

(the farthest mosque) is located in Jerusalem. It used to be the first direction Muslims faced during prayers at the dawn of Islam, before the Kaaba in Mecca became the *qibla*. Muslim scholars are unanimous on the advisability of visiting the al-Aqsa Mosque. On August 21, 1969, an Australian citizen deliberately set fire to the mosque, which sparked Palestinian protests and violent clashes with Israeli occupation forces. This event caused deep resentment in the Islamic world and prompted a number of countries to join forces to support Palestine and protect Islamic holy sites. In this context, in September 1969, the leaders of 30 Muslim countries formed the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC); in 2011 it was renamed the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Received: 03.09.2024.

Accepted for publication: 10.09.2024.

OLGA BIBIKOVA. REASONS FOR THE RADICALIZATION OF SUNNI MUSLIMS IN IRAQ

Keywords: Iraq; Sunnis; Shiites;
Kurds; American invasion.

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Citation: Bibikova O. Reasons for the Radicalization of Sunni Muslims in Iraq // Russia and the Moslem World, 2025, № 1 (327), P. 68–84. DOI: 10.31249/rmw/2025.01.05

Abstract. The article analyzes the state of Iraqi society that emerged as a result of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Having placed its bets on the Shi'ites and promised independence to the Kurds, the American government discriminated against the Sunnis under the pretext of social exclusion of the members of the Ba'ath Party. In fact, a pretext was created for persecuting the intelligentsia, the middle class, and army officials, which eventually forced the Sunnis to take up arms and get in contact with ISIS.

The state of Iraq is located in an area where several civilizations and religions have interacted since ancient times. Iraq is the dividing line between Sunni and Shiite Islam, as well as between the Arab, Persian and Turkish worlds. This is what gives it its ethnic and religious uniqueness, which has kept this region in a state of high tension for many years.

The confessional aspect is a fundamental component of the socio-cultural characteristics of Iraqi society, as well as its neighboring countries. Since the reign of Caliph Uthman (644–656), the sense of national identity has given way to religious self-awareness. Within the Sunni Ummah, the Muslims of Iraq are divided into adherents of the Hanafi school of Islam, recognized as the dominant one even under Ottoman rule, and adherents of the Shafi'i madhhab.

The bulk of the population of Iraq consists of those who are called Iraqi Arabs and Kurds. In addition to these, there are Turkomans, Assyrians, Iranians, Armenians, and smaller subgroups. In 2021, the population of Iraq was estimated at 43.5 million. Approximately 95 per cent to 98 per cent of the population is Muslim, with Shia Muslims making up about 55 per cent and Sunnis less than 40 per cent [1].

Iraq is the birthplace of Shiism. It is home to the city of Karbala, near which the famous battle took place on October 10, 680, resulting in the death of Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, and the beginning of a new direction in Islam – Shiism. In addition, it is home to the highly revered city of Najaf, known as the burial place of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. Shiites consider him to be the Rightly Guided Caliph and the first of the 12 Imams. The city is a Shiite pilgrimage center, although the question of the imam's grave is still controversial.

The north-east of Iraq is populated by Kurds. There are more than 6 million of them, 98 per cent of whom are Sunnis and 2 per cent are Shiites – Fayli. During the time of Saddam Hussein, the Kurds were subjected to repression. The fact is that the area of residence of the Kurds in northern Iraq – the governorates of Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, Halabja and Dohuk –