

# Iraq Culture Smart Card

## Guide for Cultural Awareness



GTA 24-01-003

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## Ethnic Groups

### Arabs: 18.5 Million

- Descended from nomadic Bedouin tribes.
- Culture closely intertwined with Islam.
- 65% Shia Muslim / 35% Sunni Muslim
- Most are members of one of Iraq's 150 tribes.

### Kurds: 5 Million

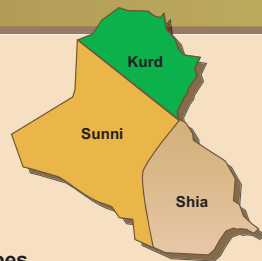
- Ethnically distinct from Arabs, Turks, and Persians (Iranians).
- “Kurd” originally used to denote non-Arab nomads.
- Speak Kurdish, a language distinct from Arabic and Turkish; similar to Persian.
- Most are Sunni Muslim. Sufi orders are prevalent and influential.

### Assyrians/Chaldeans: 800,000

- Claim to be heirs to the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia.
- Christians.
- Live in urban areas and throughout northern Iraq.

### Turkoman: 500,000

- Ethnically related to Turks and Azeris.
- 66% are Sunni Muslims and 33% Shia Muslims.
- Primary language is Turkish. Most are also fluent in Arabic.
- Most live in Iraq's northern cities.



## Religion

### FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

The practice of Islam is based upon five pillars:



1 SHAHADADA

Faith:  
Allah is the  
one true God.



2 SALAT

Prayer:  
Pray five  
times a day.



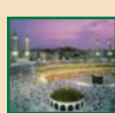
3 ZAKAT

Alms/Charity:  
Assistance to  
the needy.



4 SAWN

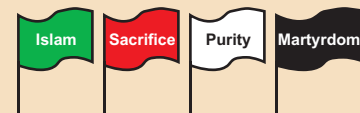
Fasting: Ramadan-  
month of fasting  
from sunrise to sunset.



5 HAJJ

Pilgrimage  
to Mecca in  
Saudi Arabia.

### ISLAMIC FLAG MEANINGS



Muslims often fly colored flags to observe various holidays or dates of personal significance. Each color carries a specific meaning. **Green is the color of Islam and is particularly meaningful to the Shia.**

### ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS TERMS

- **KORAN:** Islamic Holy Book, given by Allah to the Prophet Mohammad.
- **MOSQUE:** Muslim house of worship.
- **SUNNI and SHIA:** Two main branches of Islam.
- **SHIA:** Form majority of Muslims in Iraq, but less than 10% globally.
- **SUNNI:** Call their religious leaders Imams, but to Shia, the Imam is a supreme religious leader descended from Mohammad.
- **SHARIA:** Muslim law.
- **FATWA:** An order from a Muslim religious leader.
- **WAHABBI:** Puritanical Muslims from the Hanbali school of Sunni Islam. Never shave their beards.
- **MADRASSAH:** Islamic educational system.
- **MULLAH:** Local religious leader.

## Cultural Groups

### ARABS

- Arabs view Kurds as separatists within Iraq and are wary of their desire for autonomy.
- Arabs view the Christian Assyrians and Chaldeans as Iraqis, but recent Islamic extremism has sparked some hostility towards them.
- Arabs look down upon the Turkoman because Arabs generally view Turkish culture as inferior.
- Arabs view Iranian Persians negatively and fear the historically strong political and cultural influence of Persia.

### SHIA AND SUNNI ARAB

- Tension exists between Shia and Sunni Arabs over access to political and economic power.
- Sunnis blame Shia for undermining the mythical unity of Islam and they view them as less loyal to Iraq.
- Shia blame Sunnis for marginalizing the Shia majority and resent Sunni attempts to question their loyalty to Iraq.

### KURDS

- Kurds are openly hostile toward Iraqi Arabs and seek to assert their political and cultural independence.
- Kurds are distrustful of the Turkoman, as they have competing claims over Kirkuk.
- Kurds do not interact much with Assyrians and Chaldeans.

### ASSYRIANS

- Assyrians experienced persecution by both Kurds and Arabs.
- Assyrians recognize their minority status as a religious and ethnic group.
- Assyrians believe they have much in common with the Chaldeans, including ethnic and Christian religious heritage.

### CHALDEANS

- Chaldeans rejoined the Catholic Church in the 18th century and do not believe that they are similar to Assyrians.
- As a religious and ethnic minority, the Chaldeans distrust both Kurdish and Arab intentions.
- They have peaceful relations with Turkoman.

### TURKOMAN

- Turkoman view themselves as a marginalized repressed minority and seek greater influence in Iraq.
- Turkoman fear Kurds, and there has been a long history of conflict between the two groups.
- Turkoman identify closely with Turkey and the Ottoman period of Iraqi history

## Religious Holidays

### KEY RELIGIOUS DATES

Islamic Calendar follows the lunar cycle. Below are the approximate dates on a Western Calendar.

#### 2004

30 Jan - 03 Feb 04 **Hajj**  
01 Feb 04 **Eid al-Adha**  
22 Feb 04 **Islamic New Year**  
02 Mar 04 **Ashura**  
02 May 04 **Mohammad's Birthday**  
15 Oct - 13 Nov 04 **Ramadan**  
07 Nov 04 **Layla tul-Qadr**  
14 Nov 04 **Eid al-Fitr**

#### 2005

19-23 Jan 05 **Hajj**  
21 - Jan 05 **Eid al-Adha**  
10 Feb 05 **Islamic New Year**  
19 Feb 05 **Ashura**  
21 Apr 05 **Mohammad's Birthday**  
05 Oct - 04 Nov 05 **Ramadan**  
29 Oct 05 **Layla tul-Quar**  
03 Nov 05 **Eid al-Fitr**

#### 2006

29 Dec - Jan 01 06 **Hajj**  
10 Jan 06 **Eid al-Adha**  
10 Feb 06 **Islamic New Year**  
19 Feb 06 **Ashura**  
21 Apr 06 **Mohammad's Birthday**  
5 Oct - 24 Oct 03 **Ramadan**  
29 Oct 06 **Layla tul-Quar**  
04 Nov 06 **Eid al-Fitr**

### WHAT TO EXPECT

**Fasting/Prayer  
Celebration  
Procession**



**Prayer:**  
Many Islamic holidays  
include public displays  
of piety and prayer.



**Celebration:**  
Eid al Fitr is a three-day  
celebration at the close  
of Ramadan.



**Procession:**  
Some Islamic holidays  
include a mass procession.  
Ashura,  
includes public,  
self-inflicted mutilation

## Clothes / Gestures

### MALE DRESS

White



Has not made the  
hajj, or pilgrimage  
to Mecca.

Black and White



From a country with  
Presidential rule (i.e.  
Libya or Egypt) and  
has made the hajj.

Red Checkered



From a country with a  
monarch (i.e. Saudi  
Arabia or Jordan) and  
has made the hajj.

### FEMALE DRESS

Traditional  
Dress



Western  
Dress

Arab women often wear Western dress with a shawl or head scarf.

Devout or conservative women wear a hejab, a full head covering, and an abaya, a body covering made of dark colors.

Western dress is common in urban areas, but traditional dress is still prevalent in rural Iraq.

### GESTURES



Right  
hand  
over  
heart is  
a sign of  
respect  
or  
thanks



Hand is  
Motionless

Right  
hand,  
palm  
up,  
fingers  
touching,  
means to  
slow down  
or be  
patient.



Quick  
upward  
head  
snap with  
tongue  
click  
means  
no.

## Cultural Customs

### HONOR AND SHAME

Admitting “I don’t know” is shameful for an Iraqi.

Constructive criticism can be taken as an insult.

Women will often wear head scarves as a show of respect, even if wearing Western clothing. Women are rarely without a male relative or friend for escort.



### FAMILY



Family is the center of honor, loyalty, and reputation.

Men are always the head of the family. No direct attention should be given to female relatives.

### PERSONAL SPACE

Iraqis do not share an American concept of “personal space” in public situations, and in private meetings or conversation. It is considered offensive to step or lean away from an Iraqi.



Women are an exception to this rule. One should not stand close to, stare at, or touch women.

### SOCIALIZATION AND TRUST



When conducting business, it is customary to first shake the hand of all the males present, taking care to grip neither too firmly nor too meekly.

Allocate plenty of time for refreshments before attempting to engage an Iraqi in business conversation. It is important to first establish respect and trust.

## Cultural History



**Ancient Mesopotamia 18th - 6th Centry B.C.**

Babylonian Empire seen as cradle of modern civilization

### The Ottoman Period 1534-1916

Iraq consisted of three semi-Independent provinces.

The Turks Ottoman Empire supported Sunni governance to counter influence from Shia Safavid Iran.

Persla sponsored Shia missionaries during the 1800s. The majority of Iraq's population converted from Sunni to Shia.



**The British Mandate and Monarchy 1920-1958**

The British forged modern Iraq in 1921 under an appointed Sunni King.

The Kurds became a stateless ethnic group split among Turkey, Iraq, and Iran.

British and Sunni forces repressed a Shia and Kurdish revolt. Sunnis dominated Iraqi society.

The 1958 coup brought independence and republican rule.


### Modern Iraq 1958-Present

Instability from 1958 to 1968 until Ba'ath Party takeover, Sunni Arabs dominate Iraq by oppressing Shia Arabs and Kurds.

Following the 1979 Shia revolution in Iran, Saddam Hussein feared a Shia uprising.

The Iran-Iraq war from 1980-1988 exacerbated religious and ethnic tensions, leading to numerous Kurdish and Shia uprisings-all were brutally repressed.



Commands	Numbers	Do This	Social Structure																																				
<div>stop / <b>awgaf</b></div> <div>do not move / <b>le tet-Harak</b></div> <div>lower your hands / <b>nezill eidayk</b></div> <div>turn around / <b>in-dar</b></div> <div>drop your weapons / <b>Dhib is-la-Hak</b></div> <div>move / <b>it-Ha-rak</b></div> <div>hands up / <b>irfaa eidayk</b></div> <div>move slowly / <b>it-Ha-rak aala kay-fak</b></div> <div>come here / <b>ta-aal hena</b></div> <div>no talking / <b>le teH-chi</b></div> <div>walk forward / <b>it-qa-dam li-gi-dam</b></div> <div>surrender / <b>sel-lim nefsek</b></div> <div>come with me / <b>ta-aal wi-ya-ya</b></div> <div>calm down / <b>aala kay-fek</b></div> <div>do not resist / <b>la it-qa-wem</b></div> <div>form a line / <b>awgaf bi-ss-ira</b></div> <div>stay where you are / <b>ib-qa makanak</b></div> <div>one at a time / <b>waHid waHid</b></div> <div>speak slowly / <b>iH-chee aala kayfak</b></div> <div>lie on your stomach / <b>in-baT-aH</b></div>	<div>1 / <b>waHid</b></div> <div>2 / <b>ithnayn</b></div> <div>3 / <b>thalatha</b></div> <div>4 / <b>arbaa</b></div> <div>5 / <b>khamsa</b></div> <div>6 / <b>sit-ta</b></div> <div>7 / <b>sabaa</b></div> <div>8 / <b>thamanya</b></div> <div>9 / <b>tisaa</b></div> <div>10 / <b>aash-ra</b></div> <div>20 / <b>aaish-rin</b></div> <div>30 / <b>tlatheen</b></div> <div>40 / <b>arbaa-een</b></div> <div>50 / <b>khamseen</b></div> <div>60 / <b>sit-teen</b></div> <div>70 / <b>sabaa-een</b></div> <div>80 / <b>thmaneen</b></div> <div>90 / <b>tisaa-een</b></div> <div>100 / <b>mi-ya</b></div> <div>1000 / <b>alif</b></div> <div>more (than) / <b>akthar (min)</b></div> <div>less (than) / <b>a-qal (min)</b></div>	<div>IN GENERAL</div> <div>Shake hands gently in greeting and departure, but always with your right hand.</div> <div>Respond to a woman's greeting only when she initiates the contact. Allow her to shake hands using only her fingertips.</div> <div>Refer to the entire family when making inquiries, well wishes, or blessings.</div> <div>Be patient; the Iraqi approach to time is slow and relaxed.</div> <div>IN IRAQI HOMES</div> <div>Try all food offered to you, even if in small portions. Feel free to ask about the cuisine or its preparation.</div> <div>Appear relaxed and friendly; social interaction is critical in building trust.</div> <div>AS A GUEST</div> <div>Be gracious; do not appear anxious to leave.</div> <div>Offer profuse thanks to host and wish his family well.</div> <div>Arrive on time for meetings, but expect casual conversation and a gradual approach to a business discussion</div>	<div><div><div><div><div>Sunni Arabs</div><div>Shia Arabs</div><div>Kurds</div><div>Turkoman</div><div>Assyrians</div><div>Chaldeans</div></div><div><div>Pan-Arabism</div><div>State</div><div>Religion</div><div>Tribe</div><div>Clan</div><div>Family</div></div><div><div>High</div><div>Medium</div><div>Low</div><div>None</div></div></div><table><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table></div><div><div>CLANS are extended families that trace their lineage to one patriachal figure.</div><div>TRIBES usually consist of several clans, all of which claim a common ancestor. Tribes mediate conflict and distribute economic goods. Tribes cultivate values, such as loyalty, bravery and shame. These are central to Arab identity.</div><div>PAN-ARABISM emphasizes solidarity between Arabs across national borders.</div></div></div>																																				
Questions	Helpful Words / Phrases	Don't Do This	Understanding Arabic Names																																				
<div>Do you speak English? / <b>tiHchee inglizi?</b></div> <div>Do you need help? / <b>tehtaj musa-aada?</b></div> <div>Where are you injured? / <b>wayn mit-aawer?</b></div> <div>Do you have...? / <b>aandek...?</b></div> <div>Do you need..? / <b>teHtaj...?</b></div> <div>Who is in charge? / <b>minu almas-'uul?</b></div> <div>Which direction? / <b>bi-ay it-tijah?</b></div> <div>Is it far? / <b>baa-id?</b></div> <div>How many? / <b>ish-ged?</b></div> <div>Who? / <b>minu?</b></div> <div>When? / <b>sh-wa-kit?</b></div> <div>What? / <b>shinu?</b></div> <div>Where? / <b>wayn?</b></div>	<div>hello / <b>marrhaba</b></div> <div>good-bye / <b>maa as-salama , a-lla wiyakum</b></div> <div>help me / <b>sa-aaid-ni</b></div> <div>thank you / <b>shukran</b></div> <div>yes / no / <b>ee / la</b></div> <div>good / bad / <b>zayn / mu zayn</b></div> <div>north / <b>shimal</b></div> <div>south / <b>jinub</b></div> <div>east / <b>sharq</b></div> <div>west / <b>gharb</b></div> <div>food / <b>ak-il</b></div> <div>water / <b>may</b></div> <div>danger / <b>kha Tar</b></div> <div>shelter / <b>mel-ja'</b></div> <div>medicine / <b>duwa</b></div> <div>mines / <b>algham</b></div> <div>weapon / <b>is-laH</b></div> <div>we are Americans / <b>iH-na amerikan</b></div>	<div>Don't use your left hand for contact with others, eating, or gestures. It is considered unclean.</div> <div>Don't point with a finger; it is a sign of contempt. Instead, point with your entire hand.</div> <div>Don't ask for a single opinion on an issue, as Iraqis often first reply with the answer they think you want to hear, rather than an honest response.</div> <div>Don't slouch, lean, or appear disinterested when conversing with Iraqi men. Do not expose the soles of feet or shoes.</div> <div>Don't back away from an Iraqi during conversation. Close personal interaction is customary and distance is considered rude.</div> <div>Don't offer a Muslim food or drink or consume either publicly during Ramadan. Never offer a Muslim alcohol or pork.</div> <div>Don't engage in religious discussions.</div> <div>Don't make the "OK" or "thumbs up" signs; they are considered obscene.</div> <div>Don't praise an Iraqi's possessions too much. He may give them to you and expect something of equal value in return</div>	<table><tr><td>FATHER</td><td><b>Abu Yusuf</b></td><td><b>Muhammad</b></td><td><b>Al-Tikriti</b></td><td><b>Al-Sayf</b></td></tr><tr><td></td><td>(Parental Title) Father of Yusuf</td><td>(First Name)</td><td>(Birthplace, occupation) from Tikrit</td><td>From the Al-Sayf Family</td></tr><tr><td>MOTHER</td><td><b>Umm Yusuf</b></td><td><b>Rahil</b></td><td><b>bint Hassan ibn Ibrahim</b></td><td><b>Al-Saddaf</b></td></tr><tr><td></td><td>(Parental Title) Mother of Yusuf</td><td>(First Name)</td><td>(family hertiage) Daughter of Hassan, and Hassan, son of Ibrahim</td><td>From the Al-Saddaf Family</td></tr><tr><td>CHILD</td><td><b>Yusuf</b></td><td><b>ibn Muhammad</b></td><td><b>Al-Sayf</b></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td>(First Name)</td><td>(Family Heritage) Son of Muhammad</td><td>From the Al-Sayf Family</td><td></td></tr></table> <div>An Arabic name may be spelled several different ways in English.</div> <div>Women do not take their husband's name. Parents add a title to their name that includes the name of their first son.</div> <div>When including family heritage in names, women use "bint," meaning "daughter of," and men use "ibn" or "bin", meaning "son of ."</div> <div>Information provided by: Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA) Quality and Dissemination Branch 3300 Russell Road, Suite 250, Quantico,VA 22134-5011 For additional information see MCIA's CD-ROM "Cultural Intelligence For Military Operations: Iraq CD-ROM dissemination: COM: 703-784-6167 DSN: 278-6167</div> <div></div>	FATHER	<b>Abu Yusuf</b>	<b>Muhammad</b>	<b>Al-Tikriti</b>	<b>Al-Sayf</b>		(Parental Title) Father of Yusuf	(First Name)	(Birthplace, occupation) from Tikrit	From the Al-Sayf Family	MOTHER	<b>Umm Yusuf</b>	<b>Rahil</b>	<b>bint Hassan ibn Ibrahim</b>	<b>Al-Saddaf</b>		(Parental Title) Mother of Yusuf	(First Name)	(family hertiage) Daughter of Hassan, and Hassan, son of Ibrahim	From the Al-Saddaf Family	CHILD	<b>Yusuf</b>	<b>ibn Muhammad</b>	<b>Al-Sayf</b>			(First Name)	(Family Heritage) Son of Muhammad	From the Al-Sayf Family							
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