

The Geopolitics of the Civil War of Shia Islam

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The US Invasion of Iraq

With the attack on Iraq in 2003, the United States overturned the Sunni Arab minority of Saddam Hussein. Saddam Hussein was a socialist dictator who was governing Iraq by oppressing the Arab Shia (Shiite) majority, and also by oppressing the Kurds of Iraq. When the Americans overturned Saddam Hussein, the Shia Arab majority of Iraq became the dominant political force, and the ex-people of Saddam Hussein became the leaders of ISIS in Iraq, and many of them also became dominant figures of ISIS in Syria.

Remember that during the previous decades the Alawite minority of Syria was running Syria, and therefore the Sunni Arabs of Syria were not the ones to hold the top positions in the Syrian public sector and in the Syrian army. On the contrary, the Sunnis of Iraq were running Iraq, and they were holding the top positions of the public sector and the Iraqi army, and they were more qualified to hold top positions in ISIS. For more details about what happened in Iraq see “The Truth about the US Invasion of Iraq in 2003”, and “Saddamm Hussein : The Father of ISIS in Iraq”.

1) “The Truth about the US Invasion of Iraq in 2003”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/12/02/the-truth-about-the-us-invasion-of-iraq-in-2003/>

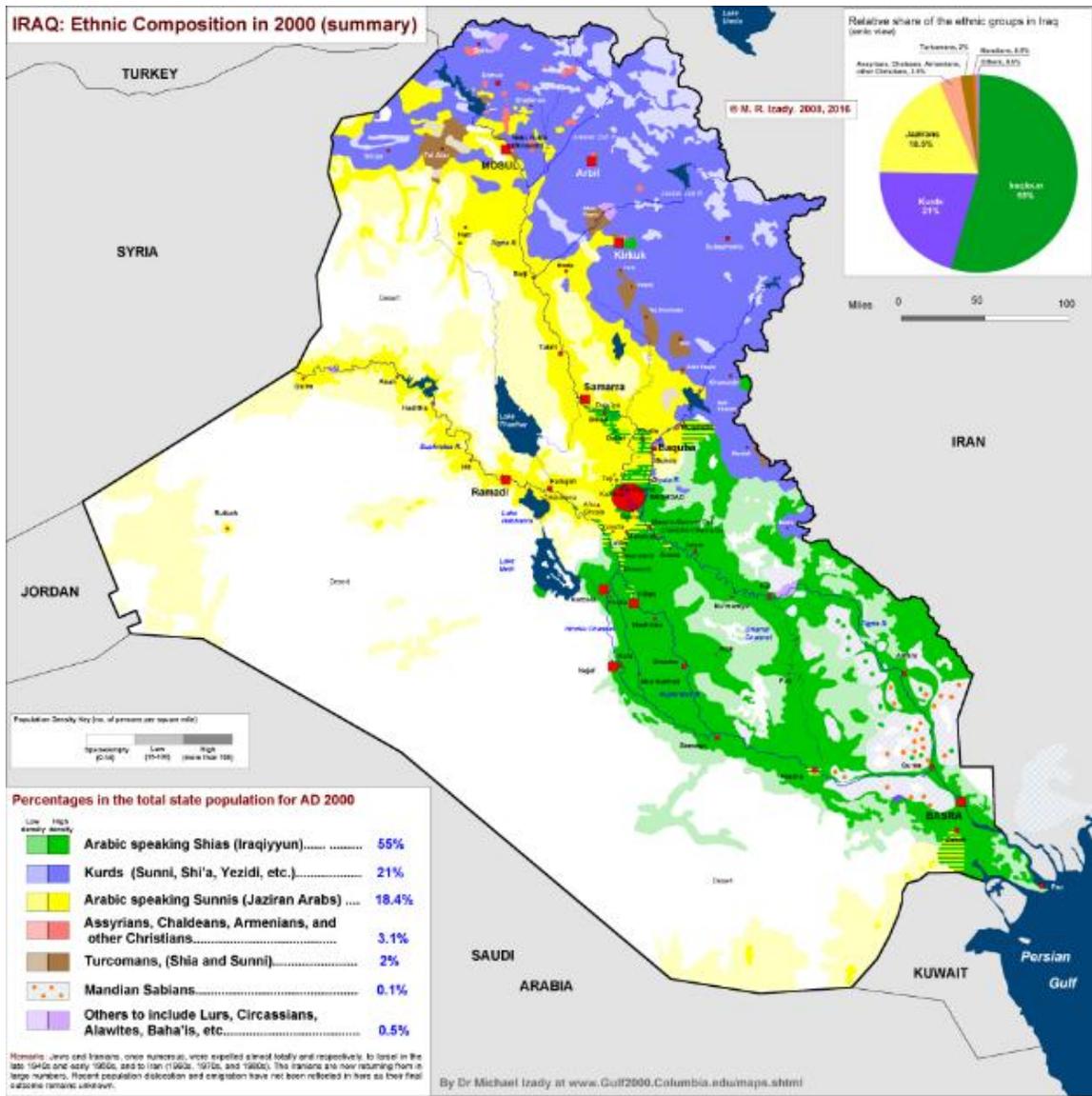
2) “Saddamm Hussein : The Father of ISIS in Iraq”

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2016/01/08/saddam-hussein-the-father-of-isis-in-iraq/>

To understand the war for the oil and natural gas of Syria and Iraq it is imperative to have a basic understanding of the region's geography, and also a basic knowledge of the main ethnic and religious divisions of these two countries. Therefore, before addressing the issue of the civil war of the Shia Muslims of Iraq, I will use some standard maps that depict the geography and ethnic divisions of Iraq and Syria.

The first map shows the main Iraqi divisions i.e. the Shia Arabs (green) of Iraq, the Sunni Arabs (yellow) of Iraq, and the Kurds (blue) of Iraq. The Kurds are normally Sunnis, but they act on their Kurdish identity, and not on their religious identity. The white-yellow part of the map shows the Iraqi desert, with few Sunni elements. As you can see the Sunni elements are positioned along the rivers Tiger and Euphrates.

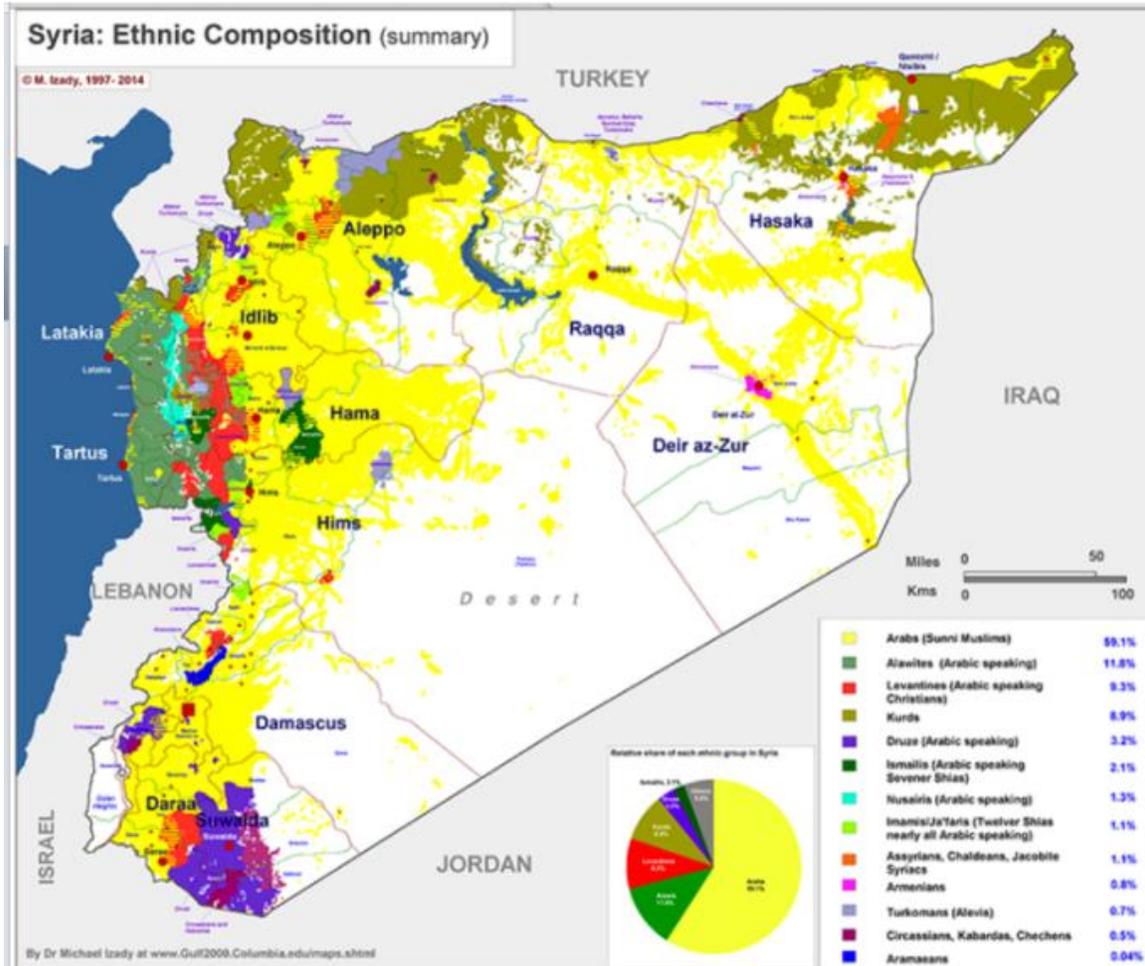
Map of Iraq : Shia Arabs (green), Sunni Arabs (yellow), Kurds (blue), Iraqi desert with moderate Sunni elements (white)



http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Iraq_Ethnic_lg.png

The second map shows the main divisions of Syria i.e. Alawite Arabs (green) of Syria, Sunni Arabs (yellow) of Syria, and the Kurds (khaki) of Syria. Again the white-yellow part shows the Syrian desert, which like the Iraqi deserts has some Sunni elements. As you can see the Sunni elements of Syria are mainly positioned across the Euphrates river.

Map of Syria Sunni Arabs (yellow), Kurds (khaki), Alawite Arabs (green), the Syrian desert with some Sunni elements (white)



<http://www.geocurrents.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Syria-Ethnicity-Summary-Map.png>

Speaking of deserts, I must also add the map of Jordan. Jordan is a predominantly Sunni Arab country, and deserts (orange) account for most of her territory. The Arab Peninsula (Saudi Arabia) is also a desert. The Southern part of Israel is also a desert (Negev), and obviously the Sinai Peninsula is a desert.

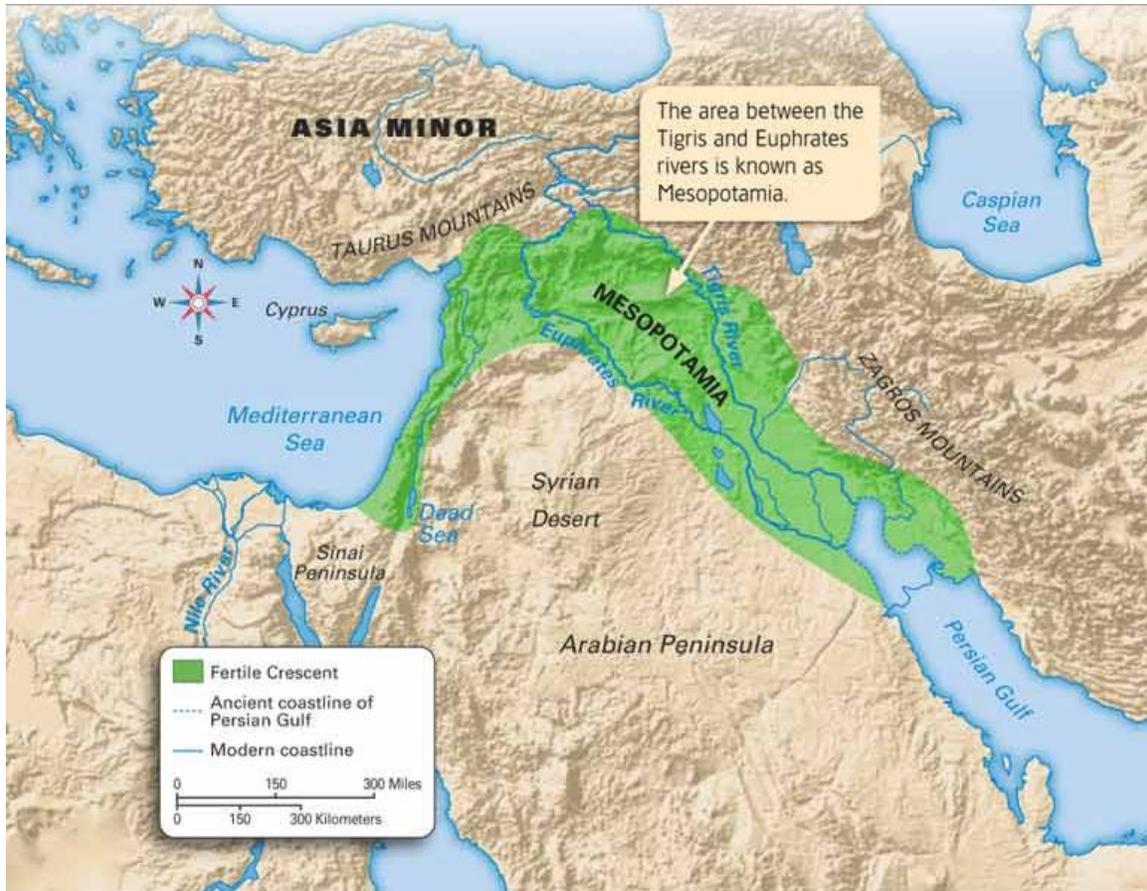
the construction of pipelines, or make these pipelines more vulnerable to sabotage.

Map of Deserts



http://images.nationalgeographic.com/wpf/media-live/photos/000/063/cache/map-world-desert_6364_600x450.jpg

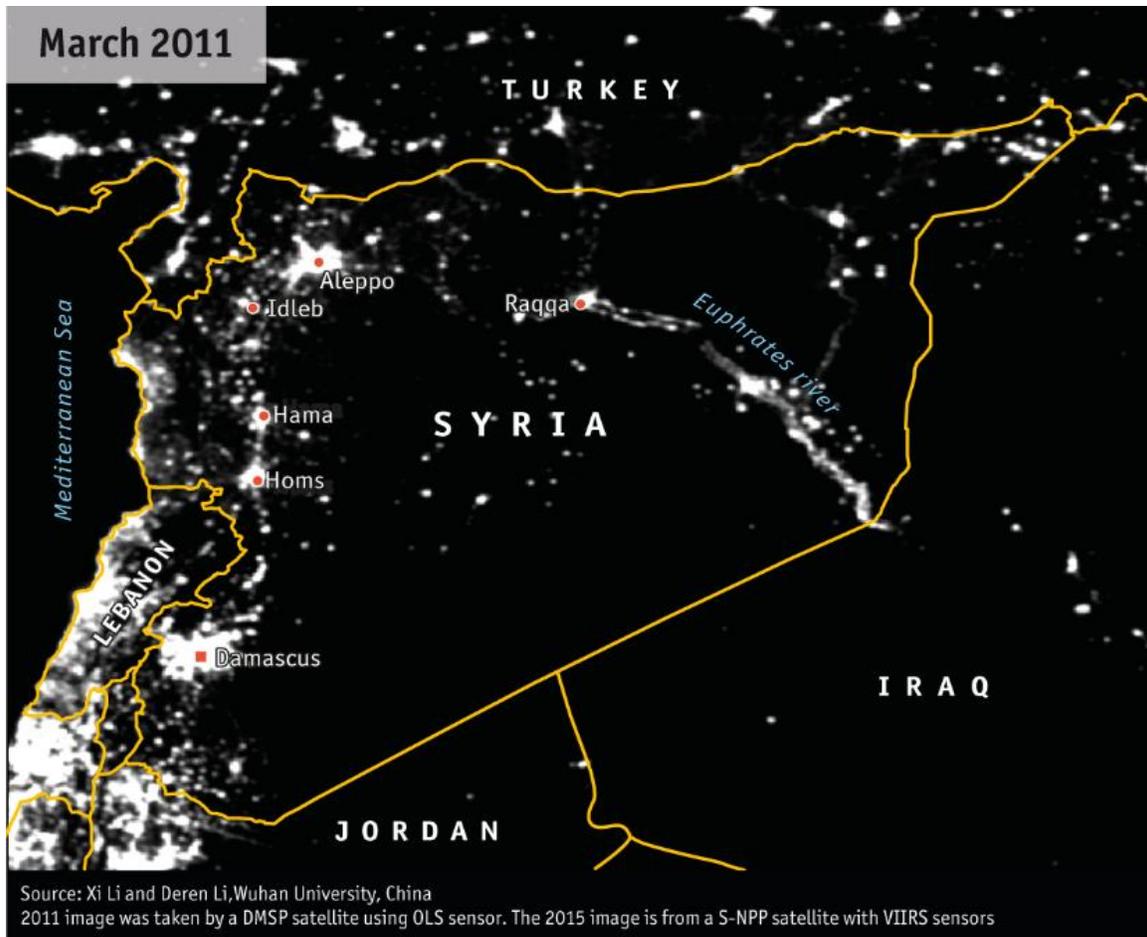
Map Mesopotamia



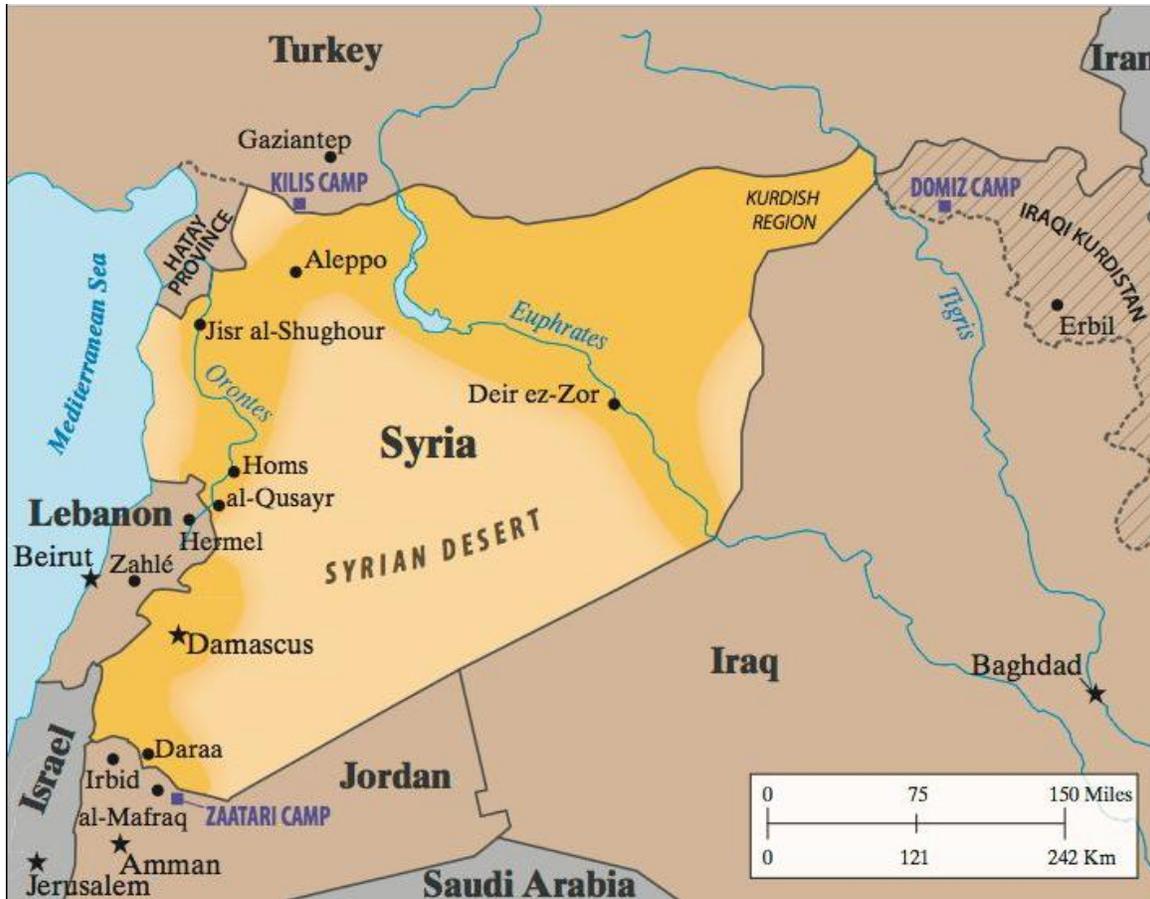
<http://www.slidego.com/res/palooza/world/MiddleEast-geography/B727973D.jpg>

At the following map you can see a night view of Syria before the war. You can see that most of the lights are at the Mediterranean coasts and across the Euphrates River.

Map Syria



Map The Syrian Desert



<http://www.nybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/syria-map-101013.png>

At the following map you can see the Iraqi desert (South-West Iraq) and the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan at the northern part of the country, and of course Mesopotamia.

Map Desert of Iraq



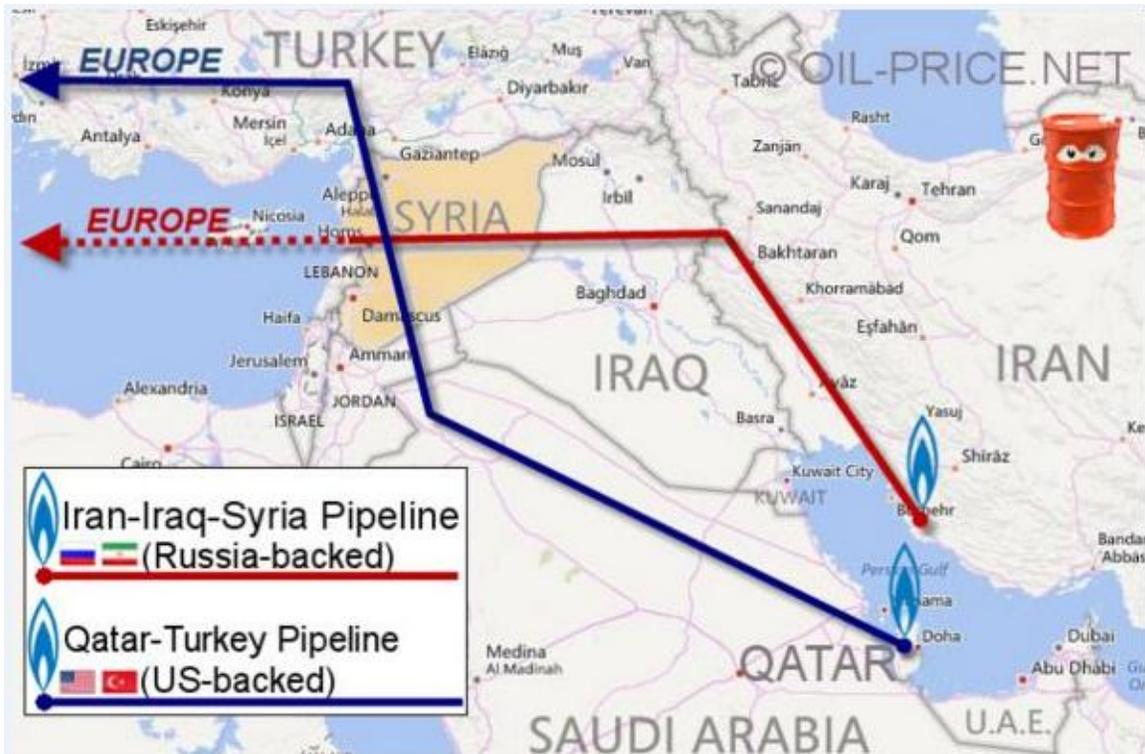
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/images/iraqart/map_people.gif

The Shia-Sunni Pipelines

All these maps are very important for the understanding of the oil and natural gas wars of the Middle East, but also for the internal conflict of Shia Iraq. Keep in mind that the war in Syria is very different from the war in Iraq. The war in Iraq happened because the Americans wanted to overturn Saddam Hussein, one of their bitter rivals, who had supported many terrorist attacks against them, in order to bring to power the Shia majority of Iraq, which was oppressed by Saddam Hussein. The Shias of Iraq saw the Americans as liberators. By overturning Saddam the Americans also strengthened the Kurds of Iraq, who are another American ally.

On the other hand, the war in Syria had nothing to do with the Americans, but with the wish of the Turks and the Arabs to construct the Arab-Turkish natural gas pipelines (Qatar-Turkey), through the Sunni parts of Syria, and in order to prevent Iran from reaching the Mediterranean Sea through Iraq and Syria. I say that because people forget that the Americans did not intervene in Syria. The rich in oil Iraq is very important for the Americans and the Chinese, while the poor in oil and gas Syria is not very important for them. But Syria is very important for the Arabs, the Iranians, the Turks and the Russians, because she can be used to export Iranian oil and gas to the Mediterranean Sea, or to export Arab oil and gas to Turkey and Europe.

Map Sunni VS Shia Pipelines



I have uploaded many posts about the Sunni-Shia pipeline war, and I do not want to further discuss the issue. Instead I want to write about the internal rivalry of Shia Iraq, and about how geography shapes this rivalry. As you can read at the following Anadolu article, many American analysts expect a conflict among the Shia Muslims of Iraq. Note that Anadolu is one of the main state-owned news agencies of Turkey. See Anadolu “US expert warns of conflict among Shia groups in Iraq”, April 2016.

As you can read at the Anadolu article, a very important Shia (Shiite) cleric of Iraq i.e. Muqtada al Sadr, is no longer supporting the Shia leadership of Iraq, and he wants Iraq to be governed by technocrats instead. Obviously technocrats will pay more attention to the economic fundamentals and not to religious factors i.e. who is a Sunni and who is a Shia Muslim. Al-Sadr comes from a very big Shia family of Iraq, and some members of his family

were even killed by the Sunni regime of Saddam Hussein. You can read many articles about the rivalry and the internal conflict of Shia Iraq. See for example Al Monitor “The collapse of Iraq's Shiite alliance”, April 2016.

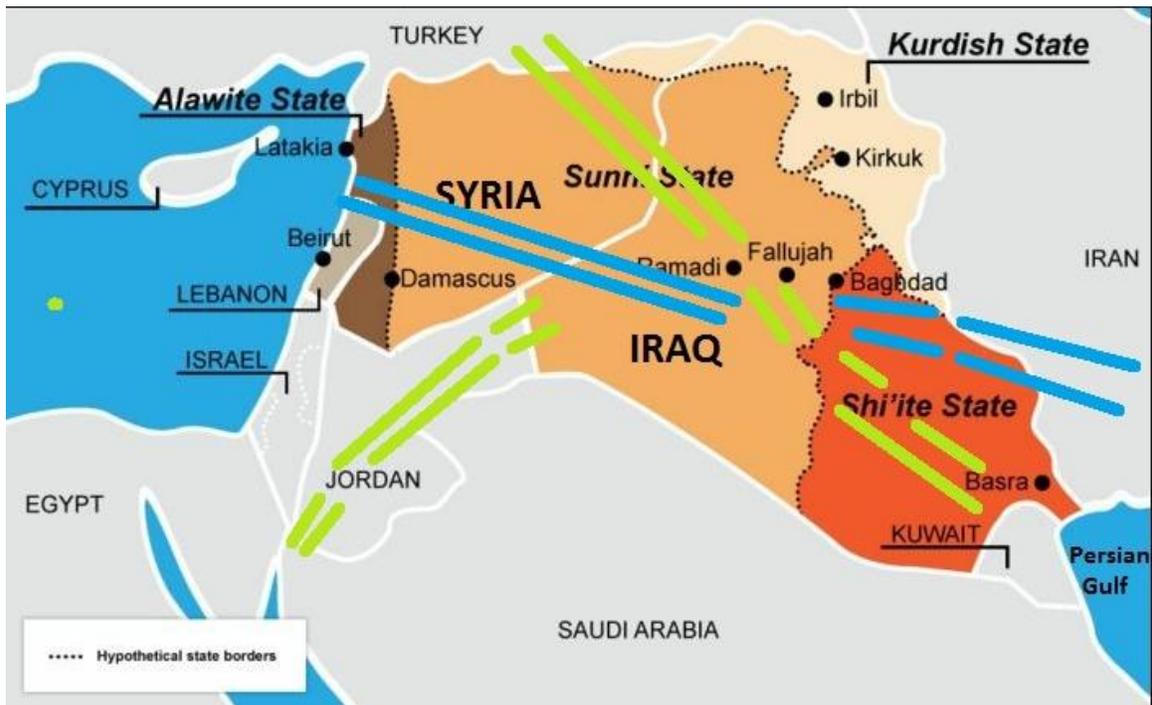
In the past, Sadr had been connected to Iran, but now he wants better relations with the Sunni Arabs of Iraq, with the Kurds of Iraq, and also with Turkey. See Al Monitor “Sadr Allies With Sunnis to Challenge Maliki”, January 2013.

Given that Sadr played a major role in the Sunni-Shia war of Iraq, it might sound strange to hear him calling for better relations with the Sunnis. Moreover, many of his supporters want Iran out of Iraq. Remember that Iran was traditionally supporting the Iraqi Shias and the Iraqi Kurds against Saddam Hussein, in order to destabilize Iraq, because Iraq and Saddam Hussein was one of Iran's main rivals.

What is important, and what you should remember, is not the name of Sadr, because tomorrow Sadr might hold different views. The important thing is how geography shapes the energy policy and options of Shia Iraq, and therefore the unity of Shia Iraq. There is a lot of discussion about the Shia and Sunni pipelines. The Syrian Arab Alawites are a version of Shia Islam, and if the Arab Alawites of Syria and the Arab Shias of Iraq are in power, and they emphasize their religion i.e. Shia Islam, and not their ethnicity i.e. Arabism, they would ally with Iran, and the Shia pipelines would go ahead i.e. Iran-Iraq-Syria, while the Sunni pipelines would not go ahead (Qatar-Turkey).

If on the other hand the Shia Arabs of Iraq, and the Alawite Arabs of Syria, emphasize their Arabism and not their religion, they will ally themselves with the Turks, the Saudis and the Qataris, and the Sunni Pipelines will go ahead (Qatar-Turkey), and not the Shia pipelines. There are also the Sunni-Shia pipelines i.e. Shia Iraq-Sunni Iraq-Sunni Syria-Turkey.

Map Sunni-Shiite Pipelines



http://cdn2.vox-cdn.com/assets/4396135/sunni-shia-kurd_state_crop.jpg

You can see that there are many combinations of Sunni pipelines, or Shia pipelines, or Sunni-Shia pipelines, and I have only included a few of them on the map. For example two Shia-Sunni pipeline that are already running are the Iran-Turkey pipeline, and the Azerbaijan-Turkey pipeline. Note that Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq and Bahrain are the only Muslim countries with Shiite majorities. Actually Turkey and Iran are talking about enhancing their Shia-

Sunni pipelines in order to send Iranian natural gas to Europe through Turkey.

Table Shia Muslims

Countries with More Than 100,000 Shia Muslims

	Estimated 2009 Shia Population	Approximate Percentage of Muslim Population that is Shia	Approximate Percentage of World Shia Population
 Iran	66 – 70 million	 90 – 95%	37 – 40%
Pakistan	17 – 26 million		10 – 15
India	16 – 24 million		9 – 14
 Iraq	19 -22 million	 65 – 70	11 – 12
Turkey	7 – 11 million		4 – 6
Yemen	8 – 10 million		~5
 Azerbaijan	5 – 7 million	 65 – 75	3 – 4
Afghanistan	3 – 4 million		~2
Syria	3 – 4 million		~2
Saudi Arabia	2 – 4 million		1 – 2
Nigeria	<4 million	<5	<2
Lebanon	1 – 2 million	45 – 55	<1
Tanzania	<2 million	<10	<1
Kuwait	500,000 – 700,000	20 – 25	<1
Germany	400,000 – 600,000	10 – 15	<1
 Bahrain	400,000 – 500,000	 65 – 75	<1
Tajikistan	~400,000	~7	<1
United Arab Emirates	300,000 – 400,000	~10	<1
United States	200,000 – 400,000	10 – 15	<1
Oman	100,000 – 300,000	5 – 10	<1
United Kingdom	100,000 – 300,000	10 – 15	<1
Bulgaria	~100,000	10 – 15	<1
Qatar	~100,000	~10	<1
World Total	154 – 200 million	10 – 13	100

Note: Countries with an estimated Shia population of less than 1% of the country's Muslim population are not listed. The figures for Shias are generally given in a range because of the limitations of the secondary-source data (see Methodology for Sunni-Shia Estimates). Figures may not sum to totals due to rounding.

<http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population/>

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