Introduction

This book is an attempt to understand the inner workings of a modern Arab state from its own meticulous records rather than journalistic or secondary sources. For the first time, we are able to delve into the functioning of a one-party Arab state in the grip of a powerful authoritarian ideology. This is neither a history of the Ba'th Party nor of Iraq, but a study of the party's activities and modus operandi when it ruled the country between 1968 and 2003.

The research relies primarily on the massive archive of government documents captured by the United States after the fall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003. The records of the Ba'th Party, the intelligence services – mainly the Special Security Organization (SSO) – the presidential *diwan* (offices), and the Ministry of Information, as well as the audiotapes of meetings of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) and the leadership, found in the Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC), provide unparalleled insights into the ideology and structure of Saddam Hussein's regime. Whereas the documents reveal the decisions made, the tapes capture the spontaneity of private discussions among the country's leaders.

Most of these documents have come to light for the first time.[1] Some relate to the 2.4 million pages of the *North Iraq Dataset* (*NIDS*), which has already been partly published. The pages were sent to the United

[1] The Iraq Memory Foundation, *Prospectus 2008* (Washington, DC: 2008). There has been much controversy about the ownership of those documents. It is my understanding that they are currently in the custody of the Hoover Institute, but it has been agreed that the legal owner is the government of Iraq. The originals (which I have never seen, as all researchers have access only to digitized copies) will be returned to Baghdad when an agreement has been reached on timing.

States in May 1992 and August 1993, in two shipments of eighteen tons of official Iraqi state documents that had been captured by Kurdish groups during their March 1991 uprising.

The new material sourced for this book consists of about 6 million pages of documents of the *Ba'th Regional Command Collection* (*BRCC*), taken to Washington, DC, by the Iraq Memory Foundation under the direction of expatriate Iraqi scholar Kanan Makiya. About a third of both sets of documents were handwritten; typewriters were either not widely available or considered a "dangerous weapon" if they fell into enemy hands. All the documents have been digitized and are currently housed at the Hoover Institute, at Stanford University, or, in the case of many of the digitized *NIDS* files relating to the Iraqi Secret Police, at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The audiotapes are stored at the National Defense University in Washington, DC, and are indeed a treasure trove, conveying an intimate sense of how Saddam Hussein and the RCC conducted the business of the country.

Since Hanna Batatu published his magisterial work about Iraq,[2] most of our knowledge of Iraq has been based on secondary sources. Many books have dealt with different aspects of Iraq's history, and some excellent books such as those by Charles Tripp, Phoebe Marr, and Peter Sluglett have given us an extensive overview of Iraq's history.[3] Among the important works of significance to this study is the landmark work by Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear*, which exposed the repression of the Ba'th regime.[4] The book, however, focused mainly on fear and violence and almost ignored the incredibly extensive system of rewards that allowed Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party to stay in power for such a long time. Similarly, important aspects, such as the resistance to the regime, were not emphasized. Other works added to our knowledge of certain essential elements in the history of the period such as tribalism and the political discourse under the Ba'th. Many of those works overstated the Sunni–Shi'i

[2] Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

[3] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, paperback edn. (Cambridge University Press, 2000); Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 2nd edn. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004); Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country 1914–1932*, paperback edn. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: KPI, 1987).

[4] Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq*, paperback edn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Originally the book was published under the pseudonym Samir al-Khalil.

chasm, although the documents clearly indicate that Saddam Hussein was almost "egalitarian" in his treatment of anyone considered or suspected of disloyalty, and that many Shi'is were part of the system to the end.[5] While newspapers, the speeches of Saddam Hussein, and the Ba'th literature are critical to our comprehension of the period, the documents, in numerous instances, clearly indicate that the declared policies and speeches had other dimensions of which we were unaware. One example is the treatment of religiosity in the 1990s: the regime publicly launched a faith campaign but simultaneously, behind the scenes, continued to be anti-religious and to repress any sign of real religiosity. The documents allow us a more nuanced understanding of this period and of how the party played a fundamental role in every aspect of life in Iraq.

These fascinating records illustrate in minute detail how the different arms of the state functioned, and how the intelligence services gathered information, recruited informers, and carried out their surveillance of society. Reports were filed by all levels of the party hierarchy and were meticulously cross-referenced. From these records and countless memos we can build a unique picture of Saddam Hussein and his regime. Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a selection of the reports on its website and graphically described the "bureaucracy of repression" portrayed in these documents. The description is applicable to the majority of the documents:

> The language is numbingly dry, the format highly formalistic. . . . Written thus, the documents bespeak the daily tedium of career civil servants hewing closely to established bureaucratic procedure. The all-pervasive Iraqi bureaucracy manifests itself in another fashion: through the simple mechanism of referencing, the documents are linked to one another in a vast and complex administrative web. Official decrees are issued from high and passed down the ranks. . . . In a fashion, the meticulous cross-referencing that is characteristic of the Iraqi documents simply reflects the complexity of daily life in a sophisticated modern state.[6]

Although the regime laid strong emphasis on filing, we do not have much information about the filing system they used. We do know that filing continued uninterrupted during the First Gulf War and even for a couple

[5] See, for example, Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968–89* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 15. Baram discussed "the near-disappearance of the Shi'i element from the first rank of its leadership, and apparently from the lower echelons as well" by the late 1980s.

[6] Human Rights Watch, *Bureaucracy of Repression: The Iraqi Government in Its Own Words*, February 1, 1994, http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/1994/02/01/bureaucracy-repression (accessed November 10, 2010).

of weeks after the invasion of 2003 began.[7] The regime created its own terminology and expanded it over time. For example, *mu'tamin* (the trusted one) became the term for an informer; *'arus al-thawrat* (the bride of all revolutions) was the coup d'état of February 8, 1963, which catapulted the Ba'th into power for the first time; and numerous metaphors referred to special days of celebration and to organizations, such as *munadhammat al-munadhilin* (the Organization for Party Veterans), which was an organization for retired senior Ba'thists.

During the Ba'th's thirty-five-year rule, the party underwent many changes in response to the turbulent events that the country faced. In the 1970s, a time of relative economic prosperity, the party expanded its base dramatically and concentrated on recruiting new members from all sectors of the population. In northern Iraq, its operations against the Kurdish insurgency were closely coordinated with the security organizations, and the party's myriad branches were active in the Arabization of the region and in recruiting informers.

The 1980s were dominated by the Iran–Iraq War, and the party's political machine focused on attracting young people into the armed forces and popular militias. Deserters and prisoners of war were dealt with harshly, particularly from the mid-1980s onward, and the regime remained heavily engaged militarily in Kurdistan. In the 1990s, the devastating results of the First Gulf War were followed by uprisings in the Kurdish north and the Shi'i south. Neither the party nor the security organizations were prepared for these and their ramifications. Despite this intelligence failure to anticipate the reaction of the civilian population in those two regions, the documents do not indicate a fundamental change in the party's role or that it was weakened, as some have argued. The active participation of a Party Secretariat member in every committee continued until the 2003 invasion, and the correspondence of the presidential *diwan*, the SSO, and the Ba'th Regional Command offers ample evidence that the party continued to be involved in implementing every decision. Furthermore, party recruitment, although flagging in certain areas, continued to increase. In fact, the number of those affiliated with the party grew substantially between 1991 and 2003.

Decision making in the 1980s and 1990s became centralized in the presidential *diwan*, but in both decades the party was deeply involved in micromanaging the country. During the 1990s the party also had

[7] For an interesting discussion of the systems of filing and their importance, see Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917–1967* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 31–61.

to contend with the repercussions of the severe international sanctions imposed on Iraq, and it was preoccupied with defensive preparations for the 2003 invasion. Moreover, the documents clearly illustrate the Ba'th Party's vital role in intelligence gathering. After the 1991 uprising the regime understood that it must extend its control of both the civilian and military populations to anticipate such events and, more importantly, to crush any nascent opposition. Therefore, during the regime's final decade, the security services were expanded, especially the SSO and the party's apparatus that monitored security. Last but not least, the party's considerable political and media resources were the driving force behind Saddam Hussein's personality cult.

In describing the activities of the Ba'th regime, this book draws many comparisons with the one-party regimes that ruled Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and between Saddam Hussein and leaders like Stalin. However, the differences also need to be highlighted. First of all, although terms such as *authoritarian*, *tyrannical*, and *dictatorship* are applicable to Iraq, *totalitarian* is not. Iraq differed from totalitarian regimes in a number of respects, the most important being the absence of any policy to transform the country and its economy into a centrally managed society – a command economy; furthermore, no attempts were made to emulate Stalin's draconian measures to industrialize the Soviet Union.[8]

Second, Iraq was unique because of its history. The country was involved in two major wars: the eight-year conflict with Iran from 1980 to 1988 and the First Gulf War in 1991, the latter precipitated by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Iraq was then subjected to almost thirteen years of sanctions, and until 1991 its army was engaged in recurrent military confrontations with the Kurds and then a major civilian uprising at the end of the 1991 War. Another fundamental difference was that, unlike East Germany or Hungary, the regime did not enjoy the protection of a patron superpower that could intervene to crush opposition.[9] Thus, it had to be

[8] For discussion of this topic, see definitions of *authoritarian* and *totalitarian* in Patrick O'Neil, *Essentials of Comparative Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), pp. 12–13; for specific discussions on Iraq, see Achim Rohde, *State–Society Relations in Ba'thist Iraq: Facing Dictatorship* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 14–16; Hazem Saghieh, "Saddam Hussein, quel totalitarisme?" [Saddam Hussein: What Totalitarianism?] in Chris Kutschera (ed.), *Le Livre Noir de Saddam Hussein* [The Black Book of Saddam Hussein] (Paris: Oh! Editions, 2005), pp. 119–38. See also the section of Chapter 8 on the economy.

[9] For an interesting comparison with the Soviet Union's involvement in setting up the Stasi and dealing with the 1953 uprising in East Germany, see Gary Bruce, "The Prelude to Nationwide Surveillance in East Germany: Stasi Operations and Threat Perceptions, 1945–1953," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 3–31.

self-reliant in ensuring "coup-proofing" and needed to co-opt large segments of the population to strengthen its power base. Indeed, in contrast to communist regimes, repression and violence did not decrease with the regime's longevity.

Finally, a comparison of Saddam Hussein's personality cult with, for example, Stalin's is complicated by the latter's successful record as a war leader. Stalin managed to orchestrate victory for his country in the Second World War in spite of massive loss of life and was seen as a heroic figure by his people. Saddam Hussein, on the other hand, took Iraq into a long and bloody war against Iran without achieving tangible results. He then invaded Kuwait, which led to the devastation of his country and to the imposition of severe sanctions that lasted until the final day of the Ba'th regime. Notwithstanding these differences, the international comparisons put into context many of the policies discussed in this book and are a reminder that Saddam Hussein and the Ba'th leadership copied or adapted many tactics from similar regimes in the Middle East and beyond.

The uniqueness of the Ba'th regime, however, is that in spite of the turbulent path it followed for thirty-five years it managed to survive against all odds. This book reveals how the Ba'th Party systematically penetrated every stratum of society and built an impressive political machine more powerful than any other group in Iraq, which drew large numbers of people into its sphere of influence. While using extreme violence and terror against its citizens, the regime created a notable parallel system of rewards for its supporters and succeeded in underscoring the necessity and importance of universal support. Another distinctive characteristic was flexibility; Saddam Hussein did not hesitate to change a policy even if it meant a complete reversal of his declared beliefs and actions. He did so in regard to tribalism, religion, and the status of women, and this trait was both his strength and his weakness.

Nevertheless, Saddam Hussein was consistent in his belief in coercive power, and his "repeated and extended episodes of war-making" had "pervasive effects on the dynamics of Iraqi politics, the organization of state and economy, and on state–society relations."[10] His own failure as a youth to be accepted into a military college may have made him determined to prove that he was a great military strategist, even at an immense cost in Iraqi lives. He had an instinctive empathy with the

[10] Isam al-Khafaji, "War as a Vehicle for the Rise and Demise of a State-Controlled Society: The Case of Ba'thist Iraq," in Steven Heydemann (ed.), *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 259.

worldview expressed by Georges Clemenceau: "Ma politique étrangère et ma politique intérieure, c'est tout un. Politique intérieure, je fais la guerre; politique étrangère, je fais la guerre. Je fais toujours la guerre."[11]

In Iraq, the party was one of three pillars of government, together with the military and the bureaucracy, but it was the most important. This differed from the contemporaneous Ba'th regime in Syria, where the army was far more central because of the military background of the party's leaders. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein deliberately weakened the military as part of his coup-proofing, and the party became the essential core of the political system's command and control. The ideological domination of the armed forces began immediately after the party seized power on July 30, 1968, and the party machinery soon operated in all military ranks.[12] Historically, Iraq had developed a competent civil service that managed day-to-day administration, although the party slowly but surely crept into this bureaucracy and succeeded in bending it to serve its own political ends. Remarkably, the state bureaucracy continued to function during the decades of instability, even though the senior management of every ministry fell into the hands of Ba'thists. By the early 1980s, bolstered by his personality cult, Saddam Hussein had become the final decision maker on almost every important issue. Although the presidential *diwan* became a center for processing data before decisions were made, the party stayed involved at all levels and orchestrated the execution of major decisions made by Saddam Hussein and the RCC.

Yet the centralization of power and Saddam Hussein's dominating personality cannot on their own explain the regime's durability. Its underlying strength was derived from the remarkable symbiosis that developed between the leader and the party, which kept the regime functioning in spite of its several disastrous decisions. Saddam Hussein was very shrewd at manipulating the rivalries between different blocs of the Ba'th while concentrating state power in his own hands. But he saw the need for a central narrative that could unify as well as control the population, and for an apparatus to create a personality cult that would elevate him to untouchable status. Thus, failures were always blamed on others, never

[11] Clemenceau was prime minister of France before and during World War I. This excerpt is from a speech he gave in the French Chamber of Deputies on March 8, 1918. "My foreign policy and internal policy, it is all one. Internal policy, I make war; external policy, I make war. I always make war." http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/Clemenceau1918.asp.

[12] For an interesting perspective on the infiltration of the army, see Taha Yasin's autobiography, which is part of his party file in *BRCC*, 002-3-7 (277–280).

on the president, and even by 2003 there were no signs of a fundamental change in the regime's potency or influence.

Although Saddam Hussein was astute in dealing with internal affairs, he was less successful at understanding foreign powers. His inability to grasp the implications of invading Kuwait and his belief that the United States and coalition forces would not invade Iraq are two blatant examples of his misjudgment. In a pattern familiar to other dictators, the presentations of intelligence information and ideas by members of the inner circle became colored by the leader's own view, by the presenters' anticipation of what he really wanted to hear, or by fear of offending him.

The apparatus of repression that developed in Iraq under the Ba'th regime and that facilitated its durability affected the country deeply. Yet it would be wrong to assume that compliance was based primarily on fear and the threat of violence. For repression to be effective, "a substantial section of society must identify with or even approve its activities."[13] Indeed, informers were not always hired under duress; they were attracted by the rewards and opportunities offered. Young men competed eagerly for coveted jobs in the intelligence services that brought them power and benefits, and many men and women from across the socioeconomic spectrum became part of the Ba'thist system for this reason. Others sincerely believed that the Ba'th ideology could solve the country's many problems. In the multidimensional relationship between the leadership and the Iraqi people, repression and rewards were used in tandem to entrench the regime in power, and they cast a long shadow across Iraqi society.

The regime's success lay also in its ability to attract large numbers of supporters and make them feel vested in the system. In its recruitment policy, which was a major element of Ba'thification, the party sought to achieve a good percentage of women members and, more importantly, to overcome the aging of its cadre by attracting the younger generation. A great deal of pressure to join the party was brought to bear on citizens, and some became members under duress, but many joined voluntarily, through conviction or from a desire to benefit from being a Ba'thist. The documents abound with evidence of citizens applying to join or rejoin the party. The vast majority of party affiliates, however, played little active role, because of the party's rigid hierarchy: only the upper echelons of membership were effectively involved in executing policies. Even so, a complex web of checks and counterchecks ensured that the privileged

[13] Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia*, paperback edn. (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 208.

few could not become too powerful. Above them, the Party Secretariat monitored every far-flung branch, which in turn controlled every aspect of civil and military life in the country.

A high priority of the Ba'th Party and its branches was the political indoctrination of members. Ba'thification of the masses was no less important, with special attention paid to the youth. By the 1990s, however, the Ba'th Party ideology and its emphasis on political and cultural education became centered on Saddam Hussein's personality cult. *Jil Saddam* – Saddam's generation – was imbued with Ba'th philosophy in every direct and indirect way. As time went on, the lines between cultural education and political education became blurred, causing severe damage to the quality of education and literature in Iraq.

From cradle to grave, it is hard to find any aspect of state or society in which the party did not wield some influence. Economically, it was in charge of allocating resources and granting contracts, a role that increased after sanctions were imposed, because the party had to police the rationing system. It used these powers to manage all imports and exports and to cement its economic control and political penetration of society. Apart from some short-lived attempts at socialism, the private sector functioned and even prospered at times. But, as part of Ba'thification, all professional and trade unions were subordinated to the party, and their real role was to be the eyes and ears of the regime in the different professions and to report any politically hostile activity.

In setting the background for the period under study, one has to look at Ba'th ideology and its role in creating an authoritarian regime. The word order of the party's motto – unity, freedom, and socialism – was significant. The party's emphasis on unity was central to its founding fathers, Michel 'Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar. Its main slogan, "One Arab nation with an eternal mission," was inscribed on all major party documents. However, the ill-prepared unification between Syria and Egypt in 1958, followed by its swift collapse in 1961, led many Ba'thists in Syria, particularly army officers, to resent the idea of unity, given the way they were treated by the dominant Egyptians. The Iraqi Ba'th Party realized early on that Arab unity could not be achieved in the way that the party had imagined in the early 1960s. Hence, no effort was made to pursue it, and unity became a mere slogan.[14]

[14] See an interview of Saddam Hussein with *al-Tadhamun*, London, February 6, 1988, translated in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS-NES-88-029). The interview with one of his biographers, the journalist Fuad Matar, is dated January 30, 1988.

Furthermore, the rift with Syria was definitely an impetus to deemphasize the party's zeal for pan-Arabism in favor of Iraqi patriotism.[15] Freedom, the second word of the motto, is essential from the perspective of this book in understanding authoritarianism in Iraq. Freedom, in the Ba'th jargon, meant people's democracy rather than a parliamentary democracy. The issue of freedom was rarely discussed in the party's corridors, and Saddam Hussein argued that Ba'th Party branch members were free to choose their delegates, and that this in itself represented democracy and freedom. Indeed, both the Syrian and Iraqi Ba'th parties focused far more on staying in power than allowing a free society. The failure of the Ba'th in Iraq in 1963 to hold on to power further underlined the practicality of governance that in turn rendered the ideology of freedom hollow. The two Ba'th parties paid attention to their own region only and created "authoritarian centralized governments, which rested heavily on military power."[16] Essentially, the party's ideology was at odds with Western democracy because of its belief that democracy became "a mere façade to conceal the tyranny, falsification and exploitation [by] the reactionary classes."[17]

As for socialism, the party "believed in socialism as a means for the total and radical liberation of the Arab individual."[18] In reality, however, apart from some nationalization of industries by both regimes in Syria and Iraq, and distribution of land seized from large landowners, there was cohabitation with the private sector, and the ideology's flexibility allowed the private sector in Iraq to grow for most of the period under study. The party's ideology was malleable in other areas as well. In the 1970s, Saddam Hussein called for wide-ranging reforms that would enable women to study and become economically active. However, by the mid-1980s these opportunities were curtailed as a consequence of the war against Iran and Saddam Hussein's obsessive fear of Khomeinism. He also reversed his policy on religion. Once the nationwide faith campaign had been launched to promote religiosity, women were encouraged to stay at home and produce children, in part to reduce Iran's demographic superiority and to make up for the huge loss of life in the Iran–Iraq War. Saddam Hussein's view of religion was complex, but not ambiguous.

[15] Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology*, pp. 14–16.
[16] John F. Devlin, *The Ba'th Party: A History from Its Origins to 1966* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1976), p. 227.
[17] Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, *Some Theoretical Principles: Approved by the Six National Congress October 1963* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1974), p. 48.
[18] *Ibid*.