

Frequently Asked Questions Iraq and the Iraq War

1. Was life better for Iraqis under Saddam Hussein's regime? Or is it better under the US occupation?

Iraqis were better off before the U.S.-led interventions and current occupation.

After the expulsion of Iraqi troops from Kuwait in 1991, thirteen years of comprehensive economic sanctions crippled one of the most developed public sectors in the Middle East. Over several decades, pre-dating even the period of Saddam Hussein's rule, free education, health care, and an outstanding social security system were commonplace.

While political freedoms were repressed under the former Iraqi government, social movements, including for women's rights, continued to create a better Iraq. The US-led war and occupation destroyed not only the former Iraqi political dictatorship. It also destroyed the entire Iraqi national government and what remained of the social movements. Four years after the US occupation of Iraq, Iraq's social infrastructure is deteriorating, and the prospects for political stability and political freedoms remain illusive.

2. I was against the war, but now that the US is already there, shouldn't we just stay until things get better?

The first step in making things better for Iraqis is for the US to pullout its troops and military bases and give Iraq back to the Iraqis and help them rebuild their country.

Staying in Iraq should not be an option. It's illegal and immoral, it's against the will of the Iraqis, the majority of Americans, and it is pushing Iraq into more violence. According to credible U.S. polling institutions, less than 1% of the Iraqis polled feel safe around coalition troops. Around three-fourths of both the Iraqis and the US troops in Iraq support setting a timetable for ending the US presence there. More than half of the US population agrees, according to polling data.

Pulling the troops out of Iraq is just the first step to ending foreign intervention and stemming Iraqi-Iraqi violence. Iraqis have thrived as a community for the last 7,000 years, and have survived many wars, occupations and colonial rulers. They know how to heal their wounds and rebuild their country. Nonetheless, the US is still responsible for fixing the humanitarian disasters it has caused in Iraq due to its illegal intervention.

3. What about Sunni and Shia violence against each other?

The Iraqi-Iraqi conflict is political rather than sectarian, and it started after 2003 because of the occupation, not despite it.

Sunni and Shia Iraqis have never had a civil conflict or war before the US-led occupation. This conflict does not follow strict sectarian lines because it is a political, rather than sectarian, conflict. It's important to note that it is a secondary conflict happening on the side of the major Iraqi-US occupation fight.

After the fall of Baghdad in 2003, the occupation produced a parallel Iraqi-Iraqi conflict. Nationalist Iraqis, regardless of their sect or religion, have been fighting against Separatist Iraqis. Nationalists want a united Iraq with one capital and no occupation forces, while Separatists want to split Iraq into three states, and keep the occupation forces for the long run. The US and other regional powers have been trying their best to portray and make this political Iraqi-Iraqi conflict into a sectarian or religious one.

4. Are Shia Iraqis loyal to Iran?

No. The majority of Shia Iraqis are nationalists who identify with Iraq.

Iraq had the longest war in its modern history with Iran, the war of eight years that ended in 1988. Shia Iraqis fought alongside fellow Iraqis against Iran. The perception of Iran being the Mecca of Shia Muslims does not make sense for an Iraqi Shia. Iraq is the origin of Shia Islam, and Iraq has all the major Shia Muslim holy sites. Thousands of Iranians come to Iraq each year to visit these places and to bury their loved ones in the holy cemeteries of Iraq. Iranians follow the Shia Iraqi religious clergy and consider it to be the supreme Shia leadership. Iranians have to study Arabic and thus speak the same language as Iraqis to perform their religious ceremonies.

There is no reason for Iraqis to follow Iran for religious reasons, and the vast majority of Shia Iraqis, like the followers of Al-Sadr

and Al-Fadhila party, are strong nationalists. However, there are a few Iranian-supported political parties, like the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and Dawa Parties, which came to Iraq after 2003 with a separatist pro-Iranian, pro-occupation agenda.

5. Isn't pulling out the troops a betrayal of the US personnel and of Iraqis?

No. Both of them want to end the occupation, and there are other ways to support them.

Betraying the troops is sending them to fight a war they don't believe in. Polls say that 72% of them want to come back home and end the occupation. Betrayal also is not giving them the care they need when they return to the United States. Many Iraq War veterans think that "supporting the troops" should happen by ending the war and taking care of veterans, rather than sending more troops to Iraq. Supporting the war "is not supporting our troops."

Ending the occupation and giving Iraq back to the Iraqis is what the Iraqis want. Keeping the US occupation or abandoning Iraq after the occupation ends would be a betrayal of Iraqis. Compensation and reparation are channels the US and the international community must take so that Iraqis successfully can govern and rebuild their country after the last occupation soldier leaves.

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May 2007*



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