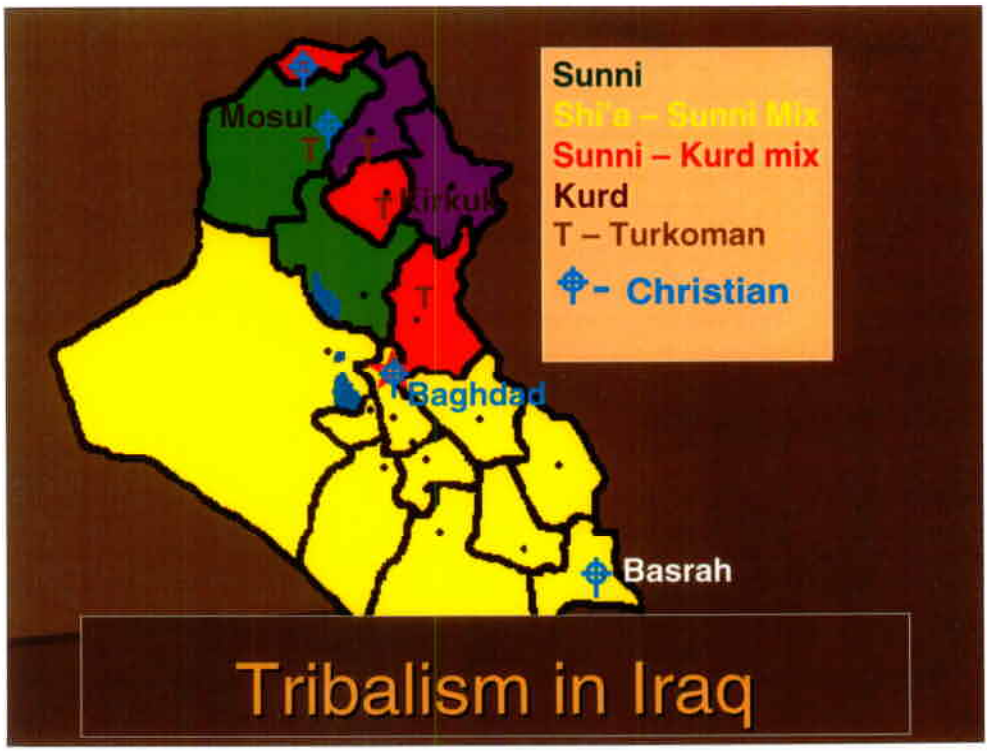
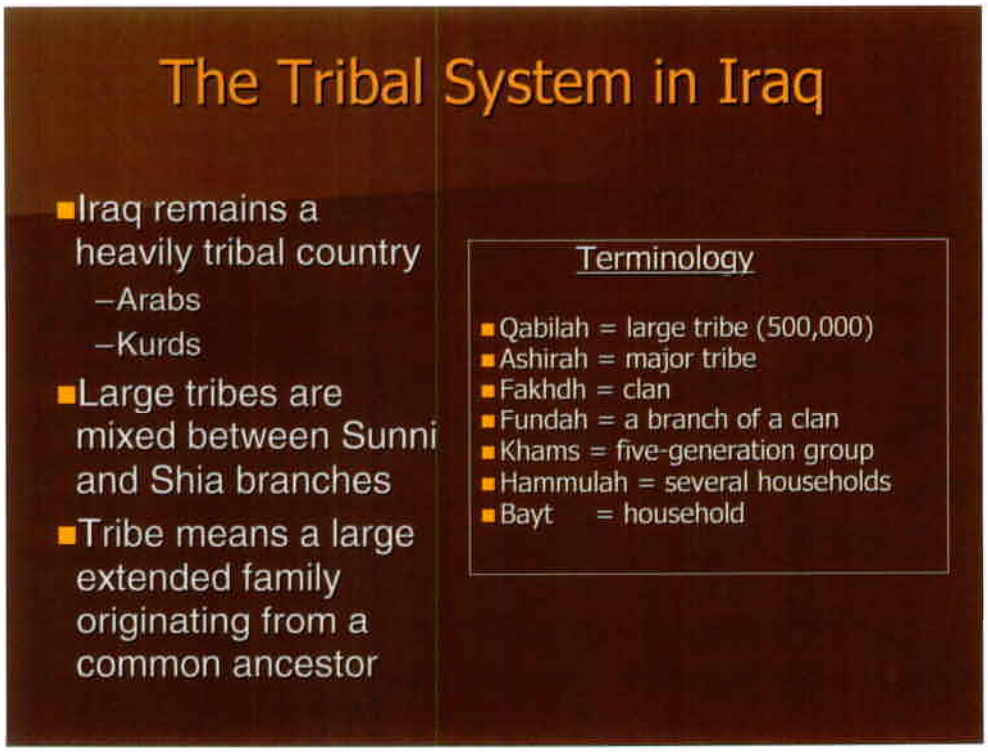
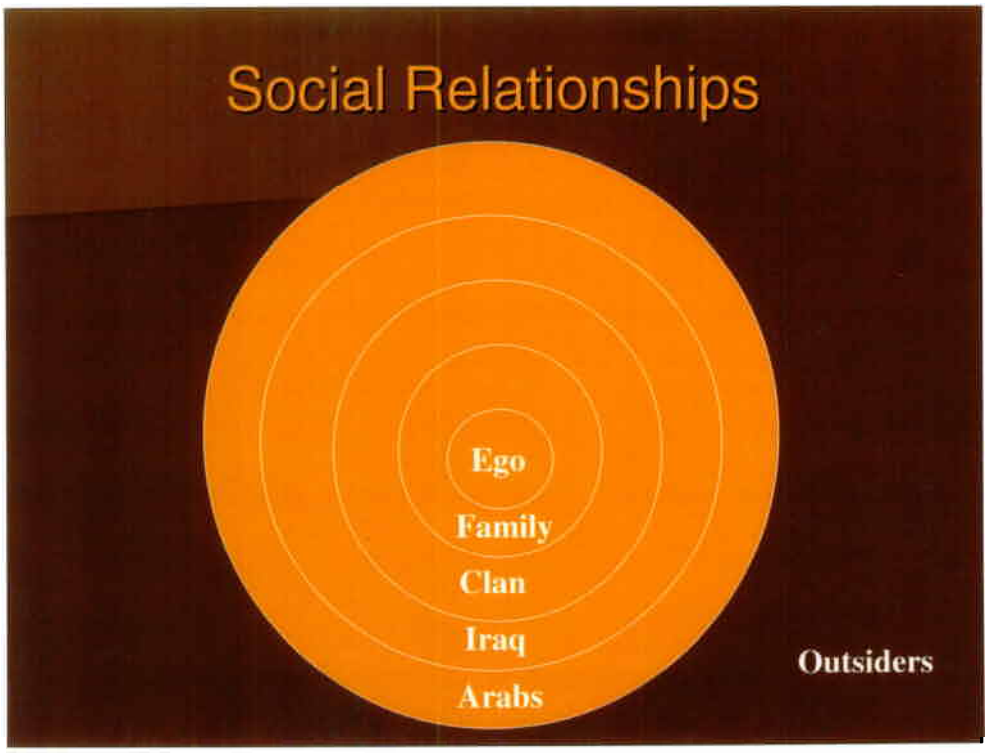


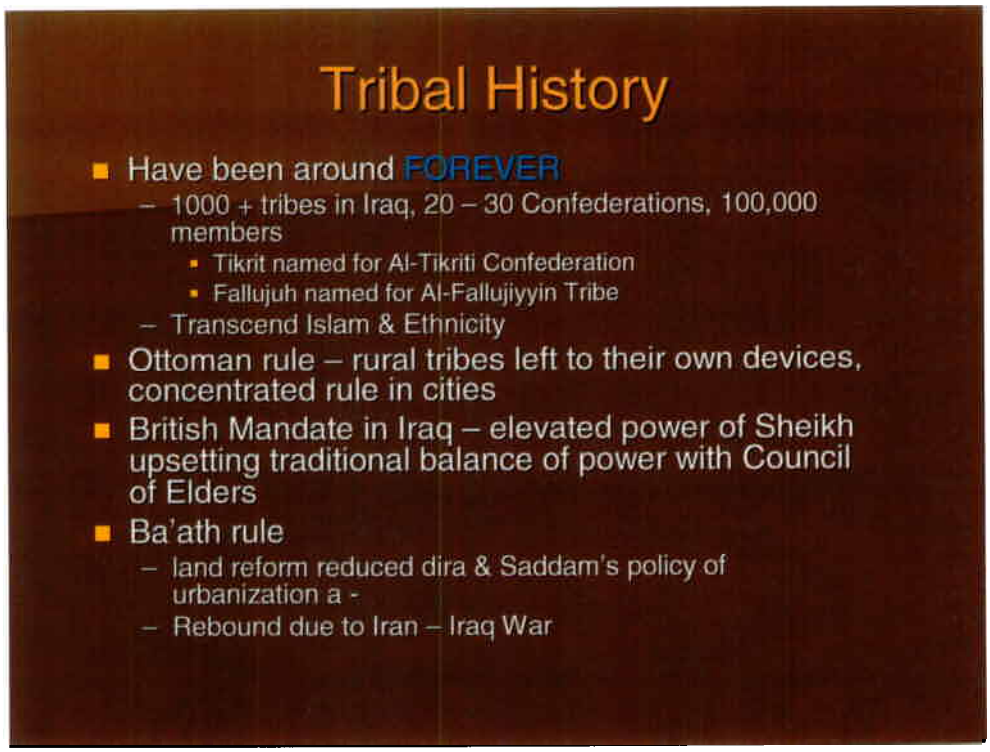

When modern Iraq was put together from three disparate Ottoman provinces, it lacked a common religion, language, or ethnicity. The ethnic split between Arabs and Kurds has undermined a sense of shared Iraqi identity. Every Iraqi government has attempted with varying degrees of success to create a nation from the diverse elements within its boundaries. To that end, the regime has experimented with methods ranging from pluralism and assimilation to oppression and annihilation. It also periodically embarked on explicit campaigns to create a culture that would be both uniquely Iraqi and common to Arabs and Kurds. Under Saddam Hussein, this culture somewhat awkwardly combined elements of Iraq's Mesopotamian, Arab, Islamic, and tribal heritages. However, no single formula was capable of rallying all parts of the population. To the contrary, such fluctuating and contradictory policies further undermined the creation of a clear Iraqi national identity.




Iraq remains a heavily tribal country. The nation's two largest ethnic groups, the Arabs and Kurds, continue to identify themselves primarily through tribal affiliation. The larger tribes have both Sunni and Shi'a branches, and some even have Arab and Kurd branches. The tribe is basically a very large extended family tracing lineage back to a shared common ancestor. The tribe or Qabilah can number as many as 500,000 and is composed of Fakdhs (clans), Fundah (branches of clans), Khams (five generation groups), Hammulahs (several households), and Bayts (households).



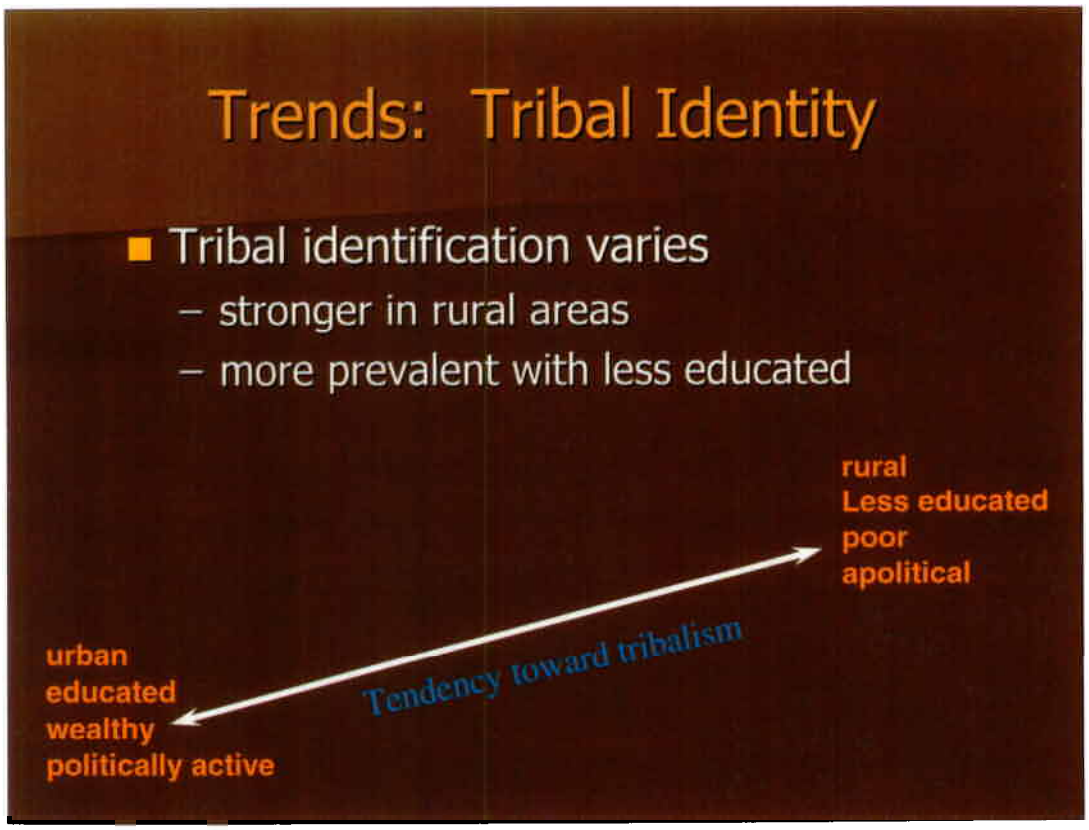

Iraqi-Arab identity is a series of levels of association that progress outward from the individual to household to tribe to Iraqi nationalism and ultimately Arab nationalism. The bond that unites tribesmen is a shared common ancestor and tribal lore. This socially ascribed identity is reliant on it being recognized by others and is not necessarily associated with a claim to specific territory. This belonging carries with it certain obligations, such as defense against external aggression.



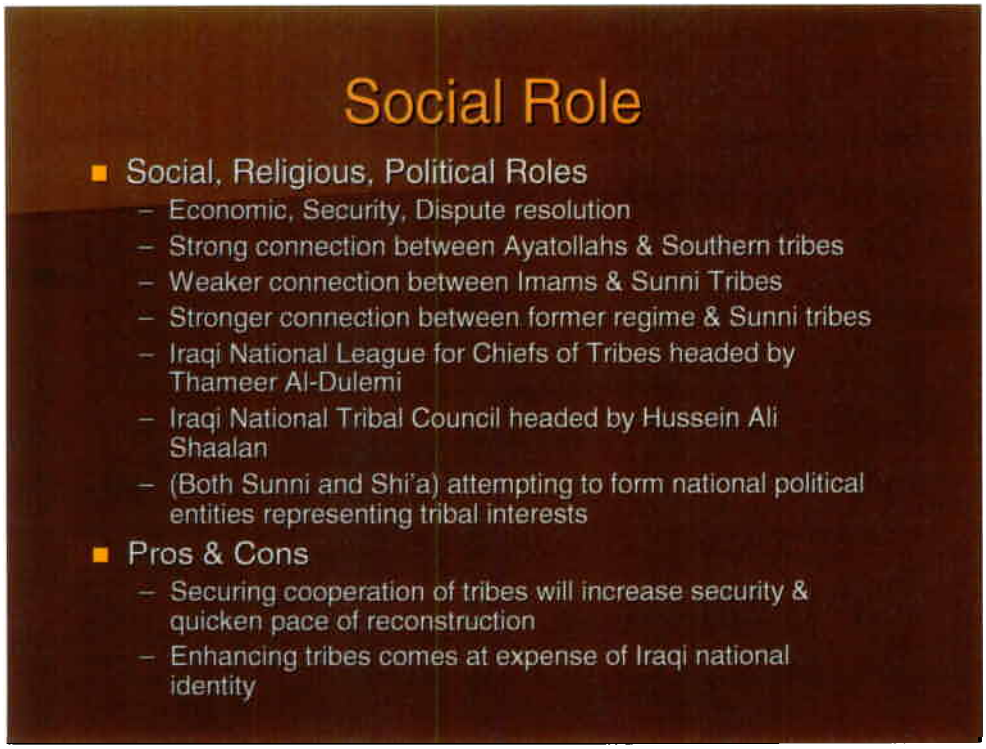

The tribes in Iraq are older than Islam itself. One of the obstacles the Prophet Muhammed tried to overcome was tribal rivalries. There are over 1000 distinct tribes in Iraq, which are often associated with a tribal village or town. The towns of Tikrit and Fallujah are named for the tribes that dominate them, for example. Again, tribes transcend Islam and ethnicity with some tribes having both Sunni and Shi'a and Arab and Kurd branches.

Tribes have always played a political role in Iraq. During Ottoman rule, the tribal system was strengthened in the rural areas. The Ottomans concentrated their rule on the cities and so long as the tribes did not rise up in revolt they were left to their devices.

Following the First World War, during the British Mandate, the British changed the dynamics of the tribal structure. They sought to repeat the success they had in India ruling the country indirectly through the Raj. The British strengthened the role and prestige of the Sheikh by elevating his power over the Shura (council of elders). This upset the traditional balance of power within the tribe and Saddam would do much the same. Initially, Saddam did not have much support from the tribes after he and the Ba'ath Party took power. Saddam sought to bolster Iraqi nationalism at the expense of the tribes and initiated a number of programs to accomplish this objective. The most radical were a land reform program that reduced the tribal land holdings (dira) and a policy of urbanization to resettle Iraqis within cities. The tribes soon made a rebound after the Iraqi invasion of Iran when Saddam needed the assistance of the tribes.




Tribal identification within Iraq varies but generally the more traditional people in Iraq maintain stronger ties to the tribes of which they are a member of. These traditionalists tend to be rural, less educated, poor, and less involved in politics.

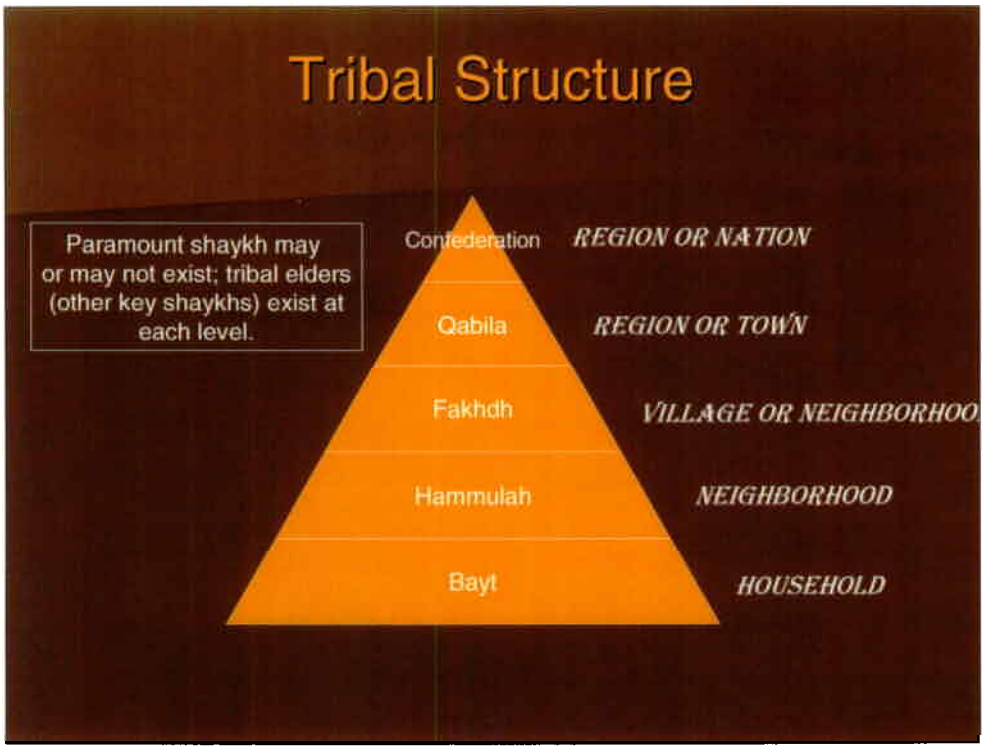



Tribes in Iraq play important social, religious, and political roles. They provide Iraqis with economic opportunity, security, and means for resolving disputes. These are all roles that the state plays in Western societies. In the south, the tribes also play a religious role as there is a strong tie between the Ayatollahs and the tribes they come from. When Coalition forces entered Najaf, Grand Ayatollah Sistani's tribe surrounded his home to protect him. The tribes are also beginning to form the nucleus for political parties. The Iraqi National League for Chiefs of Tribes is headed by Thameer Al-Dulemi of the Dulaym Tribe and the Iraqi National Tribal Council headed by Hussein Ali Shaalan are two organizations that will likely play an increasing important role in Iraqi politics. The Coalition faces the same dilemma faced by the Ottomans, British, and Ba'athists in dealing with the tribes. The tribes could be immensely helpful in stabilizing Iraq and providing security to quicken reconstruction, but this may come at the expense of Iraqi national identity and ultimately cohesion.

## Arab Tribalism

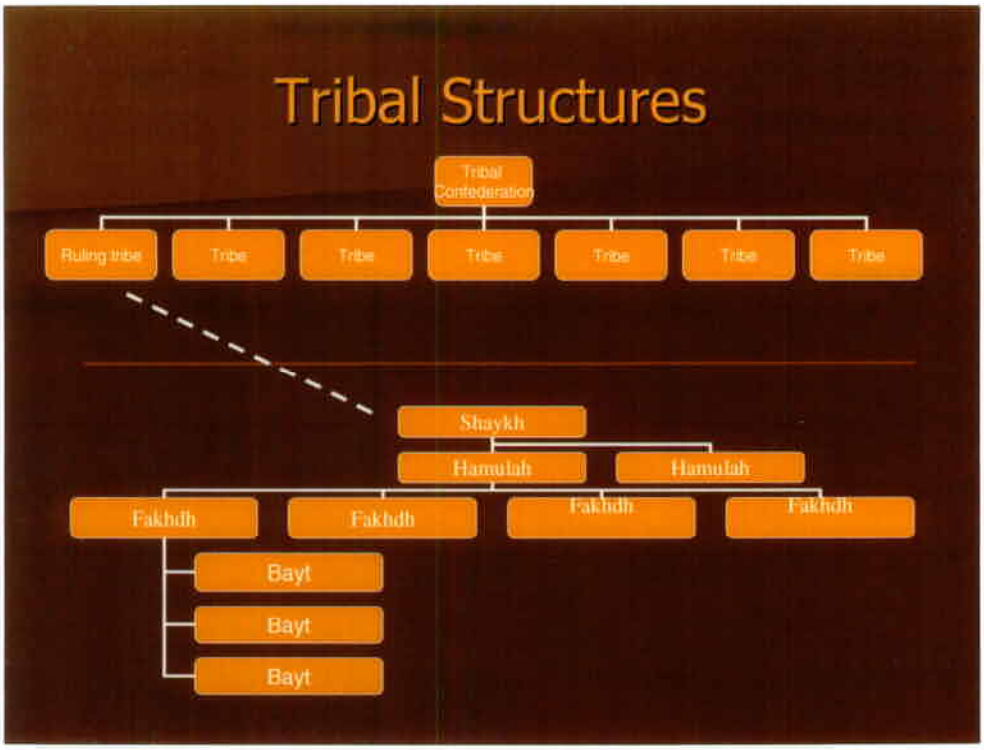
- *Asabiya* – solidarity of tribal structure
- *Dira* – tribal grazing territory, no boundaries, size of *dira* dependent upon tribes size and political influence, ever shifting and fluid
- Camel herding tribes required largest extent of land and most fiercely defends *dira*
- Mixed herding tribes (camels, goats and sheep).
  - One branch occupies permanent watering sites for goat and sheep, other branch roams desert dira for camel grazing

The key value within Arab tribalism is Asabiya or solidarity. Honor is collective and external in order to protect the tribe's reputation and security. The dira is the tribal grazing territory, which may or may not be clearly marked by boundaries. The dira is dependent upon the tribe's strength and political influence, which can be in a constant state of flux. Camel herding tribes required the largest dira and by reputation most fiercely defend their dira. Mixed herding tribes normally don't require as large dira but tend to permanently occupy watering sites.

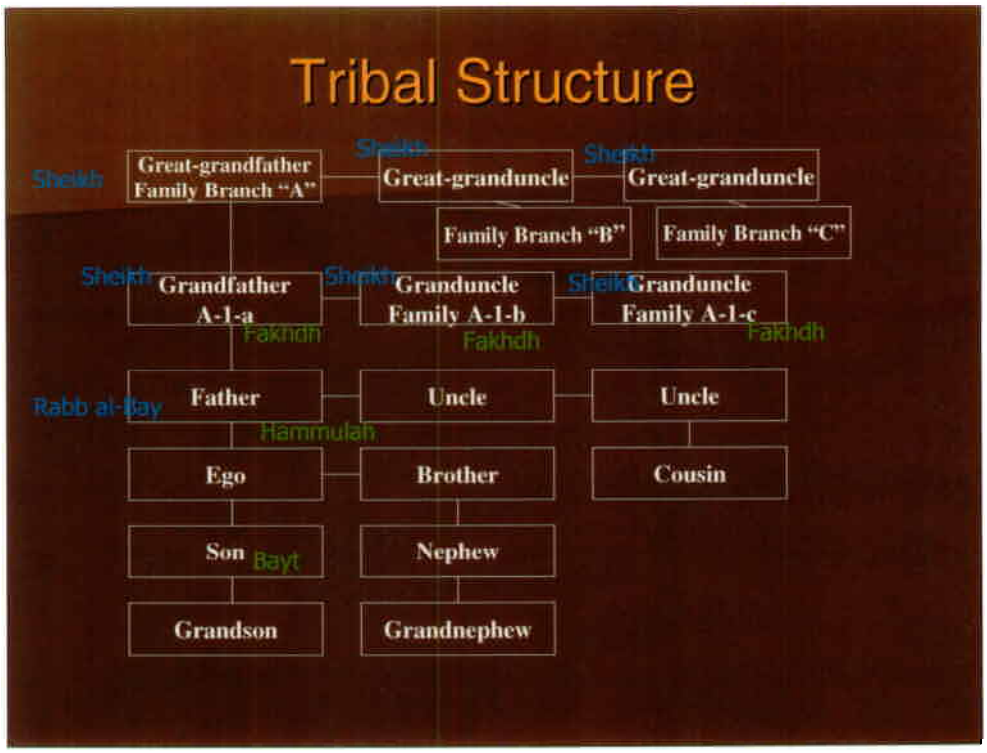



In Iraq the Bayt (family) is the basic unit within the tribe. The Bayt is headed by the Rabb al-Bay (Master of the House) and may be a father or grandfather. A group of Bayts are called Hammulah, which can be headed by a Sheikh who is the patriarch of the family. Several Hammulah comprise a clan or Fakhdh as they are known in Iraq. The tribe or Qabila is in turn composed of several clans. A certain clan will always provide the Sheikh who leads the tribe.

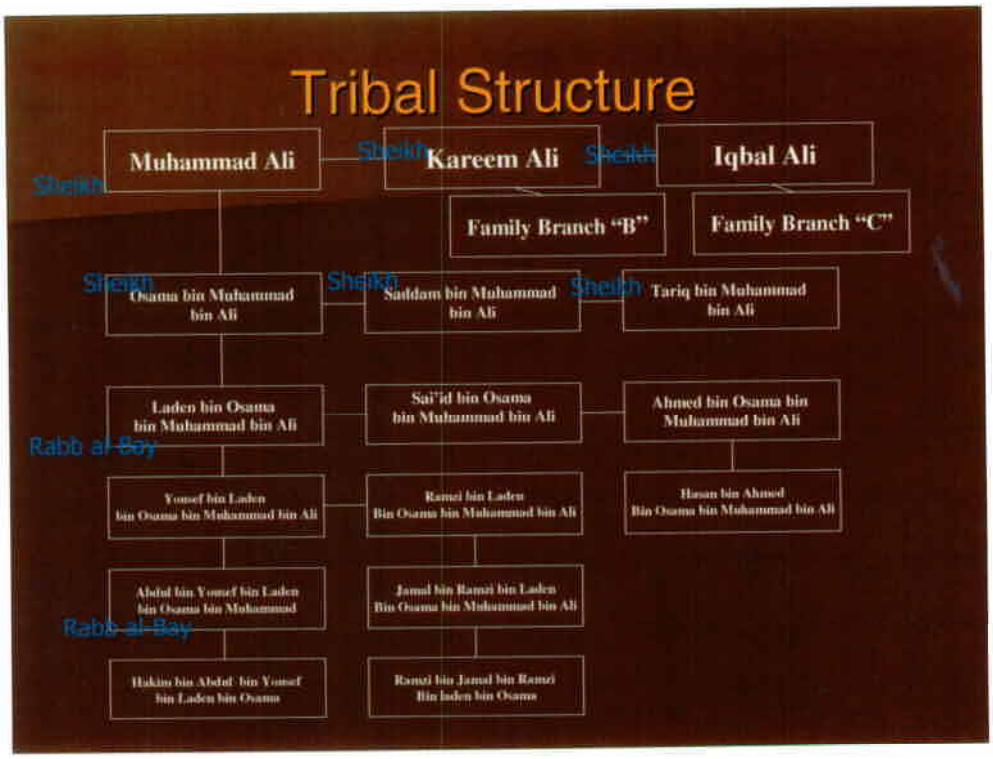
Geographically, the Bayt is associated with an individual household while the Hammulah will typically be concentrated in a neighborhood. The clan (Fakhdh) can be located within a neighborhood or if it is a large clan an entire village. The tribe is usually associated with a town or a region, but it is common for tribes to be spread throughout the country. In large cities in such as Baghdad and Basra the tribes will usually concentrate themselves in neighborhoods. Confederations are large organizations and are associated with regions or even nations.




Keeping in mind that each clan and Hammulah is led by their own sheikh, it is important to know the internal hierarchy of the tribe. The tribal Sheikh may actually be "wearing four gutrahs"; Rabb al-Bay, Hammulah sheikh, Fakhdh sheikh, and tribe sheikh.




Understanding kinship is critical to identifying tribal membership and affiliation.




Understanding kinship is critical to identifying tribal membership and affiliation.

For the past 30 years the normal fractions and jealousies between larger, wealthier, more powerful tribal groups and those lacking in size, patronage, status, and influence probably have been held in check by fear of Baghdad and of plunging Iraq into chaos in the face of external threat.

Saddam's tribe, the Albu Nasir, is closely allied with the Jubbur, which hails primarily from the Tikrit area and Mosul. Also allied with Albu Nasir is the Ubaid, most of whom live immediately north of Baghdad; the Dulaim, which inhabits the region west of Baghdad; and the large Shammar Jarba federation in the Jazirah, west and northwest of Baghdad.

Other tribes allied with the Albu Nasir and supporting the regime include

•The Harb from the area of Dur

•The Aqaydat from southwest of Mosul

•The Khazraj from the west of the Tigris between Baghdad and Samarra

•Al-Azza from between the Tigris and the Iranian border north of Baghdad

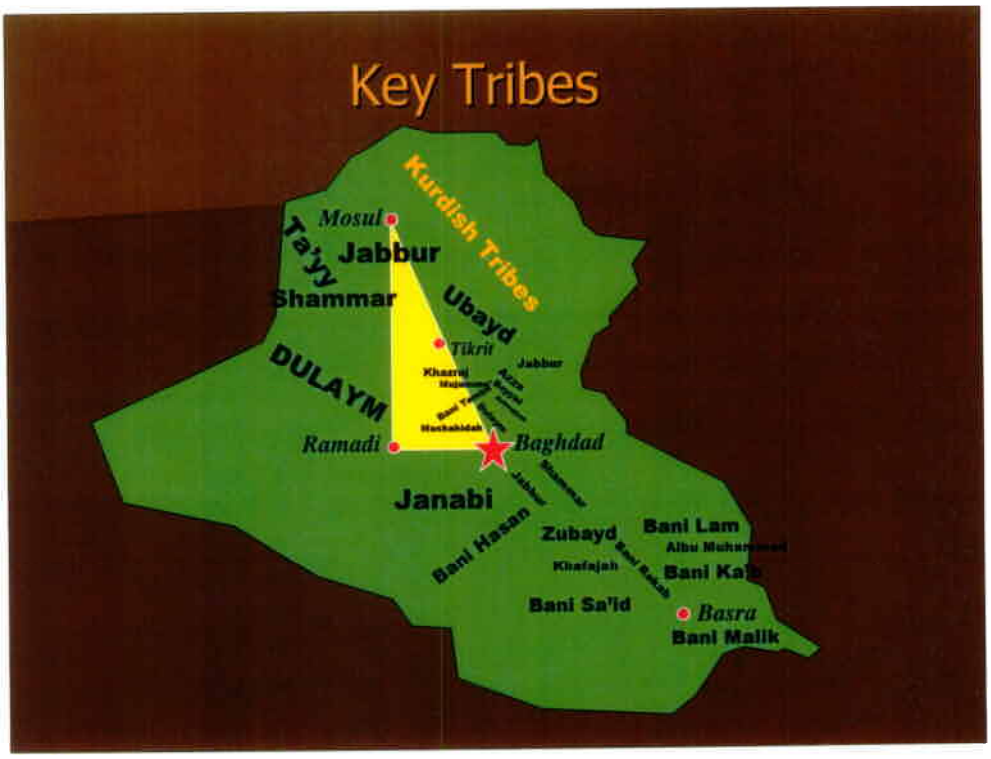
•The Sa'dun clan from the south around Nasiriyya

•The Tayy from Mosul

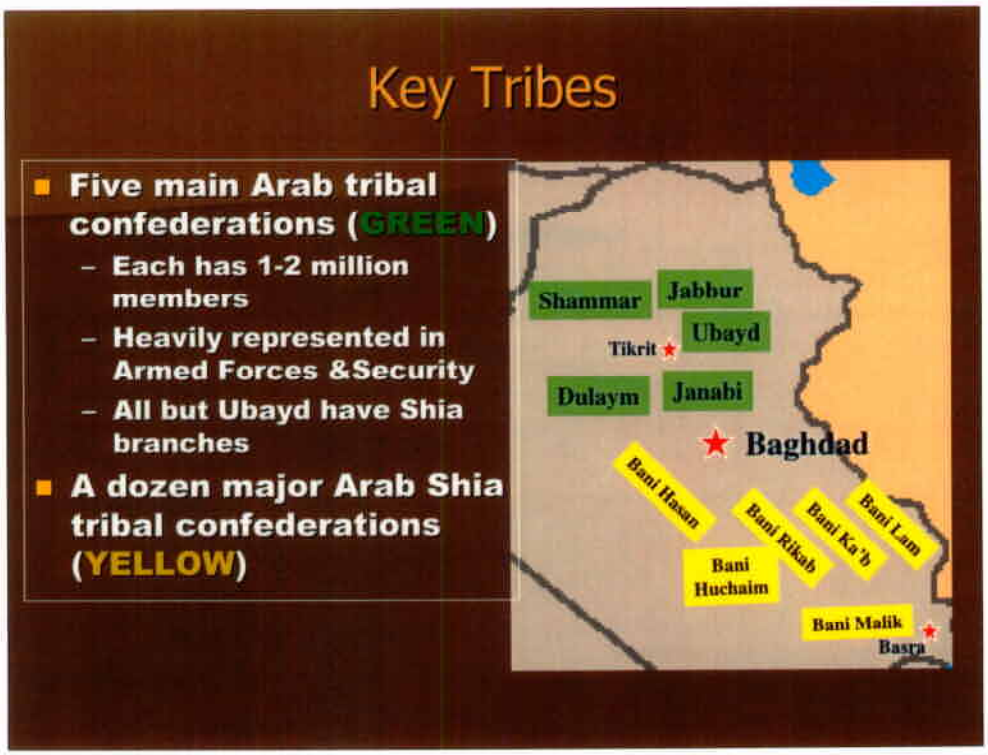
•The Mushahda from Tarmiya

•The Maghamis from Khalis

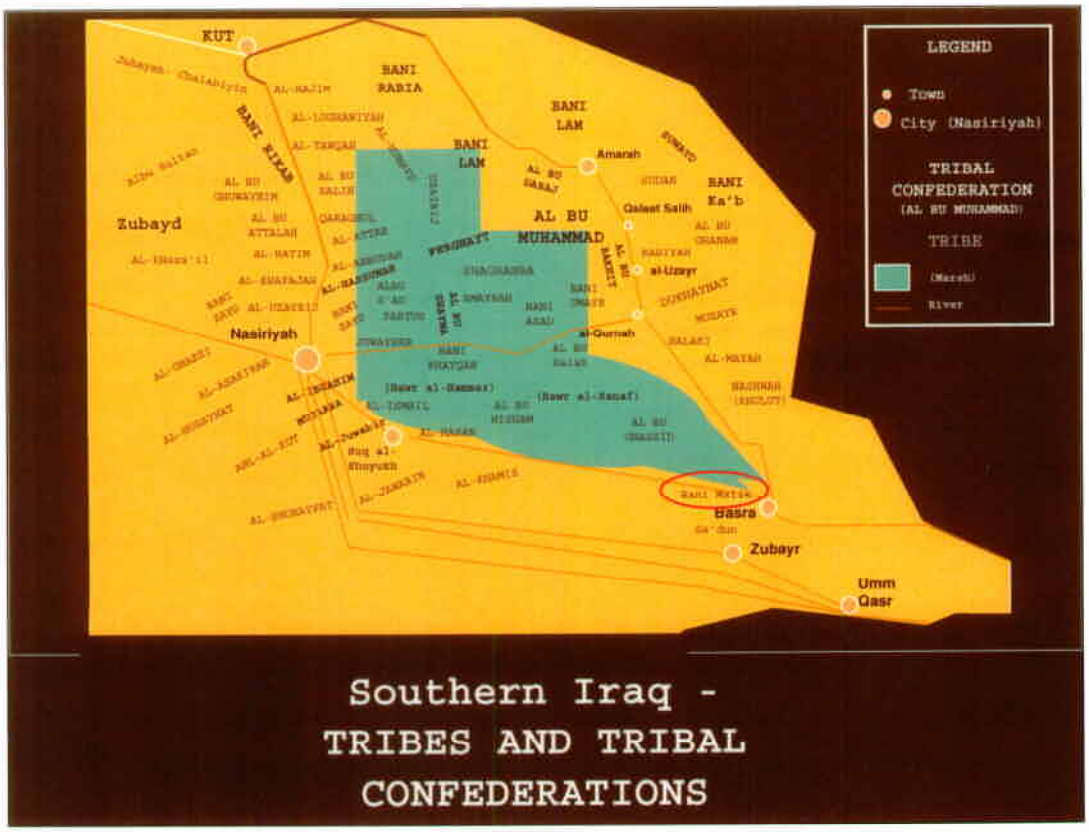
•The al-Hadithiyyun, Al-Shaya'isha, Albu Khishman, Al-Rifa'iyyan, Albu Yasin, al-Luhayb, and Albu Bazun, all residing in and around Tikrit.




Turing now to the main tribes in Iraq it should now become apparent how difficult it is to find "Where's Waldo". Tribal alliances are notoriously volatile and allegiances may differ even among groups within a particular tribe. The history of Iraqi tribes has been marked by shifts in allegiances, betrayals, and conditional alliances. Often tribes have looked out for their own interests, regardless of who controlled the state. Confederations warred with one another. The Dulaim, for example, are traditional enemies of the Shammar Jarba. Conflict also occurred within the larger confederations. Much of the tribal warfare of the 19th Century resulted from rivalries among factions of the Shammar confederation. The Ottoman government's continual wavering in appointing paramount chiefs exacerbated this conflict. Many Iraqi tribes migrated to Iraq from Arabia around the time of the Islamic conquest and maintained ties with Arabian tribes (as well as Syrian tribes). They also had links with one another. For example, the Dulaim and Albu Muhammed split from the Zubaid in the late 17th Century. However, tribal alliances were not always determined by kinship, as tribes overlooked genealogical links in pursuit of economic or political interests. Kinship rhetoric often masked a sense of pragmatism, and external factors played a crucial role; it was not uncommon for a tribal section to ally itself with an outside power. In other words, tribes are essentially practical links that reflect existing ties, rather than formal lineage classifications that dictate political action.

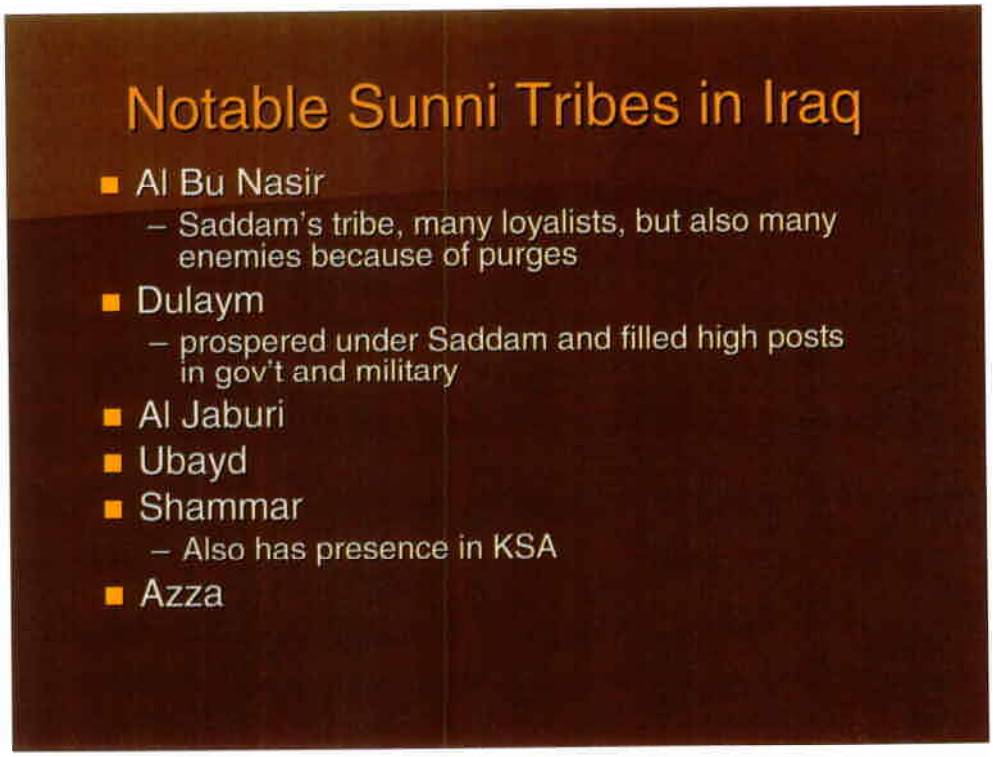



There are five main tribal confederations within Iraq. Each has millions of members and provided representation in the Iraqi armed forces to include the Special Republican Guard and the Republican Guard. All but the Ubayd have Shi'a branches so one cannot automatically assume that adherence to Shi'a Islam guarantees that that tribe will be cooperative with the Coalition. There are approximately twelve Shi'a confederations, but there are also hundreds of independent tribes within Iraq. Their behavior is difficult to predict because of the shifting alliances and perceived benefits or consequences in cooperating or opposing the Coalition.




Southern Iraq - TRIBES AND TRIBAL CONFEDERATIONS

The Muntafiq, for example, was composed of three tribal groups; the Bani Malik, Jawed, and Bani Sa'id. These three, in turn, included multiple sub tribes and clans. The Muntafiq was often unstable as a result of internal dissentions. In fact, the confederations truly bonded only when faced with external threat. Their basic nature and function, therefore, is they were confederations for war and defense purposes. Even within the individual member tribes, there is little unity of purpose and each sub tribal unit usually has its own priorities. More often than not, tribal leaders favor the interests of their extended family over those of the sub tribe.




Some of the notable Sunni tribes in Iraq include Saddam's own Al bu Nasir, the Dulaym, al Jaburi, Ubayd, Shammar, and Azza tribes.

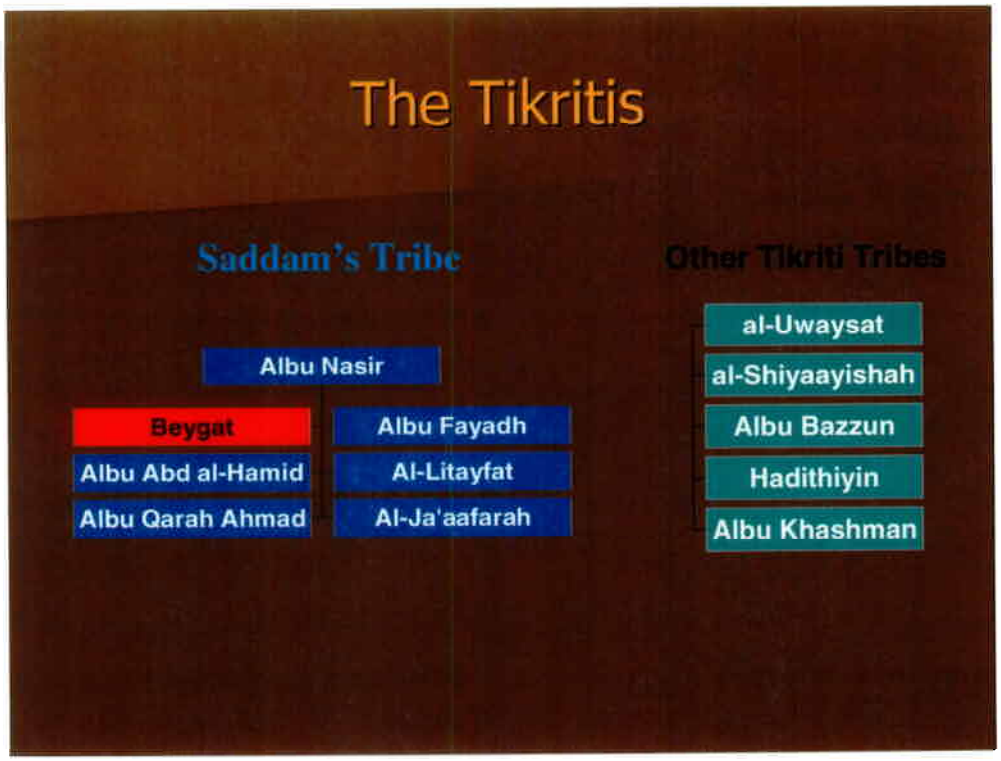
## Al-bu Nasir Alliances

- Overwhelmingly Sunni
- Al Jubbur & Shammar have Shi'a branches
- Bani Hasan also supported regime
- Sunni Tribes persecuted by regime:
  - Jubbur – RG & Army units
  - Ubaid
  - Dulaim – Ar Ramadi Revolt

Other than Jubbur, a mixed tribe with a sizeable Shi'a component south of al-Hillah and the Shammar, which has a large branch in the Shi'a south (Shammar Toqa), all of these tribes are entirely Sunni tribes. Several Shi'a tribes from the south, such as the Bani Hasan, are also supporters of the regime. Other Shi'a tribes are passive supporters for lack of any other option.

Three Sunni tribes on which Saddam Hussein has traditionally relied have fallen under suspicion in recent years. In 1990, the regime uncovered a plot by the Jubburi tribesmen of the Republican Guard and regular army units. In 1993-94, the military officers of the Ubaid also fell under suspicion for coup plotting. In May 1995, the Albu Nimr of the Dulaim tribe actually revolted against the regime. Anti-regime also broke out in the city of Ramadi, the capital of the Sunni al-Anbar province, less than 100 miles from Baghdad. The unrest was sparked by the execution of Generals Mazlum al-Dulaimi and Turki al-Dulaimi. Until that time, the Dulaim tribe was among the most loyal to the regime. In 1991, for example, the Dulaim played a key role in suppressing the Shi'a rebellion in the south. Tribes that sympathized with Dulaim in 1995 included the al-Jumailat, al-Anis, al-Rawis, and al-Kubaysis.

In January 2003, several tribes, including the Bani Arid, Al-Barakat, Bani Tamim, Al Khaza'il, Al-Imarah, and Zubaid, pledged their allegiance to Saddam Hussein.




Other, smaller tribes in the Salah al-Din governorate are also allied with the Albu Nasir. These tribes live mainly in Tikrit itself, the village of al-Uja, 5 kilometers south of Tikrit, the town of Baji (Beiji), 35 kilometers north, and Dur, 10 kilometers south of Tikrit. Most significant of them is the Jawa'ina. This tribe, which originated in the town of Haditha on the Euphrates northwest of Baghdad, was the most influential tribe under the monarchy.

•Kurds are distinct from Arabs, Turks, and Persians (Iranians) of their region, but are ethnically and linguistically closest to Persians. Kurdish origins are commonly traced back to the Empire of the Medes in the 6th Century BC.

•Kurds live in the mountainous region of the Middle East where the borders of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran meet. There are an estimated 20-25 million Kurds throughout the Middle East. The region they inhabit is sometimes called Kurdistan, although this does not refer to a political designation. The Kurds have always been a stateless people.

•Kurds in Iraq make up 15-20 percent of the Iraqi population of 24 million, or about 4-5 million people. The number of Kurds in Iraq is a disputed issue, and the Kurds accuse the former Iraqi regime of undercounting Kurds to reduce their status as a significant minority.

•Iraqi Kurdish areas span three provinces (Dohuk, Arbil, and Sulaymaniyah) of Iraq. Kurds also comprise a substantial portion of the population around Kirkuk, and live as far south as Khanaqin.

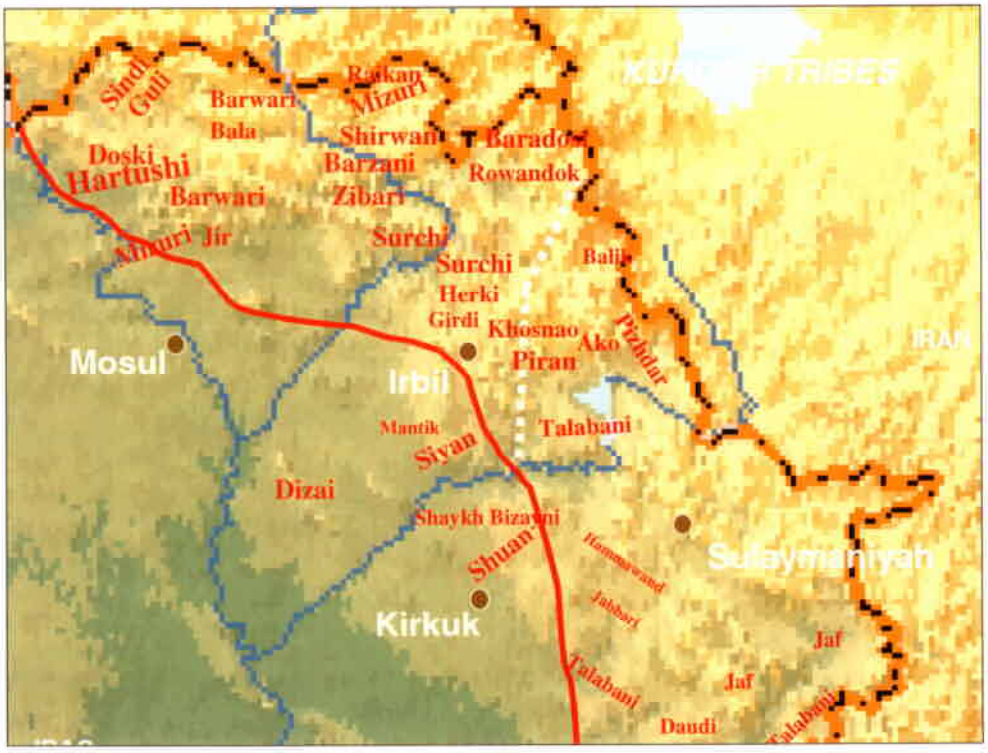
•Kurds in Iraq are divided between the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) factions in northern Iraq. These entities are political-military-tribal organizations. The KDP and PUK are currently cooperating with each other, although they fought a civil war in 1996.

•The KDP and PUK are tribally based organizations. The two parties form two centers of inter-tribal alliances as they group several tribes together under an overarching organizational structure.

•Kurds consider Kirkuk, a 5,000 year old city and a center of oil production, as the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, even though it contains more Arabs than Kurds. Both the KDP and PUK regard Kirkuk as a key piece in their plan for a secure and economically viable Kurdistan.

•Kurds speak Kurdish, which is a language distinct from Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. There are several dialects of the Kurdish language and are specific to different regions of Kurdistan. In Iraq, the dominant dialects are Kurmanji (Northern) Kurdish and Surani (Southern) Kurdish.

•Kurdish cultural identity has been fundamentally influenced by their experience at the intersection of the Turkic, Persian, and Arab cultures. These three cultures have dominated Kurdish culture, in part because of the empire and state borders that have prevented coordination and unity within the larger Kurdish population.


Sindi
Gulli
Barwari
Bala
Rakan
Mizuri
Doski
Hartushi
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Zibari
Barado
Rowandok
Mizuri
Jir
Surchi
Surchi
Balik
Herki
Girdi
Khosnao
Piran
Ako
Pizhdar
IRAN
Mosul
Irbil
Mantik
Siyan
Talabani
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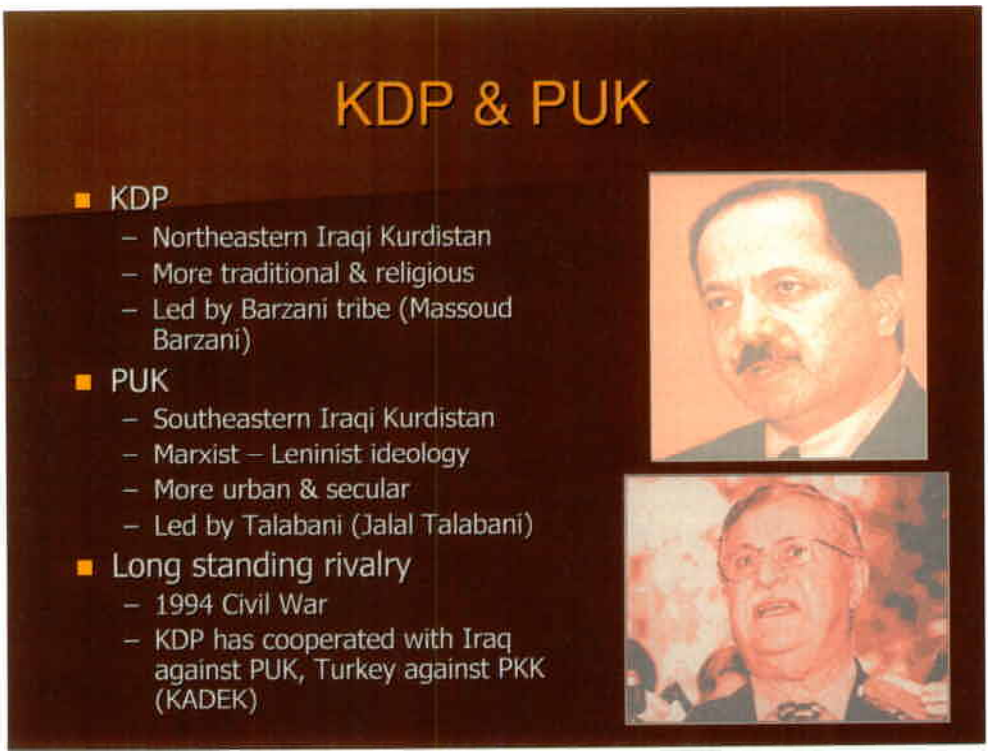
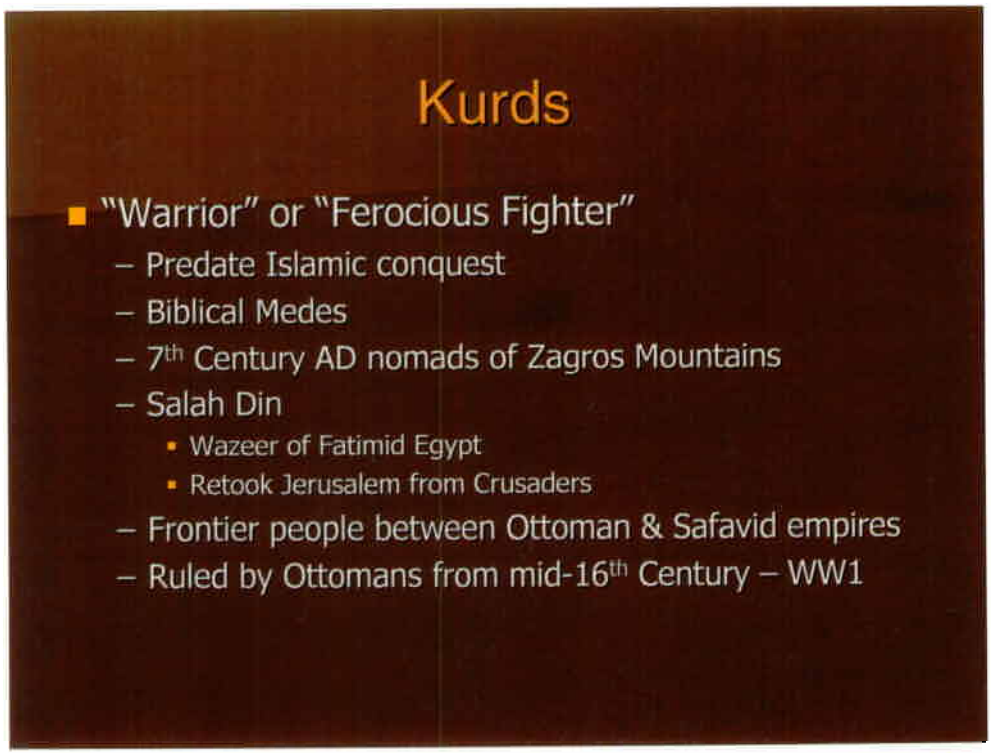



The **Kurdistan Democratic Party** (**KDP**) has remained a dominant force in Iraqi Kurdish politics for more than half a century. Since the death of his father Mullah Mustafa in 1979, **Massoud Barzani** has led the KDP through decades of conflict with the Iraqi central government and with local rivals, the **Patriotic Union of Kurdistan** (**PUK**). The **KDP** commands tens of thousands of armed militia fighters, known as **peshmerga**, and controls a large area of north-western Iraq. Mr. **Barzani** is a member of the Iraqi Governing Council. The Barzani-led KDP is familial, with firm grass-roots connections through tribal and local elders and community leaders. The Barzanis are religious, with their followers being traditionalist and inward-orientated looking people.

Under the command of the veteran Kurdish leader **Jalal Talabani**, the **Patriotic Union of Kurdistan** (**PUK**) has created militia forces and a party organization to rival the traditionally dominant **KDP**. The **PUK**, founded in June 1975, now claims to be a modern, social-democratic party with a membership of nearly 150,000. The party's literature says the PUK was founded in order to "rebuild and redirect Kurdish society along modern and democratic lines" although the PUK has traditionally been Marxist-Leninist in ideology. The Talabani led PUK represents a more urban, modern, and outward looking population. The party is less religious, accommodates multiple political ideologies and agendas, and its leaders seldom consult local tribal or religious leaders.

There is long-standing rivalry, occasionally erupting into civil war, between the KDP and PUK. The KDP controls the northwestern region; the PUK the southeastern parts of the Kurdish inhabited areas of Iraq. Both have limited appeal outside their tribe and region.

Kurdish Areas of Northern Iraq
TURKEY
SYRIA
IRAN
KDP concentration
Forward line of Iraqi forces
Salah ad Din
KDP HQ
Arbil
Mosul
No-fly zone north of 36th parallel
No man's land
PUK concentration
PUK HQ
As Sulaymaniyah
IRAQ
Kirkuk
Islamist area
Halabjah
IRAN
Khanaqin
Kurdish-inhabited area
KDP - Kurdistan Democratic Party
PUK - Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
Islamist area - Several Islamist groups operate in this area, including the Islamic Movement in Kurdistan-Iraq (IMKI), Islamic Group of Kurdistan (IGK), and Ansar al-Islam.

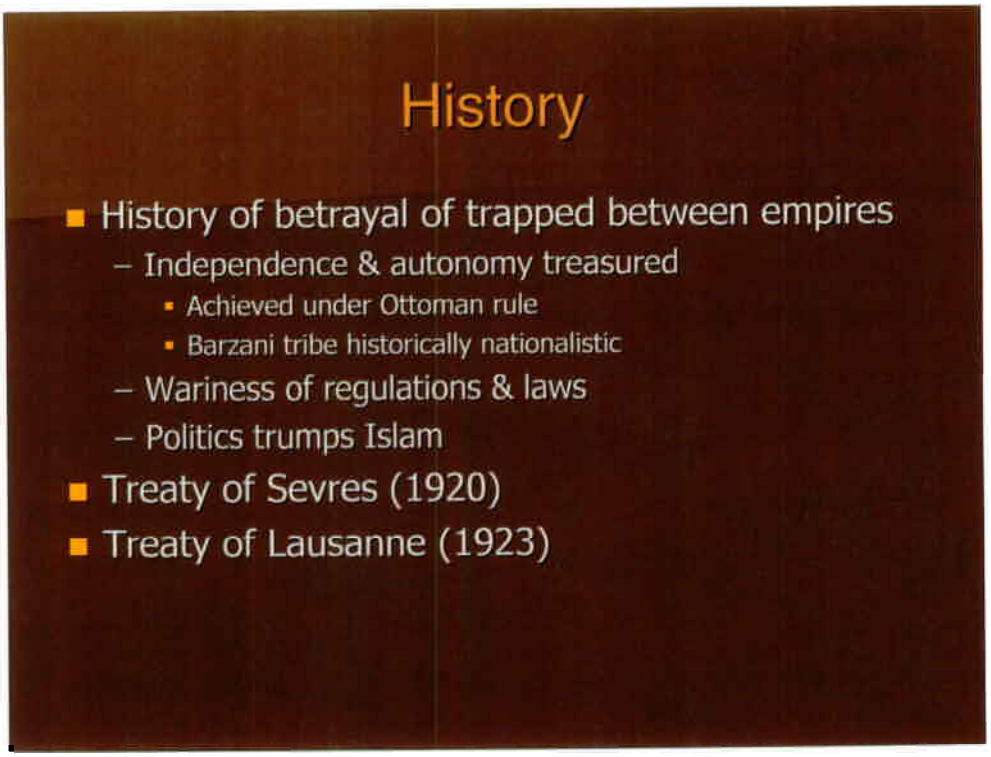



•The name "Kurd" was a generic term used to denote nomads and non-Arabs in particular. In Kurdish, the name "Kurd" means "warrior" or "ferocious fighter". By the time of the Islamic conquest of the northern Middle East in the 7th Century, the name "Kurd" was already in use as a term to designate the population of Western Iranians in the Zagros Mountains.

•Kurdish origins are commonly traced back to the Empire of the Medes in the 6th Century BC. Salah Din who led Muslim forces against the Crusaders and retook Jerusalem was a Kurd.

•By the beginning of the 16th century, the Shi'a Safavid (Empire) had emerged as a rival to the Ottoman Empire. The Kurds found themselves in the middle of the territories claimed by the Sunni Turkic Ottomans and the Shi'a Persian Safavids. The two empires fought at the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, where the Ottomans defeated the Safavid Shah. The result of the battle established a boundary between the two empires that split the Kurds between Turkic and Persian empires.

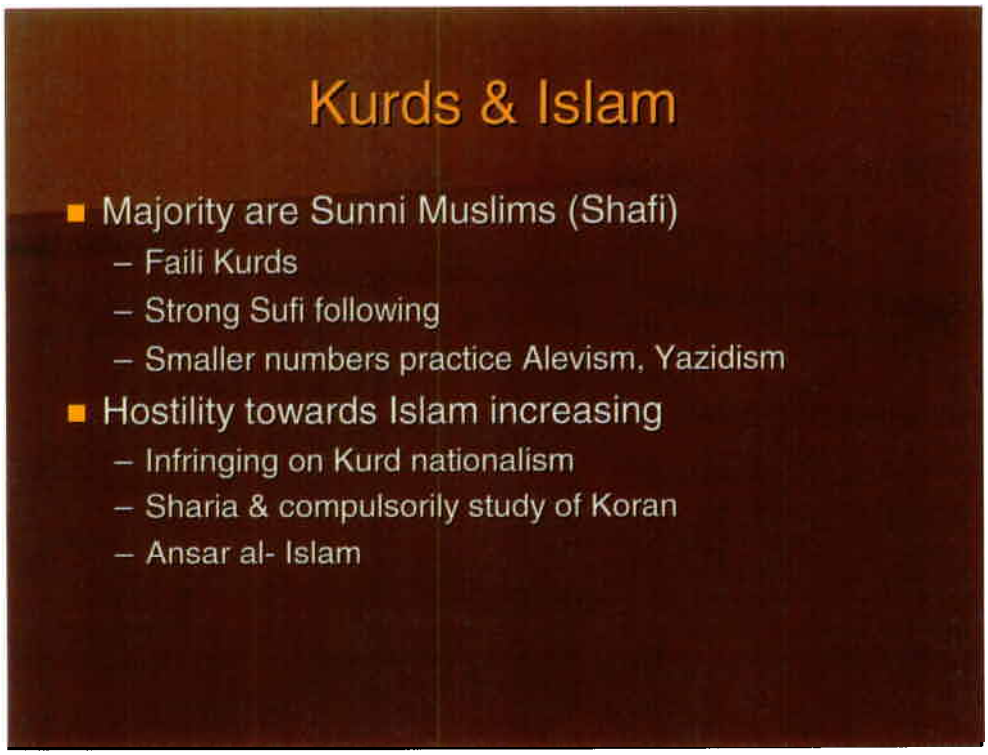
•From the mid-16th Century through World War One, the Ottoman Empire ruled three provinces (vilayets); Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul, that comprise contemporary Iraq. The Kurdish are in modern-day Iraq was part of the Mosul vilayet.




Because of their history of being betrayed and their strong tribal inclinations, independence and autonomy are essential to any binding resolution. Furthermore, Kurds are wary of laws and regulations. It is in their nature to try to skirt regulations or laws that they see as not in their best interest, which can hamper conflict resolution efforts. Kurds tend to hold local political concerns above religion insofar as religion does not counter the interests of the tribe or confederation. Unlike Arabs, who attach many of their struggles and efforts to Islam, the Kurds are predominantly concerned with political and tribal matters.

During the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds were granted significant autonomy in return for securing the frontier with the Persian Safavid Empire. The Barzani tribe established nationalistic credentials during the Ottoman period. With the outbreak of the First World War, the British made overtures to the Kurds to rebel against the Ottomans. Following the war, President Wilson called for an independent Kurdistan and the Treaty of Sevres (1920) established an independent homeland for Kurds but was vague about where. The oil rich Ottoman province of Mosul was detached from Turkey and added to the newly created British mandate of Iraq that also was comprised of the former Ottoman provinces of Baghdad and Mosul. Mustafa Kemal (Attaturk) began the war for Turkish independence and was aided by the Kurds. After defeating the Greeks and establishing Turkey as a republic he betrayed the Kurds and began a program of cultural assimilation (Mountain Turks). The Treaty of Sevres was repudiated by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and is considered a betrayal by the British. The Barzani Tribe leads revolts in the 1920's against the British, which uses the Royal Air Force to bombard Kurdish fighters in the mountains. Many Kurds are forced to flee into Iran.

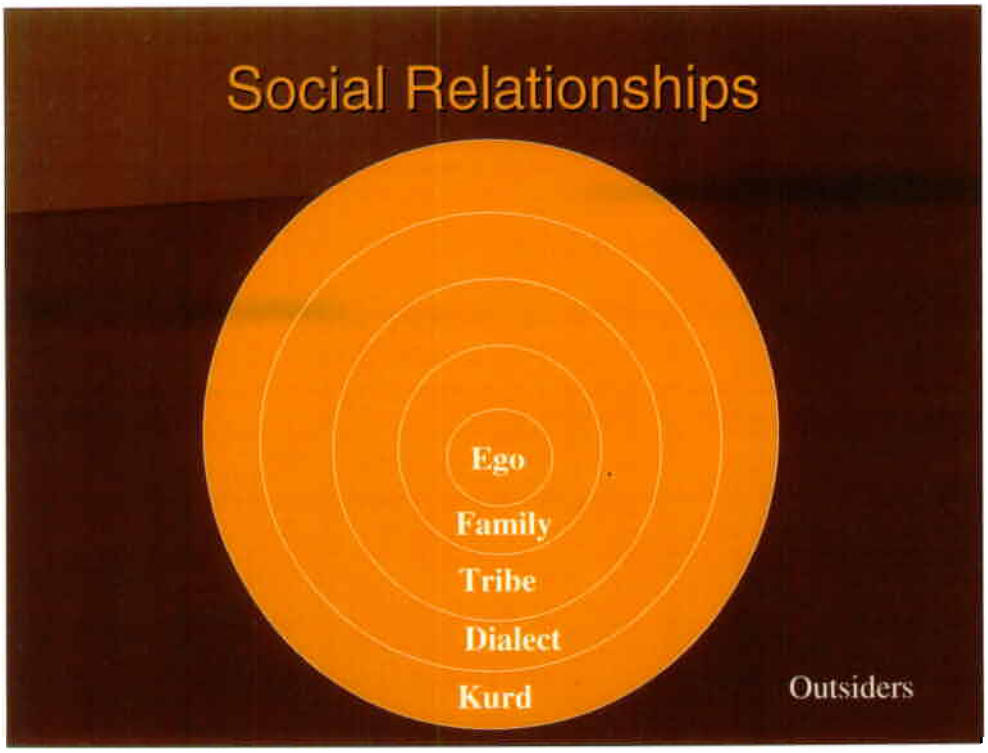
During the Second World War, the British and Soviet invasion of Iran created a power vacuum that allowed the Kurds to establish an independent republic that lasted from 1945 until 1946. After the Soviet withdrawal Iranian troops reentered and executed the leaders of the republic. No Western power recognized the Kurd republic. Massoud Barzani and 500 followers were forced into exile in the USSR. With the 1958 revolution, Barzani and his followers were allowed to return to Iraq and government drafted a constitution guaranteeing Kurd autonomy within Iraq but soon reneged. Thus began a series of guerrilla uprisings and the creation of the Peshmerga. Kurds were driven from Kirkuk and Mosul and inhabitants of smaller villages were also forced to flee. The fighting intensified with the coming to power of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party that was concerned primarily with Arab nationalism. In 1972, Iraq and the Soviet Union signed a friendship treaty and Iraq became a Soviet ally and arms recipient. This was the Soviet betrayal. Iran and the United States now became patrons of the Kurds to offset both Iraq and Soviet influence in Iraq. However, according to the Pike Report (1976), neither country was interested in seeing the Kurds victorious; only strong enough to sap Iraqi strength. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the start of the Iran-Iraq War, the US withdrew aid to the Kurds, but Iranian support continued. Kurdish support of Iran in the war ultimately led to the chemical attack on Halabja and the brutal Anfal campaign to which the US offered muted criticism and continued support against Iran. The Kurds consider this a betrayal by the US. Following the Gulf War and the brutal suppression by the regime of the uprising called for by President Bush, the Kurds again felt betrayed by the US. American resistance to Kurdish independence post-OIF out of sensitivity to Turkish concerns continues to be a source of strain and mistrust with Iraqi Kurds.




The majority of Kurds are Muslim, while the remainders are followers of heterodox (non-traditional, unorthodox) religions. Within the Kurdish ethnic group, there are variations of Islamic practice. Nearly all Kurds in Iraq are Sunni, with the exception of the Faili Kurds, who are Shi'a converted during the Safavid Empire, and live in and around Kirkuk and south to Khanaqin. While Faili Kurds are predominantly merchant middle class, they tend to sympathize with the Iraqi Communist Party and more recently with the KDP. Sunni Kurds follow the Shafi school. In addition to the followers of the orthodox Islamic practice, there is a strong Islamic Sufi mystic following among the Kurds of Iraq. Small numbers of Kurds follow Alevism, Yazidism, or are members of the Ahl-e Haqq/Kakai religion, all of which are heterodox and non-Islamic.

Although religion has been a force for building a measure of Kurdish unity, there has simultaneously been a growing hostility towards Islam among nationalist Kurds. This resistance is a reaction to the governmental manipulation of religious symbols and values to enhance the image of the Iraqi Arab government in the eyes of its main (Arab) constituency. By the end of the 1980's, largely in response to the Iran-Iraq War, the Baghdad government infuse much of its language with Islamic rhetoric and introduced Islamic principles into its legal system. During the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Iraqi rhetoric relied heavily on Islam to enlist popular support. In the last decade of Saddam Hussein's regime before OIF, there was no return to secularism. Rather, the Iraqi regime continued to expand Islam Islamic law within the Iraq legal system and introduced compulsory study of the Koran at all educational levels. In an apparent appeal to Muslim sensibilities, Saddam Hussein attempted to cultivate his image as a pious Muslim ruler.

Prior to OIF, Ansar al-Islam, a group of Kurdish Islamic militants linked to Al Qaida, controlled several villages in the Kurdish region of Iraq beneath the Shinerwe Mountains near the border with Iran. In each village they had established fundamentalist Islamic rule. The group's 15 member leadership council, or shura, operated from the village of Beyara. Ansar al-Islam, which means "Supporters of Islam", formed in 201. It had approximately 600 fighters. The group is believed to have been responsible for the recent assassinations of several officials in the Kurdish regional government and a deadly carbombing.



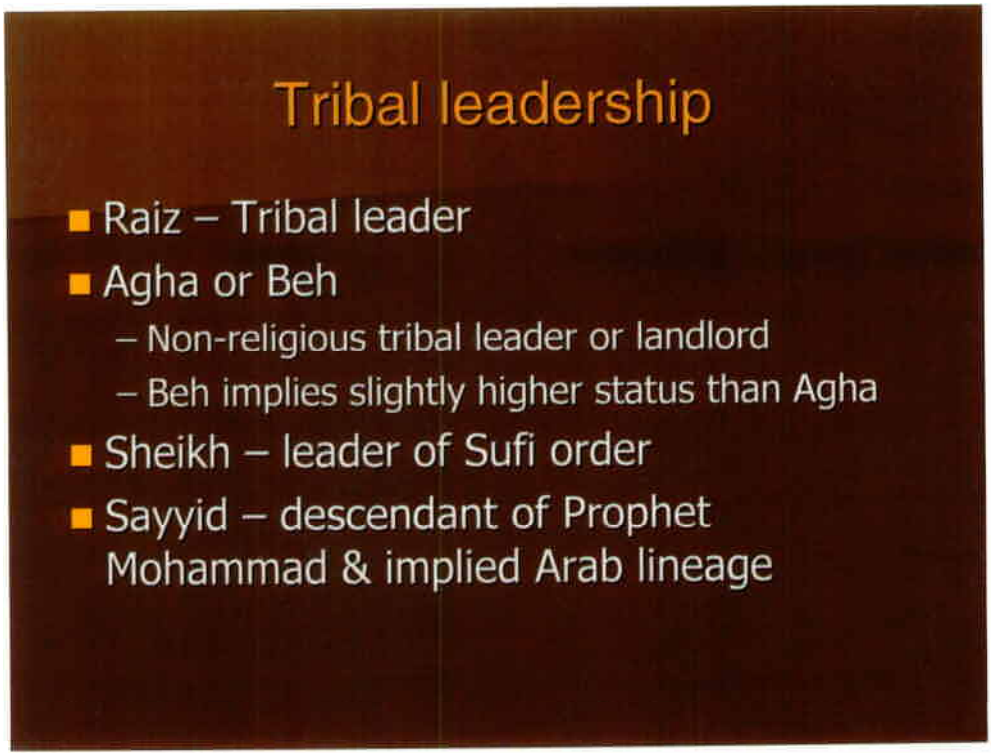

Kurdish identity is a series of levels of association that progress outward from the individual to household to lineage to tribe to dialect group. The bond that unites Kurdish tribesmen is a common tradition that is always based on at least the claim to common origin and has resulted in the creation of a general body of tribal lore. This socially ascribed identity is reliant on it being recognized by others and is usually associated with a claim to specific territory. Thus all the people who live in a rea belong to the tribe by virtue of their presence in its territory. This belonging carries with it certain obligations, such as defense against external aggression.

Kurdish society has been composed of a combination of urban centers, villages and pastoral tribes since the Ottoman period. The Kurds were once nomadic or semi nomadic, but over time a growing number of the Kurdish population has gained its livelihood from settled agriculture. Although there is a substantial number of non-tribal Kurds, the tribal system remains a key feature of the Kurdish social framework.

Kurdish tribes are socio-political, economic, and territorial units that are the primary system of social organization within the Kurdish ethnic group. The membership of a tribe is not determined by kinship ties alone, as the Kurds do not hold to their genealogies to the same extent as Arabs. A tribe may have clients who have attached themselves to a tribe and who, after several generations of cohabitation and cooperation, especially in military defense of the tribe, are accepted into the tribe as full members, regardless of their lack of kinship ties.

The terms used to describe tribal units such as confederation, clan, or section vary in different parts of Kurdistan and are draw from Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Kurdish. The variations in size and form of internal tribal organizations do not allow for a standard terminology. The following describe the most commonly used terms. A large Kurdish tribal confederacy is called a shiret is divided into a number of tribes or sub-tribes called tira. The tira is primary political and landowning group. Membership in it is patrilineally inherited. The genealogical depth of the tiras varies. Each tira is led by a hereditary raiz (leader). The leader's position is hereditary within the clan and a new leader must have the approval of the senior male members of the tira. Growth of population and internal tension may lead a branch of a tira to split and form a new tira. The whole tira rarely camps in one unit, but generally divides into several tent camps call khel (consisting of a number of households.) Each khel is led by an older man informally elected because of his prestige, power, and capabilities.

Kurdish tribes are closely related to a particular territory. The name of the tribe is often the same as that of the town or region where the tribal members originate, for example the Barzani tribe is from the town of Barzan.




The Kurds recognize the titles of agha, beh, sheikh, and sayid as carrying prestige. In each case, the term applies both to the historical individual and the lineage descending from him. The agha/beh title is non-religious and refers to a landlord and / or tribal chief. (Beg implies a higher status than agha). Sheikh and sayid are religious designations. Prestige and respect for esteemed persons is crucial to Kurdish social organization.

Every tribe encompasses one of more prominent agha lineages. These families historically wielded great power and in some cases still do. Aghas are those families who have historically maintained their claim to territory, to the extent of essentially ownin their tribal villages. Aghas traditionally operate within tribally defined networks and also serve as brokers with the state and with other tribes. Aghas have shown great skill in forming alliances to play one neighboring power off another. Agha succession does not follow the rules of primogeniture. In theory, all male descendents are eligible to be the next agha.

Sayid status is accorded those lineages that trace descent to the Prophet Mohammad. Throughout the Islamic world, sayid status confers significant prestige. Of course, Sayid status implies Arab origin as well, which can be problematic for nationalist Kurds. The status by itself does not bring material gain or power. However, for those Kurds who already possess both, it adds to their prestige.

Sheikhs are important figures in Kurdish culture. In Kurdish terms, "sheikh" does not refer to the head of a tribe as it does in the Arab world. Rather, it refers to the head of a Sufi order. Many sheikh families also claim sayid status. The Barzani sheikh lineage produced the leaders of the KDP. The Barzanis success as nationalistic leaders can be traced to the powerful role of sheikhs in Kurdish culture.

Bardost – The Bardost tribe lives near the intersection of the border of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. They speak the North Kurmanji dialect of the Kurmanji group of the Kurdish language. The Bardost are followers of the Naqshbandi Sufi order. The Bardost Tribe has long been a rival of the Barzani tribe, and has sided with the Iraqi government and fought against the Barzanis.

Barzani – The Barzani tribe is from the area around the town of Barzan on the Greater Zab River. They speak the Northern Kurmanji dialect. The Barzani tribe was part of the Zibari tribe until the 19th Century when it split into a separate tribal formulation. Barzani tribal leaders have been the most prominent Kurdish resistance fighters and political leasers up to and during the post-1991 Gulf War period. The Barzani tribe has engaged in sporadic conflicts with many other Kurdish tribes. The Barzani are Naqshbandi Sufi followers.

Hamawand – The Hamawand tribe lives in the Sulaymaniyah area in the vicinity of Chamchamel and speaks Surani (Southern) Kurdish. Historically, the tribe sustained itself by raiding, rather than as nomadic shepard's as were most other Kurdish tribes. Hamawand tribe members follow the Qadiri Sufi order. Sheikh Sayid Barzinji and his son Sheikh Mahmoud Barzinji were of the Hamawand tribe.

Herki – The Herki are one of the few Kurdish tribes in Iraq to maintain significant elements of their nomadic lifestyle as recently as the 1980's. They live near the Greater Zab River in the area east of Rawanduz. Another grouping of the Herki tribe lives at the intersection of the borders of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. The Herki in southern Iraqi Kurdistan speak Sorani; members of the tribe in northern Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran, and Turkey may speak either Sorani or Kurmanji. The Herki tribe has historically been an adversary of the Barzani triebe, with a disagreement in 1994 sparking intertribal fighting between the KDP and PUK.

Jaf – The Jaf tribe is located on the Iran-Iraq border close to the city of Halabja, west to Kirkuk and north to Sulaymaniyah. They speak Sorani. The Jaf maintained relations with Kurds across the border in Iran after they settled in Iraqi territory at the end of the 18th Century. During British rule, the Jaf tribe held divided loyalties, with a minority of tribesmen supporting the Sheikh Mahmoud Barzinji rebeillion, while the majority of the tribe offered to help suppress the revolt. The episode was an indication of divisions between as well as within Kurdish tribes. The Jaf and the Talabani tribes worked together during the 1988 Iraqi Anfal campaign and maintain good relations.

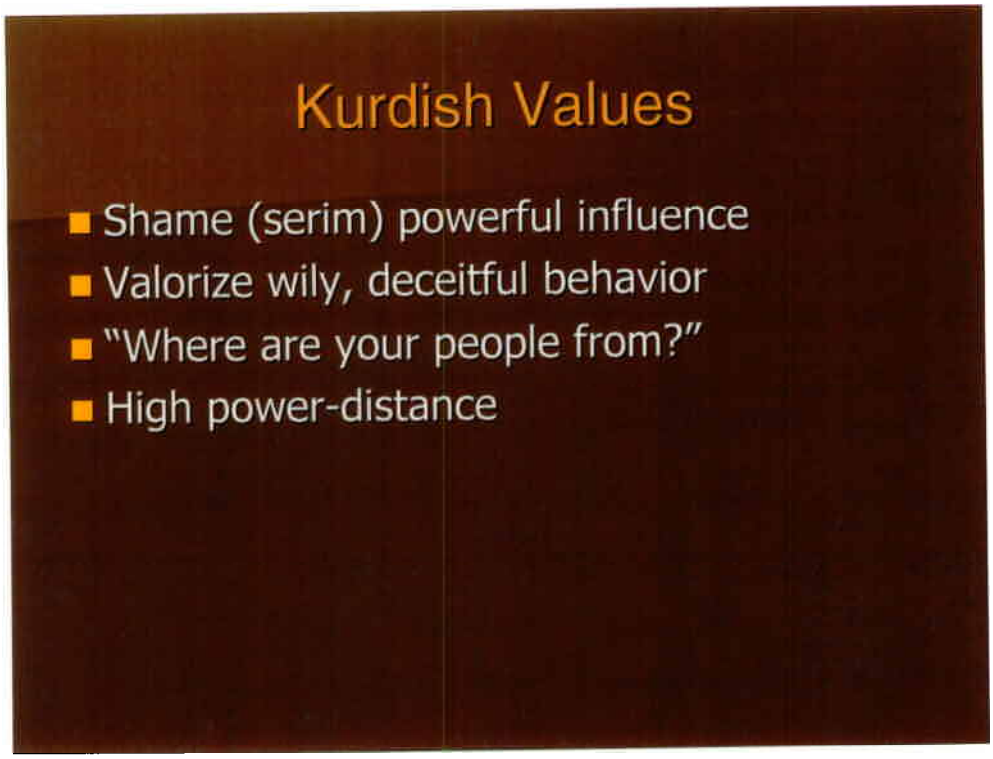
Pizhdar – The Pizhdar tribe lives along the Iran-Iraq border near the Lesser Zab river in the vicinity of Qala Diza on the Iraqi side and Sadasht in Iran. Members of the Pizhdar tribe speak Sorani and follow the Qadiri Sufi order. The social organization of the tribe is hierarchial and stratified with distinctions between the ruling class and their subjects, who are forther subdivided into original tribal members and those who have attached themselves to the tribe either through conquest or voluntarily. The Pishdar tribe foght with the government against Kurdish nationalists in the 1970's, placing themselves in opposition to the very prominent Barzani tribe.

Talabani – The Talabani tribe is one of the southern-most located of the Kurdish tribes in Iraq. The tribe members speak Sorani and are members of the Qadiri order. The leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Jalal Talabani is tribal leader and Sheikh of the Qadiri Sufi sect. The Talabani tribe has been allied with the Jaf tribe, relations between the Talabani tribe and the Barzani tribe, to which the leader of the KDP belongs, are strained by the divergent political goals and positions of the two Kurdish parties.

Zibari – The Zibari tribe is a long-standing rival of the Barzani tribe because of the close proximity to each other in northern Iraqi Kurdistan, and the Zibaris often sided with the government against the Barzani tribe. However, the two tribes have also found common cause whtn the situation requires. The towns that give their names to the tribes – Zibar and Barzan – are located near each other along the Greater Zab River. The Zibari tribe split and one half supported secular tribe leaders while the other supported the Shakyh of the village of Barzan, creating the Barzani tribe. Mullah Mustafa Barzani married the daughter of the Zibari chieftan, making the current leader of the KDP, Massoud Barzani, a descendant of the Zibar tribe as well as a member of the Barzani tribe. Zibari tribe members speak Kurmanji.

Kurds value freedom and independence (azad). This independent spirit is a central facet of Kurdish culture and identity and helps explain the success of Kurdish resistance to imperial and Iraqi attempts to rule them. At various times in the history of Iraq the Kurds have raised demands ranging from independence to federal union with Iraq to the liberation and unification of Greater Kurdistan. Most Kurds advocate autonomy in a federated Iraq as a middle ground. Overall, most Iraqi with the possible exception of more militant Kurds, want to maintain the unity and territorial integrity of the state.

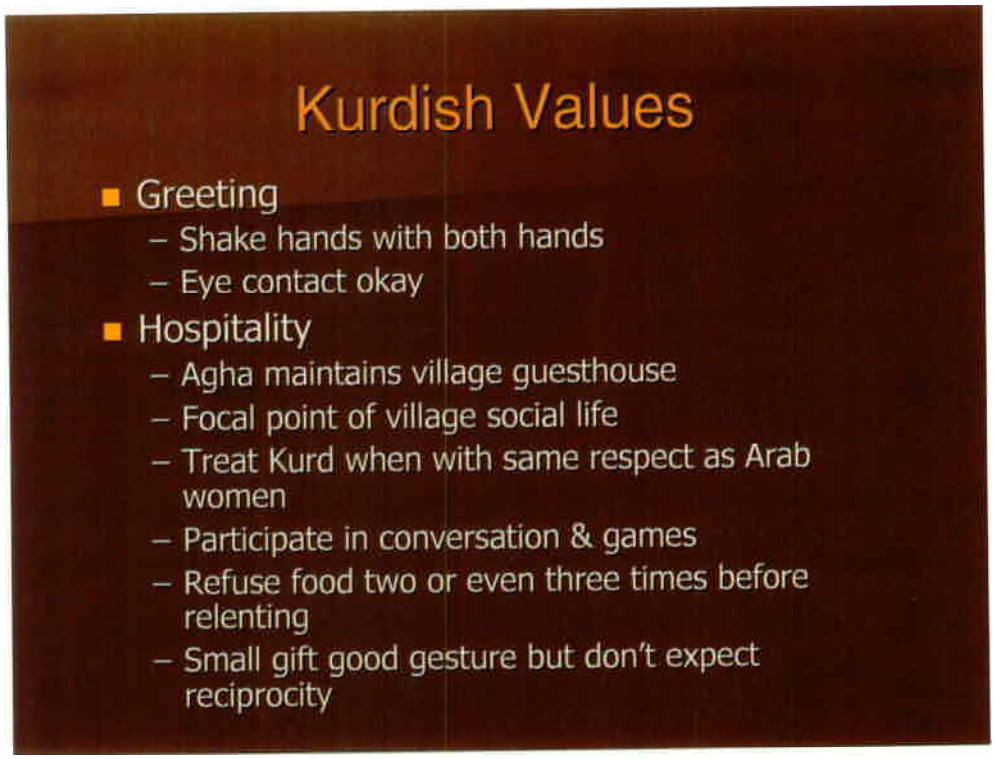
Kurds associate their homeland with the mountains. Like Arabs, Kurds do not mind being in crowds, but do not like being confined indoors. This relates to their appreciation for the outdoors and the mountains. Kurds also do not have the same concept of personal space that westerners have. They do not mind being close enough to smell someone and it is not considered a personal privacy invasion. The Kurdish year is 365 days and based on Georgian calendar. Like westerners, they have 12 months, 24 hour days and a leap year every fourth year.




The Kurdish concept of serim (shame) powerfully shapes Kurdish behavior. Under normal circumstances, it prevents overt, face-to-face challenges to hierarchy and authority. Kurdish culture to some extent valorizes wily or deceitful behavior. At the same, people who display integrity are highly admired.

When most Kurds meet they ask, "where are your people from?" The answer may be general, naming a tribe or area, or it may be more specific noting the village, name of presiding Agha and lineage. However, urban Kurds may define themselves by their millet, or their religious community. Kurds respect formality, and believe that only using first names is a sign of disrespect and calls into question the professionalism of the person speaking. It is important to use titles and first and last speaking. It is important to use titles and first and last names when speaking to Kurds. Kurds typically adopt the name of the father for the middle name and the tribal name for the last name and will introduce themselves as such when greeting someone.

In some cases, Kurds will use one's first name if it is preceded by a term of formality. The most common terms are "Kak" which is similar to mister and "Mam' which is similar to uncle. These terms are used among Kurds with a strong level of familiarity with each other. Adhere to strict protocol when greeting Kurds, a break in formality is seen as disrespectful unless you are good friends with the Kurd in question. Initially Kurds are suspicious of strangers and strange things due to the betrayals that the Kurds have endured throughout their history.

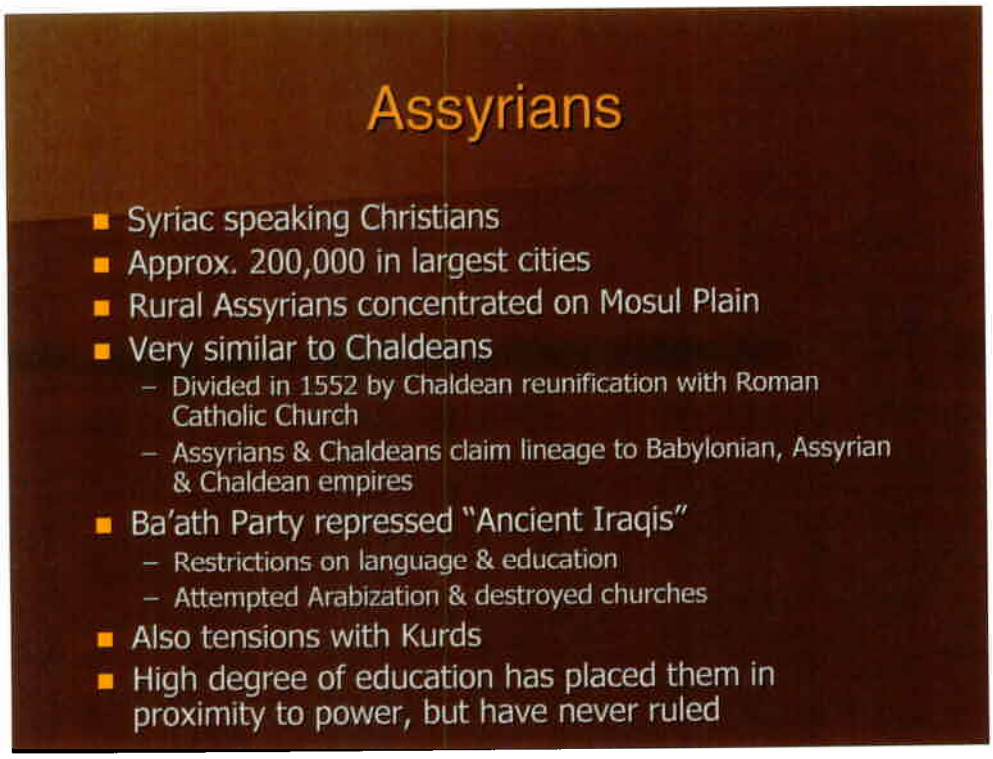



Kurds typically shake hands using both hands. Most Kurds will extend their hand and when grasped, they will grasp with their opposite hand and shake vigorously. Kurds like Arabs, will look people in the eye when shaking hands.

In rural parts of the Kurdish homeland it is customary to offer strangers food and shelter. Shelter is usually provided by the Agha, the highest-ranking member of the community. Agha means landlord, and it is considered his duty to maintain the guest house. Since the guesthouse is the dwelling for visitors to the village or town it is often the focal point for that community. When visiting the Agha's shelter, women will remain out of sight except to make food and at times serve it. Because Kurds take pride in being good hosts, they will be disappointed by somber or uncooperative guests that do not go along with the entertainment aspect of visiting, be it conversation or games. When visiting, Kurds will refuse offers of food two or three times before accepting, and similar behavior is expected of a visitor. Unlike Arabs, Kurds do not believe that they have to offer their possessions as gifts to visitors. However, when visiting a Kurd in their home it is customary to bring a small gift, this practice is especially prevalent when in rural areas. Acceptable gifts are sugar, tea, coffee, cloth, matches, soap, tobacco or cigarette paper.

Kurds are forthright to a fault, form the western perspective. Kurds will voice their opinion positive or negative, which can at times be interpreted as being aggressive or rude. In business this can make people uncomfortable and hesitant to embrace Kurds as partners. Kurds will use some of the same hand signals as Arabs, but they do not place the same importance on them. Most of the hand signals that Kurds use are adopted from the people who live near them. Two of the most important hand signals to avoid are, beckoning to or pointing at someone with a finger and shaking the "OK" sign at someone. In Iraq and parts of Iran, these signs are seen as offensive.

In addition, the disconnect between the Kurds and the countries that they occupy has hampered outside investment in traditional Kurd areas. However, Kurds pride themselves on precision and attention to detail. They are also more inclined to individual enterprise and a sense of self-reliance. Wealth and success are not seen as being excessive and are things to celebrate. Many Kurds feel that these business characteristics set them apart from their Arab neighbors.




•Assyrians are a Syriac-speaking people of Christian faith and of mixed Semitic, Aramaean, Assyrian, Persian, and Kurdish descent. Contemporary Assyrians, influenced in the 19th Century by Western nationalism, now identify themselves as a single ethnic group, unit by the Syriac language, the Christian Church of the East, and a common cultural heritage of the ancient Assyrian civilization. Syriac is a language closely related to the Aramaic spoken by ancient Mesopotamian peoples, including Jesus. These historical facts strengthen the Assyrian identification with the ancient Assyrian and Chaldean civilizations, and the early Christian church.

•There are about 200,000 Assyrians in Iraq who constitute approximately one-sixth of Iraqi Christians. Assyrians are located mostly in the large cities of Baghdad, Mosul, Arbil, Kirkuk, and Basra. Rural Assyrians are located primarily in towns on the Mosul plain in northern Iraq.

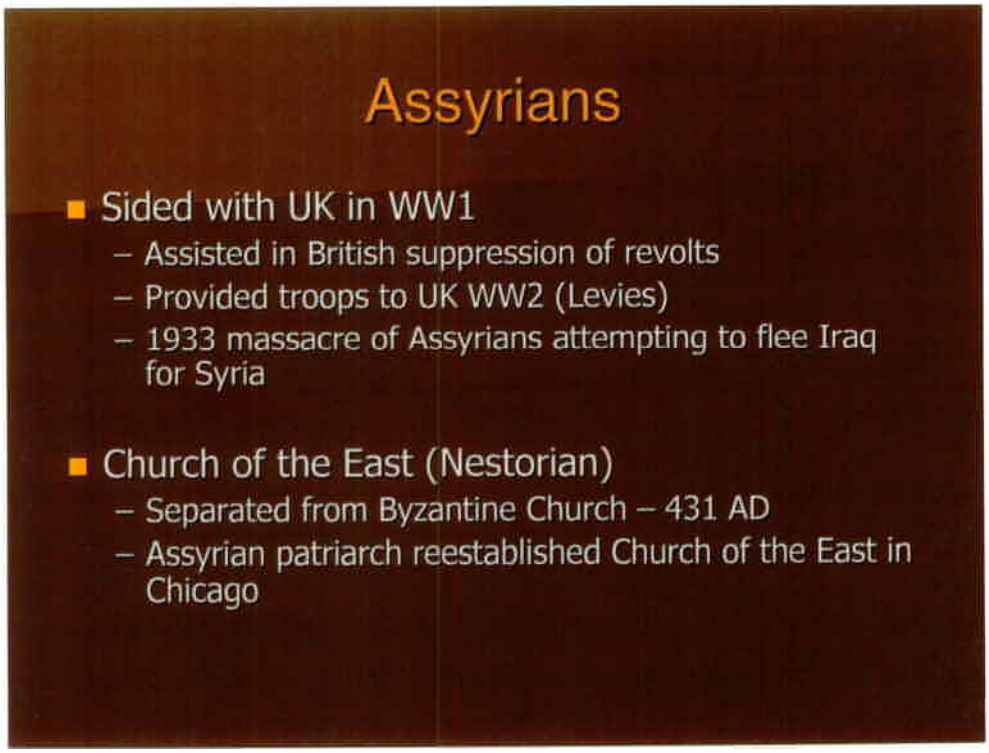
•Assyrians share the Syriac language and much of a common history with Chaldeans. The two groups were divided over the last 500 years by the Chaldeans reunification with the Roman Catholic Church in 1552.

•Both contemporary Assyrians and Chaldeans claim to be heirs of the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, including the ancient Babylonian, Assyrian, and Chaldean empires.

•Assyrians resisted attempts by the Ba'ath government to deny them their language and culture by giving them labels such as "ancient Iraqis" and "Iraqi Christians". They also oppose government policies that attempt to force Arabic and Arab culture upon them. Likewise, Assyrians in northern Iraq resist attempts by Kurds to assimilate them into Kurdish culture, language, and political parties.

•Assyrians did not fare well under Saddam Hussein, who destroyed Assyrian churches. Saddam's emphasis on tribal identity alienated contemporary Assyrians, who are excluded from Arab tribes and tribal customs.

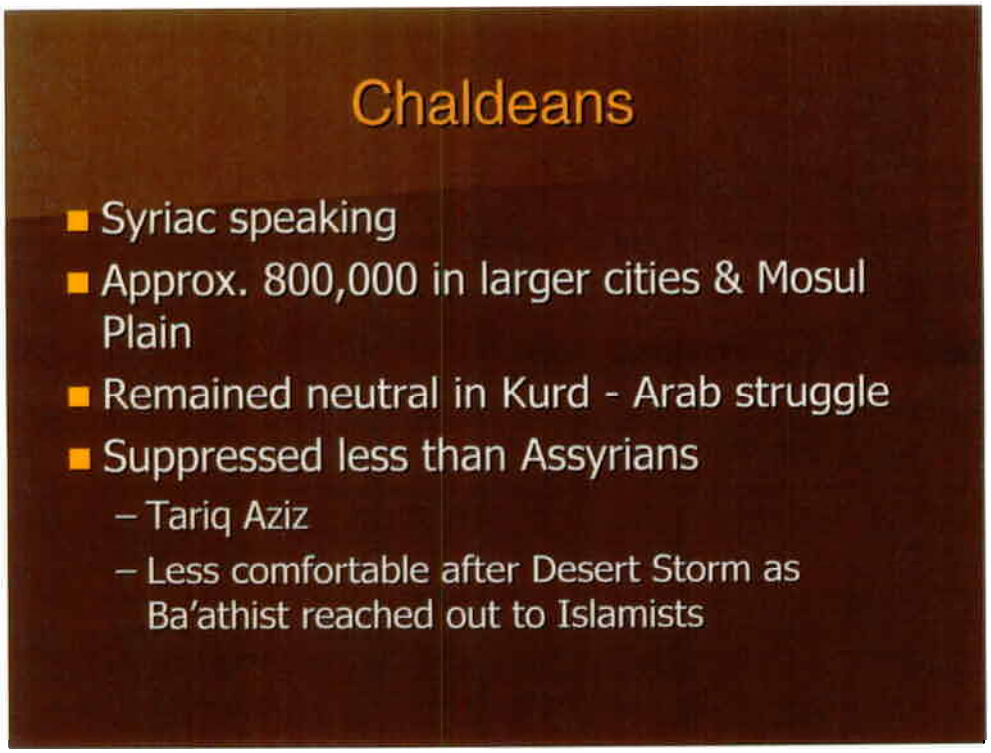
•Assyrians have been in close proximity to political power in a number of empires of which they have been a part, despite their small numbers. As leaders of the Church of the East traditionally emphasized learning, their political success was often due to their high degree of education.




•Although the Ottoman Empire, which ruled Iraq, was allied with Germany during World War One, the Assyrians sided with the Britain and were later protected by the British during the British Mandate that ruled Iraq after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Assyrians joined the British imperial troops, known as Levies. The Levies were notoriously used as instrument of internal security, particularly to suppress Kurdish revolts in northern Iraq. Considered haughty by other Iraqis, the Assyrians earned bitter resentment among Iraqi Kurds and Arabs during this period.

•In 1933, as several hindered Assyrians attempted to cross the Tigris River in the French mandate of Syria, fighting erupted with Iraqi border troops. Within a few days, thousands of unarmed Assyrians were summarily executed in their villages while the Iraqi government stood aside. The Assyrian patriarch fled to exile in Cyprus and Britain, eventually reestablishing his seat in Chicago in 1939 along with approximately 15,000 Assyrians.

•The Assyrians emerged as a distinct Christian group in 431 AD when their religious leader, the Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople, broke away from the Byzantine Orthodox Church during the Third Ecumenical Council when his teachings were declared heretical. The Assyrians became pejoratively known as followers of the Nestorian Church, although Assyrians traditionally referred to themselves as "Suraya" or as followers of the "Church of the East". Assyrians do not believe that the teachings of Nestorius are in violation of Christian teachings.




•Chaldeans are a Syriac-speaking people of Catholic Christian faith and of mixed Semitic, Aramaean, Assyrian, Persian, Arab, and Kurdish descent. Chaldeans are also called Assyro-Chaldeans, Nestorian Catholics, Chaldean Catholics, and East Syriacs.

•There are about 800,000 Chaldeans in Iraq who constitute approximately two-thirds of Iraqi Christians. Chaldeans are located mostly in the large cities of Baghdad, Mosul, Arbil, Kirkuk, and Basra. Rural Chaldeans are located in towns on the Mosul plain in northern Iraq.

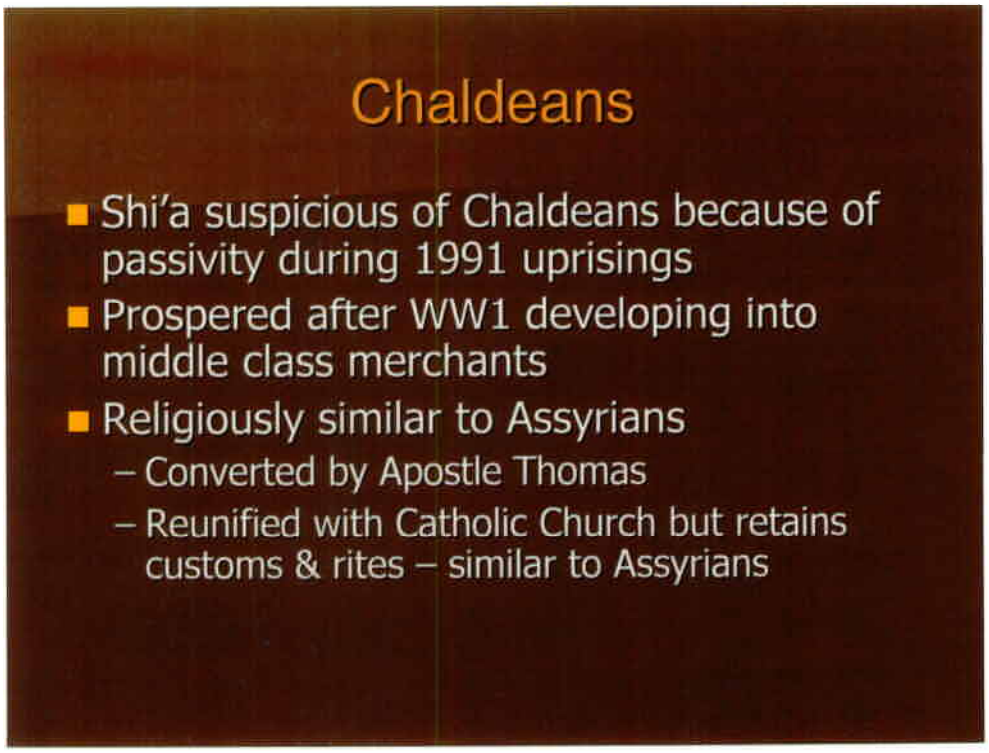
•Chaldeans resist attempts by the Iraqi government to deny them their language and culture by giving them labels such as "ancient Iraqis" and "Iraqi Christians". They also oppose government policies that attempt to force Arabic and Arab culture upon them. Likewise, Chaldeans in northern Iraq resist attempts by Kurds to assimilate them into Kurdish culture, language, and political parties.

•In the 20th Century, Roman Catholic clergy were influential in persuading their congregations to avoid involving themselves in the political and military struggles between Arabs, Kurds, and the British, thereby protecting Chaldeans from some of the hatred that was focused on the Assyrians, who were associated with British imperial power.

•Chaldeans fared better than the Assyrians, Kurds, or Shi'a under Saddam Hussein, who destroyed Assyrian churches, but spared Chaldean churches and schools. There were, however, divisions within the Chaldean community regarding support for the Ba'ath regime. Some Chaldeans remained loyal to the regime and served in prominent positions, such as Tariq Aziz, Iraq's former Deputy Prime Minister. Others condemned the government. Most Chaldeans fear a poorly managed transition to democracy that could produce greater persecution under a more radical Islamic or Arab regime.

•In the late 1990's, support for the Iraqi government declined among Chaldeans, as Saddam Hussein began courting Islamic fundamentalism, publicly elevating Islam over Christianity, and closing Chaldean schools.

•Saddam Hussein's emphasis on tribal identity has also alienated Chaldeans, who are excluded from Arab tribes and tribal customs.




•Chaldeans are occasionally at odds with Shi'a Arabs. Since Shi'a Arabs participated in the 1991 uprisings that were brutally suppressed, many express frustration towards Chaldeans, whom they perceive as having supported Saddam Hussein's regime.

•Chaldeans prospered after World War One as middle-class merchants, shopkeepers and restaurant owners in Iraq's larger cities. As a result, Chaldeans hope to reestablish Iraq as a prosperous, well-educated, advanced Middle Eastern society it once was.

•Christianity is a significant facet of identity among Chaldeans and Assyrians who trace their religious identities to the beginning of the Christian era, when legend maintains they were converted by the Apostle Thomas on a missionary journey in the First Century.

•Despite their minority status and small numbers, Chaldeans, first as Nestorians, and later as Catholics, have been generally well educated and in close proximity to political power.

•Chaldeans were unified with the Roman Catholic Church through the Chaldean Eastern Rite. This allows them to preserve their customs and rites, which are very similar to those of the Nestorian Church of the East, and use of their traditional ritual language, Syriac. The head of the Chaldean Church is based in Baghdad.

## Turkoman

- Turkish speakers; many also speak Arabic
- Descendants of the Oghuz line of Turks
  - Migrated from central Asia in 9th Century
  - Related to Turks, Azeriz, Turkmen of Turkmenistan
  - Turkoman means "A Turk"
- Ruled & administered Iraq during Ottoman rule
- 2 – 3 million (15% Iraqi population)
  - Concentrated in Kirkuk & Mosul
  - Predominantly middle class
- Also resisted Arabization policy
- Sunni Muslim (Hanafi)

•The Turkoman speak Turkish, though a majority also speak Arabic.

•The Turkoman (also called Turkmen, Turkomen, Turcoman) are of Turkic ethnic descent, primarily from the Oghuz line, which is closely related to modern Turks, Azeris, and Turkmen of Turkmenistan. Turkoman means "a Turk". The Turkoman in Iraq are part of the broader group of Oghuz Turkic people that migrated from Central Asia in successive waves, beginning in the 9th Century. From the time of their arrival in the region, the Turkoman played a crucial role, through their involvement in various wars and conquests, in the shaping of would become modern Iraq.

•From the mid-16th Century through World War One, the Ottoman Empire, founded by Osman, an Anatolian Turkoman, ruled three provinces or vilayets; Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul that comprise contemporary Iraq. The Turkoman of Iraq initially played an important strategic role by maintaining a bulwark against the Persian and Shi'a Safavid Empire of Iran.

•The Turkoman comprise 2-3 million (or approximately 13 percent) of the population of Iraq. They are found primarily in northern Iraq, in the provinces of Mosul, Kirkuk and Irbil. The Turkoman settled around the urban centers of north-central Iraq, specifically Kirkuk and Mosul, and became increasingly urbanized. Gradually, the Turkoman population came to provide the bulk of Ottoman administrative capacity in the region. They also engaged in sedentary private activities such as agriculture and industry. These two developments combined to create a significant Turkoman middle-class that was necessarily dependent on the protections and support of the Ottoman state.

•The exact number of Turkoman living in Iraq is disputed as Iraqi authorities have imposed "assimilation" policies upon the Turkoman, dissuading them from defining themselves as anything but "Arab". The last official Iraqi census, taken in 1987, reported the Turkoman as only 320,000 (or two percent) of the 16 million-person population.

•Most Turkoman are Sunni Muslims, predominantly of the Hanafi sect. Approximately a third of the Turkoman are Shi'a, and up to 30,000 are Christian, known as *kale gavuru*. Sufism is also prevalent among the Turkoman of Iraq.

•The longstanding tension between the Turkoman and the Kurds has created a deep sense of collective concern on the part of the Turkoman of an eventual independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq.

•With the rise of the Ba'ath Party in the 1960's and 1970's, the Turkoman found themselves increasingly pressured to assimilate and forego their traditional cultural practices, most significantly, their use of the Turkic language in schools.

•Because of their cultural ties to Turkey and the Ottoman past, the Turkoman have developed a unique identity. They have deep roots in northern Iraq, and although they may have an affinity for Turkey, the Turkoman define themselves as Iraqis and support the continued existence of a sovereign Iraqi state.

Press to continue