

# READING PACKET #2

## Iraq

The Republic of **Iraq** is a leading nation in the [Middle East](#). It is bordered to the north by [Turkey](#); to the west by [Syria](#) and [Jordan](#); to the south by [Saudi Arabia](#) and [Kuwait](#); and to the east by [Iran](#). Central **Iraq** is bisected by the [Tigris](#) and [Euphrates](#) Rivers. Once known as [Mesopotamia](#) ("the land between the rivers"), it was a cradle of ancient civilization. The name **Iraq**, which means "cliff" in Arabic, refers to the remains of a cliff formation in the area.

After Arab Muslims conquered **Iraq** in the 7th century A.D., they made it a center of Islamic culture. In the 13th century **Iraq** declined. In the 17th century it came under rule of the [Ottoman Empire](#). Following World War I, the European powers fixed the boundaries of the modern state, and Britain installed a monarch. **Iraq** gained full independence in 1932; a military coup ended the monarchy in 1958. Independent **Iraq** has played a major role in regional affairs. Unfortunately, two wars in the 1980s and 1990s—the [Iran-Iraq War](#) (1980–88) and the 1991 [Persian Gulf War](#)—plus the 2003 [Iraq War](#) have left the country economically crippled and bitterly divided.

## Land and Resources

**Iraq** is marked by geographic extremes. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which originate in Turkey, endow the country with the fertile double valleys of ancient Mesopotamia. Separated by as much as 160 km (100 mi), the rivers come closest near [Baghdad](#), the capital. The southern plain extends southeast from Baghdad for about 565 km (350 mi) and never exceeds some 90 m (300 ft) in altitude. Natural mud and silt levees protect it from flooding. The rivers merge north of [Basra](#) to form the [Shatt-al-Arab](#). The Shatt-al-Arab marks the border with Iran in its lower stretches and empties into the [Persian Gulf](#); it is therefore of great economic and strategic importance. In the mid-1990s, much of the vast marsh area (9,090 km<sup>2</sup>/3,510 mi<sup>2</sup>) bordering Iran just to the north was drained. This caused the dislocation of several hundred thousand marsh dwellers and threatened their way of life.

Upper **Iraq** is marked by rolling plains and fertile soil. The [Zagros Mountains](#) in the northeast extend into Iran. Mount Halgurd (3,728 m/12,230 ft) is the highest point in the country. The desert plateau of western **Iraq** covers approximately 35% of the country. Virtually uninhabited except for nomadic [Bedouin](#), it flows into the neighboring states of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria with no natural border.

### Climate.

**Iraq**'s climate is characterized by aridity and intense summer heat. Rainfall in the lowlands is rare, averaging only 50 mm (2 in) during the November–April rainy season. This makes irrigation from river water essential for agriculture. Despite the absence of summer rainfall, large areas of standing water produce a high humidity level in many parts of the country. Upper **Iraq** receives roughly 400–600 mm (15–25 in) of rainfall annually, but nonirrigated farming is feasible only in the northeast. The July mean temperature in Baghdad is 34° C (93° F); the January average is 10° C (50° F), although sudden heat waves may produce temperatures as high as 27° C (81° F). Winters in the uplands are cold.

### Resources.

[Petroleum](#) is the country's primary mineral resource. Excluding oil sands, **Iraq** has the third-largest proven petroleum reserves (115.5 billion barrels in 2005) in the world, after Saudi Arabia and Iran. Experts believe that

it may actually sit atop as many as 200 billion to 300 billion barrels. Prior to the Iran-Iraq War, **Iraq** was the second-largest oil producer in the Middle East. Since that time, more than two decades of war and economic sanctions have reduced its production capacity. By early 2003, only one-third of its 73 known oil fields were actually producing oil. Oil exports were suspended during the military phase of the **Iraq** War, and later efforts to resume them were hampered by sabotage, including attacks on the critical pipeline in the northern portion of the country that carries Iraqi oil to Turkey. Petroleum is found in the north, northeast, and south. Oil was discovered near [Kirkuk](#) in 1927; in the 1930s the British-dominated Iraqi Petroleum Company began production and shipment via two pipelines to the [Mediterranean Sea](#). **Iraq** also has significant natural-gas reserves and deposits of phosphate rock, sulfur, lead, gypsum, and iron ore. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers provide water for irrigation and hydroelectric power.

Papyrus, lotus, reeds, willows, poplars, and alders flourish in the lower Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. Deciduous forests are found in the upper Zagros Mountains. Wildlife includes hyenas, jackals, foxes, gazelles, antelopes, porcupines, desert hares, bats, and various birds.

## People

Following the 7th-century Arab Muslim conquest, **Iraq** underwent a religious, cultural, and linguistic transformation. Today [Arabs](#) constitute 75–80% of the total population. Arabic is the official and most widely used language. The largest ethnic minority are the [Kurds](#) (15–20%), most of whom reside in the northeastern mountain region known as Iraqi [Kurdistan](#). Kurdish nationalist aspirations have produced a series of uprisings. The most recent of these, in 1991 following the Gulf War, resulted in the flight of some 1 million refugees into Turkey. The Kurds were the strongest allies of the U.S.-led military coalition that seized control of the country in 2003. Kurdish is spoken by the Kurds; the Persian and Turkish languages are used by small minority populations along the Iranian and Turkish borders.

### Religion.

The population of **Iraq** is 97% Muslim. A majority of Muslim Iraqis (60–65%) are [Shiites](#) (members of the Shia sect of [Islam](#)). Most of Iraqi Shiites reside in the south. [Karbala](#) and [Najaf](#), the holiest cities to Shiites after [Mecca](#), are in **Iraq**. Both were heavily damaged during the Persian Gulf War and subsequent antigovernment uprisings. Sunni Muslims (32–37%; see [Sunnites](#)), who live in the north, long dominated the government and the army. Christians of various [Roman Catholic](#) and [Eastern Rite churches](#) make up nearly 3% of the population.

### Demography.

The leading cities are Baghdad, [Mosul](#), Basra (formerly **Iraq**'s major port, which was heavily damaged in the Iran-Iraq War), [Irbil](#), and Kirkuk. The city of [Umm Qasr](#), near the border with Kuwait, has become the chief port for the shipment of relief supplies to southern **Iraq**. [Fallujah](#), a center of Sunni and foreign resistance to the U.S. military presence after the **Iraq** War, is located in the so-called Sunni Triangle north and west of Baghdad. The population of **Iraq** is primarily urban. Nonurban peoples include the pastoralist Bedouin in the western desert and the marsh-dwelling Arabs ([Madan](#), or Ma'dan) along the Iranian border. About 40% of the population are under the age of 15.

By early 2009, with improvements in the security situation, some of **Iraq**'s refugees had begun to return. More than 4 million Iraqis had fled their homes during the height of the communal and religious strife that followed the 2003 U.S.-led military invasion of **Iraq**. About half of those displaced moved to safer parts of the country, and the remainder left the country entirely. About 1.2 million Iraqis sought refuge in Syria; some 500,000 were in Jordan; most of the remainder were in Iran, Lebanon, Egypt, or Turkey.

## Education and Health.

Education and social services improved greatly following the 1958 revolution. Free education was decreed in 1974. In 1978 primary-school enrollment (ages 6–11) was estimated to be 100% of eligible children. By 1992, however, it had declined to 79%; secondary-school enrollment (ages 12–17) was 37% in 1992. By 1999 it was estimated that government funding for education had dropped by 90% from pre-Persian Gulf War levels. The following year, tuition for children attending public schools was reimposed. In 2001, Iraqi leader Saddam [Hussein](#) offered Palestinian Arab students living in territories ruled by the [Palestinian National Authority](#) free tuition at Iraqi universities and other educational institutions. The new administration that took control after the 2003 **Iraq** War revised **Iraq**'s textbooks to demilitarize a curriculum that had lauded battlefield prowess and demonized the United States. School enrollment in **Iraq** has increased each year since the war, reversing more than a decade of decline. Although enrollment has declined in strife-torn Baghdad, the general increase is one of the brightest spots in **Iraq**'s difficult postwar reconstruction.

The Persian Gulf War destroyed a great deal of **Iraq**'s infrastructure, including electrical, water-treatment, and sewage systems. Much was repaired, but as a consequence of the war an estimated 2 million Iraqis were suffering from poverty and health problems. An estimated 285,000 Iraqis, including 100,000 children, died from malnutrition or waterborne diseases between 1991 and 1995. Between 1990 and 2000 the infant-mortality rate rose from 25 to 127 per 1,000 live births. Malnutrition in children, which reportedly peaked in 1997, remains a serious problem, primarily in central and southern **Iraq** (infant-mortality rates in the northern Kurdish areas have decreased). A 2005 UN study found that since the U.S.-led intervention, malnutrition rates in children under the age of 5 had nearly doubled, to almost 8%, by the end of 2004.

Humanitarian assistance and the rebuilding of **Iraq**'s infrastructure were key priorities of the post-**Iraq** War administration. Many health centers in areas not affected by the insurgency have been rebuilt, and approximately 95% of children under the age of 5 have been vaccinated against childhood diseases. Nevertheless, by early 2007, **Iraq**'s health-care system was overall in much worse shape than it had been before the war. Numerous hospitals had shortages of drugs and qualified staff. Poor sanitation, huge gaps in services, and the fact that the security situation made many people afraid to leave their homes to seek treatment had contributed to many preventable deaths and high levels of illness. Compounding the difficulties was the fact that physicians had become a target of the postwar insurgency. This caused many senior physicians to leave the country.

## Economic Activity

**Iraq** has long been a primary hub of international commerce. The Asian silk route passed through Mesopotamia, and the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers linked **Iraq** to Indian Ocean trade. Baghdad was an economic center of the Islamic world for 500 years. The economy was mainly agricultural until the discovery of oil and the rapid modernization of recent decades. The 1958 revolution led to the forced breakup of large estates. In 1968 the Arab Socialist [Baath party](#) initiated the transformation to a state-controlled economy, which created a vast public sector. In 1987 the government began privatizing state-run industries. Nearly 600 state organizations were abolished.

**Iraq** is a charter member of the [Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries](#) (OPEC). The state nationalized the oil industry in 1972. During the Iran-Iraq War, oil shipments via the Persian Gulf were halted. **Iraq** did continue to transport oil by road and pipeline through Turkey and Saudi Arabia, though. Economic recovery after the war with Iran was shattered by the 1991 Persian Gulf War. In October 1992 the [United Nations](#) Security Council voted to seize Iraqi assets frozen abroad after **Iraq**'s invasion of Kuwait in 1990; they were used to compensate Kuwaiti victims of the invasion and to pay for UN expenses in **Iraq**. A UN-sponsored boycott on Iraqi oil, designed to pressure government reform or the ouster of Saddam Hussein, remained in force because of Hussein's reluctance to comply completely with UN peace terms. Iraqi oil production had been

about 3 million barrels per day in mid-1990. By mid-1995 it had declined to 600,000–700,000 barrels per day. In late 2000, in an effort to force international concessions, **Iraq**'s oil exports were temporarily suspended. The sanctions had a devastating impact on the urban poor due to rampant inflation and the 1994 halving of government food rations. Many Iraqis wealthy enough to leave the country did so; middle-class families sold their possessions for food; and the social order started to break down. By 2002 the nation's middle class had been virtually eliminated. Inflation stood at 50%, while per-capita income had plummeted from approximately \$3,000 in 1991 to only \$715.

In 1996, Hussein finally accepted the terms of a UN oil-for-food program that became effective in December of that year. The oil-for-food program allowed **Iraq** to sell \$2 billion of oil every six months, two-thirds of which was to be used to buy food and medicine. In February 1998 the UN allowed **Iraq** to double its oil exports to pay war reparations and purchase humanitarian supplies. **Iraq** was unable to radically increase exports, however, because its oil-production system had deteriorated. The UN Security Council subsequently approved repeated six-month extensions of the oil-for-food program. It allowed **Iraq** to use some of this money to purchase previously banned imports such as electrical goods and construction materials and to repair and maintain its deteriorating oil infrastructure. By that time, rising world oil prices had greatly increased the income **Iraq** was receiving from its oil exports (both legal and illegal). But in 2001 the Iraqi gross domestic product shrank by 6%. It dropped even further in 2002, due partly to a substantial decline in purchases of Iraqi oil by U.S. companies. (**Iraq** had provided 8% of U.S. oil imports in 2001.)

After the 2003 U.S.-led military invasion, it was estimated that the crippling of oil exports to Turkey owing to saboteur attacks on the main export pipeline from the northern Kirkuk fields was costing the country \$7 million a day. By 2005 petroleum was providing 90% of all Iraqi government revenues. Iraqi oil production had nearly returned to prewar levels by late February 2004, but by December 2005 continued sabotage had reduced oil exports to their lowest level since the invasion. This created major difficulties for reconstruction efforts. These efforts had already fallen far short of predictions due to the unexpectedly deteriorated state of the existing Iraqi infrastructure and the expense of keeping power plants, sewer plants, and other facilities running once they had been built despite insurgent attacks.

The oil-for-food program, the largest aid program ever undertaken by the UN, officially came to an end in November 2003; its food-distribution contracts were taken over by the post-**Iraq** War U.S.-led coalition administration. On June 28, 2004, the sovereign interim government of **Iraq** assumed sole authority for the disbursement of the nation's oil and natural-gas revenues. By mid-2005 almost all Iraqis continued to receive a monthly government ration of flour, rice, beans, and other goods. The cost of this program consumed nearly one-third of the national budget. It harmed domestic farming and industry because it relied almost entirely on imported goods. Yet the political costs of ending this and other subsidies when the country remained politically fragile and in the face of massive unemployment were considered too great to halt them.

**Iraq** was once the world's leading exporter of dates. In recent years its date orchards have been decimated by lack of water, fungi, and pests; in 2008, **Iraq** produced about half the quantity of dates it did in the mid-1980s. Although wheat, rice, fruits, vegetables, and sheep and poultry products remain important, **Iraq** is no longer self-sufficient in these areas. Only 3% of **Iraq**'s arable land (12% of the total land area) is presently farmed. In 1990 land on collective and state farms was opened to private farmers at nominal rents in an attempt to boost food production. Nevertheless, harvests have been reduced by severe drought; shortages of fertilizer, pesticides, and spare parts for equipment; and outbreaks of [foot-and-mouth disease](#) in the late 1990s that threatened the nation's livestock.

Until it deteriorated as a result of economic sanctions, neglect, and war, **Iraq** had long been one of the most technologically advanced countries in the Middle East. Its diversified industrial base, which includes petrochemical, textile and leather goods, steel, sugar, and cement manufacture, was damaged by war (including power outages) and a lack of spare parts. War damage and the extensive looting that took place during the last

days of the **Iraq** War posed further obstacles to the nation's economic recovery. So did **Iraq's** huge national debt, most of which observers believed would never be repaid.

Unemployment, estimated to have been reduced from roughly 70% immediately after the war to approximately 30% by late February 2004, later again rose due to ongoing security concerns. The revival of private entrepreneurship was considered crucial to **Iraq's** future stability and prosperity; it was threatened, however, by a rash of kidnappings, frequent power outages, and risky supply routes. By September 2004 the security situation had become so precarious that the U.S. government shifted about \$3.46 billion of its \$18.4 billion aid package for **Iraq** from reconstruction projects to security and short-term job-creation programs. Despite this, difficulties continued. In November 2004, in an effort to support the country's postwar rebuilding, France, Germany, Russia, and other members of the Paris Club of creditors agreed to forgive 80% of the \$38.9 billion owed to them by **Iraq**. This amounted to roughly one-third of **Iraq's** total obligations to foreign creditors.

The government intends to maintain control of oil drilling and extraction, although it hopes to put refining and other downstream industries into private hands if the security situation improves. By mid-2005, production was averaging 1.4 million barrels per day (bpd). By late June 2006, however, it had risen to 2.5 million bpd; this was its highest level since the launch of the **Iraq** War. (Prewar output had peaked at 3.5 million bpd.) Some 17% of this went directly to Iraqi Kurdistan. The country still has to import about half of its gasoline due to a lack of refining capacity. Lack of capacity and security problems have led to the environmentally-damaging disposal in **Iraq** of millions of barrels of refinery waste; this waste, known as black oil, was once exported to more efficient foreign refineries. In addition, many much-needed repairs have still not been made, and sabotage of oil facilities and pipelines continues. **Iraq** is paying more than 20 times as much for gasoline imports than it charges for gasoline at home due to government oil subsidies. This has encouraged a domestic black market and the smuggling of oil to neighboring countries. Removing the subsidies is politically difficult, because they allow poor people to run generators during the frequent power outages. A December 2005 decision to triple domestic fuel prices when **Iraq's** largest oil refinery was forced to shut down temporarily after death threats to tanker drivers led to widespread protests.

By the summer of 2007, many reconstruction projects had not been completed or had fallen into disrepair. Corruption was rampant. The national power grid was meeting only about half of the demand; experts warned that it was on the verge of collapse. Nearly one-third of Iraqis were believed to be in need of emergency assistance, and 70% lacked adequate supplies of uncontaminated water. Violence hampered economic recovery and fueled a massive refugee crisis. By early 2008, however, improvements in the security situation had raised hopes for economic growth, driven by buoyant petroleum exports. These hopes were somewhat tempered by the later drop in world oil prices due to a global economic slowdown. International competition, poor management, and a lack of foreign investment have also negatively affected Iraqi industry.

## Government

Radical officers abolished the Iraqi monarchy in 1958. A series of revolutionary socialist regimes followed. The Baath party ruled **Iraq** from 1968 to 2003, and Saddam Hussein seized complete power in 1979. His official titles included president, prime minister (until 1991), head of the Revolutionary Command Council (the ruling junta), commander of the armed forces, and secretary-general of the Baath party.

Elections to the National Assembly were first held in 1980. A period of lessened repression followed the Iran-Iraq War. In 1990 the legislature approved a draft constitution to replace the 1970 interim charter. It provided for a multiparty system and civil liberties. Kurdistan, granted limited autonomy in 1970, first held free elections in 1992. But Hussein, who used chemical weapons against his own people and harshly subdued uprisings in both the Shiite south and the Kurdish north after the Persian Gulf War, headed what was considered one of the world's most brutal dictatorships. Family members and others from Hussein's hometown of [Tikrit](#), in the north,

dominated the government and the army until Hussein's government was ousted by a U.S.-led military coalition in the 2003 **Iraq** War.

Although the United States declared that its goal was the creation of a democracy by and for Iraqis, postwar **Iraq** remained under U.S. military occupation until order could be restored and the economy rebuilt. Several cities (including Baghdad, on July 7, 2003) chose city councils that were given advisory roles under the U.S.-led provisional administration headed by chief U.S. civilian administrator Paul **Bremer**. A national Governing Council made up of 25 prominent Iraqis was named in July 2003; on September 1, a 25-member cabinet was appointed by this council.

An interim constitution (the Transitional Administrative Law) was signed on Mar. 8, 2004, by the Governing Council. The document did not specify the precise nature of the provisional government. It was to be headed by a president and two deputies, who would collectively select a prime minister and cabinet to run the government. The interim constitution included a bill of rights protecting freedoms of speech, religious expression, and assembly as well as due process. It made Islam the state religion. Although it mandated that no law was to be passed that would contradict the basic teachings of Islam, the interim constitution did not grant religious courts authority over civil matters. Kurdish and Arabic became official languages. One of the interim constitution's most controversial clauses safeguarded the rights of minorities; it stated that the referendum on the permanent constitution would fail if two-thirds of the population of any 3 of **Iraq's** 18 provinces voted against it.

After much confusion, the interim government was named by June 1, 2004. The largely ceremonial post of president was filled by a Sunnite, Ghazi Ajil al-Yawer, a member of one of **Iraq's** largest and most powerful tribes. The prime ministership went to Iyad Allawi, a Shiite who had turned against Hussein in the 1970s. Both the president and the prime minister had been members of the Governing Council, which had assumed a larger role than had been anticipated in the selection process. Once its work had been completed, the council dissolved itself.

On June 8, 2004, the UN Security Council passed a resolution formally endorsing the interim government, which was to have "full sovereignty." The U.S.-led provisional authority was dissolved and replaced by the world's largest U.S. embassy when the interim administration formally assumed sovereignty on June 28—two days ahead of schedule. The mandate of the U.S.-led multinational force was to expire when a full-term government, directly elected under a permanent constitution no later than Dec. 31, 2005, took power, although its mandate could be reviewed before that time. The UN was to assist in coordinating relief and reconstruction efforts, protecting human rights, planning a census, setting up elections, and drafting a constitution.

In landmark democratic national, provincial, and local elections on Jan. 30, 2005, the predominantly Shiite United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) captured 48% of the vote. The Kurds had come in second in a poll largely boycotted by the former ruling Sunnite minority. Because a two-thirds majority was needed to pass legislation in the newly elected transitional parliament, the UIA agreed to form a coalition with the Kurds. Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani became **Iraq's** first president; UIA candidate Ibrahim al-Jaafari was prime minister. The main task of the new legislature was to approve a new constitution under which elections for a permanent government could be held.

This constitution was approved by Iraqi voters in an Oct. 15, 2005, referendum. It declares **Iraq** a democratic, federal, representative (parliamentary) republic that is an Islamic (but not an Arab) nation, with a government that is elected every four years. The charter declares that no legislation can contradict either the fixed principles of Islam or the basic rights and freedoms (including equality before the law) outlined in the constitution. It calls for the fair apportionment of oil and natural-gas revenues based on **Iraq's** demographic distribution. It also sets aside at least 25% of legislative seats for women. The approval of two-thirds of the legislature is required to select the president and a prime minister representing the main party in the legislature. A two-thirds vote is also required to amend the constitution.

The first elections for a permanent government under this constitution were held on Dec. 15, 2005. Voting took place largely along religious and ethnic lines. The UIA captured 128 of 275 legislative seats and 41% of the vote. The Kurdistan alliance won 53 seats (22% of the vote). Another 55 seats and 19% of the vote went to the two main Sunnite-led coalitions. Just 25 seats (8%) went to the secular Iraqi List led by former prime minister Allawi. The remaining seats were won by smaller parties and independents. Because no one party had secured an absolute majority, negotiations to determine the shape of the new government were protracted. On Apr. 22, 2006, the legislature finally reelected Talabani as president. He then nominated Jawad al-Maliki (who reverted to his original name, Nuri al-[Maliki](#), on April 26) as prime minister. Al-Maliki's new government was sworn in on May 20. He remained prime minister following new provincial elections on Jan. 31, 2009. His coalition was the leading vote getter in 9 of 14 provinces (polls in the 3 Kurdish provinces were held in July 2009, and Kirkuk remained in dispute). The al-Maliki victory was considered an indication that a majority of Iraqis supported the idea of a strong central government. Talabani said he would not seek another presidential term following new general elections planned for Jan. 30, 2010.

## History

Mesopotamia is one of the world's oldest centers of settled agriculture and urbanization. Archaeological remains of a farming settlement near [Nineveh](#) date to 9000 B.C. The civilizations of [Sumer](#), [Babylonia](#), [Akkad](#), and [Assyria](#) all developed in the central river valleys. In the 2d century A.D. the [Sassanian](#) Persian empire established its capital near the site of present-day Baghdad. After a period of economic and political decay, Arab Muslims conquered **Iraq** in 637. The Arabs repaired waterworks and built new cities, reviving commerce and setting in motion the Arabization and Islamization of **Iraq**. In 750 the [Abbasids](#) seized the [caliphate](#). They began construction of Baghdad, which became the political, economic, and cultural hub of the Islamic world for five centuries. In 1258 the [Mongols](#) sacked Baghdad and ended Abbasid rule. **Iraq** never regained its stature. Thereafter it became a contested frontier, primarily of Turkish and Persian dynasties. Under Ottoman rule after 1638, **Iraq** comprised three districts: Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. [Midhat Pasha](#), the two-time grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire who was largely responsible for the empire's first constitution, served as governor of Baghdad from 1869 to 1872.

### Establishment of the Iraqi Monarchy.

British forces occupied the country during World War I. After the war, under the terms of a secret 1916 British-French accord to dismember the Ottoman Empire (see [Sykes-Picot Agreement](#)), the Arab provinces of the empire were divided into [League of Nations](#) mandates (see [mandate system](#)) under British and French control. Britain was delegated by the League of Nations to oversee **Iraq**'s transition to independence. It installed a monarchy under [Faisal I](#) (r. 1920–33) of the Hashemite family of Arabia. In 1932, Britain gave **Iraq** independence and helped Faisal exert authority by force. Britain remained influential in **Iraq** until 1958. Faisal was succeeded by his son, [Ghazi I](#), who died in 1939. [Faisal II](#), Ghazi's son, was a minor, so his uncle ruled as regent until 1953.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Iraqi politics was dominated by issues of Arab nationalism. During World War II, when pro-Axis forces seized power, British troops occupied the country and restored a friendly regime. The leading figure in Iraqi politics throughout the monarchy was [Nuri al-Said](#). By the late 1940s, Nuri al-Said's pro-Western nationalist policies drew increasing fire from radical nationalists. **Iraq** joined the [Central Treaty Organization](#) (CENTO) in 1955. Because it was the only Arab state to do so, this put it at odds with other [Arab League](#) members and a group of dissident Iraqi army officers known as the Free Officers. The latter staged a coup on July 14, 1958. Nuri al-Said and the king and other members of the royal family were murdered.

### The Rise of Saddam Hussein.

The next two decades were marked by political instability and authoritarian regimes. The government of Gen. Abd al-Karim [Qasim](#), the leader of the Free Officers, was toppled in a Baathist-inspired coup in 1963; Qasim was killed. Col. Abd al-Salam [Arif](#), the pan-Arabist who succeeded Qasim as president, was deposed in 1968 by the Baathist Ahmad Hassan al-[Bakr](#). Bakr had briefly served as prime minister following the 1963 coup; he was ousted, in turn, by Saddam Hussein in 1979. Negotiations aimed at a political union with Syria (also ruled by the Baath party) and Egypt foundered in the 1960s. Throughout that decade **Iraq** drew increasingly close to the Soviet Union, and in 1972 the two nations signed a treaty of alliance. Consistently anti-Israel, **Iraq** participated in the 1973 [Arab-Israeli War](#). In 1981, Israeli warplanes destroyed a nuclear reactor in **Iraq** that Israel feared would be used to produce atomic weapons. Diplomatic relations between **Iraq** and the United States, severed in 1967, were restored in 1984.

Kurdish nationalist aspirations have led to periods of intense conflict with the Iraqi government. A Kurdish rebellion led by Mustafa [Barzani](#) was crushed in 1975 when Iran agreed to stop supporting the Kurdish forces along its border with **Iraq**. In September 1980, fearing Iran's revolutionary Muslim ideology and the resumption of a long-standing dispute over control of the Shatt-al-Arab, **Iraq** invaded Iran. **Iraq** initially made substantial military gains. By mid-1982, however, Iranian forces had turned the tide and crossed into **Iraq**. The Iran-Iraq War dragged on for years at great cost. Casualties were heavy and chemical weapons were reportedly used by both sides. Civilian and industrial centers were bombed. The flow of oil from the Persian Gulf was disrupted. In August 1988 both sides accepted a UN-mediated cease-fire. Shortly thereafter, **Iraq** allegedly used chemical weapons to crush a Kurdish rebellion in the north.

### **The Persian Gulf War and After.**

In July 1990 the Iraqi government accused Kuwait and the [United Arab Emirates](#) of exceeding their OPEC export quotas, thus holding down world oil prices and reducing Iraqi revenues. **Iraq** also charged Kuwait with stealing Iraqi oil from the Rumelia fields on their common border, a line **Iraq** had challenged since independence. **Iraq** also demanded that Kuwait and other Arab Gulf states waive \$30 billion in loans they had granted **Iraq** to finance the war with Iran. Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait on Aug. 2, 1990. On August 28, **Iraq** formally annexed Kuwait as its 19th province.

Fearing **Iraq's** enhanced economic power and Saddam Hussein's personal ambition to dominate the region, the world community, including most Arab states, denounced the invasion. Six Arab League members (Jordan, Libya, Mauritania, Sudan, Yemen, and the [Palestine Liberation Organization](#)) refused to condemn **Iraq**, although their support soon wavered. **Iraq's** move generated a degree of favor among many Arabs who felt little sympathy for wealthy Kuwait. Others decried the aggression of one Arab state against another.

An international force, composed largely of American, European, and Arab troops, was deployed in Saudi Arabia to deter further Iraqi advances. When a UN-imposed deadline for Iraqi withdrawal passed on Jan. 16, 1991, coalition forces launched air strikes against Iraqi targets. A ground attack followed on February 24. On February 28, a cease-fire was declared. **Iraq** accepted the coalition peace terms on March 3; these included scrapping **Iraq's** chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and long-range missile programs and allowing UN inspection of weapons sites.

Despite revolts by Shiite Muslims in the south and Kurds in the north, Hussein remained in power and reasserted his authority over the country. Many leading Shiite clerics, including Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-[Sadr](#), were subsequently killed or fled into exile in Iran. Coalition forces established a safe haven for Kurdish refugees in Kurdistan in April 1991. A year later, they began policing a "no-fly" zone for Iraqi aircraft in the south. In October 1994, Iraqi troops briefly massed along the Kuwaiti border. U.S. forces were sent to counter the threat. The following month **Iraq** formally abandoned all territorial claims to Kuwait. In July 1995 it finally admitted to the production of biological weapons, including such deadly agents as anthrax and

botulism. It had already complied with the remainder of the UN cease-fire terms in an effort to end UN sanctions, which were controversial because of their impact on Iraqi civilians.

In October 1995, Iraqi voters approved Hussein's continuing as president for an indefinite term. In March 1996 the country held its first legislative elections since 1989. Only candidates loyal to Hussein were allowed to run, however. Iraqi forces attacked Irbil, a city in the Kurdish enclave in northern **Iraq** controlled by an Iranian-backed Kurdish faction, on Aug. 30, 1996. This sparked retaliatory U.S. missile strikes against military targets in southern **Iraq**. Although **Iraq** was given permission in 1996 to sell oil in exchange for humanitarian supplies, UN economic sanctions remained in place.

In November 1997, and again in January 1998, Hussein attempted to block U.S. participation in UN weapons-inspections teams. The move was widely seen as a strategy to retain his weapons of mass destruction, which included both chemical and biological weapons. The Iraqi leader's ruthless suppression of domestic dissent continued. After his assassination in 1999, reportedly on Hussein's orders, the dissident Shiite cleric Muhammad al-Sadr became a rallying point for Iraqi Shiites. In the meantime, Western aircraft continued to patrol **Iraq's** "no-fly" zones in the north and south.

The ongoing crisis between the UN weapons inspectors and Hussein escalated in November 1998. **Iraq** ended all dealings with the UN inspectors and barred them from monitoring known production sites after the UN Security Council announced that it would review **Iraq's** progress on eliminating prohibited weapons without agreeing to the government's demand that such a review lead directly to the lifting of the sanctions. In December, when **Iraq** refused to allow the UN personnel to search one of the offices of the ruling Baath party after having pledged full access, the United States and Britain launched air and missile attacks on some 100 military and political targets in **Iraq**. The attacks, code-named Desert Fox, were criticized by China, Russia, India, France, and many Arab nations. In their aftermath, **Iraq** announced that it would consider allowing the arms inspectors to return only if the UN sanctions were lifted; it subsequently attacked U.S. and British planes patrolling the no-fly zones.

In December 1999, a year after UN arms inspections had ceased, the UN Security Council established a new disarmament agency for **Iraq**—the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC). Meanwhile, **Iraq** still refused to cooperate with the UN arms inspectors. Criticism of the economic sanctions on **Iraq** continued to mount due to their devastating impact on Iraqi civilians, but the lifting of the sanctions still depended on such cooperation. New legislative elections were held in March 2000. All candidates had to be approved by the Baath party, and failure to vote was rare because it was considered an expression of disloyalty to Hussein.

As world frustrations with the sanctions increased, Hussein capitalized on the rising tide of regional anti-Israeli and anti-U.S. sentiments in late 2000 to improve his relations with his Arab neighbors and end his country's decade of near isolation. **Iraq's** land borders with Saudi Arabia were reopened. Construction of a pipeline linking Jordan and **Iraq** was soon to begin, and high-level diplomatic talks with Iran were held. In addition, **Iraq** signed free-trade agreements with Egypt and Syria. Rail service with Turkey resumed, and the airport near Baghdad received a stream of international flights from countries and groups seeking to have the UN sanctions lifted. Scheduled international flights to **Iraq**, which had been halted on June 1, 1992, resumed in 2001.

The Iraqi government was the only Arab government that did not condemn the [September 11, 2001](#), terrorist attacks in the United States. It was, however, quick to condemn the retaliatory U.S.-led military strikes against [Afghanistan](#) launched in October. In November the UN Security Council approved a compromise resolution that extended the oil-for-food program while promising a revision of the sanctions against **Iraq** within six months. As the [Taliban](#) was driven from power in Afghanistan and Hussein continued to support the Palestinian revolt against Israel, the United States hinted that **Iraq** might become the next target in its war against international terrorism. Subsequently, Hussein declared that **Iraq** no longer possessed weapons of mass destruction and had no intention of producing them again. He also said that he would consider allowing UN

weapons inspectors to return to **Iraq**, and that the lifting of sanctions would not be a precondition for talks on the matter.

In May 2002 the UN Security Council approved streamlined procedures for implementing the sanctions against **Iraq**. The new policy was intended to reduce the sanctions' impact on Iraqi civilians rather than ending them altogether, as many countries had advocated. It was seen as a diplomatic victory for the United States and Britain. A new rubber-stamp referendum endorsing yet another seven-year presidential term for Hussein was held on Oct. 16, 2002; he reportedly received yes votes from every single eligible Iraqi voter.

A year after the September 11 attacks, there were increasing indications that the United States was willing to intervene militarily if necessary to force Hussein's ouster before he acquired nuclear weapons. Yet there appeared to be little international support for such an action and little effective opposition to him within **Iraq**. The Arab nations in the region and most of the other countries that had participated in the Gulf War feared that such an invasion would have a destabilizing effect on the entire Middle East.

In an address to the UN General Assembly on Sept. 12, 2002, U.S. president George W. [Bush](#) asked that the UN force **Iraq** to comply with its previous commitments to eliminate its programs to produce weapons of mass destruction. He also made it clear that the United States was prepared to act if the UN did not. Hussein said that he would allow UN inspectors to return under earlier UN agreements (which had hampered the ability of the inspectors to access all suspected weapons-producing sites or to operate without advance warning). He released as many as 10,000 of **Iraq**'s political prisoners in an effort to curry domestic support. He also launched a less-than-successful campaign to persuade his neighbors that a U.S. strike against **Iraq** would be an attack on the entire Arab world. Meanwhile, Bush continued to press for Hussein's removal. In October 2002 he gained congressional approval to use force against **Iraq** to protect U.S. national security and enforce UN resolutions if diplomatic and other peaceful means failed. U.S. and British attacks on Iraqi air defenses in the no-fly zones intensified.

On Nov. 8, 2002, after eight weeks of negotiations, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1441, giving Hussein a week to accept or reject its terms. The new resolution called for the UN arms inspectors to return to **Iraq** on November 18 with unfettered access to any sites suspected of housing weapons of mass destruction. It did not commit the United States to waiting for a second resolution authorizing military action before deciding whether or not to go to war. The Iraqi parliament, which had no real power, unanimously voted to reject the measure; it left the final decision to Hussein, though, who ultimately accepted it. The UN weapons inspectors returned, and **Iraq** met the December 8 deadline to declare the status of all its weapons programs in a voluminous report. As the United States continued its military buildup in the Gulf region, the oil-for-food program was extended for an additional six months. The greatest concern remained, however, that Hussein would agree to accept the resolution and ostensibly cooperate with the UN inspectors while still managing to hide some of his weapons of mass destruction.

In February 2003, **Iraq** agreed to allow U-2 surveillance flights over Iraqi territory to help the inspectors in their search for banned weapons. That same month U.S. secretary of state Colin [Powell](#) presented evidence of **Iraq**'s failure to comply with Resolution 1441. The **Iraq** controversy caused serious divisions within the [NATO](#). The governments of Spain, Portugal, Italy, Britain, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Denmark backed the U.S. position on **Iraq**; Germany, France, and Belgium opposed it. The legislature of Turkey, NATO's only Muslim member, narrowly failed to pass a measure permitting the deployment of more than 60,000 U.S. troops in Turkey. This would have allowed the United States to establish a second, northern front in a possible war with **Iraq**.

As world pressure to resolve the crisis peacefully increased, **Iraq** began destroying the banned long-range al-Samoud II missiles discovered by UN inspectors. It also agreed to verify that it had destroyed its supplies of anthrax and nerve gas and to permit its scientists to have private interviews with UN inspectors. Although the UN agents acknowledged that **Iraq** still had not complied in full—and had a possibly illegal unmanned drone

and might still possess Scud missiles, mustard gas shells, bombs capable of chemical and biological warfare, and significant amounts of anthrax—they requested more time. The U.S. government contended that **Iraq's** moves were too little, too late.

## **Iraq War and After.**

On the evening of Mar. 17, 2003, President Bush gave Hussein and his two sons, Uday and Qusay, 48 hours to leave **Iraq** or face a U.S.-led military invasion. When Hussein defiantly refused, the United States launched an air attack on Baghdad on the night of March 19–20 in an unsuccessful attempt to kill Hussein and his sons. The ground attack followed within hours, on March 20. Although 30 nations (a much smaller number than in the 1991 Gulf War, and including no Arab states) were publicly identified with the U.S.-led coalition, only Britain, followed distantly by Australia, committed substantial troops to the operation. By April 6, large parts of Basra, the chief city of southern **Iraq**, were under British control. Despite continued pockets of resistance, Baghdad fell to U.S. forces on April 9. Kurdish fighters together with U.S. special forces captured first Kirkuk (April 10), then Mosul (April 11) in the north. The United States was criticized for its delay in halting widespread looting that followed the downfall of Hussein's regime and the expulsion by Kurdish fighters of Arabs whom Hussein's regime had resettled in northern **Iraq**.

On Apr. 8, 2003, the first members of the initial interim postwar administration arrived in the country. This administration, called the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), was headed by a retired U.S. general, Jay Garner, who reported to U.S. defense secretary Donald [Rumsfeld](#). It was charged with coordinating humanitarian aid and reconstruction; running medical facilities, utilities, and other infrastructure; and restoring **Iraq** to the control of its people.

The U.S. government declared on May 1, 2003, that the military phase of the conflict was over. Shortly thereafter, Garner was superseded by former State Department terrorism expert Paul Bremer. Bremer arrived in **Iraq** on May 12 after being named civilian administrator. During this first postwar stage, U.S. and British military forces remained in charge of overall security and command.

The precise shape of and timetable for the second stage (an interim Iraqi administration) and third stage (representative government) of postwar governance remained vague; the United States insisted that it wanted to restore the government of **Iraq** to its people as soon as possible. On May 22, 2003, the UN Security Council approved UN Resolution 1483 by a vote of 14-0. The resolution lifted the UN sanctions on **Iraq**. It gave the United States and Britain broad authority to administer **Iraq** for at least one year and to export its oil. Foreign corporations and governments were once again free to trade with **Iraq**, although an arms embargo remained in effect. On May 23, Bremer ordered the disbanding of the Iraqi army; the Republican Guard; and Hussein's security, intelligence, and propaganda services and paramilitary groups. The condition and whereabouts of Hussein remained unknown until he was captured alive by U.S. forces on Dec. 13, 2003 (his sons had been killed by U.S. troops on July 22, 2003).

A new 25-member Iraqi Governing Council chosen by the U.S.-led coalition began meeting in Baghdad on July 14, 2003. The council was drawn from all of **Iraq's** ethnic groups but was dominated by Shiite Muslims, who constitute roughly 60% of the country's population. Among the panel's first actions was an agreement to establish a war-crimes tribunal to try former members of Hussein's regime and others accused of crimes against humanity. It was also to create a commission that would eradicate the former ruling Baath party from Iraqi society. In September 2003, after initially refusing to recognize its authority, the Arab League allowed the Governing Council's delegation to occupy **Iraq's** seat.

The security situation, however, became increasingly troublesome. In August 2003 a car bomb exploded outside the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad, killing more than a dozen people and injuring scores more. This was followed by the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad on August 19, in which 22 people died; among

those slain was UN special representative to **Iraq** Sergio [Vieira de Mello](#). On August 29 a powerful car bomb was detonated outside a sacred Shiite shrine in the city of Najaf, killing more than 85 people and threatening to undermine Shiite cooperation with the U.S.-led coalition. In the wake of a second bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad in September, the UN further scaled back its operations in **Iraq**.

Criticism of U.S. efforts to provide security and services grew and attacks on coalition forces by Hussein loyalists and others (some allegedly linked to Osama [bin Laden](#)'s [Al Qaeda](#) terrorist network) intensified. By Sept. 1, 2003, U.S. fatalities since the May 1 official end of major combat operations had exceeded the toll from the war itself. On September 3 a 9,000-strong Polish-led multinational force took over operations in an area south of Baghdad that included Najaf as part of an effort to relieve some of the burden on U.S. troops. The UN Security Council finally unanimously approved a U.S.-drafted resolution preserving the dominant role for the U.S.-led administration but called for power to be transferred back to the Iraqi people as soon as practicable. The new resolution did not, as the United States had hoped, result in significant new pledges of troops or funds from the international community.

Instead, attacks on U.S. troops and other foreign targets increased in number and sophistication. This atmosphere led to the pullout of many foreign-aid personnel. New estimates that the Iraqi economy would shrink by 22% in 2003, after declining by 33% in 2001–02, indicated just how difficult the reconstruction effort would be. Nevertheless, there were many post-Saddam improvements outside the Sunni Triangle around Baghdad where most of the attacks were taking place.

Although the U.S. government insisted that it would remain in **Iraq** as long as necessary, it said that it would move more swiftly to transfer political power to the Iraqis. The UN sent a team of election experts to **Iraq** in an effort to resolve the deadlock over how this transfer should come about. The UN experts ultimately concluded that general elections could not possibly be held before the end of 2004 at the earliest; they could certainly not take place before the scheduled June 30, 2004, transfer of power, as Ayatollah Ali al-[Sistani](#), the most influential Shiite cleric in **Iraq**, had wanted. A controversial interim constitution under which sovereignty was to be transferred to the Iraqis was signed by Bremer and the members of the Governing Council on Mar. 8, 2004.

In early 2004 former chief U.S. weapons inspector David Kay testified before the U.S. Congress that he believed that **Iraq** had had no significant stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction prior to the war. He also declared that evidence for direct ties between Hussein and Al Qaeda seemed lacking. This ultimately forced the U.S. government to acknowledge that the intelligence on which it had based its decision to go to war might have been flawed. The errors in the government's prewar risk assessment were later confirmed by the U.S. Senate and independent U.S. government investigative panels. During the week beginning Apr. 4, 2004, in the worst chaos and violence since the fall of Baghdad a year earlier, U.S. Marines launched an offensive against Sunni insurgents in the long-restive city of Fallujah following the killing and mutilation of four U.S. private security contractors there. Simultaneously, Shiite militias loyal to radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr temporarily seized control of three southern cities, raising fears of a two-front full-scale war. In addition, Iraqi insurgents began kidnapping foreigners in an effort to force their governments to end their cooperation with the U.S. occupation.

As tensions escalated, it was clear that the new Iraqi security forces were not yet up to the job of restoring order. The U.S. image in **Iraq** and throughout the Muslim world suffered a serious blow when photographs were released in late April and May 2004 showing U.S. soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners at what had once been Hussein's most notorious prison, Abu Ghraib. Criticism of the U.S. involvement in **Iraq** intensified. Nevertheless, the Bush administration continued to insist that its decision to launch the **Iraq** War had been correct. It contended that any swift withdrawal from that troubled nation would have a devastating impact on the war on terrorism and on U.S. strategic interests in general.

The interim government replaced the Iraqi Governing Council on June 28, 2004; it included a cabinet, headed by a prime minister, that was to run **Iraq**'s day-to-day affairs and help it prepare for elections. John D. [Negroponte](#) was chosen to serve as ambassador to **Iraq** and oversee U.S.-financed reconstruction efforts from the world's largest U.S. embassy. The embassy formally reopened (it had been closed on the eve of the Gulf War) after Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was disbanded on June 28, 2004. The CPA's record had been mixed. Although schools, hospitals, power plants, and other infrastructure had been refurbished, the persistent lack of security, jobs, and basic services had cost the CPA much of the original Iraqi goodwill. Little of the promised reconstruction aid had been disbursed (with most projects being funded by Iraqi oil revenues rather than aid); few Iraqi jobs had been created; the initial decision to dismiss some 60,000 Iraqis from their government jobs and disband the 400,000-strong Iraqi army had created tremendous resentment; the new Iraqi armed forces and police had not been adequately rearmed and retrained; and efforts to rewrite **Iraq**'s laws to transform the country into a free-market, U.S.-style democracy had been ill-advised.

The new interim Iraqi government (IIG) granted itself the power to declare martial law and detain terrorism suspects in an attempt to control crime and insurgency violence so that **Iraq**'s democratic transition could be completed. The death penalty was reinstated and could be applied against Hussein and 11 of his top aides who were being held in coalition custody. (All 12 were transferred to Iraqi legal custody and charged with war crimes and genocide during their arraignment before a special Iraqi war-crimes tribunal on July 1, 2004.)

The late-April 2004 cease-fire between coalition forces and the followers of al-Sadr broke down in August. Fighting resumed in al-Sadr's strongholds of Najaf and the Baghdad slum of Sadr City. It was thus evident that the 138,000 U.S. soldiers still stationed in **Iraq** would continue to play a major role in security. They did, however, try to lower their profile after the handover. They concentrated on targeting terrorist networks, protecting U.S. forces, and conducting joint operations with the Iraqis. The IIG faced the difficult task of declaring its independence of the very forces required to protect it.

Meanwhile, escalating U.S. attempts to enlist additional international participation in the reconstruction process made little progress. The insurgency hampered both reconstruction and the delivery of supplies to coalition forces. By mid-October 2004, more than two dozen foreign hostages had been killed by their kidnappers. The Philippines pulled out of the coalition early to save the life of a Filipino hostage (Spain, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic had already withdrawn); Kenya and several other countries warned their citizens not to work in **Iraq**. The 31 other countries involved in the multinational force (including recent members Singapore and Tonga) said that they would not yield to demands of hostage takers. Nevertheless, Costa Rica, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, and Thailand withdrew later when their military commitments ended. The Netherlands, Ukraine, Hungary, and Bulgaria did so by the end of 2005, and Italy pulled out some of its troops in June 2006.

The first session of the long-awaited national conference finally opened on Sept. 1, 2004. It was intended to elect a 100-member National Council (transitional parliament) that would organize the January 2005 elections. It would also have veto power over legislation passed by the government of interim prime minister Allawi. By this time, large parts of the country appeared to still be under the effective control of groups hostile to the interim government. Estimates of the Iraqi death toll since the war began, including civilians as well as insurgents, police, and soldiers, ranged from 10,000 to 37,000, among them some 3,500 killed between April and September 2004. A controversial independent study released in October of that year gauged that the total civilian Iraqi death toll from the war was at least 100,000, much higher than previous estimates. The well-publicized killings of foreign hostages (including the November 2004 murder of Margaret Hassan, the longtime head of [CARE](#)'s relief efforts in **Iraq**) continued. On November 7, Allawi declared a 60-day state of emergency throughout most of the country, excluding the relatively peaceful Kurdish areas.

By early January 2005 the head of the Iraqi intelligence service estimated the number of insurgents and their active supporters at 200,000 (more than the 150,000 U.S. troops stationed in the country). The courage, determination, and joy of the estimated 8 million Iraqi voters who had turned out in the landmark elections was

admired around the world, although turnout was low in Sunni areas, where clerics and insurgents had called for a boycott. Iraqi expatriates voted in 14 countries. Shiites and Kurds were thus significantly overrepresented in the new government, making **Iraq's** already disaffected former ruling minority feel even more disenfranchised. Because no party garnered the two-thirds majority required to rule alone, the Kurds and Shiites formed a coalition government.

In July 2005, insurgents led by Jordanian-born Abu Musab al-**Zarqawi**, who had declared himself the head of Al Qaeda in **Iraq** and was orchestrating many of the attacks against the U.S. presence, claimed credit for the kidnapping and killing of Egypt's ambassador-designate to **Iraq** in Baghdad, Ihab al-Sherif. Insurgents also attacked other diplomats in an effort to keep other Arab and Muslim regimes from legitimizing the new Iraqi government. On Aug. 31, 2005, nearly 1,000 Iraqi Shiite pilgrims, many of them women and children, died during a tragic stampede on Baghdad's Bridge of the Imams that was sparked by rumors that a suicide bomber was about to blow himself up in the crowd. The catastrophe caused the highest one-day death toll in **Iraq** since the U.S.-led invasion.

### **A New Constitution and Permanent Government.**

A stalemate over the composition of the 55-member constitution-drafting committee named by the legislature was finally broken on July 5, 2005. The Shiite and Kurdish majority formally accepted 15 additional Sunni Arab politicians into the group, which previously had included only 2 Sunnites; 3 of them were later assassinated, driving home the high cost of participating in the new government. Among the key issues in drafting the constitution were the role of Islam in the future Iraqi state; how power would be divided between the central government and the regions; and the division of oil revenues (most of the oil was in the Kurdish north and the Shiite south). A powerful group of southern Shiite politicians was pressing for the creation of a Shiite autonomous region in the south similar to the Kurdish one in the north. The push for a federalist system was vehemently opposed by the Sunnites. They feared that such a system would lead to the disintegration of **Iraq**.

Despite delays and disagreements, 79% of Iraqi voters approved the final document in an Oct. 15, 2005, referendum. Most Sunnites voted against the charter despite last-minute changes drafted by the legislature in an effort to gain their support. But only two of the required three provinces had the two-thirds majority of no votes needed to defeat it.

Meanwhile, opposition to the war mounted in the United States. Total Pentagon spending in **Iraq** through September 2005 was estimated at \$173 billion, but that figure did not include the costs for such things as disability and health care for injured soldiers or debt financing for war expenditures. On Oct. 25, 2005, the total U.S. death toll in **Iraq** reached 2,000; that among other coalition forces exceeded 200.

Approval of the constitution failed to halt the insurgency. It did, however, convince at least some Sunni leaders that they needed to increase Sunni representation in the new legislature. In the elections on Dec. 15, 2005, voter turnout throughout the nation was high. Iraqis cast their ballots largely along ethnic and religious lines. The Shiite-led UIA won the largest number of seats but fell 10 seats short of a two-thirds majority. Despite complaints from Sunnites and Allawi's secular coalition, observers declared that the elections had been generally acceptable by international standards. The United States pressed for the formation of a government of national unity that included Shiites, Kurds, and Sunnites.

The process of forming the new government, which would establish the formal balance of political power until 2010, was to officially begin with the convening of the 275-member Council of Representatives. That body was to elect a president by a two-thirds vote. The president would then appoint a prime minister, who was to be the leader of the largest block in the legislature. The prime minister would choose a cabinet, which would require legislative approval.

Meanwhile, on Feb. 12, 2005, the UIA selected interim prime minister al-Jaafari as its candidate for premier. A moderate Islamist, he won the UIA elections by just one vote after receiving the support of al-Sadr. Many Kurds and Sunnites had criticized al-Jaafari's performance, charging that his transitional government had been ineffectual and had fostered attacks on Sunnites by Shiite militias within and outside the security services. They refused to join a government that he headed. In the void, **Iraq** came closer than ever to civil war when bombs destroyed the Shiite al-Askariya mosque in [Samarra](#) on Feb. 22, 2006; it was the most provocative attack on a Shiite religious target since the American invasion. (The same shrine was subjected to another attack in 2007.) The assault provoked retaliatory attacks on Sunni targets.

President Talabani said that he would convene the legislature on Mar. 12, 2006, the last date possible under the constitution. Talks to form a new government had by this time reached an impasse, however. This led to a constitutionally questionable decision to postpone the opening legislative session beyond that date, although parliament did hold a brief inaugural meeting on March 16. In the meantime, more broadly representative security committees were established to tackle the insurgency, and bylaws for the next cabinet were written. The latter required cabinet approval for most government decisions; this was in contrast to the previous government, in which ministers had run their departments as private fiefdoms.

Al-Jaafari finally agreed to step down in April 2006. New prime minister-designate Nuri al-Maliki's government was sworn in on May 20. The conservative and outspoken al-Maliki was a top leader of Daawa, **Iraq**'s oldest Shiite party. He asserted that he expected that Iraqi forces would take over all security duties from U.S.-led coalition forces within 18 months. As outrage in **Iraq** mounted over reports that U.S. Marines had killed 24 Iraqis in the town of Haditha in November 2005, he also denounced what he said were habitual attacks against Iraqi civilians by coalition forces. Agreement on who would head the all-important interior and defense ministries was not reached until June 8, 2006. The death of Al Qaeda leader Zarqawi in a U.S. air strike the previous day appeared to have little effect on the Iraqi insurgency. Neither did a national reconciliation incentive launched that month by **Iraq**'s new prime minister. In November 2006 the Iraqi government estimated the total Iraqi death toll to be 150,000 since the war began. The U.S. death toll in **Iraq** reached 2,500 on June 15, 2006, two days after Bush paid a surprise visit to Baghdad. The violence was especially bad in the capital. In late July the U.S. government therefore decided to shift some U.S. forces that had been scheduled to leave the country to Baghdad. In one positive sign, British and Australian forces turned over responsibility for relatively peaceful Muthanna province to Iraqi forces on July 13, 2006. This was the first security transfer of an entire province. On September 8 the Iraqi government took control of its ground forces.

Nevertheless, the country teetered on the brink of a civil war some believed had already begun. In ethnically or religiously mixed areas, huge numbers of people were forced from their homes. The exodus of middle-class Iraqis increased; between 2003 and August 2007 the UN estimated that 2.1 million Iraqis had moved abroad as refugees, mostly to Syria and Jordan. Another 2.4 million within **Iraq** were homeless.

In November 2006, Syria and **Iraq** reestablished diplomatic relations, which had been severed in 1982. Cooperation between the governments of **Iraq** and Iran also increased. The two countries agreed to coordinate security along their joint border. Iran also pledged to provide significant economic assistance to **Iraq**'s Kurdish and Shiite areas. This cooperation highlighted Iran's growing influence in the entire region, from Afghanistan to Syria and Beirut. Al-Maliki broke with the United States in July to denounce Israel's attacks on Lebanon, launched in retaliation for a cross-border attack by Lebanon's Iranian-financed Shiite [Hezbollah](#) in which two Israeli soldiers had been captured. Maliki's position was considerably stronger than the initial reactions by many Sunni Arab governments. Some believed that it reflected a growing sense of Shiite identity throughout the Middle East.

The coalition death toll reached 3,000 on Oct. 16, 2006; it included 2,759 U.S. troops, 7 U.S. civilian contractors working for the military, and 119 Britons. By this time there were about 142,000 U.S. troops in **Iraq**; the combined total from other countries was about 18,000. As the situation on the ground in **Iraq** continued to deteriorate, mounting American antiwar sentiment affected the outcome of the November 2006

U.S. midterm election. Friction between the U.S. administration and Iraqi prime minister al-Maliki also increased. Al-Maliki's government extended **Iraq's** nationwide state of emergency, originally imposed in 2004. On October 11 the legislature had pushed through a law that would allow the formation of federal regions. Many feared that this would create sectarian ministates while doing little to halt the violence. The measure was overwhelmingly opposed by Sunnites because **Iraq's** oil wealth was concentrated in the Shiite south and the Kurdish north. The sentencing of Hussein to death on Nov. 5, 2006, did little to halt the violence. In fact, the manner of his execution on Dec. 30, 2006, increased sectarian tensions.

Bush ignored the long-awaited report of the **Iraq Study Group**, which was released in December 2006; it repudiated his policies for the war and the region. Instead, he committed more than 20,000 additional U.S. troops to **Iraq**, mostly to provide security in Baghdad and in Anbar province. By this time U.S. defense expenditures had reached their highest level since World War II. U.S. auditors reported that much of the money spent for postwar reconstruction had been wasted. In August 2007 the U.S. military death toll in **Iraq** topped 3,680. Bush faced mounting pressure to begin withdrawing U.S. forces.

Meanwhile, in late February 2007, the Iraqi cabinet had approved a controversial draft framework for the distribution of oil revenues. The passage of this bill was one of the four major benchmarks the U.S. government hoped the Iraqi government would meet before the fall of 2007, but disagreements continued. On Apr. 13, 2007, the Sarrafiya bridge across the Tigris River, one of the main links between the two halves of the city, had been destroyed by insurgents. That same day, a bomb exploded in the cafeteria of the Iraqi parliament inside Baghdad's elaborately secured Green Zone. Parliament had largely come to a standstill and seemed increasingly irrelevant to many Iraqis. Nevertheless, the two events reflected the lack of security virtually everywhere.

Al-Maliki's claim to head a broad-based government was further weakened in August 2007 by the resignations of the six cabinet ministers representing the largest Sunnite bloc and the suspension of participation in the government by five members of the secular coalition led by former prime minister Allawi. This left the government with no Sunnite cabinet members. That month the legislature went on vacation; it had still not reached agreement on oil revenues, constitution reform, provincial elections, or other key issues. Al-Sadr's party withdrew from the ruling coalition in September, further weakening al-Maliki's government.

There was some progress on the military front, particularly the growing cooperation of mostly Sunnite tribal chiefs in operations against Al Qaeda insurgents. In the Shiite south, however, factional strife among groups and individuals competing for power and resources mounted. Half of the British troops stationed there had been removed by the spring of 2008. Even the relatively peaceful Kurdish north faced a threat from Turkey, which attacked Turkish Kurdish separatists it said were finding shelter there.

Five months after an additional 30,000 U.S. troops entered **Iraq**, insurgent attacks in Baghdad and several other parts of the country had diminished significantly. Nevertheless, 2007 was still the deadliest year yet for U.S. forces in **Iraq**. By Mar. 23, 2008, U.S. casualties had reached 4,000. The Iraqi government had finally passed a law allowing some former Baathists to apply for government positions and receive pensions. Some of the millions of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced people began to return home. By late July 2008, U.S. troop levels had returned to pre-surge levels, the Mahdi army was generally observing a cease-fire, and the tenuous security situation was largely holding.

Despite a significant reduction in violence in 2008, however, there still had been little of the hoped-for political progress. The Iraqi legislature finally passed legislation to govern provincial elections scheduled for October by delaying elections in Kirkuk. But the polls had to be postponed, and the division of oil revenues remained a major unresolved sticking point. Tensions between various Shiite factions and between the Shiite majority and the Kurdish and Sunni minorities continued.

Reconstruction efforts were also far behind schedule. Oil production had returned to prewar levels. Soaring world prices had been forecast to leave the Iraqi government with a budget surplus of as much as \$79 billion at

the end of 2008. By August, however, almost none of this had been used for reconstruction or for the maintenance of reconstruction projects financed by the United States. Later in the year, world oil prices plummeted in the midst of a global economic crisis.

Some experts had called for the division of **Iraq** into three semiautonomous regions (Shiite south, Sunni center, and Kurdish north), with a relatively weak central government. This division was opposed by the al-Maliki government. It would be difficult in any case because the populations in many areas, especially Baghdad, were mixed. All sides, however, seemed to be coalescing around a plan to carefully begin drawing down U.S. forces in **Iraq**; how and when to do so was a major issue in the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign.

As the UN resolution authorizing the U.S. military presence in **Iraq** was due to expire on Dec. 31, 2008, **Iraq** and the United States were negotiating a bilateral Status of Forces Agreement (SoFA). The SoFA would determine the future role of the United States, and its civilian and military personnel, in **Iraq**. The use of private contractors not subject to U.S. military law had become an increasingly contentious issue, particularly after a Sept. 16, 2007, shooting by Blackwater security guards in Baghdad that left 17 Iraqis dead.

By the time of the November 2008 U.S. presidential election, Iraqi authorities had taken over responsibility for security in 13 of **Iraq's** 18 provinces. With Iraqi general elections planned for 2009 and security improved, Iraqi politicians faced new pressure to assert their independence from the United States. This was reflected in the prolonged negotiations over the new SoFA accord. The United States finally granted concessions on the two major areas of controversy. It agreed that there would be no exceptions to the Dec. 31, 2011, deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from **Iraq**. It also agreed to grant Iraqi courts jurisdiction over serious crimes committed by off-duty, off-base U.S. soldiers as determined by a joint U.S.-Iraqi committee. The Iraqi cabinet then overwhelmingly approved the accord, on Nov. 16, 2008. As the major Shiite and Kurdish factions supported the revised SoFA, it was swiftly approved by the legislature. All U.S. forces were to be withdrawn from Iraqi cities and towns by the summer of 2009. In the interim, the Iraqi government was to be given greater control over their activities, particularly their ability to raid Iraqi homes without the permission of the Iraqi authorities. The Iraqi government signed agreements with Britain and Australia authorizing their continued military presence until July 2009. Similar accords were also signed with El Salvador, Estonia, and Romania, the only other nations still providing troops for the multinational force in **Iraq**.

Al-Maliki's coalition captured the largest share of the vote in generally peaceful provincial elections held in 14 provinces on Jan. 31, 2009; turnout was high among Sunni Muslims who had boycotted the previous polls. Nevertheless, the polls and the reduction in government oil revenues due to depressed world oil prices highlighted the fault lines that continued to threaten the nation's stability. Power shortages, disputes over water rights with neighboring countries, efforts to reduce reparations to Kuwait, and political jockeying ahead of planned January 2010 national elections continued. No polls were held in the 3 autonomous Kurdish provinces until July 2009, when the ruling Kurdish alliance retained control of the autonomous regional parliament. The dispute over Kirkuk also continued. The Kurds had begun exporting oil to foreign markets in June 2009, over the objections of the central government. Kurdish plans for a new regional constitution that laid claim to disputed oil-rich areas further reflected mounting tensions between the Shiite majority and the Kurdish minority.

After six years, American combat troops officially withdrew from **Iraq's** cities on June 30, 2009. By August 1 of that year, no countries of the former multinational coalition except the United States still had troops in **Iraq**. New U.S. president Barak [Obama](#) pledged that all U.S. combat troops would leave **Iraq** by Aug. 31, 2010, and that all U.S. troops would be withdrawn by the end of 2011. One of the major U.S. responsibilities in the interim was to help maintain security for the scheduled Jan. 30, 2010, national elections. A national referendum on SoFA itself, originally to be conducted by July 30, 2009, did not take place; if Iraqi voters had rejected the SoFA timetable, the deadline for U.S. withdrawal would have been shifted to the summer of 2010. Some suggested that such a referendum might be held in conjunction with the January 2010 elections.