

CHRONOLOGY

- 1918 Ottoman Empire is defeated. British occupy key areas of Iraq.
- 1920 Uprising against British dominance. British army uses poison gas.
- 1921 British arrange for Faisal (son of Hussein, Sharif of Mecca) to become King.
- 1925 First parliamentary elections.
- 1927 Oil discovered.
- 1932 Independence. Kurdish uprising.
- 1933 King Faisal dies, succeeded by Ghazi. Botched uprising by Assyrian militants leads to massacre of Assyrians.
- 1936 Reformist army officers seize power.
- 1938 King Ghazi claims Kuwait as part of Iraq's territory.
- 1939 Ghazi dies in car crash. Succeeded by three-year-old Faisal II with his uncle as Regent.
- 1941 Pro-German faction briefly takes power. British forces occupy Iraq.
- 1943 Kurdish uprising.
- 1946 Striking oil workers killed by police.
- 1947 First Congress of Arab Ba'ath (Renaissance) Party
- 1948 New treaty giving Britain permanent right to military bases leads to several days of violent protests with large numbers of deaths.
- 1952 Ba'ath Party established in Iraq.
- 1954 Baghdad Pact allies Iraq with the West.
- 1958 Monarchy overthrown, king and royal family and Prime Minister killed. Abd al-Karim Qassem takes power. British forces leave Iraq.
- 1959 Uprising and attempted assassination of Qassem by Ba'athists. Iraq withdraws from Baghdad Pact.

IRAQ

With about nine percent of the world's oil reserves and a population of 26 million, Iraq has the basic requirements for both prosperity and regional prominence. Its history since independence, however, has been marked by dictatorship, by internal, regional and international wars, and by extended periods of foreign control.

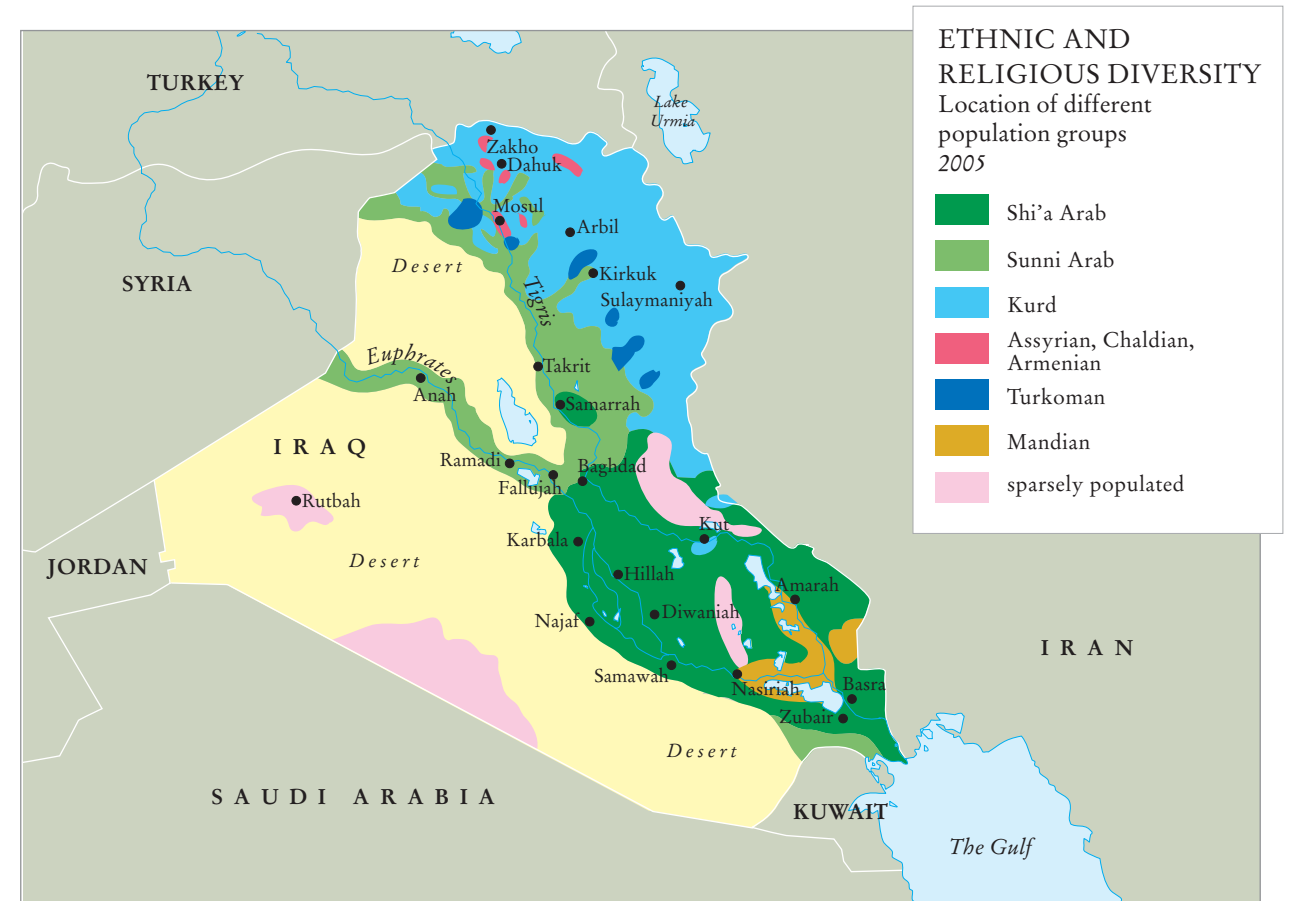
On the demise of the Ottoman Empire, Iraq was formed out of three imperial provinces. The country's history thus started as a dependent British territory, which is in reality how it remained until after World War II, despite formal independence in 1932. Though there were elections as early as 1925, Iraq has never been a democracy. Real power has always been in the hands of other states, various army factions or, for 35 years from 1968 to 2003, the Ba'ath Party.

Each of the three old Ottoman provinces that made up Iraq had its own history and identity; broadly, Kurdish in the north with large Assyrian and Turkoman minorities, Arab Sunni Muslim in the centre of the country, and Arab Shi'a Muslim in the south-east. Onto this patchwork, in 1921, the British brought an outsider to be king – Faisal, son of the Sharif of Mecca, commander in the Arab uprising against the Ottomans from 1916. The name al-Iraq that the British gave to the new mandate territory had previously been used for an area near Basra in the south. There was little basis for regarding Iraq as a unified country.

The lack of a common history and a unifying national consciousness did not make control by an outside power popular. In Iraq's first decade Britain held the country together and also held it down. In 1920, before Faisal was placed on the throne, there was an uprising against British domination by about 100,000 fighters. The British responded by bombing and strafing rebel villages. They have been widely accused of using poison gas weapons (not banned by treaty until 1925); though the evidence about this is not clear, there is no doubt that commanders in Iraq and the authorities in London considered the option.

The early years of Iraq's independence from 1932 were marked by political instability. The military moved onto the political stage in 1936 with a coup inspired by the model of Turkey under Kemal Atatürk. The monarchy remained in place throughout various upheavals; the appointment of a reforming cabinet, its removal by more conservative senior offices, and the successive governments made and re-made by this group over the next five years. In 1941 a pro-German army faction staged a coup; in response, Britain took over again.

In 1958 the monarchy was overthrown in a violent coup by a group inspired by the Free Officers' Movement in Egypt that had overthrown King Farouk six years earlier. Its leader Brigadier Qassem, became President. The coup had mass support but the Iraqi officers' movement lacked unity on two key issues – a programme for social and economic



development and Iraq's position in the Arab world. On the latter issue, the choice lay between the pan-Arab unity of Nasserism and an Iraq-first approach. Some officers wanted to join the United Arab Republic, newly formed by Egypt and Syria. But Iraq-first had strong support, including from the Iraqi Communist Party, which had flourished despite being banned under the monarchy, and could mobilize 500,000 supporters in demonstrations. For them, much of the point of the revolution was to be free of the influence of foreign leaders and outside powers.

