



Iraq Fact Sheet

Government

The Iraqi government was created by a new constitution in 2005, after the fall of Saddam Hussein. The government is led by a Kurdish President, currently Fuad Masum, a Shia Prime Minister, currently Haider Abadi, and a Sunni Arab Vice President, currently, Khodair Khozaei. The Prime Minister is the dominant leader. The population of Iraq is [estimated](#) to be 38 million, with two official languages, Arabic and Kurdish.

Ethnic and Religious Groups

- **Sunni Arabs:** Iraqi Sunni Arabs number about 20% of the population, or around 5-7 million people. Under Saddam Hussein, who was a Sunni Arab, they had a privileged place in Iraq. During the de-Ba'athification process post-2005, Sunni Arabs were largely excluded by the Shia elites, particularly under former Prime Minister Nouri Maliki. Sunnis, including those from the "[Awakening Councils](#)," were also mostly excluded from joining the Iraqi Army, as it was feared that they could retake control.
- **Shia Arabs:** Shia Arabs are roughly 60% of the total population. Under Saddam, the Shiites were largely oppressed, shut off from their Shia neighbor Iran, and generally excluded from power in the country. In post-Saddam Iraq, the constitution gave Shias the most powerful position, that of Prime Minister. Nouri Maliki, the former Prime Minister, favored Shias. Maliki also took advantage of U.S. aid; it is reported that Iraq's security forces received nearly [\\$100 billion](#) from 2006 to 2014. Maliki [became](#) increasingly authoritarian during his eight years as premier, and eventually was pushed out. The current Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, is also a Shia Arab from the same party – Dawa – as Maliki, but has been generally [less biased](#), [less corrupt](#), [more pro-American](#), and less pro-Iranian.
- **Kurds:** In Iraq, there are [5.5 million Kurds](#), about 15% of the population, who reside primarily in the four northern provinces that make up the [Kurdish Regional Government \(KRG\)](#). Iraqi Kurds have had de facto autonomy since 1991, when a U.S.-led coalition established a no-fly zone over Kurdish areas to protect them from Hussein. The KRG was originally founded by two Kurdish political parties – the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Masoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). Barzani is the current President. Both the KDP and the PUK are [essentially](#) autocratic family run organizations. Some Iraqi Kurds live outside of the KRG, however, and the Kurds have laid claims to those areas, including the oil-rich Kirkuk region. [Kirkuk was originally Arabized during the Baathist control of Iraq](#). Although the KRG [overall](#) has a better record of respecting the rights of its own people and minorities in its region, [including refugees](#), both Iraqi Christians and Yazidis were angered after many Peshmerga forces [fled](#) when ISIS conquered Sinjar and other areas in 2014. The KRG has an excellent relationship with the U.S., and [with Turkey](#), to whom it sells oil. The KDP is a [rival](#) of the PKK, a Kurdish group from Turkey. The PUK [is](#) an ally of the PKK and the YPG, a Kurdish group from Syria. It [is also](#) an ally of Iran. In 2014, KRG President Barzani threatened independence and called for a [referendum](#).
- **Turkmen:** The Turkmen are estimated to number [between 500,000 to 3 million](#), making them Iraq's third-largest ethnic group, comprising 1.3% - 7.8% of the population. The Turkmen are religiously diverse: Roughly [six in 10 are Sunni and the rest Shia](#). [Most](#) Iraqi Turkmen consider themselves part of Iraq. Turkmen feel [mistreated](#) by the Kurds, a reality that they say Ankara [has done little to alleviate](#) despite its influence on KRG President Barzani.
- **Yazidis:** The [500,000 to 700,000](#) member Yazidi religious minority in Iraq and Syria [is also](#) ethnically Kurdish. The Yazidis are mostly grouped in Iraq of which 400,000 lived in Sinjar (Shingal). When ISIS attacked their land in 2014, [around 300,000](#) fled, primarily to the KRG. ISIS has murdered more than

5,000 Yazidis, raped thousands of Yazidi women and children, and sold at least 7000 Yazidis, mostly women and children, as sexual slaves. The Yazidis are allied with their fellow Kurds, although they split between the different Kurdish groups.

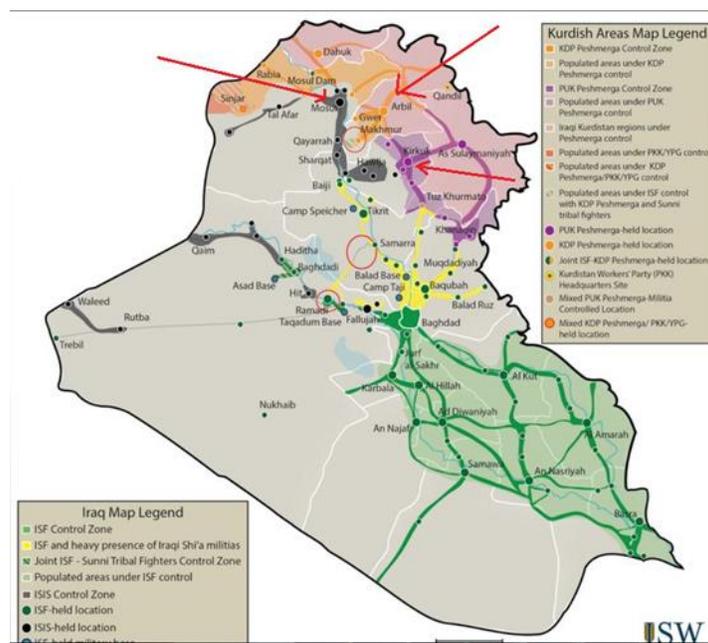
- **Christians:** Most Christians in Iraq are Assyrians, and still speak Aramaic, although they also speak Arabic. The Christian community also includes Chaldeans, Armenians and Syriacs. Many Christians do not consider themselves Arabs. In 2013 they were officially numbered at 1.5 million, although today they are estimated to be no more than 500,000. Most of them have fled the country, although a sizable number have been killed. They are constant targets of both Sunni and Shi'ite groups in Iraq. Many Christians have fled to Kurdish areas, where they are safer.

Iraq under the control of Iran

Since 2011, Iran has exercised increasing control over the Shia government in Baghdad. Qassem Soleimani, the Commander of the Quds Force, Iran's special operations branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), has met with numerous Iraqi leaders and visited the Kurdistan region. With the rise of ISIS, Iran has claimed that it is protecting Iraq's Shi'ite population. In 2009 it was estimated that Tehran's financial assistance to its Iraqi surrogates ranged from \$100 to \$200 million a year.

ISIS

ISIS, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria began as only ISI, Islamic State of Iraq, a splinter group of Al Qaeda. Its main goal is to create a caliphate, an Islamic state consisting of only Sunni Arabs spanning all of the Middle East. ISIS was founded by Abu Musab Zarqawi, who operated under Osama Bin Laden in Iraq. Zarqawi was later killed by US airstrikes in 2006. Today, Abu Omar al-Qurashi al-Baghdadi is the leader of ISIS. ISIS targets Kurds, Shi'ites, Christians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Westerners and anyone else who is not a Sunni Arab. There are 12,000 to 15,000 battle ready ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria.



<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2016/02/10/isis-in-iraq-february-2016/>

Military Strength

- **Iraqi Army:** The Iraqi army fell apart after ISIS over ran Mosul in 2014. In 2011, the Iraqi Army numbered 200,000 soldiers and was armed with heavy U.S. military equipment and billions of dollars in support. In 2012, the Iraqi military was equipped with 1,1000 new armored personnel carriers, and 140 M1 Abrams battle tanks. However, today, the Iraqi military has about 50,000 troops.

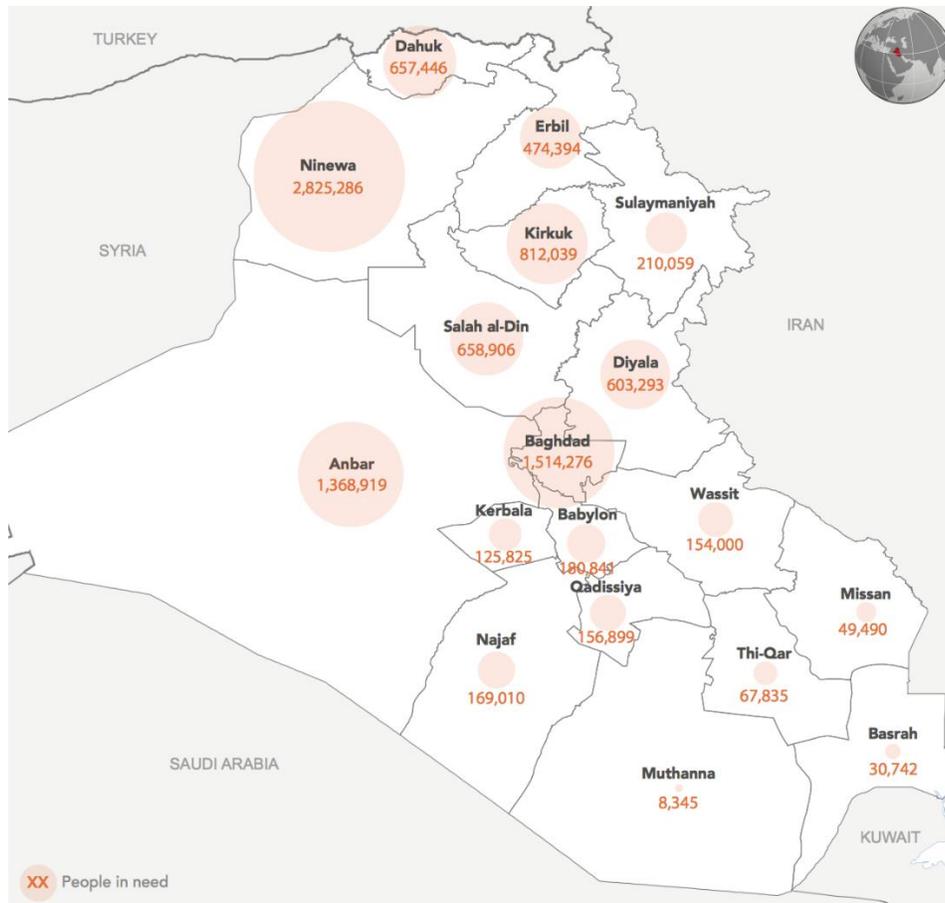
- The U.S. [has trained](#) some 35,000 Iraqi soldiers over the past decade.
- The Iraqi army [has](#) an elite 1st Special Operations Brigade, an American-trained counterterrorism unit of some 10,000 soldiers representing all of Iraq's religious sects whose senior officers are graduates of the U.S. Army Ranger School. The elite Iraqi unit is often called "the Golden Brigade," or, more recently, "the Golden Division". The elite unit answers directly to the Iraqi prime minister. The division's soldiers have proved to be tenacious fighters, having led the successful fights to oust ISIS from Ramadi and Fallujah, and now are leading the fight in Mosul. But sources inside the U.S. Central Command tell that the division has, as a result, suffered "horrific" casualties every day.
- **Shiite forces:** Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) or Hashd al-Shaabi, was formed in 2014 as a coalition of Iranian trained Shiite militias numbers composed of [100,000-120,000 fighters](#). PMF works and reports to the Shiite government and PM Haider Abadi; it was created as a response to ISIS. Despite its allegiance to the Iraqi PM, the PMF is not part of the Iraqi army, but recently was given "[official status](#)." The PMF has been accused of roaming beyond its territory in southern Iraq and into Sunni strongholds, threatening, kidnapping and killing Sunni Muslims. In July 2016, The UN reported that the PMF abducted [640](#) Sunni men and boys west of Baghdad, while executing 50. The PMF has also threatened to retake Kirkuk from the Kurds, and offered its "protection" to the KRG, which was rejected by President Barzani. In August of 2016, Kurds and the PMF clashed in Tuz Khurmatu, southern Kirkuk, killing 9 Peshmergas and 13 PMF fighters. Iran [has spoken](#) about using the PMF in the Syrian conflict once Mosul is freed from Islamic State.
- **Kurdish Militias:** The Kurdish Peshmerga (those who face death) is composed of nearly [190,000](#) fighters from the KRG - both KDP and PUK members. They have been among the most effective forces against ISIS in Iraq. The PKK and its allies [have](#) an armed stronghold in the Qandil mountains along the Iraq-Iran border. An [estimated](#) 5,000 PKK Kurds are stationed there. There [are](#) three Yazidi militias: 1) the Sinjar Defense Units (HPS), led by Haider Shesho, which has 5,000 fighters, including about 400 women, and is affiliated with the PUK; 2) the Qasim Shesho Peshmerga, which is led by Qasim Shesho, has 3000 fighters, and is allied with the KDP; and 3) the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), an offshoot of the PKK, which has almost 2,000 men and women fighters. The YBS [has clashed](#) with the Peshmerga.
- **Turkish Troops:** Turkey [has stationed](#) about 2,000 soldiers near Mosul (Bashiqa Camp, northern Iraq). Turkish President Erdogan has rejected calls from Baghdad to leave.
- **Christian Militias:** There are a number of Christian militias in Iraq (they also operate in Syria). The Nineveh Plain Protection Unit has about [500 fighters](#), although up to [3500 more](#) have registered to be trained. It is the [only registered local security force](#) on the Nineveh Plain under the authority of Iraqi Prime Minister. This militia [is also allied](#) with the Shia militias. There is the Babylon Brigade with about [1,500 fighters](#), which is also associated with Iraq and the Shia militias. The Gozarto Protection Force is allied with the Shia militias, and has about [500 fighters](#). The Nineveh Planes Forces have about [800 fighters](#), and [are allied](#) with the KRG. There is also [Dwekh Nawsha](#) (Self-Sacrificers in Aramaic), with about 100 fighters, although more than [2000 men](#) have expressed interest. It [is also linked](#) to the KRG.
- **Iranian Troops:** Aside from Iran's militias (PMF), there is estimated to be about [1,000](#) Iranian forces supporting the Iraqi government.
- **U.S. Troops:** Starting in March of 2003, [thousands](#) of American troops moved into Iraq. The high point, during the surge, had 170,000 U.S. troops in Iraq, during June of 2007. After the withdrawal of the U.S. troops in 2011, the U.S. began to send them in again, so that now it has about [7000 troops](#).

Operation to liberate Mosul

[54,000 Iraqi soldiers, 40,000 Kurdish Peshmerga, 14,000 PMF, and around 500 U.S. troops](#) liberated Mosul, ISIS's last stronghold in Iraq, which began October 17th, 2016, and [officially ended](#) on July 9, 2017. ISIS had about 5,000 fighters in Mosul. [More than 30,000](#) people were killed, and another 600,000, roughly a third of the population, have been displaced. Turkish troops are also nearby. The Turks and the PMF [have threatened](#) each other over their actions around Mosul.

Humanitarian Crisis

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), [there are](#) currently 10 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, and 3.1 million Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) in Iraq, of which [over 2 million](#) are in the KRG. [One estimate](#) of the number of Iraqis killed since the invasion of Iraq in March of 2003 is 236,546. [Since](#) the U.S. invasion (October, 2016), 3,693 American soldiers, sailors, airmen or Marines in combat, and 4,541 American personnel, have been killed in Iraq.



Map: [UNICEF](#)