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# I. THE COUNTRY

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## Area and Geography

The Republic of Iraq (formerly known as Mesopotamia) is situated to the northeast of the Arabian Peninsula. It covers an area of about 445 000 km<sup>2</sup>. Turkey lies to the north of Iraq, Iran to the east, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the west, and, to the south, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and The Gulf. The two great rivers of Iraq, the Tigris and the Euphrates, descend from the mountains in Turkey until they converge in the south to form the Shatt Al-Arab River, which has its estuary on The Gulf, Iraq's only sea coast.

Iraq is divided into three basic regions:

- The great arid desert lands of the south and west, which cover more than one half the country's total area;
- The alluvial plains or river valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; and
- The rugged mountain area, which receives an abundance of rain, in the north and east.

## Climate

Iraq has a subtropical climate. The summers are very hot; temperatures in the shade can exceed 43°C. Winters are surprisingly cold; frost although rare in the south, can be quite severe in the north. Abrupt hot spells during winter are another characteristic in the central and southern areas of Iraq. With the exception of the northeast (Assyria), rainfall is minimal over the country. The unusual physical conditions have restricted movement and development of all kinds of communications. The effect has been to isolate many communities that have differing ways of life, language and religious beliefs. These numerous minority groups are a feature of Iraq.

## History and Government

The area now known as Iraq was the cradle of some of the world's earliest identifiable civilizations. Its recorded history predates 3000 BC. In the time since then, Iraq has been influenced by almost all of the great Eurasian civilizations.