

## The Politically Unpopular Iraq Success Story 20 March 2025

It appears I am in the minority over the Iraq War. I served two tours there and learned to genuinely like and respect the Iraqi people and their country. It is a great land with tremendous potential. And with the benefit of hindsight, I think it was a good decision to go to war in 2003 but that also is irrelevant.

Marines do not decide where to battle – as a democracy, that is up to our elected officials – we only can see to it that if we do, we do it to win. We did that in Iraq. So now, after 22 years have passed, I again assert that I am proud still of my service in Iraq and proud of what my country did there.

The best place to start this story is as a Marine who fought the war on terrorism. And first and foremost: We slaughtered an entire generation of international foreign Islamic extremists in Iraq. And they came from all over: The Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Central Asia, and many from Europe.

Every month in 2004, they came by the hundreds along what we called "rat lines." These overwhelmingly originated through Assad's Syria – so good riddance to that SOB – but also through an Iranian infiltration network bringing in many terrorists from Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>

But it did not work. Their average life expectancy was measured in weeks. It was a virtual death sentence to go into al Anbar where the Marines were operating. We knew this because Marines often captured the passports of the foreign dead and compared date of entry into Syria against the KIA date.

Europe and the Muslim world should be forever in our debt for that feat.

Further, the war on the ground in Iraq was a victory (and not just the conventional 2003 offensive that destroyed Saddam's army). Here is the critical timeline:

- By June 2004, the insurgency had spread to 10 governorates, 3 more had some violence and only 5 were pacified.
- In 2005, al Qaeda declared the Iraq War "...the greatest battle of Islam in this era."
- In 2006 Taliban leader Dadullah (now dead) declared "... we fight for the Iraqi Mujahideen."
- But by 2007, al Qaeda in Iraq was losing the war. At that point, al Qaeda began to cut support to Iraq and surge it to Afghanistan – **they beat us to the punch by two years.**

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<sup>1</sup> These types of "my enemy's enemy is my friend" alliances as the one between Iran and al Qaeda are remarkably common in Southwest Asia.

- After 2007, the war clearly had shifted in our favor as witnessed in the former “Triangle of Death” south of Baghdad which became a place of lasting peace.  
[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pbzu-saPft8>]
- By June 2008, the Iraq war was centered in 4 governorates while 3 had some violence and 11 were pacified – a dramatic turnaround from 2004.
- By June 2010, the war was over in all 18 governorates with only residual violence carried out by surviving terrorist cells.

And the good news for Iraq was not limited to the 90% decline in violence.

By every honestly reported statistic, Iraq is far better off today than it ever was at any point under Saddam Hussein.

For the first time in history, the Shi’a majority has true political power and no longer are systemically discriminated against. The schools-university system is vastly improved and stronger than at any time under Saddam. Health care has significantly improved. Personal freedoms exist at unprecedented levels. And the police are better trained, more professional, and far less corrupt than it ever was during the Saddam era.

Iraq quietly become one of the great triumphs in the region. Saddam had treated the banks as his private piggy bank now they are strong and follow the rule of law. And of course, Saddam ran a kleptocracy that crippled the economy. That too has ended.

By 2008, Iraq was one of the ten fastest growing economies in the world and generally operated on a balanced budget, the country was undergoing the biggest building boom in its modern history, and the standard of living grew rapidly.

But things only have gotten better. Under Saddam, the “international” Iraqi economy consisted of a small cartel of rogue states. Now Iraq is fully integrated into the global economy having trading partners in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and even the Americas. And a stock market was formed in 2004 which helped spark the greatest era of private-sector investment in Iraq’s history. There were maybe 7,000 businesses/companies in Iraq before 2003 and now there are over 30,000.

So here is the hard evidence the defeatist naysayers refuse to see:

**Iraq Before and After Saddam**  
(m = million, b = billion)

	<u>2000</u>	<u>2024</u>
Population	22.676m	42.083m <sup>a</sup>
Pop. growth	2.86%	1.99%
Farmable lands	12%	18.1% <sup>b</sup>

Pasture land	9%	9.2%
GDP	\$59.9b	\$572.9b
Per Capita	\$2,700	\$12,600
Annual Inflation	135%	5%
National Debt	\$130b	\$14b
Exchange Rate	\$1:1,900 dinars	\$1:1,300 dinars <sup>c</sup>
Imports	\$8.9b	\$69.2b
Exports	\$12.7b	\$127.1b
Unemployment	+40%	15.5% <sup>d</sup>
Literacy Rate	Unknown	85.6% <sup>e</sup>
Political System	1-party dictatorship	14-party democracy
Electricity	24.4b kWh	31.2b kWh
Mobile phones	negligible	43.7m
Internet users	negligible	21.56m
Sunni	34%	32%
Shi'a	63%	63%
Christian	3%	1%
Other/None	0%	4%

<sup>a</sup> Population growth also reflects over 3 million Iraqis who returned from exile after Saddam's fall.

<sup>b</sup> A key to farmland growth was the recovery of the irrigated marshland ecosystem destroyed by Saddam to punish the Shi'a living there.

<sup>c</sup> It was about 2,400 dinars to \$1 in 2003.

<sup>d</sup> In 2003 before the war, the unemployment rate was above 50%.

<sup>e</sup> Under Saddam, the education system collapsed in the late 1990s. Teachers went months without pay forcing them to seek "moonlighting" jobs and there was no such thing as new textbooks or school supplies in any form. Unsurprisingly, most of today's illiterate were of school age under Saddam.