950's when a group of self-taught artists began painting street scenes in Baghdad. The Baghdad Group of Modern Art was founded by painter and sculptor Jawad Salim. The group fused principles of ancient art with those of cubism. The result was an artistic style where objects appeared to have been shattered and glued together.^{89, 90}

Music and Dance

A popular Arab dance, the *hacha'a*, is popular with Iraqis. The dance form is similar to belly-dancing but there is more neck and hand movement. The female dancers swing their long hair to the music. The dance is performed by a single female dancer as the drummer moves around her.⁹¹ Another traditional is the *chobi*, in which male dancers hold hands in a line (or sometimes in a circle). This dance is often performed at weddings.⁹²

Music has long been a central feature of Iraqi life. Traditional music is often characterized as informal and improvisational. Songs tend to change



Traditional flute player
Wikimedia ! Michael T. Luongo

as they are handed down through generations. Traditional instruments included the *oud* (a lute-like instrument); the *rebab* (resembling a violin); the *riqq* (tambourine); and a hand drum known as the *darbuka*.^{93, 94}

Sports



Iraqi Soldiers Playing Soccer
Flickr / JBLM PAO

Soccer is the most popular sport in Iraq. As a spectator sport, it has served as a unifying force in a nation prone to sectarian and ethnic conflict. Iraq's national team, with Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish players, draws support across the country. Known as the Lions of the Two Rivers (after the Tigris and Euphrates), the team earned international recognition in 2007 for winning its first Asian Cup; it defeated neighboring Saudi Arabia 1–0 in the final. Many Iraqis viewed the victory as a symbol of national pride, unity, and resilience in the face of adversity. One Iraqi citizen stated after the victory that the win is a bandage healing [Iraq's] wounds. It's a lesson to politicians that Iraqis can be one. We were all supporting our team—none of us was saying this

player is a Sunni, a Shiite, or Kurd.^{95, 96} In July 2009, the team played its first international match on Iraqi soil since 2003, when the war and subsequent security concerns had forced the team to play outside the country.^{97, 98}

Iraqis also enjoy other sports. Iraq has two major basketball leagues and one of the strongest wheelchair teams in Asia. Swimming, weightlifting, taekwondo, and tennis are also popular. Riyafh al Azzawi earned the World Kick-boxing Network Championship in 2008 and became the first Arab world champion.⁹⁹

Sports remain a largely male activity. The conservative Islamic values of Iraqi society discourage women from participating in any sports including physical education.^{100, 101}

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Society: Chapter Assessment

1. The status of women in Iraq has declined precipitously since 2003.

TRUE

Prior to 2003, Iraq was known for its progressive policies toward the status of women. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein conservative Shi'ites controlled the country and women's situations have dramatically deteriorated.

2. At over 60% of Iraq's population, the Sunni Muslim community runs the country.

FALSE

Iraq is one of only five countries with a Shi'ite majority. Shi'ite Muslims constitute 60–65% of the Iraqi population. The majority of the government is Shi'a.

3. Saddam Hussein and his Ba'athist party quickly excluded Shi'ites from the party and the government.

TRUE

Until the 1960s, most Shi'ites were members of secular political parties and formed 53% of Saddam's Ba'athist party. By 1968, they represented only 8% of the party and were soon banned or restricted for many years under the rule of Saddam Hussein.

4. In a nation prone to sectarian and ethnic conflict, soccer has served as a unifying force.

TRUE

Soccer is the most popular sport in Iraq. As a spectator sport, it has served as a unifying force. The national team draws support across the country and earned international recognition in 2007 for winning its first Asian Cup. Many Iraqis viewed the victory as a symbol of national pride, unity, and resilience in the face of adversity.

5. Most Iraqi Kurds are Shi'ites.

FALSE

The Iraqi Shi'a community is predominantly Arab, with small numbers of Turkmen and Faily Kurds. Most Kurds are Sunni.



*Peshmerga
Flickr / Kurdishstruggle*

Security

Introduction

The ouster of Saddam Hussein and his government offered hope that Iraq would be able to create a more inclusive government and heal some of the country's deep sectarian divides. None of that came to pass. In 2015, Iraq remains a fragmented nation with deeper ethnic divides and growing popular unrest. Corruption continues to plague the government and stall both political and economic progress. The successes of ISIL in the region have been destabilizing and have damaged even further the fragile economy and social fabric of the nation. Many analysts remain skeptical that the nation can survive in its current form and

anticipate more instability in the future.^{1,2, 3, 4, 5}

United States–Iraq Relations

The United States had little interest in or involvement with Iraq until the end of World War II, when the U.S. main interest was in stopping Soviet influence. Relations were never particularly strong and in 1967, Iraq severed diplomatic relations and did not restore them until 1984. Relations remained tense in the 1970s as the United States continued equipping Kurdish rebels in hopes of weakening Iraq's government. After Iraq's invasion of Iran in 1980, the Reagan administration became more embroiled in

the Iran-Iraq War, supplying intelligence and military support to the Iraqis.^{6, 7, 8}



*Iraq/USA relations
Flickr / chuck holton*

Relations soured again after the war's end in 1988 as Hussein made a series of territorial grabs. A series of diplomatic efforts to halt Iraqi aggression failed and in 1991, the United States launched Operation Desert Storm and called on Iraq's Sunnis to mount an insurrection against Saddam but the plan backfired. During the next few years the U.S. strategy with Iraq was one of containment. Tensions mounted following the terrorist attacks against the United States in 2001. Amid allegations that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction, the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 and removed Saddam. The U.S. worked to establish a democratic and inclusive

government, but these efforts were undermined by a growing insurgency. The U.S. sent more troops to the region and by 2008, Iraq's internal situation had stabilized. By December 2011, all U.S. troops had withdrawn from Iraq, signaling an end to bilateral strategic relations.^{9, 10, 11}

Within days, Islamic State rebels (ISIL) seized 33% of Iraq's territory. The U.S. response was lukewarm, especially given its reservations about the government of Nuri al-Maliki, widely credited with worsening the nation's secular divide. The U.S. informed al-Maliki that any U.S. aid was contingent upon his resignation. A new prime minister, Haidar al-Abadi took over amidst promises of more inclusive governance. The two nations are trying to craft a relationship. In response to escalating violence, the U.S. sent a small number of troops into Iraq and is considering more troops in a direct combat role against ISIL.^{12, 13, 14, 15}

Relations with Neighboring Countries

Iran

Iraq's diplomatic relations with Iran are complicated. Tensions were at their highest between 1980 and 1988 when the two nations were at war. Following the ouster of Saddam Hussein, Iran's Shia government provided major support for the government of Nuri al-Maliki. Although there were frequent high-level visits between the two nations through 2011, relations began to cool.¹⁶ As sectarian violence in Iraq spiked, however, Iran began supporting militia activities in Iraq through weapons shipments and training. Iran is alleged to have 1,000 troops in Iraq, and has played a central role supporting the current Iraqi government and halting the advance of ISIL fighters. The situation has generated controversy in the country, however, amidst claims of violence against Iraqi Sunnis and too much Iranian influence in Iraq's affairs.^{17,}



*Soldiers on APC
Flickr / Hamed Saber*

18, 19

Iraq's trade relations with Iran are growing. In 2013, total trade reached USD 12 billion and that number is expected to increase to USD 20 billion. Iran is planning to export engineering services as Iraq rebuilds its transportation and energy infrastructure.^{20, 21} In addition to expanding trade, both countries have reached several other significant agreements including closer regulation of their joint borders and a dredging project on the Shatt-al-Arab River waterway.²²

Jordan

Jordan's shared border with Iraq is the shortest.²³ However, Jordan has long been interested in a stable Iraq, but it has wielded little influence in recent years. Relations between the two nations has become increasingly strained.^{24, 25, 26} Jordan shelters an estimated 51,000 Iraqi refugees, the majority Sunni Arab. Iraqi Sunnis are considered guests in Jordan and do not have legal status. Consequently, the refugee influx has strained Jordan's infrastructure.^{27, 28, 29, 30}

The instability in Iraq has also affected Jordan economically; bilateral trade has been severely



*Jordanien Iraq
Flickr / Alex Brey*

curtailed. The situation grew especially desperate in 2013, when armed groups closed Jordan's border with Iraq and prohibited crossings. For trucks that manage to cross the borders, costs have skyrocketed because of rising fears of kidnapping and security concerns.³¹

Kuwait



*Kuwait Sign
Flickr / Bob McCaffrey*

Kuwaiti rulers have long been wary of Iraq. Since the discovery of oil in Kuwait, Iraq has often asserted territorial claims on Kuwait.³² In 1990, the Hussein government acted on these territorial claims, seizing and annexing Kuwait and precipitating Operation Desert Storm.³³ ³⁴ The 1991 Gulf War left Iraq owing Kuwait reparations for the destruction of Kuwaiti infrastructure. As of mid-2011, about USD 24 billion of that bill remained.³⁵ Iraq continues to deposit 5% of its oil revenues into a UN-administered fund to compensate Kuwait.³⁶ Iraq has lobbied the UN for at least partial relief from these payments, arguing that the present government is being penalized for the Hussein

government's bad behavior. So far, Kuwait has stood firm on preserving the status of reparations, although negotiations between the two countries are ongoing.^{37, 38} Also, after high-level contacts in 2011, the two countries expressed their hopes for better relations.^{39, 40} In 2015, there was some progress in improving relations. However, Kuwait admitted that a complete normalization of relations and the development of trust will take time.^{41, 42}

Saudi Arabia



*Iraq and Saudi Arabia
Flickr / Richard White*

Saudi Arabia is a predominantly Sunni Arab nation with a significant Shia minority in its eastern province. The Saudi government is concerned about Iraq's stability and the potential for Iran to influence developments. The kingdom's longest and most porous border is with Iraq, and continuing disorder there could facilitate an influx of terrorist elements into Saudi Arabia. Conversely, Iraq remains concerned about the infiltration of Saudi jihadists into their country.^{43, 44, 45} Because terrorist elements threaten the stability of both nations, Saudi Arabia is constructing a security

fence along its border with Iraq. The fence will use the latest surveillance technology.^{46, 47,}

48

Saudi Arabia's relationship with Iraq has been shaky; the kingdom severed diplomatic ties with Iraq after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Relations between the two nations remained frigid during the administration of Nuri al-Maliki. However, relations have since improved. The Saudis have appointed an ambassador to Iraq and promised to reopen its embassy, although it is not clear when that will take place. Relations became somewhat tense in early 2015, following Iraq's criticism of Saudi Arabia's military involvement in Yemen.^{49, 50, 51} Nevertheless, financial and trade ties between the two nations are strengthening. In 2015, these were estimated to total USD 1.3 billion annually. The countries have pledged to explore more investment opportunities and to cooperate on the valuation of the Iraqi dinar.⁵²

Syria



*Center for Strategic Studies
Flickr / Center for Strategic International Studies*

Syrian and Iraqi diplomatic ties were severed in 1982 during the Iran–Iraq war (in which Syria supported Iran). Relations were not restored until November 2006.⁵³ Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the countries have been divided by Iraq's perception that Syria was turning a "blind eye" to the infiltration of insurgents and arms across the border. Syria has denied any such policy; instead, it has claimed that the long, isolated border between the two countries was impossible to police without

assistance.⁵⁴ In 2015, ties between the two nations remained complicated due to internal turmoil in both countries. In September, Iraq announced a security and intelligence sharing deal with Syria, along with Russia and Iran, to combat ISIL forces.^{55, 56}

The large number of Syrians and Iraqis fleeing violence is another cross-border issue. An estimated 310,000 Syrian refugees are currently in Iraq. Those numbers are expected to increase to 400,000 by the end of the year.⁵⁷ At the same time, nearly 127,000 Iraqi refugees reside in Syria, although those numbers are anticipated to drop by the end of the year due increased fighting.⁵⁸ The shared border between Iraq and Syria is also a commercial asset. Syria is Iraq's second-largest import partner.⁵⁹ By February 2015, trade between the two nations equaled USD 2.8 billion, in spite of the violence. Trade relations are continuing to strengthen.⁶⁰

Turkey

Relations between Iraq and Turkey are frequently troubled, but they have improved under the newly elected government of President of Haidar al-Abadi.⁶¹ The relationship



Kurish Women in Turkey
Flickr / petit1ze

between Turkey and Iraq is focused on ethnic demographics and the economy. The Kurds live predominantly along both sides of the Iraqi–Turkish border. The Kurds weigh heavily in Turkey’s foreign policy because of their historical struggle for an independent homeland.^{62, 63}

The Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), founded in 1978, has carried out cross-border attacks against Turkey since 1984. After a 6-month truce, PKK militants resumed attacking Turkish targets in March 2011, 4 months ahead of national elections.⁶⁴ Turkey has promised to expand its efforts against the PKK. Turkey’s military efforts have been more focused on fighting the PKK, rather than the looming ISIL threat. This situation has heightened tensions between Iraqi Kurds and the Turkish government.^{65, 66, 67}

Economic motives also underlie Turkey’s desire for a secure and peaceful Iraq. Turkey is Iraq’s largest import partner.⁶⁸ Yet, the violence in Iraq has limited trade. Iraq is Turkey’s second-most important trading partner, but trade between the two dropped 2% in the first half of 2014.^{69, 70} Early in 2015, Ankara and Baghdad signed new agreements related to oil, natural gas, and electricity. The agreements promise to increase Iraqi oil production and improve bilateral trade relations, as well as investment by Turkish companies in Iraq.⁷¹



Bayonet training16
Flickr / Bridget Bosch

Military and Police Structure

Military

The armed forces of Iraq were disbanded by the Coalition Provisional Authority in May 2003. Since August 2003, the Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq (MNSTC–I) and then the United States Forces–Iraq have been working with the Iraqi Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior to recruit, train, and deploy forces for the new Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). The ISF comprises both military and police

forces: army, navy, air force, police, and counterterrorism. Total active personnel in Iraq in 2015 numbered 271, with 525,500 reserve personnel.^{72, 73} There is concern that the Iraqi forces are unable and unwilling to carry out effective military campaigns. The ISF collapsed during the ISIL offensive in northern Iraq in 2014. Some speculate that the defeat left the Iraqi Army with only 50,000 regular troops.⁷⁴ Iraq's armed forces remain heavily reliant on the international community for help. Shia militants continue to play a major role in armed activity within the force. These groups are led mainly by Iranian military commanders. Thus, implications related to the continued reliance on sectarian forces remains unclear.^{75, 76}

Most of the Iraqi military forces under the administration of the Ministry of Defense are army units. The army is composed mainly of light infantry, with some mechanized and armored elements.^{77, 78} In 2015, the army had 13 infantry divisions and 1 mechanized division.^{79, 80} The air force has about 230 total aircraft, including 12 fixed-wing aircraft. As part of their efforts to develop a strike capacity, the air force has ordered F-16 aircraft.^{81, 82, 83, 84} The navy is largely staffed in Umm Qasr and headquartered at Baghdad. The force consists of roughly two marine battalions and a special forces unit. The navy has 88 vessels, including 23 coastal defense craft. The navy's personnel stood at approximately 3,000 in April 2010.^{85, 86, 87} Iraq also has a small coastguard of approximately 500 personnel that are separate from the navy. It mainly operates in the Shatt al Arab waterway, and its primary mission is to stop smuggling.⁸⁸

Police



*Police Training
Flickr / The U.S. Army*

The Ministry of Interior oversees all police units. The Iraqi Police Service (IPS) grew to approximately 306,000 by December 2008. During this same time, the National Police had approximately 43,000 members.⁸⁹ The National Police was renamed the Federal Police (IFP) in August 2009. It is a paramilitary organization with duties between those of the army and local police forces. The IFP officers have body armor, small-arms, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades. In addition, they operate motorized units consisting of pick-up trucks and SUVs. Beginning July 2009, an additional task of the Federal Police has been to escort U.S. military convoys through Iraqi cities.^{90, 91, 92}

Issues Affecting Security

Iraq is at the highest risk level for political instability. The main threats include terrorism, civil disobedience, and insurrection.⁹³ Large scale protests have disrupted

Iraq in recent years. The discontent is related to a number of factors including sectarian divisions between Shia and Sunni factions, government corruption, and issues related to poverty and the economy.^{94, 95}

Poverty and Corruption



*Rumsfeld Saddam
Flickr / Chris De Bruyn*

Poverty and unemployment remain serious concerns. In 2015, approximately 16% of Iraq's labor force was unemployed and one in four Iraqis lived below the poverty line.^{96, 97} Reliable data is difficult to gather under current conditions, but it is estimated that millions of Iraqis still depend on government food rations.⁹⁸ Growing poverty and deteriorating economic conditions in the country have helped fuel the rise of ISIL. A number of Sunni tribesmen in Anbar province allied with ISIL when their government compensation ended.¹⁰⁰ Many of the protests which have recently erupted also rail against corruption in the government. Corruption is responsible for the poor delivery of basic services including electricity and ration cards.^{101, 102, 103, 104}

Sectarian Divide

Hopes for a more inclusive government in Iraq have not materialized. The Shia-Sunni sectarian divide is fueling tensions that could spiral into civil war. This is partially the result of continued exclusion of Sunnis from positions of power.^{105, 106, 107} The tensions between the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and Iraq's central government are also fragile, and have the potential to spark serious civil violence.¹⁰⁸ Shia militias play a critical role in supporting government forces in their fight against ISIL and other terrorist groups. Yet, Shia militias stand accused of abuses and human rights violations against Sunnis, even those not aligned with ISIL. Such retaliation has further escalated resentments. Consequently, some displaced Sunnis have voiced the sentiment that Iraq's Shia-led government is targeting them.^{109, 110, 111}

Terrorist and Militia Groups

Nearly 50 known terrorist organizations operate in Iraq, threatening to destabilize the government and the region. Many of the groups are believed to have strong links to the Iraqi security forces, a factor that makes them especially risky. Some of the terrorist militias are accused of carrying out massacres, with the support of the Iraqi Security



*ISIL in Iraq
Flickr / Day Donaldson*

Forces or other government agencies.^{112, 113} Among the most well-known is The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, aka ISIL. ISIL activity has surged since 2013, even capturing some Iraqi cities.¹¹⁴ The *Islamic Army of Iraq* (IAI) has fighters in the ranks of ISIL. IAI was one of the largest insurgent organizations in Iraq, but its ranks have split since the Awakening movement began. Several reports have identified IAI field commanders as leaders of “Sons of Iraq” militias (part of the Awakening councils, providing informal security).^{115, 116, 117, 118} The organization is considered more nationalistic than religious in its motivations.¹¹⁹ Another group is the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK),

which the U.S. identified as a foreign terrorist group in 2007. The group was founded in 1978 and began violent attacks 6 years later. Primarily consisting of Turkish Kurds, the PKK mostly operates out of Iraq. Its goal is to establish an independent Kurdish state in southeastern Turkey. The PKK is attracting larger numbers of Iraqi Kurds, however, who have become disillusioned with their government.¹²⁰

Various Shia militia groups operate in Iraq. Most are conservative and staunchly aligned with Iran. The largest and most powerful are those aligned with the Badr organization. Badr Forces Militia is headed by Hadi al-Amiri. It has successfully infiltrated the ranks of Iraq’s interior ministry, and has been accused of mass torture and the execution of Sunnis. The Sayayah Salam Militia is a Shia organization headed by Moqtada al-Sadr. His militia has frequently battled U.S. troops in Iraq. The U.S. alleges that the group

receives significant support and backing from the Iranian Quds Force, Iran’s Islamic Guards’ Special Forces unit.^{121, 122}



*Waterfall
Flickr / jan Sefti*

Water Security

Iraq is facing a major water shortage, which could play a key role in settling the conflict in both Iraq and Syria.^{123, 124} The successes of ISIL in the region pose a real threat to security and water supplies, especially to southern Iraq, including the capital of Baghdad. ISIL already controls strategic dams in Mosul, Ramadi, and Haditha, and could take control of other key facilities on the Tigris and Euphrates.^{125, 126}

Iraq’s dependence on water access is

complicated by Iraq's location downstream from Turkey and Syria. The Euphrates and Tigris rivers originate in Turkey, enter Syria, and then pass into Iraq. The rivers are an important source of water for drinking, irrigation, and sanitation for all three countries. Three times between 1975 and 1991 Iraq, along with Syria, threatened military action against Turkey over water supplies. Turkey has since reduced overall water flow to Iraq from the Euphrates by 33%, and proposed construction of other measures that could reduce the Euphrates flow by 80%.¹²⁷ These prospects are a grave concern for Iraq, whose agriculture and economic viability are heavily reliant on water. Access to safe drinking water, as well as reliable supplies for electricity, are important to limiting social protests and dissatisfaction with the government.^{128, 129}

Outlook



*Emergency Services Unit
Flickr / The U.S. Army*

Iraq's political outlook is cloudy, and some analysts suggest the current government may not survive.^{130, 131, 132} The U.S. Head of the Defense Intelligence Agency offered a pessimistic view. He asserted that Iraq may be permanently torn apart by the current political and insurgent problems.¹³³ The current prime minister, Haidar al Abadi, has the difficult job of trying to balance both internal needs and external interests. Abadi lacks any significant power base. He is increasingly reliant on political groups, many of whom appear to want to dislodge him from office. Iraq's continued reliance on Shia militant brigades to support the military is risky. Abadi has tried to roll back their growing influence, yet he has also become more accommodating to their needs.¹³⁴

Abadi has also been unable to end the sectarian divide that has fractured his country, and stalemated real political growth. This inability to unite the various factions is complicated by the fact that the former prime minister, Nuri al Maliki, still wields considerable power and influence within the military. Maliki is widely regarded as responsible for widening the sectarian divisions during his tenure, and may be mounting a return to power.^{135, 136, 137}

The rise of ISIL in Iraq threatens the economic and political stability of the nation. Iraq remains heavily dependent on oil revenues. The decline in world oil prices has hurt the country. The disruption of oil supplies by ISIL presents an additional risk. Continued fighting has destroyed the nation's infrastructure, and the situation is expected to get worse before it gets better. More people are fleeing the country to escape dangerous and dire circumstances.^{138, 139}

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Security: Chapter Assessment

1. The United States was largely disinterested in Iraq before the Cold War.

TRUE

The United States had little interest in or involvement with Iraq until the end of World War II when the U.S. main interest was in stopping Soviet influence.

2. Iraq's diplomatic relations with Iran are generally positive.

TRUE

Relations have greatly improved since the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988. Iran has played a central role in supporting the current Iraqi government and halting advances of ISIS fighters. Trade relations are growing.

3. Saudi Arabia has restored full diplomatic relations with Iraq.

FALSE

Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic ties with Iraq after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Relations have since improved and the Saudis have appointed an ambassador to Iraq and promised to reopen its embassy although it is not clear when that will take place.

4. Iraq sets aside 25% of its oil revenues as Gulf War reparations to Kuwait.

FALSE

Iraq continues to set aside 5% of its oil revenues to compensate Kuwait. But Iraq's government has lobbied the UN for at least partial payment relief—arguing that the current government is being penalized for the Hussein regime's bad behavior.

5. The Iraqi Security Forces in 2015 had approximately 271,500 active personnel.

TRUE

Total active personnel in Iraq in 2015 numbered 271,500 with 525,500 reserve personnel.

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