

## Iraq: War and Peace Introduction

This resource has been produced by Oxfam to help teachers unravel the mass of information on Iraq for their pupils aged 8–16, and to answer some of the many questions that children raise. It includes:

- A fact file about Iraq
- Arguments for and against the war
- The history of Iraq's relationship with Britain
- The poles of influence and power
- The aftermath of the war and Iraq's future
- Teaching and talking about war
- A range of classroom activities – including some on media coverage
- Taking action
- Suggestions for further resources

This download includes all the background information you'll need to talk about Iraq. On the main Iraq page you'll find activities about the conflict.

[www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/iraq](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/iraq)

For up-to-date information on Oxfam's stance and humanitarian response, please see

[www.oxfam.org.uk/iraq](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/iraq)

Further information and activities for teachers and pupils are available on

[www.oxfam.org.uk/education](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education)

## Fact file on Iraq

<b>Population</b>	28 million. Almost half the population is under 18.
<b>Religions</b>	Shi'a Muslim (60–65%), Sunni Muslim (32–37%), Christian 3%.
<b>Ethnic groups</b>	Arab (75–80%), Kurd (15–20%), Other 5%.
<b>Resources</b>	Oil, natural gas, sulphur, phosphates, tar, and dates.
<b>Economy</b>	Under Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi economy declined disastrously for decades due to sanctions and wars with Iran, Kuwait, and a US-led coalition. Now 43 per cent of Iraqis are in absolute poverty.
<b>Currency</b>	Dinar.
<b>Health</b>	The incidence of preventable disease has increased more than 100% since 1990.

From the 1980s to 2002, the average annual Iraqi income fell from \$3,600 to around \$500. Since the invasion in 2003, Iraq has entered a deep humanitarian crisis.

### What has changed since 1990?

	<b>1990</b>	<b>2007</b>
<b>Life expectancy</b>	74 (women) 73 (men)	61 (women) 51 (men)
<b>Annual average salary</b>	\$1,000–\$1,200	\$24 –\$60
<b>Child mortality</b>	30.5 per 1,000 children (1989)	125 per 1,000 children
<b>Maternal mortality rate</b>	50 deaths per 100,000 live births (1989)	294 deaths per 100,000 live births (2001)
<b>Water</b>	93% access to clean water in towns and 70% in rural areas	30% of Iraqis have access to clean water

Sources: Oxfam, WHO, UN, UNICEF, FAO

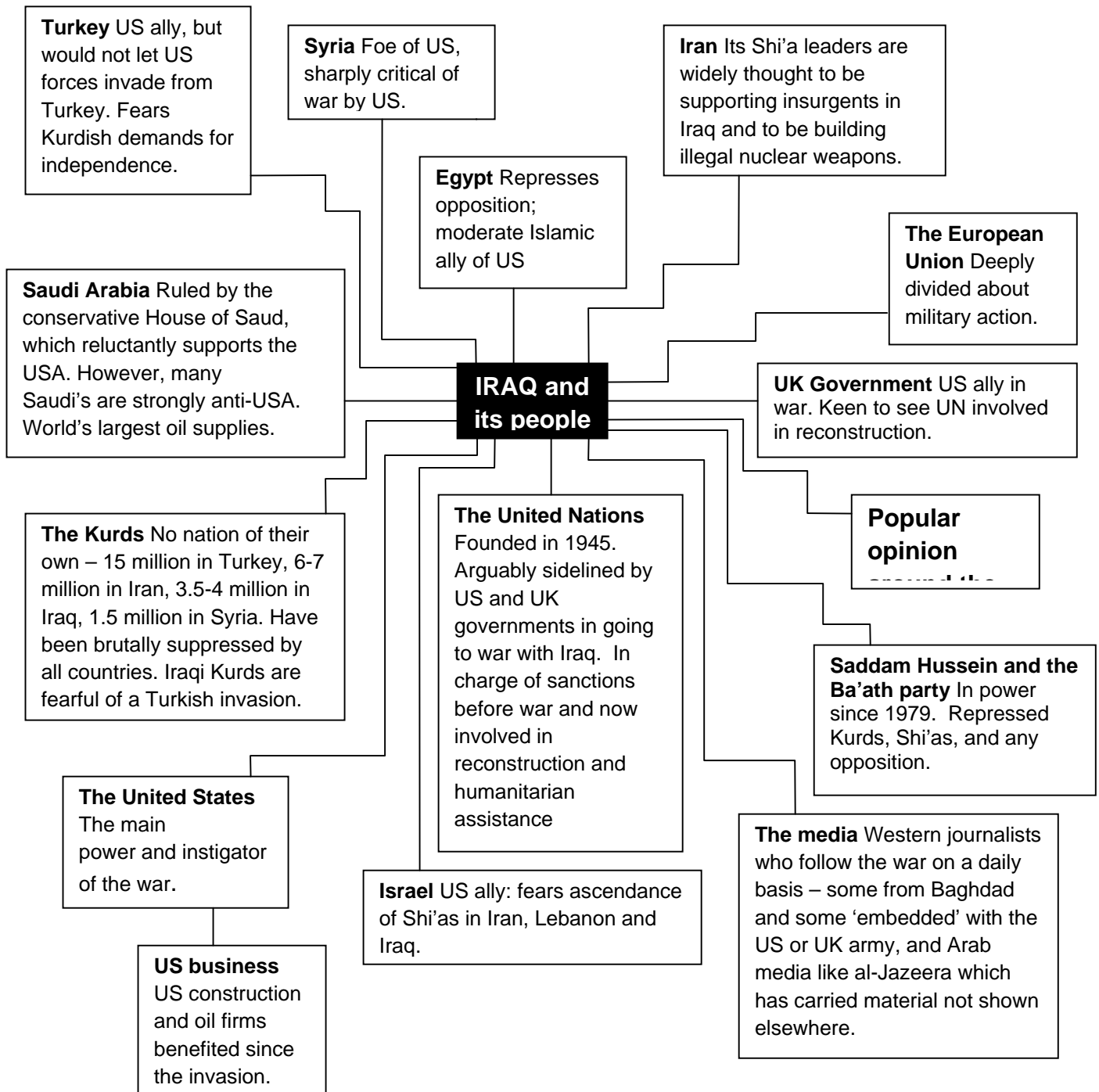
## Arguments for and against the war

Both sides feel equally strongly that they are right about the reasons for and against the war with Iraq; here are the main arguments given by each. You may find this information useful to refer to before carrying out a class debate (see activity 5).

<b>For the war</b>	<b>Against the war</b>
The US and UK had to go to war to get rid of Saddam Hussein, who was an 'evil dictator'.	We supported Saddam Hussein with arms during the Iran–Iraq war from 1980–1988, and when Iraq used (American) chemical weapons against the Kurds in 1988, the world turned a blind eye.
He regularly tortured and executed anyone who opposed him and operated a regime based on fear.	Other regimes torture and execute their opponents, but this is not seen as a reason to attack them.
If Saddam had complied with UN demands to comply with weapons inspectors, there would have been no war.	After the invasion, no weapons of mass destruction were found, but the US and UK governments still thought the war was justified.
Sanctions were needed to keep the regime from becoming more powerful.	Sanctions propped up the government because people who were hungry had no option but to support those who were feeding them.
Under Saddam thousands of people were murdered by the government and millions lived in fear. Iraq is better now he has gone.	2 million people have fled the country since the invasion; up to 650,000 Iraqis have died. Insecurity prevents anyone from earning a livelihood. This is worse than before the invasion.
Saddam Hussein had links with terrorism and everyone thought he could have provided terrorists with weapons to use against us.	There were no proven links with al-Qaeda, but following the invasion Iraq has become both a host for terrorists and a rallying point for radicals round the world.
The Iraqi people wanted to get rid of Saddam Hussein and his regime.	The Iraqis may not have wanted Saddam, but neither did they want to be ruled by America.
Iraq had broken seven UN Security Council resolutions.	Other countries have flouted more resolutions, but no action has been taken against them.
The international community could not tolerate Iraq's persistent disregard of the UN, so a resolution was passed that authorised 'necessary measures' against Iraq.	The UK and US did not get a second UN resolution that would have explicitly authorised the use of force, so the invasion was as illegal as Iraq's conduct.

## Poles of influence and power

Many people are interested and involved in what happens in Iraq, now and when the conflict is over. Below is a brief outline of some of the main influences on what will happen to Iraq and its people.



## After the war ...

### The humanitarian crisis

The warm welcome received by the invading forces was soon overwhelmed by violence. Disbanding the Iraqi army without disarming them or providing alternative livelihoods for the ex-soldiers was widely regarded as a fatal mistake. Despite elections, insecurity and a weak government allowed armed militia – many of them connected to the police – to flourish.

Armed violence now prevents millions of people from earning a living, accessing clean water or getting an education. Six million people are in urgent need of emergency aid, plus another two million who have fled to neighbouring countries. Many more are living in poverty.

Despite the violence, the Iraqi government, the UN, and international donors can do more to deliver humanitarian assistance and reduce unnecessary suffering. If people's basic needs are left unattended, this will only serve to destabilise the country further.

### The future

Most coalition countries are withdrawing some or all of their forces from Iraq. This includes the UK government, who are based in south Iraq. While the UK Government has handed to Iraqi control three of the four provinces it controlled, many in the US are concerned that this will allow militia – particularly those backed by Iran – to seize control of the oil-rich south, which is also the way supplies reach coalition troops.

The departure of other countries leaves the US and its 162,000 troops in Iraq increasingly isolated and suffering mounting casualties. The insecurity can only be resolved by a political settlement on how to divide power and Iraq's oil. The mounting violence and corruption make such agreement increasingly remote.

The report by the Iraq Study Group, a panel of senior American politicians, recommended that the US should engage with regional powers in order to rein in the militia and move to stable democracy. This would mean greater engagement with Iran, a long-standing enemy of the US but one with great and growing influence in Iraq. The level of this engagement may depend both on the level of violence in Iraq and the result of the US Presidential elections in 2008.

## Timeline

Iraq and the UK have been linked since the time of the Crusades. At the end of the nineteenth century, when oil was discovered, Britain controlled 65 per cent of Iraq's trade. People in Iraq are very aware of their connections to the UK and the role we have played in the past; people in the UK are perhaps less aware of our long relationship with Iraq.

### **4000–2000 BC Mesopotamia: the cradle of civilisation**

Writing, the wheel, and the plough are invented.

### **700–1200 AD Arab culture flourishes**

The first university is established; algebra is invented.

### **1095–1291 The Crusaders**

The British come with the Crusaders to fight the Muslim leader, Saladin.

### **1200 The Mongols**

In 1258 Genghis Khan reduces Baghdad to rubble and 80,000 people are killed.

### **1500–1917 The Ottoman Turks**

The Ottoman Turks drive out the Mongols and rule Iraq for three centuries.

### **1917 The British take Baghdad**

Britain claims Baghdad and Basra and crowns King Faisal 1 as a puppet-king in 1921.

### **1920 Independence crushed**

Churchill advocates the use of 'poison gas' against 'uncivilised tribes'.

### **1932 Independence won**

Iraq is declared independent, ending the British mandate.

### **1937 Saddam Hussein is born**

### **1943 The Ba'ath party is formed in Damascus, Syria**

Its politics are based on the idea that individual states were 'regions' of a bigger Arab 'nation'.

### **1956 Suez Crisis**

Iraq sides with Egypt and breaks diplomatic ties with Britain and the USA.

**1979 Saddam Hussein comes to power**

War with Iran in which over a million people die. Iraq is armed by the West, which fears Iran.

**1988 Iraq attacks the Kurds**

Iraq unleashes poison gas attacks on the Kurds. Iraq's allies say nothing.

**1990 The Gulf War**

Iraq invades Kuwait and is attacked by the UN. Uprisings are suppressed. The Kurds are given a UN 'safe haven'. In 1992 the Marsh Arabs are driven out of the country.

**The 1990s Aftermath – sanctions**

The UN imposes sanctions on Iraq, plus a system of weapons inspections suspended in 1998. In 1995 it imposes an 'Oil for food' programme.

**2003 War**

In January 2003, the weapons inspectors go back, but stay only three months. Failing to get a UN Security Council resolution to go to war, the USA and Britain launch an attack on Iraq in March 2003.

**February 2006: Bombings**

The bombing of an important Shia shrine at Samarra triggers worse violence between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

## Teaching and talking about war

### Introduction

The activities on the following pages are designed to help pupils think for themselves to formulate, discuss and express their views, and to have their voices heard. Skills used include developing critical thinking, promoting self-esteem, getting involved in discussion and debate, learning how to interpret the media, and treating others with respect and fairness. You will see links to subject areas in school, especially in Citizenship, PSHE, PSE, PSD, RE and Literacy/ English.

Many children will have been anxious about the war and whether it will affect them. They should be encouraged to share their thoughts and fears. It helps to know that others are feeling the same things too. It may be that pupils become very animated, and that a period of calm and reflection would be helpful. A circle-time activity can enable everyone to voice how they are feeling, and to think about what has been said by themselves and others. Follow the usual procedures for circle time – a helpful resource for this is, *Turn Your School Round* (1993) by Jenny Mosley, LDA. A circletime activity could be done at any point during this series of lessons, or it could be done after each of them, with the introductory sentence relevant to the issues that have arisen.

Introductory sentences could include:

I feel angry/ upset/ fed-up/ when...

- I can't explain what I mean.
- No-one listens to my point of view.
- People are rude to me.

I feel happy/ valued when...

- People say I have made a good point.
- Someone else supports my argument.
- I feel I have something to add to the discussion.

Oxfam's Global Citizenship Guide 'Teaching Controversial Issues' also provides ideas and support for dealing with difficult subjects in the classroom

<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/teachersupport/cpd/controversial/>

## Keep informed

Children and adults alike are having to deal with huge amounts of information. It is often difficult to separate fact from fiction, let alone understand what is happening from a range of perspectives (See <http://media.guardian.co.uk/iraqandthedia>).

You may find it difficult explaining to children what is happening – as far as possible – will help them to make sense of the war. Also, share and acknowledge what can't be known. (See Activity 1).

## Help pupils think for themselves

Schools are there to help young people to think for themselves, and to sort out and clarify their emotions, judgements and values. They therefore need skills in weighing up evidence, choosing between alternatives, thinking about pros and cons, showing respect for people with whom they disagree, and abiding by rules and conventions of courtesy and civil argument. So it often helps to turn pupils' questions around – 'What do you think?', 'Why?', 'Have you always thought that?', 'Are there other ways of seeing this?', 'What do you think might cause you to change your mind?'

It can be reassuring to children and young people, as distinct from alarming or depressing, to be reminded that their elders are in disagreement with each other about important matters. It may be more important for them to live with differences and uncertainties rather than to settle for simplistic solutions [1].

## Support children's concerns

Some children may have relatives who are in the military, or relatives in Iraq or in the Middle East, but all are likely to be anxious about people being killed. Teachers cannot reassure children about what might happen, but they can take their worries and fears seriously.

## Be vigilant about bullying and racism

While ongoing sectarian violence now blights Iraq, it is important to stress that this war was not about Islam – Iraq has been one of the most secular states in the Middle East. Christian and Muslim leaders alike have spoken out against the war. It is particularly important to keep informed about what is happening amongst pupils, and be ready to intervene to prevent violence, verbal as well as physical [2].

Remember that you are supported in anti-racist work by the amended race relations act.

[1] & [2] From the journal Race Equality Teaching, Spring 2003, published by Trentham Books, [www.trenthambooks.co.uk](http://www.trenthambooks.co.uk)