

Iraqi Cultural Orientation

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Country Profile

Introduction

Iraqi culture, one of the world's most ancient, is experiencing a tumultuous transition. In December 2005, the Iraqi people voted in free elections, signaling Iraq's change from military dictatorship into a parliamentary democracy. The change is moving forward, despite being thwarted by insurgency and elements of civil war. There is confusion over how to handle the fragmentation of the state, and issues of power-sharing among people are breaking down along ethnic and religious lines, dividing the country. Although 60–65% of Iraqis are Shi'a Muslims,¹ Sunnis affiliated with the Ba'athist political party ruled under Saddam Hussein, and deep political divisions exist between these groups. Disenfranchised Ba'athists and other sectarian groups have maneuvered for power and control, using tactics that include violently exploiting the Shi'a–Sunni split. Within Iraq's new democracy, the strategic goal of political reconciliation that represents security, stability, and peace to the people of Iraq remains a plausible but distant objective.



USAID

Iraqi voter

Geography

Area

Iraq is situated at the northern end of the Persian Gulf. Iran lies to its east, Syria and Jordan to its west, Turkey to its north, and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to its south. Iraq's total border is 3,650 km (2,268 mi). The portion shared with Iran is 1,458 km (906 mi); Kuwait, 240 km (149 mi); Saudi Arabia, 814 km (506 mi); Jordan, 181 km (112 mi); Syria, 605 km (376 mi); and Turkey, 352 km (219 mi). It has a 58 km (36 mi) coastline on the Persian Gulf, its only access to the world's oceans.¹ In total area, Iraq is about the size of California.

Iraq can be divided into roughly four major geographical divisions. Its west and southwestern region consists of flat, stony and sandy mixed desert. This desert zone is an extension of the Syrian Desert. Second, a rolling upland spreads through northern Iraq between the upper Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. It starts about 120 km (75 mi) north of Baghdad and extends to the Syrian border. This region is a mix of desert and deep river valleys. The third geographical division includes mountainous highlands in the north and northeast, which extend into Iran and Turkey. Last, an alluvial plain that begins north of Baghdad



© Hovio / flickr.com
Syrian Desert

¹ CIA World Factbook. Iraq. People - Religions. 15 November 2007.
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

sweeps southward along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers through the central and southeastern sections of the country.²

Topographical Features

Mount Haji Ibrahim, or Gundah Zhur, once believed to be the highest peak in Iraq, reaching 3,607 m (11,837 ft). However, the Unnamed Peak nearby is higher at 3,611 m (11,849 ft). These mountains are an extension of the Zagros Mountains in western Iran.

The mountainous region of Iraq begins just southwest of Mosul and Kirkuk and extends to the borders of Iran and Turkey. Elevations range between 1,000 m–4,000 m (3,000 ft–12,000 ft). Grazing and some cultivation can be found in the area.



© Mary Loosemore

Zagros Mountains, Iran

The Iraqi Marshlands extend from around central Iraq toward the lower portions of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, culminating in the area where the two rivers join. The floodplain wetlands have existed for over 6,000 years and enabled the cultivation of rice and other agricultural products.

Flood relief lakes are located in the vicinity of Baghdad. They include man-made Lake Tharthar, which receives overflow from the Tigris River. Lakes Habbaniyah and Razazah relieve the floodwaters from the Euphrates River. These lakes were created in saline depressions to fight flooding, but to some extent they contribute to the 6,000-year-old Iraqi wetland culture as well.

Climate

Iraq has mostly a desert climate with hot, dry summers and mild winters. In the northeastern mountains, winters are cold and occasionally bring heavy snowfalls. Temperatures in the northeastern foothills and western desert range from an average low of 0°–15°C (32° to 59°F) in winter, and from 22° to 38°C (71.6–100.4°F) in summer. In the alluvial plain and marshy areas south of Baghdad, temperatures range from 4°–17°C (39.2°–62.6°F) in the winter. In summer, the temperature range fluctuates between 29° and 43°C (84.2°–109.4°F).³

The country has a Mediterranean rainfall pattern, receiving 90 % of its rain between November and April. Average annual rainfall is 100–170 mm (4–7 in), but in the northern and northeastern uplands, the range is from 320–570 mm (12.6–22 in). Annual

² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Iraq.” August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Iraq.” August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

rainfall in the mountains may be as much as 1,000 mm (40 in). The rain that falls in the uplands usually works its way slowly downriver to the Persian Gulf.⁴

Dust and sandstorms occur because of the *sharqi*⁵ winds from the south and southeast. These destructive storms carrying walls of debris, dust, and dirt can occur at any time of year, but the peak of the sandstorm season is July.⁶ Iraq's sandstorms are strong enough to disable the engines of machinery and aircraft and reduce visibility to almost zero.



© James Gordon
An approaching sand storm

Rivers

It is Iraq's great rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, that have made agriculture so rewarding in Mesopotamia. The rivers flow over 2,500 km (1,553 mi) in a southward direction through Iraq, joining approximately 150 km (93 mi) north of the Persian Gulf.⁷ Because the flow is very slow, both rivers deposit much silt along the journey. Spring floods over millennia have also deposited this rich silt on farms along the way, producing some of the most fertile land in the world. However, that same silt carries salt which reduces some of the land's productivity. Maximum flow periods for the Tigris are from March to May, with two-fifths of the annual flow occurring then.⁸ So much silt has been deposited in the alluvial plain at the rivers' mouth that it stretches out noticeably farther today than it did during Babylonian times.

Both rivers begin elsewhere—the Euphrates in Turkey, reinforced by the Nahr al Khabur of Syria, and the Tigris in Turkish Armenia. They enter from the northwest, both fed by melting winter snows. The Euphrates flows through a number of deep gorges, and then enters the plain at Ar Ramadi. The Tigris flows along the edge of the Zagros Mountains and has a number of important tributaries: the Great Zab, Little Zab, and Diyala. It is just north of Al Başrah where the Tigris and Euphrates join, forming the Shatt al Arab waterway that flows into the Persian Gulf at al Faw on the Iranian border.



© Jayel Aheram
The Euphrates River

⁴ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

⁵ "Raqs sharqi" is belly dancing--literally means "eastern dance." The *sharqi* wind presumably got its name because it comes from the east.

⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Iraq: Climate." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-22930>

⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Iraq: The Tigris-Euphrates River System." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-232256>

Significant dams have been built for flood control and for irrigation, and canals were constructed to move water where it is most needed. One canal connects the Tigris near Samarra with Buhayrat ath Tharthar (Lake Tharthar). A second canal connects the lake to the Euphrates at al Habbaniyyah. In 1990, Syria and Iraq agreed to share the waters of the Euphrates equitably, and Turkey has promised an annual minimum flow where it shares a border with Syria. There is no three-party agreement.⁹

Draining of the Marshlands

One of the projects begun by Saddam Hussein after the Persian Gulf War was the construction of two canals in the south, supposedly designed to improve irrigation. One canal, however, was punitive, intended to drain the marshland homes of the Marsh Arabs (*Ma'dan*) who had attacked Iraqi government forces during the war. The Hussein government drained over 90% of the extensive southern marshes. As a result, the area rapidly turned into dry salt flats.¹⁰ The Marsh Arabs had depended on the waters of the marsh for fishing and the surrounding grasslands as an area where their herds of water buffalo could graze. Deprived of these resources, they became displaced.



US Army Corps of Engineers
Marsh Arabs poling on marsh

Since the fall of the Hussein regime, marsh restoration efforts have begun with floodgates being opened and embankments being breached. As a result, 40% of the old marshlands have been restored. Some scientists question, however, whether future water availability will allow for full restoration of the southern marshes.¹¹

Biodiversity

The open oak forests of the Kurdistan mountains have largely disappeared, reduced by drought and exploitation for firewood. Juniper, wild pear, and hawthorn trees grow on the less elevated mountain slopes alongside small trees that exude *terebinth*, a substance used in the varnish for manufacturing violins.¹² Much of the rest of northern Iraq is steppes, open and treeless, with a multitude of herbs, grasses, and shrubs. In the lowlands along the rivers, one finds licorice plants, willows, poplars, and tamarisks. Throughout southern Iraq, the landscape is dominated by date palms.¹³

⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Iraq: Irrigation and Canals." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-232257>

¹⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Iraq: Irrigation and Canals." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-232257>

¹¹ BBC News, International Version. "Iraq Marshes' Recovery 'in Doubt'." 30 August 2006. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/5295044.stm>

¹² Luscombe Violins. Varnish Glossary. March 2002. <https://secure.wyenet.com/violins/popup/vargloss.html>

¹³ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Iraq: Plant and Animal Life." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-22931>

Birds are the most frequently seen form of wildlife. Their numbers have been reduced by the draining of the marshes, a major breeding ground and rest site for birds migrating between Eurasia and southern Asia or Africa.

Animals that once roamed wild, for example the lion and oryx, have disappeared from Iraq, and others are endangered. Wolves, hyenas, wildcats, jackals, foxes, and wild pigs exist, some of them feeding on smaller mammals such as badgers, martens, muskrats, and porcupines. Lakes, rivers, and streams are stocked with fish such as catfish, loach, and carp.

Damage to Biodiversity and Environment from War

The environmental degradation that has resulted from Iraq's three wars (1980–88, 1991, and 2003 to present) has been severe. The spillage of around 4 billion gallons of crude oil, one of the world's largest marine oil spills, severely polluted 560 km (348 mi) along the coast and harmed local ecosystems. Damage to oil pipelines and accidents at oil terminals also caused large oil slicks in the Gulf, which damaged marine life. A toxic stew found in 13,700 tons of smoke that poured daily into the air from oil wells that had been set on fire spread hundreds of miles into the regional environment. It caused respiratory and other health problems, affecting people, wildlife, and the environment. Toxins were further widely disbursed through the destruction of chemical facilities and from waste products, including depleted uranium shells. Conservation areas and groundwater in large, underground aquifers were damaged and polluted.¹⁴



DOD photo

Pipeline repairmen

The last three wars involving Iraq severely impacted the regional environment. Damage includes toxic leakage from bombed industrial sites, damaged archaeological sites, and release of heavy metals and toxins into the air, soil, and water. Land mines and unexploded ordnance left in exposed positions killed or wounded approximately 100,000 people in the early 2000s.^{15, 16}

Natural Resources

Iraq is a land of abundant natural resources. The country has plentiful water resources from its two main rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates. On the lower alluvial plain, the land is rich and productive because of the river systems. Iraq also has mineral resources,

¹⁴ BNET Research Center. *Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review*. McManus, Keith P. "Civil Liability for Wartime Environmental Damage: Adapting the United Nations Compensation Commission for the Iraq War." 2006. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3816/is_200605/ai_n16350886/pg_1

¹⁵ BNET Research Center. *Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review*. McManus, Keith P. "Civil Liability for Wartime Environmental Damage: Adapting the United Nations Compensation Commission for the Iraq War." 2006. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3816/is_200605/ai_n16350886/pg_2

¹⁶ Federal Research Division. Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

including both oil and natural gas. It holds the world's third largest oil deposits and approximately 2% of the world's natural gas reserves.¹⁷

Major Cities

Baghdad

The capital of Iraq, Baghdad was founded by the Abbasids in 762 B.C.E. The city straddles the banks of the Tigris River, and 11 bridges connect the two sides. With 5.6 million inhabitants, it is the largest city in Iraq today and the center of industry, commerce, and culture.

Basrah

Basrah is Iraq's third-largest city, with a population of 1.3 million. It is also Iraq's main port. The city's rich history dates back to the Abbasids. Basrah's main exports are grains, dates, and petroleum.



US Army photo
The Tigris River at Mosul

Mosul

With its 1.7 million inhabitants, Mosul is Iraq's second-largest city. The city's history dates back to Mesopotamian times (4000–5000 B.C.E.) and to Assyrian rule in 800 B.C.E. Its mostly Kurdish population lives together with the largest Christian community in Iraq, the Chaldeans.

Karbala

The holy city of Karbala is the site of the tomb of the Martyr Husayn Ibn Ali, who was killed there in 680 C.E. This event triggered the split between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. After Mecca, Karbala is the place most visited by Shi'a pilgrims and has developed into a major center of Islamic religion in Iraq.

Kirkuk

Kirkuk's ancient history dates back over 5,000 years. Mostly Kurds and Turkmen make up its population. Kirkuk has been the center of the petroleum industry since the 1930s, producing one million barrels of oil daily. It is a major industrial and agricultural center.

Erbil

One of the world's longest continuously-inhabited cities, Erbil's roots date back over 8,000 years. Close to Turkey and Iran, it represents the center of the Kurdish independent movement. Commerce, agriculture, and administrative work are of main interest in Erbil.

¹⁷ Federal Research Division. Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

A Brief History

Around 3000 B.C.E.,¹⁸ Sumerian civilization became established in Mesopotamia, the rich floodplains between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Known as the “Fertile Crescent,” this land became one of the world’s central areas of agricultural production over 10,000 years ago.¹⁹ The Sumerians created a civilization characterized by its urban culture and body of highly developed religious and ethical views, architecture, and art. The cuneiform script (written on clay) evolved out of the Sumerian language and remained in use for approximately 2,000 years.²⁰

The Sumerian empire weakened and was conquered by the Akkadians, who built an empire that lasted around a century. They were followed by the Babylonians, Hittites, and Assyrians, each leaving their cultural insignia. The region became part of the Persian empire in 539 B.C.E., and of the Greek empire in the 3rd century B.C.E.

The ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur (today known as *Tall Al Muqayyar*), whose ruins lie halfway between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf, was a vibrant city in the 1st and 2nd millennium B.C.E.²¹ It was here, during the reign of the Babylonians, that Abraham, patriarch to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, first realized and preached the oneness of God.



© M.Lubinski
Ruins of Ur, Iraq

In the mid-7th century C.E.,²² Arab armies swept into Qadisiyya, south of Baghdad, and defeated a Sassanid army six times their size. The Arabs brought with them the religion of Islam, which spread throughout the region. While the first Arab-Muslim empire, the Umayyad Dynasty, emerged from Damascus, the second and much longer lasting one, the Abbasid Dynasty, had its center in Baghdad from the middle of the 8th century until 1258 C.E.²³ During this time, Baghdad developed into the world’s second largest city, surpassed in size only by Constantinople. It was also a center of culture, arts, and science. The Abbasids ruled the Middle East for half a millennium, until the Mongols arrived during the 13th century and destroyed everything in their path, including Baghdad. It was also in Iraq that the Shi'a branch of Islam was founded (in the late 7th century), a religious breakaway from mainstream Sunni Islam.

¹⁸ B.C.E. stands for “Before Current Era,” formerly identified as B.C. (“Before Christ”).

¹⁹ UNEP. United Nations Environmental Programme. WCMC. “Conflict and the Environment in Iraq.” 2003. http://www.unep-wcmc.org/latenews/Iraq_2003/biodiversity.htm

²⁰ MSN Encarta Online Encyclopedia. “Sumer.” 2007.

http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761576369/Sumer.html

²¹ MSN Encarta Online Encyclopedia. “Ur.” 2007.

http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761553113/Ur.html

²² C.E. means “Current Era,” formerly identified as A.D. (*Anno Domini*: Latin: *In the year of (Our) Lord*).

²³ Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. “Iraq.” 2007.

http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761567303_11/Iraq.html#s33

The Ottoman Empire ruled Iraq for almost four centuries, from the 16th century until 1920.²⁴ Toward the end of this time, in the mid-1800s, Britain became interested in Iraq for its value as a direct overland route to India. To build their power, the British set up treaties with Arab tribal chieftains. The British also gained right to explore the oil fields in nearby Iran, forming the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1909.

Ottoman and British forces fought in Iraq during World War I, and the British occupied most of the country in 1917. To gain the loyalty of the Arab population, the British had promised independence if the uprising against the Ottomans was successful. It was, but instead of receiving independence, Iraq became a British territory under the mandate of the League of Nations. The Iraqi Arabs rebelled against the British, who fought back by bombing the country, killing around 9,000 people.²⁵ The British also decided that ruling Iraq indirectly through a provisional government could work better than direct rule. They subsequently planned that Iraq would be a kingdom, governed by a council of Arab officials who were supervised by the British High Commissioner. Faisal became the first king and built a base of power by negotiating with the various tribal leaders, giving them judicial and tax-levying authority over their tribes. Ultimately, the British controlled the country, ruling through King Faisal. The fact that Faisal was of Saudi royal blood and was loyal ultimately to the British undercut his legitimacy as a ruler.²⁶



Courtesy of Wikimedia
King Faisal the First

Independence, which finally came to Iraq in 1932, brought neither stability nor tranquility. Sunni Arabs had become the dominating force in the army and government, and ongoing problems stemmed from the Sunni–Shi'a split and factionalism. Tribalism and the setting of arbitrary borders also tended to fragment the country.²⁷ Since its beginnings as a sovereign republic, Iraq has been chronically plagued with coups and wars.

Recent History

The most recent troubles have their genesis in the events of 1979, when Saddam Hussein took power as head of the socialist Ba'ath Party and became president of Iraq. In 1980, Hussein launched a costly eight year war with Iran, ending in a stalemate and with

²⁴ The History of Iraq. Courtney Hunt. “Chapter 5: The Ottoman Empire [p. 52]; “Chapter 6: The British Occupation [p. 61].” 2005. Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press.

²⁵ Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. “Iraq.” 2007.

http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761567303_11/Iraq.html#s33

²⁶ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Iraq.” August 2006.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

²⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Iraq.” August 2006.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

extensive loss to life and resources.²⁸ Later in the same decade, he used poison gas to wipe out whole Kurdish towns and villages as the Kurds were pressing for autonomy.

In 1990, Hussein attacked and occupied Kuwait, but was forced out by a U.S.-led international coalition. Hussein refused to cooperate with U.N. inspectors investigating a possible program of weapons of mass destruction. As a result, Iraq languished under U.N. sanctions throughout the 1990s. It was not until 2002 that Iraq finally agreed to unconditional arms inspections.²⁹

Operation Iraqi Freedom

In March 2003, the U.S. led a second coalition of nations in “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” which toppled Saddam’s dictatorial Ba’athist regime. The basis for the invasion was the belief that Iraq had supported the 2001 attacks against the U.S. and was concealing weapons of mass destruction.³⁰ The U.S. long-term goal has been to build a “strategic partnership” with the Iraqi government that will lead to a “democratic Iraq that can govern, defend, and sustain itself, and be an ally in the War on Terror.”³¹



DoD photo
Saddam Hussein on trial

Post-Saddam Iraq

Saddam Hussein was put on trial after his capture and convicted of crimes against humanity by the Iraq Special Tribunal. He was sentenced to death by hanging and was put to death in late December 2006.

In January 2005, Iraq held a national election to choose members of an interim National Assembly who were charged with drafting a permanent constitution. The draft constitution was approved in October 2005 by a slim margin of Iraqi voters. Two months later, voters elected a permanent parliament who were to finalize many of the remaining constitutional details. Intense debate followed about how to fairly distribute power among the different political sects in Iraq, culminating in approval of a permanent government led by Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki.



DoD photo
Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and U.S. soldiers

²⁸ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Iraq.” August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

²⁹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Iraq.” August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

³⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Iraq.” August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

³¹ WhiteHouse.gov/. “Initial Benchmark Assessment Report.” 12 July 2007. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/iraq/2007/FinalBenchmarkReport.pdf>

Although Maliki's Shi'a-led government has attempted political reconciliation, bringing Sunnis and Kurds into the government, progress has been uneven. Reconstruction of Iraq's infrastructure and economy has been blocked by escalation of insurgent attacks, most of them targeting the civilians of rival sects.³² In some areas of Baghdad, the Shi'a Mahdi army rules, and Sunnis have relied on American forces to protect them from Shi'a militias who attack them or drive them out. In other neighborhoods, Ba'athists and Sunni extremists have attacked Shi'as. Neighborhoods once mixed with Sunnis and Shi'as are now divided. Because of increased sectarian violence in 2006, Coalition Forces recognized the need to provide greater assistance to Iraqi forces in their efforts to take control of national security. The stated purpose of this upsurge has been to provide time for the Iraqi government to become stronger and to "address the all-important issue of reconciliation" within Iraqi society.³³ Before Iraqis can unite, they need a strong central government to trust and unite behind.

Constitutional changes are still being worked out. Key legislation has yet to be passed by the new government outlining the distribution of oil resources and revenues to the Iraqi people. The law will also address the rights of foreign investors in Iraqi oil production.

With the buildup of U.S. forces to around 160,000 coinciding with the decision of many Sunni leaders to oppose elements of the insurgency, violence is down in parts of Iraq.³⁴ This has not, however, had the desired effect of providing momentum toward political reconciliation. On 26 November 2007, an anticipated piece of legislation considered vital to reconciliation was bluntly rejected by Shi'a members of the Iraqi parliament. This bill would have allowed Sunni Ba'athists (former members of Saddam Hussein's party) to return to a role of public life in Iraq. Its adoption was one of the 18 benchmarks that measure the progress of the predominantly Shi'a government led by Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki. The bill, already revised four times, is now scheduled to undergo further changes before the deeply divided parliament will reconsider it.³⁵

Concerning the presence of US-led forces in Iraq, the Iraqi Prime Minister announced on the same day that he wants the UN mandate over these forces ended after December 2008. Under this provision, the UN mandate, which has been renewed yearly by the UN Security Council since 2003, would only be renewed one final time, ending in December



A JSC conference for Shiite and Sunni members
DoD photo

³² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

³³ White House.gov/. "Initial Benchmark Assessment Report." 12 July 2007. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/iraq/2007/FinalBenchmarkReport.pdf>

³⁴ The New York Times. Cave, Damien and Stephen Farrell. "At Street Level, Unmet Goals of Troop Buildup." 8 September 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/09/world/middleeast/09surge.html?_r=1+oref=slogin

³⁵ Iraq Updates. "Shiites reject Bill to allow return of Baathists." 26 November 2007. http://www.iraqupdates.com/p_articles.php/article/24385

2008. Prime Minister Maliki indicated that a direct pact between the U.S. and Iraq should replace the UN mandate.³⁶

Economy

Overview

A recent ranking placed Iraq as the second most unstable country in the world, judged by each country's "vulnerability to violent internal conflict and societal deterioration."³⁷ Of the 12 measures used to determine the level of instability, the area where Iraq scored best, if still well below most world countries, was on its economy. A continuing influx of oil revenues and foreign grants has kept the economy afloat, despite the ongoing violent insurgency that has caused over 2 million Iraqis to flee to neighboring countries.³⁸ The estimated 2007, median household income in Iraq is USD 286 per month.³⁹ Although median household income has reportedly increased in some areas, increases have been negated by inflation. In January 2007, according to the State Department, Iraq's inflation rate was the second highest in the world.⁴⁰ In addition, much of the money flowing in necessarily supports security costs rather than a foundational infrastructure which would move the country forward. Finally, unemployment in Iraq is high, standing somewhere between 30 and 50% for 2007.⁴¹,⁴²

Iraq has vast petroleum deposits, estimated to be 112.5 billion barrels (2006 est.) of proven reserves.⁴³ Some fields in western Iraq are untapped, leading some to speculate that there may be more reserves available; existing oil fields are located in the south and in the north along a line drawn from Mosul to Kirkuk. Although 73 fields have been discovered, only 15 of them have been developed.⁴⁴ Pre-war



DOD photo
Oil refinery

³⁶ BBC News. "Iraq seeks UN troop mandate's end." 26 November 2007.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7113969.stm

³⁷ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. *Foreign Policy*. "The Failed State Index." July/August 2007. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3865

³⁸ AFP. "UN Agencies Launch 85 mln dollar Iraqi Refugee Appeal." 18 September 2007.

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hzx2X7WSVkJxuNpVKZx-5IKL5Q>

³⁹ ABC News. Nagorski, Tom. "Iraq: Where Things Stand. Overview of Life in Iraq Four Years After Invasion." 19 March 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Story?id=2962206&page=3>

⁴⁰ ABC News. Nagorski, Tom. "Iraq: Where Things Stand. Overview of Life in Iraq Four Years After Invasion." 19 March 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Story?id=2962206&page=4>

⁴¹ Newsweek.com. Spring, Sylvia. "Blood and Money." 25 December 2006.

<http://services.newsweek.com//search.aspx?offset=0&pageSize=10&sortField=pubdatetime&sortDirection=descending&mode=summary&q=Blood+and+Money&site-search-submit.x=41&site-search-submit.y=6>

⁴² ABC News. "Iraq: Where Things Stand. Overview of Life in Iraq Four Years After Invasion." 19 March 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Story?id=2962206&page=3>

⁴³ Central Intelligence Agency. CIA World Factbook. "Iraq." 16 August 2007.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

⁴⁴ GlobalSecurity.org. "The Rebuilding of Iraq." 16 March 2004.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2004/040316-iraq-rebuilding.htm>

production for 2002 was 2.2 million barrels/day (bbl/day or bpd) compared to an estimated 2.13 million bbd/day in 2006, although current production fluctuates due to insurgent sabotage.⁴⁵ High crude oil prices have kept income for many high despite the production stoppages. Presently oil income goes to a central fund used to pay war costs and reconstruction.

Generally, Iraq depends on crude oil sales for its revenue, rather than refining, although it has a refining capacity of 700,000 bbl/day. Because of poor security and infrastructure, however, only half of that capacity is being produced. Consequently, Iraq has to import oil products. Iraq spends more than USD 200 million/month to import various refined petroleum products for its industrial and domestic use.^{46, 47} New refineries are being built, and considerable U.S. reconstruction aid (over USD 1.6 billion) has gone toward the repair and modernization of Iraq's existing oil infrastructure.⁴⁸

Economy by Sectors

The oil industry accounted for 63.9% of Iraq's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2005, down from 83.4% in 2000.⁴⁹ Most of Iraq's other industries are tied to oil as well, including chemicals and fertilizers. The only major non-hydrocarbon-based industrial product produced in Iraq is cement, a key material used in the country's construction industry.⁵⁰ Despite its importance to the Iraqi economy, oil provides less than 1% of the jobs in Iraq.⁵¹

Although agriculture has traditionally provided one-fourth to one-third of the Iraqi GDP, that percentage has declined steeply since the 1990s.⁵² Much of Iraq's most arable land lies in the northern Kurdish



© Kjirstin Bentson
Date Palm trees

⁴⁵ CIA World Factbook. "Iraq." 29 June 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

⁴⁶ DenverPost.com. Tatum, Christine. "Colo. Firm Vies for Iraq Refinery Job." 5 November 2006. http://origin.denverpost.com/business/ci_4602008

⁴⁷ GlobalSecurity.org. U.S. Department of Defense. "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq. Section 1.2: Economic Activity." June 2007. http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2007/iraq-security-stability_jun2007-01-2.htm

⁴⁸ GlobalSecurity.org. U.S. Department of Defense. "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq. Section 1.2: Economic Activity." June 2007. http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2007/iraq-security-stability_jun2007-01-2.htm

⁴⁹ alBawaba.com. "Iraq Economic & Strategic Outlook GDP & Current Account." 28 June 2007. <http://www.albawaba.com/en/countries/Iraq/214525>

⁵⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

⁵¹ The World Bank. "Rebuilding Iraq: Economic Reform and Transition [p. 32]." February 2006. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/IRFFI/Resources/IraqCEM-finalComplete.pdf>

⁵² Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Iraq: Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-22944/Iraq>

areas of the country, but low-price food subsidies and ethnic politics or policies that favor one group over others have caused agricultural production in this region to lag.⁵³ The most important agricultural crops are barley, rice, wheat, cotton, dates, and vegetables, while sheep and cattle are the main livestock.⁵⁴

The services sector constituted 26.1% of Iraq's GDP in 2004, the last year in which estimates are available.⁵⁵ A substantial percentage of service workers are employed by the government. Interestingly, one of the most prosperous sectors has been personal and institutional protection, surveillance, and other forms of security, with at least 60 companies providing those services. Iraqi tourism, nonexistent since 2003 because of lack of security in Iraq, still employs 2,500 people in 14 regional offices of the Iraqi Tourism Board.⁵⁶

Infrastructure

All communications systems were severely damaged during the 2003 war, and sabotage has continued to be a serious problem. Cellular service has developed, with service centered on three regional networks. It is estimated that over 8 million Iraqis had mobile telephones as of January 2007, compared to zero pre-war, when Iraq did not have a cellular network, only landline. Around 89% of phone subscribers had internet access as of March 2007. There were an estimated 114 radio stations on the air in Iraq as of 2007, up from zero in 2005. In 2006, 54 commercial television stations were broadcasting, compared to 10 in October 2005.^{57, 58}



DOD photo
Independent Media

Reporters for the media in Iraq (including print, radio, and TV) are experiencing the dangers of working there. According to a watchdog group called the Committee to Protect Journalists, Iraq—for the fifth year in a row—is the world's most dangerous place to be a journalist. They report that since 2003, 173 journalists and media support workers have died. They are not only targeted by insurgent groups but also by Iraqi government

⁵³ Iraq Updates Limited. Kurdish Globe. Salih, Mohammed A. "Agriculture is Ailing in Kurdistan." 9 July 2007. http://www.iraqupdates.com/p_articles.php/article/19161

⁵⁴ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

⁵⁵ CIA World Factbook. "Iraq." 29 June 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

⁵⁶ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

⁵⁷ ABC News. Nagorski, Tom. "Iraq: Where Things Stand. Overview of Life in Iraq Four Years After Invasion." 19 March 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Story?id=2962206&page=4>

⁵⁸ The Brookings Institute. "Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq." 16 July 2007. <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf>

officials. Reporters in Iraq claim that they are often bribed to report the views of politicians or insurgent groups.⁵⁹

Lack of electricity has been a particularly vexing problem for people living in Baghdad, and it has been getting worse. According to estimates, Iraqis nationwide received an average of 4–8 hours of electricity daily before the 2003 war. Baghdad residents received more, between 16 and 24 hours per day prewar. As of February 2007, Iraqis nationwide received an average of 9.3 hours of electricity daily, an increase over their prewar average. The Baghdad average, however, was dismal: the city received only 6 hours of electricity daily, varying among neighborhoods. Further, this was down from two years earlier, January 2005, when the city's residents received an average of 9 hours of electricity daily.⁶⁰

Iraq is connected to Turkey and Europe by rail with connections through Syria. As of 2006, there were 2,200 km (1,367 mi) miles of standard gauge track.⁶¹ Tracks were poorly maintained, and signals lacking. Of the country's 38,625 km (24,000 mi) of roads, 85% are paved.⁶² The condition of many of the roads is poor because of war damage and lack of maintenance.

International airports serve the country in Baghdad and Al Başrah, both of which sustained serious war damage. Domestic airports existed previously in Kirkuk, Irbil, and Mosul. The Mosul airport had only one runway and lacked basic infrastructure. All of the airports need modernizing, including the installation of security and air traffic control equipment. Airport employees also need to be trained in international flight standards and the use of modern equipment.^{63, 64}

Umm Qasr is the only deep-water port in Iraq, and it has serious silting problems that require almost constant dredging. Additionally, during the war with Iran and during the Persian Gulf War, ships were sunk in the harbor to block its use for shipping. There is also considerable dock and warehouse storage space available at Umm Qasr. Other ports are smaller and more specialized. The ports on the Shatt al Arab waterway are hampered by low water levels,



DoD photo

Umm Qasr Port

⁵⁹ The Christian Science Monitor. Dagher, Sam. "Iraqi Media Braves Assault from All Sides." 20 December 2007. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/1220/p06s01-wome.html?page=1>

⁶⁰ ABC News. Nagorski, Tom. "Iraq: Where Things Stand. Overview of Life in Iraq Four Years After Invasion." 19 March 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Story?id=2962206&page=4>

⁶¹ CIA World Factbook. "Iraq." 29 June 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

⁶² University of Military Intelligence. "Iraq Economy: Infrastructure." 2004–2007. http://www.universityofmilitaryintelligence.us/tcc/cultural/iraq/economy_infrastructure.asp

⁶³ University of Military Intelligence. "Iraq Economy: Infrastructure." 2004–2007. http://www.universityofmilitaryintelligence.us/tcc/cultural/iraq/economy_infrastructure.asp

⁶⁴ Portal Iraq. "Iraqi Infrastructure: \$10.3 Million Reconstruction Contract to Allow Mosul Airport to Host International Flights." 11 December 2004. [http://www.portaliraq.com/news/\\$10.3+million+reconstruction+contract+to+allow+Mosul+airport+to+host+international+commercial+flights_677.html](http://www.portaliraq.com/news/$10.3+million+reconstruction+contract+to+allow+Mosul+airport+to+host+international+commercial+flights_677.html)

security difficulties, silting, and obstructions in the water. River boats navigate the Tigris River from Al Başrah to Baghdad.⁶⁵

Ethnic Groups

In Iraq, individual identity tends to matter very little. For Arabs, tribal identity, ethnicity, and Islam have become the principal defining qualities in Iraq.⁶⁶ Within the tribe, group loyalty is valued highly, and responsibility circulates through the entire group rather than in any one individual.

In order to present a clear picture of ethnic groups in Iraq, it is necessary to include some of the religious and political underpinnings of tribal and ethnic identity, linked to disruptions of those identities. *Sunnis and Shi'as*

The importance of tribal affiliation has increased, rather than decreased in Iraq, for several reasons. For one, Saddam Hussein exploited the tribal structure to encourage support for the Iran-Iraq War. He secured the loyalty of tribal leaders, particularly favoring the tribal roots of Sunni Ba'ath Party leaders until the legal system became permeated by a network of Ba'athist loyalties. Tribal affiliation also increased when economic sanctions sent people to their tribes for economic support. Tied to this, the regime change in 2003 dislocated large numbers of the population, who were forced to seek support from within their clans or tribes.⁶⁷

Not least, the war has deepened the sectarian divide between Sunnis and Shi'as. A gulf between the two groups distinctly opened up, for instance, after the golden-domed al-Askari Mosque in Samarra was bombed in February 2006. The insurgents who attacked this historically important Shi'a holy site are believed to have been Sunni extremists.⁶⁸

After the overthrow of Sadaam Hussein, all Sunni Ba'athists were kicked out of the government. The Iraqi government today under Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki is primarily Shi'a. The situation has deteriorated into one in which Sunni extremist militias try to evict Shi'as from certain neighborhoods, and loyalists to the Shi'a Mahdi Army attack Sunnis. Iraqi civilians are now sometimes forced to rely on the sectarian group that holds power in their area for necessities of life such as medicine and gas. Neighborhoods that were formerly mixed, with Sunnis and Shi'as intermarrying and



© Jeff Werner
Separatist zone, blast walls, Baghdad

⁶⁵ University of Military Intelligence. "Iraq Economy: Infrastructure." 2004–2007.

http://www.universityofmilitaryintelligence.us/tcc/cultural/iraq/economy_infrastructure.asp

⁶⁶ GlobalSecurity.org. "Societal Framework." 2007.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/society.htm>

⁶⁷ GlobalSecurity.org. "Societal Framework." 2007.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/society.htm>

⁶⁸ GlobalSecurity.org. "Samara." 22 February 2006.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/samara-mosque.htm>

living together peacefully, have become separatist zones, making life extremely difficult for the Iraqi population. In some areas of Baghdad, the U.S. military has built large “blast walls” between neighborhoods. While these walls serve to protect the residents from bombs that detonate, they also divide people from each other and make traveling across the city difficult.

Kurds

The Kurds, who make up 15–20% of Iraq’s population, are non-Arab Sunni Muslims and are concentrated in the northeastern areas of the country. This area has largely escaped the sectarian and insurgent violence that has plagued other parts of Iraq in recent years. Since the end of the 1991 Gulf War, British and U.S.-enforced “no fly zones” over the Kurdish region effectively separated the Kurds from events in the rest of Iraq. The Kurds want their independence and have threatened to withhold cooperation or even secede from the government if the Shi’as retain too much power.⁶⁹ Given these parameters, the question as to how Kurds will share power in a unified post-Sadaam Iraq is far from being known.



DOD photo
Kurdish refugee camp northern, Iraq

Separatism characterized by a drive for independence runs strong within the Kurdish ethnic region of Iraq. The Kurdistan Regional Government’s push on this issue is seen in its independent oil deals with other nations. To date, contracts have been signed with oil companies in the U.S., Britain, India, Hungary, and other countries. It would be an understatement to say that Baghdad (the Nouri al Maliki government) strongly opposes these and any further such deals until a national oil law is passed.

Ethnic divisions exist in Iraq’s three Kurdish provinces not only between Kurds and Arabs, but also between Kurds and Turkmen. In Turkey, which borders northern Iraq, approximately 20% of the population is Kurdish.^{70, 71} After the Turkish government cracked down on its separatist Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK), the PKK moved resources and people to Kurdish Iraq. Some of the radical members among them have made cross-border attacks against Turkey, which retaliated by threatening to invade Kurdish Iraq. The possibility of this action, opposed by the U.S., has tended to destabilize political stability and ethnic relations in northern Iraq. If outside parties intervene, the Kurdistan Regional Government, not a unified body, is likely to splinter into divisive

⁶⁹ Power and Interest News Report (PINR). “Clashing Interests Between Iraq’s Shi’a Arabs and Sunni Kurds.” 17 November 2004.

http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=180&language_id=1

⁷⁰ Power and Interest News Report (PINR). “Intelligence Brief: The Risk of Turkish Intervention in Northern Iraq.” 17 May 2007.

http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=651&language_id=1

⁷¹ Guardian Unlimited. Tran, Mark. “Turkey Urges US to Clamp Down on Kurdish Fighters.” 5 November 2007. http://www.guardian.co.uk/The_Kurds/Story/0,,2205645,00.html

factions.^{72, 73} To complicate matters, in mid-December of 2007, Turkey bombed Kurdish militants in northern Iraq and sent around 300 troops over the border, in an attempt to weaken the PKK separatist infrastructure. The Iraqi foreign ministry protested the incursions, saying the Iraqi government had neither been informed nor consulted.⁷⁴

Marsh Arabs (Ma'dan)

In southern Iraq, an original population of perhaps 500,000 *Ma'dan*, or Marsh Arabs, has been greatly reduced in number by severe damage to their environment. For 5,000 years, dating back to Sumerian times, the Marsh Arabs have lived on islands that were either natural or man-made in southern Iraq. They subsisted on fishing and raising water buffalo, lived in reed houses, and traveled in reed boats. Their long-standing way of life first came under pressure from extensive damming of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which reduced the flow of water to the marshes where the *Ma'dan* lived.⁷⁵ The worst damage, however, was caused when the Saddam Hussein regime retaliated against them for their opposition during the Gulf War and drained the marshes. As a result, the area rapidly turned into dry salt flats. Many of the Marsh Arabs have either gone deeper into the remaining marshes or have fled into Iran.



© James Gordon
Marsh region

Turkmen and Other Ethnic Groups

Turkmen account for 3 to 5% of the population and also live in the northeast. Other minority ethnic groups located within northeastern Iraq include the Yazidi, Assyrians, and Armenians.⁷⁶

⁷² Power and Interest News Report (PINR). “Intelligence Brief: The Risk of Turkish Intervention in Northern Iraq.” 17 May 2007.

http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=651&language_id=1

⁷³ Guardian Unlimited. Tran, Mark. “Turkey Urges US to Clamp Down on Kurdish Fighters.” 5 November 2007. http://www.guardian.co.uk/The_Kurds/Story/0,,2205645,00.html

⁷⁴ Voice of America.com. Bowman, Michael. “US Reacts Cautiously to Turkish Air Strikes in Iraq.” 17 December 2007. <http://voanews.com/english/2007-12-17-voa62.cfm>

⁷⁵ The Guardian. Radford, Tim. “Marsh Arab Civilisation Disappearing as Iraqi Wetlands are Drained.” 19 May 2001. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,3604,492986,00.html>

⁷⁶ CIA World Factbook. “Iraq.” 15 November 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

Religion

Introduction

Out of Iraq's estimated 27,499,638 people,⁷⁷ only about 3% of the populace is Christian or belongs to other non-Muslim religions. Despite the country's 97% Muslim majority, sectarian dissent is extensive. It is fueled greatly by ethnicity and Sunni–Shi'a divisions, linked to a history of Sunni Baathist-led political oppression during the Saddam Hussein era. This disagreement has been inflamed by the struggle over power-sharing in post-Saddam Iraq.



Courtesy of Wikimedia
St. Vartan Armenian Orthodox Church, Avzrog, Iraq

The Shi'a, mostly Arabs, also include some Kurds and Turkmen, represent between 60 and 65% of Iraq's Muslim population. Sunnis number between 32 and 37%.⁷⁸ Of the total Sunnis, the population is further divided into Sunni Kurds (18–20%), Sunni Arabs (12–16%), and Sunni Turkmen.⁷⁹

History of Islam

The origins of Islam date to the 6th century C.E., when Muhammad was born in Mecca, in the country now known as Saudi Arabia. Muhammad claimed that while he was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the *Quran* to him. Muslims believe Muhammad was the messenger of Allah (God).

Muhammad died without naming a successor. This proved to be a very important factor in the separation between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in the Islamic world.

In a traditional Arab tribe at that time, the surviving male leaders of the tribe would have met in council and selected a knowledgeable member of their own to lead. Competent leadership was more important than a blood lineage. After Muhammad died, four of his close companions, called the "rightfully-guided Caliphs," or "representatives," successively ruled the new Islamic community. The first caliph was Muhammad's friend, Abu Bakr, followed by Umar and Uthman. Their followers became the Sunni Muslims.



courtesy of Wikimedia
Saqifah bowing to Abu Bakr

⁷⁷ This population figure is a July 2007 estimate taken from: CIA World Factbook. Iraq. People. 15 November 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

⁷⁸ CIA World Factbook. Iraq. People. 15 November 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

⁷⁹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. "Iraq: International Religious Freedom Report 2006." 15 September 2006. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71422.htm>

The fourth caliph was Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali ibn Abu Talib. Appointing a member of the Prophet's family as Caliph raised the question of genealogical succession.⁸⁰ Followers of Ali, the fourth Caliph, felt that he should have been the first Caliph, followed by his first son Hassan and his second son Husayn and so on. These followers became the *Shia-t-Ali*, meaning "Party of Ali," and they are the ancestors of the Shi'a of today. Ali's first son, Hassan, turned down a claim to rule, but Husayn, Ali's second son, led a Shi'a revolt against Sunni Yazid I, ruling Iraq from Damascus. At the Battle of Karbala, 10 October 680 C.E., Yazid's vastly superior force cut down Husayn's force of 200 followers. Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala became a model for modern Shi'as, who see themselves as oppressed fighters against privilege and power. Successive Shi'a leaders like Ali ibn Husayn and Muhammad al-Baqir became known as Great Imams to the Shi'a world.

Sunnis & Shi'as

Over the years, Sunni Islam emerged as the somewhat "conservative" branch of Islam. Sunnis did not require their leaders to have any family relation to Muhammad or his descendants. Sunni Islam also emerged as the majority branch of Islam and has retained that status, currently representing 80% of the worldwide Muslim community. In countries where it has been the dominant religion, Sunni Islam has had a decentralized leadership and has been a large part of the legal, political, and economic systems.

It is important to Muslims to conduct their daily life according to correct religious practices. To measure the correctness of the practices, Muslims adhere to religious law, or *Shari'a*. Not set forth in any one book, *Shari'a* is based in literature and is described as the opinion shared by the community. *Shari'a* uses first the words of the Quran, then the *sunna* or practices of the prophet. Last, it incorporates the *hadith*, consisting of stories about the prophet Muhammad, collected by his followers. These general points of religion are agreed upon by Muslims. However, when local judgments, practical norms, and societal consensus later influence this basic structure of religious law, disagreements occur.⁸¹



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Page 293, of the Quran

Historically, among Iraqi Sunnis, ethnic identity has been a more potent factor than theological belief in influencing social unity or discord. Sunnis are closely tied to Arab culture. Many Iraqi Sunnis like to highlight an Islamic heritage that links them to the Golden Age of Islamic civilization. This was during the Abbasid caliphate between the 8th and 13th centuries, centered in Baghdad.

⁸⁰ Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn. *Islamic Societies in Practice*. 2nd Ed. 2004. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.

⁸¹ University of Bergen. Vikør, Knut S. "The Shari'a and the Nation State." August 1998. <http://www.hf.uib.no/smi/pao/vikor.html>

Iraqi Kurds, mostly Sunni, adopted Sunni Islam later than did the Arab world and approach it somewhat differently. Kurdish leaders have learned to leverage the authority that Islam allows them, using it to their advantage by wielding religious authority across divisions of tribal loyalty. At the same time, they have been less accepting of the more conservative forms of Islam. This is partly true in modern times because of their direct experience. They saw Saddam Hussein repeatedly manipulating religious symbolism and values in his campaigns of persecution against the Kurds. This undermined the link between strict Sunni Islam and the Kurdish identity in the minds of many Kurds. In addition to their differences with mainstream Iraqi Sunni Islam, not all Kurds are Sunni. Some belong to the Shi'a branch of Islam.

While Sunni Islam was developing as the orthodox branch of the faith, Shi'a Islam was emerging as a separate and distinct sect within the Islamic world. Shi'a Muslims have always been characterized by their devotion to Muhammad's bloodline, their rejection of the first three caliphs that preceded Ali, and their feeling that the leadership of the Islamic movement had been stolen. Shi'ism developed as a persecuted minority sect. The Shi'a leaders stayed far away from the seat of the government. As they did so, Shi'a teachings emphasized the spiritual and supernatural dimensions of Islam, while elevating the spiritual authority of its founders, heroes, and leaders. This caused Shi'a Islam to develop a highly spiritualized and centralized hierarchy of authority.

Sunni Muslims believe that a Caliph is a political leader and an Imam is simply a person selected to lead prayers in the mosque. He may be chosen on the basis of his training, his education, or the respect shown for him in the community.⁸² Conversely, Shi'a Islam stresses that the Imam, or spiritual leader of the faith, is from the bloodline of Muhammad, thus giving special prominence to Ali and Husayn. It venerates both men as brilliant leaders and martyrs, dedicated to defending Islam's purity at a time when political corruption was threatening the integrity of the faith as they saw it.

Shi'a Islam identified holy sites and built shrines at the tombs of celebrated Shi'a heroes. It revered the teachings and pronouncements of key leaders as nearly infallible. Over the years, there were many variations of Shi'ism, but today almost all Shi'a are Twelvers (*ithna 'ashariyah*). They believe in twelve consecutive Imams and the occultation of the twelfth. In other words, the twelfth disappeared from view, but will someday reappear.

Today, Shi'a Islam within Iraq has a strong Persian influence and affiliation. This is due in part to the proximity of Iraq to Iran. Shi'a Muslims have long moved back and forth between Iraq and Iran, where Shi'a Islam historically prospered and emerged as the main



DoD photo
Iraqi children by a shrine

82 Lexicorient.com. Encyclopedia of the Orient. "Imam." 2007. <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/imam.htm>

voice of authority in the 20th century. At the beginning of the 21st century, Shi'a Islam is beginning to demonstrate that it can emerge from behind the shadow of Sunni Islam in other countries as well.

In Iraq, Shi'a Islam has long had a numeric majority, but has been subdued by the strong authority of minority leaders. It is strengthened, however, by retaining a connection to the Shi'a population in neighboring countries. Shi'a leaders in Iraq not only have a sectarian affiliation with their Iranian neighbors, they also have recent examples of a Shi'a's rise to political power (current Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki). Moreover, Iran's religious government has shown signs that it is ready to contribute to the success of the political ambitions of Iraq's Shi'a leaders.

Sufism

As Sunni Islam developed politically and legally, it addressed external concerns like community, military power, governance, and law. The leaders of Islam came from scholars and jurists, politicians, and military commanders. Sunni Islam as it evolved became more legalistic, with little emphasis on individual relationships with God. Sufi Muslims, the mystics of Islam, countered that trend by seeking direct communion with God.

Their name, Sufi, is said to have come from various possible sources. The Arabic word, *suf*, meaning 'wool' (for the woolen cloaks they wore), or *falsuf*, the word for philosopher are two possibilities. Sufis also used letters to communicate secret meanings, so the word's literal meaning is not known.

The Sufi looked for a closer personal relationship with God through spiritual, often mystical, discipline. Sufism is practiced by several groups who emphasize different dimensions and rituals of the religion. Meditation, singing and dancing, and reciting prayers are some common ways Sufis express their beliefs.⁸³



© burcu/Flickr.com

During the 8th and 9th centuries, Baghdad became a center for Islam's Sufi mystics. Within this vibrant city, Sufism offered an attractive alternative to the academic rigors of the Sunni Muslim scholars. It also offered a break from the divisive, worldly authority of Islamic politicians.

Sufi Islam continues in Iraq despite occasional periods of persecution. It has remained particularly popular among Sunni Kurds in northern Iraq. A Sufi shrine in Baghdad attracts pilgrims from around the world. Although Sufi Islam is widely accepted in Iraq, conservative Sunni theologians who dislike its mystical dimensions often label Sufism as heretical.

83 GlobalSecurity.org. "Islam: Sufi Islam." 26 April 2005.
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-sufi.htm>

The Pillars of Islam

One becomes a Muslim by reciting the *shahadah*, the Islamic testament of faith, which is the first of five pillars of Islam. Newcomers to an Islamic country should be aware that the *shahadah* should never be repeated aloud by non-Muslims in the presence of strict Muslims, as this means a conversion to the Islamic faith. Once a Muslim, one is forbidden to leave Islam. The following is the *shahadah*:

ash-hadu anna la ilaha illa allah, muhammad rasoul allah.

I testify that there is no god but God (Allah), Muhammad is the messenger of God.

The other four pillars of Islam are prayer five times daily, called *salat*; a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one's lifetime, called *hajj*; concern for and giving of alms to the poor, called *zakat*; and the purification of one's body by fasting during Ramadan, called *sawm*.⁸⁴ Note that it is incorrect and insulting to call someone who has not made the pilgrimage a *hajji*. Many Shi'a maintain that visits to Ali's burial site at An Najaf south of Baghdad and Husayn's shrine at Karbala carry the same weight as a pilgrimage to Mecca.



© BohPhoto/Flickr.com
A Muslim woman praying

There are some minor outward differences between Sunni and Shi'a. The practices of prayer differ only slightly in form. When Sunnis pray, they begin by standing up straight and placing their two hands on their abdomen. When Shi'as pray, they begin by standing up straight and keeping their two arms and hands straight down against their sides.

Other Tenets of Islam

In addition to the five pillars, other elements within Islam serve as unifying forces for Muslims, distinguishing their religion from others. For instance, Muslims are socially prohibited from consuming pork and alcohol. Also, the concept of *jihad*, or striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. It applies mainly to an inner striving to elevate the principled, higher, more civilized and moral elements of one's own being. *Jihad* is more widely known in the West as characteristic of the outward struggle Muslims may wage to preserve their faith in the society that surrounds them.⁸⁵

Converting Others

Renouncing Islam to join a different faith can lead to denunciation by the community as a heretic, for which one may be sentenced to death. Muslims treat heresy seriously. Do not

⁸⁴ Diversiton. "Traditions/Beliefs." No date. <http://www.diversiton.com/religion/main/islam/traditions-beliefs.asp>

⁸⁵ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. *Pakistan, A Country Study* [p. 127]. Baxter, Craig. April 1994.

try to convert a Muslim to another faith. It is best to avoid the subject of religion altogether. However, some Iraqis will be curious and will ask about your religion. It is best to answer politely and humbly. Neither atheism nor agnosticism is well accepted in the Muslim world.

Non-Islamic Religions

Christianity

The Christian community in Iraq predates Islam in the region. Iraqi Christianity is perhaps more diverse than Christianity anywhere else in the world. Iraqi Christians represent all five of Christianity's five major divisions: Assyrian, Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant.

The first split among Christians occurred in 431 C.E. when the Assyrian church split from the rest of Christianity. In Iraq, this division of Christianity continues as the Church of the East, and members of the church are called Nestorian Christians. They remain distinct from all other Christian churches and are led by their own Patriarch.

The second split occurred in 451 C.E. when the Oriental Orthodox churches split from the rest of the church over the wording of a theological disagreement.⁸⁶ Iraq is the home of a few Oriental Orthodox congregations that belong to the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate.

The third split was in 1054 C.E. when the Roman Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople mutually excommunicated each other. This breach resulted in a western Roman Catholic Church and an Eastern Orthodox Church. Similar to the Oriental Orthodox Churches, Patriarchs with authority and influence also lead the Eastern Orthodox churches.

The fourth and final major split was the combination of multiple divisions between 1520 and 1550 known as the Protestant Reformation. Today many Iraqis belong to a variety of western Protestant denominations. Others are Roman Catholic Christians.

Baathism

Baathism, or Pan-Arabism, though not a religion, became an important political philosophy with religious overtones. It started as part of a nationalist revolution in Saudi Arabia against the Ottoman Turks, with a vision of a



© James Gordon
Assyrian christian church



© Jimmy Palma Gil
Ruins, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

⁸⁶ This split occurred following the Council of Chalcedon.

super-Arab State from Persia to North Africa. Such a state would exclude Iran and its Shi'a population as non-Arabs. The Baath party was formed in 1943 to promote Pan-Arabism. It became the state party under Saddam Hussein in Iraq, where Baathists belonged to the Sunni branch of Islam. The Baath party also became the state party under a different mantle in Syria, unaffiliated with the party in Iraq.⁸⁷

Wahhabi

In the 1700s, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab, a tribal cleric in the Nejd Province of modern-day Saudi Arabia, ruled that Islamic doctrine after 950 C.E. was in need of reform. Unhappy with what he saw as extravagant and distracting worship, he preached a return to the earlier days of Islam to escape the wickedness of modernity. His primary intent was to purify Sunni Islam. His agitations for reform led to a series of conflicts within Islam that resulted in the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the early 1900s.

The Hussein regime banned the practice of Wahhabism, going so far as mandating the death penalty for its proven active members. Although this prohibition remains in effect, the new Iraqi constitutional provisions for religious freedom may replace or overrule it. The new government since 2003 has advocated religious tolerance and has not persecuted particular religious groups. However, members of Wahhabism still continue to experience “long-standing discriminatory practices” by some government agencies.⁸⁸

Role of Religion in the Government

The Iraqi Constitution is still very young. As adopted in 2005, it specifies that Islamic law is a source of civil law, and no law can be enacted that contradicts Islam.

Questions remain as to how this will play out in practice, since the Iraqi Constitution provides for religious freedom. The government of Iraq is in transition, and many of the current tensions occurring relate to the question of the role of religion in government. At this point, challenges exist to reconcile the political requirements of an Islamic state on the one hand, and a relatively broad policy of religious freedom on the other. The Iraqi Constitution gives a glimpse into this state of governmental and religious transition. According to a September 2005 State Department report examining the Constitution and the state of religious freedoms in Iraq:



DOD photo
Court House building, Dohuk, Iraq

While “the constitution generally provided for full religious freedom, it was heavily focused on the nation’s Islamic identity [and] recognizes

⁸⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Ba’th Party.” 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9013742/Bath-Party>

⁸⁸ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. “Iraq: International Religious Freedom Report 2006.” 15 September 2006. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71422.htm>

Islam as the country's official religion, mandates that Islam be considered a source of legislation and that no law be enacted which contradicts the faith's universally agreed tenets." The report notes further that certain articles within the Constitution state "...that citizens are equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, origin, color, religion, sect, belief, opinion, or economic or social status. Article 41 provides that citizens are free in their commitments to their personal status according to their religious groups, sects, beliefs, or choices."⁸⁹

The current government does not restrict the formation of political parties based on a particular faith, religious beliefs, or interpretations of religious doctrine. Although political coalitions have been based on religion and ethnicity, neither religion nor ethnicity is required for any position in government. For example, the majority Shi'a coalition also includes religious and ethnic minorities, such as Sunnis, Yazidi, Kurds, Turkmen, Shabak, secular Shi'a, and political independents. Shi'a Islamist parties, such as the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC) and *Da'wa*,⁹⁰ are dominant political forces. The Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party is another example of a primarily religious political party. Sunni Arabs have also held positions in the cabinet, including senior positions such as minister of defense, vice president, and deputy prime minister. Non-Muslim minorities seem to have greater difficulty finding representation in this current system.



DoD photo
Abdul Qadir Mohammed Jasim

While the Iraqi government is less involved in religious affairs than the governments of other Middle Eastern countries, it does track religious affiliation. It also imposes some religious restrictions on its residents. Government employees, however, are not required to take any religious oaths as a condition for employment. They may even display elements of their religion in the government workplace, regardless of religious affiliation. National identity cards state the religious affiliation of their holders, but passports do not.⁹¹

Another example of the government's control of religion is the requirement for all religious groups to register with the government. Foreign religious missionaries must

⁸⁹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. "Iraq: International Religious Freedom Report 2006." 15 September 2006. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71422.htm>

⁹⁰ The Da'wa is an Islamic Opposition Group based in Tehran that supports efforts to establish an Islamic state in Iraq. Iraqi new. "Islamic Dawa Party (IDP)." No date. http://www.iraqinews.com/party_islamic_daawa_party.shtml

⁹¹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. "Iraq: International Religious Freedom Report 2006." 15 September 2006. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71422.htm>

obtain permits with the government. To qualify for a permit, the religious group sponsoring the missionary must have at least 500 followers within Iraq.⁹²

The government permits religious instruction in public schools, and in most of the country students study Islam for three hours daily. This is a requirement for graduation everywhere in Iraq, except in the north. Non-Muslim students are not required to participate in Islamic studies. The curriculum provides alternative religious studies for non-Muslims.⁹³

Some local Iraqi governments have placed religious restrictions on females. The Education Director in Al Başrah mandated that all females in the schools must wear a covering over their heads. In Mosul, it is required that all female university students (including non-Muslims) wear the *hijab*, or headscarf.⁹⁴

Officially, the Iraqi government maintains a policy of protecting individuals and religious groups and their right to gather and worship freely. In practice, however, the ongoing insurgency impedes the ability of many citizens to worship freely. Conservative and extremist Islamic elements within the population often put pressure on groups to conform to certain radical interpretations of Islam. The government, focusing its resources on overwhelming problems with the insurgency, lacks the ability to address religious abuses. Also, Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are seldom able to address violations to religious freedom because they are not yet well organized or functioning at full capability.⁹⁵



© James Gordon
Iraqi schoolgirls

Religious Laws

Under the Ba'athists, civil courts did not enforce *Shari'a*. Instead, they furthered tribal and personal interests. Saddam Hussein created divisions and subdivisions in the courts, with courts reporting only to him, thus creating a system open to personal corruption where decisions could be concealed.⁹⁶ The current constitution has established a court system that should provide the foundation for an independent judiciary. It establishes a

⁹² Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. "Iraq: International Religious Freedom Report 2006." 15 September 2006. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71422.htm>

⁹³ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. "Iraq: International Religious Freedom Report 2006." 15 September 2006. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71422.htm>

⁹⁴ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. "Iraq: International Religious Freedom Report 2006." 15 September 2006. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71422.htm>

⁹⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. "Iraq: International Religious Freedom Report 2006." 15 September 2006. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71422.htm>

⁹⁶ Law.com. The National Law Journal. Coyle, Marcia. "Toward an Iraqi Legal System." 25 April 2003. <http://www.law.com/jsp/article.jsp?id=1050369446809>

supreme court, a court of appeals, and a central criminal court. A panel headed by one of the Supreme Court Justices will appoint new judges.⁹⁷

The provisions stated within Iraqi law can sometimes be at odds. For instance, according to Islamic law, it is a criminal offense punishable by death if one converts from Islam to a different religion. According to civil law, however, no penalty exists for conversion to a different religion. Further, Article 1 of Penal Code No. 111, established in 1969, allows only civil law to impose criminal penalties. Thus, even though Islam is Iraq's official religion and its main tenets are inviolable as stated in the Constitution, criminal or civil law seems to occupy a position of independence from religious law.⁹⁸

Influence of Religion on Daily Life

In Islam, prayer is required five times daily—before dawn, mid-morning, mid-afternoon, at sundown, and after sundown. One can pray at a mosque, at home, or in a private place in an office. Before prayer, there is a ritual cleansing of the face, hands, feet, and head, called *wudu*, which is performed as a fixed ritual. Once *wudu* has been performed, no interruptions are permitted until after prayers are completed. If there is an interruption, the one praying must begin the entire process again, including *wudu*.

In the insurgency that currently exists in Iraq, religion obviously plays a large and divisive role in daily life in many areas of the country. Whether one is Sunni or Shi'a can make the difference between life or death under certain circumstances. In Baghdad, neighborhoods that were once mixed with Sunnis and Shi'as are disappearing. Many people have been purged, or driven out of neighborhoods by sectarian militias simply because they are on the wrong side of the divide at a given moment. Where the Shi'a Mahdi Army rules, Sunnis have been displaced or killed. Shi'a families who stay depend on the Mahdi Army and its network to procure living necessities. Lacking a strong, central government, Iraqi civilians easily fall prey to neighborhood vigilantes because of their religious affiliation.⁹⁹



© Hazy Jenius/Flickr.com

Women worshiping in a Mosque

Influence of Religion on Gender

Women often worship in private at home so that they may care for their children. In a mosque, women worship separately, either on a balcony, in a special room, or in an area set aside for them that is blocked by a pierced wall. Generally, women are not required to

⁹⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

⁹⁸ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. "Iraq: International Religious Freedom Report 2006." 15 September 2006. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71422.htm>

⁹⁹ The New York Times. "At Street Level, Unmet Goals of Troop Buildup." 8 September 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/09/world/middleeast/09surge.html?_r=2&oref=slogin

go to a mosque on Friday, but may stay at home to pray. They are also excused from prayers during menstruation.

Buildings of Worship

Iraq has countless mosques, a few prominent Shi'a shrines, and a number of churches. The mosques generally fall into one of two categories: the smaller *masjid*, and the larger *jami*. A *jami* is usually identifiable by the presence of a prominent minaret tower. Shi'a and Sunni Muslims have both kinds of mosques, but only Shi'a Muslims have shrines. Over the centuries, the Shi'a have built their shrines to mark the location of historical Islamic events and to identify the tombs of prominent Shi'a personalities. Iraq's many Christian churches vary in shape and size. The physical features of the churches for each branch of Christianity are often distinct.

Exchange 1: At a Mosque

Soldier:	Would you permit me to enter the mosque?	tismaH-li afout bil-masjid?
Sheikh:	No. It is only for Muslims.	la. bas lil-muslimeen.

Mosques

Mosques have an important function. They provide Muslims a place where they can perform their daily individual prayers, as well as the weekly corporate noon prayers each Friday. Mosques can also function as religious community centers, youth centers, meeting halls, and training facilities. In addition to a main prayer hall called a *musalla*, some mosques have courtyards, classrooms, offices, and special washrooms for the ritual cleansing before prayer.



© James Gordon
Mosque, Baghdad, Iraq

The *musalla* is always oriented toward Mecca. The back wall of the *musalla* hall is called the *qibla*. Centered on this wall is a small niche called a *miHrab* that worshippers face when they pray. Off to one side of the *miHrab* there is usually a pulpit called a *minbar* for the prayer leader to use during the service. The *musalla* usually has either a balcony or an adjoining prayer room where women pray, segregated from the men.

Mosque Etiquette

Dress codes for a visit to a mosque, or anywhere off base, require modesty and dignity. As a rule of thumb, the more rural the region, the more one should be covered. If you are

a female, you must at the very least cover your head with a scarf and wear a long-sleeved shirt or blouse. While it is not necessary to cover your head if you're a male, it is a good idea to wear a long-sleeved shirt.

Once you are inside the mosque, there are certain things you must not touch. Do not touch any books. Do not touch the walls, especially the western corner, where people direct their prayers. Some mosques have a shrine in the center or in one corner. Do not touch it. Do not speak unless you are spoken to, and even then, speak in a whisper. Do not interrupt or walk in front of anyone who is praying. This invalidates his prayer and will upset him. These rules apply to prayer inside or outside the mosque. If you see a man handling what looks like rosary beads, this does not signify praying. Many Iraqi men of all religions enjoy carrying these beads.

Exchange 2: Into the Mosque

Soldier:	Would you permit me to enter the mosque?	tismaH-li afout bil-masjid?
Sheikh:	Yes, but you must remove your shoes.	eh, bas lazem tinza' Hida-ak.
Soldier	Thank you	shukran.

In a Shi'a mosque, you will see large banners printed on a black or green background. These banners may have personal messages of mourning or lamentations for a recently departed person. Do not touch or remove these banners. You will also find flags in a Shi'a mosque. These flags will probably be green, perhaps with some kind of Arabic slogan. Leave these alone as well.

As you enter one of the major Shi'a mosques, a man may offer you a drink of water from a cup from which many others have already drunk. On the one hand, you do not want to risk serious illness by putting your lips on this cup; on the other hand, you do not want to insult the man and this tradition of kindness. So you should accept the cup of water without drinking it, say "*shukran*" (thank you), and return the cup to the man. This shows respect.



© James Gordon
Rural mosque near Dohuk, Iraq

Exchange 3: Remember Husayn

Water server:	Drink water and remember Husayn.	ishrab my wuDh-kur il-Husayn.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran.

Shrines

A Shi'a shrine can be as simple as a small stone marker. Alternately, it can be as elaborate as the golden-domed al-Askariya Shrine in Samarra. This historic structure contains the tombs of the 10th and 11th Shi'a Imams and marks the location where the 12th Imam was last seen before he disappeared. (Unfortunately, much of the al-Askariya Shrine was destroyed during two bombing incidents in 2006 and 2007. UNESCO, the UN cultural organization, has pledged to help the Iraqi government rebuild the shrine once “security conditions are guaranteed.”¹⁰⁰) Since Shi'a Islam traces its beginnings to the time of Ali when the seat of Islamic leadership was centered in Iraq, many of Shi'as’ holiest cities are located here. In addition to Samarra, the Iraqi cities of An Najaf and Karbala are also important Shi'a holy sites. An Najaf, located 190 km (120 mi) south of Baghdad, is the purported site of Imam Ali's tomb, and Karbala, 80 km (50 mi) south of Baghdad, is the site of Imam Husayn's tomb.



People visiting the Imam Hussein Shrine, Karbala
© James Gordon

Shi'a Muslims make pilgrimages from all over the world to visit these sites, and historically such pilgrimages have been indicators of sectarian dissension within Islam. Whereas Shi'as consider the sites to be holy places that should be known and celebrated, Sunnis consider such treatment of historic markers to border on idolatry. Throughout history, Shi'a shrines have been vulnerable to Sunni attack. Although this points to the religious division, such attacks are at the same time usually politically motivated. Attacks on religious shrines have not typically been prompted by feuding Islamic theologians. Instead, they are usually triggered by the political agendas of those who want to exploit a rift between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims for their own political gain. One example is the regime of Saddam Hussein, which used Shi'a–Sunni divisions to manipulate and control the population. Another example is the actions of insurgency forces. Since 2003, they have continued to use sectarian-exploitation strategies to accomplish their political and military objectives.

¹⁰⁰ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. “UNESCO to Help Rebuild Iraqi Shi'ite Shrine.” 26 June 2007. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/06/2D5A5599-FFBE-4ED2-A032-16C1232FCB5D.html>

Churches

Church buildings in Iraq vary in size and architecture depending on when they were built and which branch of Christianity built them. Roman Catholic and Orthodox church buildings tend to be the most ornate and complex.

Perhaps more than the other Christian branches, the interiors of Eastern Rite churches reflect the distinctive features of their theology. In most cases, the wall behind the altar of these churches faces east. The ceiling of the *nave*, the portion of the church that extends from the entry to the altar, is usually domed and features a large icon of Jesus called a *Pantokratoros*. There is often a circular chandelier, the *horos*, hanging from the dome and containing the images of the saints. A screen with three doors separates the altar and sanctuary area from the nave. The center door, called the Beautiful Gate, is the largest of the three doors. The two side doors, each called the Deacons' Door, are smaller.

Protestant churches in Iraq can either be large and ornate in appearance, or small and inconspicuous. In some cases, Protestant churches meet in functional multi-purpose buildings that don't always resemble churches.¹⁰¹



© James Gordon
Iranian Pilgrim, Karbala

Iranians in Iraq

The Shi'a holy cities of An Najaf, Karbala, Kufah, and Al Kazhimiyah receive many pilgrims from Iran. These people speak Farsi, not Arabic. They may be dressed differently than Iraqi Arabs.

Religious Events

Because the Islamic calendar is based on phases of the moon, and the Western (Gregorian) calendar is based on solar cycles, the dates of Islamic holidays shift yearly. The Quran mentions only two celebrations: *Eid-al-Fitr*, or the festival on the last night of *Ramadan*, *Eid-al-Adha*, the feast at the end of the pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca. Both are celebrated all over the Muslim world, often as public holidays. Some devout Muslims will not allow any celebrations other than these two, as they are the only holidays specifically mentioned in the Quran. Observing other celebrations would constitute innovation, and innovation would indicate that the Quran was not perfect and complete in the form in which it was given to Muhammad.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Adventist News Network. "Iraq: Eighth Explosion Damages Baghdad Church." 23 March 2007 <http://news.adventist.org/data/2007/02/1173792910/index.html>

¹⁰² BBC. Religion and Ethics. "Islam: Muslim Holy Days." <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/holydays/holydays.shtml>

Ramadan

One of the five pillars of Islam, purifying the body by fasting, *sawm*, occurs during *Ramadan*. This is a 30-day period of fasting from sunup until sundown, breaking each day's fast with a large and festive family meal, called *iftar* in the evening. Not everyone fasts. Children, the elderly, and the infirm are exempt. During *Ramadan*, Muslims can be more sensitive and irritable than at other times simply because of the exhausting nature of such a long fast. During daylight hours, they may not eat, drink, smoke, or engage in sexual activities. Nothing may be taken by mouth. Non-Muslims should avoid eating and drinking in public during fasting hours of the day, as such activities are seen as disrespectful and rude. They should be performed privately or in one of the few restaurants that would possibly be open for business (usually in the major hotels and cities).

The end of *Ramadan* is celebrated with a huge feast called *Eid-al-Fitr*. *Eid* means “festival,” and the feast is joyously shared among family members and friends. The last ten days of *Ramadan* commemorate Muhammad's first revelation from the Archangel Gabriel.¹⁰³ Once the fast is broken (normally following sunset), life goes back to normal and a person is free to eat and drink publicly.

Ashura

There is a Shi'a holiday called *Ashura* that continues for several days during which many people mourn the martyrdom of Husayn, often with great passion. You might see some of them actually hitting themselves with chains and shedding their own blood. Do not laugh or show contempt. Just watch respectfully. Avoid the area unless you need to be there.



© Shabbir Siraj

Mourners hitting themselves

Exchange 4: Ashura

Soldier:	What is this procession all about?	shinu hal-mawkeb?
Iraqi Shiite:	Today is Ashura, the day of Imam Husayn's martyrdom.	el-yom ashura maqtel al-ImamHusayn.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran.

¹⁰³ Diversiton. “Islam: Holy Days, Festivals and Rituals.” <http://www.diversiton.com/religion/main/islam/holydays-festivals-rituals.asp>

Traditions

Greeting and Interacting

In the interest of good communication, it is a general rule of thumb that greeting people courteously is the best route to receiving a response in kind. In Iraq it is respectful and customary to greet people with the words *al-salamu 'alaykum*, which means “Peace be upon you.” The proper answer to this greeting is *wa 'alaykum as-salam*, meaning “And upon you be peace.” When you greet a man, shake hands (always use the right hand), then touch your right hand to your heart. It indicates that the handshake is from the heart and not a test of strength. Remember to remove any gloves before shaking hands.

Interaction between opposite sexes invokes strong cultural prohibitions. Greeting an Iraqi woman should be restricted to a head nod accompanied by the phrase *al-salamu 'alaykum*. Though a handshake between opposite genders is acceptable in some situations, it is a good policy to adhere to the head nod and then to follow the female’s lead. If she offers to shake hands, lightly grasp only her fingertips. Kissing on both cheeks, regardless of sex, is an informal tradition reserved for close friends or relatives. Visitors to the culture should neither assume this level of closeness nor informality.

It is necessary to address people in Iraq in a formal way if no prior introductions have taken place. To communicate respect, add *ostaath* (professor, teacher, or sir) in front of a male’s first name or the word *ostaatha* in front of the female’s first name. In rural areas and in the Iraqi countryside, address the males with the word *akhee* (my brother) and females with the word *uKhtee* (my sister). Using only a person’s last name to address him or her is discouraged because it is disrespectful and therefore inhibits communication.

In American culture, we appreciate eye contact, as we believe it expresses sincerity. In Iraq, the tradition is different, and breaking eye contact does not imply rudeness, ill will, or concealment. It is simply a cultural difference. The same goes for holding hands. You will also see Iraqi men hug or kiss one another in the air near the cheek. You will see Iraqi men walking down the street hand-in-hand. This shows friendship or kinship, not homosexuality. You will see Iraqi women exchanging these gestures of affection with one another. Again, these gestures show friendship or kinship only. To promote good will and communication, cultural judgments should be withheld while visiting another culture in the same manner that people should be respected in one’s own culture.



Brig. Gen. Allen greets Governor Ma'moon al-Alwani

Hospitality

In America, we would simply offer a plate of food and allow our guest to serve himself with no restrictions. Traditions of hospitality and acceptable manners are different in Iraq. An Iraqi might offer you a piece of the food, using his right hand. Accept it with your right hand. In fact, whenever it comes to some sort of interaction with the use of the

hands, use your right hand; the left hand is customarily considered unclean. Among most Arabs, the left hand is used only for hygiene after using the toilet.¹⁰⁴ This is true in both urban and rural areas.

Also, do not cross your legs or stretch your legs out when sitting around a low table or otherwise on the ground. Showing the soles of your feet to another is considered a terrible insult, so feet should be kept on the ground at all times.

If your hosts serve you tea or coffee, drink it as it is. To reject it indicates rejection of the host, a mark of offensive behavior. The drink is likely to be rather sweet, perhaps somewhat sweeter than you are accustomed to. To signal that you do *not* want a second cup, put your right hand, palm down, over the top of the cup.



© Saudi Aramco World / PADIA/Dana Smillie
Iraqi hospitality

Exchange 5: Tea?

Iraqi:	Please, do drink tea.	tfaDhal ishrab chay.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran

Do not admire or compliment an Iraqi's possessions, if you do he might try to give them to you! If you think he is well dressed and say so, and the Iraqi offers you the shirt off his back, thank him and politely refuse. He will probably offer it at least two more times. Refuse all three times, politely and graciously.

Exchange 6: The Shirt off his back

Soldier:	Your shirt is nice.	qameesak Holu.
Iraqi:	Please accept it, it's yours.	iqbal, bil-urDha.
Soldier:	No, thank you, it's yours.	la, shukran, mabrouk 'alayk.

¹⁰⁴ University of Military Intelligence. "Iraq Culture: Gestures, Mannerisms, and Taboos." c. 2004–2007. http://www.universityofmilitaryintelligence.us/tcc/cultural/iraq/culture_gestures.asp

Exchanging Gifts

Iraqis love to give and receive presents, so be prepared to give gifts since there is a good chance you will receive them. When an Iraqi gives you a gift, he expects a gift in return, although he will never actually say this. The gift really is the thing, not the expense. By custom, the recipient may or may not open the gift in front of you.



DoD photo
Gift giving

Exchange 7: Oh, you shouldn't have!

Iraqi	This is for you.	tfaDhal.
Soldier:	You shouldn't have!	shinu hazzaH-ma.
Iraqi:	It's just a little thing.	fad shee baSeet.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran.

Sharing

If you are on break, eating a snack or a meal, and there are Iraqi children or men close by, it would be a kind gesture to offer some of your food to the people. If you offer food only once, they will probably say no. So offer it a second or third time, and then they might smile and accept your offer. The three-time offer or rejection is uniform in the culture.

Exchange 8: You've got to eat!

Soldier:	Please have some.	tfaDhal!
Iraqi:	No thanks.	la, shukran.
Soldier:	Please have some, you have to eat some!	tfaDhal, lazem ta-kul!
Iraqi:	Thank you very much.	zayn shukran.

Sometimes you will work closely with Iraqi colleagues or counterparts. One day, they might bring food to the office, maybe some sweets, and offer it to you. It is best to accept a small amount graciously and with thanks. You should say *shukran* (“thank you”).

Also, if you are going somewhere, it is acceptable to offer an Iraqi male acquaintance a ride in the front seat. He will appreciate that considerably.

Exchange 9: After you, please.

Soldier:	Please climb aboard.	tfaDhal iSad.
Iraqi:	No, please, after you.	la, tfaDhal inta al-awwal.

Honor and Offenses

Honor deserves special mention because of the importance it has in an Arabic society and some of the ways it manifests itself. It is a violation of honor to embarrass someone—for example by forcing someone’s head to the ground or asking an embarrassing question. (In this case, an interpreter might honor you by simply deflecting the embarrassing question and asking some other question in Arabic, rather than the question you want answered.)

In very serious cases of violated honor, the only way to expunge shame, especially public shame, could be killing the offender.¹⁰⁵ In Arab culture, threatening to shame someone is also a way through which a family or tribe can exert control over the behavior of its members.

Other offenses may be so inappropriate as to be a violation of honor. Offering your left hand to someone or using your left hand to give something to someone is an insult. Another offense is getting directly down to business when in a meeting. Arabs prefer to get to know the person they are dealing with and precede business transactions with coffee or tea, questions about one’s health, and the like. It is more than a question of good protocol to respect such cultural mores; it communicates honor for oneself as well as for the culture one is visiting and sharing.



DoD photo
Interpreter sits with US soldiers

¹⁰⁵ Guardian Unlimited. Bedell, Geraldine. “Death Before Dishonour.” 21 November 2004. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/gender/story/0,11812,1356386,00.html>

Vendettas and Honor Killings

There is an old Arab saying, “It’s me against my brother; it’s me and my brother against my cousin; it’s me, my brother, and my cousin against the world.” A tribe may seek to avenge the death of one of their members by killing a member of the murderer’s tribe. This is legal in the eyes of the community, both under *shari’ā* and secular law. Do not interfere in these disputes unless Command has issued a policy to stop them. Leave the matter to local authorities.



DOD photo
Iraqi police provides security

The same applies to “honor killings.” Because of the perceived value of a family’s honor, an individual can legally punish any affront against family, kin, or neighbor. This could include killing a female relative for violating family honor. It is best not to get involved. Do not interfere unless Command has issued a policy to stop it.

Male–Female Relationships

As mentioned earlier, Muslims revere honor. The quality and position of the male members of a Muslim in society are measured by the esteem in which the entire family is held. The honor of that family is directly expressed in the quality and purity of its females. Therefore, females may not have contact with males outside their family. In homes, they care for children and the household, and they have separate quarters.



© James Gordon
Iraqi mother and child

Iraq has always been a more open society than many, but only to a point. Women still are generally segregated and secluded. Their educational opportunities are fewer, though now increasing, but females continue to bear primary responsibility for care of the family and home.¹⁰⁶ Women’s opportunities tend to be extensions of the family-care positions. In areas such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, women are still relegated to subordinate positions.

Interaction with Iraqi Women

Visitors to the culture should adhere to strict formality when interacting with Iraqi women. You should address a woman older than 50 as *Khala*. This is even more respectful than “ma’am.” Call a younger woman *uKhtee*, which literally means “my sister,” but is taken to mean “miss” or “ma’am.” Another title of respect is *sit*, meaning “ma’am,” used in the office environment.

¹⁰⁶ Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. CRS Report for Congress. Pina, Aaron D. “Women in Iraq: Background and Issues for U.S. Policy.” 13 March 2006. <http://italy.usembassy.gov/pdf/other/RL32376.pdf>

Interaction between sexes is usually acceptable only in universities and in the workplace. Dating is not an Iraqi or, for that matter, a Muslim custom. Normally a couple does not appear alone in public unless legally engaged or married.

Certain prohibitions narrow interactions between men and women even further: Muslim women do not marry non-Muslims. Iraqi women, Muslims or Christians, seldom marry foreigners. For this reason, foreign male visitors to Iraq and to the Arab world in general are strongly advised not to pursue romantic interests in Iraqi society. In fact, in this conservative society, men should not even approach or address women in the street unless they are first introduced. Females who are perceived to have dishonored their family may have to contend with the wrath of their relatives, which in some instances could mean death in an “honor killing.” Making a pass at or even staring at a female in Iraq could carry serious consequences for all involved. All of this applies equally to Kurdish families.¹⁰⁷

If you need to speak with a female, it is highly advisable to find a female soldier to intervene. This protects honor and prevents many problems. Otherwise, address questions to the accompanying male. Male soldiers should not speak to any Iraqi woman unless she is accompanied by a male family member.

If you are a male, do not ask an Iraqi man direct questions about the females in his family. Just ask, “How is your family?” Only a female is free to ask about the females in the family.

Exchange 10: How is your family?



© James Gordon
An Iraqi security officer

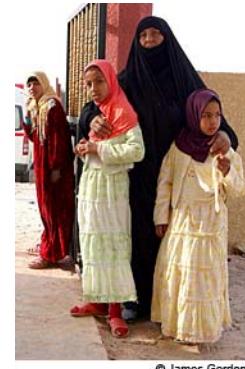
Soldier:	How are you, how's the family?	shlonak, shlon al-ahel?
Iraqi:	Thanks to God, they are fine, thanks	al-Hamdu lillah, zayneen, shukran.
Soldier:	Thanks to God.	al-Hamdu lillah.

¹⁰⁷ GlobalSecurity.org. “Iraq: Lifestyle.” 22 June 2005.
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/lifestyle.htm>

Other Traditions

Dress Codes

Western attire is well known and widely used in Iraq, but some limitations exist. For example, short pants are only worn by young children or athletes on the sports field. Men keep their shirts on regardless of the heat. Except for many areas of southern Iraq, women are not generally required to cover themselves from head to toe, as is the case in Yemen or Saudi Arabia. Although Baghdad has always been more cosmopolitan in dress, nowadays almost all women are choosing to wear the head-covering *hijab*.¹⁰⁸ Conservative dress prevails: women should not wear mini-skirts, sleeveless blouses, low-cut sweaters, or revealing clothing.



Depending on Command, short-sleeved shirts are acceptable if you are in military uniform. In mosques, everyone removes footwear and females wear headscarves. A general rule of thumb is, do not attract attention to yourself.

Alcohol

In the West, many parties or celebrations—social events—involve alcoholic beverages. Until it was banned by the former regime in 1994, alcohol was openly consumed in taverns, bars, and cabarets in Baghdad and other large cities. Some Iraqis still consume alcohol in the privacy of their own homes, but it would be safer not to discuss or consume alcohol in public to avoid complications. Strict Muslims follow the doctrine of the Quran, which forbids the consumption of alcohol.

Photography

Taking pictures is considered offensive unless prior permission is obtained from those being photographed. Generally refrain from photographing females, since this could lead to unforeseen and unnecessary problems.

Gestures

If you are in a heated discussion and you are trying to signal “patience” or “slow down!”, hold your right hand in front of you with the palm up and with fingertips touching. Move the hand up and down a bit and bend your head down a little. This means “just hang on for five seconds!”

¹⁰⁸ American Forces Press Service, U.S. Department of Defense. Garamone, Jim. “Observing Iraq.” 22 January 2005. http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2005/n01222005_2005012203.html

Iraqis signal “yes” in the same way Americans do, by nodding. However, Iraqis have different signals for “no,” or “don’t,” for example:

- Move your head back and make a clicking sound with the tongue as in “*tsk, tsk.*”
- Wave the open palm of your right hand from right to left while facing the person.
- Tilt the head slightly back and raise the eyebrows.



© James Gordon
Iraqi baker in his shop, Najaf

Firing Rifles in Celebration

Iraqis often celebrate a wide variety of events and occasions by firing rifles in the air. This could be the return from the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), a funeral, a wedding, the birth of a baby, or the arrival of a family member after a long absence. There may be many people firing their rifles in the air. You may initially think that these gun shots indicate hostile activity in the vicinity. Before making this assumption, you should first ascertain that the rifle shots are not just some kind of celebration.

Exchange 11: Firing Rifles in Celebration

Soldier:	What is all this firing about?	shinu hal-Talqaat?
Iraqi:	We have a wedding going on.	‘eedna zaffa.

The Baathist Generation

A whole generation of Iraqis has grown up in fear of the Baathist regime. They have known war and violence since the outbreak of the Iraq–Iran War in 1980. Hussein and his circle ruled absolutely. The regime did not respect the law; they were the law. As a result, this generation of Iraqis has not developed a respect for law as such; instead, they respect and fear the one who is in charge. Those who had connections to the regime could commit crimes with impunity. This mentality has ruled for a generation and it will not disappear overnight.



© Micha Niskin
A masked interpreter

Because it is hard to know a local person’s background in Iraq, it is necessary to proceed with caution when hiring an interpreter. People might often be more loyal to their ethnic or religious group than to the stranger who hired them.

Traditional Economy

Agriculture has been a longstanding traditional occupation for the people of Iraq. Nomadic tribes formed the bulk of the population, and strong trading networks existed within and between tribes. The tribes earned a living by trading agricultural products such as rice and vegetables, and also from breeding and trading livestock (camels and sheep). They often visited towns to trade, and many of the nomads themselves settled in agricultural village communities divided into large extended families.



© Micha Niskin
Produce stand, Iraq

The Tigris and Euphrates rivers have historically been used as shipping routes for trade. People throughout the country use these rivers for commerce and for travel. They traded goods up and down the rivers, from the Marsh Arabs in the south to Baghdad (on the Tigris) and points farther north.

Non-Religious Celebrations

Several celebrations and holidays take place throughout Iraq. New Year's Day (1 January) is a national holiday. Army Day is 6 January, but it is not celebrated as a public or banking Holiday. Labor Day, 1 May, is a national holiday. Republic Day is 14 July, marking the date in 1958 when Iraq's King Faisal II was overthrown and killed in an Army coup d'etat.

On the first day of spring (usually 21 March) the Kurds and many Iraqis celebrate *Nowruz* (also *Noruz*), which is also celebrated in Iran and countries throughout Central Asia and the Caucasus. It represents rebirth at the beginning of a new year, celebrated with singing and dancing, parades, picnics, and poetry recitals. People express their wishes to each other for good health, prosperity, and happiness in the year ahead. *Noruz* marks the beginning of the Kurdish calendar year.¹⁰⁹

Celebrated nationwide as a public holiday between 2004 and 2006,

9 April marked the end of the Saddam Hussein's regime. Although it was done away with as a holiday in 2007, it is still celebrated in Kurdish regions.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Canadian Citizenship and Immigration Service. Cultural Profile Project: Iraq. "Holidays" No date. <http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/iraq/holidays.html>

¹¹⁰ Q++ Studio. "Public Holidays and Bank Holidays for Iraq." No date. <http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays2008/iraq.htm>

Social Events

Engagement and Marriage

Most marriages in Iraq are contractual agreements. They are entered into to establish new familial networks and improve or strengthen the position of the families. In the Arab world as in much of the Eastern world, marriage is seen as a bond not just between two individuals, but between two families.

Most Iraqi parents still arrange their children's marriages according to tradition. When a son or daughter comes of age, the parents contact relatives and friends to ask about the availability of an eligible marriage partner. Once a match is proposed, both young people may decline the proposal. If a man declines, it is more polite for him to indicate that his proposal was not accepted.

If the match comes from outside the family, the parents of the couple must have a chance to get to know one another. They meet to ask questions about social, financial, and educational background, to try to determine whether a marriage between the two families will succeed.

While parents from both families decide whether the marriage can proceed, the final decision rests with the father. In the case of an arranged marriage, the father would give his daughter the option of accepting the marriage proposal or declining.

If she agrees to marry, the groom and his father or other close male relative will discuss the proposal with the young lady's father and ask him for his daughter's hand in marriage. They negotiate the dowry, a certain amount of money or property that is delivered to the bride. During the engagement period, the dowry arrives. Also during this period, the couple has more freedom to spend time with each other, unchaperoned. There is no fixed length of time between engagement and marriage.

Islam permits polygamy for men, but the practice has become less common in contemporary Iraq. It requires judicial approval, and the judge must be satisfied that the prospective husband can treat both wives equally.¹¹¹ The Koran reads, "Marry those women who are lawful for you, up to two, three, or four, but only if you can treat them all equally." Later in the same chapter, the Koran reads, "No matter how you try, you will never be able to treat your wives equally."¹¹²



¹¹¹ GlobalSecurity.org. "Iraq: Lifestyle." 22 June 2005. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/lifestyle.htm>

¹¹² Council on Foreign Relations. *Foreign Affairs*. Coleman, Isobel. "Women, Islam, and the New Iraq." January/February 2006. <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060101faessay85104-p0/isobel-coleman/women-islam-and-the-new-iraq.html>

At the wedding, the bride and groom sit facing each other. The groom is seated in front of two male witnesses (or one male and two women), and he repeats his offer of marriage and his dowry gift, called a *sadaq*, to the bride. The bride's *wali*, or representative, accepts the offer, and the wedding is complete. A big reception, called a *waleemah*, follows, with music, dancing, and much food.¹¹³

Funerals and Processions

Muslim custom requires the body of the dead to be ritually washed, wrapped in a plain white shroud, and buried, all within 24 hours. The prayers for the dead, *januzah*, are said over the body, either at the home, funeral home, or mosque, and is then followed by a procession to the grave site. Muslims do not allow cremation. Typically, there is a mourning period of 40 days.



© Russell Lee Kilkka
Mother comforting children

When you see a procession of faithful Shi'a Muslims on the street, either in a funeral procession or in some other religious gathering, do not interfere. Just stand aside and show respect. If you have no business in that area or district, just stay away.

Dos & Don'ts

- **Do** use your entire *right* hand only to summon a person. Keep your palm down and wave downward.
- **Do** show respect in appearance, demeanor, and behavior when visiting a mosque.
- **Do** keep your feet down and your soles on the ground.
- **Don't** summon women if you are a male soldier! Let a female soldier do that.
- **Don't** use the Western way of beckoning with one finger. It is very offensive.
- **Don't** point to anybody with a finger; use the whole *right* hand instead.
- **Don't** make the “A-OK” signal (circle with index finger and thumb of one hand). Some Iraqis may misinterpret it as an obscene gesture.
- **Don't** point upward with the middle finger. It is obscene in the U.S. and equally so in Iraq.
- **Don't** stare at Iraqi women. The consequences for both could be terrible.

¹¹³ Zawaj.com. “Marriage Ceremony in Islam: The Basics.” No date.
http://www.zawaj.com/articles/marriage_ceremony_basics.html

- **Don't** use obscene or indecent language within earshot of Iraqi citizens. Many Iraqis are familiar with American slang.
- **Don't** talk with an Iraqi with your hands in your pockets, not even one hand. This is seen as impolite.
- **Don't** cross your legs when sitting in a chair, or show the bottom of your feet to anyone.

Urban Life

Introduction

During the oil boom of the 1970s, unemployment in rural areas led people to move to the cities; however, much of Iraq remained rural until the Iran-Iraq War in 1980.

Rural tribal families of peasant farmers, shopkeepers, small traders, and craftsmen who migrated to Iraqi cities mostly congregated around others from their own villages or tribes. Many set up small shops to sell their handicrafts out of one-man stores. The majority worked for wages in the service industry or as unskilled laborers or construction workers. This migration created entire urban areas of people loyal only to a particular tribe or village.



Urban Work Problems and Issues

Unemployment is high in Iraq, varying by region, city, rural areas, and by age. It is higher in urban centers than in rural areas, and much higher among youths than for the general Iraqi population. In December 2005, the Iraq Study Group estimated nationwide unemployment in Iraq stood between 20 and 50%.¹¹⁴ The U.S. Department of State put the figure between 30 and 60% for 2005.¹¹⁵

There are several explanations why the Iraqi economy has been so damaged, resulting in such high unemployment and underemployment. Those reasons include the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s and also the long-term international sanctions that followed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991 and the subsequent war. In the Persian Gulf War, up to 90% of Iraq's power generating capacity and systems of distribution were destroyed. Aside from the wars, Iraq was distorted and damaged by Saddam Hussein's monopoly on power and resources. The result was an economy that was choked, characterized mostly by illegal activity in the public sector.¹¹⁶ Manufacturing was not diversified or modernized, most large businesses were state-owned, and factories and machines languished in disrepair. The current high level of unemployment is linked to all of these reasons, but it is especially linked to the ongoing insurgency in Iraq.

¹¹⁴ Military.com. Grossman, Elaine M. "Unemployment Fueling Iraq Insurgency." 22 December 2006. <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,121041,00.html>

¹¹⁵ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Country Profile: Iraq*. August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

¹¹⁶ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Country Profile: Iraq*. August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

After the invasion of Iraq by Coalition Forces in 2003, a special Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund (IRFF) was created to support the country's reconstruction. (Some additional funding for reconstruction was distributed through the budgets of various government agencies, such as the Department of Defense.) Much of the IRFF funding has been diverted for use in providing security, increasing oil production (slowed by sabotage), and training programs. Providing security and training in particular has proved to be a major cost. This shifting of IRFF funds to non-infrastructure projects has certainly been a response to changing circumstances on the ground. However, the end result has been that most of the early goals for providing clean water, sewage treatment, and electricity have not been met.¹¹⁷ Because the urban environment in Baghdad, for instance, has been so dangerous, projects cannot be completed and people are thrown out of work. In general, concerns over security have slowed or in some cases halted reconstruction progress.



USAID photo
Rebuilding Ramadi

Lack of security is, of course, linked to lack of political reconciliation, one of the major stated requirements of the U.S. benchmarks for progress in Iraq. Only a strong central government can unify the population and the political processes and lead the country toward reconstruction, a functional economy, and full employment.

Even as the lack of security causes projects to be halted or delayed production, thus reducing the number of jobs or hours worked, unemployment itself fuels the insurgency. In this "vicious circle," one effect reinforces and causes another. A Pentagon report dated 30 November 2006 notes that unemployment in Iraq "may make financial incentives for participating in insurgent or sectarian violence more appealing to military-age males."¹¹⁸ Iraqis need to be employed, but in the right places. Joining the new army, for instance, may not be lucrative for many because it removes them from their families and may make them targets for insurgents.



DOD photo
Iraqi army soldier

One approach to halting this deadly cycle involves closer working ties between the U.S. military and tribal sheiks. (This strategy harks back to British colonial policies used in countries that they historically ruled through the local population.) The current reasoning notes that Iraq's tribal sheiks, who have led the people in the region for millennia, are a critical cog in the wheel. Not only do the sheiks have strong influence with local people, they also want to bolster their own business interests by achieving a stable economy.

¹¹⁷ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Tarnoff, Curt. "Iraq: Reconstruction Assistance [p. 14]." 25 June 2007. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL31833.pdf>

¹¹⁸ Military.com. Grossman, Elaine M. "Unemployment Fuelling Iraq Insurgency." 22 December 2006. <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,121041,00.html>

Thus, working through them could help to stabilize the population and lead to more jobs and better security.¹¹⁹

Health Issues

Sanctions that followed the 1991 Gulf War, destruction of infrastructure during the Iran-Iraq and Gulf Wars, and the regime change in 2003 followed by a violent insurgency, have all contributed to a decline in Iraqi health care.

After 1991, Saddam Hussein reduced expenditures for health services by 90%. The invasion of 2003 and its aftermath destroyed 12% of Iraq's hospitals and both of the country's major medical laboratories.¹²⁰ Health clinics

have also been demolished. Currently, there are severe shortages in health personnel and medicines. According to the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), over half the registered physicians in Iraq have fled the country.¹²¹ Medical professionals and medical-school teachers have also left the country (many have been killed), and books and equipment have been damaged or destroyed. Much of the medical equipment does not work. Corruption has redirected imported replacement equipment to the black market. Provision of health services has also been adversely affected by degraded or nonfunctional electrical supply, communications, and sanitation.¹²²



DOD photo
Fallujah General Hospital

The primary health care system in Iraq consists of 110 health districts, each serving on average 200,000 to 300,000 people. In each district, there are five to ten health care centers. In large urban areas such as Baghdad, the availability of medical personnel can be relatively high, whereas other areas are extremely understaffed with doctors and nurses.¹²³ Almost all services provided by these clinics and hospitals are free, except for afternoon consultations at low-cost, semi-public health clinics. More well-off Iraqis might pay out-of-pocket expenses. The state-owned pharmaceutical and medical appliance company provides products heavily subsidized by the government to sell at a fixed, low rate. This is helpful, as there is no public or private health insurance; only a few small health insurance programs are provided for employees of specific companies. Generally, the pharmaceutical industry has been in decline for 20 years due to government policies, international sanctions, and wars.

¹¹⁹ Military.com. Grossman, Elaine M. "Unemployment Fuelling Iraq Insurgency." 22 December 2006. <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,121041,00.html>

¹²⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

¹²¹ ABC News. Nagorski, Tom. "Iraq: Where Things Stand." 19 March 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Story?id=2962206&page=4>

¹²² United Nations Development Programme. "Report on Iraq. Health Services." 2005. <http://www.iq.undp.org/ILCS/healthstatus.htm>

¹²³ Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office, World Health Organization. "Health Systems Profile: Iraq." June 2005. <http://www.emro.who.int/iraq/pdf/HealthSystemsProfile.pdf>

The focus of U.S. and international aid agencies, together with the Iraqi Ministry of Health, has been working on improving and rebuilding health care facilities. This includes addressing shortages of medical supplies, drugs, equipment, and fresh drinking water. One notable success has been the immunization program. In the first year after the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, 30 million doses of children's vaccinations were distributed.¹²⁴ Approximately 98% of all Iraqi children under the age of five are now immunized against polio.¹²⁵ However, other key areas in the delivery of services have lagged. It is estimated that only 32% of the population can obtain clean drinking water, and 19% have access to a functional sewage system.¹²⁶ The United Nations has reported a 70% increase "in cases of diarrhea among children since January 2006; the rise is 40% among adults."¹²⁷

In addition, corruption and the continuing security concerns have led to disappointing progress in developing additional public health infrastructure. A case in point was a highly publicized program to build 150 new primary health care facilities, 60 of which were scheduled to be constructed in southern Iraq.¹²⁸ However, poor contractor performance and lax oversight of the construction has resulted in only 20 of these facilities having been built. Additional funding beyond the original amount allocated is required to complete any of the remaining 130 facilities.¹²⁹

By all accounts, many injured Iraqi citizens receive some of the best health care available when they are taken to American military hospitals. However, that system is not set up for long-term health care, and eventually these patients are discharged to Iraqi hospitals. Once considered the best medical facilities in the region, Iraqi hospitals and clinics are now unable to provide systematic or quality medical care.¹³⁰

Because violence has driven so many physicians from the country, experienced doctors are increasingly being replaced by younger, less



DoD photo
U.S. Army Capt treats child

¹²⁴ Coalition Provisional Authority Press Release. "Iraqi Ministry of Health Becomes First Ministry to Enter the Final Stage to Sovereignty." 23 March 2004. http://www.cpa-iraq.org/pressreleases/20040328_health.html

¹²⁵ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Tarnoff, Curt. "Iraq: Reconstruction Assistance [p. 16]." 25 June 2007. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL31833.pdf>

¹²⁶ ABC News. Nagorski, Tom. "Iraq: Where Things Stand." 19 March 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Story?id=2962206&page=4>

¹²⁷ ABC News. Nagorski, Tom. "Iraq: Where Things Stand." 19 March 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Story?id=2962206&page=4>

¹²⁸ Defend America. Weiner, B. J. "150 New Health Care Clinics Planned for Iraq." 6 July 2005. <http://www.defendamerica.mil/articles/jul2005/a070605dg4.html>

¹²⁹ New York Times. Glanz, James. "U.S. Pays for 150 Clinics, and Manages to Build 20." 30 April 2006. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/30/world/middleeast/30reconstruct.html?ex=1304049600&en=9f601f52cff7fe28&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

¹³⁰ National Geographic. Shea, Neil. "Against the Odds: U.S. Medical Teams Offer a Measure of Hope to Injured Iraqis." December 2006. http://www7.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0612/feature3/online_extra.html

experienced physicians. In particularly violence-prone areas, licensed nurses are sometimes taking the role of doctors. Finally, some Iraqis are increasingly taking it upon themselves to provide basic medical care and monitoring.¹³¹

Education

Iraq's educational system was once the pride of the Middle East. Schools were mainly secular and one of the country's major assets was its well-educated populace and its high literacy rate for women. In 1982, UNESCO granted Iraq an award for "eradicating illiteracy."¹³² However, over the past 20 years, economic sanctions, wars, and misdirected funds have affected the system deeply. In the 10 years that followed the Gulf War (1991), spending on schools dropped 90%.¹³³ Rates of literacy dropped to below an estimated 60%.¹³⁴



L. Paul Bremer speaks to Ministry of Education
DoD photo

Schoolbooks full of propaganda from the Saddam era, such as presenting history from the ruling Baath Party point of view, have also been a problem that required scrapping and wholesale rewriting. Shortly after the fall of the Hussein regime, those textbooks heading into the classrooms were hastily rewritten by Iraqi educators appointed by the U.S. Images of Saddam Hussein and Baathists were removed. Controversial topics such as the attacks against the Kurds and Assyrians, the Iran-Iraq War, the invasion of Kuwait, the Persian Gulf War, and the fall of Baghdad were eliminated. A U.S. Defense Department advisor to Iraq's Ministry of Education states that "Entire swaths of 20th century history have been deleted."¹³⁵ Thus it is now up to Iraqi teachers to decide how much modern Iraqi history should be covered and how it should be described. Controversy exists as to how future history texts covering 20th century history will be written and how to avoid the danger of bias.¹³⁶

School buildings are in short supply. In the most recent census by Iraq's Ministry of Education (2003–04), there were more than 14,000 primary schools in Iraq, of which only 11,368 were available and almost 3,000 of these needed major renovation.¹³⁷

¹³¹ Institute for War and Peace Reporting. Salman, Daud and Zaineb Naji. "Violence Drives Doctors From Iraq." 29 March 2006. http://iwpr.net/?p=icr&s=f&o=260625&apc_state=henh

¹³² The Christian Science Monitor. Asquith, Christina. "Turning the Page on Iraq's History." 4 November 2003. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1104/p11s01-legn.htm>

¹³³ The Christian Science Monitor. Asquith, Christina. "Turning the Page on Iraq's History." 4 November 2003. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1104/p11s01-legn.htm>

¹³⁴ US AID. "Assistance for Iraq: Education." 9 April 2007. <http://www.usaid.gov/iraq/accomplishments/education.html>

¹³⁵ Christian Science Monitor. Asquith, Christina. "Turning the Page on Iraq's History." 4 November 2003. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1104/p11s01-legn.htm>

¹³⁶ Christian Science Monitor. Asquith, Christina. "Turning the Page on Iraq's History." 4 November 2003. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1104/p11s01-legn.htm>

¹³⁷ United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. "Iraq's Schools Suffering from Neglect and War."

(Subsequently, however, USAID reported in 2007 that nearly 3,000 schools had been rehabilitated since 2003.)¹³⁸ While attendance surged during 2003–2004, school buildings, desks, and chairs were insufficient. Many schools had to double up and run in shifts,¹³⁹ 25% running three shifts a day, which reduced classroom time for the students.¹⁴⁰

Since 2003, as the insurgency has grown increasingly violent in many areas, school attendance has taken a sharp drop. In the fall of 2006, the Iraq Ministry of Education announced that out of Iraq's 3.5 million school-aged children, only 30% were attending classes, down dramatically from 75% the previous school year and nearly 100% immediately after the 2003 invasion.¹⁴⁰ Cities hard hit by sectarian and insurgent violence, such as Baghdad, Ramadi, Fallujah, and Kirkuk, saw some of the sharpest declines in school attendance.¹⁴¹ The greatest losses were among female students, who constitute 74% of all students not attending school according to a joint Ministry–UNICEF study.¹⁴²



© James Gordon
3 Iraqi men having a conversation

Daily Life of Urban Dwellers

Where there was once a considerable activity at night, there is now its marked absence. The threat of kidnappings, murders, bomb-rigged cars, government sweeps, and general violence has caused people to come home earlier and stay home. Urban neighborhoods that were once mixed have now become divided along sectarian lines and permeated by an atmosphere of suspicion of neighbors or fear of violence. Sections of many neighborhoods are vacant, since many Iraqis of the former middle class have left for other countries, perhaps as many as 750,000 to neighboring Jordan alone.¹⁴³ More than 1.5 million Iraqis have fled to Syria, where the country's social services are inadequate to

¹³⁸ 15 October 2004. http://www.unicef.org/media/media_23630.html

¹³⁹ US AID. "Assistance for Iraq: Education." 9 April 2007. <http://www.usaid.gov/iraq/accomplishments/education.html>

¹⁴⁰ United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. "Iraq's Schools Suffering from Neglect and War."

¹⁴¹ 15 October 2004. http://www.unicef.org/media/media_23630.html

¹⁴² Reuters Foundation. AlertNet.org. IRIN. "Iraq: School Attendance Rates Drop Drastically." 18 October 2006. <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/f90f37068737141f556e65a54bd0165d.htm>

¹⁴³ Reuters Foundation. AlertNet.org. IRIN. "Iraq: School Attendance Rates Drop Drastically." 18 October 2006. <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/f90f37068737141f556e65a54bd0165d.htm>

¹⁴⁴ ABC News. Nagorski, Tom. "Iraq: Where Things Stand." 19 March 2007.

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/Story?id=2962206&page=4>

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch. "'The Silent Treatment': Fleeing Iraq, Surviving in Jordan (pp. 29, 20)." November 2006. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/jordan1106/jordan1106web.pdf>

deal with so many people.¹⁴⁴ Overall, it is estimated that over 2,000,000 Iraqis have left the country since the conflict began in 2003.¹⁴⁵

In some neighborhoods of Baghdad, life has become calmer since the reduction of violence in Iraq that coincided with and followed the U.S. surge. In Shi'a-dominated neighborhoods such as Kazimiyah and Karradah, people stay out on the streets later than in other areas, shopping and visiting coffeehouses. In these areas, Shi'a residents take advantage of the protection they receive from both Shi'a militias and the Shi'a-dominated Iraqi police. Alternately, in Baghdad's Sunni neighborhoods, people stay indoors out of fear of kidnapping by Shi'a militiamen and the streets are virtually deserted after dark.¹⁴⁶

Many refugees who fled the city have been returning to Baghdad, cheered by news of decreasing violence in the city or simply having run out of money. The government has been providing bus rides back to Baghdad from Damascus, Syria, where most refugees fled to. Their status is uncertain once they get back. They may find that their homes have been taken over by others, or that neighborhoods that were once Sunni or mixed have now become unwelcome Shi'a enclaves. There are no guarantees that they will even have a place to live when they return; they may end up living among thousands of other displaced Iraqis.¹⁴⁷

Generally speaking, daily life today for urban Iraqis varies widely by region, group, and profession. The religious throughout the country start the day before sunrise with ritual washing, then prayers, followed by breakfast, and off to work. A Kurdish construction manager in Kirkuk who works two jobs rises at 7 a.m., showers, and has a breakfast of hot tea, yogurt, and walnuts. At work, he discusses the day's projects with his staff and is very dependent on cell phone and e-mail. Communicating with people in other parts of Iraq has become easier with improved cell phone services. He takes trips in a convoy of three armored cars, changing the route and cars to avoid the dangers of predictability. Most trips are made using back routes and avoiding the morning rush hour, the most dangerous time of day.¹⁴⁸



© James Gordon
Iraqi construction worker

Farther south, a high school English teacher living near Al Başrah goes to work early because of the crowded streets. It takes him about an hour to drive 10 km (6.2 mi) to his

¹⁴⁴ Marketplace. "Syria Filters Its Iraqi Immigration." 10 September 2007.

http://marketplace.publicradio.org/display/web/2007/09/10/syria_filters_its_iraqi_immigration/

¹⁴⁵ BBC News, International Version. "Iraq refugee summit offers help." 26 July 2007.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6916791.stm

¹⁴⁶ Associated Press. Hendawi, Hamza. "Baghdad at Night Shows Shiite Dominance." 11 December 2007.

http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5hg2dKh_CTtY7l-Sc8cce9m_tLEdwD8TFGL6O0

¹⁴⁷ Chicago Tribune Web Edition. Sly, Liz. "Refugees Unsure What Waits in Iraq." 11 December 2007.

http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-refugees_sly_dec09,1,3438242.story

¹⁴⁸ BBC News, International Version. "My Day in Iraq: Businessman." 6 April 2006.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4875968.stm

workplace. After teaching all morning, he eats a lunch he has brought from home. At 3 p.m., he leaves to do errands for his family. In the evening, he has four hours of electricity. On some evenings, he might go to the river bank, where people meet to socialize, but he avoids the city. While in the city, he takes care to avoid speaking English on the street, as this could raise suspicion that he is working for the government, possibly making him a target.¹⁴⁹

Urban residents often find it difficult to procure everyday living necessities, depending on location and local conditions. In some areas, such as Erbil in the north and the border crossing into Iran at Zurbathia, commerce has expanded.¹⁵⁰ The ending of pre-war sanctions and the opening of borders has generally made greater availability of goods possible. In other areas, however, acquiring goods is difficult because of the danger of traveling outside one's immediate neighborhood.

Inflation and poverty have also made it difficult for Iraqi citizens to obtain daily necessities. City residents do not have gardens for growing vegetables to supplement their food. Like the entire Iraqi population, they have relied on subsidies for basic goods ever since the UN sanctions were imposed in 1991. All Iraqis are eligible for a basic ration of foodstuffs: rice, cooking oil, sugar, and flour. This, however, is a reduction from the 12 food items that were rationed during the last years of the Hussein regime when the country was under international sanctions. The additional cuts were made in 2006 as part of an attempt to reduce government spending on subsidies and develop more free market practices. These cuts have been a shock to average citizens. As a result of the decrease in rations, prices on non-rationed food items have increased greatly. Many people simply cannot afford the cost of everyday necessities, although experts expect prices to eventually stabilize. Incomes for some are up; but high inflation rates, driven by commodity shortages, rose 65% in 2006. And though government policies reduced inflationary pressure by early 2007, prices remained 35–40% higher than in 2006.¹⁵¹ One Baghdad resident, a father of four who works as a painter, notes that he earns only USD 50 per month. His rent takes USD 42 of that, leaving almost nothing for food and other purchases.¹⁵²

Home Life

The traditional Iraqi home would seem quite private by Western standards. If the family lives in a private house, it probably sits sheltered behind a high, windowless wall. Even in an apartment, the family guards its privacy. For example, even in modest homes, the



¹⁴⁹ BBC News, International Version. "My Day in Iraq: School Teacher." 6 April 2006. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4876792.stm

¹⁵⁰ ABC News. Nagorski, Tom. "Iraq: Where Things Stand." 19 March 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Story?id=2962206&page=4>

¹⁵¹ Institute for War and Peace Reporting. Ahmed, Zanko. "Kurds Bemoan Soaring Cost of Living." 13 July 2007. http://iwpr.net/?p=icr&s=f&o=337118&apc_state=henhBBC News

¹⁵² Global Security.org. IRIN. "Iraq: Food Prices Rise After Reduction of Monthly Rations." 2 April 2006. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2006/04/iraq-060402-irin02.htm>

house has a common kitchen, but separate living quarters. The family sets aside a room like a formal parlor for the men to receive male guests. With the separate room, other female family members can move around without being around the males.

Families cook meals on stoves fueled by propane delivered by men and boys with carts loaded with old propane cylinders. Men bang on the cylinders with a metal bar to alert people that propane is available as they make their deliveries around 7 a.m. Most city residents eat at home; few people can afford to eat out at restaurants. Thus, many restaurants have closed due to lack of business. People are now home and locked in by 5 or 6 p.m.¹⁵³

Iraqi hospitality, however, is second to none. Even during the embargo of the 1990s, when Iraqi families could barely feed themselves, they would go to great lengths to make a visitor feel welcome and valued. They would offer their guests the best foods in large quantities and do so with much fellowship, laughter, and affection.

Favorite Pastimes

Smoking and drinking tea are favorite pastimes for Iraqis, although smoking is more prevalent among males. If you smoke around Iraqis, you should offer cigarettes all around, anything less would be impolite. It is also impolite to ask an Iraqi not to smoke.¹⁵⁴ American coffee is less dominant in Iraqi society even though it is widely available in cafés and restaurants—mostly in the form of instant coffee (referred to as *Nescafé* in Iraq). Arabic coffee is the norm. Served in small cups, it is customary to shake the cup slightly once you have had enough; otherwise your cup will be continuously replenished.

The tradition of serving Arabic coffee denotes generosity and is even a matter of tribal pride. Refusing to drink the coffee when offered could be mistaken for unfriendliness on the part of the guest. This is more so the case in the rural and tribal areas of Iraq, though with the increased movement of rural people to urban settings, it may also be true in cities.

During more secure times, taking children to a park for a picnic with family or sitting in a café drinking *chai*, talking and playing backgammon, were all popular pastimes. Now, most Iraqis are in their houses by dark, where they remain until daybreak.



© James Gordon
Iraqi father and child

¹⁵³ The New Standard. Jamail, Dahrl. “Iraq Dispatches: Food.” 1 June 2004. <http://blog.newstandardnews.net/iraqdispatches/archives/000500.html>

¹⁵⁴ University of Military Intelligence. Iraqi Culture. “Food, Alcohol, and Cigarettes.” Circa 2004–2007. http://www.universityofmilitaryintelligence.us/tcc/cultural/iraq/culture_food.asp

Restaurants and Eating Habits

Iraqis insist on paying in restaurants, sometimes more than they can afford. It is impossible to explain that westerners keep informal records of whose turn it is to pay, and that there are many ways to repay friends, perhaps by hosting a picnic or giving a handmade gift.¹⁵⁵

In their homes, Iraqis eat three meals each day, with the evening meal around 8 p.m. Extra food is often prepared in case surprise guests stop by to visit.

Arab food started as nomad food—easily carried, herded, and stored, such as lamb, goat, or beef, with many kinds of grains and nuts.¹⁵⁶ In past times it was cooked over open fires, but today people use stoves fueled by gas or paraffin oil. Many also use microwaves.

The Iraqi diet consists mainly of grains, vegetables, and meat when people can afford it.



© James Gordon

Iraqi women purchasing kerosene

Both time and skill go into the preparation of many desserts. *Baklava*, for instance, is a well-known pastry made by layering honey, pistachios or walnuts, and rose water between thin sheets of filo dough.

Exchange 12: Have some.

Iraqi host/friend:	Please have some.	tfaDhal.
Soldier/guest:	Thank you.	shukran.

Coffee is served in small china cups, and tea is poured into small glasses and served sweetened and without milk. Iraqis make their own soft drinks from orange blossoms, rose petals, and fruits such as oranges, apricots, lemons, and pomegranates. Muslims avoid drinking alcohol as it is officially forbidden.

¹⁵⁵ Cultural Orientation Resource Center. "Iraqis—Their History and Culture: Some Cultural Differences." 18 February 2004. <http://www.cal.org/co/iraqi/icult.html>

¹⁵⁶ Canadian Citizen and Immigration Service. "Eating the Iraqi Way." <http://www.cpc.ca/english/iraq/eating.html>

Market Place

Vendors in markets called *souks* sell most products that are available for purchase. Many Iraqis buy meat and vegetables from a *souk*. Iraqis receive a monthly food ration, but it does not include meat or vegetables. *Souks* also specialize, so you might find a gold *souk*, a book *souk*, a rug *souk*, and others that only sell one kind of product. Typically, you can buy “everything from saffron to Saddam memorabilia” from a souk.¹⁵⁷



Unfortunately, market places have become frequent targets of bombings, which has placed a serious economic strain on small shop owners. Goods have become more difficult to get from wholesaler markets in cities such as Baghdad, which now close much earlier. In addition, increasing security costs and wholesale price inflation have forced vendors either to pass these costs along to shoppers or to absorb the costs and reduce their profit margins.¹⁵⁸

Street Vendors

It is fine to accept food when you know and trust the one who has offered you the food.

Do not, however, buy food from street vendors. You can never be sure about its safety.

Exchange 13: Sorry, I can't eat while on duty.

Iraqi vendor:	Buy some baklava? It's very delicious!	tishtari baqlawa? kulish Tayeba!
Soldier:	Thank you, it sure looks great, but I am on duty and am not allowed to eat.	shukran, akeed Tayeba, bas ani bil-wajeb, mamnu' akul.

¹⁵⁷ BBC News. Shelley Thrakal. “Iraq: 12 Months On.” No date.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/aboutbbcnews/hi/this_is_bbc_news/newsid_3700000/3700123.stm

¹⁵⁸ Reuters Foundation. AlertNet.org. Aseel, Kami. “Violence, Inflation Eat Into Baghdad Stores.” 7 December 2006. <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IBO660378.htm>

Traffic

Traffic chokes the streets of Baghdad.¹⁵⁹ It is not only annoying; it can be a death trap. Often traffic signals don't work because of electrical blackouts. Also, the enemy sometimes sets up traffic jams to explode devices in cars trapped in the jams. Soldiers must get out of traffic jams quickly, firmly, and politely. Obscene language will be counterproductive. Many Iraqis have seen enough western movies to understand English and its common four-letter curse words. It is best to use tactful, respectful language.



© Micha Niskin
Horse carts on the streets of Baghdad

Exchange 14: Traffic Commands

Soldier:	Please give way.	raja-an inTee Tareeq.
Iraqi:	Please pull over.	raja-an waKher sayyartak.
Soldier:	Please let the military vehicle pass.	raja-an Khalee al-sayyarat al-skariya tfout.

Checkpoints

Checkpoints are a way of life for anyone living in an Iraqi city. These are some of the situations one might encounter, and suggestions for dealing with them.

Under normal circumstances, women do not typically carry ID. Therefore, it would be best not to demand to see it. In fact, one should not demand to see anybody's ID, but politely request the ID. It would be far better to find a female Coalition soldier to do the talking, protecting the honor of the family. If there is no female soldier to address the Iraqi woman, the next best thing is for the male soldier to address himself to the male family member of the Iraqi woman, not to the Iraqi woman directly. A female soldier may speak directly to an Iraqi male without reservation.



© James Gordon
Iraqi man, US Army soldiers at checkpoint

¹⁵⁹ USA Today. Zabah, Zaid and Jim Michaels. "Baghdad Traffic Police Expect the Unexpected." 8 February 2007. http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2007-02-08-life-iraq-traffic_x.htm

Exchange 15: Your ID, ma'am.

Soldier:	Ma'am, your ID please.	uKhtee, hawetich bala zaH-ma.
Iraqi woman:	I do not have an ID.	ma 'andi haweyya.

Some illegal checkpoints have been set up by militia groups, causing additional traffic jams and confusion among drivers who are already stressed. In all cases, it is best to remain calm and polite.

Exchange 16: IDs, please.

Soldier:	May I trouble you for your IDs, please?	bela zaH-ma huweeyatkum?
Iraqi:	Here, take it.	tfaDhal.

Grouping at the Checkpoint

Do not place males and females into the same group if they are not related. For example, if you are guarding a checkpoint and you must order the passengers of a bus to step off so that you can check their documents, try to lead the males into one group and the females into another group. At a checkpoint, allow families to stay together. Do not group unrelated males and females together.

Rifles Abound

There are many rifles in Iraq. Most families own at least one rifle for self-protection and self-defense. The Coalition Forces respect this tradition, but they ban these weapons in Coalition facilities or zones.



© James Gordon
Iraqi men with weapon

Exchange 17: Open the trunk.

Soldier:	Are you carrying weapons?	shayel islaH?
Iraqi:	No.	la.
Soldier:	Please open the trunk.	raja-an iftaH sundoug al-sayyara.

In the following exchange, the soldier asks the Iraqi to surrender his weapon temporarily while on Coalition grounds or passing through a checkpoint. Do not expect an Iraqi man to give up his rifle willingly. He owns his rifle to protect himself and his family, and it is a question of honor. He will not give it up easily.

Exchange 18: Surrender your weapon.

Soldier:	Are you carrying weapons?	shayel islaH?
Iraqi:	Yes.	na'am.
Soldier:	Please surrender your weapon, and you may enter.	raja-an sallem islaHak hna wa-tfaDhal udKhul.

At the Base Access Gate

Iraqis will sometimes show up at various Coalition facilities seeking jobs, medical attention, or police assistance. They might also be selling food, snacks, or souvenirs. In most cases, the guard must redirect them or turn them away politely and respectfully. However, if they come with information about insurgents, follow the procedures given to you by your commander.



© scalcoholic/Flickr.com
A small shop, green zone

Exchange 19: I saw some insurgents.

Iraqi:	I saw some insurgents hiding in that house.	shufit cham muKharreb Khateleen beDhak albayt.
Soldier:	Thank you, please stay here.	shukran, raja-an ibqa hna.

If people are reporting a crime, it may be necessary to redirect them to the police force, depending on who the victim is. If Coalition Forces have been victims of a crime, follow the stated procedures which may include reporting the incident to your commanding officer.

Exchange 21: Call the cops.



Iraqi	Someone got killed in the street.	fad waHed inkital bras alshari'.
Soldier:	From the Coalition Forces?	min quwat attaHaluf?
Iraqi:	No, Iraqi.	la, iraqi.
Soldier:	Please inform the police.	raja-an Khabbar ashurTa.

Exchange 22: Someone got killed.

Iraqi	Someone got killed in the street.	fad waHed inkital bras alshari'.
Soldier:	From the Coalition Forces?	min quwat attaHaluf?
Iraqi:	Yes, American.	eh, amreekee.
Soldier:	Thank you, I will tell my commander.	shukran, raH agoul il-amer.

If Iraqis arrive at the base checkpoint seeking medical treatment, it is best to quickly redirect them to the nearest hospital or medical facility where they can get help.

Exchange 20: Go to a hospital.

Iraqi:	My son is sick, he needs treatment.	vine mareeDh, yinrad la-'ilaj.
Soldier:	Sorry, this is not a medical facility, please go to a hospital.	ani asef, haDhi mu binaya Tebbiya, raja-an ruH il-mustashfa.

Iraqi people may come to the base checkpoint seeking a job. Politely convey to them any necessary information. This would include telling them that no hiring is done at this facility.

Exchange 23: Looking for a job.

Soldier:	Are you looking for a job?	inta itdower shughul?
Iraqi:	Yes sir.	na'am, saydee.
Soldier:	I am sorry; this is not a hiring place.	ani asef haDha mu makan ta'yeenat.

Rural Life

Tribal Affiliation

In Iraq's feudal society, about three-quarters of the entire population claim membership in one of the nation's 150 tribes, which includes around 2,000 clans.^{160, 161} Although they are connected by Islam today and some of the tribes have fused, in general they lack a common identity.

Operating independently of each other, the tribes continue to be a major part of daily life in Iraq. They became even more prominent after the British united the three Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basrah into the loosely organized state of Iraq, so named after World War I when the Ottoman Empire collapsed. Ethnic, religious, tribal, and linguistic divisions remained strong, and the British ruled through sheiks (tribal leaders), restoring the sheiks' power. Thus, the tribal structure remained paramount even in the new state. Even citizens who have no tribal affiliation rely on sheiks for resources, management of conflicts, and assistance with government matters.¹⁶²



North Babil Tribal council meeting

The mostly nomadic tribes of the Ottoman period had a hierarchical order and lived from tribute, trade, raids, and raising animals. Generally, camel breeders were at the top of the nomadic social hierarchy, with sheep herders, peasants, and marsh dwellers occupying the lesser ranks. The hierarchy in areas of sedentary agriculture put rice growers above vegetable growers, who were above manual workers.¹⁶³ This was mostly true of rural areas. In urban areas, where the population has vastly increased, the tribal structure is somewhat less dynamic and reflects a more uniform social level.

In the early days of the Saddam Hussein regime, the Baathists, who were the ruling elite, tried without success to eliminate tribal structures and tribal names. However, they came to realize that tribal Arabs could be depended upon in wars against Iran, and they began to cultivate loyalties. Most of the Baathists were Sunni Arab Tikritis who had originated in the area of Tikrit, a town northwest of Baghdad. The Baathists formed the government under Saddam Hussein's leadership and received deferential treatment throughout the country. Many allied Sunni tribes along with a Shi'a tribe from Tikrit supported the Baathists, and a codependent relationship between the government and the tribes became

¹⁶⁰ GlobalSecurity.org. "Iraq: Tribal Structures." 22 June 2005.
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/tribes.htm>

¹⁶¹ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Hassan, Hussein D. "Iraq: Tribal Structure, Social, and Political Activities." 15 March 2007.
<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS22626.pdf>

¹⁶² GlobalSecurity.org. "Iraq: Tribal Structures." 22 June 2005.
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/tribes.htm>

¹⁶³ GlobalSecurity.org. "Iraq: Tribal Structures." 22 June 2005.
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/tribes.htm>

official in the 1980s at the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq war. For those tribes who were loyal to the government, the Baathists provided electricity, roads, and water systems to their villages.¹⁶⁴

The tribes were largely left out of the political process in post-Saddam Iraq until 2005. Since then, they have increasingly been used as mediators, interceding on behalf of the occupation forces to bring order to some areas.¹⁶⁵

Tribal, ethnic, and sectarian groups intersect dynamically in the eastern half of the country, where virtually the entire population of Iraq is located. Kurds are mostly found in the north, mixed with Sunni Arabs and Turkmen around Erbil and Kirkuk. The area from Mosul south along the Tigris River and along the Euphrates entering from Syria is mostly Sunni, as far south as Baghdad and Fallujah. Here, Shi'a are mixed among the population.

Shi'a dominate the region from just north of Karbala and east to the Iranian border, all the way south to the Persian Gulf.¹⁶⁶



DoD photo
Tribal sheiks in Baqubah, Iraq

The typical structure of an Iraqi tribe is in a *biet* (“house”), which is shared by the *khams* (extended family). The *khams* is structured around male children descended from the same great-great grandfather. At the most basic level of organization is the single family, which may be part of a *khams* that includes hundreds of members. Households organize into a clan, or *fakhdh*, and clans form *'ashira*, or tribal organizations. Sometimes tribes will organize around a town like Fallujah. The al-Fallujiyyin (named after the town) is composed of 16 clans based on 1980s genealogical charts. Other tribes may range from a few thousand to tribes with over a million members. Several tribes form into a confederation (*qabila*), such as Saddam Hussein's al-Bu Nasir tribe, part of a confederation around Tikrit named al-Tikrita.¹⁶⁷

Different Regions and Different Ways of Life

Kurds

The Kurds are a large ethnic minority group with a long history in this part of the world. They have been mostly pastoral and sedentary, keeping close contact with tribes from

¹⁶⁴ GlobalSecurity.org. “Iraq: Tribal Structures.” 22 June 2005.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/tribes.htm>

¹⁶⁵ The New York Times. Tavernise, Sabrina and Qais Mizher. “In Iraq’s Mayhem, Town Finds Calm Through Its Tribal Links.” 10 July 2006.

http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/10/world/middleeast/10amara.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1

¹⁶⁶ Public Broadcasting System. “Beyond Baghdad. Map: Peoples and Politics.” 12 February 2004.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/beyond/etc/map.html>

¹⁶⁷ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Hassan, Hussein D. “Iraq: Tribal Structure, Social, and Political Activities.” 15 March 2007.

<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS22626.pdf>

whom they receive both protection and direction. There is a wish among Kurdish tribes to confederate, but thus far, they have remained autonomous. Their language, though using Arabic script, is not related to Arabic. Their struggle to rectify their statelessness continues to this day.

Since the end of the First World War, the Kurds in Iraq have fought openly with non-Kurds, pausing mostly to regroup. Tribal allegiances have generally hobbled larger nationalistic Kurdish movements. One Iraqi government after another quashed these rebellions, but none as viciously as the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein. From 1987 to 1989, Saddam's forces committed genocide against the Kurdish people, using poison gas in Halabjah, as well as conventional means, to murder the Kurds. In 1991, coincidental with a call from the U.S. for the Iraqi people to overthrow Saddam Hussein, the Kurds rose up and were defeated. This defeat forced as many as 450,000 of them to the border of Turkey, where they were refused admission, and over 1,000,000 into Iran.¹⁶⁸ A U.N. multinational force subsequently established a safe haven in the northern areas of Iraq, allowing most of the Kurds to return home.



© James Gordon
The Kurdish Peshmerga, Kurdistan, Iraq

Most villages in the Kurdish region are more remote and smaller than those in the Iraqi lowlands. The Kurds' community organizational structure begins with a *shiret*, a large Kurdish tribal confederacy, divided into a unit known as *tira*, or subtribes. Membership in a *tira*, which is the main landowning and political group, is inherited patrilineally. Its leader, or *raiz*, inherits his position with the approval of the senior males. Internal divisions or population growth can cause the *tira* to split into new subgroups.¹⁶⁹

Nomads

The Bedouin, virtually the only nomads in the country, have mostly left the deserts of western Iraq. They have moved to cities, lured by employment and government policy, or else left the country. Many retreated into the isolation of the desert during the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, trying to escape conflict. They were sometimes forced into the army or were persecuted if they refused to join the Baathist Party. Since the collapse of the Baathist regime, some of the Bedouin have returned to areas near the Euphrates River where their



DOD photo
Bedouin Sheik and daughter

¹⁶⁸ Britannica.com. "Worlds Apart: The Roots of Regional Conflicts: The Kurds." 1999. http://www.britannica.com/worldsapart/3_timeline_print.html

¹⁶⁹ GlobalSecurity.org. "Iraq: Societal Framework." 22 June 2005. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/society.htm>

flocks of sheep and camels can graze on the fertile land.¹⁷⁰ Few Bedouin, however, still live in Iraq.¹⁷¹

Marsh Arabs

The *Ma'dan*, or Marsh Arabs, live in 15,540 sq km (6,000 sq mi) of marsh at the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, in a triangle formed by Basrah, Amarah, and Nasiriyah.¹⁷² Created by the yearly flooding of the two rivers which refreshed the water in the marshes, the ecosystem here has supported civilization for over 5,000 years. The inhabitants of the marshes have traditionally depended on raising water buffalo and fishing, living in houses made of reeds. Many of their houses today are small huts located on higher ground near the marshes. When the water levels are high, the people get around in canoe-like boats. Urban Iraqis consider the *Ma'dan*, who are Shi'a, backward. The *Ma'dan* return the consideration, labeling urban Iraqis as being untrustworthy and irreligious.¹⁷³

Recent times have seen devastating changes for the *Ma'dan*. Most *Ma'dan* moved out of the region after Saddam Hussein had canals built to drain the swamps in retaliation for an attempted revolt against him during the 1990s.¹⁷⁴ Since the fall of the Baathist regime in 2003, water has been diverted back into the marsh areas and some *Ma'dan* have returned. However, it has been a continuing struggle to fully resurrect the marshes and the old ways of life of the *Ma'dan*. Turkey has built over 20 dams on the rivers in the last two decades, and much of the water has been siphoned off before the rivers even reach Iraq. The Euphrates has been more heavily dammed, and marshes that depended on its fresh waters have not made a comeback. However, the Al Hawizeh Marsh that relies on the Tigris River for infusion has recovered much of its original area.¹⁷⁵

Rural Economy

The economy of most rural areas in Iraq is based almost entirely on agriculture and living off the land. One exception is the mountainous Kurdish villages to the north, where animal husbandry predominates. River



DoD photo
Oil flowing in the Tigris River, Baiji, Iraq

¹⁷⁰ Voice of America. "Iraq's Bedouins Emerge." 1 May 2003.

<http://www.voanews.com/uspolicy/archive/2003-05/a-2003-05-01-4-1.cfm>

¹⁷¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Iraq: Rural Settlement." 2007. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-232263/Iraq>

¹⁷² Cultural Orientation Resource Center. "Iraqis—Their History and Culture: The People." 18 February 2004. <http://www.cal.org/co/iraqi/ipeop.html>

¹⁷³ Smithsonian Magazine. Hammer, Joshua. "Return to the Marsh." October 2006.

<http://www.smithsonianmagazine.com/issues/2006/october/marsh.php?page=1>

¹⁷⁴ Cultural Orientation Resource Center. "Iraqis—Their History and Culture: The People." 18 February 2004. <http://www.cal.org/co/iraqi/ipeop.html>

¹⁷⁵ Smithsonian Magazine. Hammer, Joshua. "Return to the Marsh." October 2006.

<http://www.smithsonianmagazine.com/issues/2006/october/marsh.php?page=1>

fishing as a livelihood has declined since the 2003 conflict began due to increasing pollution levels in the Tigris River that results from dumping industrial waste, bodies, and sewage in the river. Pollution reached such a high level of toxicity in this important river that local Imams have declare *fatwas* (religious bans) against river fishing.¹⁷⁶

Only 50–60 % of the arable land in Iraq has been cultivated throughout the region's known history. Since the late 1980s, wars, sanctions, drought, and mismanagement of soil and water resources have kept agricultural production far below necessary levels to feed the population. The international Oil-for-Food program that ended in 2003 further depressed the rural economy. The program encouraged the importation of foreign foods that were artificially low priced, so farmers had little incentive to plant.¹⁷⁷

Available agricultural data since the fall of the Hussein regime show some encouraging signs. The 2003 production of grain was higher by 22 % than the previous year and production continued to grow in 2004. However, most experts predict that in the foreseeable future, Iraq will be importing agricultural products. There are long-term plans to invest in agricultural machinery and materials and improve crop varieties.¹⁷⁸

Rural Education

The educational system in rural areas suffers from very low attendance rates. According to a report prepared by Iraq's Ministry of Education, only 30% of students countrywide were attending class in September 2006, compared to around 75% the previous year.¹⁷⁹ Rates of nonattendance are higher in rural areas than in cities, although it is low in cities where urban violence is prevalent. A United Nations survey completed in 2004 found that the net enrollment for girls in rural areas was only 13%, compared to 44% in urban areas. For boys, the difference was 37% enrollment in rural areas compared to 50% in urban areas.¹⁸⁰



© James Gordon

School renovation project, Erbil

Security concerns, poverty, a lack of nearby schools, and traditional attitudes against female schooling all contribute to the problem of low attendance. The UN survey and other agencies state that in rural areas, girls do not attend school because their families

¹⁷⁶ Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Iraq: Imams Issue Fatwas Banning Fishing in the Tigris." 5 July 2007.

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73091>

¹⁷⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." August 2006.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

¹⁷⁸ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Iraq." August 2006.

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ Reuters. Cited from IRIN. "Iraq: School Attendance Rates Drop Drastically." 18 October 2006.

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/f90f37068737141f556e65a54bd0165d.htm>

¹⁸⁰ United Nations Development Programme. "Iraq Living Conditions Survey 2004: Education." 2005.

<http://www.iq.undp.org/ILCS/education.htm>

don't want them to, often out of concern for their safety.¹⁸¹ Deteriorating school infrastructure has also been a problem that keeps students away from school. Projects to construct new schools and rehabilitate old schools are ongoing. In some rural areas, people have taken it upon themselves to rebuild their local schools. One village in southwestern Iraq, Ghadhari, never did have a school. Tired of waiting for government assistance after the fall of Saddam, villagers built their own primary school out of wood and packed mud. The entire village has helped to run the school. Some teachers were found locally, and the village sheik pays taxi fares for staff to commute from a larger nearby city. In other areas, villagers have constructed schools out of tents or whatever materials they have available.¹⁸²

Retaining teachers has also been a problem for the school system in Iraq. Many have fled the country. The shortage of teachers will likely continue to be an issue until the overall security situation and widespread dislocation in the country improve.¹⁸³

Transportation Issues

Through the 1970s and 1980s, the Hussein government built roughly 38,000 km (20,000 mi) of highway throughout the country, mostly for military and commercial use. Around 85% was paved.¹⁸⁴ The 1991 Persian Gulf War targeted that transportation infrastructure of roads and bridges. Much of the damage has been repaired, but main roads and bridges have been subject to repeated damage by saboteurs.

In remote villages, roads are unpaved and in poor condition. Upkeep of roads in rural areas is minimal or nonexistent, and road signs are missing. Where small roads connect to larger ones, the interchanges are not well designed or constructed. In June 2006, the World Bank approved funding for a road rehabilitation project which would target central and southern Iraq. The project would restore 150 km (93 mi) of rural village roads and 300 km (186 mi) of highways, and replace three floating bridges with structures that are permanent.¹⁸⁵



© James Gordon
Road to the Baghdad Café, Iraq

¹⁸¹ Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Iraq: Children's Education Gravely Affected by Conflict." 14 March 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=70697>

¹⁸² ReliefWeb. Institute for War and Peace Reporting. al-Yasiri, Hussein. "Mud Schools in Forgotten Land." 29 May 2007. <http://reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/TKAI-73P5JF?OpenDocument>

¹⁸³ Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Iraq: Children's Education Gravely Affected by Conflict." 14 March 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=70697>

¹⁸⁴ Export.gov/Iraq. "Overview of Key Industry Sectors in Iraq." 4 June 2004. http://www.export.gov/Iraq/bus_climate/sector_overview.html

¹⁸⁵ PortalIraq. "Iraq Transportation: World Bank's Approval of Road Rehabilitation Credit to Promote Iraqi Trade, Employment." 6 July 2006. http://www.portaliraq.com/news/World+Bank%27s+approval+of+road+rehabilitation+credit+to+promote+Iraqi+trade%2C+employment__1112061.html

Rural Hospitality

If there were a sixth pillar of Islam, it would be hospitality. There is a long tradition among nomadic Arabs of granting sanctuary to anyone who asks, even an enemy. Most Arabs would be puzzled at how westerners seem to need specific invitations and notice before a visit. A general invitation from an Iraqi to visit, without giving a specific time and place, might leave Iraqis sitting at home, wondering why westerners are so unsociable.



© Saudi Aramco World / PADIA/Dana Smillie
Iraqi hospitality

In a village, the tribal elder may invite guests to a feast. He may slaughter a sheep and roast it and prepare an enormous meal in their honor. Serving plates full of food would be placed directly on the ground and the food eaten communally. The males eat first; the females who prepared the food eat separately. When hands and fingers are necessary, only the right hand is used. Everybody sits around the food, on the ground, and eats without any forks, knives, spoons, or individual plates.

The host would reach into the plate of meat with his right hand and pull out the juiciest, most tender piece of meat and give it to his guest, to honor him. The guest should accept it graciously with his right hand and thank the host sincerely. To refuse the offering would dishonor the host and his family. The guest should always leave some food on his plate (if eating from a plate) or on the table: This will feed the rest of the host's family. If the host serves fruits, this signals that the main course is done.

Life in the Countryside

The daily routine of life in the countryside follows the rhythm of the seasons. There are crops to tend and animals to move. Tea is served in the afternoon and dinner around 7 p.m. There are mandated prayer times. In rural areas, many families grow vegetables and may keep a few chickens or livestock such as goats or sheep. Their monthly food ration from the government does not include vegetables, so growing their own helps to supplement their diet.

Almost all land ownership is in private hands, with the government owning the infrastructure. Agricultural plots are mostly for subsistence, worked and owned by the family. This is one of the reasons why it is very difficult for a young man to set up an independent household for himself, even after many years after marriage. The wife normally moves in with her husband's parents and they live there, sometimes until the father dies. Thereafter, the brothers could stay together and form joint family households that include remaining parents, themselves, wives, and children.

Rural Iraqis receive minimal services for health care, education, and water and sewage systems, and the services vary, depending on the area. For instance, in Erbil province in northern Iraq, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration provided funding for a new water system. It provides clean water to rural families as well as 155,000 people living in the town of Erbil.¹⁸⁶ In most rural areas, however, few government services are available. Iraqis in general do not have safe sources of drinking water, having to rely on water from polluted rivers and streams. In Anbar province, it is estimated that 60% of the people use drinking water from the river.¹⁸⁷



© James Gordon
Iraqi girl running with water bottles

Sectarian violence or the threat of it remains a part of daily rural life in some provinces although violence has decreased in Anbar Province. Many parts of the rural south have remained fairly peaceful. Lack of progress toward national political reconciliation remains a problem that affects both rural and urban areas. According to a Pentagon report released in June 2007, reconciliation between Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish factions remains "a serious unfulfilled objective" and political division still predominates.¹⁸⁸ Where there is political division, sectarian fighting often fills the gap.

In some rural areas tribes have intervened to help restore order and fill a security role that the central government cannot meet.. Events in Maysan province, in the countryside, provide an example of how this works. Islamist forces including Shi'a militias previously tried to forcefully impose their views on this area and on the town of Amara, capital of Maysan province. The Islamists banned the popular game of dominoes as being un-Islamic and laid down restrictions on the playing of music and acceptable styles of clothing. Those who resisted were punished with violence. Because of these punitive actions, the tribal sheiks of the approximately 14 tribes in the province gathered and agreed that they would intervene and punish any militiamen who harmed tribal members, in the countryside or in the town. After that, the Islamist attacks began to dwindle and the number of homicides dropped sharply. According to British military statistics, the



© M.L. Bonsirven-Fontana / UNESCO.org
Marsh region

¹⁸⁶ U.S. Department of State. "Life-Sustaining Water System for Iraq." 25 July 2007. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/pix/b/prm/90596.htm>

¹⁸⁷ ABC News. Nagorski, Tom. "Iraq: Where Things Stand." 19 March 2007. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Story?id=2962206&page=4>

¹⁸⁸ WashingtonPost.com. Tyson, Ann Scott. "No Drop in Iraq Violence Seen Since Troop Buildup." 14 June 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/13/AR2007061302357.html?hpid=topnews>

homicide rate for the area dropped by 71% for the first five months of 2006, compared to the preceding five months.¹⁸⁹

In another instance of tribal intervention, one town in the eastern marshlands has found a way to peacefully coexist with the insurgents: they use tribal connections to negotiate standoffs. After one insurgent attack, a tribal trial called a *fahsal* was convened to examine the event. The wrongdoers' families agreed to pay a large fine and banish the two men who were responsible for the attack.¹⁹⁰

Camps for the Displaced

Many of Iraq's displaced people who fled the violence and later returned have not been able to find housing in the cities where they once lived. Instead, they have been forced to find shelter in squatter villages or refugee camps in the countryside outside the cities, where they sleep and live in tents or small shacks. Most have no access to jobs or services such as clean water or shopping facilities. Their backgrounds are both Sunni and Shi'a and they are from all income groups—mostly poor, but some middle class and wealthy. In the camps, however, they all live as refugees, barely able to find food for their families and unable to return to their homes.¹⁹¹



© James Gordon
Iraqi family, Samarra, Iraq

One such family lived in a Sunni city near Fallujah until sectarian violence killed three of the sons and forced the family to leave after the Samarra bombing. The father, formerly a corporal in the Iraqi army, moved his remaining family to a refugee camp. He says he cannot return to the city where he lived out of fear that "the vengeance killing will continue."¹⁹²

Over 1 million Iraqis are internally displaced, and over 2 million have fled the country. Those of both groups are mostly unable to return to their original homes. The homes may be occupied by others or destroyed, or it may be simply too dangerous for them to return to neighborhoods from which they were driven out. The Iraqi government, struggling

¹⁸⁹ The New York Times. Tavernise, Sabrina and Qais Mizher. "In Iraq's Mayhem, Town Finds Calm Through Its Tribal Links." 10 July 2006.

<http://travel2.nytimes.com/2006/07/10/world/middleeast/10amara.html>

¹⁹⁰ The New York Times. Tavernise, Sabrina and Qais Mizher. "In Iraq's Mayhem, Town Finds Calm Through Its Tribal Links." 10 July 2006.

<http://travel2.nytimes.com/2006/07/10/world/middleeast/10amara.html>

¹⁹¹ International Herald Tribune. Rubin, Alissa J. "A Bitter Life for Iraq's Displaced." 18 October 2007.
<http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/10/18/asia/najaf.php?page=2>

¹⁹² International Herald Tribune. Rubin, Alissa J. "A Bitter Life for Iraq's Displaced." 18 October 2007.
<http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/10/18/asia/najaf.php?page=2>

with security issues, has not as yet had the resources or organizational capability to address the refugee problem.¹⁹³

Landmines

The gravest current threat to military and civilians traveling on Iraqi roads is improvised explosive devices (IEDs) used by insurgent groups. Many of these are command-detonated—the user decides when to explode it—but victim-activated devices have also been used. A more advanced kind of mine developed for use in 2005 is activated by personnel in remote locations, using laptop computers to set off the device.¹⁹⁴



© James Gordon
Minefield, Iraq

Besides mines associated with the ongoing insurgency, Iraq has a severe problem with landmines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and abandoned ordnance (AXO) from conflicts that date back to World War II.¹⁹⁵ Many of the legacy landmines are along Iraq's border with Iran, left behind from the Iran–Iraq war in the 1980s. The southern and central provinces also have areas of UXO and landmines from that conflict. More recently, minefields were laid on the Saudi Arabia border and around military positions prior to the 2003 invasion.¹⁹⁶

The Iraq Landmine Impact Survey completed work in April 2006 and found over 4,200 suspected hazardous areas containing either mines or UXO that affected over 2,100 communities. However, these numbers probably underestimate the total UXO and landmine contamination, especially in the south, because of local inhabitants' suspicions of and reluctance to talk to surveyors in some of these areas. Most de-mining operations of legacy mines and UXO continue to focus on northern Iraq because of the more challenging security concerns in the central and southern areas.¹⁹⁷



© James Gordon
local Iraqi civic leader

Who's in Charge

The oldest male in a group of Iraqis is the person who has the most authority, and questions should be directed to him. Still, there may be others who have more influence. To find the most influential person,

¹⁹³ International Herald Tribune. Rubin, Alissa J. "A Bitter Life for Iraq's Displaced." 18 October 2007. <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/10/18/asia/najaf.php?page=2>

¹⁹⁴ GlobalSecurity.org. Military. "MATRIX/Spider/Intelligent Munitions Systems (IMS)." 9 July 2005. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ground/matrix.htm>

¹⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch. "Landmines in Iraq: Questions and Answers." December 2002. <http://hrw.org/campaigns/iraq/iraqmines1212.htm>

¹⁹⁶ International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Landmine Monitor. "LM Report 2006: Iraq." 2006. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2006/iraq.html>

¹⁹⁷ International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Landmine Monitor. "LM Report 2006: Iraq." 2006. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2006/iraq.html>

it is necessary to find the leader of the tribe with the most members and contact the leader or sheik of that tribe. Throughout Iraq, among Kurds or Arabs, tribal leaders supported by family networks have more local, practical power than any urban or government force. It is not coincidental that insurgent violence in some of the western provinces only began to decrease when local tribal sheiks started to actively support the Coalition forces.¹⁹⁸

The Kunya

A soldier may search for a particular individual in his own neighborhood where he ought to be known. Yet his neighbors may say they do not know him by this name. They might use a different name to address him. Close friends, relatives (even spouses), and neighbors do not use "official" names to address one another.

Instead, they use the *kunya*, a name made up of "abu" (father of) or "umm" (mother of). For example, you may be searching for Muhammad Husayn Ad-Dalaymee. Muhammad's eldest son is Ali. Muhammad's friends and neighbors will refer to Muhammad as "Abu Ali" (father of Ali), not as "Muhammad."

Exchange 24: You mean Abu Ali.

Soldier:	Please, we are looking for Muhammad Husayn Ad-Dalaymee.	raja-an dendawwer ala muHammad Husayn ad-dalaymee.
Iraqi #1:	I have not heard such a name.	ma sama' heechee ism.
Iraqi #2:	I know, you mean <i>Abu Ali</i> . You might find him in the market.	a'ruf, tuqsud abu ali. yimkin telgah bissoog.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran.

¹⁹⁸ Washington Post.com. Partlow, Joshua. "Sheiks Help Curb Violence in Iraq's West, U.S. Says." 27 January 2007. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/26/AR2007012601497_pf.html

Search and Cordon

It is highly advisable to observe the following protocols: When searching a house, be sure not to bring a dog inside. It is highly insulting and it could get you killed. Dogs are considered unclean. If circumstances allow, knock on the door before you enter; courtesy will go a long way to save lives. Give the man of the house the chance to protect his family's honor; avoid barging in on the family while the women are not covered.

Though one would hope that the man of the house cooperates, do not assume that this will always be the case. People in their homes may react in unpredictable ways out of fear or hostility.



© Soldiers Media Center/Flickr.com
soldier and working canine

Exchange 25: Allow us to inspect your house.

Soldier:	Please allow us to inspect your house.	ismaHelna nfattesh baytkum.
Iraqi:	Sure, but just a minute while I get the family and the kids outside.	ma yKhallef, bas daqeeqa aTalli' al-ahel wa-jehal barra.
Soldier:	Take your time.	KhoDh raH-tak.

Family Life

Family Structure

Whereas Western society highly values individualism and independence, the family is still held up to similarly high levels in the Arab world. Iraq is no exception. Here, a person is known more for his family and his position within it than for his own personal or professional achievements. Family members choose both the marriage partner and career of their child. In some rural areas, an individual moving into a neighborhood can become a member of a tribe or clan by generations of association until the relationship is finally assumed to be by blood. Any Iraqi business owner would prefer to hire members of his own family or choose a close relative as his partner as a matter of trust. Loyalty to one's family, clan, or tribe is absolute.



© James Gordon
Urban family, Najaf, south of Baghdad

The oldest male in a household will serve as the head of the family. In rural areas, his mother, wife, sons, their wives and children, and any unmarried daughters or sisters generally live under the same roof, incorporating three generations. Although his wife and, perhaps, mother may wield considerable influence, especially with her sons and daughters-in-law, his decision is the one that counts. The women perform family-care duties.

With less space to build, or fewer resources, an urban family may have all the same relatives living nearby, rather than under one roof. Family visits are frequent. It is likely that in-laws, cousins, aunts, and uncles live in the same neighborhood. This is part of the kinship relationship outside the immediate household.

Household Structure

Iraqi houses traditionally center on a courtyard, with a windowless wall to the outside. This helps protect the family's privacy. Most homes concentrate on the interior, with a structure that allows men to visit without accidentally running into the women of the house. This is also true in apartments, where family privacy is closely protected.¹⁹⁹



© James Gordon
Iraqi men emerge from their home

If you are searching for a man, and you come to his house, his family may tell you that he is at his other house. If a man takes a second wife, he would prefer for her to live in a second house if he can afford it. Nevertheless, it will probably be his name on the deed of

¹⁹⁹ Cultural Orientation Resource Center. "Iraqis—Their History and Culture: Life." 18 February 2004. <http://www.cal.org/co/iraqi/icult.html>

both properties, not his wife's. Therefore, when the family tells you that he is at "his other house," they mean that he is in the house where his other wife lives.

Exchange 26: His Other House

Soldier:	Where is the father of your children?	wayna abu jjehal?
Iraqi:	In his other house.	bbayt al-luKh.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran.

Though a Muslim man may have more than one wife, he now needs a court order for permission and he also must treat each wife equally. Four wives is the maximum permitted by *shari'a*. Polygamy is rare, however, and even illegal in some Arab countries. Its rarity comes from the wealth needed to support more than one wife, and the judicial permission required.

The patriarch takes care of the family's estate, however large or small it may be, and his decisions are final. In public situations, males will speak for female family members. This absolute authority has been moderated slightly in Baghdad and other big cities, with the growing influence of the public schools and other state institutions.

Life Events

Marriage

A marriage or engagement is an exciting event, as it signals the joining of two families or the cementing of relationships within one. It is more a social contract than a religious ceremony. The groom will ask the prospective bride's father for her hand in marriage, in front of all males from both sides, while the women wait in another room. This serves as the major formal contract, the question already having been raised and discussed privately. The father will also most likely have asked his daughter if she wants to marry the prospective husband. Seldom now will a girl be forced into marriage, although it can and does happen. Marriage among cousins is common, even seen as desirable, for reinforcing family and tribal ties. The religious ceremony is brief, and registration of the marriage with the court is obligatory. The wedding party after the ceremony is often big, with many guests, and the best food and entertainment affordable is provided by the hosts.



© James Gordon
An Iraqi wedding dress shop

Divorce

Divorce, called *talaq*, is as emotionally difficult as in any society. Recent changes allow divorce to be initiated by either husbands or wives, and on several different grounds. The family of a divorced woman may intercede on her behalf, as she retains a strong connection to her birth family throughout her married life. Custody of young children is usually granted to the father, or may be awarded on the basis of what best benefits the children, up to the age of 10, and in some cases, 15. At this age, children may choose with whom they wish to live. Both parties have separate and distinct financial rights under the law.²⁰⁰ Depending on how it is ultimately interpreted, the new constitution may allow these laws to be defined differently depending on sect and ethnic group.²⁰¹

Birth

At the birth of a child, a Muslim father whispers the Muslim call to prayer, *adhaan*, into the baby's right ear so those are the first words the newborn will hear. Then the parents might chew a piece of date and rub the juice along the baby's gums so its first taste of food is of something sweet.

After the seventh day, the baby's head is shaved to show the child is the servant of Allah. The hair is weighed and its equivalent in silver is given to charity. Additionally, a sheep is slaughtered and the meat is distributed to relatives, neighbors, and the poor. Subsequent birthdays are often celebrated as in western countries, with cakes, candles, gifts, and singing and dancing.

The rite of passage for boys is circumcision, called *tahara*, meaning "purification." It occurs at any time from birth to puberty. Whether it is celebrated elaborately or simply, it marks the beginning of a boy's life as an adult. As a prelude, the boy recites from the Quran from memory for the first time. There is much festivity, music, special foods, and many guests.

Domestic Law Concerning Marriage and Inheritance

The Personal Status Law forbids Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims. Concerning inheritance for men and women, the law proscribes that a woman can receive only half of the amount that a man can receive. These provisions contradict Article 14 of the constitution, which



Iraqi baby is examined by US Navy Lieutenant Siler



An Iraqi family celebrating a wedding

²⁰⁰ Emory School of Law. Islamic Family Law. "Iraq, Republic of." 2002.

<http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/legal/iraq.htm>

²⁰¹ Council on Foreign Relations. Coleman, Isobel (moderator) and Nathan Brown, Haleh Esfandiari.

"Sharia, Women's Rights, and the Iraqi Constitution." 11 October 2005.

http://www.cfr.org/publication/9010/sharia_womens_rights_and_the_iraqi_constitution_rush_transcript_federal_news_service_inc.html

guarantees that everyone is entitled to equal protection under the law “without discrimination based on gender or religion.”²⁰² No court has yet ruled on this issue.



© James Gordon
Iraqi children

Superstitions

Every culture has its own superstitions. One popular Iraqi belief is that you should not admire or compliment a man’s children unless you qualify it with the expression *ma sha Allah*, "May God protect him." The reason is that if you call attention to the fine features of a child, you are alerting the so-called Evil Eye, which will then come to harm the child.

Exchange 27: Ma sha Allah.

Iraqi:	This is my son Ah-mad.	haDha ibnee aHmad.
Soldier:	He looks so smart, may God protect him.	mbayyen alayh shaTer, ma sha allah.

Status of the Elderly, Children, and Young Adults

Children are obligated to give their elderly parents the same care their parents gave them. Most Iraqi families have several children, who are adored and indulged. Boys absorb the attitudes of males by being included early in all-male gatherings. The males thoroughly protect girls from the very beginning, and the girls learn domestic skills by participating with their mothers, sisters, and other female relatives. It is common to find a family with five to ten children, who learn to care for each other and their other family members.²⁰³



© James Gordon
Iraqi man, near Baghdad, Iraq

Family Honor

The concept of family honor is inherently connected to women’s role and their chaste conduct in the family and in society. Women in Iraqi culture are highly sheltered and seen as the bearers of culture and family values. Although strictness of customs for women in this regard varies according to religious tenets, many Iraqi women have a great

²⁰² Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. “Iraq: International Religious Freedom Report 2006.” 15 September 2006. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71422.htm>

²⁰³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Country Studies: Iraq*. “Family and Society.” Pelletiere, Stephen. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+iq0044\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+iq0044))

deal of social power through their role in their families. The role of women and honor in Arab culture in general cannot be realistically evaluated or judged by Western standards. One useful interpretation of the role of women in Arab culture is summarized as follows:

At the heart of treatment of women are the very basic belief in a man's honor and that of his family, and the equally basic belief that men and women left to their own devices are unable or unwilling to control their physical urges. (This is not a uniquely Arab belief: The whole notion of the chaperone is based on the same belief.) For this reason, protection of women is a central tenet of Islamic society, and both men and women believe it to be necessary. What seems to us like repression, and causes the feminists among us to wonder at the docility of Arab women, is likely to be viewed by those women as evidence that they are loved and valued. Our Western feminine freedom is quite capable of being interpreted by Arab women as evidence of neglect or even immorality. Furthermore, men and women are believed to be different in their very natures, and women's role is centered on the home and family.²⁰⁴



© James Gordon
Iraqi woman, near Baghdad, Iraq

Naming Conventions

Iraqi Names – Introduction

A complete Iraqi name has a minimum of three components and often four, five, or more. The Iraqi naming system differs somewhat from the system used in the West, but it also bears certain similarities. In both the Western and Iraqi naming systems, the parents give the newborn child a "given name" which appears first in the order of names. In the West, that name might be "John" or "Mary," and in Iraq it might be "Muhammad" or "Alia."



© James Gordon
Iraqi man, Erbil

The So-called "Middle Name"

In the West, we have the concept of a "middle name." A male may bear the first and middle names "John Paul" and a female may be "Mary Elizabeth." The concept of the "middle name" does not exist in Iraq. Instead, every child takes his father's first name as his or her own second name.

For example, if a child's first name is Muhammad and his father's first name is Husayn, the child's first and second names will be, Muhammad Husayn, respectively. If Muhammad has a sister, Alia, her first two names will be Alia Husayn. In other words, this rule applies to males and females alike. So far, Iraqi and Western names do not differ vastly. However, after the second name, we may find significant divergence.

²⁰⁴ Cultural Orientation Resource Center. "Iraqis—Their History and Culture: Life." 18 February 2004. <http://www.cal.org/co/iraqi/ilife.html>

In the West, the name that follows the middle name is the family name; i.e., the last name. Thus, when we meet “John Paul Goldenpepper” and “Mary Elizabeth Goldenpepper,” we could infer from the last name that they are related by blood or marriage.

A Five-Part Name



© James Gordon
Iraqi merchant, Kirkuk

With Iraqi names, the third name may not be the last name at all! All Iraqis have family names, but the family name may show up not in third position, but perhaps in 4th, 5th, or 6th position. The reason is that some Iraqis wear the names of their paternal grandfather or great-grandfather in front of their family name. Thus, we could encounter a five-component name such as the following:

<i>Muhammad</i>	given name
<i>Husayn</i>	given name of father
<i>Ali</i>	given name of paternal grandfather
<i>Abdallah</i>	given name of paternal great-grandfather
<i>Al-Dlaymi</i>	family or tribal name

The likely three

Most Likely:	
<i>Muhammad</i>	Given name
<i>Husayn</i>	Given name of father
<i>Al-Dlaymi</i>	Family or tribal name
Less Likely:	

<i>Muhammad</i>	Given name
<i>Husayn</i>	Given name of father
<i>Ali</i>	Given name of paternal grandfather

Prefixes and Suffixes in Iraqi Names

Any component of the name could contain two segments: a prefix plus a stem or a stem plus a suffix. A common prefix is *Abd*—“servant of....” Muslims believe the highest service is service to *Allah* (God). According to Islam, *Allah* has 99 attributes: *al-Rahman* (“The Merciful”), *al-Raheem* (“The Compassionate”), *al-‘aleem* (“The Most Knowing”), *al-Kareem* (“The Generous”), etc.

Abd Names

A common way to form names is to place the prefix *Abd* in front of *Allah* or one of his 99 attributes, e.g., *Abdallah* (Servant of Allah), *Abd al-Kareem* (Servant of the Generous [God]), *Abd al-Rahman* (Servant of the Merciful [God]), etc. Problems arise in how to write these names using the Roman alphabet. For any *Abd* name, there are a multitude of spellings:

Abd al-Rahman / Abdul Rahman / Abdarahan / Abdal Rahman / Abd alrahman / Abdurrahman / Abdel Rahman / Abd elrahman / Abderrahmane. Statistically, the *Abdel* / *Abdal* configuration tends to show up most frequently.

Abu Names

Another key prefix is *Abu* —“father of...” Iraqi parents take enormous pride in their children, and they may take something else, too: their names! Recall that in the name above, *Muhammad*’s dad is named *Husayn*. Let’s say that *Muhammad* is the first son of *Husayn*. *Husayn* will take such pride in *Muhammad* that he will name himself after his son. He will call himself *Abu Muhammad*, i.e., “Father of Muhammad.” Soon his relatives, friends, neighbors, and co-workers will start calling him *Abu Muhammad* instead of *Husayn*. If *Husayn*’s wife is *Alia*, *Alia* will soon be called *Umm Muhammad*, i.e., “Mother of Muhammad” instead of *Alia*. This use of *Abu* or *Umm* is called the *kunya* (nickname). You will usually not find the *kunya* in official documents, but prepare for an occasional additional complexity: The *kunya* may be incorporated into the family or tribal name, e.g., *Abu Shabbara*, *Abu Haneefa*, *Abu Zu’ayma*, etc.

Thus, you may find the following name:

<i>Muhammad</i>	given name
<i>Husayn</i>	given name of the father
<i>Ali</i>	given name of the paternal grandfather
<i>Abdallah</i>	given name of the paternal great-grandfather
<i>Abu Haneefa</i>	family or tribal name

Al-Deen

In the West, we are familiar with the name Saladin, the mighty Muslim commander who defeated the Crusaders in the Holy Land. Few of us know, however, that his name is actually *Sallah al-deen* or *Sallah addeen* meaning “Rectifier of the Religion.” The suffix *al-deen* shows up in many Muslim names, a small sample of which follows. Note, however, that these Arabic names may be spelled in various ways when the Roman alphabet is used, and this list is by no means exhaustive.



courtesy of Wikimedia
Saladin

<i>Sallah al-deen</i>	<i>Shams al-deen</i>	<i>Nour al-deen</i>
<i>Sallah addin</i>	<i>Shams addin</i>	<i>Nour addin</i>
<i>Sallahaddin</i>	<i>Shamsaddin</i>	<i>Nouraddin</i>
<i>Sallahedin</i>	<i>Shamsedin</i>	<i>Nouredin</i>

Names Identify Background

Certain names reveal a person's religious or ethnic background. Christians prefer Biblical names; Muslims prefer Islamic names. Shi'as avoid taking the names of Sunni historical figures who persecuted the Shi'as. Christians may bear non-Arabic names, Muslim men do not.

Sunnis, Shi'as, Christians, and Kurds share thousands of non-Islamic Arabic names. A small sample might include *Faris, Saleem, Sami, Sabri, Sabah, Muneer, Salim, Sameer, Nizar, Sa'eed, Shakir, Siham, Layla, Nirwan, Masam, Haytham, Layth, and Sinan*. Family or tribal names often start with "al" and end with "i," e.g. *al-Tikri*

Given Names by Ethnicity/Religion

Shi'a	Sunni	Kurdish	Christian	Chaldean	Armenian
<i>Abid Ali</i>	<i>Omar</i>	<i>Azad</i>	<i>Boutros</i>	<i>Sargon</i>	<i>Arshak</i>
<i>Haydar</i>	<i>Muawiyah</i>	<i>Badirkhan</i>	<i>Boulos</i>	<i>Sancharib</i>	<i>Arteen</i>
<i>Kadham</i>	<i>Oth-man</i>	<i>Armanj</i>	<i>Morkos</i>	<i>Ashur</i>	<i>Yuhanees</i>
<i>Abdul Husayn</i>	<i>Yazeed</i>	<i>Nazaneen</i>	<i>Fadi</i>	<i>Ashtar</i>	<i>Vatkees</i>
<i>Abdul A'imma</i>	<i>Bakir</i>	<i>Ashti</i>	<i>Abdel Messih</i>	<i>Ninwi</i>	<i>Vahan</i>
<i>Abdul Zah-ra</i>	<i>Sufyan</i>	<i>Sarbast</i>	<i>Georgis</i>	<i>Ninus</i>	<i>Boxhos</i>

<i>Abdul Hassan</i>	<i>'Aisha</i>	<i>Shivan</i>	<i>Esho</i>		
<i>Abdul Ikhwa</i>	<i>Abdul Qadir</i>		<i>Quryqos</i>		

Tribal Names,

Sunni vs. Shi'a*

Sunni		Shi'a	
<i>Al-Dulaymi</i>	<i>Al-Tae</i>	<i>Al-Tamimi</i>	<i>Al-Samawi</i>
<i>Al-Shamari</i>	<i>Al-Basri</i>	<i>Al-Musawi</i>	<i>Ajja'fari</i>
<i>Al-Jubori</i>	<i>Al-Ani</i>	<i>Al-Mudarrisi</i>	<i>Al-Hilli</i>
<i>Al-Samarai</i>	<i>Al-Rawi</i>	<i>Al-Hakim</i>	<i>Al-Lami</i>
<i>Al-Hadithihi</i>	<i>Saadoun</i>	<i>Assadir</i>	<i>Al-Hussaini</i>

*While this table may seem to indicate a sharp distinction between Shi'a and Sunni family/tribal names, these distinctions represent statistical majorities only. In other words, a Shi'a might bear some of the family/tribal names shown in the Sunni column, and vice-versa.