Over the past forty years the people of Iraq have dealt with numerous problems throughout their country. Iraq continues to struggle with problems related to the government, economy, and social issues. Prior to the American invasion in April 2003, Saddam Hussein ruled over different religious and ethnic groups with an iron fist after he seized presidential power in a coup d’etat in 1979 (www.npr.org/husseinbiography). Although the United States’ War in Iraq technically ended on August 31, 2010, the country continues to deal with issues directly related to the war and the preexisting problems in the country (www.thinkprogress.org). Despite complicated and long standing political, economic, and social problems, Iraq possesses potential to become one of the most economically productive democracies in the Middle East.

The cycle of revolution and dictatorship plagued the government of Iraq for many years. The religious and ethnic divisions within Iraq fueled this cycle of revolution and dictatorship. The country’s population is divided into two major religious groups (www.cia-worldfactbook.com). About sixty percent of the country is Shia Muslims and about forty percent of the country is Sunni Muslims (www.cia-worldfactbook.com). These two groups have fought for control of Iraq since the country was first formed in 1932. There is an ancient rivalry between these two religious groups, but the rivalry was also impacted by the British attempts to divide and conquer in the early 1900s (www.abcclio.com/Iraqhistory). As a Sunni Muslim Saddam Hussein rose to power in 1979, putting down all Shia attempts at rebellion with harsh force. Once Saddam Hussein was removed from power by the American invasion in 2003, the Shia Muslims sought out revenge against the Sunni Muslims for roughly 25 years of massacres and intense political oppression. During the course of the Iraqi War Shia and Sunni Muslims basically fought a Civil War with both sides attempting to attack American soldiers. Sunni and Shia Muslims wanted American forces out of Iraq in order to carry out massacres, suicide bombings, and other types of attacks against each other (www.time.com/wariniraq). Currently the Shia Muslims have won the most recent democratic elections, but they have made an effort to include the Sunni minority in the new government. Random acts of terrorism by Sunni and Shia Muslims continue to present challenges to the newly formed fragile government (BBCcountryprofile.com). Sunni and Shia Muslims need to find away to move away from their violent history in order to get out of the cycle of revolutions, dictatorships, and civil war.

A peaceful combined effort by Sunnis and Shias should also help produce a government that could oversee a stable economy. Iraq possesses large reserves of oil, but the years of dictatorship and political instability prevented any widespread economic development. Saddam Hussein and his friends kept most of the wealth generated by the oil in Iraq. Currently Iraq’s gross domestic product is around $138.8 billion dollars, which is 62nd in the world (www.cia-worldfactbook.com/iraq). Most of this money comes from oil production. However the per capita income (the average household income) is only $4,200 dollars per year, which is 161st in the world (www.cia-worldfactbook.com/iraq). This major difference between the overall gross domestic product and the average per capita income tells us that there is still a large gap in wealth in Iraq. Many people at the top make a lot of money from oil production, but it has not yet helped produce job opportunities for the rest of the country. The political stability and the newly formed democratic government should help encourage economic development over the next few years. Economic development should lead to more jobs and hopefully an increase in the average per capita income for the families of Iraq.