Inside Iraq

Iraq is one of the most talked about countries in the Middle East. It lies at the north-western tip of the Persian Gulf. Its neighbours are Iran to the east, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to the south, Jordan and Syria to the west and Turkey to the north. Its capital is Baghdad.

Most of the country is a dry flat plain formed by the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Farmers can grow crops with the water they get from these two rivers. A sandy, hilly desert covers the south-western and western parts of the country.

PEOPLE

Iraq has a population of about 25 million. The country is made up of many different people with separate cultures, histories and religions.

- **SHIA ARABS**
  
  About 55% of the country’s population belong to this group. Shiites live in southern Iraq and most of them were against Saddam Hussein and his government.

- **SUNNI ARABS**
  
  Sunni Arabs were the most powerful group in the country, even though they represent only 20% of the population. They live mostly in Central Iraq. Saddam Hussein and most of his followers came from this group.

- **KURDS**
  
  Kurds are mainly Sunni Muslims that live in the northern part of the country and make up about 20% of the Iraqi population. They have always tried to get freedom and independence from the rest of the country. Saddam Hussein and his government attempted to wipe out the Kurds because of this. In 1988 he launched an attack on the Kurds using chemical weapons and killing thousands of them.

WORDS

- attack = strike
- attempt = try
- capital = an important city of a country, where the government is
- chemical weapon = something poisonous, mostly a gas, that is used in war
- cover = spread over
- crops = a plant like wheat, rice that is grown by farmers and used as food
- desert = land that is very hot and dry
- even though = while
- follower = someone who believes in a system and helps the leader who teaches it
- freedom = liberty; the feeling of being free
- government = the people who rule a country
- independence = self-government, freedom, liberty
- launch = start
- make up = consist of
- plain = a large area of flat, dry land
- population = the people who live in a country
- represent = stand for
- separate = different
- Shiite = a person who belongs to the Shia group of Muslims
- tip = end
- wipe out = to destroy or remove completely
**HISTORY**

The world’s oldest civilisation **developed** about 6000 years ago along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in a region which we know as Mesopotamia.

In 637 Arab **Muslims** took over the area. They **founded** Baghdad as their capital, which, by the year 800 had grown into a city of more than one million people and had also become a centre of **trade** and culture.

In 1258 Mongol **warriors** from Central Asia came to Mesopotamia and **destroyed** much of the Arab **empire**. Up to the 1800s the **plain** between the two rivers was **ruled** by the Ottoman empire which was **located** in today’s Turkey.

During World War I British **troops** took control of the area and in 1932 Iraq became a free, **independent** nation. In the **decades** that followed many different governments **ruled** the country until Saddam Hussein took over power in 1979.

**SA D D A M H U S S E I N**

Saddam Hussein was born in 1937 in a village near Tikrit in northern Iraq. He **joined** the Ba’ath Party, which was a **revolutionary** group that wanted to **overthrow** the government.

In the 1960s and 70s Saddam Hussein slowly got more and more **influence** in his party. In 1979 he **forced** Iraq’s president to **retire** and took over the job himself. Hussein ruled as a brutal dictator with a powerful army that **supported** him. Even though he himself became extremely rich, mainly through the oil that was sold, much of the population **remained** poor. Those who were against him were put into prison and often murdered.

In 1980 Saddam Hussein started a war with neighbouring Iran. The United States and many western European countries **supported** him because they thought that Iran would become too powerful in the region.

Things changed in 1990 when Saddam **invaded** another neighbouring country, Kuwait, because he wanted control of the small country’s oilfields. During the war that followed the United States and its **allies drove** the dictator’s soldiers **out** of Kuwait but Hussein himself stayed in power in Baghdad.

When the Iraq War started in 2003 the Americans and other countries were **determined** to **remove** Saddam Hussein from power. During the invasion he **managed** to escape but a few months later US soldiers found him in a small village near his home town.

In October 2004 Sadam Hussein was put on **trial** for murder, **charged** with the killing of 148 people in 1988. In 2006 he was found **guilty** and **sentenced** to death. Iraq’s dictator was **executed** by hanging on December 30, 2006.
THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

On August 2, 1990 Iraqi forces took control of its tiny southern neighbour Kuwait, a country with a lot of oil that Iraq desperately wanted. After the United Nations had repeatedly demanded that Iraq’s army get out of Kuwait, a group of countries, led by the United States, attacked Iraq. Many Arab states, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia fought alongside the Americans because they were afraid the dictator would take control of the whole region.

A month later the war was over. Saddam Hussein and his army lost and were forced out of Kuwait. In the course of the war most of Baghdad was destroyed by bombs.

IRAQ WAR

After the Gulf War of 1991 Iraq agreed to destroy all biological and chemical weapons that it had, as well as the buildings in which they were produced. Some experts even thought that Iraq was close to making a nuclear bomb.

During the 1990s Iraq did not fully obey this agreement. In 1998 the government refused to allow international weapons inspectors into the country to check out the situation.

After the 9/11 attacks on America, US President George Bush grew even more suspicious of Iraq because he thought that there was a link between Iraq and Al Qaeda, the group responsible for the attacks.

After the US had threatened to attack Iraq, Bush set a 48-hour deadline for Saddam Hussein and his sons to leave the country. On March 20, 2003, the United States, Great Britain and other states started attacks by bombing targets in Baghdad. Ground troops entered the country from the south and marched towards Baghdad.

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Not everyone supported the Americans in this war. Many European nations, including France and Germany, as well as the superpowers Russia and China, thought that the Americans were wrong. Hundreds of thousands of people around the world protested against the war.

After the war, the Americans stayed in Iraq, tried to restore law and order and set up a temporary government. They also started looking for weapons of mass destruction, but, up to today, haven’t found any.

Many Iraqis celebrated the fall of Saddam Hussein’s government. At last they were free in their own country, but they also thought the Americans should get out and leave them alone.
The situation in Iraq today is very unclear. Thousands of foreign troops are still in the country, most of them Americans. Even though the war officially ended in May 2003 fighting is still going on, especially between Sunni Arabs, who ruled the country for a long time and Shia Arabs, who are in control now and also supported by the USA.

Over the past years a few thousand American and British soldiers have died in daily attacks. Buildings and other targets have been bombed by Sunni and terrorist groups, that want the Americans to leave. High ranking government officials have been killed and hundreds of Iraqi and foreign civilians have been kidnapped.

In 2005 the Iraqi people were allowed to choose their own leaders in the first free election in decades. Americans have been training Iraqis and showing them how to build up their own police force and army. They have also tried to keep the country safe.

For a long time the United States was undecided on what to do next in Iraq. Many politicians in the USA said that it should pull its soldiers out of Iraq. In June 2009, only months after Barack Obama became president, American soldiers withdrew from Iraq’s towns and cities. President Obama has promised to bring home all US soldiers by 2011.