Iraqi Ethnic, Tribal, and Religious Groups
Iraq is a multi-ethnic nation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Estimated Population</th>
<th>Also Found In</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabs</td>
<td>16 to 20 million</td>
<td>Throughout North Africa and the Middle East, Iran</td>
<td>65-80 percent Shia, 20-30 percent Sunni, less than 5 percent Christian</td>
<td>Arabic (Iraqi dialect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurds</td>
<td>3.6 to 4.8 million</td>
<td>Turkey, Iran, Syria, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan</td>
<td>Mostly Sunni, Shia, and Yazidi minority</td>
<td>Kurdish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkomans</td>
<td>300,000 to 800,000</td>
<td>Related to other Turkic peoples in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkmenistan</td>
<td>Primarily Sunni</td>
<td>South Azeri Turkish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>As many as 1 million</td>
<td>Mostly Christians, Iranians, and other groups found in the Middle East</td>
<td>At least 50 percent Christian; Shias, Sunnis, and members of other religions account for the balance</td>
<td>Mostly Arabic, some Persian and other languages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elements of Iraqi Arab Social Organization

- Each individual is a member of a tribe (‘ashira) and groups of tribes are part of tribal federations (qabila). There are about 150 tribes in Iraq.
- Some tribes are quite large. For example, the Al-Dulaim number about 100,000 with most of them in western Anbar province.
- Tribes are composed of related clans (fukhđh) led by a paramount sheikh or sheikh of sheikhs.
- Clan leaders are called sheikhs.
- Clans are divided into houses or sub-clans (beit) and then into extended families (khams).
- The clan and tribal system is segmentary.
- Most Iraqis identify strongly with their tribe such that they are more loyal to it than the national government.
Segmentary Clan Structure (Iraq)

I: tribe (‘ashira)
A-B: clan (fukhdh)
1-4: house (beit)
a-h: extended family (khams)
Clan Dispute Settlement & Solidarity

- The clan *sheikh* is expected to settle disputes between extended families and sub-clans. However, dispute settlement through revenge killing may occur between families of different sub-clans without the intervention of the *sheikh*.

- If these vendettas get out of hand the *sheikh* may authoritatively impose a settlement.

- Raids and ambushes are the accepted means of
  - settling disputes
  - enforcing authority
  - obtaining property

- The *sheikh* represents the interests of the clan within the tribe. And each tribe has a grand *sheikh* who is normally the head of the largest and most powerful clan.

- Clan members assist each other with loans, jobs, political support, bureaucratic intervention, etc.
Politics of Revenge

Each clan or tribe must avenge the death or harm (e.g., theft) done to any member by someone outside of the clan or tribe.

With a strong national government tribal revenge was inhibited by the police much of the time.

If American troops kill clan members all other clan members have an obligation to seek revenge.

The same applies to conflict between Sunni and Shiite sects who belong to different tribes.