



Iraq

The Republic of Iraq (**Figure 1**) sits at an intersection within the Middle East region, with ties to Iran, Turkey, the Levant, and the Arabian Peninsula shaping its interests, constraints, and opportunities. Iraq is emerging from decades of strife and conflict, and U.S.-Iraq security cooperation continues amid strains imposed by regional tensions. Thousands of U.S. troops remain in Iraq at the government's invitation to support shared counterterrorism objectives. A period of relative stability and prosperity has prevailed in Iraq since political leaders settled a tumultuous dispute over government formation after the 2021 national election. Iraq's leading Shia and Sunni Arab and ethnic Kurdish parties are competing within and across communal lines in advance of the next national election, set for November 2025.

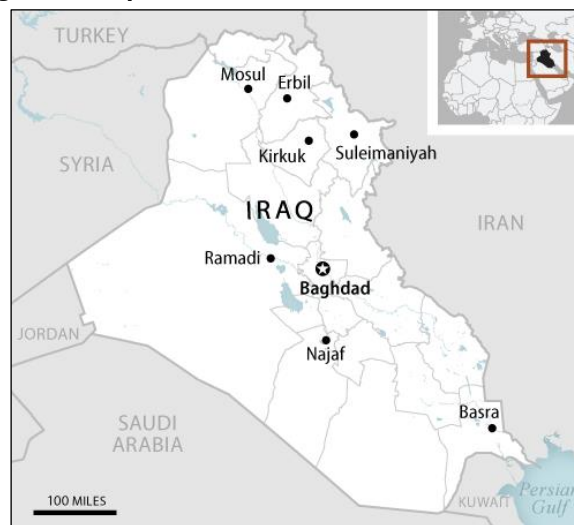
Ongoing competition for influence in Iraq between outside powers, especially neighboring Iran and the United States, complicates Iraqi decision making. Related pressures have increased since October 2023; Iran-aligned Iraqi armed groups launched a campaign of attacks through 2024 against Israel and on U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria in the context of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. Since 2024, Israel-Iran conflict and U.S. strikes on Iran have resulted in greater international attention to Iraq's orientation and sovereignty. The collapse of the Iran-backed Asad government in Syria rekindled Iraqi concerns about Syria-based terrorism threats and altered the context for planned changes to U.S. and coalition military operations in Iraq.

U.S. military forces remain deployed in Iraq to provide advice and aid to Iraqi security forces, including the *peshmerga* forces of the federally recognized Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). U.S. plans jointly developed with Iraqi security officials are providing for the relocation and consolidation of U.S. forces in Iraq as counter-Islamic State coalition operations come to an end. Iraqi and U.S. officials have stated their intent to continue security cooperation and training on an enduring bilateral basis.

Some U.S. diplomatic personnel temporarily departed from Iraq in June 2025, as tensions involving Iran increased. Following U.S. strikes against nuclear targets in Iran in June 2025, several unclaimed drone attacks in Iraq have targeted locations in the Kurdistan region and some sites hosting U.S. troops. The 119th Congress may consider developments in Iraq and Iraq's relationships with its neighbors as Members review the Trump Administration's FY2026 requests for U.S. security assistance and foreign aid for Iraq and planned changes to the deployment of U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria. Members also may consider steps to shape U.S.-Iraq security cooperation and economic ties, influence relations between Iraq's national government and

the KRG, and monitor the rights of Iraqi religious and ethnic minorities.

Figure 1. Iraq



Sources: CRS, using ESRI and U.S. State Department data.

Background

Iraqis have persevered through intermittent wars, internal conflicts, sanctions, displacements, terrorism, and political unrest since the 1980s. The legacies of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq continue to shape U.S.-Iraq relations: the invasion ended the decades-long rule of Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party but ushered in a period of chaos, violence, and political transition from which the country struggled to emerge. U.S. forces withdrew in 2011, but conflict in neighboring Syria and divisive sectarianism in Iraq enabled IS insurgents to seize and exploit much of northwestern Iraq from 2014 to 2018. Iraqis leveraged new U.S. and coalition military support to defeat the Islamic State, but Iran's influence in Iraq also grew during this period as several Shia militia groups mobilized and later were consolidated into the national security apparatus under the Popular Mobilization Forces.

As of 2025, IS threats in Iraq have diminished, but some remnants of the group remain active in remote areas, including disputed territories between the Kurdistan region and areas to the south secured by national government forces. Joint Iraqi-U.S. operations have targeted IS leaders in Iraq since 2024, with several senior figures eliminated. IS fighters also are active in eastern Syria, where U.S.-backed partner forces are negotiating with Syria's interim authorities while detaining thousands of IS fighters and IS-associated persons, including Iraqis awaiting repatriation.

As conflict inside Iraq has receded, opportunity has emerged for many Iraqis, but unresolved domestic issues,

regional tension, rising temperatures and water shortages may cloud Iraq's future. Since 2022, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al Sudani has led a power-sharing government that is the first since 2003 not to include all of Iraq's leading political factions. An uneasy partnership between several Shia Arab parties and Iraq's major Sunni Arab and Kurdish parties has enabled the ruling State Administration Coalition to enact expansive public spending legislation and advance U.S.-supported banking reforms. Political rivalry and national government differences with Kurdish leaders over security and federalism, including energy policy and revenue sharing, have limited the government's effectiveness. Sudani has adopted a nationalist posture toward unilateral foreign military operations in Iraq and Iraqi airspace, criticizing actions by Israel, Iran, Turkey, and the United States. His government has described Iran-aligned Iraqi armed groups' attacks as illegal and inconsistent with Iraq's desire to continue cooperation with foreign partners.

Election Looms and Pressures Mount

Transitions in U.S.-Iraqi security cooperation arrangements are being implemented as Iraqis navigate a period of renewed political campaigning in 2025. National elections are planned for November 11, and candidate, coalition, and party registration had closed as of June. Prime Minister Sudani is seeking a second term and intends to lead a new electoral list (the "Reconstruction and Development Alliance") to compete against some of his current partners in the Shia-led Coordination Framework (CF) coalition. Iraq's electoral law has been revised to return it to a framework expected to benefit party-backed candidates over independents.

Victors in the election will face challenges posed by strains between the national government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Iraq's fiscal dependence on oil export revenue, Iraq's assertive and troubled neighbors, and the activities of Iraqi armed non-state actors, including militia groups associated with some CF members.

Views from the Kurdistan Region

Iraqi Kurdish self-government developed after the 1991 Gulf War. In 1992, Iraqi Kurds established a joint administration between Iraqi Kurdistan's two main political movements—the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—in areas under their control. Iraq's constitution recognizes KRG authority in areas that were under Kurdish control as of March 2003. After a 2017 KRG independence referendum, national forces reasserted control of some disputed territories.

The Erbil-based KDP and the Suleimaniyah-based PUK won the most seats in the October 2024 KRG regional election and are the largest Kurdish parties in parliament. Historic KDP-PUK tensions have resurged and have delayed the formation of a new KRG cabinet since the 2024 regional election. KDP leader and former KRG president Masoud Barzani remains influential; his son, Masrour Barzani is KRG prime minister. Nechirvan Barzani is KRG president and is the prime minister's cousin. The KDP and PUK retain separate politically aligned militia and security

force units, despite U.S. efforts to encourage the unification and depoliticization of the KRG security sector.

The United States cooperates with the KRG and supports the resolution of long-standing KRG-Baghdad disputes over oil production, the budget, territory, and security. Baghdad has placed conditions on the transfer of funds to the KRG, contributing to the KRG's fiscal strains. Since 2022, Iraqi court rulings have reduced the KRG's autonomy, including rulings that have found the KRG oil and gas sector law unconstitutional, invalidated long-standing KRG electoral arrangements, and required the transfer of KRG revenue to national authorities for payment of KRG employees.

Iraq has opposed Turkey's unilateral military presence and operations in the Kurdistan region, where Turkish forces have targeted the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. The PKK's 2025 decision to disarm and initial steps taken to implement this decision may prompt changes in Turkey's posture.

U.S. Partnership and the 119th Congress

In 2024, Iraqi and U.S. officials outlined plans to end the counter-IS coalition mission in Iraq in 2025, with Iraq hosting Syria-focused coalition forces into 2026. Those plans are now being implemented. Subsequent security cooperation may include a residual U.S. force presence.

The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and U.S. Consulate in Erbil remain open. The U.S. Consulate in Basra closed in 2018. The position of U.S. Ambassador to Iraq is vacant, and U.S. Ambassador to Yemen Steven Fagin has served as chargé d'affaires A.I. in Baghdad since May 2025.

Since 2014, Congress has appropriated more than \$8.2 billion for counter-IS train and equip programs for Iraqis. Congress has authorized counter-IS train and equip programs for Iraq through 2025, and has appropriated related funds available through September 2026, including aid to the KRG Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs (MoPA) subject to Baghdad's approval and pursuant to a nonbinding U.S.-KRG 2022 memorandum of understanding.

Through 2024, the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development funded security, economic, stabilization, and democracy programs in parallel to Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and Defense Department Counter-ISIS Train and Equip Fund (CTEF) and Global Train and Equip (10 U.S.C. 333) security assistance. The Trump Administration's 2025 foreign aid review ended some U.S. aid programs and preserved others. The Trump Administration has not requested specific aid for Iraq in FY2026 except for FMF funding and \$212.5 million in FY2026 CTEF funds. Pending appropriations bills (H.R. 4016/S. 4921) would provide the requested CTEF amount.

Other bills in the 119th Congress would repeal the 2002 authorization for use of military force for Iraq (H.R. 1488), make Iraqi gas imports from Iran sanctionable (H.R. 2574), or require the terrorist designation of some Iraqi entities and place related conditions on U.S. aid (H.R. 2658).

Christopher M. Blanchard, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.