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SADDAM HUSSEIN
PORTRAIT OF AN ARAB LEADER



A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

RAY T. BRADLEY, MAJ. USAF
B.A., Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, 1977

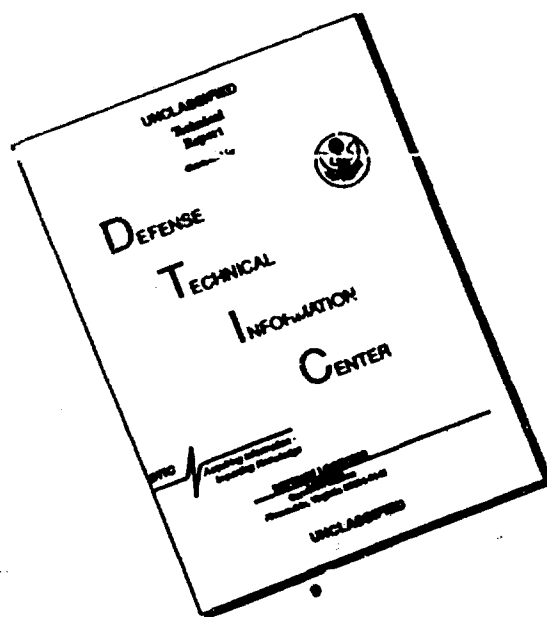
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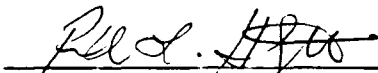
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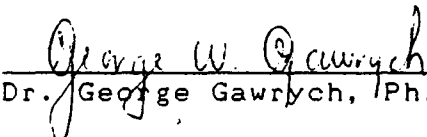
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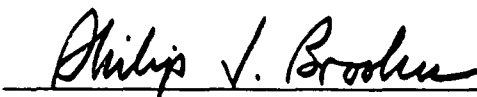
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ABSTRACT

SADDAM HUSSEIN: PORTRAIT OF AN ARAB LEADER by MAJ Ray T. Bradley, USAF, 95 pages.

This study examines how Saddam Hussein's past has shaped his political outlook and how he has used power to make that outlook a reality. His past is reviewed in terms of Iraq's social environment during his youth and his early political career to 1963, the date of the first Baathist Revolution.

A major portion of this thesis is devoted to Saddam's use of power in three areas: shaping national will, political power, and military power. Since it is not the author's intent to provide exhaustive coverage of Saddam's political life, only two or three examples will be discussed in each area.

Iraq's history of political violence and Western interference helped mold Saddam into the ruthless leader he is today. By investigating his use of power, certain character traits become apparent. He views the world in simple terms, believes violence is the proper response to most situations, and has aggressive regional goals.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

With the recent Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the world's attention focused on Saddam Hussein. Interestingly, this attention is not on Iraq as much as on Saddam himself. This is as it should be. The present conflict is not a regional crisis, but a clash between world powers and a charismatic ruler who is determined to dominate the region.

This being the case, it is important that Saddam be examined to determine his impact on Iraq and how he relates to Middle East affairs. It is also important to see how Saddam Hussein's past shaped his political outlook and how he used power to make that outlook a reality. The purpose of this thesis is to provide an accurate and balanced analysis of Saddam Hussein as an Arab leader. By gaining an appreciation of his background, priorities, and goals, we can better understand his current actions and anticipate his future adventures.

Unless the current Gulf crisis sweeps Saddam from power, or his military forces are eliminated thus reducing his influence in the region, the Western nations

will be forced to deal with him in the future. A clear understanding of his views and motives are crucial in anticipating and effectively countering his actions. If he is removed from the scene, this thesis could provide an analysis of how leaders of this ilk arise, and how they might exercise power. Another Arab leader like Saddam may arise in the future. As Saddam was influenced by Nasser, this future leader may use Nasser and Saddam as his models. This study will provide insights on how radical Arab leaders might view their role in the Middle East.

In examining events in Saddam's life, there will obviously be some speculation, rather than hard fact, about how these events influenced his life. In the area of personal background, some critical events are not recorded in Western sources, thus judgments must be made without all the facts. Additionally, one must be careful using a Western mind to interpret the influence culture has on an Arab mind.

Upon examining Saddam's early life, it becomes evident that British colonialism, British post-colonial activities in Iraq, and the partitioning of Palestine have influenced his view of the West. Britain's attempts to manage Iraqi affairs from 1920 to 1958 were viewed by the Iraqi politicians and intelligentsia as a barrier to independence.¹ The United Nations' partitioning of Palestine to provide a Jewish homeland further reinforced the Arab

perception of Western interference in Middle East affairs.² Thus, recent history, interpreted from an Arab viewpoint, provides Saddam with justification for developing an anti-Western bias.

Another influence that shaped Saddam's political outlook is the constant thread of political violence in Iraq. Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of the British Mandate, rarely has there been a peaceful change in Iraq's government; violent overthrow is the norm. Twenty-two coups, coups attempts, or overthrows have occurred since 1920.³

In such a volatile political environment, how has Saddam managed to stay in power since 1979? This thesis will consider three elements of power he used to maintain his position: national will, political power, and military power.

In his use of national will, Saddam created a personality cult centered around his image. He portrays himself as a fighter of conspiracies. His speeches are full of references to various conspiracies against the Iraqi people.⁴ In these references, he shows himself as the leader in the fight to protect Iraq from these threats.

Saddam also projects the image of heir to the ancient Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar.⁵ With this, he tries to instill a sense of history into an ethnically divided nation. Primarily, he wants Iraqis to identify with

the glorious years of the Babylonian Empire, a time when the Mesopotamia and its king ruled the known world.

In his attempt to expand his influence throughout the Middle East, Saddam assumed the mantle of Nasser as the leader of pan-Arabism.⁶ He attempted to create an image as the sole leader who can unite the Arab people and rid the region of the artificial boundaries imposed by Western powers.

In addition to using national will, Saddam has also used political power to maintain his position as leader of Iraq. Since this element of power is a broad topic, this thesis will limit itself to his use of the secret police, the armed forces, and the Arab Cooperation Council.

During the formative years of the Arab Baath Socialist Party (ABSP), Saddam was instrumental in creating the internal security apparatus.⁷ This not only established a power base for the ABSP, but built a power base for Saddam as well. Later, he would use the secret police to eliminate all internal threats to his regime.

The armed forces are included in the discussion of political power because of Saddam's measures to prevent military coups. The armed forces have played a major role in the majority of Iraq's coups.⁸ In order to ensure his regime is not likewise threatened, he politicized the military.⁹ Most non-ABSP officers were purged and decisions were often based on party politics rather than

military necessity. This political influence weakened the military's combat effectiveness but helped ensure its loyalty to Saddam.¹⁰

Another aspect of Saddam's use of political power is his participation in the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) formed in 1988. He quickly gained control of the council and became its strongest actor in regard to military power.¹¹ It is apparent that he attempted to use the ACC to expand his influence throughout the Middle East.

Lastly, the author will explore Saddam's use of military power against the Kurdish rebellion and against Iran. The suppression of the Kurds will show how he used this power against internal dissent. Conversely, the Iran-Iraq War will display his use of military power against an external threat. These two examples will demonstrate his employment of military force in significantly different scenarios.

Whether Saddam survives the current crisis or not, the United States will still face the need to deal with radical Arab leaders. Regardless of the outcome of the Gulf crisis, the fundamental issues dividing the Middle East will probably not be resolved. Western powers will still consider the Gulf region a vital interest, ensuring their continued involvement in its affairs. Additionally, the Arab-Israeli conflict will continue to be a source of ethnic and religious strife. With these major issues remaining, other radical leaders will surely arise in the future. By examining

Saddam's background and his use of power, the United States will better understand what drives these radical leaders and how they might operate politically.

ENDNOTES

¹Stephen H. Longrigg and Frank Stoakes, Iraq (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1958), 83.

²Palestine: A Study of Jewish, Arab, and British Policies, Vol I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), 475.

³David Lamb, The Arabs (New York: Random House, 1987), 285.

⁴"Saddam Delivers Revolution Anniversary Speech," Baghdad Voice of the Masses (16 July 85), sec. E, p. 1.

⁵Paul Lewis, "Ancient King's Instructions to Iraq: Fix My Palace," New York Times, 19 April 89, sec. A, pp. 4-5.

⁶"Saddam Delivers...Speech," E2.

⁷Samir al-Khalil, Republic of Fear (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 12.

⁸Ibid, 22.

⁹Ibid. 25.

¹⁰Anthony Cordesman, "Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War: The First Round," Armed Forces Journal International, (April 1982): 40, 42.

¹¹Yohanon Ramati, "Iraq and Arab Security," Global Affairs V. no. 1 (Winter 1990): 122.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this chapter is to help the reader understand Saddam by providing basic information concerning Iraq's geography, demography, and history. Saddam's power is not exercised in a vacuum, and these three factors must be understood to correctly evaluate his past actions. The chapter's contents will be limited to facts that pertain specifically to this thesis, and is not intended to be a comprehensive coverage of Iraq.

To properly examine Saddam's methods and motives, one must be familiar with the nation of Iraq. Its history as well as the composition of Iraqi society play a key role in his decisionmaking. Does twentieth century Iraqi history explain Saddam's actions in the Middle East? Do the Kurds or the Shiites in Iraq pose a domestic threat which justifies his policy of suppression? If they do, has he reacted reasonably? These questions cannot be answered without an adequate understanding of Iraq as a nation.

Geography

Like most nations in the world, the geography of Iraq plays an important role in the social and political life of the country. Iraq, a country of 438,317 square kilometers, is bordered by Turkey, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria.¹ (See Figure 1). Its territory is made up of mostly alluvial plain and desert with mountains in the northeast and marshes in the southeast near Kuwait. The only other prominent geographic features are the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers which originate in Turkey and flow southeast to the Persian Gulf. (See Figure 2).

Iraq's historic name, Mesopotamia, means "land between the rivers."² This is an appropriate name since much of Iraq's population lives along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. These rivers merge about 100 miles before their waters pour into the Persian Gulf. This confluence, called the Shatt al-Arab, has been the source of continual disputes between Iraq and Iran, and played a major role in the Iran-Iraq War. (See Figure 2).

The border along the Shatt al-Arab was created under British auspices. In 1937 it was determined that the Iraqi border would be on the east bank of the river which placed the waterway entirely in Iraqi territory. The Iranians contended the border should be at the river's midpoint to give equal access to each country. The issue smoldered until 1969 when Iraq refused Iran access to the

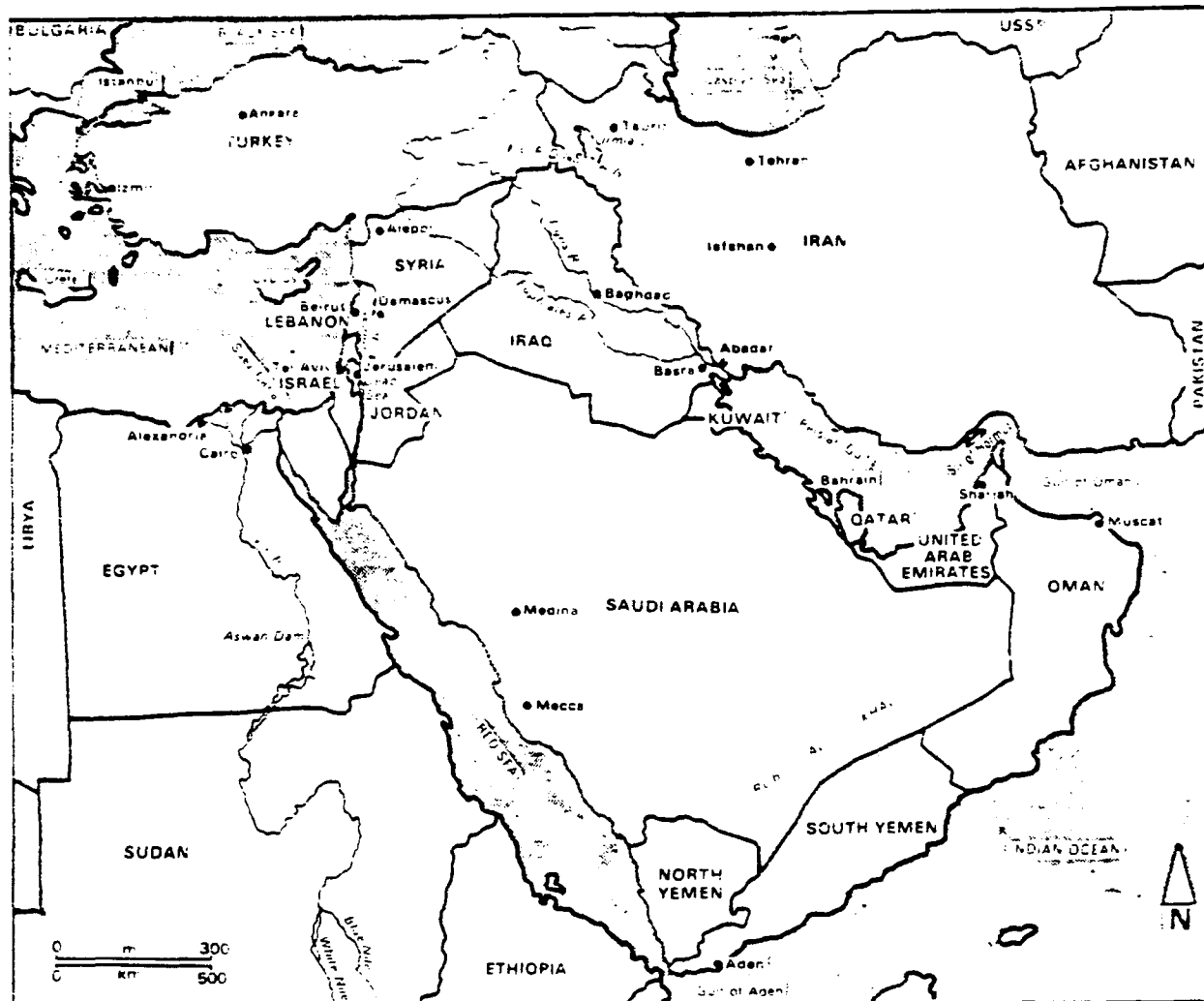


Figure 1.--The Middle East. Maps on File (New York: Martin Greenwald Associates, Inc, 1981). 0.008.

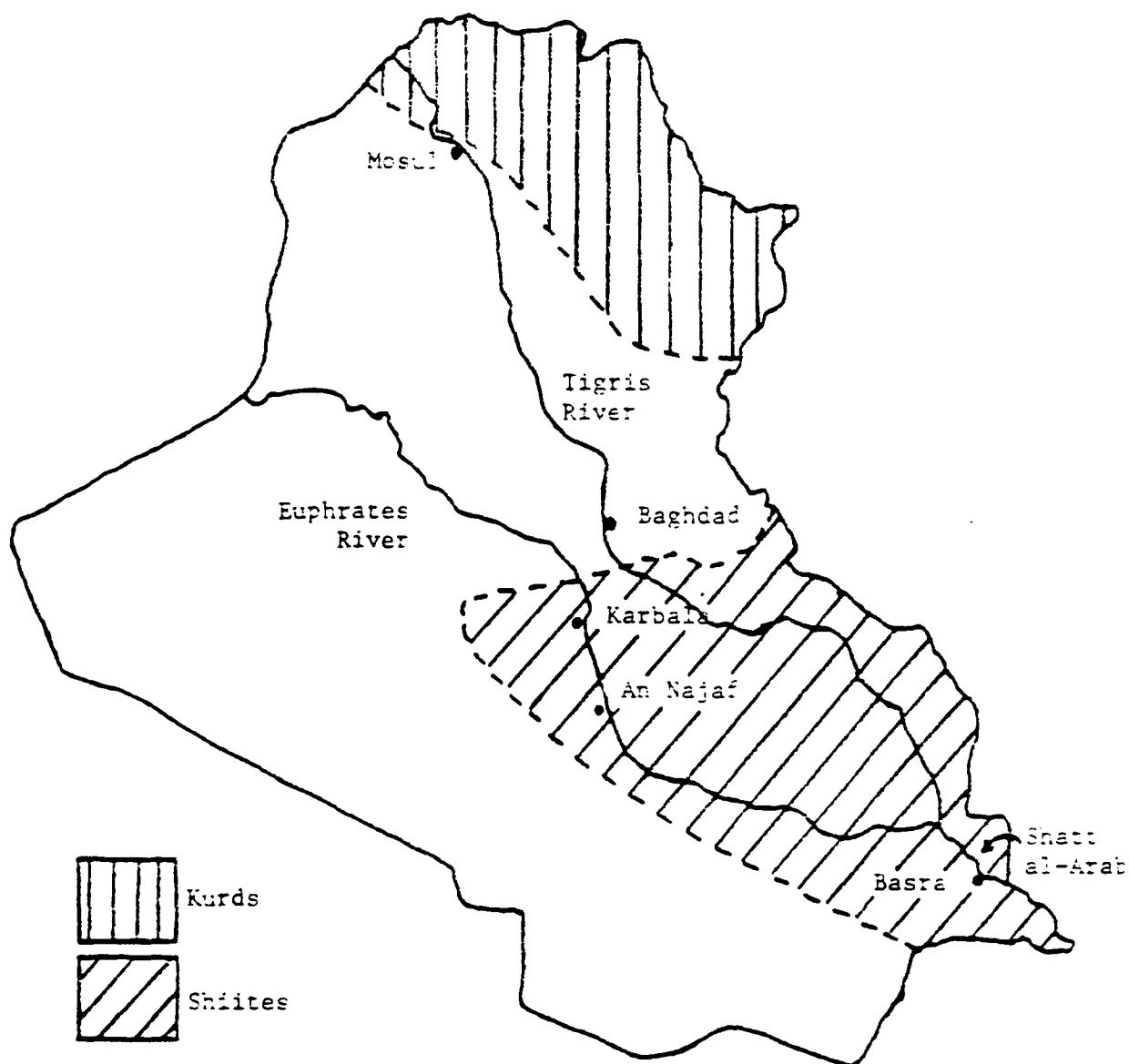


Figure 2.--Iraq. Helen C. Metz, ed. Iraq: A Country Study (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 82.

waterway. It was not until 1975, when the Algiers Agreement was signed, that the dispute was settled. In return for its sharing of the waterway, Iraq was to receive pockets of territory along the central border with Iran. Despite the official settlement, Saddam claimed Iran never released the territory and cited this as one of the reasons for its invasion of Iran in 1980.³

Prior to the Gulf War, the Iraqi border with Kuwait has been the subject of controversy as well. Prior to World War I, Kuwait asked Great Britain to represent it in foreign affairs, even though Kuwait was part of the Ottoman Empire. Britain agreed, and in 1913 concluded an agreement with the Ottomans which set the present boundaries. When Iraq gained its independence in 1932, it accepted the recognized border. However, in the 1960s and again in the mid-1970s, Iraq levied claims against portions of Kuwaiti territory.⁴

A rather unique feature about the Iraqi border is the neutral zone on the Saudi border near Kuwait. (See Figure 1). Great Britain and Abd al Aziz ibn Abd ar Tahman Al Saud, the father of Saudi Arabia, signed the Mohammara Treaty in 1922. This treaty established the Iraq-Saudi border, including the diamond-shaped neutral zone. This border was not officially ratified by the independent government of Iraq until 1975.⁵

The neutral zone was created for the Beduins of both countries. Their nomadic travels take them across vast areas each year in search of pasture for their animals. The

neutral zone provides the herds with access to limited water and grazing without interference from either Iraqi or Saudi citizens.⁶

Another major geographic feature is the northeastern highlands which run along the borders with Turkey and Iran. This mountain region, which rises to 12,000 feet, is the home of the Iraqi Kurds. (See Figure 2). Politically, this rugged frontier has been difficult for Saddam to control. This area is important to Iraq for significant economic reasons. Fifty percent of the hydroelectric plants are in northeastern Iraq. Also, many of Iraq's oilfields and agricultural areas are there as well.⁷

The major cities of Iraq are Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra. Each was the capital of its respective province in the Ottoman Empire.⁸ After World War I these three provinces were combined by Britain to form the nation of Iraq. Two other cities are important to note. An Najaf and Karbala hold the tombs of Ali and his son Husayn, major martyrs in Shia Islam.⁹ In dealing with Iraqi Shiites, Saddam must take the religious nature of these cities into account.

Demography

There are many ethnic and religious groups within Iraq, but two stand out as significant in terms of Iraqi security: the Kurds and the Shiites. Saddam is conscious of the diversity in Iraq's society and has attempted to shape a

national identity. Yet, many divisions remain. Sporadically throughout the last 60 years, the Kurds have clashed with Iraqi policies. Demanding the establishment of an independent Kurdistan, they have often forced the Iraqi government to use the armed forces to squelch rebellion. On the other hand, the Shiites have incorporated themselves rather well into Iraqi government and business, though they are still underrepresented.

The Kurds, descendants of the Medes, are the largest ethnic minority in Iraq.¹⁰ (See Table 1). They, like the Palestinians, are an ethnic group without a homeland, and have struggled with Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq for independence. The northern highland was formerly their homeland and provides them with a remote area in which to carry out this struggle. At various times in the past, each country has attempted to incite the Kurds against one of the other countries.¹¹ Not only has this served to stymie cordial relations among the countries involved, but it has been devastating to the Kurdish people.¹² Each country has responded in kind to the Kurdish violence.

Table 1.--Ethnic Groups of Iraq

Population	Number	Percentage
Arabs	11,289,500	73.5%
Kurds	3,318,000	21.6%
Turkmens	368,500	2.4%
Others	384,000	2.5%

Source: Aharon Levran, ed., The Middle East Military Balance (Jerusalem: Westview Press, 1987), 247.

Religious groups play an important part in the domestic and foreign policy of Iraq. The Shiite sect of Islam makes up 53.5 percent of the Iraqi population.¹³ The majority of Iraqi Shiites live in the southern half of the country along the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. (See Figure 2). This is a strategic location for Saddam because it provides him access to the Persian Gulf.

The Sunni and Shiite sects trace their roots to the Prophet Muhammad but view their religious obligations in distinctly different ways. The basic difference is the belief of how Muhammad was to be succeeded. It was understood that the successor would not have the prophetic powers of Muhammad.¹⁴ This being the case, what role would the successor play?

To the Sunni, the selected leader of the believers would be responsible for the community's obedience to the Qur'an. In this respect, the leader as successor (caliph), would be selected by community consensus from the Quraish tribe to which Muhammad belonged. The Caliph would be the guardian of Islamic Law.¹⁵

The Shiites, on the other hand, believe the Caliph has a spiritual function "connected with the esoteric interpretation of the revelation and the inheritance of the Prophet's esoteric teachings."¹⁶ They also believe that religious authority rests with the imam, or religious leaders, who are given the ability of infallible interpretation of the Qur'an. The imam must also be descendants of Ali,

the first imam in Shiite history and its most famous martyr. With Muhammad, divine revelation ended. However, he established the "cycle of initiation" for the continuing guidance of the community.¹⁷ Unlike the Sunni who see their imam as wise teachers, the Shiites view them as those who speak for Allah. While it would be incorrect to assume Sunnis and Shiites cannot live together peacefully, it is clear that they differ significantly on matters of loyalty and leadership.

It is important for the Western mind to understand that Islam is not simply confined to the religious realm of society, but can be fully integrated into political affairs. Since Christianity is separated from governmental affairs in the West, it is often assumed that this is true of Islam. Raphael Patai, in his book The Arab Mind, addresses the Muslim's view of how Islam affects his life. "Religion was not one aspect of life, but the hub from which all else radiated. All custom and tradition was religious, and religious do's and don'ts extended throughout all activity, thought, and feeling."¹⁸ He goes on to say that "Religion was--and for the traditional majority in all Arab countries has remained--the central normative force of life."¹⁹

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 radicalized Shiism in Iran and threatened Iraq with its revolutionary ideology. The Ayatollah Khomeini attempted to internationalize the revolution and spread his form of Islamic rule across the Middle East.²⁰ Needless to say, Arab rulers throughout the

region considered this form of fundamentalism a threat to their stability. Considering the fact that the majority of Iraqis are Shiites, Saddam viewed this as a serious challenge to his regime.

Since much of the government is controlled by Sunni Arabs and the Shiite sect is the predominant religious group in Iran, the Iranian Revolution created serious security concerns in Iraq. But these concerns must be put into perspective, for discriminatory policies toward Shiites were not as extensive as one might assume.

When Saddam came to power in 1979, Sunni Arabs dominated the political scene. One of the two deputy prime ministers and the defense minister were Sunnis, as were most of the top posts of the security services. In the military, Sunnis held most of the corps commander positions as well.²¹

By the late 1980s, Saddam had altered the political alignment. Of the eight members of the Revolutionary Command Council, Iraq's highest governing body, three were Shiite, three were Sunni, one was Christian, and one was a Kurd. Also during this time, several Shiite generals were given corps commands.²² According to Metz, "Observers believed that in the late 1980s Shias were represented at all levels of the party roughly in proportion...to their percentage in the population."²³

Saddam's motive for these alterations is unknown. He had the power to make these changes as vice-president

(1968-79), but did not. Since he did this during the Iran-Iraq War, one can assume it was to encourage the Shiites to remain loyal to Iraq.

History

Just as geography and demographics have had a significant effect on Iraqi policy and Saddam's outlook, so has history. Iraq has a long history of over 5,000 years of civilization. Ancient peoples such as the Sumerians, Assyrians, and Babylonians controlled empires extending from the Tigris and Euphrates area. The earliest record of codified law, the Code of Hammurabi, originated here. Leaders such as Nebuchadnezzar ruled the entire region from what is today Iraq.²⁴

During Islamic times, the Abbasid Dynasty (750-1258) controlled an area from India to Morocco. The second caliph of this dynasty constructed a new capital in a village called Baghdad. Surrounded by walls and moats, Baghdad became the center for Islamic philosophy, science, and literature. It also became the key trading hub between Asia and the Mediterranean. By 806, it became second in size only to Constantinople.²⁵

Throughout recent centuries, Iraq has only known either autocratic or foreign rule. Prior to World War I the Turks controlled much of the Middle East in what was

called the Ottoman Empire. Once a powerful entity, it became known as the "Sick Man of Europe" due to its political and social decay.

Great Britain was particularly interested in the empire's fate for several reasons. Since 1616, Mesopotamia has played a key role in British foreign policy due to its position along the military and commercial routes to India. This interest was increased in the early 20th century with the discovery of Iraqi oil and the British decision to convert its naval fleet from coal to oil.²⁶ These factors made the area a vital interest to Britain.

Another reason for British concern was German efforts to gain influence in the area. In 1899, the Ottomans allowed the Germans to build a railroad from Konya in southwest Turkey through Baghdad to Basra. The British viewed this as a threat to their trade routes and oil concessions.²⁷ When Turkey allied itself with Germany in August 1914, Britain invaded Iraq via the Shatt al-Arab and drove northward toward Baghdad. It was not until March 1917 that Baghdad fell. Immediately upon its capture, General Stanley Maude, Commander of British Forces, declared that Iraq would be allowed to control its own affairs.²⁸

Following World War I, Great Britain and France carved the Middle East into two spheres of influence known as the French and British Mandates. Included in the British Mandate was Iraq. The intention of the Mandate system was to manage

the territories and teach them how to govern themselves. Autonomy and independence of the countries were the ultimate goals.²⁹

During the Mandate years, Britain attempted to upgrade the standard of living in Iraq. It secured the national borders and established diplomatic relations with other countries in Iraq's name. Iraqi political life began as a constitution was written, criminal and civil law was codified, and a parliament was elected. "Security throughout the country, never perfect, stood higher than at any period since, at least, the Caliphate."³⁰

Not all British actions served the Iraqi people and many decisions had adverse effects on local economies and the political development of the country. There were factions in Iraq who resented Western influence and especially Western hegemony in their country. Rural and tribal uprisings occurred throughout the Mandate years, but what remained in the minds of Iraqis was that they were put down with British military force.³¹

During the Mandate, Iraq proved to be a difficult area to govern. The years following the Mandate would be no better. Iraq moved from a Class A mandate under Britain to an independent monarchy in 1932 and an independent republic in 1958.³² Throughout these years, the country was fragmented and political violence was widespread. More will be said of this period in Chapter Three.

The social and political conditions in his country had a great impact on Saddam Hussein. As he grew up and became more aware of the society around him, he learned of the geographic problems Iraq faced, such as border disputes. He realized the problems ethnic diversity caused. Also, he experienced the impact of foreign involvement and political violence in his country. As he watched Iraq continue to flounder in its political development, he would decide to become directly involved and play a key role in charting Iraq's future.

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CHAPTER THREE

EARLY POLITICAL INFLUENCES ON SADDAM HUSSEIN

Much of a person's personality is shaped by events of his or her youth. Saddam Hussein is no different. The purpose of this chapter is to examine what events have affected him and how they may have been incorporated into his political outlook. These early years are divided into two parts.

The first part begins in the 1930s when Saddam was a young boy. The political and social conditions in Iraq during this time were stark and violent, and surely made a serious impression on young Saddam. Even though many of these events occurred prior to his birth, they shaped social opinion and created the anti-Western environment in which he grew up.

The second part begins when he became actively involved in the society around him, and extends to the first Baathist Revolution in 1963. During this period, Saddam begins to take an active role in the political environment around him.

Youth

Saddam Hussein was born to a poor, landless peasant family in a village near Takrit, Iraq, about 100 miles north of Baghdad. At the time of his birth, the villagers lived in mud houses and used manure for heating and cooking fuel. There was no electricity or running water.¹

Official accounts state that his father died when Saddam was a small boy. According to his former secretary however, Saddam's father abandoned him and his mother. His mother remarried a man named Ibrahim Hassan, who developed quite a dislike for Saddam. Years later, Saddam would bitterly recall how his stepfather would drag him out of bed at dawn, barking "Get up, you son of a whore, and look after the sheep." Ibrahim often fought with Subha [Saddam's mother] over Saddam, complaining, "He is the son of a dog. I don't want him." Still, Ibrahim found some use for the boy, often sending Saddam to steal chickens and sheep, which he then resold.²

During this time, Saddam was eager to enroll in school, but his step-father would not allow him. Frustrated, he ran away to live with his uncle, Khairallah Tulfah, in Baghdad where he began school at age 10. After graduating from the American equivalent of junior high school, Saddam applied for admission to the prestigious Baghdad Military Academy. He wanted to follow in Tulfah's footsteps as an army officer, but poor grades prevented his admission. When

he became President in 1979, Saddam compensated for this lack of military background by promoting himself to field marshall.³

In 1941 Tulfah was thrown out of the Iraqi Army for his involvement in a failed coup attempt against the monarchy. The British Army, supported by Transjordan's Arab Legion, put down the rebellion and reinstituted the monarchy. This further tainted the monarchy as a British creation and underscored the fact that Iraq was not a sovereign nation. The British suppression of the attempt left Tulfah with a lasting hatred for the British and imperialism. Saddam would be told stories of Tulfah's exploits during the revolution, and how his relatives had been killed by the British and their homes burned down.⁴

Also, as a devout Sunni, Tulfah probably adhered to the Islamic teaching that it is morally wrong for Muslims to be ruled by a non-Muslim government. This, coupled with his removal from the army, surely inflamed Tulfah's attitude toward the British and any Iraqi government that appeared to be controlled by them. Surely the burning fervor of his uncle, who had taken him in from an oppressive stepfather, would have a significant effect on Saddam's world view. This was Saddam's first exposure to what Arabs view as Western, and particularly British, interference in the Middle East.

It was a British objective to control Iraq following World War I. For several reasons it believed that its domination over Baghdad was critical to its plans for the region.

This is illustrated by a note from the British Civil Commissioner concerning demobilization in Mesopotamia (Iraq) after World War I. On 10 December 1918 he wrote the following message to the Secretary of State for India:

My view is that the strategic centres of the Middle East lie in Baghdad and the Caucasus, in both of which the Muhammedan populations greatly predominate. If we encourage the idea of Arab, as opposed to European predominance in Arab-speaking countries which have been wrested from the Turk at the cost of British blood and British wealth, we shall without doubt excite latent religious hatreds between Sunni and Shi'ahs in 'Iraq, thereby depriving ourselves of some of the strategic advantages which the possession of this ganglion gives us.

By occupying Mesopotamia during the war we drove a wedge into the Muhammedan world, thereby preventing the possibility of a combination of Muhammedans against us in the Middle East. I submit that it should be our policy under peace conditions to keep Mesopotamia as a wedge of British Controlled Territory [sic]. That it should not be assimilated politically to the rest of the Arab and Muhammedan world, but remain insulated as far as may be, presenting a model to the rest....⁵

His point was further reinforced in his 21 November 1919 letter:

If Baghdad is strongly held, and ample reserves of war materials and means of transportation be kept on the spot,...the Middle East would be dominated, in a military sense, from Baghdad and our political influence would be proportionate to our potential military strength. Great Britain alone as trustee for the civilized nations of the world could ensure the peace of the Middle East,.....⁶

With this political objective, Britain was willing to use whatever means possible to control this portion of the Middle East.

The British got their chance to do so in May 1920. During the Islamic holy day of Ramadan, Iraqi religious leaders exhorted the people to reject British rule.

Nationalist activity increased and the Grand Mujtahid of Karbala, Imam Shirazi, issued a religious proclamation stating that living under non-Muslim rule is against Islamic Law and called for a Jihad against the British. Iraq was in disarray for three months before Britain could restore order.'

While the British did much to create a stable and progressive government in Iraq, many of their policies only benefited Britain. Many Iraqis realized this and developed a considerable bias toward anything Western. Even though many of these events occurred before Saddam's birth, he undoubtedly heard about the hardships from family and friends as he grew up.

There have been many events in the Middle East which could be interpreted by Arabs as Western interference. It is not the author's intention to discuss and evaluate each of these events, but to simply show how they might have influenced Saddam's beliefs and behavior.

As a young boy, Saddam grew up around the results of British policy in Iraq. Takrit was economically depressed due to British imports supplanting the local textile and leather goods industry. This turned the town into a hotbed of political activism.'

Iraqis benefited little from the trade or industry generated by the British. A case in point is the 1923 British and Iraqi negotiation for oil concessions. Iraq had previously been promised 20 percent equity participation in

the British-controlled Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC). But, the British began to balk, and eventually the Iraqi government submitted to a new agreement.⁹

The main reason for Iraq's submission was that the League of Nations was about to vote on whether Mosul and its surrounding territory should be given to Turkey, or whether it should remain part of Iraq. Iraq feared that, without British support on this vote, it would lose Mosul. "In March 1925, an agreement was concluded that contained none of the Iraqi demands. The TPC...was granted a concession for a period of seventy-five years."¹⁰ In the end, the League of Nations voted to keep Mosul in Iraq, but it cost Iraq in oil revenues.

The oil industry grew, yet few Iraqis were employed by the oil companies. Additionally, the oil boom inflated the economy which placed a further strain on Iraqi households.¹¹ For the local citizen, it did not take much to believe that Western imperialists were pillaging the country and leaving nothing in return.

Even before the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Western powers were maneuvering to carve up the remains. As discussed in Chapter Two, the League of Nations divided the Middle East into two spheres of influence: the British and French Mandates. This resulted in rather arbitrary national borders being drawn with little or no regard for historic tribal or ethnic boundaries.¹²

For example, Mosul in northern Iraq had historically conducted much of its commerce with Syria while Basra in the south had done so with Iran. The imposition of these new boundaries severely restricted this commerce and led to economic depression.¹³

During the Mandate years, both France and Britain set up governments which could be influenced in a favorable way. Seldom did this work the way it was planned, but both countries endeavored to install leaders who would be dependent on the parent country.¹⁴

In Iraq, Britain placed Faisal on the throne. France had established him as ruler in Syria, but later removed him. Faisal was a capable ruler; the leader of the Arab Revolt in Arabia and in the direct blood line to the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁵

But to the Iraqis, he was a British creation. He was a Hashemite and not an Iraqi. Also, monarchy was alien to Iraq which further identified Faisal's rule as foreign. The Mandate also angered Iraqis because they believed Britain had promised them independence following World War I.¹⁶ Yet it is evident that the British had no intention of relinquishing their control of Iraq.

Arguably, the most politically disruptive Middle East event during this century was the partition of Palestine in 1948. In Arab minds, this not only caused an excessive influx of Jews to the region but, more importantly, it illegally

appropriated land from Arab owners. All of this was legitimized by a resolution in the United Nations.¹⁷

To Arabs, this symbolized but one more instance of Western interference in the region. In their view, Western powers created a Jewish homeland due to their guilt complex over the Holocaust. But in creating this homeland, they should have used their own land because they are the ones guilty of the atrocity, not the Arabs. Arabs should not be forced to pay for this Jewish homeland by losing their land.

By only a cursory look at Western involvement in recent Iraqi history, it is easy to see how Iraqis interpret these events as interference in their affairs. Whether or not interference is an accurate term, these events evidently shaped Saddam's psyche as it pertained to the West.

The violent nature of Iraqi politics during Saddam's younger years undoubtedly molded his outlook as well. Its prevalence made violence appear normal in the political process. While much of this violence was associated with Britain's attempt to manage Iraqi affairs, the extent and nature of the Iraqis' use of violence cannot be blamed on Western nations. The Iraqi people, as a nation, are responsible. Regardless of the conditions against which they rebelled, the methods of violence that were used in almost every overthrow can only be described as repugnant. Two examples will show how these activities may have influenced Saddam.

On 14 July 1958, the monarchy in Iraq was overthrown in a bloody coup. General Abdul Karim Qassim led a group of Arab nationalist army officers in an attack on the King's palace. At the end of the two hour ordeal, King Faisal II, his regent, family, and household servants were killed in a hail of machine-gun fire.¹⁸ By world standards, this was not an unusually violent overthrow. But the response by the citizens after the coup demonstrates the nature of violence often associated with Iraq.

Following the successful overthrow, uncontrollable crowds roamed the streets of Baghdad. "The body of 'Abd al-Ilah [Faisal's regent] was taken from the palace, mutilated, and dragged through the streets until it was finally hung at the gate of the Ministry of Defense."¹⁹ Others were killed, including innocent Jordanians and Americans who fell into the hands of the mob. The next day, the body of Nuri al-Said, Faisal's close advisor, was disinterred by the crowd and dragged through the streets like al-Ilah's.²⁰

The second example of the violent nature of Iraqi politics also occurred during a coup. After a failed attempt, the Baath Party finally succeeded in assassinating President Qassim in November 1963. What followed was an indication of the extent the Party would go to attain political power over the Iraqi people. Since much of the Shiite population was quite fond of Qassim, many of them refused to believe that he was dead. The Baathists chose a particularly gruesome method to prove he was, in fact,

dead. Night after night, they displayed his body on national television. Samir al-Khalil, in his book, Republic of Fear, provides the following description of the event:

The body was propped upon a chair in the studio. A soldier sauntered around, handling its parts. The camera would cut to scenes of devastation at the Ministry of Defense where Qassem had made his last stand. There, on location, it lingered on the mutilated corpses of Qassem's entourage (al-Mahdawi, Wasfi Taher, and others). Back to the studio, and close-ups now of the entry and exit points of each bullet hole. The whole macabre sequence closes with a scene that must forever remain etched on the memory of all those who saw it: the soldier grabbed the lolling head by the hair, came right up close, and spat full face into it.²¹

These stories are but a sampling of the violent society in which Saddam grew up. As a man who had traveled little outside Iraq, this environment was all he knew. This does not rid him of responsibility, but simply serves to illuminate Saddam's background. His willingness to adopt this style of operation will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Early Political Life to 1963

Being reared in this environment, it was only a matter of time before Saddam became actively involved in the society around him. Following the 1958 revolution in which Qassem came to power, an official in Takrit was murdered. Saddam was accused of the murder and placed in jail. The court system established by Qassem was conducting a reign of terror, executing many who appeared before the court. In fact, many Baathist were summarily executed without going to

jail. Saddam was incarcerated and there met many men who would later become close Baathist friends.²²

Due to a key political connection, Saddam was eventually released from jail and was immediately summoned to Baghdad by the Baathist leadership. There he was asked to volunteer to assassinate Qassem. Considering it an honor, he accepted. He and five other men would conduct the operation in the streets of Baghdad.²³

Saddam's role in the assassination was to provide cover for the other four men as they killed the President. Qassem was severely wounded, but survived the plot. During the attempt, one member was shot in the chest and Saddam was wounded in the leg. Carrying his bleeding comrade, he escaped to a Party hideout in Baghdad.²⁴

The validity of the remainder of the story cannot be substantiated, but it serves as a foundation for Saddam's revolutionary image. Not only does he appear as a true believer of the Baath Party, but the story portrays him as a clever, cunning individual as he escapes across the desert. Verifying this story about Saddam in a society like Iraq is difficult. Surely there is at least some embellishment of the details and heroics.

Following the assassination attempt, Saddam realized he must escape Baghdad. Realizing he could only trust party members and his family, he departed for Takrit. He began walking, but later bought a horse due to his wounded

leg. After resting at Takrit, he headed west toward Syria. It was during this portion of the trip that his cunning served him well.²⁵

On several occasions Saddam was challenged by government officials. One instance involved several customs officials. While riding down a road on his horse, he was overtaken by two cars. From the cars, men ordered him to stop or they would shoot him. After dismounting, Saddam quickly took the offensive. He demanded to know why they had stopped him and pointed their machine-guns at him. They replied that he was suspected of being a smuggler. In a further demonstration of his defiance, he demanded that he be taken to their commander to determine his innocence. Instead, they beat him and told him not to tell anyone they had met. Saddam calmly went his way.²⁶

Following this, Saddam came to a small town on the banks of the Tigris River. After several unsuccessful attempts at purchasing fare across the river, he decided to leave his horse and swim to the far side at night. According to the official story, the night was freezing cold. He tied his clothes in a bundle and placed them on his head. With his knife clinched between his teeth, Saddam swam the frigid river to the other side. Supposedly, whenever fatigue crept up on him, he would double his effort to reach the far bank.²⁷

After climbing out of the river, he made his way to a nearby farm house. Initially accused of being a thief,

Saddam cleverly convinced the family he was no thief, but simply a traveler who needed a place to warm himself. As he prepared to leave the next morning, the men of the family refused to let him go. They said his swimming of the river meant that something was very wrong and he could not leave until they understood what had happened. Again Saddam resorted to Bedouin cunning and answered them with an argument he knew they would understand:

Supposing I have committed a crime against one of the clans on the other side of the river; supposing they follow me here and kill me in your home. What good will it do you when my clan finds out I was killed among you?²⁸

Bedouin ethics requires the protection of guests. If a guest is harmed, the host is held responsible and is subject to revenge.²⁹ Saddam's trick worked by convincing the men that they faced a blood feud with his tribe if any harm came to him.

The official government story continues as Saddam makes his way into Syria and ultimately Egypt. Along the way he sneaks across the desert, avoiding government patrols and drinking water polluted by goat droppings.³⁰

The accuracy of these stories may not be as important as the fact that Saddam's regime propagates them as truth. It is part of the personality cult which he has built to legitimize himself as the rightful ruler of Iraq. He was one of the first to fight and bleed for the Baath Party. On numerous occasions he risked his life to bring about a change in government in his country. The message is that he has

paid his dues and has earned the right to lead Iraq. The image is of a legendary leader--cunning, brave, and daring.

Having heard of Saddam's role in the assassination attempt, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser arranged for him to come to Egypt and settle in the community of Arab exiles. It was during this time that Saddam added Nasser's pan-Arabism to his own anti-Western sentiments. "Hussein was profoundly influenced by the revolutionary rhetoric of Nasser, whose aim was the creation of an independent Arab realm from 'the Atlantic to the Gulf,' free from all Western control."³¹

President Nasser was the first Arab leader of the twentieth century to show any success at unifying the Arab nations of the Middle East. His main thrust was to openly defy Western interests in the region. In 1955, he became the first Arab leader to purchase Soviet weapons systems.³² Shortly after this, the United States withdrew financing for the Aswan High Dam, a project of immense importance to Nasser. To counter this action, he nationalized the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956 to generate the funds necessary to continue the dam's construction. This brought Britain and France into the conflict because they had recently bought control of the canal from Egypt.³³ Like Saddam would do in 1990, Nasser had created a situation which put him at odds with the Western powers. The Arab masses cheered him for his courage to defy the West, even though he had placed himself in a dangerous position.

On October 29, 1956, the Sinai-Suez War began.³⁴ Though Nasser had to eventually withdraw from the Sinai and relinquish control of the Suez Canal, he was hailed by many Arabs as a hero.³⁵ This does not mean that Nasser and the Baath were always compatible, but his efforts to unite the Arab world against the West paralleled Baathist goals, and Saddam's in particular.

At this point in Saddam's life, he had known nothing but "exploitation" by the West, political violence of an extreme nature, and determined men trying to change their societies. He never had any type of career outside of the Baath Party. All of his energies were directed at consolidating power, eliminating political opponents, and building the party. Already he had become a calculating politician who was genuinely convinced that violence was often the best option for his country.³⁶ After spending a couple of years in Egypt, he would get his opportunity to exercise greater political power after the first Baathist Revolution in 1963.

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CHAPTER FOUR

SADDAM'S USE OF POWER

This chapter addresses Saddam's use of the following elements of power: national will, political power, and military power. Saddam has attempted to shape Iraq's national will by emphasizing its historic heritage and the need for national unity. In concert with this, he has portrayed himself as the heir to the Babylonian throne of Nebuchadnezzar, thus underlining Iraq's ancient ties to Mesopotamia. Additionally, Saddam strongly believes in Arab unity. To this end, he has created an image of himself as the leader of pan-Arabism. This image-building is intended to establish a national will that is supportive of Saddam's national and pan-Arab objectives.

Two examples will be considered concerning Saddam's use of military power. First, his domestic use of the armed forces against the Kurds provides insights into the military's role in domestic stability. Second, Saddam's war with Iran demonstrates his ineptness in using this element of

power against an external threat. Due to the extensive nature of the Iran-Iraq War, only his initial commitment of troops in 1980 will be examined.

Saddam's use of political power on the domestic scene is renowned. His control of the ABSP through the secret police has proven to be as effective as it is absolute. He has also gained control of the armed forces. This will be discussed under political power because much of his concern is with preventing coups originating within the military. To do this, he has filled the officer ranks with men who are politically reliable, rather than militarily competent. In the international realm, Saddam was responsible for the formation of the Arab Cooperation Council, which helps him exercise political influence across the region.

National Will

Saddam as a Fighter of Conspiracies.

Based on Saddam's background and the political violence in Iraq's history, there are certain characteristics that are apparent in his use of power. All leaders have various prejudices which color their decisions. In the case of Saddam, there are two predominant traits: he is conscious of conspiracies around him, and he believes force is the best answer to most political problems.

Conspiracies have played a key role in Iraq ever since the end of World War I. Twenty-two coups or revolutions have occurred since the beginning of the British Mandate in 1920.¹ These experiences have not been lost on Saddam Hussein. He is ever conscious of their impact on the Iraqi people and, more directly, on Iraqi leaders.

Not only does Saddam remain sensitive to the threat of conspiracies, but he most likely uses this to keep the Iraqi populace in a siege mentality. To justify his oppression, he reminds Iraqis that internal and external forces are bent on their destruction. The purge of 1968 serves to illustrate this.

Within three months of the ABSP coming to power in July 1968, the regime announced the discovery of a Zionist spy ring in Iraq. Fourteen alleged spies were quickly hung in Baghdad's Liberation Square. During the next year and a half, the Baathists executed many other Iraqis for alleged espionage, but the percentage of Muslim executions increased. "The Jews had been but a stepping-stone to the regime's real target, its political rivals."²

Even education has been embroiled in Saddam's conspiracy-busting. In 1984, Dr. Fadhil al-Barak, head of the *Mukhabarat*, or Party Intelligence, wrote a book about the Iranian and Jewish schools in Iraq. According to Barak, the idea for the book came from a 1979 speech by

Saddam in which he discussed the "social and political means of sabotage practiced by evil expansionist forces inside Iraq."³

In his book, Barak documents alleged Zionist conspiracies dating back to the seventh century B.C. "For the modern period, Barak relies on the anti-Semitic forgery of the Tzarist police, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion."⁴ He goes on to state that Freemasonry was the link which tied the British imperialists, local Iraqi Jews, and the world Zionist leadership together in their conspiratorial activities. To Barak, and no doubt Saddam, these forces used "education in the form of false ideas as the principal means by which to spread the conspiracy against Iraq."⁵

Saddam also used this conspiracy theme to justify his war with Iran. One occasion when he did this was during the 17th anniversary of the 1968 Revolution. Throughout his speech, he referred to the current conspiracy against the Iraqi people and the "Arab nation" as a whole.⁶ Considering the occasion, it is clear Saddam was reminding Iraqis of the threat against them and the need for strong preventive policies.

Analysis of this speech shows that he used conspiracy to condemn both Zionism and Khomeynism. On one occasion he combined them in the same speech:

This sound assessment of the Zionist-Khomeyniite conspiracy against Iraq and the Arab nation is the

basic reality...that the sound perception of things would be obscured and the conspiracy would attain its objectives."

Saddam's concern was not totally unfounded in this case. Israel had supported Iran throughout the war, thus indirectly threatening Iraq. This shows another facet of his concern of conspiracies. In addition to using imagined conspiracies to justify repression, he also uses real conspiracies to encourage Iraqis to rally around him. Whether real or imagined, conspiracy becomes a tool Saddam uses to mold national will and maintain power.

To Saddam, the threat is never-ending, and once again, Iraq leads the defense:

After Iraq succeeds in repulsing this conspiracy and its ill wind, the urgent basic task we must currently assume on the pan-Arab level is the confrontation of other parts of this black Zionist scheme, which is being implemented...against Arabism and Islam...."

In this statement, Saddam states that Arabism and even Islam itself is under attack. Not only is Iraq providing the army to fight the current threat, Saddam provides the vision and leadership needed to defeat this sinister conspiracy.

Saddam has also used this same method when addressing the Kurdish problem in northern Iraq. On October 17, 1973, he convened the Baath Party Regional Command to discuss the draft autonomy law for Kurdistan. Advocating that Arabs and Kurds alike should consider each side of the issue, he alluded to the imperialist conspiracy which created the

problem. "This is the spirit, brothers, which makes us one people and enables us to confront imperialism and its plans with resolution and deprive it of the opportunity to exploit any breaches...."

The purge of 1979 provides another example of Saddam using the threat of conspiracy to accomplish political ends. The previous president of Iraq, Ahmad Hasan al Bakr, had stepped down due to ill health. Immediately upon assuming the presidency, Saddam announced his discovery of a Syrian conspiracy to overthrow the Baathist regime.¹⁰ This resulted in the execution of twenty-two people for high treason and imprisonment of thirty-three others. After the sentences were announced, Saddam decided that other members of the party would carry out the executions.¹¹

This joint participation in the executions served an important purpose for Saddam. It forced the members of the Party to be participants, instead of just observers, in the reign of terror. No longer could they claim innocence in the violations; they were now collaborators and accomplices. "In this way the victims acquire a personal stake in the defense and preservation of the very regime that is torturing and crushing them."¹²

Saddam as the Heir to Nebuchadnezzar.

Iraq is a divided society. Ethnically it is divided between Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen.¹³ Religiously it consists

of Shiites, Sunnis, and a small percentage of Christians and Jews.¹⁴ To make matters worse, these groups reside primarily in their own historic territories where they constitute the majority of the population: the Kurds in the north, Shiites in the south, and Sunni Arabs in the middle. Throughout the history of Iraq ethnic and religious strife among these groups has hampered moves toward national unity.

This lack of unity creates quite a challenge for Saddam. How has he tried to convince these people to not think of themselves as Kurds or Shiites, but as Iraqis? Furthermore, what methods has he used to make them embrace his vision of grandeur and regional leadership?

The answer is two-fold. One, he has tried to instill a sense of national history in the populace. Saddam has used numerous activities to do this, including rebuilding Babylon. He continually reminds Iraqis of their heritage. For example, on January 2, 1991, Saddam told his troops that Iraqi civilization was flourishing 6,000 years ago while the rest of the world lived in caves.¹⁵ Primarily, he wants them to identify with the glorious years of the Babylonian Empire, a time when Mesopotamia, and its king, ruled the known world. Two, he has used terror to coerce dissidents into line. The latest dealings with Kurdish and Shiite refugees are indicative of his use of force against dissent. Following the Gulf War, reports abounded of systematic bombings of hospitals, executing children, and strafing civilians.¹⁶ His

view is that massive military force should be used against all those who resist his rule, whether they pose a military threat or not. This martial mentality has a historical precedent in Mesopotamia.

For Saddam, Nebuchadnezzar is an excellent historical choice to help forge Iraqi unity. This ancient Babylonian king was the most powerful world leader to come from the Tigris-Euphrates region. He conquered the mighty Assyrians, Egyptians, and Israelites. Interestingly enough, his empire covered what is today Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Israel; the very countries that Saddam has at one time or another threatened or invaded.

Is all this a coincidence? Probably not. There is evidence that he has taken many steps to openly identify himself with Nebuchadnezzar. Beginning in 1986, he started an aggressive program to rebuild the ruined city of Babylon, which lies about 50 miles south of Baghdad.

Over a thousand laborers imported from the Sudan (Iraqi men were away fighting Iran) have worked seven days a week through wet winters and scorching summers to rebuild what archeologists call King Nebuchadnezzar's Southern Palace--a vast complex of some 500 rooms and the reputed site of the legendary Hanging Gardens of Babylon."¹⁷

To further identify himself with the king, he is inserting bricks inscribed with his name into the city walls, as did Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century B.C."¹⁸

Saddam's purpose in this reconstruction was to strengthen Iraqi nationalism by appealing to history. He

reminded Iraqis that their country was the cradle of civilization and that their ancestors built the great cultures of Babylon and Nineveh, which flourished thousands of years ago in Mesopotamia, between the Tigris and Euphrates.¹⁹ But his vision goes farther than this.

Saddam also wants the Iraqi people to visualize him as the legitimate successor to Nebuchadnezzar. Not long ago, Saddam "had himself photographed...in a replica of the war chariot of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king whom Saddam apparently reveres as his hero."²⁰ During a recent nighttime celebration, visiting diplomats and guests were asked to gaze upward into the sky.

There above them hung twin portraits of Saddam and Nebuchadnezzar etched against the night by laser beams. Saddam's features were rendered unusually sharp and hard in order more closely to resemble the ancient carved images of Nebuchadnezzar."²¹

He envisions himself as the heir to Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, anyone resisting him and his plan for the region is seen as betraying history's aim for Iraq and the Arab world.²²

Much of what is known of Nebuchadnezzar is found in the biblical book of Daniel. This Hebrew prophet describes several of the former king's traits. He destroyed Jerusalem and carried hostages back to Babylon, threatened to execute his close advisors, and attempted to kill anyone who caused dissent.²³ All of these events in Nebuchadnezzar's past can be identified in Saddam's rhetoric or actions.

According to Daniel 1, the Babylonian king conquered Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and took hostages back to Babylon.²⁴ This event is confirmed in secular literature. The Ancient Near East Texts describe how Nebuchadnezzar conquered the city on the second day of Adar, deposed the king, and took "much booty" back to Babylon.²⁵

Saddam has continually threatened Israel with destruction, and indeed attempted it through his Scud attacks in January and February 1991. At the beginning of the Gulf Crisis, he quickly seized foreign nationals in Kuwait and Iraq and refused to allow them to leave. Saddam preferred to call them guests, when in the eyes of the world they were clearly hostages.

The second trait mentioned in the book of Daniel is Nebuchadnezzar's propensity to execute his close advisors. In Daniel 2, he threatened to execute all of his advisors if they did not tell him the contents of his previous night's dream; an unreasonable request. "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble."²⁶

Just as Nebuchadnezzar threatened to execute his wise men, Saddam has proven over and over that he has no compunction about purging his most valuable advisors. On November 23, 1990, the London Daily Telegraph reported that

Saddam had executed eight of his top generals, including his army chief of staff. The newspaper stated:

General Nezar Abdul Karim Al-Khazraji and seven other army officers were executed sometime last week in a move that appears to reflect President Saddam Hussein's growing fears about the loyalty of some of his key aides."²⁷

General Al-Khazraji had recently been contacted by retired army officers who had apparently urged him to do what he could to avoid the coming war. He was arrested for failing to report the receipt of the letter."²⁸

The disappearance of Saddam's close advisors is not uncommon. In 1989 the Defense Minister, Adnan Khairallah, was killed in a freak helicopter accident. Unofficial reports were that the crash was no accident. Khairallah, Saddam's cousin and brother-in-law, had made the fatal mistake of disagreeing with him about taking a second wife."²⁹ The Health Minister, Riyadh Ibrahim, met a similar fate. He had suggested that Saddam step down from the presidency. A short time later, his wife "received his remains, chopped to bits."³⁰

During the early years of the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam made a remarkable statement concerning his executions of commanders. In an interview with the West German journal *Stern*, Saddam commented on recent executions:

Stern: It is known that your Excellency is not satisfied with the Iraqi military command. Is it true that in the recent period 300 high-ranking military officers have been executed?

Husain: No. However, two divisional commanders and the commander of a mechanized unit were executed. This is something very normal in all wars.

Stern: For what reason?

Husain: They did not undertake their responsibilities in the battle for Muhammara [Khorramshahr].³¹

This statement is significant because it indicates yet again that Saddam's answer to a threatening problem is violence. Whether it is a political rival or a less-than-successful military officer, violence is his first option.

The third trait of Nebuchadnezzar was to execute anyone who dared offer any dissent. In Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar had erected a statue to which everyone was to bow down. Three Hebrew men refused to pay homage to the image and immediately became the object of wrath. The king was so enraged that he ordered them thrown into a blazing furnace which he had prepared for any dissenters. Daniel 3 describes the event:

The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.³²

Obviously, a man after Saddam's own heart.

Saddam has not hesitated to use any means of force against anyone who dared resist his rule. The most obvious example of this is his brutal oppression of the Kurds. In 1987, the last full year of the Iran-Iraq War, an investigator for the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee

encountered a 17 year old Kurd who had witnessed the chemical attack on a Kurdish village. The details in the report indicate the shock of this eyewitness:

The first body I saw...was completely black. I heard the cries of a few survivors which were incomprehensible. Most of the people there were sprawled around dead. There must have been many more than 3,000. They were all huddled together in family groups, and they died like that....[The next day] I had binoculars and saw thousands of soldiers with gas masks and gloves entering the gorge. From my hiding place, I saw them dragging bodies into piles and then setting fire to them. I saw over a hundred fires. ³³

Saddam's use of terror against his own population has been well documented in the world press. But less publicized incidents against smaller groups, even single families, are just as ghastly. Reports abound of human rights abuses in Iraq. Over 200 cases of disappearances in Iraq in 1980. One of these cases involved Mohammed al Jabiri, an Iraqi diplomat who was recently elected chairman of the United Nations Human Rights Commission's Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.³⁴

Another incident involved an Iraqi citizen named Mohammed Baqr, a Shiite who opposed the Iraqi attack on Iran in 1980. He fled to Iran and made regular radio broadcasts attacking Saddam Hussein. Saddam's response was not surprising. He had 80 to 90 male members of Baqr's family arrested and forced a Shiite religious leader to witness six executions.³⁵

After observing these executions, this religious official was left in an isolated jail cell for ten days.

He was then taken to the Baghdad Airport and flown to Istanbul. He was ordered to continue his trip to Tehran and deliver the following warning to Hakim: "Mohammed Baqr Hakim must cease his activities against the Iraqi regime, otherwise all other members of his family will be executed."³ Once again, Saddam demonstrated his absolute intolerance of dissent.

Since Saddam came to power in 1979, he has seen victories as well as defeats in his effort to create a national unity. His use of Babylonian history can be considered as ineffective. The Kurdish and Shiite rebellion after the Persian Gulf War indicated these groups still cling to their own heritage and have little loyalty to Saddam. This is not to say they have no allegiance to Iraq. During the Iran-Iraq War, most Iraqi Shiites willingly fought against the Shiites in Iran's army. This shows their religious affiliation did not interfere with their nationalism.

Saddam as the Leader of Pan-Arabism.

Saddam's image also portrays him as the logical leader of pan-Arabism. In this regard, he has tried to assume the mantle of Nasser as the regional leader who will unite the Arab people into one nation. This is not to say Saddam is following Nasser's political agenda, but simply that he wants to be viewed as the Arab leader who can

successfully challenge the so-called Western imperialism in the region. Many of his speeches are laced with pan-Arab rhetoric. His speech on the 17th anniversary of the 1968 Revolution is a good example:

Brothers, sons of the great Arab nation, the plot against Iraq and the Arab world--the plot in which the ruling regime is used--is, as I have said, the most dangerous plot against the Arab nation after the Zionist occupation of Palestine. This plot is a main link in the chain of plots aimed at dividing Arabs and creating sedition among them, as well as fragmenting and weakening them in order to control their territory, exploit their resources, and prevent them from achieving progress and development.³⁷

Later in the same speech, he refers to the need for solidarity among the Arabs. Claiming that he is courageously taking the lead in this effort, he says the most important prerequisite is "the genuine pan-Arab option, so that we may be capable of safeguarding our independence and the components of our existence and progress."³⁸ He states that a relinquishing of this option "is a disavowal of ourselves and a forgery of the Arab entity."³⁹ In all, this speech contains terms like Arab Nation, pan-Arab, Arab independence, Arab entity, and Arab solidarity no fewer than forty times.⁴⁰

Both before and after these passages of his speech, Saddam alludes to Iraqi leadership in the conflict with Iran, and his protection of the "Arab nation." When he mentions battlefield sacrifices, he refers to Iraqi losses in the war. But when he discusses the Iranian threat, it

is a threat against the "Arab nation."⁴¹ Thus, one is left with the impression that the courageous Iraqi Army and its leader, Saddam Hussein, are defending the Arab entity against the Persian threat.

Political Power

Saddam and the Secret Police.

Saddam played a leading role in the formulation of the ABSP's ideological basis and reorganization following the failure of the 1963 Baathist Revolution.⁴² After this point, the ABSP would carry the mark of Saddam Hussein in its methods of operation.

Following the overthrow of the Qassim regime in 1963, Saddam returned from Egypt and became actively involved in Baath party politics. At age twenty-six, he became an interrogator and torturer for the Baath Party. The palace in which King Faisal II and his family were executed had been turned into a torture chamber and called Qasr-al-Nihayyah, the Palace of the End.⁴³ It was there that Saddam and his cohorts performed the most grisly forms of torture. Accounts abound of beatings with rubber hoses filled with rocks, and procedures involving electric wires and iron stakes on which prisoners were forced to sit. After the Baath regime of 1963 was toppled, a machine was found in the palace "which still bore traces of chopped-off fingers."⁴⁴

During its first regime, Baathist control of the Iraqi government was tenuous for several reasons. Its membership was small, numbering fewer than 1,000. Also, the party was not well represented in the officer corps or the army as a whole. This was a weakness that Saddam would correct in later years. Most importantly, the ABSP leadership was inexperienced; it was not capable of administering the country. Major problems confronted Iraq, and Baathist ideology could not correct them.⁴³

In this environment of confusion and conflict, the ABSP tightened the Party's control of the government and refused to tolerate any dissenting views. But there were divisions within the party between doctrinaire hardliners and more pragmatic moderates. Under such conditions, the state of the nation deteriorated and within one year, the military overthrew the Baathists in a bloodless coup in November 1963.⁴⁴

Following the coup, Saddam went underground and continued his work with the ABSP. He was eventually tracked down by authorities and imprisoned for two years. During these idle years in prison, Saddam reflected on the causes of the Baathist failure. He concluded that party divisions consisting of rightist military officers and party dissidents were responsible for the fall. Within a party of only 1,000 members, these divisions would no longer be tolerated. The ABSP must be united at all cost. Convinced of the urgency of

this matter, Saddam "determined to build a security force within the Party, to create cells of loyalty which answered to no one but himself, to ensure that victory once won would be kept."⁴⁷

In 1966, Saddam escaped prison and immediately began building the ABSP's secret police apparatus to guarantee party unity. This also created a power base for Saddam himself. This party organ was referred to as the *Jihaz Haneen*, or "instrument of yearning" and became famous for its harassment and executions of political dissidents.⁴⁸

After the ABSP regained control of the government in 1968, Saddam was appointed deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, in charge of internal security. He continued to strengthen his hold on the secret police by installing family members in the organization. "The security services graduated hundreds of Saddam's men from their secret training schools, among them his half-brothers, Barzan, Sabawi, and Wathban...."⁴⁹

Nadhim Kzar was appointed by Saddam as the first chief of Internal State Security. Sadistic and ruthless, Kzar was feared throughout the government for his methods of interrogation. "He had a penchant for conducting interrogations personally and extinguishing his cigarette inside the eyeballs of his victims."⁵⁰

Kzar was responsible for the torture and killing of thousands of people, mostly Kurds and communists. But in

1973, he and thirty-five of his followers were executed for the planned assassination of President Bakr. As Kzar heard of the impending arrest, he took the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Defense hostage and attempted to flee to Iran. When he was eventually trapped by his pursuers, he shot both of the ministers. In what has become a pattern in Iraqi political life, an extensive purge of the Party ensued.⁵¹ Saddam's response to this incident shows his deftness at political maneuvering. It is also another example of how he resorts to force to overcome political difficulties.

Since Saddam was Kzar's immediate superior, his position in the ABSP was probably weakened by this scandal. He survived this period due to his close relationship to President Bakr. In fact, they were cousins. Together they had become a formidable pair, considering Saddam's tight control on the Party apparatus and Bakr's popularity throughout the army and Iraq as a whole.⁵²

In his book, Republic of Fear, Samir al-Khalil suggests three other factors that helped Saddam during this time. First, he implicated his primary rival, the third most powerful man in the country, 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Samarra'i. "Samarra'i was tried on the flimsiest of evidence, but Bakr refused to ratify his execution order."⁵³ He was eventually executed in 1979 when Bakr left office.⁵⁴

Second, Saddam personally took command of the loyal units of the party militia and used them in key roles against Kzar. This prevented the army from threatening the regime.⁵⁵

Third, Saddam completely reorganized the internal security apparatus personally. Under this new structure, three agencies were created. The following descriptions show that the secret police was not just shuffled, but enhanced to provide even tighter control of the country.⁵⁶

The first agency was the *Amn* or State Internal Security. It was restructured along KGB recommendations. Under this reorganization, Saddam also negotiated a secret intelligence agreement with the KGB to provide sophisticated surveillance and interrogation equipment, training for Iraqi personnel, and exchange of intelligence information.⁵⁷ The outcome of this action was a more efficient and effective agency.

The second agency was the *Estikhbarat*, or Military Intelligence. It conducts operations against Iraqis and other nationals who live abroad.⁵⁸ Assassinations by the *Estikhbarat* include Iraqi Prime Minister, Abdul Razzaq al-Nayef, in London and the Israeli Ambassador to Great Britain, Shlomo Argov. The second act provoked the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.⁵⁹ In addition to these duties, the *Estikhbarat* has informers in every military unit to observe personnel both on and off duty.

The third organization was the *Mukhabarat*, or Party Intelligence. This is the most feared of the three agencies because it is responsible to watch over all other internal security agencies and control the activities of the army, government departments, and the mass organizations (youth, women, and labour).⁶⁰ The party militia is controlled by the *Mukhabarat*.⁶¹

According to Iraqi emigre, another secret police organization has been formed: the *Amn al-Khass* or Special Security. This group has supposedly taken over as the most powerful arm of internal security. It is described as Saddam's personal secret police and is supervised directly from his office. This move would indicate a further concentration of power into Saddam's hands.⁶²

The need for a strong and even ruthless internal security agency is clear in Saddam's mind. The threats to the regime warrant these kinds of actions in order to preserve Baathist power. The following excerpts from his speech to the Iraqi National Assembly on September 24, 1973 underline his belief that a powerful secret police agency is necessary:

This is a valuable opportunity to speak about some of our conceptions. We know that this country was the target of imperialist forces. We know that throughout all stages..., the Revolution has closely followed the developments engineered by the forces opposed to the Revolution and its concepts....

Moreover, we should not overlook the fact that the imperialists and their hostile forces tried to revise all their old plans and methods....

However hard imperialism may now look for its concealed reserves it will never be able to compel our Revolution to retreat and collapse, nor will it be capable of destroying the Revolution. Some people may imagine that the Revolution is unaware of what is happening around it. The Revolution has its eyes wide open. Throughout all its stages, the Revolution will remain capable of performing its role courageously and precisely and without hesitation or panic, once it takes action to crush the pockets of the counter-revolution.

Those who have sold themselves to the foreigner will not escape punishment. We must know, learn, and accurately monitor the movements of imperialism.⁶³

On another occasion, Saddam made his point even clearer. In a meeting with the Revolutionary Command Council, he said:

We must not be lulled in to a false sense of security simply because eight years have passed in the life of the Revolution, believing that this is enough to close the door permanently in the face of counter-revolution. ...We must never soften our stand or ease our efforts to purify all the sensitive organs of state where rightist elements have taken up posts. We must...strengthen the basic principles of Party organization.⁶⁴

The basic principles of the Baathist Party are evident from their past policies: absolute power to the party, intolerance of dissent, and unbridled violations of human rights.

When one ponders the power residing in the security organizations which are controlled by one man, Saddam Hussein, it becomes clear that the party controls the state and Saddam controls the party. The result is that he believes he is above the law, that he is untouchable, and answerable to no one. A leader in this position will soon develop a jaundiced view toward civilized political behavior. Force will become continually more convenient.

Saddam and the Armed Forces.

in order to effectively control the country, one must control the military. This rule has been proven on numerous occasions in Iraq. Indeed, the Iraqi military has played a large role in the political process. Between 1958 and 1968, military men held 25 to 35 percent of the policy-making positions in the government.⁶⁵ The first three presidents of the republic, all prime ministers and vice-presidents except two, most of the ministers of defense and interior, and many ministers of information were ex-military officers.⁶⁶ During this period, domestic spending declined or remained the same, while the defense budget doubled.⁶⁷

Saddam understood the need to fully control the armed forces, both to provide him with a tool of violence and to prevent the military itself from armed rebellion. In 1971 he said it was his hope that "with our party methods, there is no chance for anyone who disagrees with us to jump on a couple of tanks and overthrow the government. These methods have gone."⁶⁸

After the 1963 Revolution, the Baath Party began purging the military. Civilians were given high military positions to both replace the purged officers and to give the armed forces the look of a people's army. Non-Baathist officers were sent to northern Iraq to fight the Kurds. These decisions angered senior officers and the Baath government was overthrown.⁶⁹

Unlike previous Iraqi armies, the army of the 1970's became a mechanism of the Baath Party. Samir al-Khalil mentions three things that account for this: purges, ideology, and party officers overriding orders of non-party officers.⁷⁰

The targets of the purges were influential high-ranking officers. The purges began with those who were least supportive of the new regime, "then affected party members whose power had originated in the armed forces...and finally reached [President] Bakr in 1979."⁷¹ Thus, the armed forces were co-opted in stages.⁷²

The second change involved ideology. The political activities of all military members were restricted to the Baath Party. All other political activity was a capital offense. In fact, even military and police personnel whose service was terminated faced the death penalty for involvement in other parties.⁷³ Saddam left the military with no other options but to submit to his authority.

The third action which brought the military under control was the rule that Baathist officers could rescind the orders of non-Baathist officers. Party officers, who usually had a secondary education and little military training, would refuse to carry out orders without party approval. "The officer elite was atomized by this parallel authority, and its ability to maintain a group identity not subordinate to party policy disintegrated."⁷⁴

Saddam paid a heavy price for the politicization of the armed forces. The overemphasis on morale and revolutionary fervor created a highly centralized system where honest reporting of problems were viewed as disloyal or admission of failure.⁷⁵ The effect these changes had on combat capability became evident during the war. A retired British army officer who observed the war put it this way:

They seem to have launched the war with only token planning, no real objectives and no contingency plans. They seem to lie to each other throughout their command and control structure. The junior officers and enlisted men...are good fighters, as good as any. The command level is unbelievably bad...the Iraqi General Staff seems to be a farce. They used to refer to the British army in World War One as 'lions led by donkeys'; the Iraqi soldiers are 'tigers led by a pack of jackasses'⁷⁶

As the war raged on, Saddam had to relinquish more and more authority to the military commanders. But after the cease-fire in 1988, Saddam purged hundreds of officers and regained complete control of the armed forces.

Saddam and the Arab Cooperation Council.

The Arab Cooperation Council consists of Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, and the former Yemen Arab Republic.⁷⁷ How the newly united Yemen will fit into the ACC remains to be seen. Indeed, the new political order following the Gulf War may make the organization obsolete. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the ACC will be examined as a mechanism for Saddam to exercise political power throughout the region.

The geographic aspects of this alliance reveals much about its strategic objectives. In regard to Western areas of interest, each member controls vital locations along either major sea lines of communication or the border of countries such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. Egypt controls the Suez Canal, while Yemen overlooks the Bab al-Mandeb on the opposite end of the Red Sea. Both are strategic chokepoints for Western navies. Additionally, Jordan possesses the longest border with Israel, while Jordan and Iraq both reside along Saudi Arabia's northern frontier. With the exception of the Strait of Hormuz, the ACC nations are located near all the strategic locations in Southwest Asia. By controlling the ACC, Saddam would wield considerable power throughout the Middle East.

Another aspect of the ACC is that it provides a balance against the regional influence of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The GCC consists of six Gulf states who have similar political, social, and economic interests. These states are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. Founded in 1981, its oil revenues allow it to wield considerable power in the region.⁷⁸ Oil reserves of GCC states equate to 462 billion barrels compared to the ACC's 108 billion. Comparisons in oil production are more uneven with the GCC producing 12 million barrels per day compared to the ACC's production of 1.5 million per day.⁷⁹ Additionally, Saudi Arabia has received significant military

hardware and assistance from the United States, including F-15s and E3A Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft. Taking these facts into account, the purpose of the ACC could also be to provide a forum for the non-GCC states to influence Middle East events.

Assuming that Saddam intended to dominate the ACC, he would control key locations which could threaten vital interests of the West. Whether it would be the blocking of chokepoints or aggressive action against Israel, the ACC would hold important terrain in any conflict. However, even before the Gulf War, each member would be hardpressed to defend their positions against determined Western navies.

It is interesting to note the balance of power within the ACC. As with any alliance, each member brings certain assets into the organization. But, in the case of the ACC, who stands to benefit the most from these assets?

Iraq is the richest and probably the most powerful of the member states. Prior to the Gulf War, its million man military possessed the largest and most modern arsenal in the Middle East. The army boasted of 4300 Soviet-made tanks, including 400 T-72's, and over 4,000 artillery pieces. Its firepower was further enhanced by the Soviet's best anti-tank weapons, surface-to-surface missiles, multiple rocket launchers, and surface-to-air missiles, such as the SA-6. Iraq's Air Force had also received the Soviet Union's latest

aircraft, the MiG-29 Fulcrum.⁸⁰ Overall, Iraq's military power far exceeded that of other ACC states.

Iraq's economic power was also superior to other members. Even though its debt approached \$70 billion, Egypt's had reached \$50 billion.⁸¹ The difference in potential is that Iraq could rely on future oil revenue, while Egypt had little oil reserves. The Iran-Iraq War damaged much of his oil producing and exporting capability, yet due to a new pipeline to Turkey and firmer oil prices, Saddam had reason for optimism.⁸² Also, he assumed much of his war debt to the Gulf states would be forgiven. While Iraq had problems to overcome, its economic outlook was much better than that of Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen.

This is not a one-sided arrangement, however. Iraq was indebted to each of the ACC members for their support during the Iran-Iraq War. Jordan allowed weapons and supplies to transit through its territory on its way to Iraq. Egypt supplied spare parts, specialists and workers while Iraqi men were fighting in the field. Yemen went so far as to provide two fighting brigades.⁸³

By December 1990, there was evidence that Saddam had indeed attained the leading position in the ACC prior to the Gulf War. The agenda for the Sana'a summit in Yemen was drawn up in Baghdad and controlled by Iraq. Each member state was required to forward their proposals for Saddam's

approval.⁸⁴ This is not to say that Saddam had gained absolute control over the ACC, but it is an indication where the council was heading in 1990.

The Gulf War of 1991 undoubtedly prevented Saddam from using the ACC for his regional purposes. The war itself uncovered a fatal flaw in the alliance--Egypt would not support Iraqi aggression. But the composition and strengths of the ACC indicate it was part of Saddam's plan for increasing his regional influence.

Iraq's only potential rival for the ACC leadership was Egypt, but Egypt was weaker than Iraq militarily and economically. Iraq's leverage over Egypt was further enhanced by the two million Egyptians who were working in Iraq prior to 1991. Since Egypt has difficulty employing its 55 million people, the return of these workers along with agitation by Saddam's agents could threaten Egyptian stability. Saddam cleverly increased this leverage by giving Egyptian companies a substantial share of its reconstruction projects following the Iran-Iraq War.⁸⁵

Military Power

Saddam's Use of Military Power Against the Kurds.

Saddam's use of the armed forces against the Kurdish population has been one of his bloodiest affairs. A fiercely independent minority in northern Iraq, the Kurds

have rebelled against Saddam's rule. The first resistance against the Baath regime began in 1968. This conflict was settled in 1970 when Saddam agreed to grant autonomy to the Kurds and allow Kurdish as their official language. The deadline for implementation was 11 March 1974.**

By April 1974, the war had resumed due to broken Iraqi promises and assassination attempts on Kurdish leaders. Due to the recent improvement in Iraqi-Soviet relations, both the Shah of Iran and the United States decided to sustain the rebels.**

Initially, the Iraqi army did well. "By May their troops had occupied the great plains area of Kurdistan and consolidated their position in the large cities of Kirkuk, Arbil, and al-Sulaymaniyyah."** However, their next task was to pursue the Kurds into the mountains. By doing this, they threatened the major lifeline between the Kurds and Iran. The Shah responded by moving in artillery, anti-tank missiles, and even introducing his own troops on Iraqi soil. By spring, the conflict was at a stalemate.**

According to Anthony Cordesman, the Iraqi army developed a rather peculiar fighting tactic during this time. Since they could not suppress the guerilla units, they massed against Kurdish villages and strongholds. Cordesman states:

These tactics involved massing against the objective, sealing it off, and then methodically using artillery fire and strafing to disorganize the defense. Tanks would be dug in where they proved vulnerable.

If the strong point continued to resist,...tanks would continue to be used as artillery."⁹⁰

To maneuver out of this stalemate, Saddam agreed to grant Iran territorial concessions along the Shatt al-Arab. On March 6, 1975, the two countries signed the Algiers Agreement which settled several disputes. The importance of this agreement to the Kurds is that it ended Iranian support to their cause. Almost immediately, the Iranian military withdrew and sealed their borders.⁹¹ This effectively ended any serious Kurdish threat to Saddam's regime.

But Saddam was not finished with the Kurds. Al-Khalil has said, "The measure of a regime of terror is the victims of its peace, not the casualties of its wars."⁹² The army would now be used to conduct mass deportations to the southwestern desert of Iraq. Villagers would be carried off at night along sealed routes to makeshift camps. By 1979, Iraq had destroyed over 700 villages and deported an estimated 200,000 Kurds as part of their scorched earth policy to clear a 20km by 800km strip along the northern border.⁹³

Suppressing armed rebellion sometimes warrants harsh policy. But the actions taken against the Kurdish population went far beyond warfare. At the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam renewed his attacks against the Kurdish people in what some have called a "racist war of extermination."⁹⁴ The extent of executions, disappearances, and tortures was substantial. Additionally, several hundred thousand Kurds

were relocated, and their villages deliberately destroyed. This, coupled with the use of chemical weapons against civilians, demonstrates the extent Saddam is willing to go to suppress dissent.⁹⁵

Chemical weapons use against the Kurds has been well documented. In September 1988, two congressional staffers from the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee conducted interviews at five refugee camps in southeastern Turkey. The following is a typical testimony:

At 6:00 a.m. on August 25, eight planes flew over our village. All eight dropped weapons.... When they dropped the bombs, a big sound did not come out--just a yellowish color and a kind of garlic smell. The people woke up, and some of them fainted. Those who poured water on themselves lived: those who could not reach the water died. I went into the river. Almost 50 women died. Some died who went to help their families. Seventy-five people died. My brother died....⁹⁶

In the entire area, thousands of persons are believed to have died. Immediately after these attacks, as many as sixty to one hundred thousand Kurds fled across the Turkish border.⁹⁷ Among them was Dr. Youssef Hamed, a Kurdish physician. The following comment describes his experience:

People died under my hands. It took us one week to walk here. I think in that time I saw 200 people die from the chemical weapons. There are thousands dead....At Ismasewa, three people were suffering from what I believe was nerve gas. They were hallucinating and could not move in a straight line. They vomited continuously and had severe spasms of the body.⁹⁸

Until the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, this was the only significant military action the Iraqi army experienced. Saddam's extensive use of military force against civilians says much of the Iraqi armed forces' role in society. This role is not simply to keep order, but to punish those who resist Saddam's rule. In the case of the Kurds, this punishment has proven severe.

Saddam's Use of Military Power Against Iran.

Saddam's attack on Iran in September 1980 offers an interesting observation on his use of military power. Having no military background or experience, he took a juvenile approach to military strategy. This act also shows how Saddam makes decisions based on superficial analysis rather than thorough planning.

In his article, "Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War: The First Round," Anthony H. Cordesman points out that Saddam's goals far exceeded his capability to achieve them.¹⁷ Based on Saddam's actions and statements, Iraq had seven goals in its war with Iran. Some of these were reasonable and quite attainable, such as securing the Baath regime from Iranian subversion.¹⁸ But others were very ambitious and unrealistic.

One such goal was to gain control of the Khuzistan province, one of Iran's key oil fields, and place it under Sunni Arab rule. This would provide Iraq access to the Gulf

and deprive Iran of major economic assets.¹⁰¹ But treating it as an Arab extension of Iraq was a fundamental miscalculation by Saddam. Khuzistan is in southern Iran and is adjacent to the Shatt al-Arab. Its population is about 3.5 million people, in which Arabs comprise only 33% to 40%. Additionally, many of these Arabs speak Farsi more frequently than Arabic and are Shiites loyal to the Iranian clergy.¹⁰² When the Arab oil workers in Khuzistan rioted in 1979, Saddam was persuaded they would side with the Arab forces and fight against the Shiites. He had misinterpreted this rioting as rebellion against the Ayatollah, when it was actually a protest against pay and promotion opportunities.¹⁰³

Saddam's major miscalculation was his interpretation of Iran's weaknesses. The various problems which Iran was struggling with made it appear more vulnerable than it actually was. To Saddam, the time was right. He could destroy Iran while it was weak, thus eliminating the Shiite threat to the rest of the region and emerging as the dominant power in the Middle East.

On the surface, Iran did appear vulnerable. It was in the midst of revolution. The country was divided and minorities were increasingly hostile to Khomeini. The military high command and the officer corps were being purged, leaving the military timid and confused. Riots among Arab oil workers had broken out in Khuzistan, giving the appearance that they were rejecting Shiite rule.¹⁰⁴ Another

major indication of weakness was that Iran's primary arms supplier, the United States, had now isolated Iran both diplomatically and economically.

As Saddam would learn, this was not an accurate assessment of Iran's condition. Each of these points were true, but were not as crippling as he expected. Also, there were other factors he did not consider.

Saddam's fifth objective in the war was to create conditions that would cause Khomeini's overthrow.¹⁰⁵ Yet his attack provided the Ayatollah with a classic opportunity to unify the country. Iran had been attacked by an outside force and needed to unite to expel the invaders. Khomeini's struggle with Massoud Rajavi's Mujaheddin-Khalq guerrillas provides a perfect example. It would have been difficult for him to suppress these guerrillas, which were 20,000 strong, without the unifying effect of Saddam's invasion.¹⁰⁶

The isolation by the United States was also misleading, for Iraq had severely underestimated Iran's stockpiles that the Shah had acquired.¹⁰⁷ These extensive supplies, coupled with Iran's religious and revolutionary fervor, meant it could endure a costly war for many years.

Just as damaging as Saddam's miscalculation of Iranian capability was his failure to properly analyze his own military capability. As with Iran, the superficial appearance did not reveal the true capability of his armed forces. One factor should have immediately come to mind--he

was sending a predominantly Shiite army, led by Sunni officers, to fight against a Shiite revolution. Along with this, the army had little experience in conventional warfare. Tactics used against the Kurds would not be appropriate against a large Iranian army in the field.¹⁰⁸ The Iraqi Army had also experienced its own purge in 1978 and had become thoroughly politicized.¹⁰⁹

Iran's naval superiority was apparently ignored by Iraq. With its large ships and Harpoon-equipped P-3Fs, Iran was able to threaten Iraqi port facilities as well as tanker movements in the entire Gulf region.¹¹⁰

With Iraq's narrow coast in the Gulf, it might be assumed that naval power would not be an important factor in the war. But even though its coastline is only 58 kilometers long, it was a vital area for Iraq. The three major ports of Basra, Umm Qasr, and Al Faw could easily be closed by Iran's navy. Also, Basra and Al Faw, which are on the Shatt al-Arab, could be shelled by Iranian artillery.¹¹¹

Another Iraqi vulnerability to Iranian naval power was its two oil loading facilities at Khor el Amaya and Mina al Bakr. These suffered the same threat as Iraq's ports. If these facilities were closed, the only alternatives for oil flow would be through Turkey and Syria. The Turkish route was susceptible to sabotage because it ran through Kurdish territory in Iraq and southeastern Turkey. The Syrian

route was impossible due to Syria's hostility toward Iraq and the changing political climate in Lebanon.¹¹²

The strength of Iran's navy thus posed a critical danger to Iraq's economy and would prove to be a major factor in the war. Yet it seems Saddam neglected to consider its importance in the war effort and its impact on the nation's economic welfare.

Prior to the Gulf War, Saddam had been successful in his use of national will, political power, and military power. His brutish approach to leadership had worked against his countrymen, and Saddam was fully in control of Iraq. But the difficulties during the Iran-Iraq War should have warned him that his methods were short-sighted. Saddam believed he had reached the point where power could provide him all he wanted. As with most dictators though, autocratic power eventually leads to ruin.

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²⁰ Otto Friedrich, "Master of His Universe," Time, 13 Aug 90, 23.

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³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Saddam Delivers...Speech," sec. E, p. 2.

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⁴⁰ Ibid, sec. E, pp.1-6.

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⁴⁸al-Khalil, 5.

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⁵⁰al-Khalil, 6.

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⁵⁴Ibid.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to examine how Saddam Hussein's past influenced his political outlook, and how he has implemented that outlook through Iraq's national will, political power, and military power. Saddam's exposure to Western involvement in Iraq as well as the violence in his nation's political process made him a creature of his environment. The result was a ruthless leader whose anti-Western sentiment motivated him to seek regional dominance.

After reviewing early political influences and how he has used power in the past, some character traits become apparent. First of all, Saddam appears to be a shallow thinker. He tends to see things too simplistically. His decision to attack Iran in 1980 is a good example. On the surface, there was reason to believe the correlation of forces was in Iraq's favor. However, with only a moderate amount of analysis, this proves to be untrue. Yet after eight bloody years of war with Iran, Saddam did not learn the lesson. Many of the same mistakes were repeated in the Gulf War. In both cases, he underestimated his enemy and overestimated his own strength.

This trait is what distinguishes Saddam from most Middle East leaders today. There are others who are just as ruthless. Whether it is King Hussein attacking the Palestinians in September 1970 or Assad massacring Arabs in Hama, Syria, autocratic power is common in the region. What makes Saddam different from these leaders is he shows little of their cleverness and sophistication. He does not see complex solutions to the complex problems which face him. He sees various situations in black and white. This could explain his reaction to most dilemmas: either he gets what he wants or he eliminates the dissenter.

The use of excessive force is another trait which Saddam displays. Shaped by the political environment around him, he learned that brute violence is the only sure path to power and survival. An Iraqi who has known Saddam for most of his life said he "really believes (the killings) are necessary to maintain order. He grew up with violence, and that stays in his mind."¹ David Lamb, a journalist for the Los Angeles Times, put this into perspective:

This is a region where the respect a leader garners is based on toughness, not innovation, where compromise is equated with weakness. With few exceptions, nice guys do not make it to the top, and if they do and if they want to stay there, they have to remold their images by creating what is often of mythology of stern rigidity and omniscient authority.²

This is exactly what Saddam does. He is a tough leader who will stop at nothing to reach his goal. Whether it

is napalming Kurdish women and children or invading a country of vital interest to the West, he shows no room for compromise.

David Lamb's reference to image is also true of Saddam. He portrays himself as the leader of pan-Arabism, the heir of Nebuchadnezzar, and the Father of Iraq all in one. Part of his image is a man who cares for his people. The Iraqi press shows him cooking meals for his troops. On other occasions he is shown surrounded by common citizens adoring him. Yet stories, true or not, of him personally executing high ranking cabinet members remind Iraqis he is a man of absolute power.

Finally, he is a man with regional goals. Saddam grew up in a violent time when Iraq seldom had firm control of its own government. Russia, Britain, France, Germany, and others created much intrigue in the region as they jockeyed for the remains of the Ottoman Empire. Regardless of how noble or necessary these actions were, it often created a squalid environment for the Iraqi people.

This left its mark on Saddam. Early on, he was politically active, trying to throw off whatever power was in charge at the time. Today he is a true believer in the Baath Party, yet the Baathists have oppressed the people more than any other regime in Iraqi history.

Saddam is not the only Arab to live in this environment. So we should not think that he is an anomaly.

The possibility of another Arab leader arising with a similar background and outlook as Saddam is likely. If Saddam ultimately survives the current crisis and maintains his position of power, this may convince others who seek power that ruthless, repressive behavior is the best option. In short, they would believe that Saddam's methods are effective.

Saddam Hussein has made his power felt in the Middle East. He has been a major player in the region since his rise to the presidency in 1979. Unfortunately, he has not been a positive player either for his own people or for peace in the region. He is responsible for bloodshed and devastation the likes of which the region has never before seen. It would be ironic indeed if his invasion of Kuwait ultimately caused the Middle East actors to seriously consider peace.

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