



## Iraq – Talking Points & Takeaways

**America's Overall Mission in Iraq: To be the cast on a broken bone.** America cannot heal Iraqi wounds. Only Iraqis can do that. But through the right political and military support, the US can help support that process. Our military draw down lets Iraqis heal themselves, while providing support for that process.

**America's Military Mission in Iraq: train, equip, and advise the Iraqi Security Forces.** The US military mission has evolved from providing direct security to the Iraqi people, to training the Iraqi Security Forces to provide security. President Obama envisions a US troop presence of 50,000 to oversee this mission, down from a wartime high of 175,000.

**Cautious Optimism is the Name of the Game in Iraq.** Violence is down, political bargains are being struck, the US is slowly handing security over to the Iraqis, and more than 60% of the Iraqi people braved the threat of violence to vote in parliamentary elections in March.

**Violence is down, but not out.** Violence in Iraq is far below the heights of 2006, but terror attacks and criminal violence continue. Political coalitions are likely to remain tenuous and subject to collapse, while most groups retain capability to mobilize armed supporters, including from within security forces.

**Al Qaeda is on the run.** Iraqi and American forces have killed or captured 34 of the top 42 leaders of al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, cutting off the terrorist organization from its foreign sponsors and raising questions about whether it can reconstitute, according to General Ray Odierno, the senior commander in Iraq.



## Iraq: The Basics

**Size:** 168,754 square miles – Roughly twice the size of Idaho

**Population:** 28,945,569 – Slightly larger than Texas

**Major Ethnic Groups:** Arab 75%-80%, Kurdish 15%-20%, Turkoman, Assyrian, or other 5%

**Major Religions:** Muslim 97% (Shia 60%-65%, Sunni 32%-37%), other 3%

**GDP Growth Rate:** 4.3% (2009 est.)

**Capital:** Baghdad

**Freedom House Political Rights Score:** Not Free

## Iraq – Key Players



**Nouri al-Maliki** has been the Prime Minister of Iraq since 2006. A Shiite Muslim, he is a member of the “State of Law Coalition,” which is a religious Shiite party. After this year’s election, it appears likely that his party will form a coalition government another Shiite bloc – the Iraqi National Alliance, led by Moqtada al-Sadr. If that happens Maliki will likely remain prime minister.



**Ayad Allawi** served as interim Prime Minister from 2004-2005. A secular Shiite, his secular “al-Iraqiyya” coalition won more seats than any other party in this year’s election. However, it is unlikely his party will be part of a new coalition government. Given the strong showing of his party, Sunnis – who are weary of Shiites and attracted to Allawi’s secularism – might return to violence if Allawi does not receive an important position in the new government.



**Moqtada al-Sadr** is a political leader, militia commander, and popular Shiite cleric. As head of the Mahdi Army, he stood in firm opposition to the post-invasion Iraqi government and US presence in Iraq. His forces suffered a defeat at the hands of the US-backed Iraqi Army in 2007. During the March 2010 elections, he urged all Iraqis to participate – but supported candidates who would end the US presence. His “Iraqi Alliance Party” will likely form a coalition government with the “State of Law Coalition” of Nouri al-Maliki.

## Iraq's Recent Elections Ended in Uncertainty

Iraq held parliamentary elections in March 2010. In spite of the widespread threat of violence, more than 60% of Iraqis voted. This included Sunni groups, which had boycotted elections in the past.

**A Tie Between Parties.** The result of the election was a virtual tie between two parties. The secular "al-Iraqiyya" coalition, led by secular Shiite Ayad Allawi, won 91 seats in parliament. The Shiite-dominated "State of Law Coalition" of Nouri al-Maliki, who is Iraq's current prime minister, won 89 seats. After a controversial recount, this tally was upheld.

**Forming A Government.** Neither party had enough seats to form its own government. Maliki's "State of Law Coalition" has reached out to another Shiite bloc – the Iraqi National Alliance, led by radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr – to form a coalition government. It is likely that those two parties, along with one or more Kurdish groups, will officially form Iraq's new government.



**What's It Mean for America?** If the secular Ayad Allawi does not receive an important post in the new government – especially given that his party garnered the most votes and was supported by most Sunnis – Sunni Iraqis are likely to feel that the election was illegitimate. This could lead to the outbreak of violence and the rebirth of insurgency, which would complicate America's aim to draw down its military forces to 50,000 by September 2010.

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## But Violence Over Religion Isn't Pre-Ordained

Iraq has a long tradition of cosmopolitanism, religious tolerance, and intermarriage. Recent conflict is not an age-old feud; it is fueled by fights over power.



**Roots of Religious Conflict: Who Holds Power Under Democracy:** Iraq's population is approximately 65% Shiite, 35% Sunni. However, under Saddam Hussein, Sunnis held positions of power in Iraq. The war and democracy led to Sunnis losing their positions of power, as Shiites gained influence in proportion to their numbers. This made some Sunnis resentful, while some Shiites wanted vengeance against Sunnis.



**Other Roots: Proxy War Between Sunni Arab States and Iran:** Iraqi Sunnis also worry that the Shiite parties are supported by Iran -- traditionally an enemy of Iraq, one that fought a bloody decade-long war against the country in the 1980s. At the height of religious conflict, nearby Sunni Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, provided funds to support Iraqi Sunnis, while Iran provided weapons and funds to Iraqi Shias. The Arab-Iranian conflict thus helps to fuel sectarian violence in Iraq.



**Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds. What's the difference?** Sunni is a Muslim who believes the rightful leader of the Muslim community need only follow the life example of the Prophet Mohammad. 85%-90% of all Muslims in the world are Sunni, including most Arab countries. A Shiite is a Muslim who believe the rightful leader of the Muslim community must be related to the Prophet Mohammad. 10%-15% of all Muslims in the world are Shiite, and Iran is the leading Shiite country. Kurds are an ethnic group, and are therefore not Arab. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims.

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## Challenges Being Solved Politically...For Now

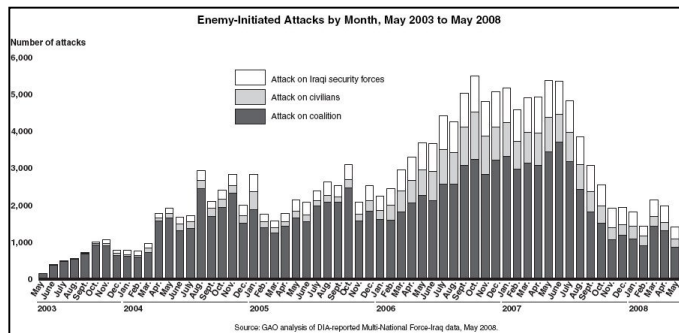
**Territorial issues between Arabs and Kurds remain unresolved.** Because Saddam Hussein tried to kill Iraqi Kurds, the US protected them with a no-fly zone for over a decade after the first Gulf War. Kurds became used to autonomy, and built a thriving region. With the 2003 Iraq War, this Kurdish region was expected to become more integrated into Iraq.



**Kurds fear being dragged into Arab violence and losing their autonomy.** Kurds also claim Kirkuk, an oil-rich city in northern Iraq that was traditionally Kurdish. Kurdish and Iraqi government forces have clashed in disputed areas, and the status of Kirkuk remains a point of controversy between Kurds and the central government. Kurds are seeking greater autonomy and control over territory in exchange for support of Arab parties.

## Violence is Down, But Not Out

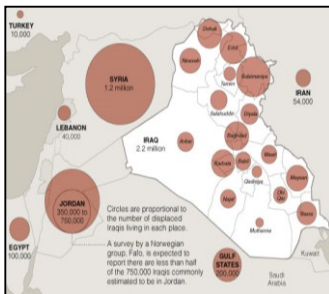
Violence in Iraq is far below the heights of 2006, and is even below 2004 levels. But terror attacks and criminal violence continue. Attacks spiked during the election season in early 2010, with approximately 600 Iraqis losing their lives as a result of violence. Political coalitions are likely to remain tenuous and subject to collapse, while most groups retain capability to mobilize armed supporters, including from within security forces.



## Humanitarian Challenges Also Remain

**Displaced Iraqis – A Humanitarian Crisis.** The war and its aftermath forced millions of Iraqis to flee their homes. Approximately 2.3 million Iraqis have left the country and settled in neighboring countries, while more than 2 million more are displaced with Iraq itself.

**Poverty, Health, & Jobs.** Many displaced Iraqis live in settlements that lack basic services, including water, sanitation, and electricity. According to a 2009 UN report, unemployment in Iraq was at 18%, with 28% of those ages 15 to 29 unemployed.



**Violence Threatens Aid.** When violence remains high, humanitarian aid agencies struggle to deliver aid to Iraqis who need it. This could become more of a problem as the US begins to withdraw forces.

**Iraqi Refugees in the US.** The US boosted the number of Iraqis it allowed in as refugees from 202 in 2006 to more than 17,000 in 2009. However, many come to the US with high levels of trauma, injury, and illness, which complicates integration. Of the approximately 146,000 Iraqis who have worked directly with the US – putting their own lives at risk – only 4,800 have been allowed to relocate to the US.

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## If Violence Stays Low, the US Will Withdraw



**Decrease in Violence.** Terrorist attacks in Iraq fell by nearly 50% from 2006 to 2008, while US military fatalities in Iraq fell from 904 in 2007 to 149 in 2009.

**Status of Forces Agreement.** President Bush approved a SOFA with Iraq in late 2008 that calls for US forces to withdraw from Iraqi cities by June 30, 2009 and from Iraq by December 31, 2011. A Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) is a document that outlines legal rights and responsibilities of foreign forces in a given country.



**President Obama.** Following the SOFA, in January 2009, President Barack Obama directed defense and military officials to plan for drawdown in Iraq. Despite concerns, US forces are now out of Iraqi urban areas. This withdrawal took place without a substantial rise in violence. There are 98,000 troops in Iraq today, which the Obama administration looks to whittle down to 50,000 by September 2010, as long as new violence does not break out.

**Training Iraqi Forces & Stability Operations.** The US military role in Iraq has shifted to focus on training Iraqi security forces and providing support for Iraq's security services.

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## Iraq War – By the Numbers (As of Spring 2010)



**US Troops in Iraq:** 88,000

**US Contractors in Iraq:** 102,000

**US Troop Fatalities in 2009:** 149

**Iraq Civilian Fatalities in 2009:** 4,645, largely a result of terrorist violence

**Cost of the War in 2009:** \$94.8 billion

**Total Cost of the War to Date:** nearly \$750 Billion

**US Troop Fatalities to Date:** 4,390

**Iraqi Civilian Fatalities to Date:** Estimates range from 100,000 on the low end, to more than 1 million on the high end

## The Bush Administration – The Case for War



**Rationale #1: Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).** The Bush administration insisted Iraq possessed WMDs – and suggested Iraq might provide such weapons to terrorists. “We know where they are,” said Defense Secretary Rumsfeld. According to Vice President Dick Cheney: “Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction.” Referring to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, President Bush put it bluntly: “They could provide these arms [WMDs] to terrorists.”



**Rationale #2: Iraq’s ties to al Qaeda and 9/11.** Bush administration officials consistently linked Iraq to al Qaeda and 9/11. Iraq was the “geographic base of the terrorists who had us under assault now for many years, but most especially on 9/11,” according to Vice President Cheney. In the words of President Bush: “We know that Iraq and the al Qaeda terrorist network share a common enemy -- the United States of America. We know that Iraq and al Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade.”



**Misleading the American Public.** According to a 2008 study released by the Center for Public Integrity, Bush administration officials made at least 935 false statements in the two years following September 11, 2001 about the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's Iraq. 9/11 Commission and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence debunked alleged connections between Iraq and al Qaeda.

## The Countdown & Early Days of War



**November 2001.** War planning begins November 2001.

**January 2002.** President Bush labels Iraq as part of an “Axis of Evil” during his State of the Union Address.

**September 2002.** President Bush addressed the United Nations, and makes his case for war with Iraq.

**February 2003.** Colin Powell addressed the United Nations Security Council, making the administration’s final pitch to the United Nations is support of war with Iraq.

**March 17, 2003.** President Bush announces that if Saddam Hussein does not leave Iraq within 48 hours, war will begin.



**March 20, 2003.** US Missiles strike Baghdad targets; war begins and ground forces follow

**March 22-April 13.** US and coalition forces face little resistance as they move through Iraq and take control of major cities, including Baghdad (which falls on April 9)

**May 1, 2003.** President Bush declares combat operations over under a banner reading “Mission Accomplished.”

## No Strategy for Post-War Iraq



**Future of Iraq Project – Ignored by Bush team.** Through the “Future of Iraq Project,” the State Department assembled teams to devise solutions for post-war Iraq. The results – the need to carefully demobilize Iraq’s military, the importance of water and electricity to win public trust, etc. – were remarkably accurate. It was ignored by the White House, and Pentagon officials were not allowed to attend workshops on post-war problems.

**Breakdown of Public Order.** As Iraq’s security services melted away, looting and criminal violence escalated. Coalition forces took little action, except to guard the Oil Ministry. Looting of arms depots allowed thousands of arms and artillery such as surface-to-air missiles to fall into insurgent hands.



**De-Baathification.** This removed members of Saddam Hussein’s Ba’ath party from the armed forces and other government bureaucracies. It was done in the belief that they were guilty for Saddam’s crimes; but most members were simple bureaucrats. This policy disproportionately hurt Sunnis, who found themselves jobless, and with an axe to grind. Many would become insurgents.

**Disbanding the Army.** The US disbanded the Iraqi Army in 2003, cutting pay to 350,000 soldiers. This created a large pool of angry, well-armed men, many of whom joined the anti-US insurgency.

**Lapse in Basic Services.** The US failed to rebuild the food, water, sewage, and other municipal systems that urban Iraqis were used to. Iraq had been a relatively modern state, and Iraqis were unaccustomed to Third-World conditions, and blamed the US for the chaos.

## Insurgency Takes Root

**Religious & Ethnic Violence.** A series of attacks on Shiite religious events and landmarks sparked wider conflict between Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims. Separatist and sectarian violence mushroomed from 2004-2007, resulting in ethnic cleansing and millions of refugees fleeing violence. Kurds – a non-Arab ethnic group – worked to cement control of northern Iraq, which also resulted in ethnic cleansing.

**Iraq's Unstable Government.** Divided between competing factions – Shiite Arabs, Sunni Arabs, Sunni Kurds – Iraq's government was unable to win the allegiance of all sectors of society, or provide basic security. The result was a free-for-all of violence, where hundreds of Iraqis were dying each day due to crime, insurgent attacks, ethnic cleansing, and clashes between various forces.



**Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).** An independent al Qaeda affiliate popped up to take advantage of the chaos, hoping to create a radical Islamist government. Although AQI constituted only 10% of the insurgency, they were responsible for almost all suicide bombings against Iraqi civilians.

**Foreign Involvement.** Fighting between Sunnis and Shiites became a proxy war. Shiite Iran funded Shiite militias, while Sunni nations such as Saudi Arabia funded Sunni insurgents.

## Turning the Tide – The Sunni Awakening

**Sunnis United Against America.** Huge numbers of Sunni Muslims joined the insurgency early on. Some had been kicked out of Iraq's army or government and therefore were not happy with the US, some believed the US was an illegitimate foreign occupier, some didn't trust the US-backed Shiite government, and some were bona-fide terrorists – such as al Qaeda – who wanted to stoke religious tension and establish a radical Islamic government.

**Al Qaeda overplays its hand – Divides Sunnis.** Al Qaeda went too far in its violence by killing innocent Sunni civilians through suicide bombings and attempting to bully Sunni tribes. Although Sunni insurgents all had a common grievance – the US presence in Iraq – and worked together to fight the US, al Qaeda's violence led many Sunni insurgents to rethink their activities.



**Sunnis team up with US.** US commanders in Iraq noticed this trend, and took advantage of the situation by reaching out to Sunni tribes and insurgents who were fed up with al Qaeda-- including insurgents who had previously fought against U.S. troops. The US provided weapons, equipment, money, and protection, while the Sunnis refrained from insurgent activity and worked to root al Qaeda out of their communities.

## Turning the Tide – New Strategy and the Surge



**What was the Surge?** In late 2006 and early 2007 President Bush's military advisors – including General David Petraeus – recommended a troop “surge” of 20,000 additional US troops, most of whom would be deployed to Baghdad. Advocates argued that the ratio of coalition troops to Iraqi citizens was too low to effectively defeat an insurgency.

**The Surge Enabled a New Military Strategy.** More troops allowed Petraeus to implement a strategy focused on protecting the population from violence, instead of only hunting down insurgents. Working more closely with local Iraqi leaders gained trust, and with it, crucial intelligence to defeat insurgents.



**Capitalizing on the Sunni Awakening.** The focus on protecting the Iraqi population and working with Iraqi leaders allowed the US to work with Sunnis who had gotten fed up with violence – especially al Qaeda's violence – and create a new atmosphere where the US could be a potential partner, not an occupier. By reaching out to Sunnis while also backing a Shiite government, America was able to be an honest broker.

**Beating Back the Mahdi Army.** One of the most powerful anti-government militias in Iraq had been the Mahdi Army, led by Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. The success of the new strategy in Iraq freed up enough resources that the Iraqi Army was able to defeat the Mahdi Army. Al-Sadr's supporters have since joined the Shiite political alliance and are participating in government.

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