

An information section prepared by the staff of Social Education

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# Spotlight on Iraq

**THE POPULATION OF IRAQ** IS estimated at about 24 million people, making it the most populous state of the eastern Arab world.

The typical inhabitant of Iraq lives in a town, as is the case in other major oil-producing states. In the past 50 years, migrants have flocked to cities from the countryside, drawn by employment opportunities offered by the government—by far Iraq’s largest employer—and jobs in trade and services in towns. Only about 25% of Iraqis now live in rural areas.

The largest city is the capital, the historic city of Baghdad. The population of greater Baghdad is estimated at about 5 million, divided mainly between large Sunni and Shia Muslim communities.

Iraq shares borders with six countries: Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Kuwait. The nation’s borders were drawn to permit a narrow finger of land to run along the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab waterway at the Persian Gulf. Iraq has no other coastline.

Iraq is a land of contrasts, with widely varying topography and climate. In the west of the country, extending to the Syrian, Jordanian and Saudi borders, is a desert. Beginning in the north and stretching down toward the Persian Gulf in the south is a fertile plain that was once called Mesopotamia (“the land between the two rivers,” the Euphrates and the Tigris). The highlands north and east of the Tigris river are a beautiful but harsh mountainous region. In the northern foothills west of the Tigris, cooler summers and adequate rainfall allow for abundant grain harvests in some places, although there are few trees, and large areas

are barren. In the south, marshes and lakes dot the map.

Economy

Among Arab countries, Iraq has the greatest potential for economic modernization. It is the only Arab country to have vast oil resources, a fair amount of fertile agricultural land, and a large and relatively well-educated labor force. In the years between 1974 and 1979, when oil prices and revenues were high, Iraqis enjoyed a high standard of living. Iraq’s subsequent wars against Iran and Kuwait, and the resulting international sanctions, have drastically reduced its standard of living and placed its economy in dire straits.

The core of the Iraqi economy is oil, first discovered in 1927 near the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk. Iraq’s known oil reserves (112 billion barrels of crude oil) are exceeded only by those of Saudi Arabia. The accompanying map (p. 413) shows the location of Iraq’s major oil fields, as well as the international oil companies working in Iraq. U.S. oil companies currently do not work there, because of past anti-U.S. policies by Iraq and the U.S. interpretation of sanctions against Iraq as prohibiting such involvement. The largest oil fields are clustered in the north, adjoining areas currently held by the Kurdish parties, and in the southern delta regions in which Iraq’s Shia population predominates.

Following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the embargo on Iraqi oil exports, Iraqi oil production fell to one tenth of its pre-war level, from 3.5 million barrels per day (bbl/d) in July 1990 to around 0.3 million bbl/d in July 1991. After Iraq was allowed to produce oil in exchange for humanitarian goods in 1995 under the oil-for-food program administered by the United Nations, its production rose again, and for 2001, Iraqi crude oil production averaged 2.45 million bbl/d, about 70% of the pre-war level. Although U.S. companies

have been banished from direct involvement in Iraq, the U.S. imported nearly 1 million barrels of Iraqi oil a day at the start of 2002.\*

Historically, Iraq has engaged in extensive trade in all directions—North Africa, Europe, central Asia and (through the Persian Gulf) India and other southern and eastern Asian countries.

Iraq has fertile agricultural land covering about one fifth of its territory, but careful water management is needed. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers, while being valuable sources of fresh water, do not deliver it when or where farmers may need it. More than 50% of Iraqi land under cultivation must be irrigated. A related problem is the high saline content of Iraqi soil: without careful management, irrigated fields can become sterile, salty deserts. Barley and dates, which are tolerant of salty soil, are two of the most widely cultivated crops in Iraq.

In recent years, a new source of trouble—the international control of water needed for agriculture, cities, and electric power generation—has arisen. Turkey is diverting the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates in twenty-two dams as part of its Anatolia Project. Syria, also upriver from Iraq, has a huge dam on the Euphrates.

\* Dan Morgan and David B. Ottaway, “In Iraqi War Scenario, Oil is Key Issue,” *Washington Post* (September 15, 2002): A1.

## Useful Educational Resources

### Books

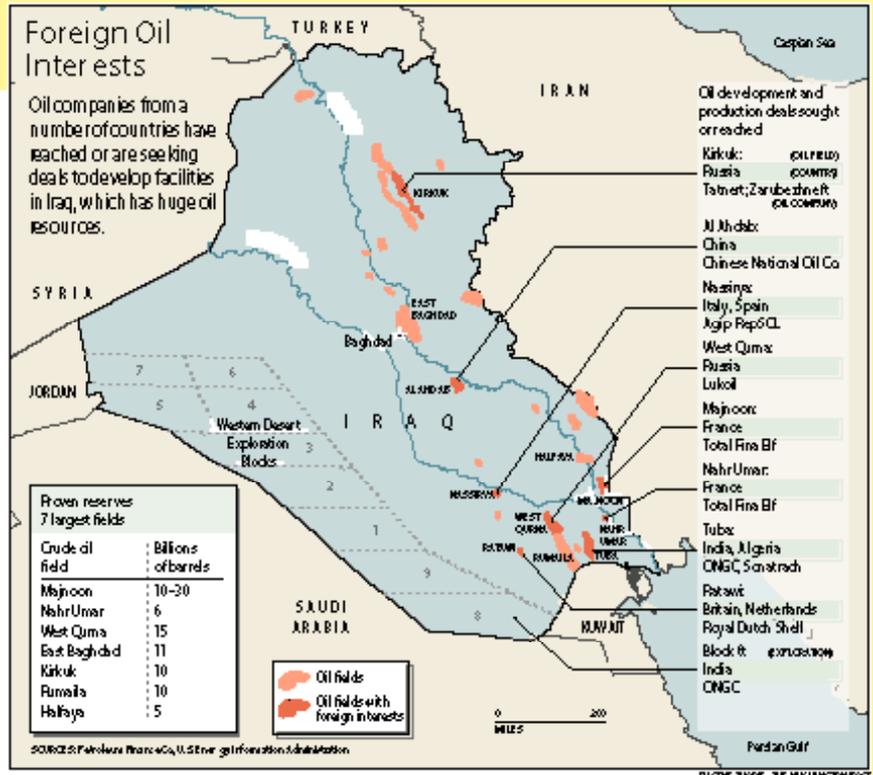
- Ciment, James. *The Kurds: State and Minority in Turkey, Iraq and Iran*. New York: Facts on File, 1996.
- *The Europa Yearbook: The Middle East and North Africa*. London: Europa, published annually.
- Helms, Christine. *Iraq*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1991.
- Al-Khalil, Samir. *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Wiley, Joyce N. *The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Shi'as*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992.

### Records of Events

- Facts on File
- Keesings Record of World Events

### Web Sites

- Brown University's Choices Education Program, Watson Institute, Brown University, "Crisis with Iraq" [www.choices.edu/iraq/](http://www.choices.edu/iraq/)
- PBS's NewsHour Extra: Debating Iraq [www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/middle\\_east/iraq.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/lessonplans/middle_east/iraq.html)
- C-SPAN in the Classroom: U.S. Policy Towards Iraq [www.c-span.org/classroom/iraq.asp](http://www.c-span.org/classroom/iraq.asp)



- The Washington Post (opinion, analysis and commentary on Iraq) [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/world/mideast/gulf/iraq/commentary/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/world/mideast/gulf/iraq/commentary/)
- The New York Times Learning Network (analysis on Iraq) [www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/)

[lessons/20020828wednesday.htm?searchpv=learning\\_lessons](http://lessons/20020828wednesday.htm?searchpv=learning_lessons)

- CNN's "Showdown: Iraq" Educator Guide: [fyi.cnn.com/2002/fyi/lesson.plans/09/27/cnnpce.showdown.iraq.eg/](http://fyi.cnn.com/2002/fyi/lesson.plans/09/27/cnnpce.showdown.iraq.eg/)
- Usnews.classroom (Lesson plans on the Middle East and on recent Iraq elections) [www.usnewsclassroom.com/resources/activities/act021028.html](http://www.usnewsclassroom.com/resources/activities/act021028.html)
- The American Friends Service Committee's Fostering Friendships: "Study Guide to Iraq for Elementary and Middle School Teachers" [www.afsc.org/iraq/guide/foster.shtm](http://www.afsc.org/iraq/guide/foster.shtm)
- The Department of Energy Energy Information Administration's "Iraq Country Analysis and Iraq Energy Chronology" [www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iraqchron.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/iraqchron.html)



## Arabs and Kurds

There are two major national groups in Iraq: Arabs and Kurds. Arabs comprise about 77% of the total population and Kurds about 20%. The remainder of the population consists of small ethnic groups, including Turkmen, Armenians and Assyrians.

### Arabs

Iraq's Arab majority is concentrated in the central and southern regions of the country.

The heartland of Iraq's Sunni Muslim Arabs is the central region, which is also the most prosperous part of Iraq. The region is agriculturally fertile as a result of a favorable climate and the Euphrates and Tigris rivers that run through it. The location of Baghdad in this region has also made it a center of government expenditures, trade, and services.

Iraq has been ruled before and since independence by governments whose influential members have been disproportionately drawn from the Sunni Arab minority. Most of the influential members of Iraq's ruling Baath Party are Sunni Muslims, as are the majority of officers in Iraq's army (in which most soldiers, by contrast, are Shia Muslims). The majority of both officers and troops in the heavily armed Republican Guards, the mainstay of Saddam Hussein's regime, are also Sunni Muslim, drawn especially from Hussein's home region in and around the town of Takrit in central Iraq.

The heartland of Iraq's Shia Muslims is the south of Iraq, a region where both regular agricultural land and marsh land are cultivated. Among the important Shia cities are the southern port city of Basra and the cities of Najaf and Karbala, whose holy places are centers of pilgrimage for Shia worldwide.

There has been a significant migration of Shia to the major cities of Iraq because of the poverty of the Shia areas. There is a widespread feeling among Iraqi Shia that their areas have been neglected by the Baghdad government, even though Shia are the majority of the Iraqi population.

Both the Sunni and Shia regions have suffered as a result of the international sanctions imposed on Iraq during the 1990s, which forced many of the middle class into poverty, and worsened the plight of the poor.

The oil-for-food program administered by the United Nations, which purchases and distributes food from the proceeds of Iraqi oil revenues, has mitigated the situation without providing a basis for long-term improvement in the Iraqi economy.

One segment of the Shia population, about half a million Marsh Arabs (the "Madan"), has suffered greatly from recent irrigation policies of Saddam Hussein's government that have diverted the water flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and deprived many Madan of their livelihood. The regime views the marshlands as a refuge for its Shia opponents.

Much of the south of Iraq is a "no-fly zone" established by the United States and United Kingdom after the 1991 Gulf War to forbid Iraqi military aircraft from entering the region. In contrast to the north of the country, where a similar no-fly zone protects the Kurds, the south of Iraq continues to be ruled by Saddam Hussein's administration.

### Kurds

The Kurdish minority is settled in villages and towns in the mountainous north and northeast of Iraq. The language of the Kurds is Kurdish, of which different dialects are spoken in Iraq. Arabic is also widely known and spoken in the Kurdish areas. Prominent Kurdish towns include Irbil, the administrative center, and Sulaymania, the Kurdish cultural capital. Since 1991, Iraqi Kurdistan has been ruled by the two main Kurdish

political parties under the protection of the no-fly zone, which is enforced by U.S. and U.K. aircraft based in Turkey.

Substantial Kurdish poverty has resulted from limited natural resources, a refugee problem, political instability, and past discrimination against Kurds by the Iraqi central government. The Kurdish region also suffered a double economic problem following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990: international sanctions were enforced against Kurdistan because it was part of Iraq, but the Iraqi government cut off revenues for Kurdish administration when Kurdistan became a no-fly zone. Foreign aid and the U.N. oil for food program have mitigated the situation in recent years.

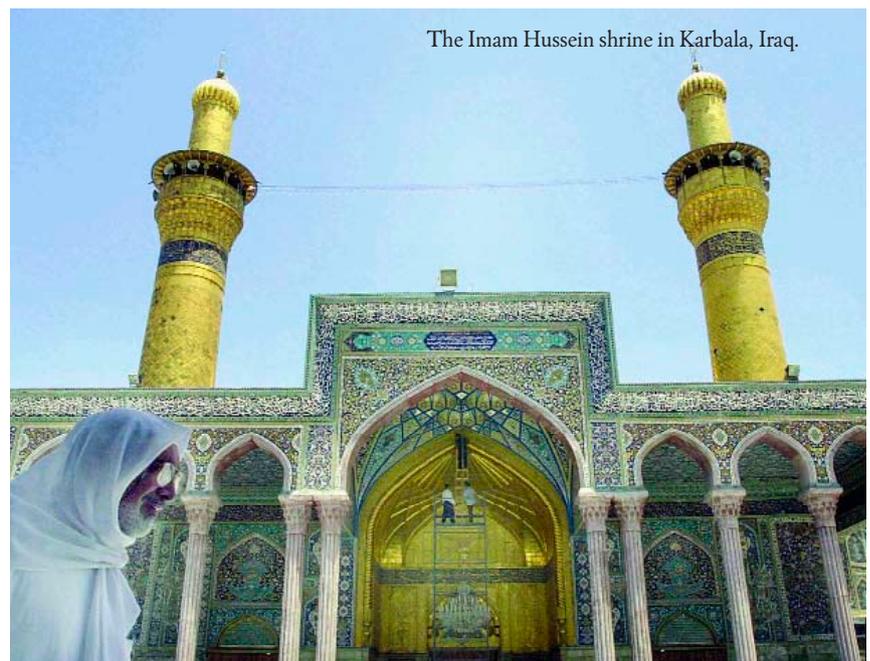
The situation of the Kurds has been worsened by an "Arabization" policy followed by Hussein's government in the Kirkuk region, that has displaced hundreds of thousands of Kurds. The oil-rich northern towns of Kirkuk and Mosul, considered by Kurds to be rightfully part of their area, remain under Hussein's control.

## Religion

Almost all Iraqis are Muslims belonging to either the Sunni or Shia branches of Islam.

Kurds are almost all Sunni Muslims. Arab Sunni Muslims constitute between 15% and 20% of the Iraqi population. The Shia, almost all of whom are Arabs, total about 60% of the population.

Both Sunni and Shia Muslims believe in the "Five Pillars of Islam": the unity of



The Imam Hussein shrine in Karbala, Iraq.

The divergences between the two branches of Islam lie mainly in differing views of the correct sources of guidance for Muslims, and in different forms of religious organization.

#### Differences between Sunni and Shia Islam

In the seventh century, Iraq was the site of the historic schism between Sunni and Shia Muslims. In a decisive battle at Karbala [680 A.D./C.E.], the Omayyad dynasty defeated and killed the Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussein to secure the leadership of the Muslim community. Hussein's shrine in Karbala is a place of pilgrimage for Shia worldwide.

Shias, whose name means "partisans" in Arabic, believe that the rightful leadership of early Islam belonged to a line of relatives of the Prophet Muhammad that included both Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law (who was the fourth Caliph, or ruler, of Islam), and Hussein, Ali's son. Shia believe that Ali possessed a special understanding of the Koran as a result of his close relationship to the Prophet, and passed this understanding down through his bloodline. In Iraq and among its Middle Eastern neighbors, the predominant form of Shiism is "Twelver Shiism," which believes that the rightful leadership of Islam was vested in a line of twelve Imams: Ali, Hussein and ten of their descendants. The twelfth Imam disappeared and is expected to return at the end of the world; during the intervening period, the Shia clergy are the authoritative interpreters of Islam.

The majority of Muslims in the world (though the minority in Iraq) are Sunni Muslims. The word "Sunni" means "orthodox" in Arabic. Sunni Muslims derive their understanding of Islam from the Koran and its interpretation by religious scholars. There are four Sunni schools of law, of which two are prevalent in Iraq: the Hanafi school (the most liberal, to which most Arab Sunnis in Iraq adhere); and the more traditional Shafii school (to which most Kurds adhere).

There are significant differences in religious organization between the two branches of Islam.

In Sunni Muslim countries, and in the Iraqi Sunni Muslim community, the senior religious officials are appointed by the government. The government exercises control over many of the endowments that fund religious activities and the maintenance

of mosques, and pays the salaries of many members of the clergy.

In Shia communities, in contrast, the clergy have typically had a stronger and more independent role than their Sunni counterparts. Ranking within the clergy—e.g., the promotion of a cleric to the rank of Ayatollah—has been a matter for the clergy itself to determine, not for the government. In addition, the Shia clergy has traditionally exercised control over its own financial endowments, so that it has been less dependent on the government. In Iran, the largest Shia country, the clergy's independence and resources enabled it to lead the Islamic revolution of 1979 against the Shah. After the Iranian revolution, when Saddam Hussein's regime faced significant Iraqi Shia unrest sponsored by members of the clergy, Hussein broke sharply with the tradition of respecting the autonomy of the Shia clergy. In 1980, his government took control of the collection and distribution of funds from Shia religious endowments, and assumed the supervision of Shia shrines, making most members of the Shia clergy dependent for funds on the government.

#### Religion and Politics in Iraq

Among Iraq's Sunni Muslims, whether Kurdish or Arab, Islamic fundamentalism has so far been a less powerful force than it has been among Sunni communities in comparable countries like Syria or Egypt. Kurdish nationalist parties have dominated the Kurdish political scene, while Arab Sunnis have mostly espoused one form or another of Arab nationalism, such as that represented by the ruling Baath Party, which promotes pan-Arabism and emphasizes the leadership role of Iraq in the Arab world.

In the Shia community, by contrast, religion has played a significant role in opposition to Hussein's regime.

From the late 1950s to the late 1970s, the seminaries in Iraq's holy city of Najaf became centers of discussion of the relationship between Shiism and the modern state, with many members of the clergy asserting the need for Islamic political activism. The influence of this period went beyond Iraq. Musa al-Sadr and Muhammad Fadlallah, who spent time in Najaf during this period, later played important political roles among the Shia of Lebanon. Ayatollah Rohallah Khomeini, who lived in Najaf from 1963 to 1978 after being exiled from Iran, first

God and the recognition of Muhammad as God's prophet; the five obligatory prayers; fasting; charity; and pilgrimage.

presented his detailed theory of Islamic government in lectures at Najaf in 1970.

A prominent Iraqi Shia religious theorist and political leader was Ayatollah Muhammad Al-Bakr Al-Sadr, a founder of the fundamentalist party Al-Dawa [The Call]. Al-Sadr advocated a state in which the clergy would serve as a judiciary determining whether legislation was compatible with Islam, and would oversee the executive. Al-Dawa played a leading role in anti-regime religious protests in the 1970s. A supporter of the Khomeini-led Iranian revolution, Al-Sadr issued a fatwa in 1979 denouncing the ideology of the ruling Baath Party and ordering Iraqi Shia to oppose it. He and his sister, also an Islamic activist, were executed by the Iraqi government in April 1980.

During the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), a number of leading Iraqi Shia religious figures, including members of Al-Dawa, took refuge in Iran, forming a religious opposition that is now part of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (see p. 421). Shia religious opposition has continued to be an irritant to Hussein's regime, which has executed many members of Shia movements. In 1998 and 1999, the regime was widely blamed for a spate of killings of prominent Shia religious figures.

## Saddam Hussein's Regime

Hussein's Iraq is a police state that tightly controls all sources of information, while glorifying its leader with a huge personality cult. Huge posters depict Saddam Hussein as a war hero, son of Islam, and friend of the working man.

A large secret police force monitors the population, through such methods as a nationwide network of informants, telephone taps, and interception of mail. Places where people gather—cafes, markets, squares, universities, and mosques—are under constant surveillance.

Any sign of opposition is ruthlessly repressed. Since the start of his rule in 1969, Hussein has directed personal attacks, arrests, sham trials, assassinations and executions to silence or eliminate those suspected of challenging him.

An Amnesty International report states that, during 2001:

Scores of people, including possible prisoners of conscience and armed

forces officers suspected of planning to overthrow the government were executed. Scores of suspected anti-government

opponents, including people suspected of having contacts with opposition groups in exile, were arrested. The fate and whereabouts of most of those arrested, including those detained in previous years, remained unknown. Several people were given prison terms after grossly unfair trials before special courts. Torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners and detainees were systematic.\*\*

In his attempts to deter popular opposition, Hussein has also resorted to arresting and killing members of his opponents' families. He has inflicted mass punishments on Kurdish communities in the north and the Shia Marsh people of the south for harboring members of the opposition.

Hussein's repressive measures aim not only at monitoring and intimidating the public, but at preventing an army coup.

When a 1969 coup brought the Baath Party to power, Hussein, formerly a conspirator against other Iraqi governments, turned his attention to developing a system of coup prevention that made him the most durable ruler of Iraq in the twentieth century.

Because of the size of military forces at Hussein's command, especially the Republican Guard, which is the iron fist of his regime, a coup in Iraq would need to be carefully coordinated among different units of the armed forces. Hussein's government has strictly regulated communications between all military units to pre-empt actions that might lead to a coup. Senior officers have regularly been shuffled from one unit to another to disrupt the possibility of their coordinating their units in a conspiracy. Army officers have come to accept extensive spying on them by the regime as part of the reality of their profession. The atmosphere is one in which a senior officer approached to participate in a coup needs to presume that the person approaching him may be a government agent testing his loyalty rather than a genuine conspirator against Hussein.

Many "carrots" accompany Hussein's "stick" in his dealings with army officers in general, and members of the Republican Guard in particular. They are rewarded for loyalty with lavish bonuses and such luxuries as fine food, cars, and good housing. Hussein's aim is to make these crucial supporters believe that they could not aspire to a similar standard of living and privileges under another Iraqi regime—which might, in any case, put them on trial for serving him. Hussein's reputation as a survivor who has

sent most of his adversaries to their doom has created a psychological climate that has worked in his favor.

In addition to armed force and internal repression, Hussein has exercised political skills to try to gain support for his regime. While his political messages have changed with time, he has relied on the following themes:

Arab nationalism. Hussein has attempted to mobilize Arab nationalist sentiment in Iraq by voicing militantly anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian, and anti-American rhetoric. In 1978, he made Iraq the center of the "Rejection Front" that has opposed Arab-Israeli peace agreements. He has supported Palestinian groups opposed to Yasser Arafat's peace agreement with Israel, and has offered financial support to Hamas, the Islamic Palestinian movement.

Sectarianism. Although official statements treat the Iraqi people as a single Arab people, with no distinction between Sunni and Shia, Hussein draws most of his support from members of the Arab Sunni Muslim minority that rules Iraq. Arab Sunni army officers and soldiers dominate the well-armed Republican Guards who are the mainstay of his regime. Iraq's Arab Sunni community, which has benefited more than the other communities during his rule, is fearful about its fate in a post-Hussein Iraq, and Hussein has used this fear to rally support and foster a "rule or die" mindset.

Populism. Iraq's oil wealth is controlled by the state, and in the "good years" between 1974 and 1980, when oil revenues were high, Hussein invested significantly in programs that were publicly visible and designed to increase the popularity of his regime. His government built new roads, schools, public hospitals and housing, monuments, and mosques. It also promoted improvements in the minimum wage and public services. The impoverishment of Iraq as a result of the wars with Iran and in Kuwait and subsequent international sanctions has made the regime incapable of continuing along this path.

Religion. Early in Hussein's rule, his government pursued secularist policies that included stopping Islamic broadcasts on state radio, and dropping teaching about the Koran from the state school curriculum.

Under the pressure of Shia religious opposition, the Iran-Iraq war, defeat in Kuwait and international sanctions, Hussein's message has become increasingly religious. In January 1991, in the middle of the Gulf crisis, he added the Islamic statement "Allahu Akbar" (God Is Great) to the Iraqi flag. He constantly invokes Islam and Koranic quotations in his speeches. Hussein introduced strict Islamic penalties, including amputation, for some crimes at the height of the period of poverty resulting from

international sanctions, and has launched a nationwide program for teaching the Koran.

Tribalism. Many Iraqis are members of tribes or clans. When the Baath Party came to power in Iraq, it initially viewed tribalism as a force that weakened society and prevented the building of a modern state. As his two wars and economic sanctions have weakened his popularity, however, Hussein has made his regime increasingly dependent on support from tribes. He has offered government funds, favors and positions to tribes that support him and are willing to provide him with loyal fighters; these benefits have, among other things, protected the tribes against the worst impact of sanctions. Some are southern Shia tribes, but the most important are Sunni, especially his own Abu Al-Nasr tribe and others from his home region of Takrit. The soldiers of the Republican Guards are heavily drawn from these tribes.

\*\* "Iraq," Amnesty International Report, 2002 (New York: Amnesty International, 2002). Available at [web.amnesty.org/web/ar2002.nsf/mdg/iraq](http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2002.nsf/mdg/iraq)

## Saddam Hussein's Wars

### War with the Kurds

Kurdish rebellions have been a recurrent feature of modern Iraqi history. Between 1974 and 1975, Saddam Hussein faced a major rebellion led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani, and supported by the Shah of Iran and the CIA. Iraqi forces were able to crush the rebellion after Hussein signed an agreement with the Shah of Iran in 1975 sharing rights over the Shatt al-Arab waterway that divides Iraq from Iran. (Iraq had previously claimed the entire waterway). The Shah then withdrew his support from the Kurds.

The Kurdish problem remained unresolved, and another Kurdish rebellion flared during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88. As the Iran-Iraq front lessened in intensity, Hussein turned his military strength against the Kurds, who were crushed by the Iraqi military machine. In 1988, the Iraqi army killed around 5,000 Kurdish villagers in Halabja with poisonous gas. An estimated one- to two-million Kurds then fled north to Iran and Turkey. (See also War with Kuwait, below)

### The Iraq-Iran War

In 1979, a fundamentalist Islamic revolution in Iran overthrew the ruling Shah, and its Shia leaders called for similar revolutions throughout the Muslim world. As revolutionary disorder broke out in Iran, Saddam Hussein was concerned that the Iranian revolution might spread to Iraq's Shia majority, and believed that Iran's weakness

offered Iraq an opportunity to dominate the region. In September 1980, Hussein ordered his troops across the border into Iran in a war backed by guarantees of financial aid by the oil-rich Arab Gulf states, whose Sunni rulers feared the effects of the Iranian revolution on their own Shia populations. In the war's resulting battles, invasions, and bombing of urban centers and petroleum facilities, hundreds of thousands were killed on both sides. In 1986, Iraqi troops used chemical weapons (poison gas), killing more than 10,000 Iranian soldiers. Finally, after eight years of war, a cease-fire was arranged in 1988, which left neither side victorious.

#### War with Kuwait

After the war with Iran, Hussein's government was saddled with a war debt estimated at \$100 billion. The Iraqi economy was weak, and he faced the problem of having to demobilize hundreds of thousands of soldiers for whom there were few jobs. Hussein requested that Kuwait and other Arab nations help with a reconstruction program and forgive Iraq's war debt. They did not.

Officially, Hussein listed several grievances as reason for his invasion of Kuwait. The price of oil had fallen, in part because Kuwait produced more oil than its agreed-to OPEC quota. He accused Kuwait of siphoning off an underground oil field by using slant drilling. In addition, there was a long-standing territorial dispute, with Iraq asserting sovereignty over Kuwait because Kuwait had once been part of the Iraq region during the Ottoman Empire, the predecessor of independent Iraq.

On August 2, 1990, Hussein sent his troops into Kuwait to overthrow the monarchy and seize its oil fields. Despite pressure from leaders of other Arab states and a total ban on trade with Iraq by the U.N., the Iraqi leader refused to withdraw. On January 16, 1991, U.S. warplanes attacked Baghdad under authority of the U.N. Among the Arab nations, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Morocco, Oman and the smaller Gulf states supported Operation Desert Storm. Continued aerial bombardments denied Iraqi troops communication, reinforcement, or supplies. Iraqi civilians suffered from these bombardments and from shortages of food, water, and medicines. Thousands died, and part of Iraq's economic infrastructure (e.g., water plants) was destroyed.

On February 24, the allied forces began their ground assault. By the evening of the 27th, large numbers of Iraqi soldiers had surrendered and Kuwait City was in allied hands. But Iraqi troops had set fire to hundreds of oil wells and spilled oil into the Persian Gulf. In southern Iraq, Shia rebels attacked government targets, believing that they would be supported by the allies, but this support never materialized, and the rebellion was crushed. Likewise, a Kurdish revolt in the north was suppressed when no support was forthcoming from coalition forces. A huge Kurdish refugee problem caused international intervention to protect Kurdistan. Later in 1991, after the establishment of a no-fly zone in Kurdistan, and after experiencing difficulty controlling the Kurdish areas, Hussein withdrew his forces from most of Kurdistan, but kept control of the oilfields of Kirkuk and Mosul.

## Iraq and the World

### Iraq and the Soviet Union

After the 1958 overthrow of the monarchy, Iraq built a strong relationship with the Soviet Union, which was willing to provide it with heavy armaments. In 1972, Iraq and the Soviet



Iraqi citizens read newspapers in front of a poster of Saddam Hussein.

Reuters/Faleh Kheiber

Union signed a fifteen-year treaty of economic and military cooperation that led to massive military aid (about \$1 billion in 1975). Iraq, however, was never a "satellite" state of the Soviet Union. In 1979, Hussein condemned the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. In 1980, the Soviet Union, which viewed the Iran-Iraq War as a disaster, suspended arms shipments to Iraq for two years.

### U.S. Foreign Policy since 1980

After the 1979 overthrow of the Shah of Iran, a bulwark of U.S. interests in the Middle East, Iran became a country hostile to the U.S. A crisis arose after Iranian militants seized the U.S. embassy in Iran in 1979 and held Americans hostage for more than a year.

Prior to the Iranian revolution, relations between the U.S. and Iraq were poor. The U.S. took a second look at Iraq after it launched a war against Iran in 1980 that was supported by the Arab oil producing allies of the U.S. In 1982, Iraq was taken off the U.S. list of nations sponsoring terrorism. In 1983, Donald Rumsfeld, then a special envoy to the Middle East, met with Hussein. The U.S. re-established full diplomatic relations with Iraq the following year. The Reagan and Bush administrations (until August, 1990) provided Hussein with military intelligence about Iran; financing, including U.S.-backed loans; weapons; and weapons platforms such as helicopters. The U.S. also provided Hussein with high-tech computers, software (ANSYS), and advanced machine tools useful for weapons production. By 1989, Iraq had become one of the largest Arab trading partners of the U.S.

also sold weapons to Iraq, hoping to weaken its alliance with the Soviet Union.

Hussein took advantage of his new international respectability to obtain weapons and develop programs to build biological, chemical, and nuclear warfare capabilities, purchasing technology and materials on the international open and black markets. But U.S.-Iraqi relations crumbled in August, 1990 when Hussein invaded Kuwait (see p. 417).

#### U.N. Inspections and Sanctions

After the victory of Desert Storm in 1991, the U.N. sent inspectors into Iraq to verify that the production and deployment of weapons of mass destruction—such as nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons—had ended. Thus started a vicious cycle in which U.N. inspectors would visit a facility in Iraq, observe or require the dismantlement of weapons and production facilities, but note that Hussein seemed to be concealing key information and material. Hussein would then accuse the inspection team of illegal actions or of harboring spies and refuse further cooperation. Finally, at the end of 1998, the U.N. inspection teams filed a strong report on Hussein's obstruction and left the country. The U.S. and U.K. launched air strikes against Iraq. Hussein then refused to accept the inspectors' return.

According to the former U.N. inspector, Scott Ritter, writing in 2000, Iraq's means of producing and deploying weapons of mass destruction had either been eliminated or could be prevented by stringent monitoring.<sup>†</sup> Other U.N. inspectors note that when the inspectors left Iraq in 1998, "significant quantities of biological warfare agents and short-range missiles remained unaccounted for."<sup>††</sup>

#### Economic Sanctions Against Iraq

After Iraq's defeat and withdrawal from Kuwait in 1991, the U.N. Security Council sustained the arms embargo and economic sanctions imposed on Iraq in 1990, hoping to force Hussein to comply with weapons inspections and to cease his repression of minorities.

The economic sanctions prevented Iraq from acquiring the parts, heavy equipment,

and investment funds needed to repair or rebuild civilian infrastructure (facilities to purify drinking water, treat sewage, and generate power) destroyed by coalition bombing. They also prevented Iraq from importing medicines and life-sustaining goods. Without imports of fertilizer, pesticide, and spare parts for farm machinery and transportation, Iraq began suffering food shortages. By 1996, U.N. agencies such as UNESCO reported that economic sanctions were causing hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths through malnutrition, treatable disease, and lack of medical supplies. The mortality rate for children five and under increased by a factor of six.<sup>†††</sup> Support within the U.N. for sanctions began to break down. An oil-for-food program established in 1995 and other changes to the sanction regime eased the worst of the food shortages, but did not end the humanitarian crisis.

The sanctions had other unwanted and unintended consequences, such as fostering an international black market: Iran, Syria, Jordan, and Turkey have received smuggled Iraqi oil and other goods. In May 2002, the U.N. Security Council endorsed a new "smart sanctions" regime, limiting the kinds of goods that must be reviewed prior to export to Iraq (e.g., "dual use" materials with civilian or potential military uses, like aluminum pipes).

#### Prospects for the Future

Once considered a potential U.S. ally, Iraq is now one of three nations named by President Bush in his 2002 State of the Union speech as part of an "Axis of Evil" (the other two being Iran and North Korea).

During 2002, the Bush Administration maintained that Saddam Hussein's development of weapons of mass destruction was an international threat, and that there was a need to change the regime in Iraq, using armed force if necessary. It also accused Hussein of contacts with Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda. At times, it seemed willing to act unilaterally against Saddam Hussein, while at other times it sought an international alliance against him.

Of the other veto-wielding U.N. Security Council members, the U.K. supported the U.S. position, while Russia, France and China expressed reservations about the use of military force. These countries differed in their view of the threat posed by Saddam

Hussein, arguing that sanctions had weakened Iraq's capability to develop weapons of mass destruction. There was, however, widespread agreement that Iraq had not conformed with U.N. resolutions relating to the destruction of such weapons.

U.S. officials stressed the benefits of action for the removal of weapons of mass destruction and the elimination of a tyrannical government. Many European and other countries, more dependent on Arab oil than the U.S., worried about the possible negative repercussions of unilateral U.S. military action, such as oil disruptions, increased anti-western militancy in the Islamic world, and chaos in a post-Hussein Iraq. In the Middle East, Israel supported a U.S. invasion of Iraq, while the Arab League expressed opposition.

In October 2002, the U.S. Congress gave President Bush authority to wage war against Iraq to end "the threat of weapons of mass destruction" after only two days of debate. The resolution falls short of a declaration of war, as the decision concerning the actual need to go to war is left with the president.

**Iraq and Neighboring States: October 2002**  
Of the six neighbors of Iraq, Hussein has launched wars against two (Iran and Kuwait). He has had prolonged bad relations with two more—Saudi Arabia, and, until recently, Syria. His two least hostile neighbors have been Turkey and Jordan.

The U.S. victory in 1991 successfully contained Iraq, so that neighboring countries no longer see it as an active threat, and are apprehensive about Iraq's reaction to a war. For example, they believe that Hussein could use weapons of mass destruction, or locate troops near the hospitals, schools, and mosques surrounding Baghdad, increasing civilian casualties in an attempt to incite Arab and world condemnation of the U.S. He could fire missiles at Israel during the fighting, with unpredictable consequences. He could conduct "environmental war" tactics by spilling oil into the Persian Gulf (as he did in 1990), or targeting water supplies of belligerent neighbors with biological contaminants.

Even if Hussein is removed, the stability and direction of a post-Hussein Iraq is not clear. If an invasion of Iraq occurs, the following concerns will preoccupy neighboring governments:

Turkey. With a larger Kurdish population than Iraq, Iran, or Syria, Turkey has faced a revolt led by the Kurdish Workers Party. It seeks to prevent the Kurds of Iraq from establishing an independent Kurdish state that would incite Turkish Kurds to join it.

Syria. Syria is ruled by a rival wing of the Baath Party to that of Hussein in Iraq. Relations between the countries have been poor for about 30 years, but have recently improved, partly as a result of increased trade. Syria would like a pro-Syrian Baath Party regime to succeed Hussein, but is concerned that a hostile pro-western or Islamic fundamentalist regime might follow him instead.

Jordan. The imposition of sanctions on Iraq harmed the Jordanian economy, and Jordan would like to see a stable, internationally accepted regime in Baghdad. It is constrained in its policy toward Iraq by the pro-Saddam Hussein sentiments visible among the Palestinian community in Jordan.

Saudi Arabia. Although Saudi-Iraqi relations have been poor since the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, Saudi Arabia has stated that it does not want the U.S. to use its military bases in Saudi Arabia to launch an attack on Iraq. The monarchy seeks to reduce internal opposition to its Western ties; it also fears that a post-Hussein Iraq might fall apart or be dominated by Shia militants.

Kuwait. Desiring to prevent any future invasion by Iraq, Kuwait regards the U.S. as its major protector against Iraq and can be expected to align closely with the U.S.

Iran. Iran is host to the main Iraqi Shia opposition movement, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, and trains its militia. While its Islamic government fears that a U.S. invasion of Iraq might presage future U.S. hostilities against Iran, it would see Hussein's removal as offering the chance of a Shia-dominated Iraqi government well-disposed to Iran.

† Scott Ritter, "The Case for Iraq's Qualitative Disarmament," *Arms Control Today* (June 2000), [www.armscontrol.org/act/2000\\_06/iraqjun.asp](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000_06/iraqjun.asp)

†† Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Iraq: The UNSCOM Experience* (Stockholm, Sweden: SIPRI, 1998): 13. [editors.sipri.se/pubs/Factsheet/unscom.html](http://editors.sipri.se/pubs/Factsheet/unscom.html).

††† Save the Children et al., *Iraq Sanctions: Humanitarian Implications and Options for the Future* (London, UK: Save the Children, 2002):10.

## War with Iraq? Ten Key Questions

As the U.S. contemplates war with Iraq, Americans are faced with important questions. The ten questions below are derived from a recent article in the *Washington Post*.\*

1. To what degree has the status quo — the "containment" of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his war ambitions — been successful in preventing violence (and the threat of violence) in Iraq, the Middle East, and the rest of the world?
2. What has brought us to the brink of war with Iraq? Specifically, how did Hussein come to power, construct a police state, and build a formidable military? What has the relationship been between the U.S. and Hussein throughout his career?
3. What is the best strategy for reducing the danger of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East? Toppling Hussein's government (i.e., "regime change")? Deploying U.N. peacekeeping forces and weapons inspectors to Iraq? Regional (multinational) and gradual disarmament?
4. In the event of war, what would Hussein's military do? Would Hussein's commanders "fire chemical and biological weapons into Israel, trying to ignite a pan-Arab war, and lob gas bombs at approaching U.S. troops?" Or would "Iraqi officers refuse to commit such futile war crimes in the face of certain defeat and turn on the dying regime?"
5. In the event of war, what would the Iraqi people do? Would they be grateful for the arrival of "American liberators," resist U.S. "occupation," and/or split into many factions at war with the U.S. and each other?
6. How will the people living in the other nations of the Middle East react to the war and its aftermath?
7. Would a military campaign in Iraq help or hurt the larger "war on terrorism," which calls for cooperation between nations in locating, arresting, and trying suspected terrorists?
8. How great is the danger posed by Hussein today when compared with other threats to security that the U.S. should attend to (such as loose nuclear material in the former states of the Soviet Union, or nuclear weapons production in North Korea)?
9. How might a full-scale war, started by the U.S., affect the U.S. economy (for example, the price of oil), civil liberties, and security in the U.S.? How would it affect Iraqi civilians and their society and environment?
10. What are the likely costs — financial, material, political, and human (civilian and military, Iraqi and American casualties) — of a short war? Of a prolonged and/or regional war? Of a possible U.S. occupation of Iraq?

\* David Von Drehle, "Debate Over Iraq Focuses On

## Iraqi Opposition Movements

There are more than 70 Iraqi opposition groups in all, some of which are very small. A number have been formed by discontented former Iraqi army officers; the others represent the range of different Iraqi ethnic and religious affiliations and political and ideological beliefs.

As of September 2002, the United States had designated seven Iraqi opposition groups as eligible for U.S. aid under the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998. Two are Kurdish nationalist parties, two are movements led by westernized Iraqi exiles, one is composed of former Iraqi Baath Party officials and army officers, and two are Islamic movements (one Shia, and one Kurdish).

Being eligible for U.S. aid does not necessarily mean that a group actually receives aid, and the U.S. has concentrated its aid on the Iraqi National Congress.

Some groups that have been active in Iraqi politics in the past are not eligible for U.S. aid. The Iraqi Communist Party, for example, played an important past role in Iraqi urban politics. However, the ascendancy of nationalist movements among the Kurds and Arab Sunni Muslims, and the rise of Islamic movements among the Shia, have weakened its capacity to attract members.

Other exiles not supported by the U.S. include Baath Party members who have fled Iraq and taken refuge in Syria, which is ruled by the rival wing of the Baath Party. Syria has made unsuccessful past efforts to sponsor a coup in Iraq that would establish a Baathist regime aligned with Syria.

The following are the seven Iraqi opposition groups designated as eligible for U.S. aid as of September 2002.

### Kurdish Opposition Groups Kurdistan Democratic Party

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) is led by Massoud Barzani, son of the famed Kurdish nationalist leader, Mullah Mustafa Barzani. It obtained 50 of the 105 seats in the Kurdish parliament in the elections of 1992. It has a militia of about 12,000-15,000 members.

The KDP controls the northern and north-eastern part of Kurdistan, near the Turkish frontier. Its principal support comes from tribes and clans supportive of the Barzani family. While the Barzani family has been closely associated with past Kurdish demands for independence, the declared current policy of the party is to seek Kurdish autonomy within the framework of a democratic Iraq ruled by a federal government.

### Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) controls the eastern and southern part of Iraqi Kurdistan, near the border with Iran, with which it has recently had good relations. Led by Jalal Talabani, it obtained 50 of the 105 seats in the Kurdish parliament in the 1992 elections. Its principal support comes from tribes and clans supportive of the Talabani family, but its ideology is more leftist than that of Barzani's KDP, and the PUK obtains more support in urban areas.

Like the KDP, the PUK officially states its objective to be autonomy for the Kurds within the framework of a federal and democratic state of Iraq. It has a militia of about 12,000-15,000.

### The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan

The Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan is a third, much smaller Kurdish movement. A Sunni Muslim fundamentalist movement founded by Shaikh Uthman Abdul-Aziz, its headquarters are in Halabja, the town that suffered a devastating chemical attack by Iraqi forces in 1988. The movement has had good relations with Iran, and has also sought support in Arab Gulf states. In the Kurdish parliamentary elections of 1992, the movement received about 5% of the vote, which fell short of the minimum necessary to obtain a seat in the Kurdish parliament.

One positive result of the international protection of Kurdistan after the Gulf war was that there was greater political freedom: newspapers, radio stations, political parties and parliamentary elections. A negative development in the mid-1990s was armed conflict between the two main Kurdish parties over the extent of their areas of control and over taxes from legal and illicit trade between Kurdistan and neighboring countries. In the de facto division of Kurdistan,

Barzani's KDP was receiving revenues from its control of the lucrative trade going over the Turkish border, while Talabani's PUK derived revenues from the lesser volume of trade crossing the Iraqi-Iranian border. In January 1995, PUK forces seized the Kurdish administrative capital, Irbil. During the next year and a half, clashes continued between the two groups.

In August 1996, Barzani accused Talabani of getting aid from Iran, and took the extraordinary step of asking Saddam Hussein for assistance against Talabani.

On August 31, 1996, Hussein sent a force of more than 30,000 Iraqi troops with tanks and armored cars into Kurdistan, where it captured Irbil. In September, Iraqi-supported KDP forces also captured the town of Sulaymaniya from Talabani, whose forces recaptured the town the next month. Iraqi forces withdrew from the invaded area, turning Irbil over to Barzani's KDP. During their invasion, Iraqi forces also killed and captured many members of the Iraqi National Congress.

The United States response to the Iraqi invasion, which took place at the start of the Labor Day weekend, was to launch airstrikes against targets in southern Iraq a few days later, and to make prolonged efforts to re-establish working relations between the two Kurdish parties. In 1998, an agreement on the points of contention between the KDP and PUK was reached in Washington, DC. In 2002, as the U.S. warned of its willingness to invade Iraq and to change the Iraqi regime, the parties both participated in high-level contacts with the U.S. In October 2002, in an act of cooperation between both parties, the Kurdish parliament held its first session for six years.

### Arab Opposition Movements The Iraqi National Congress

The Iraqi National Congress (INC) was formed by Ahmed Chalabi in 1992 as a coalition of Iraqi groups opposed to Saddam Hussein. Chalabi comes from a wealthy and politically active Shia family, and left Iraq when the monarchy was overthrown in 1958. He was a university professor and banker before forming the INC with U.S. support in 1992.

Chalabi's intention when he founded the INC was that it would be an umbrella group for diverse Iraqi opposition movements. The original INC strategy was to treat Kurdistan as a liberated Iraqi territory,

from which resistance would be launched to Saddam Hussein's regime, under protection of the "no-fly zone," and in which the INC would be based.

This strategy suffered a major setback when Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party requested Saddam Hussein's intervention in Kurdistan in 1996 against Talabani's PUK, and the Iraqi army killed and captured hundreds of INC members in its invasion of Kurdistan.

The result of the strife in Kurdistan was to place the center of gravity of Chalabi's activities even more firmly in the United States, United Kingdom, and communities of Iraqi exiles in the west. Within the U.S. Administration, there have been divisions of opinion about the INC's ability to rally support within the part of Iraq ruled by Saddam Hussein, as well as its accounting for U.S. funds provided to its movement. The Department of Defense has been supportive of Chalabi, and the State Department and CIA skeptical.

#### Constitutional Monarchists

This movement is led by Sharif Ali Bin Al-Hussein, the claimant to the throne of Iraq, who is a western-educated economist, and also serves as spokesman for the Iraq National Congress. The Iraqi royal family is part of the Hashemite dynasty that also rules Jordan and is descended from the Prophet Muhammad. The dynasty is not native to Iraq, but originally came from the Hijaz, in what is now Saudi Arabia. Al-Hussein's strategy is to seek a referendum in a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq on whether the country should be a republic or a constitutional monarchy.

#### The Iraqi National Accord

The Iraqi National Accord is a group of former Iraqi political and security officials and army officers led by Ayad Alawi, a former Baath party official. While Alawi is a Shia Muslim, Sunni Muslims are well represented in the group.

Of the seven Iraqi opposition groups approved for U.S. aid, the INA is the only group composed of former insiders in Hussein's regime. It seeks to use its connections in Iraq to foment a rebellion against the regime, and was associated with a major coup attempt in 1996 that was foiled after the organizing group was infiltrated by Hussein's intelligence service. It has worked closely with the CIA.

The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

Based in Iran, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq is a coalition composed principally of Iraqi Shia religious groups who seek an Islamic state in Iraq. The leader of the Supreme Council is Ayatollah Muhammad al-Bakr Al-Hakim, who comes from a distinguished Iraqi Shia religious family. It has a militia of about 8,000 that is composed of Iraqi refugees and prisoners-of-war in Iran, and has been trained by Iran.

The clergy are a powerful force in Shia communities, and the Supreme Council aims to use this power to rally the Iraqi Shia community. It sees Islam as a unifying force in ethnically divided Iraq, and seeks cooperation with Sunni Muslim fundamentalists.

During the 1980s, Ayatollah Al-Hakim faced a problem within Iraq's Shia community because his movement was closely associated with Khomeini-style Iranian fundamentalism, while the mainstream of the Iraqi Shia community was not. During the Iraq-Iran war, Al-Hakim took refuge in Iran, where the Ayatollah Khomeini recognized him as Iraq's rightful leader. During that war, however, Iraqi Shias were loyal to Iraq and constituted the majority of rank-and-file soldiers in the Iraqi army; Iraqi Shias have always identified themselves as Arabs, not Persians like the Iranians.

Despite this, Ayatollah Al-Hakim is highly respected in an Iraqi Shia community whose leadership has been weakened by exile, arrests and executions. In the 1991 uprising in south Iraq, a number of rebels proclaimed Al-Hakim to be their leader. Saddam Hussein's repression of the South after the revolt of 1991 and the impact of sanctions have left many Shia embittered. And in a future Iraq in which the current regime is likely to be blamed for destroying the country by launching

wars of aggression against Iran and Kuwait, the Council hopes that its high political profile and unbending opposition to Hussein's rule will work in its favor, and that a population weary of dictatorship and war will look to Islam for political salvation.

Designated as one of the seven Iraqi opposition groups eligible for U.S. aid under the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, the movement has refused to request U.S. aid. It was, however, represented at high-level meetings in Washington, DC in August 2002 between Iraqi opposition groups, Secretary of State Powell, and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld.

## Iraq Timeline

### WORLD HISTORY

4000 B.C.E. The world's first known civilization, Mesopotamia, is born on the plains between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Sumer, a group of 13 city-states, arises in the Delta Region.

2334 B.C.E. The Akkadians conquer Sumer. Over the next two millennia, successive waves of invaders conquer, rule, and become part of the population and culture of ancient Iraq, including Babylonians (1900 B.C.E.), Assyrians (1600 B.C.E.), Chaldeans (800 B.C.E.), Persians, or Iranians (550 B.C.E.),



Jalal Talabani



Ahmed Chalabi



Ayatollah al-Hakim



Massoud Barzani

Greeks (331 B.C.E.), Persian Parthians (126 B.C.E. ), and Romans (98 A.D.)

636 A.D./C.E. Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, leads troops into Mesopotamia.

680 In a battle for rule over the Muslim community, Muhammad's grandson Hussein is defeated by the Omayyad leader, Yazid. Muslims who recognize the right of Hussein's descendants to rule the Muslim community become known as Shia.

750 Abbasid caliphate begins a "Golden Age of Iraq." Baghdad, larger than any other city in Europe or Africa, becomes the center of political power and culture in the Middle East. Swamps are drained, which frees the city of malaria.

800s In the reign of Caliph Al-Maamoun, Iraqi scholars translate ancient Greek philosophy and science texts into Arabic, preserving this knowledge for humankind. An academy, the Bayt al-Hikmah ("House of Wisdom"), houses a vast library and astronomical observatory. The flowering of Arabic culture includes major advances in mathematics, architecture, art, literature, and science.

830s Upon the death of Al-Maamoun, his brother, Abu Ishaq, becomes caliph. He recruits Turkish mercenaries, establishing a foreign, military class that dominates the political life of Iraq for centuries.

945 Baghdad is taken by Muizz Ad-Dawlah, a Buyid chief of the Shiite Daylamite people from the area southwest of the Caspian Sea. Baghdad begins to break apart into small communities, either Sunnite or Shia, each with its own walls.

1055 Turkish Seljuq sultan, Toghril Beg, a Sunni Muslim, enters Baghdad, and erodes the power of the Shia caliphs.

1200 Caliph an-Nasir ends more than 200 years of "secular" military domination, first under the Buyids and then the Seljuqs, and attempts to reconcile Sunnis and Shias.

1258 After years of gradual decline that include civil war, slave revolts, territorial disputes, and domestic political instability, Baghdad's Golden Age comes to an end when Mongol invaders sack Baghdad, killing as many as 800,000 inhabitants, and wreck Iraq's irrigation system.

1520 Sultan Sulayman I of Turkey takes control of Mesopotamia, which becomes part of the Ottoman Empire and defeats the Safavids (a Persian family).

1763 The British East India Company establishes an agency in Basra, thus securing Iraq's importance as a conduit for Indian-British trade.

1798 Mamluk ruler Sulayman Pasha allows a permanent British Agent to be appointed in Baghdad, entwining the interests of the British Empire into Iraqi government and politics.

1869 The three-year rule of Ottoman governor Midhat Pasha transforms Baghdad with trams, a water supply system, hospital, textile mills, savings bank, paved streets, and a bridge over the Tigris. The governor met with less success in his attempts to impress Western law and land reform onto tribal and communal practices.

1899 Germany constructs railroad lines from Konya, Turkey, to Baghdad, which the British perceive as a threat to their interests in the Persian Gulf.

1914 TO 1958

1914 The Ottoman Empire sides with Germany at the outset of World War I. British forces land on the Gulf coast, move toward Basra, and fight Turkish troops.

1917 British troops march into Baghdad and General Maude promises eventual independence to Iraqi nationalists.

1920 The League of Nations draws borders so as to create weak Middle Eastern states and gives them as "mandates" to the victors of the World War. Iraq is entrusted to Britain, Syria to the French. Disappointed nationalists initiate "The Great Iraqi Revolution." Secret societies, strikes, rallies, and violent demonstrations spread throughout Iraq. Sunnis and Shias, tribes and city dwellers, struggle together for nationhood. Severe repression by the British, which includes the aerial bombardment of civilian targets, ends the general anarchy after three months.

1921 The British proclaim a non-Iraqi, Faisal Ibn Hussein, a member of the Hashemite dynasty, to be King of Iraq, but the British in effect rule the nation and crush successive revolts

for independence in the following years. In England, the call to "get out of Mesopotamia" gains popular support, as the mandate is expensive in human life and money.

1922-24 Kurds revolt against British encroachment in areas of traditional Kurdish autonomy.

1925 King Faisal reluctantly grants a 75-year concession to the IPC (the Iraq Petroleum Company, owned by Britain and France) after two years of acrimonious debate.

The League of Nations awards Mosul Province, with its restless Kurdish population, to Iraq, rather than to Turkey, as many Kurds had hoped.

1932 Iraq becomes an independent nation on October 3 and is admitted to the League of Nations, with a monarch who is beholden to the British.

1933 King Faisal Ibn Hussein dies and is succeeded by his son, Ghazi. The more than 50 cabinets formed between 1925 and 1958 and several attempted military coups attest to the instability of Iraq's political system.

1934 Tribes revolt against the government's decision to allocate money for a new military conscription plan rather than for a new dam for agriculture, but are defeated. The conflict follows British-supported land reform that dispossesses thousands of tribesmen and weakens traditional tribal society.

1936 General Bakr Sidqi and two politicians (Hikmat Sulayman and Abu Timman, who are Turkoman and Shia, respectively) undertake Iraq's first military coup d'etat—the first in the modern Arab world. They displace the elite that has ruled since the state was founded; the new government contains few Arab Sunnis and not one advocate of a pan-Arab cause.

1936-39 British quell a Palestinian Arab revolt, intensifying anti-British sentiments in Iraq. Disgruntled officers in Iraq begin planning the overthrow of the monarchy.

1937 A military group assassinates Sidqi, who has made enemies in every group and faction.

1941 Rashid Ali Kailani seizes power in a military coup and appoints an ultranationalist civilian cabinet, which gives only conditional consent to British requests for troop landings in Iraq. The British quickly retaliate by landing forces at Basra. Many Iraqis regard the move as an attempt to restore British rule. They rally to the support of the Iraqi army, which receives aircraft from the Axis powers. The British, who want to use transportation and communication facilities in conducting

- the larger war, win the battle in 30 days.
- 1945 Iraq becomes a founding member of the British-supported League of Arab States (Arab League) and joins the United Nations.
- 1948 Iraq objects strongly to the U.N.'s partitioning of Palestine in 1947, sending troops to the first of several Arab-Israeli Wars. About 120,000 Iraqi Jews emigrate to Israel. The 1948 Wathbah (uprising) against continuing British influence and economic inflation weakens the monarchy.
- 1952 Gamal Abdul Nasser takes over Egypt. His pan-Arab politics are a major force in Iraqi politics over the next 20 years. Oil revenues enrich the government but cause inflation, which hurts the urban poor and middle class.
- 1952 Bad harvests, economic depression, and political oppression (including cancelled elections) lead to large-scale, violent, anti-regime protests. Iraq, led by Prime Minister Nuri as Said, joins a British-supported mutual defense pact (CENTO) with Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, which infuriates Nasser.
- 1956 British, French, and Israeli troops attack Egypt, but withdraw under pressure from the U.S., which seeks to prevent Nasser from allying with the Soviet Union.
- 1958 In a military coup (the "July Revolution"), officers overthrow the monarchy, kill King Faisal II, and proclaim Iraq a republic. Abdul-Karim Kassim heads the new socialist-leaning government, which favors communists over pan-Arabists.
- 1959-2001
- 1959 A coup against Kassim's government fails, and communists retaliate by massacring nationalists and some wealthy families in Mosul. Kassim signs an extensive economic agreement with the Soviet Union. A member of the Baath (Arab Renaissance) Party, and the future president, Saddam Hussein attempts, but fails, to assassinate Kassim.
- 1960 The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is created at a Conference in Baghdad by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela (to be joined later by several others).
- 1961 In Kirkuk, a rally gets out of hand, and communist Kurds kill many Turkomen. A Kurdish insurrection erodes Kassim's base of power. The pan-Arab socialist Baath Party is actively organizing cells in the military.
- 1961 Britain awards independence to Kuwait. Kassim threatens to invade. British, then Arab League forces protect Kuwait.
- 1963 Baathist officers launch a coup in which Kassim is killed and form a new government, which lasts for less than a year. General Abdul-Salam Arif becomes President. Talks with Nasser of Egypt and the new Baathist regime in Syria, aimed at a united Arab nation, collapse.
- 1963 In November, after a split within the Baath, Arif removes the Baath from government and begins working again toward a union of Egypt and Iraq, but enthusiasm cools by 1965.
- 1964 Arif nationalizes banks and essential industries.
- 1967 While Arab nations are defeated in the Arab-Israeli "Six Day War," Iraq does not intervene, which leads to political unrest in Iraq.
- 1968 Members of the Baath Party, led by Saddam Hussein, stage another coup, this time bloodless, and take over all branches of government. Ahmad Hasan Al-Bakr becomes president of Iraq, but Hussein remains the dominant leader.
- 1972 The Soviet Union and Iraq sign a treaty of friendship and build a political, economic, and military partnership. Iraq nationalizes the Western-owned Iraqi Petroleum Company (25 percent U.S.-owned).
- 1973 Iraq supports Arab nations in yet another war with Israel.
- 1974 A Kurdish insurrection is sparked by Hussein's forced relocation and persecution of Kurds.
- 1975 Iran and Iraq resolve a border dispute. With military aid to the Kurds (from Iran and the CIA) suddenly cut off, Hussein attacks. More than 200,000 Kurds flee to Iran.
- 1978 An Arab League summit held in Baghdad condemns and ostracizes Egypt for making the Camp David Peace Accords with Israel.
- 1979 Saddam Hussein, the vice-president of the ruling group and already the real center of power, seizes the presidency. A massive purge of the Baath Party follows, resulting in executions of many Party members. Negotiations for economic and political unification of Iraq and Syria break down.
- 1980 Iraq invades Iran over their disputed boundary and Iran's support for Shia fundamentalists in Iraq. This begins a ten-year war that kills hundreds of thousands of people and destroys cities and infrastructure in both nations. The Soviets halt their arms shipments to Iraq for two years, hoping to force a ceasefire.
- 1981 Israeli air force planes destroy a nuclear reactor near Baghdad. Israel states that Iraq was producing material for nuclear bombs at the French-built facility.
- 1983 The U.S., Britain, France, and Germany begin providing weapons, intelligence, and financing to Saddam Hussein.
- 1988 Hussein's troops drop chemical weapons on the Kurdish village of Halabja, killing more than 5,000 civilians, in retaliation for Kurdish rebel attacks during the Iran-Iraq War.
- 1988 A cease fire ends the Iran-Iraq War, neither side having gained any land. Hussein requests that Arab countries in the Gulf (that financed the war) forgive his huge war debt, but they refuse. Major creditors also include France, the United States, Britain, and Germany.
- 1990 On August 2, Iraq invades Kuwait (citing Kuwait's failure to abide by oil quotas, a perennial border dispute, and other grievances), sparking the Gulf War. The U.N. imposes a weapons embargo and economic sanctions against Iraq, which halts oil exports and internal investments.
- 1991 After about one month of ground combat and bombing of targets in Kuwait and Iraq, U.S.-led forces liberate Kuwait. The victorious coalition does not prevent Saddam Hussein from stifling uprisings against him by Shias in the south or Kurds in the north.
- 1993 The United States fires 24 cruise missiles at targets in the city of Baghdad after accusing Iraq of a plot to assassinate former U.S. president George H. W. Bush as he visits Kuwait.
- 1996 U.N. agencies report that economic sanctions are causing hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths. A U.N. oil-for-food program allows Iraq to sell some oil in exchange for U.N.-monitored purchase of food for civilians.
- 1998 The U.S. Congress passes the Iraq Liberation Act, authorizing the provision of U.S. economic and military aid to groups opposed to Saddam Hussein's regime. U.N. weapons inspectors withdraw. U.S./U.K. air forces drop bombs on sites throughout Iraq.
- 2000 Notable personages from Britain, France, and Italy fly to Iraq, in defiance of the U.N.-imposed "no fly zone," to deliver medicine to civilian hospitals.
- 2001 Unlike every other national leader in the Middle East, Hussein does not make a statement of regret after the terrorist hijackings of September 11.
- 2002 In January, President Bush describes Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as forming an "Axis of Evil" that supports terrorism. He accuses

Iraq of developing weapons of mass destruction, and advocates overthrowing its leader (“regime change”). In October, after two days of debate, the U.S. Congress authorizes a resolution (which is short of a declaration of war) that would enable the president to undertake a major military invasion of Iraq. G