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# AREA HANDBOOK
# for
# IRAQ

MARCH 1969

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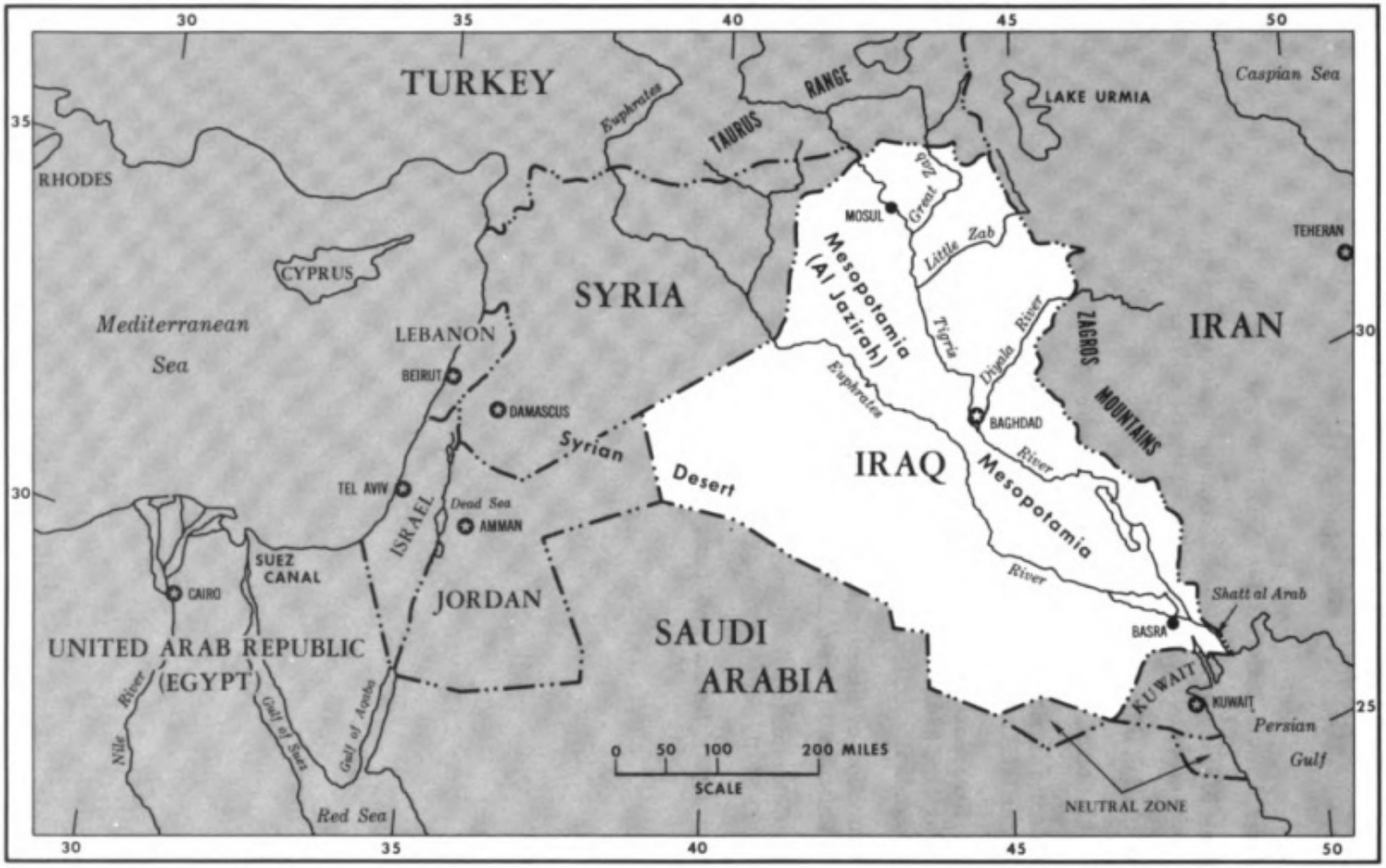


***Figure 1. Position of Iraq in Southwest Asia.***

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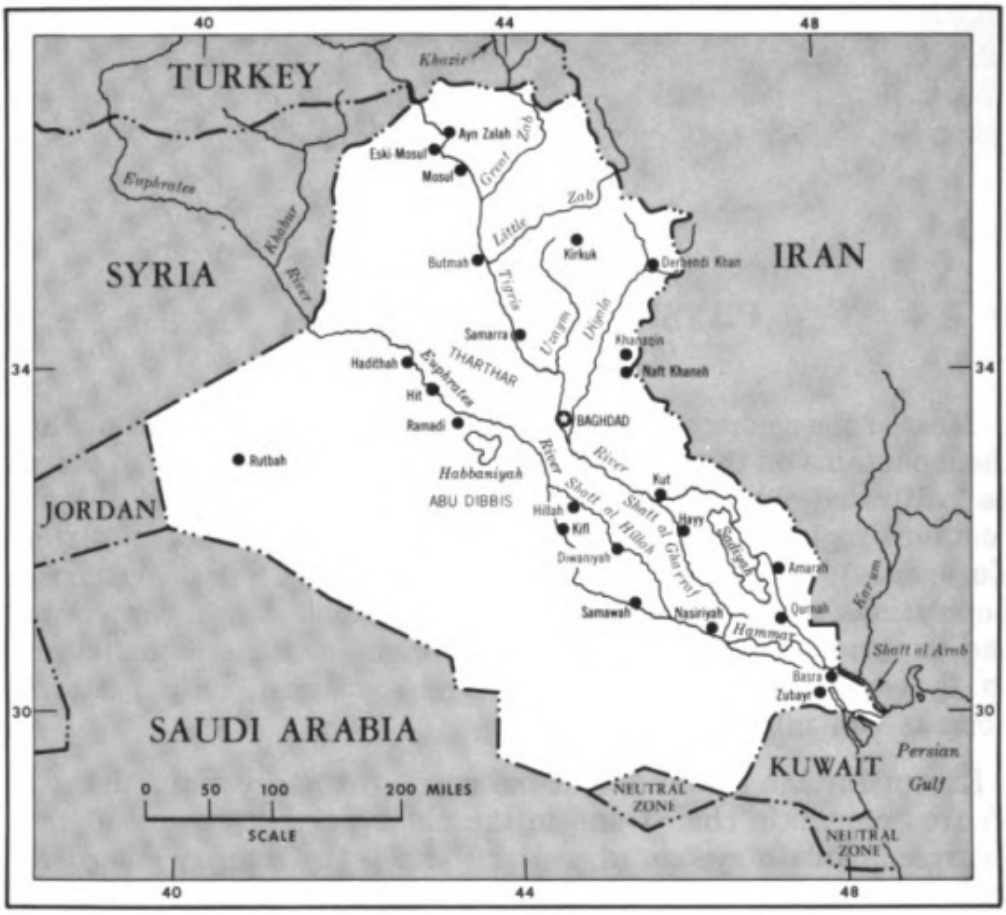


*Figure 2. The Terrain and River System of Iraq.*

The country's only access to the sea is through the Persian Gulf, on which is its 30-mile coastline. The Shatt al Arab (River of the Arabs), formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers about 40 miles above Basra, flows to the Gulf and permits access to the port of that city. The location of the country's single outlet to the sea and the difficulties of access over land across deserts from the west tended, before the development of the Suez Canal in the mid-nineteenth century, to orient Iraq to the east, especially to India and to what was then Persia. Because of the construction of the Suez Canal, the development of port facilities at Basra and, later, the rise of air travel, Iraq's direct economic and political relations with the West grew in importance. Baghdad has become one of the major links in air routes from Europe and North Africa to the Middle East and to southern and eastern Asia.

The lower Shatt al Arab flows along the border between Iran and southeasternmost Iraq, but the river is entirely within Iraq. Unlike most international river boundaries, this one is not drawn to follow the lowest points in the river channel (thalweg line) but



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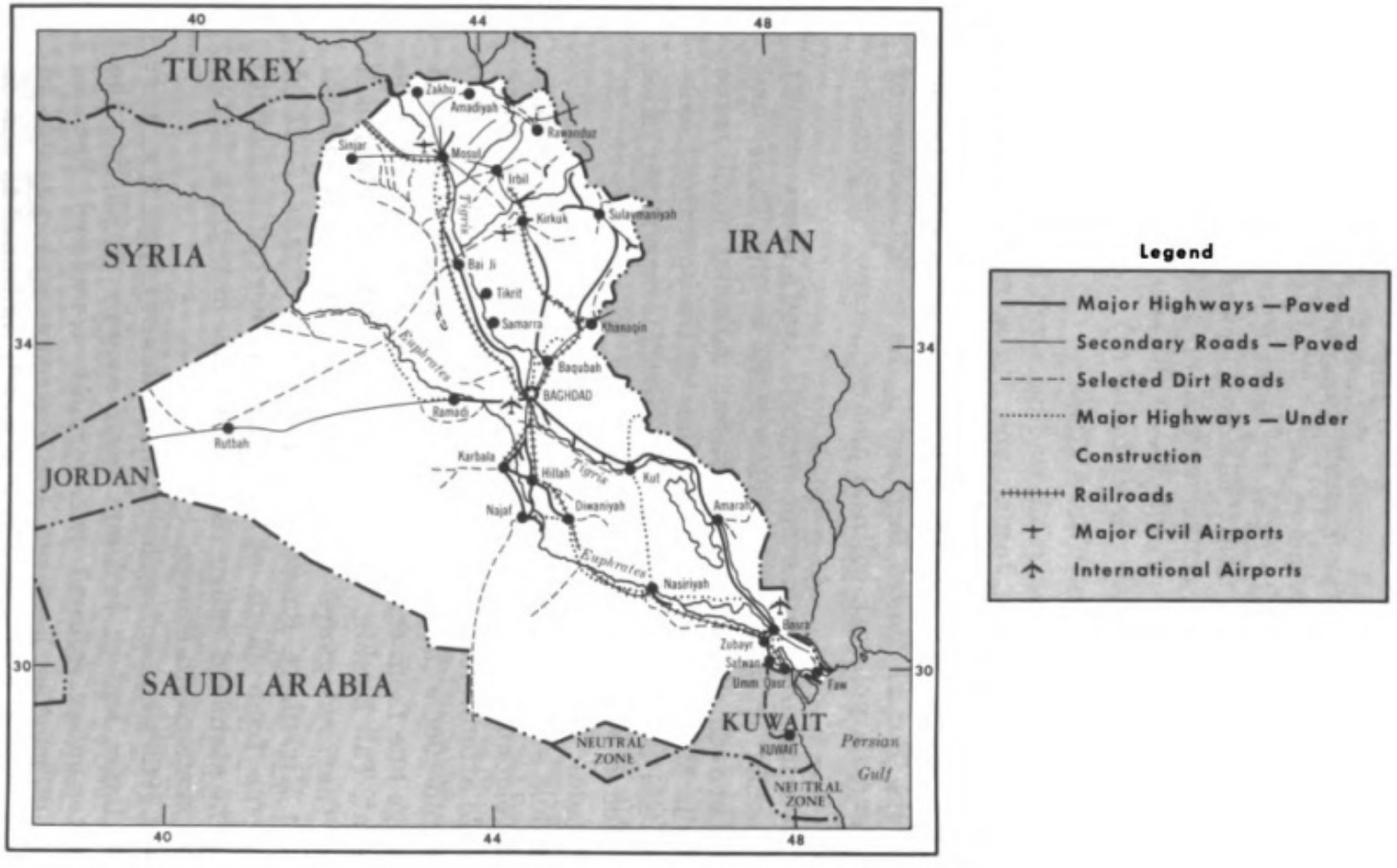


***Figure 3. The Transportation System of Iraq.***

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is directly linked via Syrian

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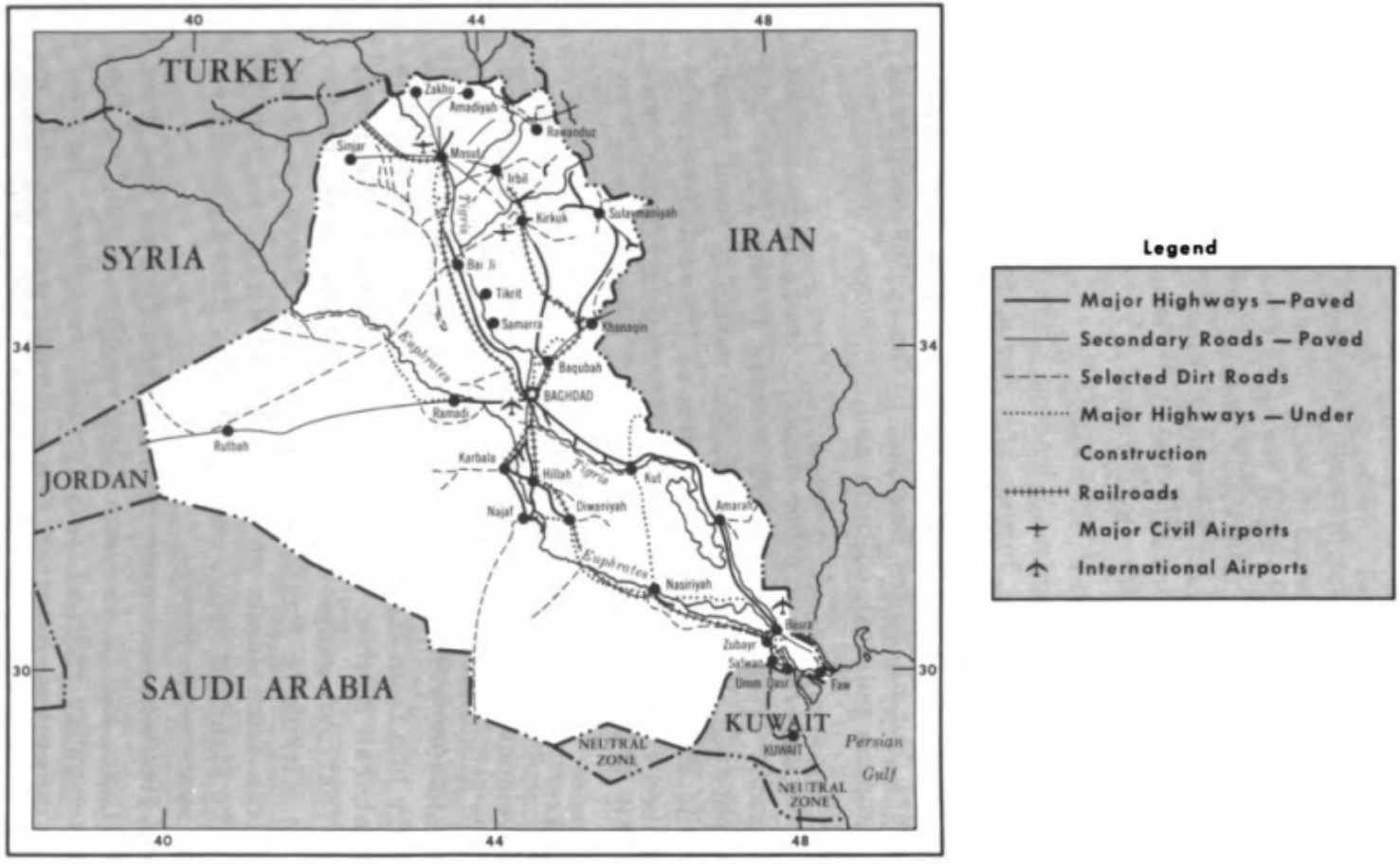


*Figure 3. The Transportation System of Iraq.*

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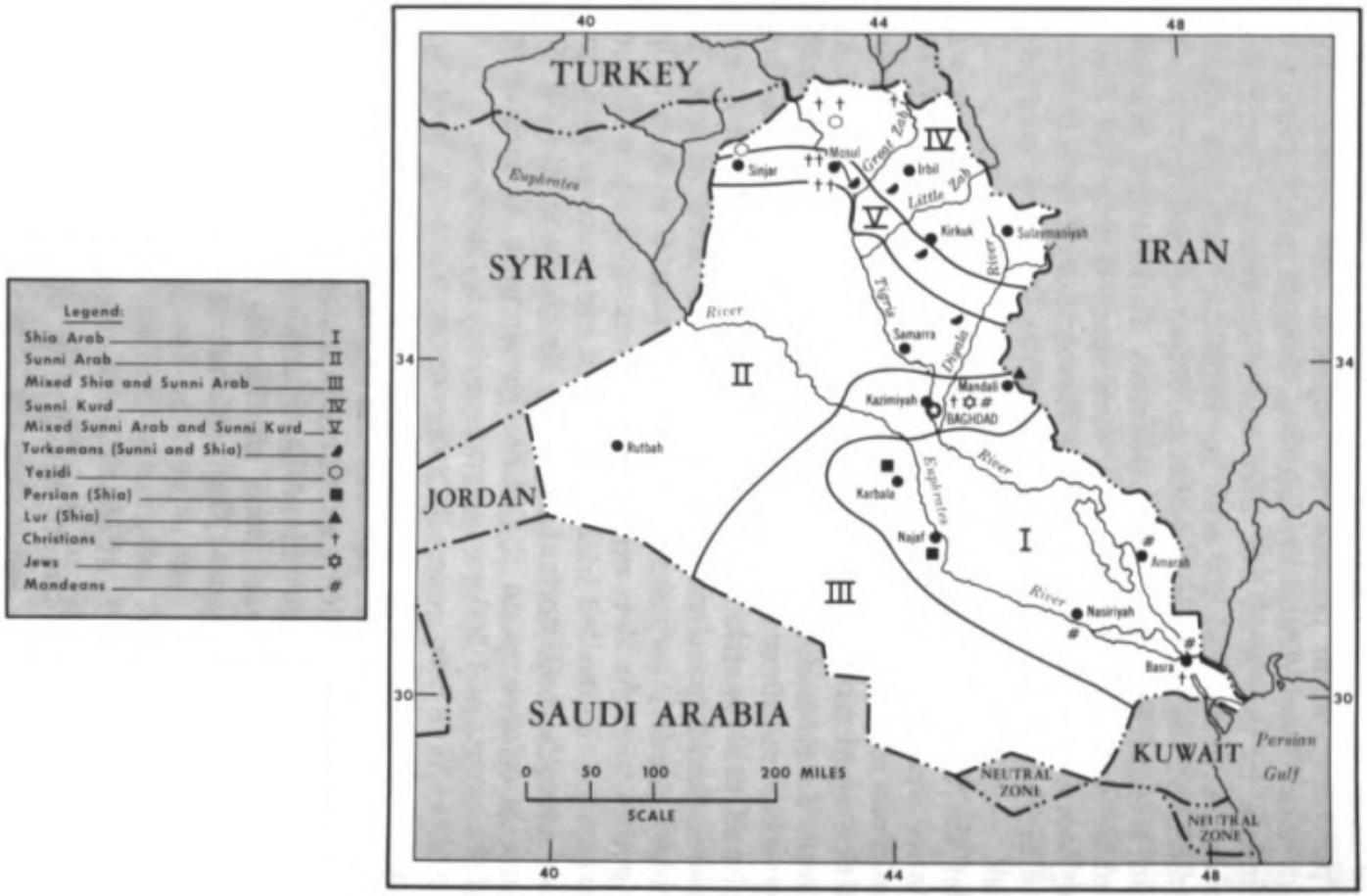


*Figure 4. Geographic Distribution of Ethnic and Religious Communities in Iraq.*

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