

The final borders of present day Iraq have only recently been settled; the region emerged as a nation state following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire when Iraq became a monarchy in 1921 under a British mandate.

When the British mandate ended in 1932, Iraq joined the League of Nations as an independent monarchy. The United Kingdom, however, continued to have considerable influence in Iraq until 1958. In that year, a military coup overthrew the monarchy and made Iraq a republic governed by a revolutionary command council (RCC). The council is responsible for the administration of the various ministries and state organizations.

Iraq is currently under the authority of a provisional constitution issued on September 22, 1968. The document establishes Iraq as a democratic republic governed according to socialist principles. The constitution protects basic freedoms of speech and religion, etc., and calls for an elected assembly; the first was elected April 1989. The political and social philosophy of the Ba'ath ruling party has been called "Arab Socialism," that is, the economy is controlled by the state within the framework of an Arab cultural and value system.

The current President is Sadaam Hussein. He has held this position since 1983 and enjoys considerable support both within the party and with the general public. It is probable he will be president under the new constitution that is to be drafted in 1989.

In the RCC and at the ministerial level, personal relationships are very important. The late Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Military was the president's brother-in-law and the current (1989) Minister of Industry and Military Industrialization, who is leading the privatization and efficiency movement, is the president's son-in-law.

Population and Principal Cities

In 1988, the Iraqi population was estimated at over 16 million. Baghdad Governorate, where the capital city of Baghdad is located, has a population of about 4 million. Baghdad is the centre of economic activity in Iraq. The two other major cities are Basra, the main port of Iraq, and Mosul.

The Arabic-speaking population co-exists with a number of minority groups. The largest of these is the Kurds who live for the most part in northern Iraq. Other smaller groups of minorities are the Armenians, the Assyrians, the Yazidis