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War Crimes and Atrocities of Iraq

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## Thesis

Past war crimes and atrocities were significantly greater in Iraq since the modern day era after the Vietnam War.

## Outline

1. Iraqi Historical Background
  - A. Religion
  - B. Government
  - C. Culture
  - D. Economy
  
2. Iran-Iraq War
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ABSTRACT

There were many war crimes and atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein, but history shows they were significantly fewer than in previous conflicts. This paper will give a brief history of Iraq's government, religion, culture, and economics which led up to the significant loss of life the military forces and civilians suffered during his reign of power.

In the Iran-Iraq War of 1980, war crimes and atrocities were committed. Over those eight years, history captured many horrible moments of people suffering and the terrible ways combatants and noncombatants lost their lives. Saddam Hussein ruled for more than twenty years and this research paper will point out specific atrocities his government was responsible for against fellow Iraqi's that challenged his reign of power.

According to Beverly Milton-Edwards during World War I, Turkey sided with Germany to conquer and occupy Iraq. The British government sent troops to protect its interests in Iraq by securing the city of Basra. While Britain was defending their interests in Basra, the Iraqi leader, Lawrence of Arabia, marched into the city and helped the British defeat the Turks. After securing a victory, the Arabs expected the British government to respect their claims of independence. When Lawrence went to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, he discovered that Britain was not in support of their newly found independence. In a private deal with France, Britain had previously divided Iraq between them. In 1920, the newly created state of Iraq was formed from three former Ottoman provinces of Iraq previously known as: Basra, Bagdad, and Mosul. Britain was granted control of these provinces. The Iraqis created disturbances against the British government, but were defeated by British troops each time (Milton-Edwards, 2003, *Conquerors or liberators*, para. 5.).

In 1921, at the Cairo Conference, there were constant propositions to honor Iraq's Sunni's minorities over Shia's majority. These proposals positioned the Sunni minorities into administrative positions. The British government had discovered oil in certain regions of Iraq and was determined to hold on to those areas of interest. Then in 1933, Iraq achieved independence and became members of the League of Nations. This, however, did not create freedom from British control. It was the Anglo-Iraqi treaty which allowed the British to

maintain military control and guaranteed their oil supplies. Britain appeared to surrender control, although, they secretly maintained the power they were accustomed to. In 1959, after decades of British rule, the Iraqi troops killed the Royal Family and the Iraqi military took power, thus ending British democracy. In 1968, the Ba'ath Party formed an alliance with the military to form one power. Also in 1968, Britain announced its intention to withdraw from Iraq, which took place in 1971 (Joyner, 1990, Intention to withdraw from Iraq). Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, a member of the Ba'ath Party, was the Iraqi President, but the man pulling the strings was still Saddam Hussein.

Over the next eleven years, Saddam was fashioning the Ba'ath Party to model his way of thinking, all the while anticipating his plan for domination over the country. In 1979, Saddam Hussein took control of the Iraqi government managing every facet of Iraqi life and any hint of democracy had vanished. Some of the Iraqi people had been enticed by the prospect of wealth and the remainder were coerced into yielding to his absolute power. This type of Iraqi government lasted for twenty-four years until he was overthrown by the United States in 2003 (Milton-Edwards, 2003, Storing up trouble, para. 1.).

Iraq's primary religion is Muslim; it is made up of 60% Shia and 40% Sunni. It is a nation in agony from considerable religious issues. Iraq is a perfect example of how religion creates division among united people, which promotes violence and leads to the collapse of society. Saddam Hussein aggressively used religion to promote his political agenda. During the Iran-Iraq War, the political party went as far as making public appearances at religious ceremonies. Saddam Hussein and his party also gave huge monetary support to reconstruct mosques throughout Iraq. Religious groups committed acts against each other because of their differences of opinion regarding religious beliefs. This division created violence throughout Iraq

(The web site for religion and religious violence in Iraq, 2007).

Iraqi's culture is very unique. Based on personal experiences of having been exposed to the culture of Iraq, the citizens are very generous, loyal, and polite to their friends. Iraqi people love to touch each other and stand close to one another when they are talking. People of the same sex will often hold hands while talking or walking. They even kiss when greeting each other, but public affection between people of the opposite sex is discouraged. Conversations are highly emotional and full of gestures. This culture is thought to be the first advanced civilization on earth. Family is the most important social unit in Iraq and family loyalty is one of the most important values. Iraqi weddings are the most important festivals, aside from the Islamic holy days in Iraqi life.

Iraqi's primary source of revenue is oil production. It claims the world's second largest reserve in the world. 95% of Iraq's export is crude oil which grosses approximately \$12.6 billion a year in revenue. Iraq's primary imports are "food, motor vehicles, spare parts, iron, steel, and medicines." (Sanford, J., 2003, Petroleum, para. 1). There imports cost about \$4 billion a year; the major suppliers are France, Australia, China, Italy, and Vietnam.

The Iran-Iraq War was a costly and devastating war for both countries. The conflict lasted for eight years until both sides agreed to end the war. In July 1988, Resolution 598 from the United Nations Security Council was put into place and both countries terminated their conflict. The war ended a month later and both sides were terribly damaged. Historians say that Iran claims to have lost approximately 200,000 civilians during the eight year conflict, but the Iraq government stated it was four times that many. With the wounded and captured soldiers, the casualty total rose to over two million. According to Jonathan C. Randal, chemical weapons were wide spread during this

period in history. It was stated that the Iraqi government committed war crimes by killing over 750,000 Iranian Soldiers and over 200,000 of their Soldiers by using these weapons of mass destruction (Randal, J., 2007).

On many occasions, it has been proven that Saddam Hussein would use extreme measures to maintain control of his country, even if he committed human right violations to achieve his goals. History is unable to capture the many atrocities that this dictator committed during his reign of power. Here are some of the many atrocities he committed. In 1982, during the Dujail Massacre, 148 Shitte residents were slaughtered because a Shitte group attempted to kill Hussein while driving through the city. In 1983, The Barzani Clan Abductions resulted in 8,000 civilians were abducted and later found in mass grave sites in southern Iraq; hundreds of the corpses were women and children. From 1986 to 1989, 180,000 Iraqi men, women, and children from the north were killed by chemical weapons. Saddam Hussein targeted the Kurds and Shias. He had 2,000 people killed a day, causing the Kurds to flee to the mountains of Iran and Turkey. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis died in the process (Head, T. 2007. The war crimes of Saddam Hussein, para. 10).

It is unlikely that history will ever be able to comprehend all the human rights violations Saddam Hussein committed but there's one thing for certain, he was not afraid of outside governments or the people of his own country threatening his power. His leadership style made him one of the most ruthless dictators of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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