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978-0-521-88461-7 - Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance

Dina Rizk Khoury

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## Iraq in Wartime

When U.S.-led forces invaded Iraq in 2003, they occupied a country that had been at war for twenty-three years. Yet in their attempts to understand Iraqi society and history, few policy makers, analysts, and journalists took into account the profound impact Iraq's long engagement with war had on the Iraqis' everyday engagement with politics, with the business of managing their daily lives, and on their cultural imagination. Starting with the Iran-Iraq war, through the First Gulf War and sanctions, Dina Rizk Khoury traces the political, social, and cultural processes of the normalization of war in Iraq during the last twenty-three years of Ba'athist rule. Drawing on government documents and interviews, Khoury argues that war was a form of everyday bureaucratic governance and examines the Iraqi government's policies of creating consent, managing resistance and religious diversity, and shaping public culture. Khoury focuses on the men and families of those who fought and died during the Iran-Iraq and First Gulf wars. Coming on the tenth anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, this book tells a multilayered story of a society in which war has become the norm.

Dina Rizk Khoury is Associate Professor of History and International Affairs at The George Washington University. Since 2005, she has been writing on the contemporary history of Iraq, particularly on violence, sectarian politics, and war and memory. She is the author of *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge 1997).

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# Iraq in Wartime

*Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance*

DINA RIZK KHOURY

*The George Washington University, Washington, DC*



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*In Memory*

*of*

*Adel Rizk, whose remembrance of Nabatiyye nourished him  
through years in the desert, war, and debilitating illness*

*And for Iraqis*

*May memories of a place sustain them wherever they may be*

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The neutron bomb is highly intelligent.  
It distinguishes between  
An “I” and an “Identity.”

And now  
I remember trees:  
The date palm of our mosque in Basra, at the end of Basra  
a bird’s beak,  
a child’s secret,  
a summer feast.  
I remember the date palm.  
I touch it. I become it when it falls black  
without fronds,  
when a dam fell, hewn by lightning.  
And I remember the mighty mulberry  
when it rumbled, butchered with an ax ...  
to fill the stream with leaves  
and birds  
and angels  
and green blood.  
I remember when pomegranate blossoms covered the sidewalks.  
The students were leading the workers parade ...

The trees die  
pummeled.  
Dizzied,  
not standing, the trees die.

*from “America, America” by Saadi Youssef*

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## Acknowledgments

This book was born, more than six years ago, out of a lunch conversation in Foggy Bottom with my Cambridge University Press editor, Marigold Acland. I did not know at that time that I would, as I was writing the histories of Iraqis at war, embark on a journey that evoked my personal history. I am thankful for Marigold's patience as I am to Sarika Narula for seeing the book to production.

I would not have been able to write this book without the stories of Iraqi men who fought in the Iran-Iraq and First Gulf wars. I am grateful for their willingness to be interviewed and for their generosity in sharing their experiences. I have changed their names to protect their privacy. Many will only read this book when it is translated into Arabic. Although I have not reproduced the words of each one of them, their collective experience has shaped the book's narrative of war. I only hope that if, as Joan Didion says, all writers sell someone out, I have not done so in a manner that makes their stories unrecognizable to them.

A significant part of my research entailed stays in Amman and Damascus, where a large number of displaced Iraqis have settled. I was able to conduct research, make contacts, and altogether organize my life with the help of a number of individuals. Hala Fattah, a historian, friend, and facilitator for all researchers of things Iraqi who flocked to Amman after the U.S. invasion, provided me with entry into the community of Iraqi exiles and intellectuals. Geraldine Chatelard, then head of the French Institute of the Near East in Amman, answered my many questions about the displaced Iraqi community. Lucine Taminian, senior researcher at The American Academic Research Institute in Iraq's Jordan office, helped with contacts and with information based on her rich

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experience in conducting research in the oral history of Iraq. Sundus Shakir and her family made concrete to me the meaning of survival and resilience in the face of sanctions, war, and dispersal. Sundus provided me with contacts, fed me, and insisted, despite all evidence to the contrary, that she and her family could lead “normal” lives in Jordan. Awad Ali spent hours telling me his story, transcribing interviews, and educating me on the state of the first Iraqi refugees in Jordan. Ali Bader shared his experience and his insights into the generational politics of Iraq and introduced me to a vibrant community of artists and intellectuals of the nineties. Conversations with Awwad and Ali, together with Haider Saeed and Dhiaa Najm al-Asadi, all men who came of age in the late seventies and eighties, proved crucial for my understanding of the cultural politics of Iraq. Last but not least, my stay in Amman would not have been half as pleasurable without the hospitality and conversations provided by Aysar Akrawi and the late Adnan Habboo; Jenny and Mustafa Hamarneh, who sheltered me in their lovely Madaba home and whose friendship has been one of the constants in my life; and Nasri and Zeena Khoury, who found a space for me in their Amman home and who shielded me from family obligations.

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Despite the centrality of oral interviews to the story this book seeks to tell, it would not have been possible to write without the access to the unique archive of the Ba‘thist state available at the Iraq Memory Foundation, now housed in the Hoover Institution. I owe a debt to Peter Sluglett, who vouched for me when I first started my research in early 2007, when the archive was just becoming available to scholars outside the intelligence and human rights communities. I deeply appreciate his friendship and unfailing support over the years. I am grateful

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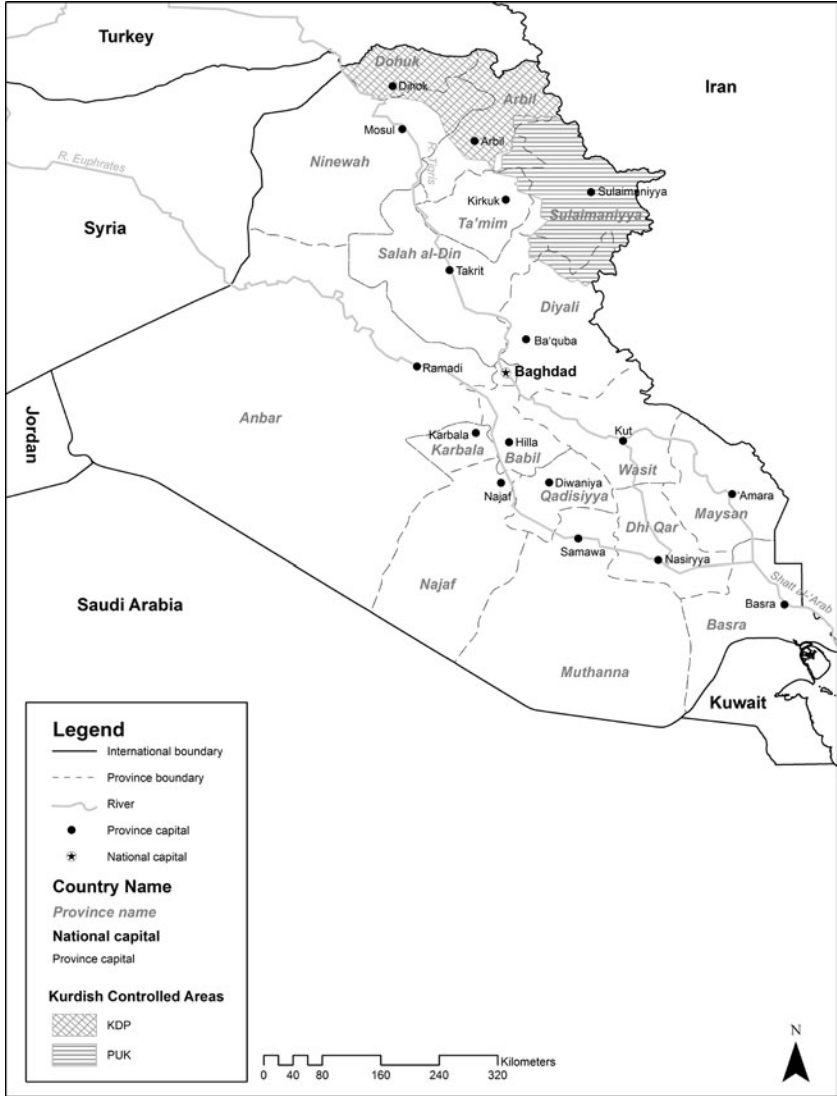
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## Note on Translations and Transliteration

This book is meant as much for a general reader as it is for a specialist. I have avoided the use of Arabic terms as much as possible and included a translation in the text whenever an Arabic term is mentioned.

I have generally followed the transliteration guidelines of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* but have not used diacritical and long vowels marks. I have also avoided adding the symbols of “alif” and “ayn” when these appear at the beginning of personal and place names unless it is necessary. This will mean that readers of the English text who know Arabic might find it difficult to translate the English back to Arabic. I apologize for the inconvenience, but my choice will make it easier for non-Arabic speakers to follow the text.



MAP I. Iraq: Provinces and principal cities. Designed by Ryan Sloan.



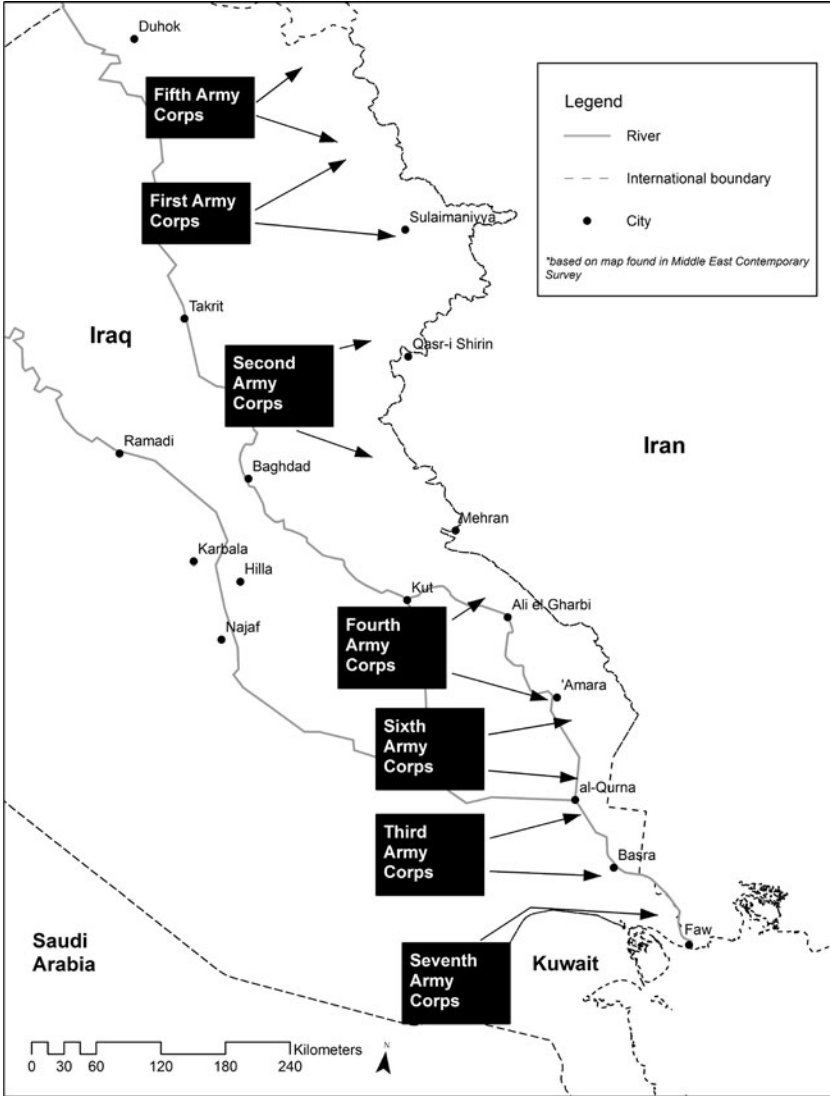
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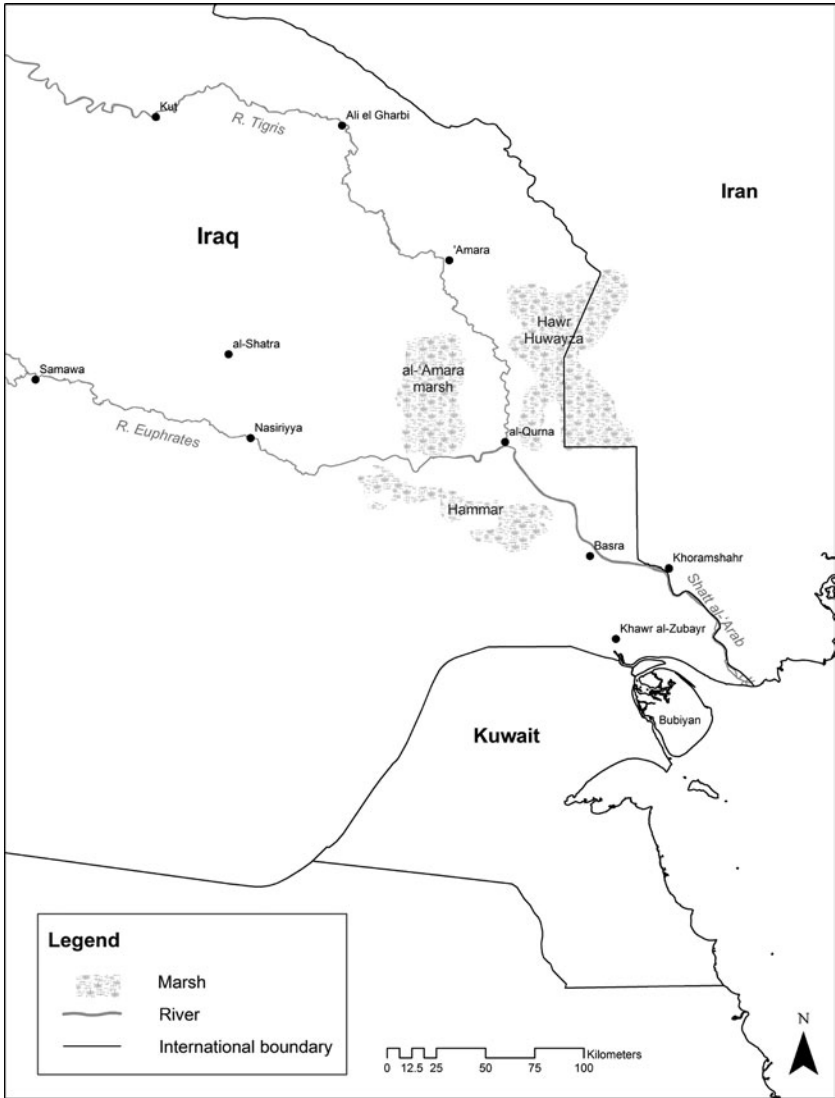
MAP 2. Distribution of Army Corps during Iran-Iraq war. Adapted by Ryan Sloan from Middle East Contemporary Survey.

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MAP 3. Iraq: Principal southern towns and marshes. Designed by Ryan Sloan.